



Project Document Cover Sheet

Project Information			
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Lead Institution	Coventry University		
Project Director	Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams		
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Partner Institutions	n/a		
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Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

Project Name: Coventry Online Writing Laboratory (COWL), Coventry University

Report compiled by: Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, Project Director

With contributions from: Penny Gilchrist, Project Manager; Dr. Mary Deane, John Tutchings, and Dr. Christine Broughan, workpackage leaders; Ray Summers, CAW Learning Technologist; and Fiona Secondino, CU Business Development Office.

Reporting period: 30th September 2009 – February 2010

Section One: Summary

It is increasingly recognised that university students benefit greatly from explicit teaching in the conventions of scholarly writing and in the writing of disciplinary genres. It is also clear that academics require support in cascading the teaching of writing into modules and degree courses.

In 2004 Coventry University made a pioneering investment by establishing a Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) that specialises in researching and teaching tertiary writing. A cross-university unit offering scholarly writing support to students at all levels from Foundation Degree to doctoral work, CAW also provides support to academics in teaching writing in the disciplines and in their own writing for publication. By enhancing CAW's provision through the use of technology, the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) project is set to have a major impact on the work of CAW, both in terms of the scalability of CAW's writing support services and of student and staff access to these services.

As of the end of February 2010 the COWL project is on target in its development of a comprehensive, integrated platform of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanisms, which is being trialled at Coventry University and which will be disseminated for further evaluation and use at other UK HEIs. The 'pre-pilot' and 'pilot implementation' phases are now complete and the project has entered an 'evaluation and consolidation' phase. The project team has learned a great deal from the work we have undertaken throughout each of the project's phases thus far. We are now in the process of evaluating and acting upon the findings of the COWL pilots, of refining technologies and systems for online writing tutoring, of planning staff development sessions in tutoring writing online, of developing materials for dissemination, and of looking in concrete ways toward our goal of developing a plan for a sustainable university-wide COWL curriculum delivery.

Section Two: Activities and Progress

COWL's overall approach and Project Plan remain current, and there have been no changes to the project team or to the COWL project Steering Group during this period.

As detailed in yellow highlight in the project workpackages (attached), progress on the COWL project has continued to be steady. The Project Board, Steering Group and Professor Peter Hartley, our Critical Friend, have met regularly throughout the period, and in November 2009 the COWL project team hosted the project's cluster group meeting at Coventry University (discussed in more detail in Section 8 of this report).

Project activity between October-December 2009 concentrated on running online writing tutorial pilots with Economics and Paramedics students at Coventry University and focused on the following of the project's objectives:

- explore the affordances and appropriateness of applying existing e-learning tools to the online tutoring of Academic Writing
- deploy new technologies imaginatively in the area of Academic Writing
- develop new pedagogical models for teaching Academic Writing
- help discipline-based teaching staff to develop the teaching skills to, in turn, help their own students develop confidence and skill in writing
- move towards more collaborative group teaching approaches of Academic Writing

Details of the pilot activities are as follows:

