

JISC Distributed e-Learning Programme: Regional eLearning Pilot Projects

RIPPLL: Regional Interoperability Project on Progression for Lifelong Learning

Lead Institution: University of Nottingham

Evaluation Report

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1. Methodology

The credibility of the CETIS Lifelong Learning Special Interest Group is dependent on having links with FE institutions and the projects that they are engaged in. The Group also has a responsibility to keep abreast of technical developments within the JISC community. In order to satisfy these aims and to evaluate the project, as evaluator in addition to formal progress meetings I attended as many workshops and briefings as I could. The notes and impressions from those meetings frame much of my conclusions and recommendations. The outcomes of this project complemented the outcomes of the ePortfolio for Lifelong Learning Reference Model project, also led by the University of Nottingham, and together these projects ensured that there were significant benefits to the F/HE community.

2. Summary

The project was successful in developing (in partnership with other projects in Nottinghamshire) a model of ePortfolio implementation that has been of value not only to the project partners but to both the DfES and Becta, who have been charged with developing guidelines and standards for schools and FE in England. It has been a prime test bed for the implementation of the BSI LeaP interoperability standards for transferring personal data. Experience from the project will influence the production of the next generation of standards.

It has also been exemplary in its engagement with its partners. The university-based teams have provided support both to the Nottingham LEA and, significantly, through workshops, to the technical staff at the FE college partners. This pro-actively supported partnership has embraced all types of learners including those who proceed to employment. Although it is too early to judge how well the project has affected 'Widening Participation' the processes and data models (in addition to contributing to the meaning of ePortfolio) will provide a contribution to the systems that will support a partnership of institutions delivering Foundation degrees. The project has contributed to the debate around the use of standards: demonstrating that through data mapping partners can develop their own application profiles to meet their particular needs. Like all projects, some outcomes have not yet been fully met (employer involvement, number of completed use cases), but on balance the project has made a major contribution to the knowledge of ePortfolio implementation and the development of standards and services that underpin it.

3. Satisfaction of Aims

Aim	Evaluation
To support progression to HE for widening participation (WP), by making all major existing electronic systems in use in the Nottingham area for study-based Progress Files interoperable, using the UK LeaP interoperability standards	The project's links with developments in the Nottingham LA for seamless transfer of student application data from school to college ensured that real applicable solutions were achieved. The Nottingham LA link also ensured that other agencies such as Connexions became involved and that the transfer points for data to satisfy the progression routes with Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham University were implemented to meet real needs. The use of the UK LeaP standard provided major input into that's standard's review. Its status as a published draft standard has been in some part down to the experience gained from this project
To pilot the transfer of data directly from the main post-16 PDP system (City of Nottingham Passport - CoNP) into HE PDP systems (University of Nottingham ePARs; Nottingham Trent University PDP) to support learner admissions and transitions, thus joining up successive phases of study, pre-HE and HE	This has been achieved using the UK LeaP standard. An important output has been the development of a methodology for converting existing mechanisms of data transfer to one that employs LeaP and XSLT. See technical report at http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/rippll/keydocuments/FL%20tech%20report.pdf on work conducted by Nottingham Trent University.
To develop understanding of further transition processes between study and employment (in both directions) and consider connections with issues of graduate retention in the region	Understanding of transition processes between study and employment has been increased. The engagement of Connexions as a gatekeeper between schools (and FE) and careers work-based learning was valuable. Major employers in the region have been very interested in the benefits of standardised transfers of data but have not engaged as much in the technical work as was hoped. It is too early to judge the impact on graduate retention in the region.
To pilot the use of Shibboleth to facilitate access to learner information deposited at key partner organisations	Shibboleth successfully piloted by Nottingham Trent University to access data stored at West Notts College.
To contribute to the building of interoperability specifications for systems supporting lifelong learning by providing further development of the UK LeaP open standards and proving their applicability in a number of different environments.	As indicated earlier, this project has been one of the few practical attempts to implement the UK LeaP standard. The outcomes of the project has identified that the underpinning philosophy behind LeaP is correct but that there is need for simplification and the remedying of implementation anomalies. It has demonstrated that UK LeaP is applicable in a wide range of environments.

4. Satisfaction of objectives

The following objectives were identified:

