

**Cover Sheet for Proposals**  
(All sections must be completed)

**JISC Capital Programme**

**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**

- a)** Item Authoring Tool
- b)** Item Bank Software
- c)** Assessment Delivery Tool

**Call IV – Admissions demonstrators**

- a)** structured personal profiles, course entry profiles and pre-assessment;
- b)** improving applicant feedback;
- c)** accreditation of prior experiential learning;  **d)** e-portfolio based admissions.

**Call VI – Course validation**

**Call III – Technology supported learning environments**

**Call V – Course description and discovery**

**Call VII – Domain maps**

**Name of Lead Institution:** University of Chester

**Name of Proposed Project:** Piloting a decentralised learning environment using standards based tools

**Name(s) of Project Partner(s):**

**Full Contact Details for Primary Contact:**

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<b>Length of Project:</b>	<b>2 Years</b>		
<b>Project Start Date:</b>	March, 2007	<b>Project End Date:</b>	March, 2009
<b>Total Funding Requested from JISC:</b>	£100,000		
<b>Funding Broken Down over Financial Years (April – March):</b>			
<b>Apr06 – Mar07</b>	<b>Apr07 – Mar08</b>	<b>Apr08 – Mar09</b>	
£3,955	£49,106	£46,939	
<b>Total Institutional Contributions:</b>	£182,431		
<b>Percentage Contributions over the Life of the Project:</b>	<b>JISC</b>	<b>PARTNERS</b>	
	35.53%	0	
<b>Outline Project Description</b>			
<p>To build on existing recent work done by JISC to create a decentralised learning environment using institutional data already delivered by the VLE, Library Catalogue, and Student Record System.</p> <p>The project will utilise some open source development processes and tools to integrate with the University key systems, but primarily develop academic practice for the teacher and learner support that may act as a pathfinder for wider implementation.</p>			
<b>I have looked at the example FOI form at Appendix A and included an FOI form in the attached bid (Tick Box)</b>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>NO</b>	
<b>I have read the Circular and associated Terms and Conditions of Grant at Appendix B (Tick Box)</b>	<b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>NO</b>	

## 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.

<b>Section / Paragraph No.</b>	<b>Relevant exemption from disclosure under FOI</b>	<b>Justification</b>

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

## Introduction

The University of Chester will seek to develop the tools and practice required to facilitate the usage of institutional data such as online learning content, cohort member details, news and announcements, events, and reading lists outside of the institutions virtual learning environment (VLE), library catalogue and student record system (SRS).

The project will build on current work in the area of personal learning opportunities already provided, or already in a short term development schedule, by IBIS, the University VLE, having been identified through the University's participation in the HE Academy's eBenchmarking pilot project. Key features of this work already include the delivery of news and announcements, blogs and events, in an interoperable way with technology such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS), and iCal web services. Combined with research from JISC CETIS with regard to the PLE reference model, the project will enable a clear evaluation of the effects on the learner, the teacher and the wider institution in supporting and utilising this emerging decentralised delivery mechanism. To this end it is proposed to work with a small cohort studying a work based learning module, and to provide the support required to both students and staff involved with delivery.

The project will begin in March 2007, and conclude in 2 years, providing the educational community, particularly the HE and FE sectors, with set of technical tools, student focused guides to the technology, and an evaluation report which can act as a pathfinder and case study for larger scale implementations. Indeed the University wishes to disseminate its experiences throughout the project both formally and informally, particularly working with Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and conferences such as ALT-C.

## Project Description

We propose to make full use of knowledge and research available in the JISC and other communities, to enable learners in a small to medium sized cohort to view institutional information with tools outside of the Institutional VLE.

The recent Higher Education Academy's eBenchmarking pilot project provided the University of Chester with an opportunity to consider in depth the eLearning provision across the University, in particular the VLE. A study of this was undertaken which benchmarked the capabilities of the University VLE against other commercial and open source environments, and against elearning futures. One of the key outputs of this VLE study was the focus on the opportunities already identified by JISC, JISC CETIS, the HE Academy and the benchmarking team itself, with regard to social, lifelong and personal dimensions of elearning and enabling technologies that are already available, and indeed already in use by many students.

We propose to use these technologies and methods that have been identified and successfully used

in, for example, the JISC CETIS PLE project (August 2006) that defined scope, identified user and technical requirements, and produced a reference module and specification for use within a service oriented framework. These CETIS project outcomes, the report in particular, will focus our proposal somewhat away from technical implementation, although some development is required, towards practical implementation, and continued evaluation of the effects on the learner experience in terms of both technology and student learning. The students involved are in a non-traditional learning situation and not primarily face to face with other learners and their teacher. This ensures that the learner interactions with the environment under trial are significant. Furthermore the project proposes to identify and evaluate the effect upon the teacher of utilising a decentralised model of delivery, where the tools used are undetermined. This is a key area of exploration in this proposal.

