

Cover Sheet for Proposals (All sections must be completed)	JISC Capital Programme
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Name of Capital Programme: e-Learning

Bid for Call:
(Please tick ONE BOX ONLY, as appropriate)

Supporting lifelong learning

Call I – HE in FE

Technical developments to support learning and teaching

	Call II – Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> a) Item Authoring Tool <input type="checkbox"/> b) Item Bank Software <input type="checkbox"/> c) Assessment Delivery Tool		Call IV – Admissions demonstrators <input type="checkbox"/> a) structured personal profiles, course entry profiles and pre-assessment; <input type="checkbox"/> b) improving applicant feedback; <input type="checkbox"/> c) accreditation of prior experiential learning; <input type="checkbox"/> d) e-portfolio based admissions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Call VI – Course validation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Call III – Technology supported learning environments	<input type="checkbox"/>	Call V – Course description and discovery	<input type="checkbox"/>	Call VII – Domain maps

Name of Lead Institution: University of Reading

Name of Proposed Project: MeAggregator

Name(s) of Project Partner(s):

Full Contact Details for Primary Contact:

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Length of Project: 2 years

Project Start Date: March 2007 **Project End Date:** March 2009

Total Funding Requested from JISC: £102 471

Funding Broken Down over Financial Years (April – March):

Apr06 – Mar07	Apr07 – Mar08	Apr08 – Mar09
11,920	167,390	116,583

Total Institutional Contributions: £193,421		
Percentage Contributions over the Life of the Project:	JISC 35%	PARTNERS 65%
<p>Outline Project Description</p> <p>The aim of this project is to develop an open source application that can be web based or on the desktop, that will serve as a <i>Me Aggregator</i>. The Me Aggregator will configure the total set of technologies that an individual is using at a specific point of time. The technologies will include centrally supported technologies (for example university owned VLE and student records system) and user preferred technologies (for example MSN Messenger and Live Journal). The Me Aggregator will also support multi-membership, where for example a learner may also be an instructor or may belong to more than one institution. It is important that the Me Aggregator is able to adapt to the changing needs of the user (Me) and to accommodate changes within technologies. It is also considered that the user (Me) keeps control of the information relating to him/her and decides what is shared and with whom.</p> <p>Where appropriate the aim will be to use syndication services to link to technologies. Where this is not possible APIs will be specified and developed. Throughout the user (Me) will maintain control and ownership of their information. The Me Aggregator will allow the user to specify what information is pulled and pushed, and what is available to whom. Overarching the whole project will be the need to ensure security and quality. The aim will be to demonstrate and explore the issues around the integration of user-owned technologies with the institutionally-owned educational systems.</p>		
I have looked at the example FOI form at Appendix A and included an FOI form in the attached bid (Tick Box)	YES ✓	NO
I have read the Circular and associated Terms and Conditions of Grant at Appendix B (Tick Box)	YES ✓	NO

FOI Tick List**FOI Withheld Information Form**

We would like JISC to consider withholding the following sections or paragraphs from disclosure should the contents of this proposal be requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

We acknowledge that the FOI Withheld Information Form is of indicative value only and that JISC may nevertheless be obliged to disclose this information in accordance with the requirements of the Act. We acknowledge that the final decision on disclosure rests with JISC.

Section / Paragraph No.	Relevant exemption from disclosure under FOI	Justification
None		

Please see <http://www.ico.gov.uk> for further information on the Freedom of Information Act and the exemptions to disclosure it contains.

