



JISC Final Report

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1. Acknowledgements

This project was funded by Becta as part of the JISC Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology programme.

2. Report Summary

2.1. Project Overview

“Making the New Diploma a Success” enabled us to introduce new and innovative means of curriculum delivery and support mechanisms to maximise the potential of emerging technologies. We explored new ways of working, bringing together people from different areas throughout the organisation and rethinking the way in which they perform their tasks in order to use technology to deliver a more effective, flexible and student centred service.

At the heart of the project was the development of a Learner Portal (eME) that brings together seamless access to three open source applications: Moodle, Mahara (e-Portfolio) and a bespoke electronic Personal Development Plan (ePDP). By adopting these open source technologies we have been able to re engineer our curriculum delivery and streamlined various areas of our student administration and support services to offer a more personalised experience for our students, teachers and employers.

The Portal has enabled us to respond to some specific challenges namely the need

- for students to have access to 24/7 teaching/learning resources
- for students to contact tutors outside of College for support
- to promote reflective learning that can be shared with peers
- to enhance collaboration between the College, school and employers
- to offer a single point of access to data

eME has opened minds and helped staff refocus on opportunities offered by effective use of technology. As a result we have seen a more experimental approach to the adoption and embedding of various tools to support personalisation as well as an increase in the use of technology leading to efficiency savings.

2.2. Project Outputs

Project reports

- Project plan, interim reports for August 2009 and March 2010 and this final report are available from the project website. <http://www.lewishamdiplomas.co.uk/>

Case studies

Case Studies have been produced for the following and are available from the project website:

- [Asus – Eee-PC](#)
- [Video conferencing](#)
- [Using the ePDP](#)
- [Using Mahara for CVs](#)
- [Assignments in Moodle](#)
- [Voting Buttons](#)
- [eME Champions](#)
- [Planning for Success](#) (ePDP and Mahara)

Training/Guidance materials

Training materials are being constantly produced and updated and are available from the Portal:

- [How to Moodle course](#)
- [Moodle Tips course](#)
- [Mahara course](#)
- [ePDP course](#)

Technical guidelines

Technical documentation has been produced and made available via the project website:

- [Report on setting up of LDAP](#)
- [Setting up streaming server](#)

Efficiency Savings

- [Cost Benefit Analysis](#)

Project website

The project website is available at:

- <http://www.lewishamdiplomas.co.uk/>

Evaluation reports

- Baseline, interim and final reports are available from the website.
<http://www.lewishamdiplomas.co.uk/>

Dissemination reports

Blogs have been created and are being maintained for:

- [Project](#)
- [Evaluation](#)
- [Mahara](#)
- [Curriculum](#)

Dissemination Events

- ["From Vision to Reality" - Moodle Wonderland](#)
- JISC - [Advanced VLEs and ILPS](#)
- JISC - [Moodle in the WBL Sector](#)
- [Teaching Experts Group](#)
- [Moodle Moot: Integration of Mahara and Moodle](#)
- [Transforming the Curriculum to enhance learner, progress and employability](#) (Elluminate)

Videos and simulations are also available for:

- [Project Advertisement](#)
- [Project Overview](#)
- [Event - Engaging the teams](#)
- [Portal Simulation](#)

2.3. Impact and Benefits to the Community

Through the Portal we have been able to gather evidence of the impact of the use of technology in teaching and learning to increase retention, achievement, success and progression rates.

By introducing open source approaches the college has achieved yearly savings of over £50,000 in annual licenses (see [Cost Benefit Analysis](#)), this has allowed us to build additional functionalities and

respond to student needs at a faster rate than we previously could through proprietary systems. We have also seen a reduction of staff time in Campus office issuing students with timetables and EMA reports. Teachers and support staff can now monitoring and track student progress more effectively and Schools and parents can also benefit from timely information on progress and achievement.

We have consistently shared our knowledge and expertise with a range of FE, HE and Work base Learning providers across the sector through various dissemination events including the 'Vision for the Learner Portal' to full implementation. As a result of this, we have acted as advisors to providers supporting them with similar projects. We have also made available a range of interactive learning materials, 'How to guides' and support documents through our Moodle Help courses.

2.4. Main Lessons Learnt

In order for technology to become integral to learning, teaching and support we had to review existing practice starting from the curriculum design process. This was one of the key changes that led to a more joined up approach to embedding new tools and techniques into new practice

Involving staff throughout the college in the development of the vision of the Portal and getting their buy in from the beginning helped us implement it in a very short period of time (four months)

Access to formal and informal learning through an integrated portal system has helped us deliver 'more than' a qualification

Open access to enrichment activities and tools to extend and share communication have supported the emergence of focus groups and various communities of practice

The assignment tool has proven to be the most popular function for the tutors. Students have expressed similar views claiming that this has encouraged them to improve their grades.

For students the most popular and motivating tool has been the instantaneous access to their timetables, attendance and punctuality reports. As a result Registry no longer provides students printouts but instead points them to them on eME. This has also resulted in significant cost savings.

We were hoping for a holistic approach to supporting students from a variety of agents via the ePDP, however we've recognised that change in this area requires a longer period of assimilation and adoption. As a result of this project a more coordinated approach to the embedding of the ePDP will be supported by a variety of recently introduced systems and procedures linked to appraisals and our overall eCollege priorities.

3. Main Body of Report

3.1. What did you do? (Methodology)

The Leitch review (2006) highlighted the need for a relevant curriculum that would enable every young person "to leave school with the skills they need to progress to further learning and work." As a result of this, new Diplomas were developed through consultation with employers, universities, schools and colleges to offer 14-19 year olds the opportunity to explore their options through a mix of classroom learning and hands-on vocational experience.

