



Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning Programme (01/03)

Formative Evaluation Report

Glenaffric Ltd
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Executive Summary

Phase 2 of the JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme commenced in September 2003 and ran until July 2005. Building on previous MLE development work, the Programme aimed to explore the issues associated with developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions. Ten projects explored four discrete but inter-related themes:

- Learning, teaching and administrative implications of MLEs
- Interoperability for lifelong learning
- Testing the Personal Development Planning (PDP) section of the Learner Profile
- Testing the multi-institutional Learner Profile

Glenaffric Ltd e-learning consultants were commissioned in June 2003 to undertake a formative evaluation of the Programme, with the aim of maximising the synergy between projects and the long term benefits for the JISC community.

The formative evaluation framework for the Programme outlined an iterative and reflective process involving project team members, programme management and supporting agencies. Methods included documentary analysis, visits to projects, interviews and discussions with project representatives and stakeholder consultation. Frequent presentations were made and numerous reports were produced and discussed on an ongoing basis. This report outlines a record of the formative evaluation methodology and process. It presents an analytical summary of the themes that were raised and addressed, and a commentary on the implications of these for future development programmes.

A number of issues of interest were identified for exploration through the formative evaluation, which evolved in the course of the Programme to crystallise into these overarching themes:

- Project management models and processes
- Working with vendors and external organisations
- Legal issues
- Cultural issues and cross-institutional working
- Quality of the learner experience
- Programme drivers and the strategic context
- Quality of the learner experience
- Dissemination, outputs and sustainability

There was widespread acknowledgement that much was learned about how to manage multi-partner development projects, and interest in ensuring that future development programmes were able to build on the lessons learned. Projects required flexibility to react to evolving institutional contexts, personnel changes and the impact of external factors on planned activities. Challenges were encountered in adapting project plans to meet the requirements of academic cycles. There was a recognised need for a thorough audit of project team skills, knowledge and capacity at the outset.

Cultural and organisational issues were far more complex and time-consuming than technical developments. Projects were challenging established institutional hierarchies and overcoming barriers of accepted methods of working. They developed an understanding of institutional drivers and strategies for identifying key contacts in partner organisations. Engaging with appropriate committees from the outset was crucial for the sustainability and embedding of project developments. Experiences in exploring learning, teaching and administrative processes for lifelong learning in a multi-institutional context exposed the need for a whole-institution approach to organisational change through technology, and strong management support to effect genuine and sustainable shifts in organisational culture.

The Programme coincided with a period of significant relevant policy initiatives and strategic activity in higher education across the UK and in Europe. Institutional commitment to the

projects was influenced by the changing sectoral and organisational context in FE and HE. Differences in national audit, inspection and reporting requirements were highlighted as a potential barrier to successful UK-wide developments in lifelong learning.

Improving the learner experience was a key concern, particularly at times of transition between institutions, sectors and courses. Projects explored the need for incentives to encourage reflective learning in education and employment. Challenges were encountered in a work-based learning context by the tension between developing and implementing a system that benefits the employer, while ensuring that focus is maintained on the value of the experience for the learner/employee.

All of the projects highlighted the value of dissemination and networking as a means of obtaining feedback from the sector although this often placed a significant overhead burden on project resources. Working at a leading edge in development terms blurred the boundary between dissemination, networking and consultation. There was concern to ensure that subsequent projects and development programmes were able to learn from and build on Programme experiences and outputs, to ensure that appropriate knowledge transfer processes were in place and to continue to participate in the wider JISC development community.

The effectiveness of the support processes put in place for the Programme demonstrated the value of establishing evaluation and support mechanisms at the outset. Programme-level evaluation helped to promote a sense of cohesion and an understanding of the role of individual projects in the wider context of the Programme and other JISC developments.

The Programme Steering Committee promoted visibility in the UK e-learning community and ensured that issues raised were addressed at an appropriate strategic level. The Programme duration required that projects exercise flexibility and adaptability to respond to changing external movements and institutional circumstances. Projects had to adapt their timescales to accommodate the momentum of academic cycles.

The Programme exemplifies the important, informal role of JISC development work in helping to form networks and collaborations between individuals and institutions, including partnerships based on cognate interest as well as regionality, and a general lubrication of the process of FE and HE collaboration.

It also illustrates an intellectual shift through the JISC programme of MLE development work from systems and tools for data transfer to an exploration of the issues of data selection and presentation for effective learner transition. This is exemplified in changes that are being made in practice and levels of service at a local institutional level, in improved cross-institutional collaborations, and in the initiation of significant transformational developments at a strategic level.

Projects clarified the importance of specifying technical solutions based on institutional context and a shared understanding of organisational need, not on technical capability or systems capacity. A principal outcome from the Programme is a clear understanding about when and where systems interoperability is required. Specifications and standards are crucial for scalable solutions to collaborative provision and external data exchange.

The Programme has helped to develop understanding of the potential role of technology in the sector not to model existing systems, but to transform business processes and the learning and teaching experience.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations for projects/institutions and for the JISC. The italicised numbers in brackets refer to relevant paragraphs in the report.

Recommendations for projects/institutions:

- Institutions applying for project funding should recognise the need for a careful balance of aspiration and ambition with a realistic assessment of what a development project can actually achieve in context. (4.2.5)

- Projects should be aware that cultural and organisational issues are often more complex and time-consuming than technical developments, and that time and resources need to be dedicated to addressing interoperability at a human, interpersonal level. (4.5.1)
- Developments must be driven by organisational need and based on a thorough analysis of business processes and stakeholder requirements. (4.3.2)
- Confirm and maintain institutional buy in – the aims of the project must be consonant with explicit institutional strategic priorities and operational plans for all consortium partners. (4.5.5)
- Projects should implement management approaches appropriate to exploratory development projects. Consideration should be given to the interfaces between the strategic role of the project director and operational responsibilities of the project manager. (4.2.2)
- Address the people issues first – ensure there is a shared understanding among key stakeholders of the scope, objectives and intended outcomes of the project. (4.5.2, 4.5.4, 5.5.2)
- Conduct a thorough audit at the outset of project team skills, knowledge and capacity, including technical skills and requirements, avoiding assumptions about capacity and capability in consortium institutions. (4.2.7)
- Address legal issues of data protection, copyright and IPR at an early stage. (4.4.1)
- Ensure that the project activities encompass evaluation and dissemination on an ongoing basis and not just at the end of the project. Consider establishing a process of peer evaluation or review with other projects in a programme. (4.8.1)
- Embrace the potential of technology to transform institutional processes to take account of the lifelong learning agenda, rather than simply to replicate existing systems and traditional ways of working. (5.4.2, 5.5.5)

Recommendations for the JISC:

Programme management and support

- Short programmes need clearly defined and specific objectives. Longer programmes should have built-in flexibility in their aims, objectives and planned deliverables to enable projects to adapt to changing circumstances. (4.8.3, 5.3.3)
- Where possible, the scheduling of programmes should take account of institutional time and the rhythm of the academic year, including the most effective time to plan and start a new project, and the lead-in time required to recruit or second appropriate staff. (5.3.4)
- Comprehensive provision for formative evaluation and programme-level support should be established at the outset, with clear delineation of roles, responsibilities and reporting channels. Input from projects should be encouraged in identifying the scope and content of programme-level support provision. (5.2.2)
- The concept of programme-level evaluation should be further developed to promote a cohesive overall picture, with each project clearly exploring and evaluating an aspect or issue that is a recognisable part of the whole programme. (5.2.4)
- Consideration should be given to the appointment of expert consultants to provide advice to projects from the outset, perhaps after a preliminary bidding stage, with formal reporting and accountability mechanisms at programme level. (5.2.5)
- Programme-level activities and meetings need to ensure a balance of strategic overview and practical operational issues appropriate to the audience. (4.2.4, 5.5.1)
- Where appropriate, relevant legal advice should be available to projects on a programme-wide basis. (4.4.1)

Future development activities

- Developing and implementing technical systems for collaboration across the sectors, including work-based learning and HE in FE provision, needs to be based on awareness

of different sectoral contexts, drivers and constraints. Future programmes should also take into account the need to balance the UK-wide developmental remit of the JISC with the different audit, accreditation and funding systems across the UK. (4.6.3)

- There should be a clear understanding across the sector of what is actually meant by 'lifelong learning' to ensure that the needs of learners are genuinely served by the development of lifelong learning profiles. (4.7.1, 5.4.3)
- There is a need for further development work in the area of skills and competency mapping and work-based learning. (5.5.3)
- There may be merit in exploring the scope and nature of cultural paradigms for sustainable technical development in a cross-institutional context for independent lifelong learning. (5.4.4, 5.5.3)
- Consideration should be given to establishing knowledge exchange programmes to communicate programme outputs and outcomes, using existing networks and developing new communities of practice where appropriate. (5.3.5)
- A high-level awareness of future programme activities and issues arising from ongoing developments should be maintained through appointing a strategic steering group, and/or through regular briefings and standing agenda items for appropriate external bodies and committees. (5.3.1)

1 Introduction

This report summarises the activities and outputs of the Formative Evaluation Project for the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme. It outlines the background to the Programme and the methodology that was planned and implemented for the formative evaluation. This was an iterative and reflective process that generated a number of interim reports and presentations. Part of the purpose of this report is to present a record of this formative evaluation process. The report also presents an analytical summary of the issues that were raised and addressed under the evaluation themes, and a commentary on the implications of these issues. It concludes with some recommendations arising from the evaluation for future projects and for the JISC.

1.1 Programme overview

- 1.1.1 JISC Circular 01/01 in June 2001 announced the Managed Learning Environments (MLEs)¹ for Lifelong Learning Programme: Building MLEs across FE and HE. In response to a projected increase in lifelong learning, it was recognised that there was a need to plan the provision of systems that will better support those who pursue education at a number of different stages of their life, or who move between institutions while pursuing a course of study, or who make use of resources and facilities from more than one institution. The Programme funded two regional consortium-based projects and a number of supporting studies.²
- 1.1.2 Building on this work, the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme: Phase 2 commenced in September 2003. This programme aimed to explore the issues associated with developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions.
- 1.1.3 The main objectives of the Programme were:
- to explore the learning, teaching and administrative implications of implementing MLE activities to support lifelong learners on cross-institutional programmes of study;
 - to explore interoperability for lifelong learning, specifically in the areas of linking learner information between managed learning environments and awarding bodies, external learning organisations and employers;
 - to explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile; and
 - to explore and test the use of learner information packages to support seamless learner transition between institutions. This work will build on the outcomes of the phase one projects.
- 1.1.4 A total of ten consortium-based projects were funded in Phase 2, eight new projects, in addition to the continuation of two from Phase 1. Funding for an eleventh project was subsequently withdrawn by mutual agreement. The projects worked within four discrete but inter-related themes:
- Learning, teaching and administrative implications of MLEs
 - Interoperability for lifelong learning
 - Testing the Personal Development Planning (PDP) section of the Learner Profile
 - Testing the multi-institutional Learner Profile
- 1.1.5 The work of the projects was complemented by a supporting 'Study to Explore the Legal & Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record'³. The study was undertaken by the Centre for IT and Law at the University of

¹ Appendix A is a list of abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

² Glenaffric Ltd produced an overview report of Phase 1. See http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/0101review.pdf

³ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_learner_records_legal_study

Bristol. The overall aim of the project was to provide early and effective legal research and guidance to JISC lifelong learning record pilot projects and those engaged in drafting proposed learner information standards and specifications.