Whilst the project is firmly aimed at testing technology and its effects in a learning situation, some development is required, to integrate the appropriate technologies into the institutional VLE using as many open source tools as possible. Table 1 shows the technology that IBIS already utilises, and that which requires development. Furthermore, this table also shows that the University is not seeking sponsorship for such development, as it already forms part of the development schedule for academic year 2006/7.

The project will begin in March 2007 by developing the appropriate technologies, using open source development processes, such that the institutional VLE, library system, and SRS can support additional standards, using a translator methodology. Of course standards will be closely followed, with real world tests using PLEX and other tools provided by third-parties. Simultaneously, a learning technologist, with strong research focus in this area, will be recruited to take a full time role, thus ensuring that considerable existing practice can be quickly identified and used in this project, and learners and teachers will have full office hours access to technology support, should they require it.

The learning technologist and teacher will create orientation materials, and conduct a very small scale pilot to identify what students may require assistance, such that the full study can be fully prepared, and ethical issues of trialling new technology with learners can be mitigated. During this time, the learner activities may need to be refactored to fit with a decentralised approach, however because of the style of the CPD/Work Based Learning style modules proposed, this will be minimal.

Once the project begins, the Learning Technologist will meet with the learners, and provide the orientation as appropriate, also providing contact details letting the learners know that contact is expected during the project. At this stage the Learning Technologist will outline the benefits the project is bringing to the cohort, to assist with 'buy in'.

The majority of the evaluation will be of a qualitative nature, such that learner, and teacher experiences can be measured at the point of entry, during the project, and after the project using Q-Sorts methodology. Q-Sorts methodology is a qualitative tool to richly capture different perspectives in a participatory process such as this project, and also overcome the oversimplification that a

questionnaire can impart. Whilst one could assume that a good number of students are familiar with Web 2.0 technology, this clearly forms part of the initial evaluation in determining the student profiles which in turn have a great effect on the delivery of learning through the decentralised model. Furthermore, over the longer term, and outside of this project timescale, it is intended that we will continue to engage with the learners and teachers so as to evaluate whether their experiences in this project has informed their future practice.

An evaluation report however will be delivered such that the learner and teacher experiences will be summarized, and challenges highlighted both in terms of technical issues, and practice issues. Highlighting the effect on University support, both in terms of central IT support, learner support, and the help that was provided up front, also forms a key part of the evaluation report, particularly in providing the sector with a pathfinder to larger implementations.

Dissemination of the outcomes of the project are key to its purpose, and as such the University of Chester aims to deliver a full breadth of dissemination methods, throughout the pilot and at the end. We intent to frequently contribute to a blog, to record our activity throughout the two years, so that others tracking our own activities may be kept up to date, and that there are opportunities for interaction across the successful bids, and those who may be conducting similar activities outside of the Capital Bid 04/06. We also aim to interact with CETIS, the PLE community, and organisations such as ALT via their ALT-C annual conference. We also intend to work with appropriate CETLs such as SOLSTICE at Edge Hill who have an interest in work such as this, and frequently arrange conferences, and other events.

This proposal also seeks to build on the University's growing expertise in personal learning, ePortfolio systems, standards based development and delivery of IT tools such as blogs, and wikis, and the usage of such tools in the learning environment, both in traditional programmes of study, and work based learning or continuing professional development programmes such as the Foundation Degree for Government with the Cabinet Office, Foundation Degree in Health Informatics with the NHS, and the University core Work Based Learning module for all level 2 students.

Impact and wider value to HE/FE:

The intention of this proposal is to develop technology to allow institutional data and activity to be available outside of the traditional VLE, and more importantly to evaluate the impact across the University. It has the capacity and potential to act as a pathfinder in the revolution that changes the way that learners engage with their learning, and the University as a whole over their lifetime. However the effect of decentralized delivery of learner experiences on the learner, teacher, the group, and the constituent organizational units that assist in the delivery of learning must be measured such that the education sector is provided with directions that assist it to support this emerging approach.

### *Sustainability*

During the recent eBenchmarking pilot project, and the current Pathfinder project with the Higher Education Academy, the University extensively reviewed all aspects of IBIS, the learning environment, in terms of virtual learning, managed learning and personal learning. As a result, the University noted both good practice, and opportunities for development with the choice of VLE technology, particularly with regard to delivery of programmes using technology outside of the traditional VLE model. As a result the University is committed to move toward promoting the use of personal technology for the delivery of learning online, such that users who are becoming increasingly mobile, may access their learning anywhere on any device, and as such align with the JISC Strategy 2007-9. Indeed much of the future development already scheduled includes the introduction of the technologies referred to throughout this project proposal.

