

# Executive Summary

## ***Aims/objectives of the project:***

- To propose means of enhancing the learner information contained in a web-based personal statement, as part of a more flexible HE admissions process, responsive to the needs of a wider range of applicants.
- To consider the web-based UCAS application (under development for 2007) as a presentational ePortfolio and to locate it in relation to personal development planning processes, and the records arising from them (progress ePortfolios), on both sides of the transition from FE to HE.
- To test the usefulness of standards-based interoperable technology (via mapping systems to UKLeaP, a version of IMS LIP) for supporting lifelong learning, by concentrating on data transfers between 16-19 education and HE, for individual ePortfolio users moving through a sequence of episodes of study and between different institutions, mediated by the UCAS admissions system.

## ***Overall approach***

The project's pedagogic investigations were carried out with FE and HE staff and students in clusters of institutions centring on a Russell Group university in England (University of Nottingham) and a leading widening participation university in Scotland (University of Paisley), in order to capture a range of user needs associated with different study patterns and recruitment regimes.

The project team produced a number of *scenarios* to map stakeholder perspectives and requirements (often conflicting) and, within some of these, developed more detailed *use cases* to identify the information consumed and produced at key points, always with a strong learner-centred focus. These provided the testbed for a methodology for scenario development, which is one of the outputs of the project, as well as the basis for the project's proposal for an enhanced personal statement. The scenario and use case materials are now being used by the current JISC ePortfolio Reference Model project, led by the University of Nottingham, to develop and pilot profiles of UKLeaP within the eFramework.

The picture produced was critiqued and extended through further workshops with other practitioners and seminars held for invited experts, in which the focus broadened from transitions between episodes of study to transitions into employment.

The technical teams within the project concentrated on passing segments of learner data between institutions. After considering a number of approaches, the final choice was to generate UKLeaP directly for exporting data, and to use XSLT files to transform incoming data into a manageable format. This approach to data import provided a scalable solution, where the work required to accept data from a new institution amounted to no more than writing a new XSLT file to match that institution's application profile. As the project progressed interest grew in the eFramework and in a web-services approach to interoperability. In the second year of the project, two scenarios were developed to review transitions between episodes of learning from a web services perspective.

## ***Project findings***

That previously 'one-size-fits-all' models, such as the traditional UCAS application, can be tailored to the needs of different types of learner through web-based technology, and that this kind of development by UCAS would be entirely consistent with the DfES eLearning Strategy's concept of personalised learning

That there are indications of broad support among students and practitioners for the project's proposal for an enhanced, customisable personal statement and optimism that, by making more information about borderline candidates available on-line to admissions staff, the time of both candidates and university staff, which might otherwise be spent in interviews, can be saved.

That application processes at different levels of attainment exhibit common patterns of process, such that the ICT developed to support practice at one level should be re-usable at another. This suggests that the complexity and cost of implementing ePortfolios for lifelong learning could be significantly reduced and increases the probability of achieving interoperability.

That data transfers between different ePortfolio systems using UKLeaP work, but that UKLeaP is relatively unwieldy and a different sort of standard (reflected in current work to develop the eFramework) is needed. The best way forward is to break out the monolithic UKLeaP standard into the smaller, simpler interfaces required to pass information between an ePortfolio and a set of ePortfolio-enabled web services, generating a set of much more lightweight specifications upon which standards could be based.

## ***Achievements***

The project has:

- Demonstrated how the Schwartz recommendations for Fair Admissions could be implemented - especially the call for admissions processes to take full account of aptitude and potential while being transparent and accountable
- Provided the catalyst required for the complete UCAS admissions system to be mapped to UKLeaP and thus for colleges and universities to develop their capacity to exchange information via interoperable technology
- Proved that UKLeaP works for a specific, mainstream educational function, an achievement which is significant internationally, e.g. in relation to the EU's development of the Europass and to ongoing UK work in the field of international standards for learner information
- Developed studies and influential and sustainable collaboration on ePortfolio development and implementation across FE and HE in two regional centres in different parts of the UK: Nottingham (England) and Paisley (Scotland)
- Produced recommendations for the Schwartz review of admissions and for ongoing work on implementing eportfolios involving DfES, Becta, JISC, UCAS and the FE and HE community
- Produced a range of tangible outputs: methodologies, resources, technical developments, scenarios and use cases, presentations, papers and a website containing all the project outputs at: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/e-portfolio](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/e-portfolio)
- Disseminated its work in regional, national and international fora
- Identified an approach that can help coordinate JISC activities that can both deliver key aspects of the DfES eStrategy and take account of the other nations of the UK.

## **Conclusions**

There is both a pedagogic and a technical need for the service-oriented approach proposed by the eFramework and, in particular, a need for new, lightweight profiles crossing the boundaries between existing monolithic specifications such as IMS LIP and Enterprise. Preliminary discussions between JISC and BSI are being held to identify how the work of the project could form the basis of standards. DfES are sponsoring BSI to provide the secretariat of the relevant ISO committee, SC36, in order to fast-track standards where this is appropriate. JISC are formal partners in this initiative.

Now that the eFramework is no longer limited to learning processes, it has become increasingly clear how this past work could help redefine administrative and business procedures by placing the learner at the centre of the process. Specific proposals are being developed for how this may allow JISC to complement and strengthen MIAP's work in important ways. (Managing Information across Partners is an important DfES initiative.)

The methodology for developing scenarios and use cases of intended practice has proved effective in identifying the discrete services contributing to and drawing upon ePortfolio for the purposes of admissions and transitions between FE and HE, and could be applied much more widely, both within a fully developed ePortfolio Reference Model initiative and elsewhere within the eFramework.

The methodology for scenarios of practice should be brought together with the development of scenarios of policy, to facilitate effective implementations.

The forthcoming web-based UCAS application provides an excellent prototype of a presentational ePortfolio capable of working in relation to a progress ePortfolio; and the project's proposal for a customisable personal statement, within it, illustrates an important principle: that of enhancing learner information for a wider range of learners by allowing individual applicants for work or study to escape from the straitjacket of an official pro forma into the freedom and versatility of web space. This principle could be transferred to the whole concept of the UK eProgress File and its evolution into ePortfolio, striking a new balance between institutionally-provided pro formas and learner-originated presentational applications.

At the same time, planners and policy makers in the UK should recognise that there may well be a permanent need for 'impure' ePortfolio forms, in those situations where institutional provision is required and elements of quality assurance or legal responsibility or accountability are involved for specific providers.