Lewisham College introduced the Higher Diploma in ICT in September 2008, the Advanced Diploma in ICT and the Higher Diploma in Creative Media in September 2009. This project enabled us to introduce a new and innovative means of curriculum delivery putting together support mechanisms to maximise the potential of emerging technologies.

We recognise the dedication of our students to succeed and acknowledge student 'Persistence' as a commitment to ensuring ultimate achievement, as such we see Personalisation as a vehicle for students to accomplish their goals and technology a supporting tool to help us meet the needs of students with erratic patterns of attendance and hard to reach. Based on this we aimed to maximise the use of technology to make the new Diploma a success. We set out to build upon our work on Personalisation to include the 'Learner Voice', student autonomy and ownership via the development of a 'Learner Portal' and the use of mobile technology to add flexibility, adaptability and extend access to learning.

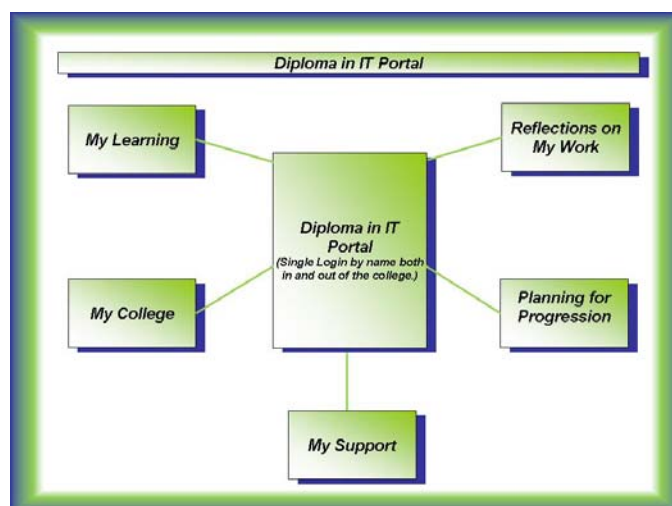
We had six core objectives:

1. Empower students to take control of their learning using a variety of devices at the time, place and pace of choice in order to achieve their individual goals.
2. Provide students with an online support network to enable them to make the most of their time at College and support them with their coursework and in making possible and realistic choices about their future.
3. Enable students to use a reflective approach to evidencing their achievements, create their own portfolio of evidence and share selected elements with their tutors and employers.
4. Empower students to become more independent, confident and self-directed by helping them to understand how they are learning, relate their learning to a wider context, articulate their personal goals and evaluate their progress towards them.
5. Create opportunities for collaboration between the College, Bonus Pastor School and Education Business Partnership (EBP Lewisham Borough).
6. Enable students to have their say, get involved and contribute to College life.

The main focus of "Making the new Diploma a Success" was the development of a Learner Portal to bring together different systems and applications and enable us to respond to some specific challenges namely the need

- for students to have access to College resources from anywhere
- for students to contact tutors outside of College for support
- to promote reflective learning that can be shared with peers
- to enhance collaboration between the College, school and employers

Consultation with students, managers, teaching and support staff led to our vision for the proposed Diploma in IT Portal (see diagram below and Appendix 1 for more details).



Having researched and listened extensively to our staff and students we chose to adopt Moodle as our platform because of its constructivist approach to scaffolding learning and its flexibility to integrate with other open source systems. This coupled with integrated ePDPs and ePortfolio tools enabled staff to provide their students with opportunities for effective interventions leading to increased student satisfaction, achievement and progression. As a result we have seen an increase in excellent practice in teaching, learning and support.

Having agreed that Moodle would be the platform we also decided that it would be hosted by ULCC who have a wealth of experience with this open source software and were able to make adaptations to it both in terms of design and functionality to meet our needs. By using an external hosting service we were able to accelerate the implementation process by capitalising on their expertise and leaving our technical team free to focus on authentication and integration with our Management Information System (MIS).

In order to facilitate seamless access our technical team set up LDAP to authenticate users and give them access to all areas of the Portal with a single login. [Full details available on the project website.](#) Dynamic links between our MIS system and the Portal keep data up to date and automates the creation of Moodle courses and staff and student accounts.

We held an internal dissemination event in May 2009 to introduce staff to the concept of the Portal and raise awareness of the project. Over 100 members of staff from all areas of the college came along to the presentations which took place on a rolling basis throughout the whole day. The favourable reaction and feedback from this event led to the decision to bring forward the launch of Moodle cross college to September 2009, and enabled us to pilot the use of Mahara and the e-PDP to a much wider audience than anticipated.

The initial evaluation plan focussed on the effect of the use of the Learner Portal to deliver the new Diploma qualification to two groups of students studying for the Higher and Advanced Diploma in IT. It subsequently became evident during the course of the project that the scope of the evaluation would be severely curtailed by the nature of the qualification and the way that it is delivered at the College. In order to fully evaluate the impact of the adoption of the Learner Portal on teaching, learning and support we decided to broaden our research to include additional curriculum areas in addition to the Diploma cohorts.

The final evaluation was therefore widened to include the following groups of students:

- Work Related Learners from the School of Hospitality

- Students studying for the Diploma in Creative Media from the school of Creative Industries
- Students studying for the BTEC National Diploma in Music Technology from the school of Creative Industries
- A group of students drawn from various courses within the School for Foundation Studies who were participating in a Lewisham College Transforming Learning Project¹ on the use of the Learner Portal

Baseline data collection in March/April 2009 consisted of statistics, illustrating how and where students accessed the Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard), electronic questionnaires completed by both groups of students and interviews with two course tutors and a Support and Guidance Officer.