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- **Economics Pilots: Assignment 1: COWL asynchronous peer review workshops (November 2009).** Approximately 240 first-year students studying Economics and Accounting and Finance attended compulsory COWL workshops to trial COWL's asynchronous website and software for online peer review (Riffly). Dr. Mary Deane, workpackage leader for the COWL pilots and for developing new pedagogies of online writing tutoring, prepared students to take part in the pilots by delivering a lecture introducing students to COWL and the pilot activities. As well as academic staff members from the Department of Economics, CAW's Academic Writing Lecturers and Academic Writing Tutors attended the COWL workshops on the Economics module to facilitate students in carrying out online peer review of other students' writing assignments.
- **Economics Pilots: Assignment 2: COWL asynchronous writing tutorials (December 2009).** Approximately 240 first-year students studying Economics and Accounting and Finance were offered formative asynchronous feedback via the COWL website. Twelve percent of the student cohort submitted their draft assignments to the COWL site, and written feedback was provided by a subject academic in Economics, who had been trained to give feedback on writing by Mary Deane and who had facilities for giving written feedback and for using Riffly to provide audio feedback through the COWL asynchronous website.
- **Paramedics Pilots: Assignment 1: COWL synchronous writing tutorials (October 2009).** Following a preparatory lecture delivered by Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, the Project Director, approximately 30 distance-learning Paramedics students were offered synchronous feedback on their writing via the COWL website (Moodle and Skype). Some of the students produced draft assignments, which they submitted to the COWL Moodle site, and real-time discussion and feedback were provided by CAW's Academic Writing Tutors and Lecturers through using Moodle and Skype with a Mikogo plug-in.
- **Paramedics Pilots: Assignment 2: COWL asynchronous writing tutorials (November 2009).** Following a preparatory lecture delivered by Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, approximately 30 distance-learning Paramedics students were offered asynchronous feedback on their writing via the COWL website. Some of the students produced draft assignments, which they submitted to the COWL site, and asynchronous feedback was provided by CAW's Academic Writing Tutors and Lecturers, who had access to giving written feedback and to using Riffly to provide audio feedback.

Data was collected throughout the pilot phase with the aim of gaining insight into students' perceptions of online writing tutoring and into the perceptions of the CAW Academic Writing Tutors, discipline-based academic staff, CAW Administrative staff, and the technology staff involved in the project. Data collection was led by Dr. Christine Broughan, the COWL evaluation workpackage leader. During January and February 2010, the project team began to analyse the data collected during the pilots and to formulate constructive actions in response to this data.

Section Three: Outputs and Deliverables

As outlined in the COWL Project Plan and the September 2009 COWL Project Interim Report, key outputs of the COWL Project will be:

- user guidance on online writing tutorials for staff and students;
- an exemplar institution-wide roll-out plan for online writing tutoring provision;
- a Good Practice Guide for institutions seeking to establish Online Writing Labs (OWLs) or systems for offering online writing tutoring;
- session plans and materials for a training course for writing tutors on online writing tutoring techniques and pedagogies;
- session plans and materials for faculty-based workshops on working with students' writing online

Other outputs will include: the final project report; materials to illustrate and exemplify the new practices introduced by COWL (e.g. screen shots of online writing tutorials and resources, photos and videos of staff and students using these materials, learner-created content including a CAW Academic Writing Tutors' forum, writing tutorial record sheets, student feedback comments, and examples of

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student writing that have been commented on synchronously and asynchronously); Academic Writing learning and teaching resources (e.g. updated CU Harvard Referencing Style resources); an evaluation report and evidence including statistical data collected through surveys and through Accutrack (CAW's electronic record-keeping system); one or more journal articles; and paper presentations and promotional activities at academic conferences.

Outputs produced during this reporting period include a set of three maps that conceptualise the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) model of providing whole-university writing development and the impact of the COWL project on transforming the CAW model. These maps have replaced the two earlier maps on the COWL project website and are entitled:

1. 'The Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) Model and Coventry University Student Journey in accessing Academic Writing Support at CAW (2004-2010)'
2. '*Anticipated* Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) Project Enhancements to the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) Model of Academic Writing Support, and the Coventry University Student Journey in accessing COWL (from 2010-11)'
3. 'Future-Gaze Map of the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) and Coventry University Student Journey in accessing Academic Writing Support via COWL'

A *Pilot Implementation Report* outlining the key findings of the COWL pilots is another output for the period. The majority of COWL outputs and deliverables are available as documents on the COWL project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/>), and many of these are in the process of being uploaded to the COWL project page in the JISC Design Studio. Three short videos and a poster conceptualising the COWL project are additional deliverables that were initially produced for JISC's October 2009 joint programme meeting.

Work is currently in progress on a number of deliverables. A six-week 'online writing tutoring' training course is being planned, scheduled and advertised to CAW's Academic Writing Tutors. Coventry University staff development sessions are in the process of being planned, and initial development work has also begun on a *Good Practice Guide for Online Writing Tutoring* and an institutional roll-out plan. Work has also started on drafting an article on resistance to engaging with online learning environments.