1. Introduction

1. The aim of this project is to develop an open source application that can be web based or on the desktop, that will serve as a *Me Aggregator*. The Me Aggregator will configure the total set of technologies that an individual is using at a specific point of time. The technologies will include centrally supported technologies (for example university owned VLE and student records system) and user preferred technologies (for example MSN Messenger and Live Journal). The Me Aggregator will also support multi-membership, where for example a learner may also be an instructor or may belong to more than one institution. It is important that the Me Aggregator is able to adapt to the changing needs of the user (Me) and to accommodate changes within technologies. It is also considered that the user (Me) keeps control of the information relating to him/her and decides what is shared and with whom.
2. Where appropriate the aim will be to use syndication services to link to technologies. Where this is not possible APIs will be specified and developed. Throughout the user (Me) will maintain control and ownership of their information. The Me Aggregator will allow the user to specify what information is pulled and pushed, and what is available to whom. Overarching the whole project will be the need to ensure security and quality. The aim will be to demonstrate and explore the issues around the integration of user-owned technologies with the institutionally-owned educational systems.

2. Project Description

3. This project will be a demonstrator of the integration of user-owned technologies with institutionally-owned educational and support systems.
4. It will build on our Learning Landscape project (RedGloo). RedGloo is supported by Reading University's Centre for Career Management Skills which is a HEFCE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The concept of the Learning Landscape is: placing the individual at the centre of their learning, allowing them to connect with other learners and create online communities. This project will go further by placing the individual at the centre of their information through the Me Aggregator, which will allow the individual to access and share their information in the way that suits them best.
5. The Me Aggregator has five main features:
 - it provides a tool for students and staff to manage the online communities (e.g. blogs, wikis, forums, MySpace, research based etc.) that they are already part of, through advanced use of content aggregation technologies such as RSS;
 - it gives them seamless access to academic content in institutionally-owned systems;
 - it gives them a new space in which to create academic-related content, which can subsequently be remixed with their personal content in any way they wish;
 - it provides access to a new source of academic online communities that will foster links across disparate groups of students and staff who may not normally meet, yet share similar interests;
 - and it will provide a large social network of students and staff through which the dissemination of ideas can more easily flow.
6. By providing a new space for the creation of academic-related content, the Me Aggregator helps democratize the tools for information production. By acting as an aggregator for this information, enabling the user to shape and remix their own and other people's content as they wish, the Me Aggregator helps democratize the distribution of information. Finally, through social bookmarking and intelligent ranking algorithms, the Me Aggregator will harness the Wisdom of Crowds effect to drive demand for information to the niches where it can best be found, and enable higher quality information to diffuse through the network of students more easily. In this way, the Me Aggregator will be aligned with the Long Tail dynamics that underlie social networks, and so will gain in value the more its users use it.
7. Furthermore, through enabling the free remixing of content of their own and other people's content, the Me Aggregator becomes a valuable information management tool in its own right, encouraging its adoption, and so bootstrapping the notoriously difficult process of populating

Example Use Case: Pete

Pete is a final year undergraduate student studying for a degree in Computer Science. Before he came to university he was working as a programmer for a SME and throughout his degree he has continued to work for them, full time in the vacations and a nominal 10 hours per week in term time.

As part of his degree he is undertaking a major project and taking several modules which are assessed by both coursework and exams.

For two hours per week he is employed by the university as a demonstrator to support first year programming practicals. With other of the demonstrators he participates in an online community to offer extra help to those who find programming difficult.

He is passionate about technology, and has also set up a community for a specific technology and organises occasional events where guest speakers present topics.

The way in which Pete works is an example of prosumption, he is both a producer and consumer of learning resources.

Pete already keeps a blog on Live Journal, he blogs, mainly, about his passion technology, but he also blogs about his course, his demonstrating and his work. For one of his pieces of coursework his lecturer requires that he keeps a blog on ethical issues related to software engineering. The lecturer wants to use the facilities offered by her VLE to comment and grade this work, currently Pete would have to use the blogging facility in the VLE, he would prefer to use his own provider.

As it is his final year Pete is considering what his future plans are, he enjoys working with his SME he is considering his options and is considering both applying for a graduate entry both with a large organisation or continuing on to a higher degree. He is developing his ePortfolio to make applications.