- 1.1.6 JISC also commissioned the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) to provide a Lifelong Learning Support Project (LLSP) for the Programme. The LLSP had a broad brief centred upon a primary aim of 'the provision of a focus for consultation, development and acceptance by the community and the implementation of e-standards'.⁴

1.2 Programme management and evaluation

- 1.2.1 In June 2003 JISC commissioned Glenaffric Ltd e-Learning consultants to undertake a formative evaluation of the Programme. The aim of the Evaluation Project was:

to provide a formative evaluation of the Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning Programme which maximises the synergy between projects and the long term benefits for the JISC community.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- to develop an evaluation framework which will encourage synergy/sharing across the projects;
- to identify common themes across the projects;
- to undertake formative evaluation activities with the projects;
- to liaise and meet with the MLE Evaluation Team⁵; and
- to provide feedback in the form of detailed reports at regular intervals.

- 1.2.2 The Programme was overseen at a strategic level by a Steering Committee which included representatives from the sector, partner agencies and relevant JISC committees. A Support and Evaluation Group (SEG) was established at the outset to assist with the operational management of the Programme and to provide comprehensive ongoing support to the projects. The SEG included the Programme Manager, representatives from the Formative Evaluation Project and the LLSP. Membership also provided continuity with the MLE Evaluation Team from Phase1.

- 1.2.3 There was a change of Programme Manager approximately midway through the Programme, and a slight hiatus of some months in mid 2004 between the initial Programme Manager taking up a new post within the JISC and the appointment of a new Manager. During this intervening period the Evaluation Project fulfilled some programme management functions.

2 Programme Context

- 2.1 The MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme was part of a large programme of JISC work on the development and promotion of Managed Learning Environments. This work included previous programmes on Building MLEs in HE (7/99), Interoperability Pilots in FE (11/00), the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Interoperability Pilots Programme (SWaNI). Phase 2 was specifically concerned with systems and processes to support lifelong learners across a wider educational landscape, including external agencies, schools and employers as well as transition between the FE and HE sectors.

- 2.2 In 2004, the JISC commissioned a review of its MLE activity over the previous five years⁶. This report outlines the strategic and organisational context for the MLE developments that were explored in the Programme, including the role of JISC in national e-learning strategies and consultations and in supporting technological

⁴ <http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/llsp>

⁵ JISC had established an MLE Evaluation Team to oversee the formative evaluation of the two projects funded in the first Phase of the Programme.

⁶ Review of JISC funded MLE Activity, Glenaffric Ltd, September 2004, http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/MLERReviewF.pdf

developments in the FE sector, as well as emerging lifelong learning and widening participation agendas.

- 2.3 The timescale of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme coincided with a period of significant government policy initiatives and strategic activity in higher education in general, with particular emphasis on the role of technology in learning, teaching and governance. This includes the periods of consultation and review leading to the publication of the DfES e-Strategy Harnessing Technology: Transforming Learning and Children's Services⁷ and the HEFCE Strategy for e-Learning⁸, both published in March 2005.
- 2.4 The Scottish context includes the publication of the Final Report of the Joint SFEFC/SHEFC e-Learning Group of July 2003⁹, and the subsequent circular letters of July 2004 outlining the context of transformational change for the Councils' e-Learning Transformation Programme.¹⁰ In Wales, the e-Learning Strategy Consultation document and subsequent reports from the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education were published in March 2003.¹¹
- 2.5 The wider strategic context for the Programme also includes the 2005 DfES White Papers on 14-19 Education and Skills¹², the 2004 Schwartz Report, Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice¹³ and the 2004 Report of the Scoping Group chaired by Professor Robert Burgess on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement¹⁴. The wider European context is also relevant, including the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 and subsequent update reports¹⁵.

3 Methodology and Approaches

3.1 Initial review and documentary analysis

- 3.1.1 Prior to Phase 2 of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme JISC had adopted a number of different approaches to the evaluation of its development programmes. This Programme provided the first clear opportunity to commence a formative evaluation process along with the Programme itself. The Evaluation Project was therefore presented with an opportunity to develop inherent processes for iterative formative evaluation, involving project team members, programme management and supporting agencies from the outset.
- 3.1.2 The first task of the formative evaluation was to review existing Programme documentation. From this review a number of key diagrams and summary matrices were produced that formed the basis of much of the ensuing evaluation process.
- 3.1.3 Early telephone interviews were carried out with the project managers. The main purpose was to introduce the evaluation team, explain the proposed evaluation process and outline early plans.

3.2 Evaluation framework

- 3.2.1 The Evaluation Framework for the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme was produced in Autumn 2003 (Appendix B). This document summarised the main theoretical principles underpinning the approach to formative evaluation proposed, and their practical application in the Programme. It identified the key sources of evaluation information as documentary evidence, programme-level evaluation activities, meetings

⁷ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/fore.shtml>

⁸ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2005/05_12/

⁹ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/joint_info/publications/joint_e-learning_report_july_2003.html

¹⁰ Circulars HE/22/04 <http://www.shefc.ac.uk/library/06854fc203db2fbd000000fd70569df8> and FE/28/04

<http://www.shefc.ac.uk/library/06854fc203db2fbd000000fd705ce4ed>

¹¹ <http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/>

¹² <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/>

¹³ <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf>

¹⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/education/02/tomlinson_report/pdf/final_report.pdf

¹⁵ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>

and interviews with key respondent groups. It proposed a timescale for evaluation activities and key outputs through the lifetime of the Programme, which was initially conceived as having three separate phases, aligned with Programme meetings and the formal project reporting cycle.

- 3.2.2 The document also presented a matrix mapping of the Programme objectives and anticipated outputs to the specific objectives and plans of the individual projects.
- 3.2.3 The framework outlines the key initial areas of interest for the evaluation, identifies key respondent and stakeholder groups, and maps the initial areas of evaluation focus to anticipated stakeholder interests. Three levels of evaluation are identified:
- Project level – evaluation throughout the life of the project that assists project staff to make effective decisions to continuously improve the project
 - Cluster – grouping similar projects to bring about systemic change by learning from other similar projects
 - Programme and policy making – evaluation at the macro level to assist decision-making for programme funding and support

These three levels form the backdrop to a diagrammatic representation in the framework of the key areas of evaluation interest, mapped to the four Programme themes and the ten specific projects.

- 3.2.4 The framework served as a reference document throughout the Programme. The matrix mapping Programme and project objectives and outputs was updated on a regular basis as the projects evolved, and the areas of evaluation interest were subject to ongoing review and adaptation.

3.3 Project consultation

- 3.3.1 The Evaluation Project was in regular contact with the projects throughout the Programme. Telephone interviews with project managers took place at specific intervals to help to identify project and Programme-wide issues, and articulate appropriate responses. Generally these interviews took the form of a free-flowing discussion about overall project progress and emerging issues.
- 3.3.2 This consultation was important in identifying possible synergies between projects, encouraging cross-project collaboration and peer review. It also served to provide early indication of emerging issues requiring attention by the Programme management and/or the Support and Evaluation Group, and issues of ongoing interest to the Programme Steering Group.
- 3.3.3 Short reports on issues arising from these interviews were produced for the SEG. Along with the analysis of project interim reports, they formed the basis for formal reports from the evaluation team to the Programme Steering Group.
- 3.3.4 Towards the end of the Programme (in May 2005) a series of semi-formal telephone interviews was held with project managers, based on the following questions:
- What did the project achieve, what were your successes – what are you pleased about?
 - What comments do you have on what you did not achieve that you set out to do?
 - What lessons did you learn along the way – what would you do differently next time?
 - Comments on Programme-level support – Programme meetings, support workshops, formative evaluation?
 - What are your messages for future projects?

3.4 Project visits

- 3.4.1 Two series of formative evaluation visits to the projects took place during the Programme. Dates were negotiated in advance, and a draft schedule for each visit was

produced outlining the purpose and planned duration of meetings and the project and institutional representatives that were to be included.

3.4.2 The first series of project visits took place in Autumn 2003. The main areas for exploration were:

- Project plan
- Outputs and outcomes
- Project evaluation
- Reviewing, reflecting and reporting
- Institutional issues

By arrangement, these visits included a short meeting with a representative from senior management at the lead institution. The main purpose of these short meetings was to explore the wider institutional and strategic context for the project.

3.4.3 The second series of visits took place in between November 2004 and January 2005. The main areas explored at this time were:

- Project evolution (from bid to project plan to revised activities and objectives)
- Lessons learned
- Outputs and deliverables, including any products
- Outcomes and any changes in practice
- Dissemination and awareness-raising
- Sustainability and future plans

3.4.4 A detailed report on each visit was produced for the project teams, including a summary of the discussion for each of the areas explored, and a note of key points for further consideration or action by the project teams. Confirmed reports were circulated to the Programme manager and the SEG. The Evaluation Project also produced summary reports on the key issues raised during each visit and their wider implications for the Programme for the SEG and the Programme Steering Committee.

3.4.5 Six of the projects were also visited in the course of the Programme by members of the Steering Committee. In order to capture the lessons from these visits for the Programme, a reporting template was provided (Appendix C). A summary report on issues of strategic interest emerging from these visits was produced by the Evaluation Project.

3.5 Programme meetings and evaluation activities

3.5.1 Evaluation activities were developed for project teams to undertake at each of the Programme meetings, which took place as follows:

Date	Location	Notes
October 2003	Birmingham	
February 2004	Birmingham	
June 2004	Manchester	
November 2004	Oxford	Joint JISC/CETIS Conference
February 2005	Birmingham	
July 2005	Cambridge	Joint JISC Programme Meeting

3.5.2 The stated aim of the first 01/03 Programme Meeting in Birmingham was to provide an opportunity for projects to establish links and identify common themes with other projects, the Lifelong Learning Support Project, the Evaluation Project and the wider JISC activities. The Evaluation Framework was presented at this meeting. Projects were also asked to complete a short 'History of the Future' exercise that involved looking

forward in time to the completion of the project, and preparing notes for a radio interview about the project and the individual's role in it. Individual notes were then compared within project teams, and the different perceptions formed a basis for a shared understanding of the project scope, intended outcomes and team member roles and responsibilities.

3.5.3 The aims of the February 2004 Programme meeting were to:

- provide background on specific key issues relating to the Programme and projects, including accessibility, interoperability standards and legal issues;
- provide an opportunity for networking on key themes identified by the projects and the SEG;
- seek to align project plans with the Programme objectives and supporting activities; and
- discuss issues arising from project interim reports and visits.

3.5.4 This meeting therefore provided an opportunity to reflect as a group on generic issues arising from the first series of project visits. It also introduced the concept of 'huddle time', which had emerged directly from the visits, suggested by one project team and endorsed by others. In programme terms 'huddle time' implied a group coming together to discuss a particular theme that was emerging from the programme through the projects. This might be a specific aspect of the programme that is a common to a few projects or an approach that one project was adopting that could be of interest to others. It could simply be an opportunity to explore challenging issues in a safe environment in which to explore aspects of a project through open and honest discussion with those who can empathise and be judgement-free. 'Huddles' were noted by the group leader using a pro forma provided, which formed the basis of a summary report on the 'huddle time' session to further inform both the projects and the Support and Evaluation Group.

3.5.5 During this Programme meeting, projects were also asked to participate in a discussion that contributed to the refinement of the MLE matrix used for the 2003 JISC/UCISA study of MLE Activity in Further and Higher Education in the UK (the 'MLE Landscape Study').¹⁶ This subsequently informed the 2005 JISC/UCISA Study of Environments to Support e-Learning in UK Further and Higher Education.¹⁷

3.5.5 The third meeting, in Manchester in June 2004, took place during the period when the Evaluation Project was also undertaking Programme management tasks. The aims of this meeting were to:

- give information on the programme changes and offer an opportunity to review and reflect on the current status of projects;
- provide background on specific key issues relating to the programme and projects, including accessibility, interoperability, legal issues, and the JISC Review of MLE Activity;
- provide an opportunity for networking on key themes identified by the projects and the SEG;
- provide guidance on the development of scenarios and use cases; and
- review project and programme development and collation of outputs.