In terms of technical outputs and system integrations, a Moodle module for the synchronous online writing tutorials, as well as a separate website for the asynchronous online writing tutorials, were set up, populated, and utilised for the COWL pilots. As a result of learning from the pilots, the technology and pedagogy teams have now begun to concentrate on moving the asynchronous feedback system over to Moodle so that it sits within the same Moodle module as the synchronous feedback system and has integrated user instructions and an integrated 'look' and 'feel'. At present, COWL is on an old version of Moodle that Coventry University was using for development purposes before releasing Moodle to the entire University community. The University's e-learning technologists are now much more familiar with Moodle than they were during the COWL Project's 'pre-pilot preparation' phase in Summer 2009, and now that the COWL pilots have ended it is possible to move COWL over to the main Moodle servers. Doing so will have an added benefit of allowing the COWL project team access to new tools (such as Horizon Wimba Voice Email) that we may wish to trial.

Section Four: Evaluation

The evaluation activities undertaken by the project team during this reporting period focused on the COWL online writing tutorial pilots. Both immediate feedback mechanisms (e.g. post-tutorial feedback questions) and delayed feedback mechanisms (e.g. interviews) were utilised, and both students and staff were involved in giving feedback:

- **Student feedback on the synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorials offered by CAW Academic Writing Tutors to Paramedics and Economics students and on the asynchronous online writing tutorials offered by the Economics lecturer.** Students were asked to provide feedback immediately following each synchronous or asynchronous session. After completing the tutorial the student was automatically directed to SurveyMonkey to fill in an online survey comprised of questions about the efficiency of the

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learning experience, the degree of comfort the student felt during the session, whether the use of technology enhanced the learning experience, the length of the tutorial, the pedagogy of the tutorial, the student's interest in participating in future online writing tutorials, the student's preference for an online or face-to-face tutorial, and the impact of the tutorial on the student's level of confidence as a writer. The survey also gave students an opportunity to write qualitative feedback comments.

Although the evaluation workpackage leader, Christine Broughan, also arranged two **student focus groups** to take place immediately following the **asynchronous online peer review workshops** that were conducted as part of the Economics pilot, no students opted to participate. It is likely that the evaluation workpackage team will pursue telephone interviews if further qualitative data is required.

- **Feedback from staff members who participated in the COWL pilots.** Throughout Autumn 2009, Christine Broughan conducted face-to-face interviews with eleven members of Coventry University staff who were participating in the pilots, including the Paramedics and Economics lecturers, technology and pedagogy workpackage leaders and members, CAW Academic Writing Tutors, CAW Administrative staff, CAW Learning Technology staff, and the COWL Project Manager and Director. The interviews were audio-recorded and are in the process of being transcribed and analysed.
- **Student profiling data.** In the original evaluation package, we suggested that we would report on the demographics of the pilot students in order to make comparisons with the demographic data for CAW students. Although demographic data was gathered on students who choose to come to CAW, due to the nature of the students participating in the pilots (i.e. they were all enrolled in particular modules rather than self-presenting), this was not deemed an appropriate comparison.

Through these mechanisms, as well as through reflective discussion between participants and members of the project team informally and formally (during the COWL Project training sessions, at Project Board meetings, Steering Group meetings, and at the Cluster Group meeting in November 2009), the evaluation workpackage team has gathered feedback on the experience of engaging in online writing tutorials that will inform the COWL Project's development both of pedagogies and technologies for online writing tutoring.

The key evaluation activities for the next six months will involve the evaluation workpackage team in analysing the interview data and presenting findings in a report to the COWL Project Board and/or COWL Steering Group. Informed by these findings, by the student feedback that has been collected, and by evidence generated through team discussions of the benefits and shortcomings of the pilots, the COWL pedagogy workpackage team and technology workpackage team will work together to try to improve the experience and effectiveness of COWL's online writing tutorials for students and Academic Writing Tutors. It is envisioned that once projected improvements are in place, the project team will run a small-scale randomised pilot of the synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutoring systems, website and user guidance. Feedback data will be gathered in the same or similar ways to our original data collection (e.g. possibly through a feedback survey and brief interviews) and will be analysed quickly in order to contribute to 'final' developments of the synchronous and asynchronous systems.