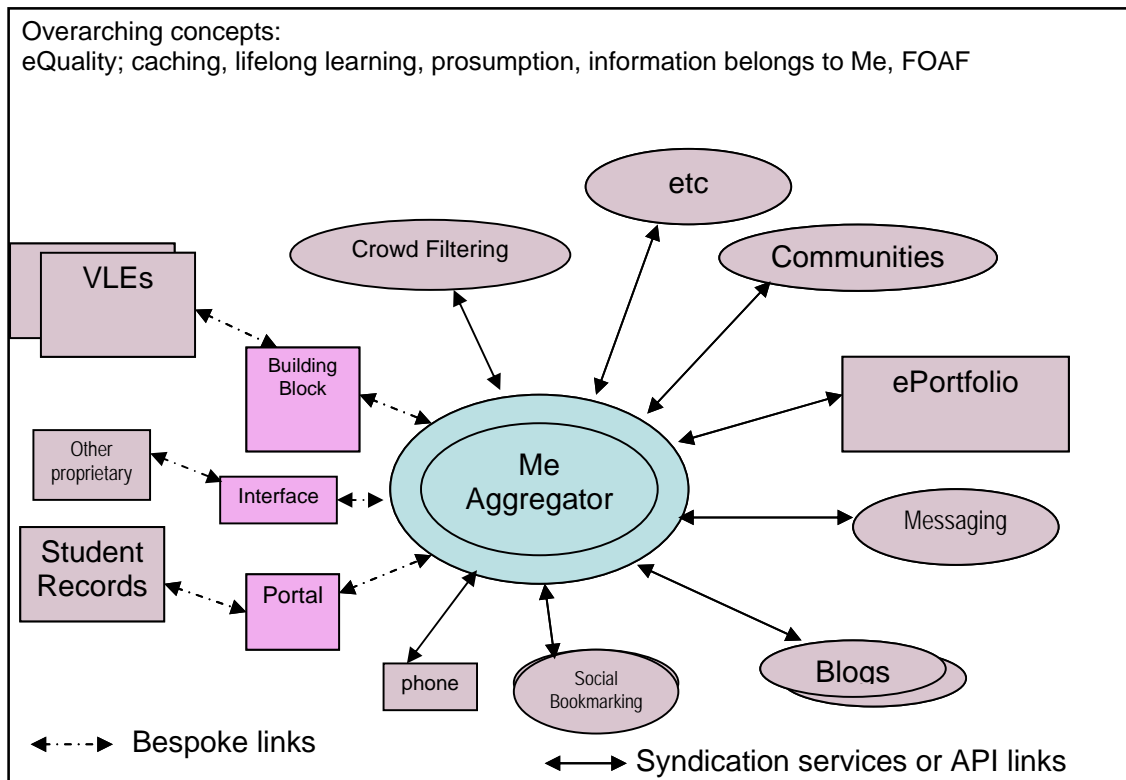
He uses various other technologies as part of his everyday life: MSN Messenger to chat to his friends, Skype to talk to his brother in America, Flickr for sharing photos, YouTube for sharing videos, del.icio.us for bookmarking, IE7 for aggregating RSS feeds, Writely for shared writing, Microsoft Exchange for his email (his university and personal mail are forwarded to his work account, with employers permission).

His university uses a SITS based system, Pete can use a web based system to access information relating to himself, the process he has to undergo to change his personal details is very laborious. The university also offers an online timetable, this has a separate interface and Pete has not found a way to get data from the timetable into his calendar.

- a social network application. Combined with the benefits of security and the ability to specify who should read what of a student's information, the Me Aggregator has the potential to become a tool users will not be able to live without.
8. Some of our students and staff already use aggregation, for example: RedGloo (which is based on the open source Elgg) facilitates aggregation; some aggregate information of interest to them via aggregators such as Google's personalised homepage; or indeed home made ones (one of the RedGloo communities recently organised an event during which participants built a simple aggregator). However there are issues that make this difficult within an academic setting, for example our university firewall/proxy prevents students readily using RSS feeds from their external blogs into RedGloo; and while our university's VLE does allow RSS feeds, this has to be permitted on a one by one basis by an administrator, and is not fully interoperable with common standards.
 9. We recently surveyed our Part 1 students to identify the methods they used for communicating on academic and personal matters. In both categories Instant Messaging (IM)