3.5.6 By this time, projects had been underway throughout the previous academic year and emerging issues were starting to coalesce around some fundamental aspects of MLEs for lifelong learning. Projects were asked to produce poster presentations on the main lessons learned and project achievements to date. The main evaluation activity at this meeting was a structured discussion on the shape and direction of the Programme, focusing on these emerging key themes in terms of the initial Programme aims,

¹⁶ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_mle_activity

¹⁷ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_mle_activity_repeat&src=alpha

objectives and intended outputs. A key evaluation objective was to reach a shared understanding of the next steps for the projects and direction of the Programme.

3.5.7 The next MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme meeting took place as a short cluster meeting during the JISC/CETIS Conference in Oxford in November 2004. This event was attended by around 200 people representing projects from all JISC development programmes, supporting agencies, international partners, and system developers. The Programme-specific cluster took the form of a round table discussion on a number of generic issues that had struck the project representatives during this joint event. A summary note of this discussion was produced by the Evaluation Project.

3.5.8 The round table Programme-wide discussion at Oxford also helped to further crystallise the key themes and issues of MLEs for Lifelong Learning that the Programme was identified and addressing. These included:

- Quality issues in multi-partner delivery
- FE realities for foundation degrees
- Student experience of PDP between FE and HE
- Skills and competencies matching

It was agreed to maintain a dialogue on these issues and explore them further at Programme level at the next Programme meeting in February 2005.

3.5.9 The aims of the February 2005 Programme Meeting were to:

- provide an opportunity for discussion and guidance on the issues of interest to projects at this stage of the programme, including e-portfolios, skills and competencies, legal issues and project outputs;
- provide an open forum to showcase the ioNodes work produced by the SHELL projects and an opportunity for consultation with the community; and
- provide an opportunity for networking on key themes identified by projects and the SEG.

Networking sessions on the key themes and issues identified by the projects and the SEG were noted using a template adapted from the 'huddle time' activity described above. A summary report was produced by the Evaluation Project.

3.5.10 During this meeting, projects were asked to summarise briefly what they would have achieved by July 2005, what they had set out to achieve at the start but had lost along the way, and where they hoped developments initiated through their projects would be in two years' time. This evaluation activity was named the 'Great Leap Forward'. Again, a summary report was produced by the Evaluation Project.

3.5.11 As part of the collation of programme outputs and distillation of key lessons for the sector, the Evaluation Project led a discussion on the development of case studies to capture examples of changing practice as it emerges from a development programme (Appendix D).

3.5.12 The Joint JISC Programme Meeting that took place in Cambridge in July 2005 was attended by over 250 people representing a range of JISC development programme and supporting agencies. It was the final formal meeting of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme, and presented an opportunity for other developments to learn about, and from, the experiences of this Programme. The Evaluation Project gave a brief presentation on exit and sustainability issues for projects and programmes, and led a discussion on capturing the experiences of the projects and the collation of Programme outputs. During sessions under the meeting theme of 'Supporting the lifelong learner through and across stages of learning', projects gave brief presentations on the challenges they had faced, strategies they had developed for addressing these challenges, and lessons learned. The Evaluation Project produced a summary note of key points from these discussions.

3.5.13 This meeting provided an opportunity for reflection on the formative evaluation of the Programme. The evaluation team also gave a brief presentation on the challenges they had faced, the strategies developed, and the lessons learned along the way. The evolution of the Programme focus was depicted in a series of graphic presentation slides showing the development of the Programme themes and evaluation issues of interest (Appendix E).

3.5.14 Reports, summaries and presentation slides relating to evaluation activities during these Programme meetings were published on the JISC Programme web pages.

3.6 Stakeholder and support agency consultation

3.6.1 The Programme Evaluation Framework included plans to conduct telephone interviews with key stakeholders during the second eight-month phase of the Programme in mid 2004. In effect the Programme Steering Group agreed that it was more appropriate and relevant for the evaluation team to carry out a series of telephone interviews with representatives from key stakeholder and support service organisations in early 2005. This enabled the evaluation project to benefit from stakeholders' developing understanding of the Programme, including the experiences of some Steering Committee visits to projects. The revised timeframe also reflected the evolution of the Programme timescale into an effective two-phase cycle in accordance with the academic year.

3.6.2 Interviews took place with representatives from the following stakeholder organisations:

- Universities Central Admissions Service (UCAS)
- Cabinet Office e-Government Unit
- University for Industry (Ufi)
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Representatives from the following support services¹⁸ were also interviewed:

- JISC infoNet
- Centre for Recording Achievement
- Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards (CETIS)

3.6.3 Respondents were asked the following questions:

- What are the areas of interest to you and your organisation in strategic terms?
- What areas of activity are less relevant to you?
- What future areas of development activity should be explored?
- How could future programmes be organised to benefit from engaging with your organisation?

3.6.4 A summary of issues of interest arising from these interviews was produced for the Programme Steering Group and the SEG.

3.7 Reports, presentations and feedback

3.7.1 The Evaluation Project organised, facilitated and noted the regular monthly meetings of the SEG, which helped to maintain the Programme focus, address operational issues relating to the projects, and consider emerging strategic issues for the attention of the Programme Steering Group and other stakeholders.

3.7.2 As well as interim reports for the Programme Manager, the Evaluation Project presented reports at the Steering Group meetings that took place in November 2003, April 2004, September 2004, January 2005 and June 2005.

3.7.3 The process of formative evaluation was one of iteration and consultation throughout the Programme. Summary reports were produced on each series of project visits and telephone interviews, and on the evaluation activities undertaken by projects.

¹⁸ It was not possible at the time to interview a representative from the JISC Outreach team as originally planned.

Presentations at Programme meetings were an important means of reflecting on evaluation themes and emerging issues across the Programme.

3.8 Synthesis of Programme outputs

- 3.8.1 The need to collate, analyse and present the vast quantity of outputs being generated by the Programme was a recurring theme for the Evaluation Project in conjunction with the Programme management team. In the course of the Programme, web pages for the collation and ongoing dissemination of outputs were created as part of the JISC e-Learning Focus web site.¹⁹ Following the submission of the project final reports, a group including representatives from the projects, the Evaluation Team and Programme management was convened to synthesise the lessons from the Programme and make recommendations on how and to whom these are disseminated.
- 3.8.2 There was a clear consensus from this group that the key messages from the Programme with most significant ongoing impact in the sector could best be articulated and disseminated through the production of short high level briefing papers for senior managers, and a summary publication based on the model of an independent lifelong learner. The summary publication would focus on the issues that institutions may need to be aware of at various stages, with links to sources of further information, reports and demonstration models from the projects.

4 Summary of Evaluation Themes

4.1 Thematic evolution and development

- 4.1.1 The Methodology and Approaches section of this report outlines processes and activities relating to the articulation of the evolution of evaluation themes and issues of interest throughout the Programme. At the outset, JISC had identified the following areas of interest and focus for the evaluation, based on the experiences of Phase 1 of the Programme, and issues of interest arising from JISC developments at that time:
- Methodologies for business process re-engineering
 - Organisational change
 - Benefits for:
 - participating colleges
 - vendors
 - Implications for:
 - lifelong learners
 - all staff across institutions
 - staff development
 - PDP using VLEs in HE and FE
 - synergy with external organisations
 - MLE models and approaches to developing architectures
- 4.1.2 Initial documentary analysis and activities with the projects revealed some project process issues that were also included in the Formative Evaluation Framework:
- Staffing
 - Project plans
 - Institutional engagement
 - Evaluation
 - Use cases
 - Data protection
 - Learner Profile

¹⁹ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/elearningfocus/mle>

- Capacity
 - Working with vendors
- 4.1.3 The Framework noted that these lists of issues and themes were by no means complete and were likely to change over time as the projects progressed and developed. In effect, some of these issues came into sharp focus while the significance of others became less apparent, and further themes and issues of interest emerged. Over the course of the Programme, evaluation issues of interest effectively crystallised into the following overarching themes:
- Project management models and processes
 - Working with vendors and external organisations
 - Legal issues
 - Cultural issues and cross-institutional working
 - Quality of the learner experience
 - Programme drivers and the strategic context
 - Quality of the learner experience
 - Dissemination, outputs and sustainability
- 4.1.4 This process of emerging themes and coalescing issues of interest coincided with and complemented the evolution of the focus of the Programme. Broadly, the original objectives were concerned with exploring the learning, teaching and administrative implications of lifelong learning records, personal development planning and interoperability. As work progressed, it became clear that the key areas of focus for project activities related to PDP processes and e-portfolios, interoperability and data transfer, and the cultural and organisational issues of cross-institutional provision.
- 4.1.5 Given the developmental role of the formative evaluation project and the iterative approach to the exploration of emerging themes, thematic analysis took place on an ongoing basis. Reports and presentations regularly highlighted issues of operational significance and strategic interest for discussion with project representatives and other key stakeholders in a cycle of information gathering, reporting, reflection and further information gathering. This section offers a summary analysis of the main issues of interest that emerged and were addressed through the formative evaluation process.

4.2 Project management models and processes

- 4.2.1 Most projects implemented a management structure involving an operational project manager who reported to a project director with strategic oversight and responsibility, usually with senior management responsibilities in the lead project institution. Most too had active and involved project steering committees or advisory board. Some projects appointed an external project manager, others seconded someone from within the lead institution staff to manage the project. In general, internal appointed project managers with continuing institutional responsibilities had less time to dedicate to project activities and felt increasingly under pressure as the projects progressed.
- 4.2.2 In general, projects adopted the JISC Project Management Guidelines²⁰, and these were used with some modifications for project planning and interim reporting. The availability and development of appropriate project management models and tools for speculative, exploratory projects was a recurring issue for the projects. The scope of the project management role and the skills and knowledge required to manage a development project successfully were the subject of a number of Programme-wide discussions and a focus of some evaluation activity. There was widespread acknowledgement that a great deal had been learned about how to manage multi-partner development projects through the experiences of the Programme, and an interest in ensuring that future development projects were able to build on the lessons learned. In this respect, the MLEs for Lifelong

²⁰ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/proj_manguide.html

Learning Programme further highlighted the role of JISC development programmes in general capacity building in the sector.

- 4.2.3 As work progressed, projects had to react to evolving internal institutional issues and changes in personnel, and the impact of external factors on their planned activities and progress. The evaluation highlighted a number of instances where project plans had to be flexible in order to adapt to changing circumstances. In some instances, experienced project managers displayed confidence and maturity in undertaking a radical review of their initial objectives in order to develop processes of lasting benefit for the project and the sector.
- 4.2.4 The evaluation also highlighted the implications for future Programme-level activities in the growing trend of appointing external project managers. From the experiences of this Programme, project managers from outside the education sectors tend to be more task-oriented and concerned with specific issues relating to the achievement of their project goals, and less interested in the wider context of programme-related research and developments. This has implications for the target audience, presentations and activities of Programme-level meetings, workshops and events. The agendas for Programme meetings evolved to ensure that opportunities to share operational experiences and practice were balanced with elements of strategic development, specific content focus and technical sessions.
- 4.2.5 In retrospect, projects reflected that they had been under a certain amount of pressure in the bidding process to make quite ambitious claims for the objectives of the planned project. Subsequently there was a need to balance this ambition with a realistic assessment of what could actually be achieved in the project scope and timescales. Many projects noted towards the end that they had spent considerably more time in the early stages than was initially planned on scoping their project, appointing staff, addressing unanticipated technical issues, and establishing appropriate relationships and contacts. They commented that time spent on preparing the ground for new developments, whether planned or unplanned, has a positive impact on sustainability of the project outcomes. Others noted that planning for post-project sustainability impacts negatively on the time available for project activities and implementation, including the need to plan activities in conjunction with (often cumbersome) internal committee cycles.
- 4.2.6 A further recurring project management issue was institutional time, including challenges in adapting project plans to meet the requirements of the academic year. Projects further reflected on the volume of invitations to participate in events, conferences, meetings and workshops as the Programme progressed, identifying a key project management task in exercising discernment in determining how best to utilise project resources in deciding which events to attend.
- 4.2.7 Some projects commented with hindsight on the need for a thorough audit at the outset of project team skills, knowledge and capacity, particularly technical skills and requirements. This was felt to be particularly important for cross-institutional projects to avoid assumptions about staff capability, capacity and the availability of resources for project development.