An interim evaluation was done in March 2010. This consisted of data gathered by means of student discussion forums, interviews with tutors and electronic questionnaires completed by both IT Diploma groups

The data for the final evaluation was drawn from interviews, electronic questionnaires and statistics obtained from the reporting system offered by the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) which is the platform for the Learner Portal. 26 students completed the electronic questionnaire about their use of the Learner Portal, the results of which are referred to in this report.

All reports and interviews may be viewed by going to the Lewisham Diplomas Website <http://www.lewishamdipomas.co.uk/> and selecting the Evaluation page. [Click here](#) to view the full final evaluation report.

The project was managed through a Steering Group chaired by the project sponsor (Patricia Forrest) who met termly and had overall responsibility for the educational case viability, the realisation and measurement of the educational benefits, ensuring that the project remained on track with the College's development platforms and reacting to any strategic issues. This was supported by a Project Team led by the project manager (Jo Burbidge) who met fortnightly to review the agreed project deliverables and ensure that the project remained on track within the preset timescale with the prescribed resources.

What did we do to meet our objectives?

Empower students to take control of their learning using a variety of devices at the time, place and pace of choice in order to achieve their individual goals.

During the first (developmental) year of the project curriculum staff worked on case studies looking at [video conferencing](#) and the use of [mobile devices](#), these are available from the project website. As a result of these we agreed to use GoToMeeting for video conferencing and Asus Eee-PCs for mobile access. We also set up a streaming server to enable provision of multimedia resources. Details of the implementation [technical journey](#) are available from the website.

During the implementation phase of the project students on the Higher Diploma used the Asus Eee-PC's primarily for their multimedia projects.

Through Moodle, students had access to an assignment tool which enabled them to submit their work 24/7. They also had the opportunity to submit completed work in the form of electronic portfolio views, using Mahara, and receive feedback from tutors and peers. The assignment tool also allowed tutors to provide electronic feedback to student. Students also received feedback on

¹ Internal project run by the College and sponsored by the Quality department

completed work submitted in the form of electronic portfolio views using Mahara, from their tutors and peers

Students were also able to access all course materials (documents, presentations, assignments, glossaries, streaming video) on Moodle by logging in to eME any time, any place.

Students studying the Diploma in Creative Media have submitted portfolio work using Mahara. Each student created six folders corresponding to each area of the qualification in their portfolio and the tutor helped them to create a standard view to make it easier to mark their work.

Provide students with an online support network to enable them to make the most of their time at College and support them with their coursework and in making possible and realistic choices about their future.

The following sites were created on the Portal giving students access to information and services available to support them during their time at College. These sub-sites are easily accessible via the following colour coded tabs:



The **Learning Centre** area provides access to a variety of resources and support for all students including Study Skills, Curriculum Resources, Online Catalogue and PC Booking. This area is maintained and updated by the Learning Centre Team.

The **Support** area gives information about support, activities, events and information about jobs and careers. This area is maintained and updated by staff in our Student Services team

The **Get Involved** area provides information about the student union, student forums, the v-involved project (England's biggest ever youth action scheme for 16-25s that encourages students to help other young people to set up and run volunteer projects).

The **Help** area gives information about eME, how to use it (including Moodle, Mahara and the ePDP) and how to get technical help

The inbuilt messaging system enabled students to contact tutors, support staff and their peers online for support regarding not only their coursework but also any other issues that they needed help with.

The Diploma students were also offered a programme of study skills covering:

- writing professional e-mails (language and style)
- revision skills, note-taking and summarising
- skim reading and scan reading
- essay and report writing
- referencing
- persuasive speaking and presentation skills

These were delivered by Learning Centre Facilitator and a range of different technologies such as Smartboards and YouTube were used to deliver these topics.

Enable students to use a reflective approach to evidencing their achievements, create their own portfolio of evidence and share selected elements with their tutors and employers.

Mahara, the e-Portfolio integrated within the Portal enables students to build up a portfolio of evidence to showcase their work to their tutors, peers and prospective employers. It has been used for the following:

- Reflection – in Hospitality 14 – 16 year old students attending college one day a week reflected weekly on their progress outside their lessons from both school and home. Their college tutor provided them with immediate feedback helping them plan their week ahead
- Self Promotion –students studying vocational areas used the interactive CV facility to showcase their work including photos and videos of their progress and themselves in action.
- Community –students/staff have created a range of forums and groups and use this as a discussion and sharing area
- eCPD – reflections from staff in the LSIS Professional Development Advisor programme are shared amongst teachers through ‘views’
- Communication –students/staff use the ‘wall and messaging’ area as a social networking tool to make friends and communicate with their peers and tutors

Staff were given training in using Mahara and eLearning support provided in the classroom to get students familiar with its features. This was supplemented with [a Moodle course to support both staff and students in using Mahara](#)

Empower students to become more independent, confident and self-directed by helping them to understand how they are learning, relate their learning to a wider context, articulate their personal goals and evaluate their progress towards them.

We worked with ULCC, our Quality team, Senior Practitioners and students to develop an ePDP that is accessible to students from anywhere within the Portal. The ePDP contains data on [attendance and punctuality](#), EMA payments and Financial Statements pulled from our MIS system. Staff have been trained in using the ePDP (both from a technical and pedagogical perspective) and [a course has been set up to support both staff and students on Moodle](#).

Students also have direct access to their [timetables](#) through the Portal.

All students on the Diploma courses have used the ePDP to set their targets and reflect on their progress via the self evaluation section; this is supplemented with termly progress reviews completed by both tutors and students. They also regularly check their attendance and punctuality records, timetable and EMA and Financial Status seamlessly displayed to students via the Portal.

Create opportunities for collaboration between the College, Bonus Pastor School and Education Business Partnership (EBP Lewisham Borough).