### *Risks*

Risk	Impact	Actions to Reduce Risk	Actions to Contain Risk
Module selected may be not be delivered due to lack of registrations	High	Only modules with appropriately sized cohorts will be considered	Wide selection of CPD and WBL modules are available
Learners may lack technical resources to use learning tools	High	Suitable orientation to the learning tools required will be given	A range of popular tools have been identified and can be presented if necessary
Learners may be unwilling to use learning tools	High	The benefits of the paradigm will be clearly highlighted in orientation	Popular tools may be highlighted such that learners are using tools from familiar names
Staff turnover during the project	Medium	Expertise is shared in the core team	Other suitable staff are available should core staff leave during the project
Appropriate staff cannot be recruited	Low	A suitable project manager has been identified, and staff already exist in the University may be	Workload can be shared in the core team

		used	
Project slippage due to lack of staff time	Low	Regular monitoring meetings with the project team	Project is part of learning strategy for the a number of teams in the University.

### *Project Objectives*

- Deliver PHP Classes for cohort membership being delivered from Tribal SITS, and reading lists from the Innopac Library Management System
- Deliver generic student and staff practical guides to decentralised delivery of learning that can be adapted by any other organisation
- A case study concerning the approach, any interventions, and successes
- Evaluation report concerning the effects of learners and teachers, and the support services within the University
- Build on and join up with recent work in the JISC CETIS community, in particular the PLE project and PLEX software
- To provide a pathfinder for the future both for the University and the education community beyond the timescales of the project

The University of Chester has various key strengths we believe enable it to make this project a success, these are:

#### *Personal Learning:*

The University introduced RSS and iCal feeds from the VLE news announcements, and module calendars in 2003, and RSS feeds from the reflective logs (blogs) provided by the ePortfolio system in 2006. This RSS delivery mechanism was utilised during the recent Higher Education eBenchmarking pilot, and Pathfinder projects that the University has and is undertaking, as a feedback mechanism to the other participants in the pilot. Knowledge and early good practice established during this time in the team involved with implementation, will guide and influence the feedback to the community.

#### *Standards Based Development and Delivery:*

Since 1999, the University VLE has been developed using a typical Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP (LAMP) architecture. The VLE is a combination of in-house developed technology, and freely available software that includes discussion board software Phorum, PHP-Calendar, and various class libraries for creating iCal and RSS feeds.

#### *Work Based Learning and Continuing Professional Development:*

Work Based Learning for all undergraduate students was introduced over a decade ago at Chester,

and has been highly successful and nationally acclaimed. More recently, an innovative programme of Learning through Work for those in employment, built around the Work Based and Integrative Studies programme and the UFi Learndirect 'Learning Through Work' scheme was successfully introduced. Indeed the University also now provides and supports a number of Foundation Degrees delivered to students based in Further Education colleges, and in the workplace further. Furthermore the Schools of Health and Social Care and Education provide significant Continued Professional Development for professionals in the region, cementing the expertise across the entire institution in work based learning, and continued professional development delivery.

### *Technology Utilisation*

**Table 1 - Technology Utilisation**

Source	Protocol	Development Required	Development Sponsor
News/ Announcements	RSS	None	
Events	iCal	None	
Blog	RSS	None	
Learning Content	RSS Podcast/ Photocast	Refactor display code to deliver HTML encoded pages in an RSS 2.0 feed	University of Chester
Cohort Membership	FOAF	Deliver FOAF entries for each student using information from Tribal SITS (PHP Class)	JISC Capital
Library Catalogue Reading List	RSS	Wrap INNOPAC reading list data and deliver using RSS (PHP Class)	JISC Capital
Blog Publishing	Atom Publishing Protocol/ Blogger API	Allow the use of external RSS feeds in place of built in RSS functionality	University of Chester
Assignment Submission	Atom Publishing Protocol	Allow the use of APP to submit work online	JISC Capital
Glossary	Greasemonkey (Firefox/Flock) Script	Greasemonkey script for auto-highlighting of all pages from definitions defined in VLE	University of Chester



	effects on support.								
12	Dissemination events.								

### IPR Statement:

Software created to assist in delivery of institutional data will be open source software and will be shared with a Creative Commons license. In addition, the University of Chester will be delighted to undertake to share any expertise developed in the project, in addition to reports and papers, with the community through JISC and any other appropriate channel.