4.3 Working with vendors and external organisations

- 4.3.1 The evaluation was initially tasked with identifying and exploring potential benefits for vendors engaging with JISC development work. Part of the context for this interest lay in the work with vendor organisations that had been undertaken through previous MLE development programmes, particularly the interoperability pilots programmes and the experiences of the Phase 1 projects. In effect, most of the Phase 2 projects were more concerned with exploring and identifying internal institutional issues and processes for multi-institutional partnership working than with the implementation of external commercial solutions. While exploring benefits for vendors was not therefore a primary Programme focus, some projects reflected on their experiences of dealing with software development companies. A number of the projects exploring interoperability for work-

based learning also encountered challenges and reflected on their experiences in working with employers and external commercial operations.

- 4.3.2 One project was directly involved with a software development company in the development of infrastructure for multi-institutional data transfer. This product was the focus of a number of Programme-wide events and is a significant part of the legacy of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme. A key issue of evaluation interest for exploration with the project team and manager was the extent to which the focus on technical systems development through the external company skewed the project focus away from the identification of business processes and development of administrative applications that would have been of genuine and lasting benefit to the participating institutions.
- 4.3.3 Projects encountered apparent vendor reluctance to lose their 'unique selling point' in the marketplace by creating interfaces for interoperability. The need to adapt software licensing agreements to accommodate lifelong learners progressing through educational sectors and employment was also highlighted.

4.4 Legal issues

- 4.4.1 The Phase 1 projects had identified data protection, intellectual property rights legislation and consortium agreements as key issues requiring attention. The commissioning of a Legal Study at Programme level assisted the Phase 2 projects in addressing these issues. In addition to the publication of formal reports, the Study was represented at each of the Programme meetings. Each project was visited by Legal Study project representatives, in consultation with the evaluation project. Some projects also sought bespoke specialist advice from the Study.
- 4.4.2 The value of the longitudinal legal study to the projects was repeatedly acknowledged in the evaluation findings. Projects benefited from consistent high quality advice at a macro level and were also able to access specific legal advice without major financial outlay. Through the Steering Group, the Legal Study was able to inform and be informed by ongoing strategic developments in the sector.

4.5 Cultural issues and cross-institutional working

- 4.5.1 Throughout the Programme, projects repeatedly emphasised that cultural and organisational issues were considerably more complex and time-consuming than technical developments. Promoting human interoperability and interpersonal understanding was far more challenging than developing systems for technical interoperability. A common theme to many projects was the realisation that business processes must be analysed and communication issues addressed before a robust and sustainable technical solution can be developed.
- 4.5.2 To some extent, projects exploring new approaches to learning and teaching through technology have had to challenge institutional hierarchies and overcome barriers of established methods of working. The need for developmental project activity to be linked to institutional strategy and operational plans has come into ever sharper focus as the programme has progressed. Projects also encountered some problems with institutional quality systems and the need to comply with the requirements of existing quality procedures while pursuing developmental projects. Development activities in some projects highlighted inadequacies and inconsistencies in existing quality procedures, which met with a mixed response from the institutions involved. Some institutions were concerned to address the issues raised as integral to ongoing quality enhancement activities, while others seemed to regard the project experiences as peripheral to mainstream developments in learning and teaching quality. The extent to which institutions were actively interested in addressing the challenges encountered by the projects is an indicator of the longer term sustainability of the project outcomes.
- 4.5.3 The evaluation highlighted a number of project experiences with different cultures and organisational processes in FE, HE and the employment sector, and the implications of understanding these differences for effective partnership working. Some projects with an

HE background had to invest time and resources in learning about the broad spectrum of activity in the FE sector, with the variety of funding sources, responsibilities and reporting requirements. A major difference with significant impact on project activities lies in the way student record systems are used in FE and HE. Some significant differences emerged in levels of service, learner expectations and professional practice between FE and HE, but also between institutions in the same sector. In the main, these differences tended to lie in the attitudes and professionalism of individuals rather than institutional policy. Some of the projects commented on the personal and political drivers as well as institutional contexts factors that impact on successful collaboration.

- 4.5.4 A key issue for the projects was developing strategies for identifying and gaining access to the right contacts in partner institutions. Engaging with appropriate committees from the outset was crucial for longer term sustainability and institutional embedding of project developments. Projects were particularly exercised by understanding how institutional and contextual drivers impact on the ways and extent to which institutions were able to sustain their engagement with project activities. Projects working with partners from the employment sector also highlighted the need for a mutual understanding and appreciation of different organisational roles, responsibilities and drivers, emphasising the mutual benefits of professional development to both the individual and the organisation.
- 4.5.5 The initial evaluation areas of interest included business process re-engineering. A recurring theme throughout the Programme was the concern to exploit technology to transform institutional processes to take account of the challenges presented by the lifelong learning agenda, rather than simply to replicate existing systems and traditional ways of working. The experiences of the projects in exploring learning, teaching and administrative processes for lifelong learning in a multi-institutional context exposed the need for a whole-institution approach to organisational change through technology, and the need for strong management support to effect genuine and sustainable shifts in organisational culture.

4.6 Programme drivers and the strategic context

- 4.6.1 A recurring focus for the evaluation was the extent to which institutional commitment to the projects and the embedding of project activities was influenced by the changing sectoral and organisational context in FE and HE. Many of the projects were working at a leading edge in development terms and were therefore actively interested in emerging strategic and policy directions at a national level. There was engagement at Programme level with the development and publication of key national e-learning strategies and Government-commissioned reports on widening participation and access to higher education. Projects were particularly concerned with emerging policies relating to lifelong learning, personal development planning and learner records. This interest extended to strategic interest in developing policy as well as operational issues of project activity.
- 4.6.2 Multi-institutional projects experienced some challenges in addressing the changing strategic context through the lifetime of the Programme. The evaluation highlighted a number of tensions for cross-sectoral projects between the broad drive for HE in FE collaboration, and the immediate institutional requirement in FE to meet the emerging requirements of the Government's 14-19 agenda.
- 4.6.3 A recurrent theme was the extent to which differences in national audit, inspection and reporting requirements may be a barrier to successful UK-wide developments in lifelong learning. Challenges presented by different organisational cultures were compounded by different data and audit requirements of the various funding bodies for FE and HE in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A general funding issue highlighted by the projects was the extent to which the lifelong learning agenda may require institutional information systems and processes to focus on individual learner needs and the learning experience rather than the funding unit.

4.6.4 A number of projects in this Programme have played a part in influencing developments in a European context towards transparency and convergence of higher education systems.

4.7 Quality of the learner experience

4.7.1 One of the initial evaluation issues of interest was exploring benefits to learners of interoperability for lifelong learners. Learners are generally not interested in the actual workings of the systems that support their learning per se, but they are interested in receiving the information and support that they need, as and when they need it. Projects were particularly concerned with improving the quality of the learner experience at times of transition between institutions, sectors and courses.

4.7.2 Improving the learner experience was a key concern of the Programme as a whole. However, many of the projects reflected that they had not been able to engage with learners and carry out learner-based evaluation of their project developments as they had initially planned. Projects working with the employment sector were challenged by the tension between developing and implementing a system that benefits the employer, while ensuring that focus is maintained on the value of the experience for the learner/employee.

4.7.3 There was ongoing concern to work towards improving the learner experience by developing connections and establishing long term collaborative relations between technology and pedagogy, between systems development and learning and teaching experiences. The Programme also highlighted opportunities for existing data systems to be redesigned in terms of their uses for learners as well as for administrative purposes.

4.7.4 Challenges were encountered and addressed in engaging with students to gauge their experiences of personal development planning. Projects also explored the need for drivers and incentives for learners to engage in reflective learning in education and employment.

4.8 Dissemination, outputs and sustainability

4.8.1 The project final reports each list the dissemination activities in which projects participated, including briefings, meetings, peer reviews, workshops, conference organisation, presentations, technical demonstrations and academic research papers. Activities encompassed institutional, local, regional, national and international events, and constitute a significant programme of ongoing large-scale dissemination throughout the Programme. It was noted that for projects working at a leading edge in development terms, the boundary between the dissemination, networking and consultation becomes quite blurred. All of the projects highlighted the value of dissemination and networking as a means of obtaining feedback from the sector. Whilst they all engaged willingly in dissemination and consultation activities, invitations to participate in events often placed a significant overhead burden on project resources both in terms of time and funding.

4.8.2 Capturing the wide range of dissemination outputs from the Programme proved quite a challenge for the Programme management team. The JISC was concerned to ensure that the sector in general, and ongoing development programmes in particular, were able to benefit from experiences, outputs and outcomes from this Programme. This was particularly relevant in the context of the development and implementation of activities in the JISC e-Learning Programme, which started while the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme was in progress and were scheduled to continue long after the MLEs Programme had ended. Programme meetings highlighted the concern of the MLE projects, too, to ensure that subsequent projects and development programmes were able to learn from and build on their experiences and outputs. The projects also expressed a willingness and desire to continue their involvement in the wider JISC development community following the end of the Programme. There was concern to ensure that appropriate knowledge transfer processes were in place to capture and build on these projects, and contribute to developing communities of practice. There was particular concern that the more intangible outcomes from the Programme in terms of

experiences and lessons learned about the processes of project management and the softer issues of cultural and organisational transformation should be available to ongoing and future development programmes and projects.

- 4.8.3 Taken as a whole, the projects produced a vast and significant quantity of outputs. An ongoing issue for the Programme was the challenge of ensuring that the collective wisdom that had been generated could be articulated and presented in a cogent and accessible way to have maximum impact and benefit in the sector. The concern of the JISC Programme management team to proclaim and showcase the vast quantity of material generated by the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme had to be balanced against the need to ensure that the key messages for the sector were not lost in the mass of information that was generated.

5 Commentary

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section addresses strategic issues of interest arising from the formative evaluation of the programme, with particular emphasis on how these may inform future programmes and activities. These comments relate to the formative evaluation process itself and the strategic management of the Programme. They also address the development of concepts of managed learning environments and lifelong learning that emerged through the Programme, and the implications from the analysis of evaluation themes for future development programmes.

