**KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT aLF PLATFORM**

You have just entered a virtual community created within aLF Platform, a methodological tool developed by UNED, Coordinator of FREE Project in Spain. This Platform has very specific characteristics, therefore we shall give you a very short tour of what you will find throughout your virtual training:

**1. Work Environment.**

The graphic theme used by aLF has the following distribution of elements on each web page:

* A header
* A side panel
* A content area
* A footer

**Header (Cabecera)**

In the header, which will always be available, you can see these parts:

* the logo of the institution
* the title of the page
* a bar with general options (help, change language, control panel, exit)
* the *breadcrumbs* bar \*
* the context tabs (Home, Courses and Communities) \*  
  Note \*: see the *Navigation* section.Panel lateral

**Side Panel (Panel Lateral)**

The side panel has a button to hide and show the panel itself. It can be hidden to gain space in the content area and can be shown again to use its content. The side panel in the user portal contains:

* a links section, or tools, to navigate the personal portal, an additional link to manage notifications, and a link to view the user preferences page.
* an interactive mini calendar that shows the events of the current month, both private to the user and shared in groups.

**Content area (Contenidos)**

The content area is the work area, the most changing part and where the portlets are located. Portlets have a button in the title bar to hide their content, if at any time you are not interested in seeing what they contain, such as when there is a very long list that forces you to scroll down the web page a lot.

The user has the possibility to distribute the portlets on different pages, change their position and their distribution in several columns from the control panel through the option *Personalize this portal*. To change the number of columns, you need first to remove the portlets from a page. After changing the choice of columns, you can add the portlets again.

**Footer (Pie de Página)**

In the footer there are links to the main page of the institution, and to the privacy policy.

**2. Groups (communities/courses)**

The groups and communities to which the user belongs are shown in the group portlet. You will find as many links, as the courses that you have been admitted to.

**Subgroups.**

Subgroups, whether from courses or communities, have the same capabilities as the course or community to which they belong. They allow to group a part of the members by means of hierarchies, or also to organize the contents, with the aim of focusing on some specific aspects, or of separating parts of an agenda.

**Group Calendar**

The calendar is the same tool as the user portal calendar, but when used from the context of a group, the information is shared with the other members, and the notifications that are sent as a reminder will be sent to everyone.

This group calendar will take into consideration the following dates:

* each FREE course will have a sequential mode, this means that 2 units/topics will be opened every two weeks until the final chapter of the training:
  + Chapters 1 and 2: July 1st
  + Chapters 3 and 4: July 7th
  + Chapters 5 and 6: July 14th
  + Chapters 7 and 8: July 21st
* From this day on, users may take the time to review and download all units and consider all the documents and materials that have been designed for them by the developers of the course;
* At the end of each unit, an exercise questionnaire, or practical case is suggested by the developers. You may want to consider these items/reflections, before you continue onto the next topics.
* Once you have completed the course, you shall then download the satisfaction survey and send it to the FREE Project no later than August 31st, date in which the virtual training period will be finalised and all Platform aLF permits will be cancelled.

**3. Communication Tools.**

**Forums**

Forums are probably the most useful communication tool for an online community. They allow you to have a debate based on a thread (message that starts a conversation) and your responses. If the forum is configured as multi-threaded, then responses can also be the start of a small discussion receiving other responses. In this case, the response chain is displayed hierarchically as a tree, similar to what folders look like in the computer's file explorer.

To enter the forum, click on its name, either from the user portal, in the forum’s portlet, where a list of all the available forums for each of the courses and communities to which the user belongs appears.

**Add a new thread**

To add a new thread, click on the button *Send a new Message*, which is located on the main page of the forum, (where the messages are displayed)

You must write a representative title, and also the content of the message. See the *writing rich text* section to learn more about adding formatted texts.

Adding a thread to a forum is done the same way in a multi-threaded forum as it is in a simple forum.

**Reply to a thread**

To reply to a thread, first click on the thread title to enter the message display page and all its responses. It is recommended to read all the answers, before adding a new one.

If the forum is multi-threaded, it is possible to reply to another reply as well. If the answer to which is answered is very long, it is advisable to quote the specific piece of text that is answered.

**Forum notifications**

Notifications can be activated for an entire forum in any activity on the forum, such as a new thread, a new reply ... or for a specific message (or more). On any of the pages of the forum there is a link *Request notifications*, with two situations ....

* if pressed from the list of threads, it will be activated for the entire forum.
* if you click on a thread and its responses will be activated only for news of that thread.

**Chat**

To chat it is necessary to enter a chat room. If there is no room, the first thing to do is create one. When creating a room, you must put a title, optionally a description, and choose either an Active Chat: to allow other users to enter (recommended) or Archive Chat: to save a history or transcript of written messages.

**Notifications**

Notifications are an automatic email sending service that allows you to be informed, at the moment, about news that occurs in the tools, such as forums, documents, calendar, etc. Subscriptions can be cancelled, or the interval can be changed, from the notification management page, always available from the control panel with the link *Manage notifications*, and from the side panel, *My notifications*.