Collaboration with Bonus Pastor took place during the early stages of the project as we shared the development of curriculum materials and the design of delivery plans as well as participating in a joint CPD programme. The Diploma Road show, which took place on 11th and 12th of February 2010, was also an invaluable opportunity to work together and meet other Lewisham Borough schools who are interested in the Diploma.

The EBP provided two week work placements for all the Higher Diploma students in IT in the borough. This proved to be a very positive experience in the first year, underpinning the ethos of this new curriculum. To support this, students are allocated mentors from various businesses and they communicate regularly via email.

The Higher Diploma in Creative Media is a two year, level 2 course with students splitting their time between their school (Addey & Stanhope) and the College where they are undertaking their principal learning one day a week. We met with the school, introduced them to the concept of the ePDP and

gave them access to the course to allow them to review student progress with a particular focus on student attendance and punctuality. As the school was included in a borough pilot reviewing several new systems for progress and attendance monitoring they were not able to contribute to the ePDPs in eME although they did give us some positive feedback.

Enable students to have their say, get involved and contribute to College life.

Student contribution to the project stems back to the initial visioning stage, they are continuously consulted on the Portal developments; as a result of this they named the Portal eME.

The Home Page features an RSS feed to news from the College website and has its own news banner reflecting current student events and news. There is also a direct link to the Jobs & Careers section as this is something that students regularly request.

Up to date information about key college events (Health Week, Black History Week, LGBT etc) with opportunities to participate in online activities such as quizzes and polls are continuously available to all students.

The Department for Foundation Studies have established an eMentoring scheme in which Students become eME champions and support their peers using the Portal. This offers them opportunities to develop functional and employability skills through Mahara forums.

Internal inspection has been transformed by using eME to gather student feedback increasing participation from a few face to face forums to hundreds via online questionnaires.

3.2. What did you learn?

Empower students to take control of their learning, using a variety of devices at the time, place and pace of their choice

Online assignments have been the biggest success in this area for both staff and students alike. Prior to this project all assignments were submitted either in hard copy or by email. Students liked to submit their work electronically and the flexibility of being able to submit their work from a variety of locations. Over 90% of students said that the assignment tool provides them with an element of control of their learning. Many of them mention the benefits of not having to print out work and the cost and time saving that this offers, and also the speed at which they can do their submissions. Although the students studying for the Higher and Advanced Diploma in IT have submitted little of their work outside of their lessons, this is explained by their access to computer labs in all of their lessons and the nature of the qualification. Other students have paid tribute to the ability to submit their work from other locations at a time that suits them.

"I think it makes work easier to hand in because it can be accessed at home or at any location with an internet connection." Duane - Advanced Diploma in IT student

I could submit a bit of work at 5 in the morning and you can go back and look at it after you've uploaded it. It just helps you keep on top so you can see everything that you have done." Joshua Dixon, Music student

"I find the assignment feature easy to use, I prefer to submit my work and get feedback electronically because it is quick." Samuel - Advanced Diploma in IT student

Creative Media students have generated Mahara views of their work and reflective logs that can be accessed via URLs. These can be sent to awarding bodies for accreditation. The students like to be able to store their completed work in this way and feel that it is secure.

"Mahara's good because it's there so you don't have to keep on bringing papers that you might lose. You can just upload your work after you've done it" Creative Media student

"Instead of having lots of papers and stuff you can just upload your work up into the internet and it's really easy and it's flexible" Creative Media student

"... I access EME from home...we also access it from school as well so it's like we kind of use it in various places and of course when we access it from home it's easy to just log on and just do whatever work needs to be done and send a reflection, get feedback, all of the basic stuff..." Work Related Learner

Students feel in control of their progress by having access to timely feedback giving them the opportunity to resubmit work and improve on the original grade. Tutors report that it is much easier to track their students' progress, particularly the course tutor who has to manage the progress of both IT Diploma groups. Students also like to be able to keep track of their submissions and see where work still needs to be completed.

"EME has provided them with the opportunity to submit their work and get feedback online instantly,, which has enabled them to see what they've submitted and what needs improvement that promotes encouragement or enforcement to work harder." Jane Teh – course tutor for the Higher and Advanced Diploma in IT

"Very easy to use...the student gets an immediate impression of where they're going, it saves the enormous shuffling of paper that normally would ensue and it's immensely better than things like email and trying to keep track of things. It's all in one place, you can do your feedback, it stays there, you can see what's happened - it's a good system." Brad Grisdale – subject tutor, Advanced Diploma in IT.

A variety of learning media is empowering students throughout various courses and levels to self assess as and when they are ready. For example a tutor who teaches electrical installation has used the quiz tool to create mock exams in order to prepare his students for the final exams.

"The thing that I like about the quizzes is that you can actually make the system mimic the exam, and they then get a fairer idea of how well they are going to perform on a real exam." Matt Day – Electrical Installation tutor

Over 50% of the students surveyed access their course materials from outside the College.

Provide students with an online support network to enable them to make the most of their time at College and support them with their coursework and in making possible and realistic choices about their future.

As part of our interim evaluation report students studying for the new Diplomas were asked how they would feel about accessing online support from guidance teams and there was a very strong feeling amongst the students that they do not consider that this is secure and that any issues they may want to raise with a guidance or support officer is better done face to face. They would like the facility to be able to book a session via the Portal and this is being considered for the future.

We used the Chat facilities within the Portal for students to get support from their tutors. As a result of our research it was established that students didn't want to use the group chat outside of the College attributing this to the time constraints of scheduled chats. However one to one communications with the course tutor have proved to be successful (46% students have used this) as students can see when their tutors are online and "talk" to them outside of class time to get help with assignments while they are working on them. They also love the opportunity to talk to their peers using this facility.

Enable students to use a reflective approach to evidencing their achievements, create their own portfolio of evidence and share selected elements with their tutors and employers.