The evaluation workpackage and project team will also make use of Kaplan and Norton's (1998) 'Balanced Score Card' method as a framework for evaluating the COWL project. We will examine, in particular, the balance between the needs of stakeholders, internal University/writing centre processes, and the level of University support for staff development in the teaching of writing.

Section Five: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Although evaluation of the COWL pilots is still ongoing, some important lessons about communicating with colleagues and managing the expectations of stakeholders have already been learned from the piloting process, and these may be of interest to the wider sector. Most importantly, the project team has learned that good communication with colleagues can be the key to managing both colleagues' and students' expectations. For example, many of the CAW Academic Writing Tutors and Lecturers

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expressed concern about using the online tutoring tools, and although some training opportunities were in place, the Project Director (who is also the Head of CAW) could have created more pre-pilot (and ongoing) opportunities for the tutoring and lecturing team to engage in meetings with the COWL project team, in reading and discussion of literature about online writing tutoring pedagogies, and in structured hands-on practice with the technologies. If the Academic Writing Tutors' and Lecturers' levels of engagement and confidence had been supported in these ways, then they would have been in a better position to know how to manage students' expectations of the sessions.

The same principle pertains to communication between the COWL project team and academic colleagues in the disciplines, who can play a crucial role both in promoting the online writing tutorials offered by COWL and in utilising online writing tutoring technologies themselves (to give their students feedback on their writing and/or to teach and encourage 'student-to-student' peer review). Indeed, communication between CAW/COWL lecturers and discipline-based academics underpins a second important lesson the project team has learned from the pilots. Offering staff development to colleagues across the University is a potential way of meeting the COWL project goal of offering sustainable pedagogic approaches to support student writers, and embedding online writing development in modules could be an effective way to do this. The COWL pilots have taught the project team to expect that this type of strategy will involve training in theories and pedagogies of online writing tutoring, collaboration, and materials development in consultation with disciplinary lecturers.

As discussed in Sections 3 and 7 of this report, another lesson learned from the pilots is that the synchronous and asynchronous systems that the project team put in place for conducting online writing tutorials need to be as fully integrated as possible. Many users found having different platforms for the asynchronous and synchronous tutorials (as well as a separate project website) to be confusing. As a result, the technology and pedagogy workpackage teams are now working to integrate and re-populate the platforms in Moodle, with the goal of eventually linking the Moodle site to the University's CAW webpage (<http://www.coventry.ac.uk/cu/caw>) when COWL's online writing tutoring officially becomes part of the services CAW offers during the next academic year.

Section Six: Communication and Dissemination Activities

Communication and dissemination activities relating to the COWL project have continued to focus on self-generated publicity. At this stage of the project, the project team is beginning to identify opportunities for inter-play between project deliverables (e.g. University-wide staff development events and materials on tutoring writing online), dissemination activities (e.g. plans for a COWL exhibit at the University's annual staff development conference) and strategies for engaging key stakeholders (e.g. academic staff across Coventry University). In other words, we are realising that using deliverables to disseminate information about the project in order to engage stakeholders is a useful and efficient strategy.

Effective communication between members of the project team normally takes place via email discussion and informal face-to-face meetings, as well as through the more formal Project Board meetings which give the workpackage leaders, the Project Manager, Project Director and other interested members of the project team opportunities to meet, report on workpackage progress, and discuss ways forward. Communication between the project team, internal stakeholders and external experts takes place face-to-face at COWL project Steering Group meetings. Notes and reports from these meetings are posted on the COWL project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/>). In addition, we have made some use of the project blog on the COWL project website. Once the project has reached a stage in which the pedagogies and technologies we are developing for online writing tutoring are ready for University-wide and public use, we intend to maximise opportunities for communicating to the wider HE sector; for example, through routes such as the HEA Subject Centre newsletters.