5.2 The formative evaluation process

- 5.2.1 Any comments in this report on the formative evaluation process itself are by definition subjective and cannot be without reporter's bias. However, they are offered in the spirit of reflective and constructive comment that informed the process itself. The final report of the SWaNI programme had highlighted the supportive role of formative evaluation, and helped to clarify the distinction between evaluation, monitoring and audit. The JISC Programme management team went to some lengths in 2003 to ensure that formative evaluation and support processes were in place from the start of this Programme. In this historical context it is appropriate to review the formative evaluation processes that were put in place for this Programme, and comment on the lessons learned for the formative evaluation of future development programmes.
- 5.2.2 The effectiveness of the support processes that were put in place for the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme demonstrated the value of establishing evaluation and support mechanisms at the outset. However, this was not without its challenges. Some negotiation was required to clarify the roles, responsibilities and activity schedules between the Formative Evaluation Project and the Lifelong Learning Support Project. There was a danger of potential over-keenness to demonstrate opportunities for projects to access supports actually serving to confuse the projects about whom to go to for what, and overwhelming them with offers of help. There was also a danger of imposing support provision on projects rather than providing support to address their specific and emerging needs. The establishment of a schedule of meetings for the SEG provided a regular opportunity for communication, and a mechanism for the provision of coherent support for the projects and the programme management team.
- 5.2.3 There was positive feedback throughout the Programme about the kind of support provided through the Formative Evaluation project. Projects commented in evaluation interviews and informally through ongoing communication about the positive impact of the process on project activities. While a certain amount of transactional bias must be noted in the attempts of the evaluation to reflect upon itself, the positive impact of the process in helping to shape understanding of what the project was trying to do, both internally within the team and externally in partner institutions, was also reflected formally in some project final reports. Reports to the Steering Committee were generally felt to have been useful articulations of the key strategic issues arising across the

Programme. The Programme management team highlighted the role of the formative evaluation team in the SEG as a key element in the operational management and planning of the Programme.

- 5.2.4 Some projects assumed at the outset that the Formative Evaluation project would conduct their project-specific external evaluation. The concept of a Programme-level evaluation was quite challenging. In this context, the use of diagrams and matrices to capture and represent the complexity of the Programme in a readily understandable form was particularly effective in demonstrating the scope of the evaluation. Ultimately these diagrams served both to illustrate and promote a real sense of cohesion in this Programme, which became far more than a disparate collection of projects brought together under an overarching theme of MLEs for Lifelong Learning. The diagrammatic representations of the programme and the tables of objectives and deliverables enhanced projects' own understanding of the role and place of their work in the wider context of the Programme, and enabled them to demonstrate this bigger picture to a broader audience within the project institutions and the sector.
- 5.2.5 The projects were formally visited twice in the course of the formative evaluation. The Programme Manager also visited each project on a regular basis in addition to ad hoc meetings. Most of the projects were also visited by members of the Steering Committee. Visits were an important element in the formative evaluation data gathering process. They also served to enhance Steering Committee understanding of the operational context of the projects, and to highlight strategic issues that could be taken forward by members. However, it was important to plan visits sensitively to avoid conflicting timescales. It was also important to report back to projects on the issues of interest raised, and any action taken, to ensure that the visit process helped the development of the projects as well as informing the visitors.
- 5.2.6 The Formative Evaluation framework outlined a cluster model of projects grouped under the key initial Programme themes. During the first round of evaluation visits a system of peer evaluation was proposed, based roughly on these clusters. This was further discussed at Programme meetings, and taken up successfully by some of the projects.

5.3 Strategic programme management issues

- 5.3.1 The Programme Steering Committee fulfilled the key functions outlined in its terms of reference. Overall the Committee was able to provide reassurance to the Programme management and support team that appropriate actions were being taken to support the projects. Members of the Committee also acted to ensure that the Programme had a high level of visibility in the UK e-learning community, and that the key agencies they represented were aware of the scope of the Programme as it evolved, and the key issues that were being raised and addressed. The Steering Committee oversaw the Programme on behalf of the JISC Learning and Teaching committee (JLT). As a steering body rather than an advisory body it was able to intervene when necessary to exercise management powers, including the formal cessation of a project.
- 5.3.2 The Programme-level Steering Committee for Phase 2 of MLEs for Lifelong Learning had its origins in the Steering Committee for the CRA-led Phase 1 project Developing Learner Profiles across FE and HE. The CRA continued to service the Committee as it assumed Programme-level responsibilities. While these services were performed effectively and with the knowledge of experience, responsibility for setting the agenda lay outside JISC, and the schedule of Committee meetings was not linked formally into the main JISC committee cycle. While this was perhaps not an issue in practice, ensuring that JLT members were appropriately briefed on the strategic issues arising from the Programme relied on the efforts of the Committee chair and JISC Executive staff.
- 5.3.3 The Programme has further highlighted the thorny question, with which JISC has wrestled for some time, of what constitutes the most effective duration for a development project. The two projects that started in Phase 1 ran for three years; the Phase 2 projects ran over two years. This timescale provides an opportunity for comparison with the

current trend in the e-Learning Programme for shorter term projects with specific objectives. Projects were able to spend time at the outset planning and scoping their activities, identifying key stakeholders and establishing effective communication channels. However, a longer project duration means more opportunities for things to move and change both in the project institutions and the sector, requiring more flexibility in project objectives, adaptability to changing external circumstances and internal movements.

- 5.3.4 The power of academic time cannot be underestimated when planning development Programmes. There are very few optimal junctures in the academic year to start a development programme. Furthermore, the valiant attempt in this Programme to devise a structure based on three eight-month phases effectively foundered as projects planned their activities in two phases to coincide with the apparently inexorable momentum of the academic year.
- 5.3.5 The Programme seems to have generated a genuine willingness among the project representatives to develop and contribute to a community of practice. Indeed, the sense of group cohesion, common understanding and mutual respect across the projects in this Programme, apparent from early Programme meetings on, was quite considerable and a valuable intangible resource both for this Programme and further development work in the sector. A number of significant ongoing collaborative partnerships have been forged, including the continuation and expansion of some partnerships in the subsequent JISC distributed e-learning regional pilot projects.²¹ The MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme illustrates the informal, unspecified but nonetheless important role of JISC development work in helping to form networks and collaborations between individuals and institutions, including partnerships based on cognate interest as well as regionality, and a general lubrication of the process of FE and HE collaboration.

5.4 The concept of lifelong learning

- 5.4.1 The Programme has seen some significant developments in the concept of lifelong learning, particularly in terms of how this is articulated and recorded. The concept of a Lifelong Learning Record underpinned the Programme and was a particular issue of interest for one of the two Phase 1 projects. Phase 2 included a study to explore the legal and records management issues relating to the concept of the *lifelong learner record*.²² However, the focus of this study shifted in the course of the Programme to an exploration of the legal implications of using a *lifelong learning profile*. Building on the Phase 1 study into developing learner profiles across FE and HE, the projects also explored the learning and teaching implications of lifelong learning profiles and the process of personal development planning.
- 5.4.2 Programme activities explored a move away from the concept of a historical, cumulative record of learning to the development of mechanisms to enable learners themselves to choose which elements of their learning they wish to access and make available at particular stages in their life. This illustrates a significant intellectual shift through the JISC programme of work on the development and promotion of Managed Learning Environments. The earlier interoperability pilots programmes in FE and HE were concerned with systems and tools for data transfer, while the MLEs for Lifelong Learning explored issues of data selection and presentation for effective learner transition.
- 5.4.3 One of the key issues with which the Programme had to come to terms was what is actually meant by the concept of 'lifelong learning', and whose interests are actually served. The underlying assumption on which the themes of the Programme are predicated is that the learner is at the centre of the lifelong learning process. In reality, the concept of lifelong learning that was explored in this Programme is actually focused on the ability of institutions to address the support and provision needs of learners at a particular stage in their life involving transition between courses, institutions or sectors.

²¹ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/pilotsdetail.html>

²² op. cit.

5.4.4 The Programme themes reflected an increasing interest in the use of technology to manage learning across a wider educational landscape, supporting the learner through transition between further and higher education, and ongoing work-based learning and professional development. In this, the work of the Programme has exposed a tension between the concept of lifelong learning as unlimited freedom for the individual to pursue personal goals, and the drive towards a capable, flexible workforce with the knowledge and skills to meet changing socio-economic priorities in a global marketplace. It has also highlighted some of the tensions for individual institutions of collaboration and competition in the drive towards cross-institutional partnerships. In an ideal world, the interests of the individual learner, the institutional provider and the national economic base would all be served by the lifelong learning agenda. In reality the Programme has highlighted some potentially conflicting priorities between what the learner wants, what the institution is able to provide, and the wider strategic context of developments in tertiary education across the UK.

5.5. Implications for future developments

- 5.5.1 There is evidence from the work of this Programme of important changes being made in practice and levels of service at a local institutional level, of improved cross-institutional collaborations, and of the initiation of significant transformational developments at a strategic level across the sector. Through its Steering Group, the Programme was able to achieve and maintain engagement and raised awareness among key strategic agencies in the sector. Some of the projects also developed high-level relationships within appropriate agencies and organisations, including international consultation and input to European developments in policy and practice. Part of the success of these strategic relations lay in the opportunities presented by the Programme for the practical demonstration of the results of change in the real working context of institutions. Future development programmes have an opportunity to build on and develop these strategic relations through genuine operational contextualisation.
- 5.5.2 The success of these strategic and operational relations often relies on inter-personal communication and sometimes protracted negotiations. Projects repeatedly emphasised the need to 'win the battle of hearts and minds' at all levels of engagement, institutionally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It is of paramount importance to specify and model technical solutions based on the institutional context and a shared understanding of organisational need, not on technological possibility or the capacity of the systems themselves.
- 5.5.3 One of the principal outcomes from the Programme, upon which future developments may build, is a clear understanding about when and where systems interoperability is required. Specifications and standards are crucial for scalable solutions to the delivery of collaborative provision and passing data to external organisations. The Programme was instrumental in the refinement of the MLE matrix for the 2005 repeat of the JISC/UCISA Landscape Study. Changes included the development of the scope of the review from its original focus on MLEs to a broader focus on environments to support e-learning. The revised study matrix also specifically extended the range of these environments to include cross-institutional, cross-sectoral and work-based learning. The development of systems for mapping, recording and developing skills and competencies in a work-based learning context was highlighted through the Programme as an area for further development work.
- 5.5.4 The Programme also clarified the idea of scenario building as a starting point for consortium projects to identify areas of common interest, and developed a methodology for scenario development. It has demonstrated that scenarios are an essential first step in the development of scalable solutions to interoperability in both a technical and organisational sense. It has also shown that this is only part of the solution. There is still a need for business process analysis with full user requirements. Use cases and UML modelling are the next steps in the distillation and specification of clear, workable solutions to complex cross-institutional transactions. While successive JISC development programmes have highlighted differences in the requirements of the

various UK funding and reporting bodies, this Programme proposed, explored and identified potential solutions for effective data exchange.

- 5.5.5 One of the later meetings of the Programme Steering Group commented that among the many achievements of this Programme has been a foregrounding of a profound issue for the JISC – the extent to which it is possible to identify and quantify what progress is actually being made towards realising the JISC aim to provide ‘world-class leadership in the innovative use of ICT’ and work towards the strategic vision of ‘ubiquitous and reliable access to an information and communication environment, so that users are able to enjoy world class technologies in support of their work and study.’²³ The point of development programmes, the Committee agreed, is to change the world, not just to describe it. The aim is not to use technology to model existing educational systems, but to transform the ways in which the sector goes about its business to the general benefit of all concerned. The MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme has the sector some way further along this road.

6 Recommendations

These recommendations for the JISC and for projects engaging in JISC development work are drawn from the analysis of key findings and the commentary on the formative evaluation process. The italicised numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs in the analysis and commentary sections of the report that are particularly pertinent to the specific recommendations made.