The key areas where we have evaluated this aim are

- Hospitality, Catering and Leisure
- Department for Foundation Studies
- Creative Industries

In Hospitality, Catering and Leisure, Work Related Learners used the Mahara blog and view features to showcase their work, and reflections on which their tutor provided weekly feedback using Mahara.

"I find it useful using the blog because it can help us improve on what we've done. We reflect on what we've doneso when we come next week we can improve." Work Related Learner

The Work Related Learners used pictures and videos of the dishes created in class to create an electronic CV using Mahara.

"They love the CVs – it's all personal. They've got bits of their work in there; they've got a little touch of personal things in there as well. Obviously the personal things we don't use for the actual CV, but their view is their own, they take ownership of it and they share it with whoever they want to share it with." Mark Dawkins Hospitality tutor

One of the students sent her electronic CV to the Hyatt Regency hotel in London and this is the feedback received from the tutor:

"The link for Chanice's CV was sent to The Hyatt Regency London – The Churchill, prior to Chanice attending for an interview with the Executive Chef and the personnel officer. The Chef raved about the CV and thought it was brilliant; a real impression was formed before he met Chanice as he could see straight away the professionalism of the student who was very proud of her achievements, highly motivated, professional and then had a great basis for a discussion with Chanice during the small interview. The outcome was that the chef was more than happy to provide the 2 week work experience opportunity and of course this sows the seeds for Chanice returning to the Hotel at a later date to continue a work experience adding additional work experience to her CV." Aiden Fullerton – Hospitality tutor

Students in the Department of Foundation Studies have also used Mahara to create their CVs electronically.

"Positive stuff has come out of the ePortfolios where we've seen students who had little or no confidence in content management putting together some really amazing pieces of work, including interactive CVs which really showcased their experience and engagement with College life and work... the results have been pretty impressive to look at. They really enjoyed it and they can see the

benefit in being able to dynamically update the CV when they achieve a qualification or gain experience in work or the voluntary sector; that goes on as and when it happens - it's a living growing organism" Charles Aigbokhai – tutor in Foundation studies

"... There is a personal data portal in Mahara where I can upload files, add information about myself including goals, blogs and even creating views e.g. My CV, which is extremely useful in that if I was applying for a job I would only have to send the link to my employer rather than printing the document..." Student on a Youth Entry to HE 2 course

Students studying for the Creative Media Diploma have used Mahara to upload all of their portfolio work for the year. This will be presented to the awarding body at the end of year 2.

"It's good that you have one space for all the relevant information – you can have your CV on there, you can have your portfolio on there. I can send a link to EDEXEL, they can then access everything they have done via the web link. It makes life so much easier for moderating purposes – they can access all the files...it's all there." Nik Cornwell – Creative Media tutor

Empower students to become more independent, confident and self-directed by helping them to understand how they are learning, relate their learning to a wider context, articulate their personal goals and evaluate their progress towards them.

All students on the Higher and Advanced diploma courses have completed their PDPs electronically this year and reported favourably on its use. Many of them state that the ability to access it online means that they do not need to carry around a student planner and over 70% feel that setting targets has helped them to progress and achieve.

"It's good for your self esteem when you see good stuff and you see all distinctions and good attendance and punctuality and it's something to be proud of." Joshua Dixon, Music student

"Yes, because I can go on it anytime I want at home and I can check what my targets are." Work Related Learner

"I think it really is useful to have targets so I can achieve and improve my learning" Work Related Learner

"I would rather it was on the computer, because if it was on paper I might lose the paper, but if it's online I know it won't go anywhere" Work Related Learner

Most (96%) students report that the ability to see their attendance and punctuality, without having to ask in the Campus office or be told by their tutor, offers them a sense of independence and provides motivation to maintain or improve their attendance and punctuality.

"Definitely good, because sometimes when a teacher tells you don't really believe it, but if you can see it there you understand it and people try to keep it 100%". Creative Media student

Tutors also report that the ability for students to be able to see their own attendance and punctuality has encouraged student autonomy and independence, as they no longer have to ask the tutor for this information. The course tutor for the Higher Diploma feels that this has contributed to her students' success this year

"I do like the fact that the Learner Portal allowed them to see day by day their attendance and punctuality. During the course of the study, based on last year, retention rate was 54% before the Learner Portal provided us with this tracking attendance and punctuality system, this year it's 92%.

Students can access the PDP from home and show their parents' their progress, which has proved useful for some of the younger students who are still at school and attend College one day a week. The ability to provide links to specific learning areas means that tutors can personalise the PDP.

"We do the one to one tutorial face to face, because the diploma students are only 15 and their mums and dads want to see what they're doing, how they're getting on; they can sit at home and say here's what the tutor says about me (by showing the parent their PDP). We can use the flip cameras to do video tutorials and we can upload those (into the PDP) and then instead of saying, "oh what did he say about me?" they can actually see the tutorial." Nik Cornwell – Creative Media tutor

Enable students to have their say, get involved and contribute to College life.

A large amount of students have contributed to online surveys (1580) and discussion forums(1800 view or post) and the majority felt that the opportunity to express their views and opinions made them feel valued and enabled them to contribute to College life. Since using the Portal all students on the Higher and Advanced Diploma in IT courses have posted to at least one discussion forum and responded to a survey. The survey facility has also been used cross college as part of our internal inspection process with remarkable results, for example in the school of Early Years, Health and Social Care 259 (60%) students responded to the pre inspection survey compared to 21 attending the forum in the previous inspection.

Members of the eLearning team regularly attend student forums to get feedback on the functionality of the Portal and use this to improve it and inform future developments.

Here are some of their comments:

"(eME) is important because we can access it at home"

"it has the work notes and teaching materials"

"work stays online, I can access it throughout the year"

"(Mahara) allows you to communicate with some of your friends!"