was second only to face to face communication, within an academic context sometimes people are hampered from using IM because they do not know the IM handles of their class mates or the staff, this information can be shared via FOAF (Friend of a Friend) however there is a need to consider issues of availability, for example a final year student who is tutoring first years may be happy to be contacted by them on Thursdays but not on other days of the week while he may still want to be available to his own class mates for group project work. Within this project we will seek to establish what current practice is, and what students and staff would like to be able to do. Use Cases will be used to represent samples of these, for example the Use Case above typifies a current undergraduate.

10. The diagram below captures the essence of the Me Aggregator as we currently envisage it.



11. The "Me" at the centre can be from any discipline and can be anyone: a part-time or a full-time student; an undergraduate or postgraduate; a member of staff or graduate. The important point is that Me has a holistic view of the technologies used and is not forced to in a manner that is uncomfortable or that is felt to be old-fashioned.

3. Detail of Proposed Activities, Timings and Deliverables

Activity	Date	Deliverable
Establish an advisory group from across the university, including: Students on full time and part time courses, undergraduate, post graduate and alumni, across the faculties; and staff. Include members with experience of accessibility issues.	March 2007	Advisory Group established
Identify technologies currently used by the advisory group, available from JISC funded projects and elsewhere.	March 2007	Technologies identified
Develop project web site and JISC web page	March 2007	Web site
Classify the list according to importance, risks and perceived ease of aggregation.	April 2007	

Identify technologies for building the aggregator, and with the help of the advisory group determine whether the first prototype should be desktop or web based.	April 2007	
Consult EFQUEL (European Foundation for Quality in eLearning) about eQuality issues and EIfEL (European Institute for eLearning) re implications for ePortfolios	April 2007	
Create Use Cases representing users that typify the diversity of the advisory group.	April 2007 – June 2008	Use Cases portfolio
Identify partners within the university to trial the 1 st prototype	April 2007 – August 2007	
Updated Project Plan (in line with JISC requirements)	May 2007	Detailed Project Plan
Build a rudimentary 1 st prototype aggregator	May 2007	Prototype 1
Test rudimentary 1 st prototype aggregator with Part 1 students after main university exams	June 2007	
Collect feedback from the test group, review risks.	June 2007	Summary of feedback and conclusions
Determine access levels and groupings (based on FOAF), so that Me can decide who to share information with.	June 2007	
Design a second prototype to be ready to be used by Freshers in late September 2007	July 2007	
Implement and test second prototype (both web based and desktop versions)	August 2007	Prototype 2
Prepare and run exercises for Freshers; evaluate the exercises	September 2007	
Present initial results at ePortfolio 2007 (or similar event)	October 2007	Paper
On going use of the second prototype	October 2007 – June 2008	
Initial Evaluation by staff and students, using focus groups and questionnaires. Production of evaluation report comparing and contrasting technologies that have been trialled. Review of risks	October 2007 – March 2008	Evaluation Report
Development of additional integration for other user-owned technologies	December 2007 – June 2008	
Design for integration of centrally supported technologies, using services such as Blackboard Building Blocks, PebblePad's Portal etc.	December 2007 – June 2008	
Further evaluation by staff and students, using focus groups and questionnaires. Review of risks	April 2008 – June 2008	
Design to allow additional security and control of the access of information	April 2008 – June 2008	
Promulgate results so far through publications and attendance at events.	April 2008 – October 2008	Report and presentation
Identify others within this university and partner institutes to trial the third prototype	April 2008 – August 2008	
Produce third prototype based on the above work	April 2008 – August 2008	
Organise training for partners and users	September 2008	Training materials
Launch third prototype	September 2008	Prototype 3
Present initial results at ePortfolio 2007 (or similar event)	October 2008	Paper
On going use and support of the third prototype	October 2008	

