

1st Interim External Evaluation Report: The DUCKLING Project

Final

July 09
Andrew K Comrie

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	External Evaluation Focus and Methodology	5
3.	Evaluation of Work Package 1	7
4.	Evaluation of Work Packages 2, 3 and 4	8
5.	Benchmarking	13
6.	Summary of Recommended Actions.....	14
	Appendix 1	15
	Appendix 2	18

1. Introduction

1.1 The **D**elivering **U**niversity **C**urricula: **K**nowledge, **L**earning and **I**nnovation **G**ains Project (DUCKLING) is funded by JISC and is one of 15 projects funded under the JISC Curriculum Delivery Programme.¹

Aims:

1.2 The DUCKLING Project aims to :

- Enhance distance and work-based delivery with three innovative technology-mediated approaches to learning.
- Engage key stakeholders throughout the delivery, development and planning
- Be flexible enough not to require re-validation by enabling subject teams to design once and deliver many times
- Inform the two key curriculum delivery-orientated elements of Leicester's new DL Strategy
- Inform Senior Managers, strategy and policy makers in the university and across the sector.

Outputs

1.3 The expected outputs from the DUCKLING project are:

- A transferable model for effective, scalable inclusive and sustainable work-distance-based curriculum delivery within a dual-mode university, with discipline based comparisons
- Exemplar delivery curricula for each pilot/demonstrator programme. With relevant documentation
- An inventory of examples of technology-enhanced, re-usable and re-versionable approaches to solutions to WB delivery challenges, with associated evidence of use, to foster transferability.
- Guidelines for HE Practitioners and managers for developing flexible, informed and learner-centred WB curriculum delivery processes in their contexts.
- Interim and Final reports and case studies, as required by the funder
- A report-based on two annual benchmarking studies (2009 +2010) involving two or more "dual-mode" HEI offering work-based distance learning across Europe.
- A community of practice of work-based deliverers from dual-mode UK universities

¹ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningcapital/curriculumdelivery.aspx>

Outcomes

1.4 The expected outcomes from the DUCKLING Project are

- Modelling curriculum delivery enhancement:
 - a. Enhanced curriculum delivery processes to support flexible delivery meeting diverse and changing learner requirements.
 - b. Improved understanding of effective curriculum delivery for work-based learning and distance informed by all key stakeholders
- Improved understanding of research to practice curriculum delivery processes and how they can be supported by technology to transform learning opportunities for students learning and earning and achieve strategic objectives.
- Evidence of learners achieving their goals via flexible, well designed, learners and employer informed delivery processes.
- An enhanced approach to WB curriculum delivery relevant to other subject areas, institutions and stakeholders.
- Contributions to national policy in curriculum design at pedagogic and institutional levels.
- Effective dissemination
 - a. Sector wide dissemination of findings and engagement with key stakeholder communities
 - b. Evidence for the value of annual DL benchmarking exercises across comparable HEIs
- Development in dual-mode universities of exemplary remote learning delivery
- Sustainability and development across the Sector.

Subject Disciplines

1.5 The curriculum delivery models developed during the project are being piloted and evaluated in the following subject disciplines:

EDUCATION:

MA Applied Linguistics and TESOL

PSYCHOLOGY

MSc in Occupational Psychology

MSc in Psychology of Work

Students

- 1.6 The students studying for the MA Applied linguistics and TESOL are practicing language teachers seeking enhanced professional competence. Many are located overseas in hard to reach areas. It is estimated that at least 25 students will participate in the pilot
- 1.7 The students studying for the MSc in Occupational Psychology and MSc in Psychology of work participating in the project are studying for CPD towards Chartered Psychologist status as practicing professionals. It is estimated that 30 Students will participate in the pilot.