6.1 Recommendations for projects/institutions

Institutions applying for project funding should recognise the need for a careful balance of aspiration and ambition with a realistic assessment of what a development project can actually achieve in context. (4.2.5)

Projects should be aware that cultural and organisational issues are often more complex and time-consuming than technical developments, and that time and resources need to be dedicated to addressing interoperability at a human, interpersonal level. (4.5.1)

Developments must be driven by organisational need and based on a thorough analysis of business processes and stakeholder requirements. (4.3.2)

Confirm and maintain institutional buy in – the aims of the project must be consonant with explicit institutional strategic priorities and operational plans for all consortium partners. (4.5.5)

Projects should implement management approaches appropriate to exploratory development projects. Consideration should be given to the interfaces between the strategic role of the project director and operational responsibilities of the project manager. (4.2.2)

Address the people issues first – ensure there is a shared understanding among key stakeholders of the scope, objectives and intended outcomes of the project. (4.5.2, 4.5.4, 5.5.2)

Conduct a thorough audit at the outset of project team skills, knowledge and capacity, including technical skills and requirements, avoiding assumptions about capacity and capability in consortium institutions. (4.2.7)

Address legal issues of data protection, copyright and IPR at an early stage. (4.4.1)

Ensure that the project activities encompass evaluation and dissemination on an ongoing basis and not just at the end of the project. Consider establishing a process of peer evaluation or review with other projects in a programme. (4.8.1)

²³ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=about_strategic

Embrace the potential of technology to transform institutional processes to take account of the lifelong learning agenda, rather than simply to replicate existing systems and traditional ways of working. (5.4.2, 5.5.5)

6.2 Recommendations for the JISC

6.2.1 Programme management and support

Short programmes need clearly defined and specific objectives. Longer programmes should have built-in flexibility in their aims, objectives and planned deliverables to enable projects to adapt to changing circumstances. (4.8.3, 5.3.3)

Where possible, the scheduling of programmes should take account of institutional time and the rhythm of the academic year, including the most effective time to plan and start a new project, and the lead-in time required to recruit or second appropriate staff. (5.3.4)

Comprehensive provision for formative evaluation and programme-level support should be established at the outset, with clear delineation of roles, responsibilities and reporting channels. Input from projects should be encouraged in identifying the scope and content of programme-level support provision. (5.2.2)

The concept of programme-level evaluation should be further developed to promote a cohesive overall picture, with each project clearly exploring and evaluating an aspect or issue that is a recognisable part of the whole programme. (5.2.4)

Consideration should be given to the appointment of expert consultants to provide advice to projects from the outset, perhaps after a preliminary bidding stage, with formal reporting and accountability mechanisms at programme level. (5.2.5)

Programme-level activities and meetings need to ensure a balance of strategic overview and practical operational issues appropriate to the audience. (4.2.4, 5.5.1)

Where appropriate, relevant legal advice should be available to projects on a programme-wide basis. (4.4.1)

6.2.2 Future development activities

Developing and implementing technical systems for collaboration across the sectors, including work-based learning and HE in FE provision, needs to be based on awareness of different sectoral contexts, drivers and constraints. Future programmes should also take into account the need to balance the UK-wide developmental remit of the JISC with the different audit, accreditation and funding systems across the UK. (4.6.3)

There should be a clear understanding across the sector of what is actually meant by 'lifelong learning' to ensure that the needs of learners are genuinely served by the development of lifelong learning profiles. (4.7.1, 5.4.3)

There is a need for further development work in the area of skills and competency mapping and work-based learning. (5.5.3)

There may be merit in exploring the scope and nature of cultural paradigms for sustainable technical development in a cross-institutional context for independent lifelong learning. (5.4.4, 5.5.3)

Consideration should be given to establishing knowledge exchange programmes to communicate programme outputs and outcomes, using existing networks and developing new communities of practice where appropriate. (5.3.5)

A high-level awareness of future programme activities and issues arising from ongoing developments should be maintained through appointing a strategic steering group, and/or through regular briefings and standing agenda items for appropriate external bodies and committees. (5.3.1)

7 References

All links below were last checked 6 November 2005.	
CRE (1999)	The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf
DfES (2004)	Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice (The Schwartz Report) http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/downloads/finalreport.pdf
DfES (2005)	Harnessing Technology: Transforming Learning and Children's Services http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/fore.shtml
DfES (2005)	Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work, Parts 1, 2 and 3 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/
DfTE (2003)	An e-learning Strategy for Wales http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/
DfTE (2004)	E-Learning in Wales: Current Developments and Stakeholder Views on Future Priorities, Information Document No: 030-04 http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/
HEFCE (2005)	Strategy for e-Learning http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2005/05_12/
JISC (2003)	Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning Programme: Building MLEs across FE and HE, Phase 1 Overview (Glenaffric Ltd) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/0101review.pdf
JISC (2003)	JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Formative Evaluation Framework (Glenaffric Ltd) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/EvaFrame.pdf
JISC/UCISA (2003)	Managed Learning Environment Activity in Further and Higher Education in the UK (The Social Informatics Research Unit, University of Brighton/ Education for Change Ltd/ The Research Partnership) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_mle_activity
JISC (2004)	Interoperability Pilots II (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – SWaNI) Programme Final Report (Glenaffric Ltd) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_swani
JISC (2004)	Review of JISC funded MLE Activity (Glenaffric Ltd) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/MLERreviewF.pdf
JISC (2005)	The e-Framework for Education and Research: An Overview. A Paper prepared on behalf of DEST (Australia), JISC-CETIS (UK). Principal Contributors: Bill Olivier, Tish Roberts, Kerry Blinco http://www.e-framework.org/eframeworkrV1.pdf
JISC (2005)	Study to Explore the Legal & Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record (University of Bristol Centre for IT and Law) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_learner_records_legal_study
JISC (2005)	Study of Environments to Support e-Learning in UK Further and Higher Education (Education for Change Ltd/ The Research Partnership/ Social Informatics Research Unit, University of Brighton) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_mle_activity_repeat&src=alpha
JISC (2005)	Project Management Guidelines http://www.jisc.ac.uk/proj_manguide.html
JISC	Strategy 2004 – 2006 http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=strategy_jisc_04_06
JISC	Distributed e-Learning Strand http://www.jisc.ac.uk/programme_edistributed.html

JISC/CRA/CETIS	The Lifelong Learning Support Project http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/lisp
JISC/CETIS	e-Learning Focus Web Site http://www.elearning.ac.uk/mle
SFC (2003)	Final Report of the Joint SFEFC/SHEFC e-Learning Group http://www.sfc.ac.uk/joint_info/publications/joint_e-learning_report_july_2003.html
UUK (2004)	Measuring and Recording Student Achievement. Report of the Scoping Group chaired by Professor Robert Burgess http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/education/02/tomlinson_report/pdf/final_report.pdf

Appendix A – Abbreviations and Acronyms

CETIS	Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards
CRE	Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and Association of European Universities
CRA	Centre for Recording Achievement
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfTE	Department for Training and Education (Welsh Assembly Government)
EU	European Union
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
JLT	JISC Learning and Teaching committee
LLSP	Lifelong Learning Support Project
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MIAP	Managing Information Across Partners
MLE	Managed Learning Environment
PDP	Personal Development Planning
SFC	Scottish Funding Councils
SWaNI	Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – Interoperability Pilots Programme II
UCAS	Universities Central Admissions Service
UCISA	Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association
Ufi	University for Industry (learndirect)
UKLeaP	United Kingdom Learner Application Profile
UML	Universal Mark-up Language
UUK	Universities UK
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
7/99	Building MLEs in HE Programme
11/00	Interoperability Pilots Programme
01/01	MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Building MLEs across FE and HE
01/03	MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme: Phase 2

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Formative Evaluation Framework

Introduction

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has commissioned a formative evaluation of the Managed Learning Environments (MLEs) for Lifelong Learning Programme (01/01) through independent consultants Glenaffric Ltd. The evaluation will take place in Phase 2 of the programme, which is covered under the 01/03 Call: MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Phase 2.

This Phase of the programme expands the scope of issues being explored, specifically in the use of the IMS Learner Information Profile (LIP), and includes links to organisations external to FE and HE.

The Formative Evaluation Project covers the continuing formative evaluation of the two Phase 1 projects, SHELL and NIIMLE, as well as the nine new projects in Phase 2 which started in July 2003. Both Phases of the programme will be completed by July 2005.

Phase 1

Under Phase 1 of the programme, an MLE Evaluation Team of experts and associated JISC developers was established to oversee the formative evaluation of the projects. The team also undertook the role of Steering/Advisory group and some additional activities:

- Attendance and participation in programme meetings
- Buddy visits to projects and feedback to projects
- Review and feedback on reports and project outputs
- Development of ITTs for supporting studies and the circular for the 01/03 Phase 2 call
- Marking and selection of proposals for supporting studies and projects under the 01/03 Phase 2 call
- Development of the programme evaluation framework

The team established an aim and objectives for the programme:

Aim:

To explore the issues related to developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across sectors and institutions

Objectives:

1. To establish cross institutional architectures to transfer student record data
2. To establish cross institutional architectures to deliver learning
3. To explore the use of student learning profiles
4. To measure and record the impact of cross-institutional systems on business processes of institutions
5. To identify and address the implications for staff development
6. To provide a formative development and dissemination process throughout the lifetime of the project which will engage the (JISC community) HE/FE sectors

From these a logframe of the planned outputs from Phase 1 was derived. The logframe can be a useful tool for planning and evaluation purposes. However, logframes can be difficult to understand and this, combined with a certain inherent rigidity, can result in the simplification of complex social processes²⁴.

²⁴ Earle, L (2003) Lost in the Matrix: The Logframe and the Local Picture. Paper for INTRAC's 5th Evaluation Conference: Measurement, Management and Accountability? 31st March – 4th April 2003 The Netherlands Available from: <http://www.intrac.org/Intrac/docs/LEarle.pdf>

Phase 2

The MLE Evaluation Team was instrumental in the development of Circular 01/03, the call for the Phase 2 projects. The objectives for this Phase are:

1. To explore the learning, teaching and administrative implications of implementing MLE activities to support lifelong learners on cross-institutional programmes of study
2. To explore interoperability for lifelong learning, specifically in the areas of linking learner information between managed learning environments and awarding bodies, external learning organisations and employers.
3. To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile.
4. To explore and test the use of learner information packages to support seamless learner transition between institutions. This work will build on the outcomes of the phase one projects.

The programme has four themes based on these objectives. The diagram at Appendix A illustrates the boundaries of these themes and their relationship to each other. A matrix of the programme objectives and planned deliverables is at Appendix B. This includes a mapping of the individual objectives from all of the Phase 2 projects as well as the two Phase 1 projects. This matrix was checked by each project at the first Phase 2 Programme meeting in October 2003 at Birmingham.

The objectives from Phase 1 map to the Phase 2 objectives. Staff development issues are not explicitly stated in the Phase 2 objectives but may be addressed through learning and teaching implications. The sixth objective from Phase 1, concerning the formative development and dissemination process throughout the lifetime of the project that engages with the HE/FE sectors, is addressed through this Formative Evaluation Project and the dissemination strategy currently under development. Both of these will draw on the work of the individual projects.

All of these activities are now overseen by the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Steering Group. This group will meet four times a year and receive reports from the Formative Evaluation Project. In addition the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) Generic Support Project will provide support for the operationalisation of LIP and capacity building in project teams. Communication and consistency between these supporting activities will be ensured through the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Support and Evaluation Group (SEG) that meets regularly and includes representation from the Programme Steering Group and the JISC.

Formative Evaluation Project

The aim of this project is:

To provide a formative evaluation of the Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning Projects which maximises the synergy between projects and the long term benefits for the JISC community.