<p>Develop 10 new progression/transition use cases reflecting a broad range of learners, including vocational pathway learners and work-based learners, progressing into further study or employment at both school and HE level, and identified in collaboration with at least three FE colleges, with employers and with the regional division of Ufi/learnirect</p>	<p>10 use cases were identified around the transition stages identified. 7 of these were written up. 3 Further Education colleges were involved. The engagement with external employers was less than anticipated, essentially because of resource implications for tool developments. The loss of responsibility by Ufi/learnirect for interoperability standards developments and resulting staff changes led to little engagement with this partner. It was recognised, though, that the educational partners in the bid are major employers themselves and this project could influence work within their Human Resources departments.</p>
<p>Extend interoperability pilots of data transfer between the Passport and the University of Nottingham PDP systems to the PDP system at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), carrying out five mapping exercises and five LIP transfers, responding to the requirements identified in the use cases for the purposes of progression/transition, induction and ongoing PDP</p>	<p>The data transfers were successfully completed. 5 mapping exercises were involved with 5 transfers of UK LeaP data.</p>
<p>Support the use of UK LeaP in the parallel development (2004-2006) of a post-16 on-line admissions project for Greater Nottingham</p>	<p>A major success. The engagement with and support given to the LA on-line admissions project provided a milestone focus for the work. The outcome this summer should provide a showcase and model for the use of standards (UK LeaP) for the transfer of ePortfolio data</p>
<p>Scope and document the interoperability issues raised for at least two major employers and for the main commercial supplier of FE systems in the region</p>	<p>The interoperability issues have been scoped and have been documented for West Nottinghamshire college as an employer. Dialogue has also taken place with the Toyota-Lexus Academy to ensure subsequent developments of the work can interface with their training and HR facilities.</p>
<p>Pilot the use of Shibboleth to facilitate access to learner information deposited at key partner organisations.</p>	<p>Nottingham Trent University have successfully implemented Shibboleth for authorisation and authentication of distributed PDP data. Subsequent advice by Becta to DfES that Shibboleth should be considered for government eLearning developments makes this experience important.</p>
<p>Reference implementations: Transfer of personal statements between institutions Providing transcripts within a presentational ePortfolio</p>	<p>In partnership with Nottingham LEA for transfer of application data between schools and FE colleges and Connexions</p>
<p>Consultation (workshops, events and use of interactive website)</p>	<p>The website was constantly maintained.</p> <p>Workshops and events include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related JISC ePortfolio projects workshop

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of ePortfolio theme: JISC/ CETIS Conference • CETL Workshop • Presentation 2005 EifEL ePortfolio Conference Cambridge • Attendance joint JISC-SURF meeting Amsterdam • Hosting joint JISC-SURF meeting, Nottingham <p>Joint management with NILTA, EM RSC and CETIS LLL SIG of Nottingham event</p>
National and international ePortfolio Network	The networks created and maintained by partners of this project are a significant output. The credibility of links with high-profile stakeholders has led this project to be a source of expertise on ePortfolio within the educational community. (See below for details)

5. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder	Interest/stake
<i>External:</i>	
CETIS	Significant contribution made to UK LeaP standards development
UCAS	Data transfers tested. Made a key contribution to UCAS's strategy as the only national agency to use UK LeaP
QCA	QCA engaged. Outcomes for QCA pending
egif	Team identified as major contributor to the newly-formed DfES Technology Unit
European Schoolnet	No engagement
Becta	Work from this and related projects (eP4LL)
DfES ref. Schwartz and 14-19 reforms; also eLearning Strategy	Advice provided not only on e-strategy and 14-19 reforms but also the broader strategy concerning the role of eportfolios for assessment
Vendors, e.g. Nuventive	Through UK LeaP developments contributed to a framework usable by vendors. Collaboration with Nuventive to create demonstration web service. Direct engagement with vendors otherwise limited
Other JISC projects/programmes and LIPSIG	Benefited (mutually) from links with eP4LL Reference Model Project
<i>Within the project:</i>	
Senior managers in all partner organisations: FEIs, HEIs, LEAs, Ufi/learndirect	Too early to objectively assess benefits to managers of institutions
Greater Nottingham 14-19 Strategy Group, esp. the FE Admissions Working Group	Nottingham Passport (now Passportfolio) has been adopted by Nottinghamshire colleges. The scope has been extended from handling application to providing data for Individual Learning Plans

Admissions officers and admissions tutors	The admissions tutors have been fully engaged in both contributing to and monitoring the project
Widening participation teams, including NTU Progression Partnerships	The increased opportunities for Widening Participation for students within Nottinghamshire have been recognised as a benefit from this project's demonstration of being able to transfer data between institutions
Tutors (in FE and HE)	Enhanced information about learners to support admissions programme planning and PDP achieved
Students	Seamless transfer of personal data between stages of education and training in addition to assisting Personal Development has been achieved
Careers staff	Links made with Connexions will embed outcomes of the project in this area of work
Work-based learners	Although the use of standards will potentially provide benefits there have been few direct benefits at this stage
Technical staff	Major contribution made to the skills of technical staff concerning use of XML, standardised data and the use of web services
Employers	Limited engagement (apart from educational institutions as employers). The contributions to standards developments in this area will help all
Vendor of FE MIS (Distinction)	Opportunity to trial interoperability specification taken. More engagement need with reference to access to Application Program Interfaces

7. Recommendations for future work

- Continuation of engagement of the development of standards in this area. The UK LeaP model has generally been accepted but urgent work is required in obtaining a full and continuing consensus amongst users.
- Continuation of engagement and support to the Nottingham LA Passportfolio projects. The system is to be launched this summer and the credibility of the application of current data standards and web services definitions is dependent upon it. Although many of the partners are outside the JISC community, failure in this work will have damaging implications for all of the educational sectors.
- A greater focus on web services and how they relate to a dynamic JISC e-Framework. More work is needed to enable the work so far to contribute to a generic pool of services at all levels that can be shared by others.
- Pilots to be launched that engage other communities in the identification and application of 'their components' within the UK LeaP data domain. Work based learners and the recipients of information, advice and guidance are just two of the communities that would benefit from an extension of this work.
- Development of an 'architectural framework' within the ePortfolio domain that will enable all subsequent projects in this area to conform to common rules and standards.
- Greater engagement required with vendors, especially concerning the use of UK LeaP (and derivatives) and the identification of Application Program Interfaces that will facilitate the production of 'connectors'.

Clive Church, 23 March 2006