Dissemination activities for this period have included identifying appropriate upcoming events and conferences and working on plans and proposals for disseminating at these events. For example, Mark Childs has been included in a proposal by Bill Thompson of the Modern Languages Association to run a session for the Committee on Professional Rights and Responsibilities and the Committee on Information Technology at the December 2010 MLA conference. If successful, Mark Childs would contribute through webconferencing to the session, which will examine the ethical implications and

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labour issues involved with Digital Scholarship and Digital Research. The specific contribution of the COWL project will be the issues involved with including staff and students in the implementation of new e-learning technologies and the impact this has on job roles and responsibilities, and how the impact on these can be taken into account when designing e-learning projects. Other conferences to which members of the project team have sent proposals for presentations or exhibits are: the European Writing Centers Association (Paris, May 2010), the Writing Development in Higher Education (London, June 2010), the Higher Education Academy (June 2010) and the ELATE (Coventry, June 2010) conferences. In addition, Mary Deane and Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams have begun planning for a series of internal Coventry University staff development workshops on the use of online writing tutorials, and envision that either these sessions or targeted future sessions can be advertised to members of staff from across the sector. We believe that this type of event will be key in enabling CAW to be recognised as the sector leader in online writing tutoring.

Section Seven: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

As indicated in the September 2009 COWL Project Interim Report, the project team faced a number of unexpected challenges immediately prior to the start of the pilots: the resignation of the Project Manager due to University restructuring; changes to CAW's Academic Writing Tutor contracts and the resulting resignations of two Tutors; the resignation of another Academic Writing Tutor; an exponential increase in student numbers on the Economics pilots (from 80 to 240); limitations of the online conferencing software that we had been planning to use; and initial lack of engagement of some of the Academic Writing Tutors with the planned new technologies. The Project Director and project team dealt with these challenges as explained in the September report, and the pilots went ahead as planned.

In order to ensure that the pilots ran smoothly and professionally despite these many challenges, however, all staff members involved put in large amounts of extra effort beyond the level of commitment that had been planned. The entire COWL and CAW teams, as well as colleagues from the University's e-Learning Unit and academic staff from the Paramedics and Economics departments should be commended for their hard work and dedication to the COWL project throughout the pilots. Examples of these extra efforts include: the flexibility and willingness of the new Project Manager, Penny Gilchrist, to learn 'on the job'; the willingness of pedagogy workpackage leader Mary Deane, Economics module leader Perihan Yavash and Paramedics module leader Mark Garrett to re-negotiate the parameters of the pilots; the willingness of the CAW Lecturers and Senior Lecturers to conduct online tutorials and to facilitate online peer review workshops; the work of the Project Director, Senior Managers, the CAW Administrative Assistant, and a CAW Lecturer in quickly progressing the hiring of new Academic Writing Tutors; the quick work of technology workpackage team members, the CAW Learning Technologist, CAW Senior Lecturers and an Academic Writing Tutor in sorting out technologies and writing instructions for using Skype and Mikogo for synchronous tutorials when it became clear that the MegaMeeting webconferencing software was not working in the ways we needed it to and seemed to users to be too complicated; and the willingness of the three remaining Academic Writing Tutors to experiment with Skype, Mikogo and the asynchronous website tools (e.g. Riffly).

A further unexpected—and fundamental—challenge that arose during the pilots was CAW/COWL's lack of dedicated IT support. As a result of the University restructuring that had taken place over the summer, CAW as a centre had lost its technical support person and negotiations regarding new service-level agreements with the University's IT Services had not been finalised by the time of the pilots. Technical issues that arose, such as problems experienced by the Academic Writing Tutors in retaining their own desktop settings during the synchronous sessions and intermittent Skype audio/video and desktop sharing 'video drop out' problems, were dealt with on an ad-hoc basis by the CAW Learning Technologist and Administrative Assistant working together with assistance from members of the technology workpackage, e-Learning Unit, and the IT Services helpdesk—and on occasion by Academic Writing Tutors coming up with creative ways to communicate with students when they could see but not hear each other. An important lesson learned from this experience that is applicable to all projects is to make sure that technical support (for both hardware and software) is in place and that clear areas of responsibility are agreed before piloting or launching new technologies in the curriculum.