Objectives:

1. To develop an evaluation framework which will encourage synergy and sharing across the projects
2. To identify common themes across the projects
3. To undertake formative evaluation activities with the projects
4. To liaise with and service the MLE Support and Evaluation Group
5. To provide feedback in the form of detailed reports at regular intervals

Given the formative nature of the project, the approach will need to exhibit certain features:

- Focus on the 'softer' side on project activities – relationships, processes, organisational context, change processes and management
- Focus on the implications of MLE development for lifelong learning – encourage relation of project activities to learning and teaching practice
- Encouraging reflection on activities and processes
- Providing constructive feedback on project activities and progress

- Encouraging synergies and cross-fertilisation across projects

The evaluation framework for the MLE programme draws on some of the recent work on the practical application of some key theories of formative evaluation to educational technology programmes. This work includes the EFX evaluation toolkit developed by CERLIM for the evaluation of the JISC X4L programme²⁵. This toolkit is based on logic models²⁶ and theory-anchored evaluation strategies²⁷. These approaches are concerned with the identification and articulation of project outcomes of interest, not in terms of progress against targets, but in the context of a developing understanding of stakeholder goals, challenges and expectations.

Methodology

This is an evaluation of the programme not of individual projects. This distinction is important not least because the projects will also be undertaking formative evaluation activities of their own. The Kellogg Foundation²⁸ has identified three levels of evaluation:

- Project level – evaluation throughout the life of the project that assists project staff to make effective decisions to continuously improve the project
- Cluster – grouping similar projects to bring about systemic change by learning from other similar projects
- Programme and policy making – evaluation at the macro level to assist decision-making for programme funding and support

Formative evaluation is primarily concerned with gathering information about a project while it is in progress to help improve its chances of success. Summative evaluation happens at the end and is concerned with demonstrating the project's success and disseminating the results to others. Summative evaluation may also be conducted as a retrospective review, particularly to explore project impact which can be difficult to evaluate during the project's life or on immediate completion.

For this evaluation project, this levelled approach is relevant as it allows themes of interest to be explored at different levels, with different clusters or groupings, and by key experts where appropriate. In this way expertise from the MLE Evaluation Team can be drawn and built on in this Phase. The programme is also phased over time which enables particular themes to be explored at specific points which are relevant and appropriate to the programme. The basic model for this approach with themes can be seen at Appendix B.

The process of the formative evaluation is iterative as shown in the diagram below:

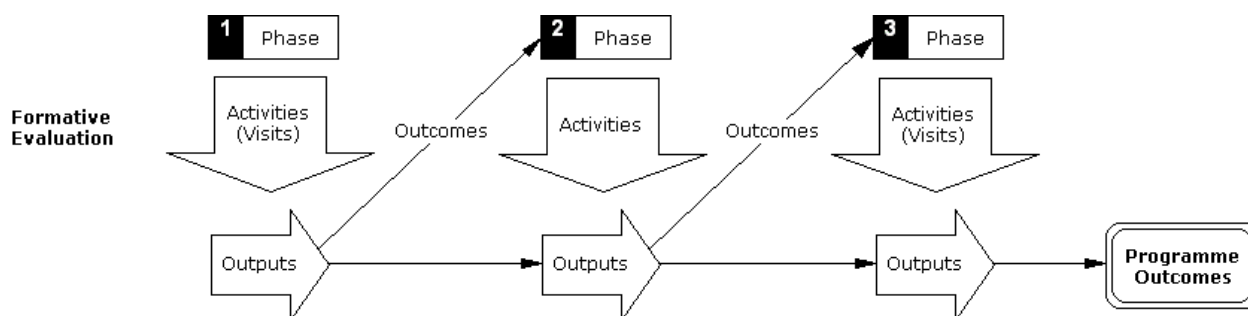
²⁵ <http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/projects/efx/toolkit/index.html> The EFX evaluation toolkit is a development from the Tavistock Guidelines for eLIB Project Evaluation, available at <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/papers/tavistock/evaluation-guide/intro.html> on which Glenaffric Ltd based the SWaNI Formative Evaluation Framework (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/SwaniEF.doc)

²⁶ See McClaughlin, J.A., & Jordan, G.B. (1999) Logic models: a tool for telling your program's performance story. Available: <http://www.pmn.net/education/Logic.htm>; also Nash, J., Plugge, L., & Eurelings, A. (2000). Defining and evaluating CSCL (Computer Supported Collaborative Learning) projects: managing towards evaluation. Paper presented at the European Conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (ECSCCL 2000), Maastricht, Netherlands

²⁷ See Strömdahl, H., & Langerth Zetterman, M. (2001). On theory-anchored evaluation research of educational settings especially those supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish Learning Lab

²⁸ <http://www.wkkf.org> WKKellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook

Appendix B – Programme Evaluation Framework



Details of the timescale and associated activities can be found in Appendix C.

Data will be acquired from three main sources:

- Documentary evidence – any written or graphical outputs from the projects and programme support staff including JISC reports from other related activities
- Evaluation activities – at each programme meeting there will be an activity designed to explore a particular aspect of the evaluation themes. For example, at the first programme meeting the History of the Future exercise²⁹ was used to explore the project teams' logic of their proposals
- Key respondents – summary transcripts resulting from meetings and interviews with those persons who have some involvement in the programme and its projects, summarised in the table below:

Key Category	Respondent Group
A	01/03 programme manager and other JISC staff
B	Project leaders, project partners and other project staff
C	Lead institution senior manager ideally with a strategic role in the provision of information systems, support and management within their institution
D	Administrative staff who may be involved with the effect of the project within their institution
E	Academic staff who may be involved with the effect of the project within their institution
F	Vendors of the technologies used by the projects
G	Support staff and other related groups (eg CETIS, CRA, SIGs, RSCs, JISC InfoNet)
H	Agencies with an interest in programme outcomes (eg UCAS, DEL, HEFCE, SFC, ELWa, DELNI)

Much of the data is qualitative in nature and will be analysed using techniques derived from a grounded theory approach which facilitates identifying and exploring emerging themes on an ongoing basis.³⁰ Where appropriate the outputs from different groups of key respondents will be cross-referenced to both inform and validate findings.

Areas of interest

The following areas of interest were identified in the ITT for this formative evaluation:

- Methodologies for business process re-engineering
- Organisational change
- Benefits for:

²⁹ See McClaughlin et al, op cit

³⁰ See Strauss, A. and Corbin, C. (1990), Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, Sage

- participating colleges
- vendors
- Implications for:
 - lifelong learners
 - all staff across institutions
 - staff development
 - PDPs/using VLEs in HE and FE
 - synergy with external organisations
- MLE models and approaches to developing architectures

Initial activities with the projects has revealed some practical issues that the projects face at the start:

- Staffing
- Project plans
- Institutional engagement
- Evaluation
- Use cases
- Data protection
- Learner Profile
- Capacity
- Working with vendors

These lists are by no means complete and are likely to change over time as the projects develop and progress. Some will be tackled by the programme manager but the majority will fall to either the Generic Support Project or the Formative Evaluation Project. Consistency and the avoidance of duplication will be addressed through the Support and Evaluation Group's regular collaboration.

Stakeholders

All evaluations have multiple stakeholders, that is any person or group who has an interest in the project being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. Where formative evaluation is concerned they key stakeholders are the project teams and the programme manager. However, others do have an interest in evaluation outcomes during the life of the programme. The distinction drawn elsewhere³¹ between the local, performance related evaluation undertaken by project teams, and the programme level formative evaluation is also relevant to this framework.

Identification of key stakeholders is an essential aspect of any evaluation strategy but would be incomplete without some consideration of how their various interest might be satisfied. Primarily this will be done through reports for specific groups and presentations at programme meetings.

Stakeholders	Interests
Project Teams	Any aspect of project management and development that can assist them in successful outcomes
JISC Programme Manager	Any aspect of programme management and development that can assist the projects in successful outcomes

³¹ Oliver, M., Conole, G. Phelps, J. Maier, P. Wilkinson, D. and Bailey, P. (1999) The EFFECTS Evaluation Framework: a transferable model for collaborative projects, BP ELT report no. 7, University of North London. Available from: <http://www.unl.ac.uk/tltc/elt/elt7.pdf>

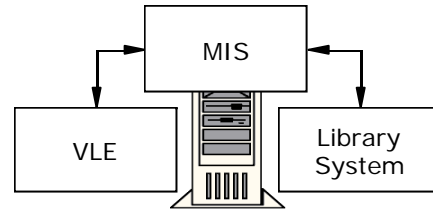
Appendix B – Programme Evaluation Framework

Stakeholders	Interests
JISC MLE Development Team	Synergies between this and other related programmes
Institutional Managers	Institutional interventions that can assist their project
Institutional Administrative Staff	Administrative activities that may be affected by the project
Vendor representatives	Synergies between projects that may be mutually beneficial
Academic staff	Academic activities that may be affected by the project
JISC Executive	Synergies between this and other related programmes that are beneficial to the JISC as a whole
Other JISC (JISCInfoNet, RSCs)	Synergies between this and other related programmes that are beneficial to their particular remits
Lifelong learners	Impact of projects on the learner experience
FE/HE Community	Wider messages about developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions
External Bodies	Interim outcomes that are relevant to their particular remits

Activities and Reporting

The formative evaluation team will gather and analyse data from and about the projects on a regular basis. The principal sources of the data are the activities listed in Appendix D. The significant events, from an evaluation perspective, are the programme meetings, the project visits and the key respondent interviews. In order to ensure that the formative focus of this project is maintained, timeous reporting of these various events is essential. The reporting cycle is summarised in the table at Appendix E. Following each round of activity, reports will be made to the projects, the Programme Manager, the Support and Evaluation Group and the Programme Steering Group as appropriate. Care will be taken to ensure that reports are in a form and style suitable for the primary audience.

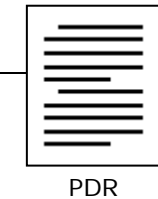
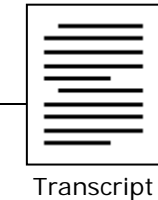
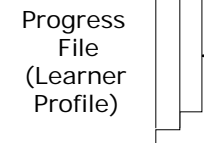
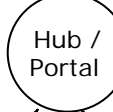
Theme 1: Learning, teaching and administrative implications of MLEs for learners



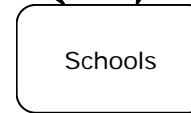
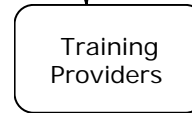
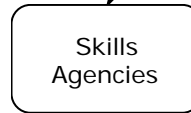
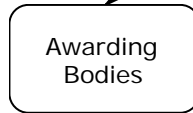
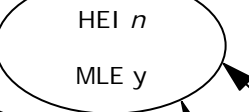
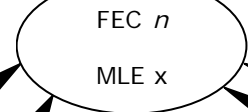
Learner

MLE model

Theme 4: Testing multi-institutional Learner Profile



Theme 3: Testing PDP section of the Learner Profile



Theme 2: Interoperability for lifelong learning

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Phase 2 Objectives

Aim: to explore the issues associated with developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions.