### Budget

Directly Incurred Staff	March 07	April 07– March 08	April 08– March 09	TOTAL £
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Total Directly Incurred Staff (A)	£5,187	£63,496	£60,354	£129,037
Non-Staff	March 07	April 07– March 08	April 08– March 09	TOTAL £
Travel and expenses (attendance at conferences, interaction between projects)	£0	£270	£270	£540
Hardware/software	£0	£0	£0	£0
Dissemination (attendance at 3 conferences)	£0	£0	£5,700	£5,700

Evaluation	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total Directly Incurred Non-Staff (B)	£0	£270	£5,970	£6,240
Directly Incurred Total (A+B=C) (C)	£5,187	£63,766	£66,324	£135,277
Directly Allocated	March 07	April 07– March 08	April 08– March 09	TOTAL £
Staff	£0	£0	£0	£0
Estates	£959	£11,512	£10,199	£22,670
Other	£0	£0	£0	£0
Directly Allocated Total (D)	£959	£11,512	£10,199	£22,670
Indirect Costs (E)	£5,268	£63,213	£56,003	£124,484
Total Project Cost (C+D+E)	£11,414	£138,491	£132,526	£282,431
Amount Requested from JISC	£3,955	£49,106	£46,939	£100,000
Institutional Contributions	£7,459	£89,385	£85,587	£182,431
Percentage Contributions over the life of the project		JISC 35.53 %	Partners 0 %	Total 100%

## Key Personnel

### *Project Manager*

**Carol Comer** BSc MSc – Academic Advisor (eLearning), Elearning Coordinator (eLearning Champions) Manager, Project Manager for this project. Carol has over twenty years teaching experience, as Programme Leader for the Foundation Degree in Health Informatics, Carol was responsible for the design and delivery of a blended learning, work-based programme. Carol is also delivering a module (blended learning) in Technology Enhanced learning, teaching and assessment as part of an on-going staff development programme.

Carol is a core team member of the HE Academy eBenchmarking Pilot and Pathfinder projects at the University.

### *Project Team*

Learning Technologist (to be appointed)

**Henry Blackman** BSc MBCS CITP – Head of Learning Technology and Deputy Director (Development) CIT Services.

Manages the Information Systems team, and Learning Technology Unit.

8 years web application development experience with web standards, and has driven the adoption of standards based development in the University.

Is a major contributor to the eLearning strategy.

Core team member of the HE Academy eBenchmarking Pilot and Pathfinder projects at the University.

A member of JISC CETIS Enterprise SIG.

**Brian Fitzpatrick** BSc – Director of CIT Services.

Manages the Communication & IT Services department with over twenty years of experience in Higher Education.

Responsible for the University Information Strategy.

Major contributor to the eLearning strategy.

Core team member of the HE Academy eBenchmarking Pilot and Pathfinder projects at the University.

**Professor Jethro Newton** BSc MSc PhD Grad. Cert. Ed ILTM - Dean of Learning and Teaching and Director, Learning and Teaching Institute.

Member of University Executive.

Responsible for University Learning and Teaching Strategy

Project Director: HEA/JISC Benchmarking Pilot (2006); HEA Pathfinder Project (2006/2007)

Executive Editor, international refereed journal

Active researcher: publications/areas of research interest in higher education policy; implementation of learning and teaching strategy; academics' and students' responses to policy



University of  
Chester

*Senior Management*

*Pro-Vice-Chancellor  
(Staffing and Resources)*

**Dr. Malcolm Rhodes**

*BA (Hons), MA, EdD*

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November 22, 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Expression on Support for JISC Circular 04/06

On behalf of the University of Chester, I am pleased to be able to confirm institutional support for this important project which will enable key staff within the University to build upon work undertaken over the past three years to extend the embrace of eLearning using IBIS, the institution's VLE. The project, and the University's endorsement of its objectives, reflect the importance that the institution attaches to the development of this work following the recent establishment of a Learning Technology Unit as a focal point for the promotion of its e-learning agenda.

The work recently undertaken as part of successful collaboration with HEA/JISC colleagues involved in the Academy's benchmarking pilot has provided a key impetus to the University's commitment to the further development of e-learning. This project will enable research and evaluation to be undertaken of the impact of this approach to learning and teaching with particular reference to the benefits of an appropriate set of technical tools and the provision of student focused guides to the technology, which will provide the basis for larger scale, sector-wide implementation.

This project, therefore, has potentially significant institutional and sector-wide impact, utilising well-established channels of dissemination such as the CETLs and ALT-C and I am pleased to be able to support the bid for funding support.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Malcolm Rhodes  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor  
(Staffing and Resources)