"(ePDP) can keep up to date with my targets"

"(ePDP) allows me to keep track of my attendance and EMA payments"

The Portal has been used to publicise events that have taken place at the College throughout the year. Some of these include Health Week, Black History Week and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) week. This is the feedback from a gay student (received via a support tutor) about the significance of using the Learner Portal to publicise LGBT week at the College:

"...liked the fact that it was accessible in private because,, even though he is open about his sexuality at college and has support from friends on the course, he did not feel able to stop and look at the poster displays as he didn't want other students to see him."

"He found it reassuring that the college was actively providing support and links to other LGBT organisations that students could follow-up directly without having to speak to anyone else first."

"Information could be printed off for future reference."

"It enabled him to watch the film trailers before deciding which film showing to go to."

Many students and staff have set up or joined groups such as the Arsenal Fan Club, Comic Club and Collective Bargainers as well as many others in Mahara and enjoy the social networking benefits it offers, with fellow students at the College.

“Using Mahara has been fun too. I like that you are able to communicate with other students and become friends or members of groups. These groups could relate to College or something outside of College. This gives you an opportunity to be a part of a group that shares a common interest.”
Student on a Level 2 Key Skills in IT course.

Unanticipated Outcomes

The key unanticipated outcome following our Portal awareness event in May 2009 was the decision to launch the Portal College wide from September 2009. Our original intention was to use the Diploma groups as a pilot and launch College wide from September 2010. Having presented the concept in May 2009 the demand for access to the Portal was so overwhelming that the decision was made to move all courses at the same time. This decision also proved beneficial from a financial perspective as we were able to save a year’s licence fee for Blackboard and didn’t have to run parallel systems for a year. Running two systems would have increased the workload for the VLE administrator and service/support areas would have had to maintain sites on both platforms.

Feedback from both staff and students has proved that this was the right decision although it meant that a lot of work needed to be done during the summer of 2009 to move courses from Blackboard to Moodle and train all staff. To do this we used a tool developed by Information Technology Services' Teaching and Learning division in University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License (<http://its.unc.edu/tl/tli/bFree>). This tool, bFree, enabled us to export material from a Blackboard Archive or Export file maintaining the folder hierarchy of the original Blackboard course content and then import this into Moodle.

Between May and September 2009 over 350 staff members attended at least one training session on using eME. As a result we have seen a rapid increase in the adoption of all areas of the new Portal and a significant uptake of Moodle increasing from 142 courses in Blackboard to 520 in Moodle within 6 months. Here are some figures:

- 94% of staff use Moodle regularly
- 5,450 active Students
- 55% staff use the ePDP
- 30% are building the use of Mahara ePortfolio into their lessons
- 1,882 ePDP users set targets (103 staff, 1,779 Students)

The introduction of Moodle as the College VLE has opened minds and helped staff refocus on opportunities offered by effective use of technology. As a result we have seen a more experimental approach to the adoption and embedding of the tools available (even though they may already have been there with Blackboard) as well as an increase in the uptake.

3.3. Impact

Improved retention and achievement

In the two groups that we were focussing on the Higher and Advanced Diploma in IT the project appears to have had a positive effect on retention and achievement. The Higher Diploma which ran over the full two years of the project saw retention grow from 62% to 92%, achievement from 69% to 73% and success from 43% to 67%.

We have also seen improved retention and achievement rates on the WRL programme:
WRL Achievement and Progression Results Average-Comparison 2007/09 -2008 /2010
NVQ L1 Achievement results 2010 up by 43%
Progressing students up by 200%

Level 2 Food Safety achievement results up by 141.75%

This improvement has been linked to the effective use of technology facilitated via the Learner Portal applications ‘... *Student achievement and subsequent progression excelled due to seamless communication, personalised targets that are constantly updated with regular feedback and lesson evaluations*’ (quote from tutor)

Cost savings

The college has achieved yearly savings of over £50,000 in annual licenses by introducing open source approaches via our Learner Portal, this has also allowed us to build additional functionalities and respond to student needs at a faster rate than we previously could through proprietary systems.

We have also identified savings in the following areas:

- By outsourcing the hosting of our Learner Portal service we have saved approximately .5 FTE for administration and developments
- We have seen a reduction of staff time dedicated to issue Students with timetables and EMA records in Registry (at least 2 to 3 staff at peak time) approximately 600 hours of staff time and almost 8,000 printouts over the course of the year
- The integration of different open source systems (Moodle, Mahara and ePDP) facilitates effective teaching that increases Student success and progression saving teacher and support staff time through more effective processes of monitoring and tracking progress

“At the end of year when we are collating all the marks to find out what their final mark will be, it’s all up there on EME it’s a case of just putting down their final grades it’s a real timesaver in terms of what we’ve been working with before on paper.” Rob Henry – Music tutor

Tutors who have embraced the use of electronic assignments and insisted that all submissions are submitted using the Assignment tool have had only positive things to say. Many mention the savings in paper generated, as well as being able to see their desks, as they are no longer buried under paper submissions.

“Cutting down on common formats like CD - students used to hand in about 15 -20 CDs a year. When you’re dealing with 15 students that’s a huge amount of CDs that were put in the cupboard at the end of the year, so it’s ecologically sound as well as economically sound.” Rob Henry – Music tutor

Sustainability

The launch of the Portal has shown a significant increase in the number of courses using the VLE to support students at Lewisham College as it provides more streamlined access to a broad spectrum of information not just to support learning but also to provide other information that students are benefitting from. The concept of paperless assessment is being brought to life as students and staff are able to access and review evidence all in one place. Students are better supported through the use of the three core elements VLE, ePDP and ePortfolio and the Portal calendar combining targets, assignments and college events from a single point of access.