Section Eight: Collaboration and Support

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Members of the COWL project team continue to find the JISC programme team to be supportive. Early in this reporting period, Professor David Morris and Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams attended the joint programme meeting, 'Designing for Delivery and Delivering the Design' (October 2009). Both considered the schedule of events and speakers to be very timely and well-gauged in terms of linking Higher Education research and development projects with the national political and economic situation and in terms of the project life-cycle stage that the Curriculum Design and Delivery projects were experiencing at that time. The programme meeting also provided an opportunity for Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams to meet for an extended discussion with the project's Critical Friend, Professor Peter Hartley, who was extremely supportive and helped her to plan effectively to deal with the challenges that had arisen in advance of the upcoming COWL pilots.

The JISC programme team has also provided excellent opportunities for collaboration and support. For example, Lou McGill recently approached Penny Gilchrist and Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams about setting up and populating a Design Studio webpage for the COWL project. Not only did Lou McGill create the webpage, but she uploaded the documents and outputs Penny Gilchrist has sent to her and has offered to continue to do so. Another JISC opportunity that was taken up by members of the COWL project team was a four-day 'Dev8D Developer Days' event in February 2010, which John Tutchings and Clive Teed attended. Also, Mark Childs and Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams were pleased to be given the opportunity in January 2010 to work on a proposal for a workshop on 'Supporting Future Learning through Technology' for the annual Higher Education Academy conference, in collaboration with Marianne Sheppard, Eddie Gulc, and members of the following institutions and projects: Kingston University/De Montfort University (MoRSE project), the University of Leicester (DUCKLING project), the University of Westminster (Making Assessment Count), the University of Hertfordshire (ESCAPE project), the University of Exeter (Integrative Technologies project), and the Open University (ATELIER-D).

The COWL Project continues to benefit from working with its cluster group colleagues at Newcastle University (the Dynamic Learning Maps Project) and St. George's, University of London (the Generation 4 Project). In November 2009, the COWL project team hosted a cluster group meeting at Coventry University. The meeting was very useful for us, as it enabled more members of the COWL project team and internal stakeholders (e.g. Library staff and lecturers from across the disciplines who are members of the COWL Steering Group) to participate in discussion with cluster group colleagues. The meeting was particularly useful because it led us to re-clarify, through the input of these external colleagues, the COWL Project's main focus on improving student access to writing instruction.

Section Nine: Financial Statement

As detailed on the attached Financial Statement, expenditure on the COWL project to date is on track. Because a large proportion of the project's dissemination activities will take place from May 2010 onwards, 75% of the money budgeted for travel and expenses and 70% of the money budgeted for dissemination has not yet been spent. At this time, no significant over/under spend is anticipated for the project. Please see the Financial Statement report to the end of February 2010, attached in PDF format.

Checklist:

Before you return this report:

- Ensure that your project webpage on the JISC site is up to date and contains the correct information. Attach details of any required amendments to this report. Project webpages can be found from: www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdelivery **Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams checked the project webpage on 16/3/10. The only amendment needed is that the title 'Dr.' should be inserted before the name Christine Broughan.**
- If there have been any changes to the original project plan and/or work packages, ensure that amended copies of the relevant sections of your project plan are attached to this report. **No changes have been made.**
- Identify and name any areas within this report that you'd like removed before the report is made public (*see below) **Please remove budget information as explained below.**

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***Please note** the interim reports will be made available on the JISC website and on the Circle site with the budgetary information removed. We recognise that projects may occasionally address very sensitive issues. We would like you to present as full a picture in this report as you can as the lessons you learn are valuable to us. We assure you that any issues you identify as confidential are removed before the report is made public. Where such issues do represent valuable lessons for the community we will involve you in further discussion as to how they could be passed on without identifying institutions or individuals.