		Worcester	Blackpool	Glamorgan	Stow	GCal	QMC	Nottingham	Liverpool	L'borough	NIIMLE	SHELL
1	To explore the learning, teaching and administrative implications of implementing MLE activities to support lifelong learners on cross-institutional programmes of study											
1.1	To further develop, explore and evaluate the issues around developing inter-institutional learning environments	X	X	X	X						X	X
1.2	To implement relevant MLE systems and the use of IMS specifications to achieve integration of systems				X						X	X
1.3	To explore and evaluate the impact of the introduction of elements of a cross-institutional MLE on staff and students by focusing upon a learning activity which is shared between institutions, colleges or learning organisations	X	X	X								O
1.4	To explore the impact of introducing MLE activities, changing business processes and embedding them into an existing course that is delivered across a number of learning organisations	O		X	X							
2	To explore interoperability for lifelong learning, specifically in the areas of linking learner information between managed learning environments and awarding bodies, external learning organisations, employers and schools											
2.1	To explore the issues of data transfer (using the IMS LIP Specification) to facilitate lifelong learning				X	X	X	X	O		X	X
2.2	To explore the linking of MLEs to external bodies rather than between FE colleges and/or HE institutions				X	X	X	X			X	X
2.3	To emphasise the development of standards/specifications for interoperability					X		X			X	X
2.4	To explore the wider issues around linking MLEs to external bodies				X	X	X	O				
2.5	To achieve agreement on a specification for interoperability					X	O	X			X	X
2.6	To piloting agreed specification within their own institution/consortium					X	O	X			X	X
3	To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile											
3.1	To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile (PDP specification Phase 1)	?	?				X	X	X	X		
3.2	To pilot actual usage of a software system to support use of the lifelong learning profile and involve learning and teaching based evaluation							X	X	X		
3.3	To ensure that the software system used implements the PDR mapping to IMS LIP using an online profiling system that collects the learner profile							X	X	X	X	
4	To explore and test the use of learner information packages to support seamless learner transition between institutions. This work will build on the outcomes of the phase one projects											
4.1	To explore and further test the Learner Profile mapping to the IMS Learner Information Package (LIP) specification for inter-institutional transfer of data						X	X		O	X	X
4.2	To explore and further test the product interfaces and protocols to allow transfer between institutions and infrastructures to support MLEs across institutions							X		O	X	X
4.3	To draw upon the developments of the SHELL and NIIMLE projects		X		X			X		X		
4.4	To explore the implications of the Learner Profile for the organisations, staff and students						O	X		X		O

JISC Deliverables

	Worcester	Blackpool	Glamorgan	Stow	GCal	QMC	Nottingham	Liverpool	L'borough	NIIMLE	SHELL
1A Demonstrable examples of MLEs supporting lifelong learning	X	X	X							X	X
1B Evaluative report of the implications of introducing MLE activities and changing business processes that is specifically focussed on the impact on staff and students	X	X	X							X	X
2A Report of the current developments and implications of linking with MLEs to the external body				X	X	X	X			X	X
2B Specification for the transfer of data between MLEs and the external body				O	X		X			X	X
2C Demonstrable pilot showing how data can be transferred between MLEs and the external body				X	X	X	X			X	X
2D Report on the implications for institutions and the future development of MLEs			O		X		X				X
3A Piloting of the Professional Development Record (PDR) mapping to IMS LIP Specification						X	X	X	X	X	O
3B Use cases of the learner planning processes explored						X	O	X	X	O	O
3C Case studies to illustrate usage with a range of users/learners	?		O			X	X	X	X	O	O
3D Evaluation report that includes a focus on the learning and teaching aspects of using learner profiles	?						X	X	X		
4A Testing of the transfer of learner information between institutions using the Learner Profile specification developed for the MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme							X		O	X	X
4B Evaluative report of the technological approach taken and the implications for other institutions			O			X	X		O	X	X
4C Exploration of the implications, benefits and opportunities presented as a consequence of the transfer of learner information between institutions						X	X	O	O	X	X

Additional Outputs

Worcester: Guidelines

Blackpool: Longitudinal study on interoperability issues of multi-institutional support

Glamorgan: Briefing papers

Stow: Project Initiation Document, How to Guides

Glasgow Caledonian: Case studies

Queen Mary College: SRS Module, Best Practice Guide, Other reports

Nottingham: Application Profile for UCAS form, UK Learner Profile v1.4

Liverpool: Toolkit for data transfer

Loughborough: Electronic Progress File

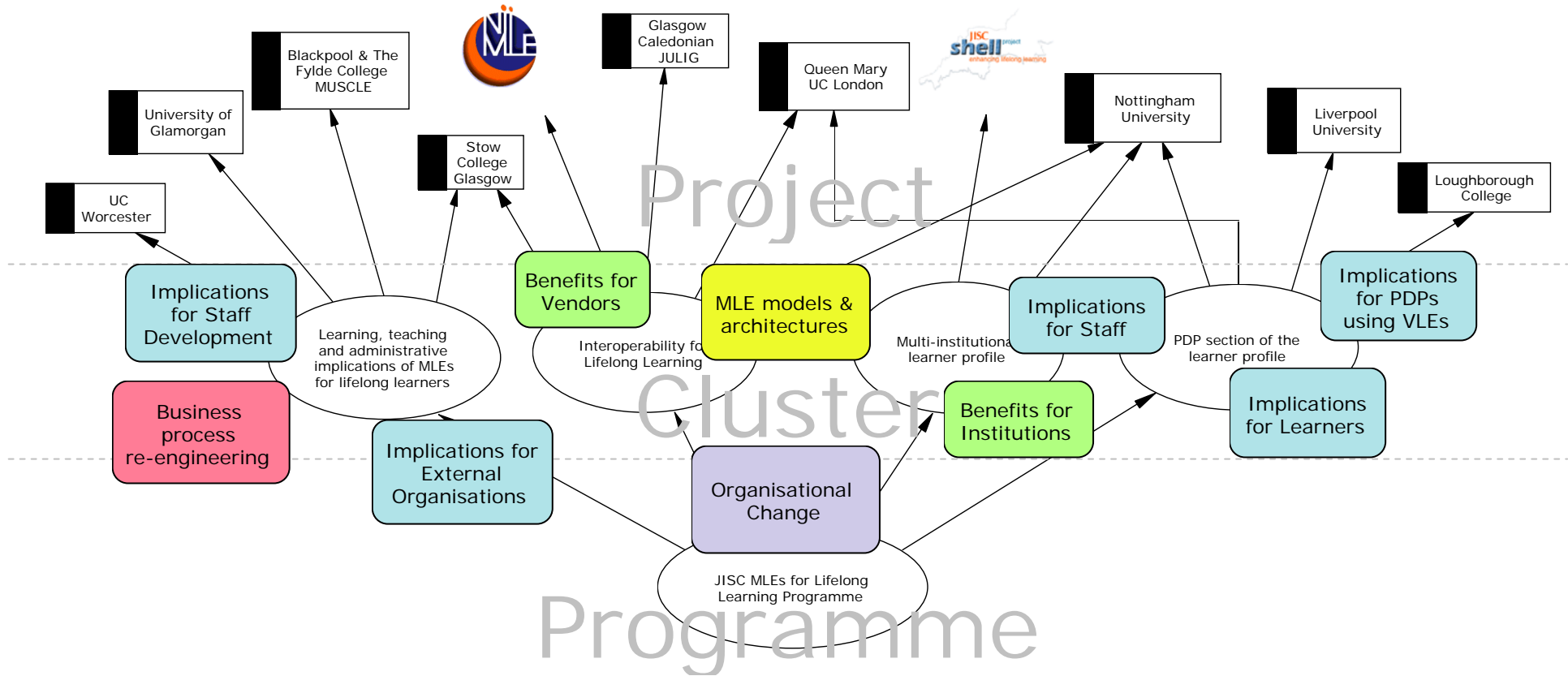
Key

X – Complete coverage as indicated in project bid

O – Partial coverage

? – Should be covered by project but not indicated in project bid

Formative Evaluation Cluster Model



Timescale	Activities
Phase 1: June 2003 – February 2004	
July – August 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial consultation with Programme Manager and MLE Evaluation Team • Analysis of background reports and documents, including relevant research papers and outcomes from related work • Analysis of bid documentation – identification of emerging issues
September 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct initial telephone interviews with project managers • Organise and prepare first project visits
15 -16 October 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – present outline Evaluation Framework • Facilitate evaluation exercise
October 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce draft Evaluation Framework – discuss and revise with SEG
November 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct first project visits • Present Evaluation framework to Programme Steering Group
November – December 2003	Visit feedback and report to project teams and Programme Manager
January 2004	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
25-26 February 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 1 summary and Phase 2 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
February 2004	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
Phase 2: March 2004 – October 2004	
March – May 2004	Conduct telephone interviews with key respondents and project managers
May 2004	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
June 2004	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
September 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise and prepare initial project visits
14-15 October 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 2 summary and Phase 3 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
October 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG • Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
Phase 3: November 2004 – June 2005	
November 2004	Conduct second project visits
November – December 2004	Visit feedback and report to project teams and Programme Manager
January 2005	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
22-23 February 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 2 summary and Phase 3 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
February 2005	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
April – May 2005	Conduct telephone interviews with project managers
June 2005	Produce draft final Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
July 2005	Revise and submit final programme Evaluation Report

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme

Formative Evaluation Project

	2003 Phase 1						2004										2005							
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Initial Documentary Analysis	A	A																						
Programme Meetings				PM				PM				UM				PM				PM				
Evaluation Visits				A	AAA	A											AAA	AA						
Project Manager Interviews			AAA						AAA													AAA		
Key Respondent Interviews										AAA	AAA													
Visit Reports to Projects					R	RRR	R										R	RRR	R					
Evaluation Reports							R					R				R								R
SEG Meetings	SM		SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM		SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	

Key:

PM - Programme Meeting

UM - Update Meeting

A - Activity

R - Report

SM - Support Evaluation Group Meeting

Note: Currently this plan does not show the Programme Steering Group meetings

JISC 01/03 MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme

Steering Committee Member	
Project Name and Institution	
Date of Visit	
Whom did you meet?	
What were the main issues discussed?	
What struck you in particular about the project and the visit?	
What advice, if any, was offered to the project team?	
Are there any issues requiring further action by the Programme Support and Evaluation Group?	
Are there any issues that may impact on the national picture and should be brought to the attention of the Steering Committee?	

Please email this form to jane@glenaffric.com or fax to 0870 052 9151

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Case Study Template

The fields identified in this template are derived from others used in the JISC e-Learning Programme. The purpose of these case studies is to capture examples of changing practice as it emerges from a development programme. The case studies will be available from the JISC e-Learning website. As with the Effective Practice with e-Learning case studies³², the focus is on learning activity, which is defined as:

‘an interaction between a learner and an environment, leading to a planned outcome. It is the planned outcome which makes it purposeful activity’.

The activity takes place in the context of a pedagogical approach derived from a perspective on the nature of the learning process. In broad terms three perspectives have been identified:

Associative – learning as acquiring competence – learners acquire knowledge by building associations between different concepts

Constructive – learning as achieving understanding – learners actively construct new ideas by building and testing hypotheses or through collaborative activities and dialogue

Situative – learning as social practice – learners develop their identity through participation in specific communities and practices

Heading/sub-heading (field)	Description
Case study title	Something snappy and/or explanatory
Institution	Name and department
Background	Give brief details of institution, type of learners and learning environment in which this activity takes place
Learning activity	Briefly outline the learning activity – for example using an e-portfolio tool
Pedagogical approach	Briefly describe the pedagogical perspective from which the activity takes place
Intended outcome(s)	Describe the objective(s) behind the practice outlined here
Challenges	Identify the issues that required attention or which prompted you to re-assess your previous practice – why did this need to change?
Established practice	Identify features of the practice previously in use – how you used to do things
The e-learning advantage	Describe the benefits of this addition or amendment to practice through e-learning, as experienced by learners, practitioners and/or the institution as a whole
Key points for effective practice	Briefly identify the most important points in this case study for other practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits
Conclusions and recommendations	A summary of how, why and to what extent the practice outlined here has been effective
Additional information	Use this optional section to add related materials or content – can this be seen somewhere, is there a key contact?

³² See JISC Effective practice with e-learning for further details

Appendix E – Programme Thematic Evolution