The work done throughout this project has raised the profile of eLearning and innovation throughout the college and become an integral part of staff and student daily activities. It has also led to the establishment of an eCollege Steering Group that works alongside SMT to ensure that the vision for technology is accomplished and further developed. The eCollege is one of the college’s ten core strategic priorities endorsed by our governors

Dissemination

The College consistently shares its knowledge and expertise with all providers within the sector while acknowledging that it can also learn from others. Dissemination based around the 'Vision for the Learner Portal' to full implementation has taken place through national and regional conferences. We have also made available a range of interactive learning materials, 'How to guides' and support documents through our Moodle Help courses. We have delivered tailor made sessions to providers to support them with similar projects. Here are some of the events that we've participated in the past academic year:

- AOC conference - [Transforming Delivery to Meet New Realities](#) (Nov '09)
- Portal simulation - JISC Innovating e-Learning 2009
- ["From Vision to Reality" - Moodle Wonderland](#)
- JISC - [Advanced VLEs and ILPS](#)
- JISC - [Moodle in the WBL Sector](#)
- Technology Exemplar Network mini-network
- Kingston College - Showcasing the Learner Portal
- [Teaching Experts Group](#)
- Learner Portal event for City & Islington, Newham Sixth Form College, CityLit, The Study Group, St Georges University, London College of Beauty Therapy
- [Moodle Moot: Integration of Mahara and Moodle](#)
- Support to City & Islington College on integrated Learner Portals
- Trade Union Centres – Congress House
- [Transforming the Curriculum to enhance learner, progress and employability](#) (Elluminate)

Here is some of the feedback from our stakeholders:

"eME has been used to revolutionise the way technology is introduced to Trade Union Students. Using a range of integrated systems, trade union students can access eME at the College and offsite in workplace Learning Centres. It has enabled the digital divide to be reduced for workers who would not normally be able to find out about the potential of technology for learning due to their shift patterns or casual working" Quote from TU Studies Head of School

"This has been an amazing development for workers in the rail sector who work many varied shifts and can now learn and be supported online. This is an interesting, vibrant and creative Portal, easy to use for adults returning to learn" (Quote from Mike Sargent, Rail Maritime Union Official)

The Learner Portal delivers personalised information to students rather than requiring users to find it within the mass of college systems. The Portal epitomises a modern philosophy of education where students are empowered and have control over their own learning coupled with aggregated systems to support this process. The system allows students to agree learning goals with their tutor and monitor their progress through their study pathway. It enables them to assume responsibility for their own learning by devolving control through a variety of integrated tools. It also enables social constructivist pedagogy so that students can share their ideas and work with their peers as part of the learning journey. The Portal uses the web 2.0 approaches that users expect from systems today; this is why it is so successful with students and staff.

(Quote from JISC RSC London)

"The work done by Lewisham College to develop a fully integrated Learner Portal using open source technologies is radically changing the way students are taught and able to access information and support. The Portal provides students and tutors with a range of tools from a single login. Whilst learner portals are not new per se, Lewisham have used theirs very effectively to introduce new learning, teaching and assessment methods which, when coupled with timely online feedback from tutors, is enabling the development of learning objectives and learning activities, customised to individual learning needs. Through this work, Lewisham is showing the Sector how learning can be

customised efficiently and when coupled with improved online access to timetable, attendance, and progress information, is impacting positively on student motivation and achievement.” (Andrew Comrie, JISC Critical Friend)

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

At the heart of this initiative is the development of new ways of delivering outstanding teaching, learning and support through the use of technology to meet the whole range of student needs for a diverse community of students including those who are disadvantaged and hard to reach. It ensures digital literacy skills are embedded throughout their learning experience in order to equip them with the skills needed to thrive in a highly technologically driven and competitive world.

Students, teaching and support staff have benefited from much improved access, monitoring and planning of learning pathways through the use of integrated technologies leading to efficiency savings and increased achievement and progression.

Based on the experience of this project we have identified four key areas for consideration for the adoption of new technologies:

Curriculum Design

The success of any curriculum technology implementation stems from the design stage. In order for this to succeed a review of the curriculum design and implementation must take place as a first step towards technology adoption. It is important that teams come together to identify and agree new ways of delivery, assessment, and communication systems. We recommend that traditional methods of delivery are challenged to ensure that technology is not perceived as an add-on but is integral to the teaching and learning process.

Teaching and Learning

Students' expectations are changing, there is a blurring between formal and informal learning that modern education needs to take into account. Teaching and learning needs to be reviewed within a completely different framework based on the following criteria:

- diverse student needs (14-19's, Adults, Work Based Learners)
- personalisation/meeting individual needs
- widening access to teaching and learning opportunities
- holistic approach to teaching and learning (digital literacy, employability, learn to learn)
- learning outside of the classroom

Staff Development

Personalisation plays a critical role in staff development (teachers as lifelong learners). The successful adoption of new delivery models (especially where new technologies are involved) relies on a robust and flexible programme of staff development opportunities that increase staff confidence and creativity through:

- team/group/one to one training
- expert/peer mentoring/support
- face to face, blended, online
- scheduled, on demand
- classroom delivery support
- Focus/Action Research groups

Organisational change (matrix working structure):

We recommend a cross organisation matrix approach to the development and implementation of projects of this nature. This needs to take both a top down, bottom up approach and everyone needs to understand their contribution and responsibility to the success of the project.

Staff need to feel empowered to make changes to the curriculum, be creative and confident with technology and practitioners and students involvement in disseminating new practice should be used as a vehicle for getting staff buy in.

Technology must play a central role in the organisation's overall objectives and there needs to be a review of processes and procedures in order to identify the technology that best supports them. This should be reflected in individual objectives through appraisals and quality improvement processes.