	– March 2009	
Final Report, including: description and discussion of: technical adaptation strategy; risk management issues; demonstrator/prototypes; evaluation; recommendations; contributions to e-Frameworks.	February 2009	Final Report
Completion Report	March 2009	
Evaluation by all users, using focus groups and questionnaires. Production of evaluation report comparing and contrasting technologies that have been trialled	October 2008 – March 2009	
Liaising with project manager, attending JISC meetings etc. Progress reports and financial statements	March 2007 – March 2009	4 progress reports and financial statements
Plan for sustainability	March 2007 – March 2009	Further projects

4. Initial Risk Management

Risk	Steps to Mitigate Risk
Unwillingness to participate in the advisory group	We have already identified representatives from Careers and Alumni offices who are willing to participate. We will work with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and school representatives to engage a breadth of people.
Attendance at focus groups	We will follow our current practice of providing refreshments and scheduling focus groups at times that are adjacent to other events.
Difficulty interfacing with proprietary software	We will use open source where possible. Where proprietary software needs to be interfaced with (e.g. commercial VLEs and student record systems) we will take early steps to gain access to appropriate interfaces and consider using open source/standards alternatives.

5. Budget

	Mar-07	Apr-07 - Mar-08	Apr-08 - Mar-09	Total	Funder
Directly Incurred Staff					
[REDACTED]					JISC
[REDACTED]					JISC
[REDACTED]					U of R
[REDACTED]					U of R
[REDACTED]					U of R
Total Directly Incurred Staff (A)	4,848	56,032	53,047	113,926	
Non-Staff					
Travel		1,500	1,500	3,000	JISC
Laptop & Interface Software	1,750	2,000	0	3,750	JISC
Hardware & Software		42,500		42,500	U of R
Dissemination			2,000	2,000	JISC
Consumables		500	500	1,000	JISC
Technical Consultancy		1,000	1,000	2,000	JISC
Total Directly Incurred Non-Staff (B)	1,750	47,500	5,000	54,250	
Directly Allocated					
Staff					
Estates	689	8,262	7,573	16,524	U o R
Other					
Directly Allocated Total (D)	689	8,262	7,573	16,524	
Indirect Costs (E)	4,633	55,596	50,963	111,192	U o R
Total Project Cost (C+D+E)	11,920	167,390	116,583	295,892	
Amount Requested from JISC	5,309	48,567	48,596	102,471	
Institutional Contributions	6,611	118,823	67,987	193,421	



7. *User Feedback and Evaluation of Outcomes*

16. Throughout the project the views of all users and potential users will be sought. Focus groups will be used to both gain input into initial design, to evaluate progress and to inform later prototypes. Questionnaires and chat based programs will also be used to gather feedback from users.

8. *Sustainability*

17. This project will provide an environment that can be used initially within this university by early adopting partners, and later on by more users within this university and beyond.
18. We will seek funding from CCMS for a related project that will expand the Learning Landscape project to other users within this university.
19. We will seek funding from our Alumni office's Annual fund to share this work with our graduates.
20. Documentation and code will be made available to the JISC community, for further development to meet individual institutional needs.

9. *IPR*

21. While copyright will rest with the University of Reading, documentation and code will be made available to the JISC community via appropriate open source licences.

JISC Executive
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol BS16 1QD

22 November 2006

Dear JISC Executive,


Re: JISC Capital Programme: e-Learning Demonstrators

I am pleased to support Dr Shirley Williams' response to your funding call.

This project demonstrates some of the exciting possibilities technology brings to the learning experience, empowering learner and teacher to operate outwith the conventional institutional boundaries as well as the resources provided by their own organisation. This underpins our mission to enrich teaching and learning with research activities, provides further innovation and vision to our CCMS (Centre for Career Management Skills CETL) with benefit to both Reading and the wider community, and contributes to the national agenda to develop the potential of e-learning. The project team are well placed to disseminate their work, having already made links and won significant funding within this area of practice.

I confirm that the University will support the activity as outlined in the bid.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Gordon Marshall