5. Implications for the future

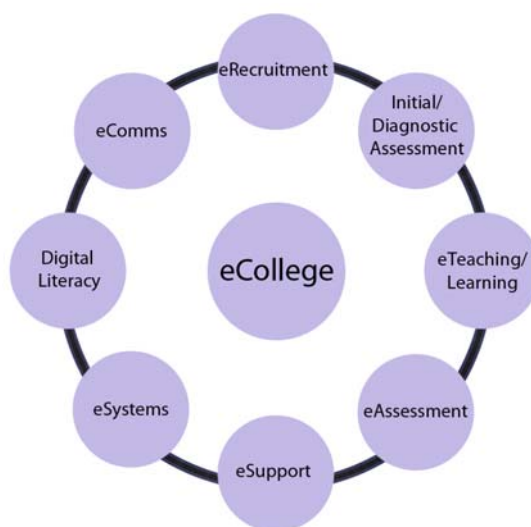
The flexibility and financial gains of using open source software has enabled us to design and adapt the Portal to meet customer needs for example: employers, schools, HE. Through the work done on this project and feedback from both staff and students captured through the Portal we have identified key areas for improvement and future development. These include:

- linking initial/diagnostic assessment to the ePDP
- introducing Assessment Manager (criteria based portfolio)
- full integration of Google Apps
- improved links to our Heritage library system

The Learner Portal model has now become a major focus of one of the College's top ten strategic priorities for 2010-2013 – 'To embed an eCollege ethos in all we do'. An eCollege strategy group, led by the Principal, has been set up and tasked with delivering the eCollege vision:

"Through the use of existing and emerging Technologies we will re-model learning, teaching, support and business practices resulting in outstanding, efficient and effective performance"

This vision has been divided into eight strands and working groups set up to review current practice, recommend Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), develop and pilot new models and make recommendations for the future. eME will play a major part in each of these strands as we use technology to generate fundamental transformation of learning, teaching and business practices



In this academic year all staff in the College will have at least one personal objective that relates to the eCollege, these have been written based on usage of Moodle, Mahara and the ePDP eg:

- Use Moodle to capture assessment evidence through assignments, questionnaires, quizzes and choice options
- Set targets, contribute to 'Progress Reviews' and monitor progress via the ePDP
- Encourage student participation and collaboration through Mahara clubs and forums

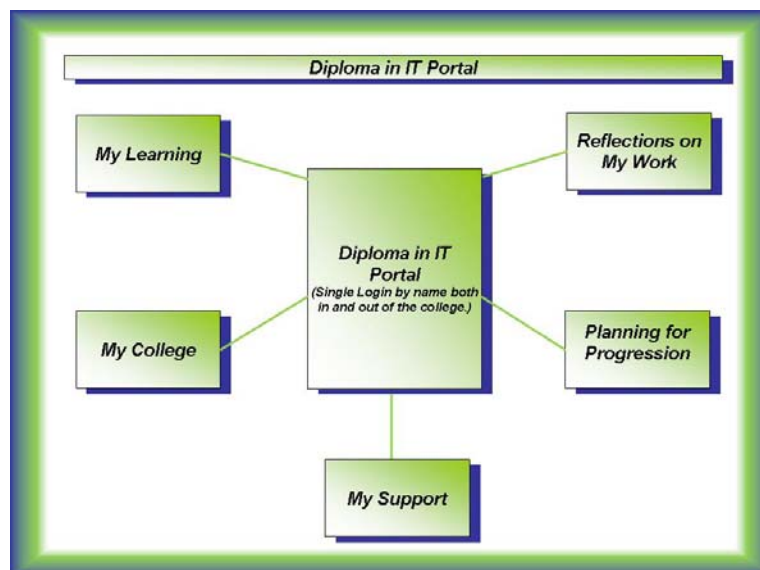
We believe that our shared knowledge and expertise around the concept of the 'Learner Portal' with many sector providers has acted as a catalyst for change and adoption for many leading to financial savings as well as increased collaboration in the sector.

6. References

7. Appendixes (optional)

Appendix 1 – the Vision

Appendix 1 - The Vision



My Learning – this is the VLE element of the Portal, offering students access to their course materials, resources available from the Learning Resource Centre, a range of formative assessment tools and opportunities to collaborate using forums, discussion boards and chat facilities.

What we did: Moodle was adopted as our VLE providing the My Learning aspects of the Portal and courses for both the Higher and Advanced Diplomas were set up. The course teams were trained in how to use Moodle and identified which elements of the VLE they would focus on.

Reflections on My Work – will focus around the e-Portfolio where students can store their work, create CVs, reflect on their learning through the use of a blog and showcase what they have produced with tutors, peers and prospective employers.

What we did: To provide Reflections on My Work we used Mahara as our e-Portfolio and this was set up, curriculum staff trained and plans made to incorporate it into the curriculum. [Further details of this journey can be found in our eResource Managers blog.](#)

Planning for Progression – will primarily be the students' e-ILP enabling them to work with tutors and support staff to articulate their personal goals, set realistic targets and evaluate their progress towards these.

What we did: Continuing with our aim to use open source applications we worked with ULCC to develop an ePDP to meet our requirement for Planning for Progression which was populated with data from our MIS system. This included dynamic access to timetables, attendance and punctuality data, EMA and Finance reports.

My Support – will provide an online support network to enable students to make the most of their time at College and support them in making possible and realistic choices about their future.

My College – will feature College news and events and will enable students to have their say, get involved and contribute to College life.

What we did: The combination of Moodle and Mahara also facilitated the My Support and My College aspects of the Portal and staff from appropriate areas of the college were trained and have populated their areas with materials, information and opportunities for students to get support and get involved.