Alignment with Institutional Strategy

- 1.8 The University of Leicester's *Strategy for Learning Innovation (2009)* was published in July 2009 as an addendum to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The strategy is based on the principles of :
 - evidence for and evaluation of benefits of enabling innovation across the institution for students' learning;
 - collaboration across the institution within strategic frameworks and through funded research and development projects;
 - raising the capability of all members of the University – students and staff- to exploit and benefit from the learning technologies of the 21st Century;
 - exploring 'beyond the obvious' to prepare for the future in unseen, unknown and uncharted territory for learning and teaching
- 1.9 The DUCKLING Project has real potential to evidence the new Learning Innovation strategy in action.

Recommended Actions

- The External Evaluator will use the final external evaluation report due in July 2010 to report on the extent to which DUCKLING is contributing to the strategic aims of the University of Leicester's Strategy for Learning Innovation. This will help the project to demonstrate to JISC the impact on learning and teaching, the student experience and the extent to which the project has contributed to institutional aims and objectives.

2. External Evaluation Focus and Methodology

2.1 This is the **first** of three interim evaluation reports for the DUCKLING project. Each interim report is structured around three core questions as defined in the JISC six-step evaluation model²:

- What have we done/built/achieved, to what quality, and how efficiently?
- What has been learned or confirmed through development activities?
- How has the learning been acted on or fed back in?

2.2 Each interim evaluation is scheduled to take place at key points during the life of the project to enable the external evaluator to focus and report on different project work packages, outcomes and outputs. Full details are defined in the external evaluation framework which takes into account activities set out in the project's evaluation plan.

2.3 Each interim report will:

- confirm the extent to which work packages have been completed satisfactorily;
- scrutinise evidence and confirm the extent to which the project's intended outcomes are being realised and confirm the impact that this is having;
- summarise key learning points from the project and where relevant, recommend actions for sharing learning with other stakeholders;
- provide the project team with formative feedback in the form of recommended actions that are intended to help the team maximise outputs and/or, enhance evidence in support of outcomes;
- provide formative feedback in the form of recommended actions that are intended to inform future project planning and prioritisation;
- Provide evaluative commentary on outputs from the project and recommend actions to enhance the output, as appropriate.

2.4 The first external evaluation has focussed on work packages 1, 2 3 and 4 and their associated outputs/outcomes. At this stage in the project, only work packages 1, 2 and 3 are scheduled to have been completed. Work package 4 is in progress and is not scheduled to be completed until the end of July 09.

2.5 There is a good deal of overlap between the activities in work packages 2, 3 and 4. As a result, these work packages have been evaluated together.

² <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/reppres/evaluationhandbook.pdf>

2.6 The methodology used to externally evaluate the DUCKLING project at this stage has included:

a. ***Focus Group Discussions with the DUCKLING Research Team and academic staff teaching on the psychology and education Masters programmes.***

b. ***Literature Review.*** The literature review took into account:

- Project Plan
- Steering Group Minutes
- Project BLOG
- University of Leicester's Strategy for learning Innovation 2009-12

3. Evaluation of Work Package 1

Overview

3.1 This work package was designed to set the project up and to establish the project's governance arrangements. The Work package was scheduled to run between November 08 and January 2009.

3.2 Evaluation has focussed on:

- the extent to which the activities in the work package have been completed satisfactorily;
- provide evaluative commentary on outputs from the project;
- Key learning points from this work.

What have we done/built/achieved, to what quality and how efficiently?

3.3 The activities listed in Work Package 1 have been completed satisfactorily and have resulted in:

- **Formation of the project team.** The project team has now been formed and includes a research team and Project Champions from the Schools of Psychology and Education. Project progress is reviewed regularly at monthly project team meetings.
- **Establishment of the Project Steering Group.** The Steering Group has been established with a clearly defined remit and has met once since the start of the project. Minutes of the meeting are informative, clear and actions clearly assigned. A schedule of future meetings have been agreed and scheduled.
- **Participation in JISC programmes level activities.** Members of the research team are actively participating in JISC Programme events. This has included participation in the Programme Launch in November 08, the Evaluation workshop in January 09 and the Programme Meeting in Birmingham on the 12 May. Members of the project team have worked with other projects in their cluster, supported by their Critical Friend Peter Chatterton, and attended two cluster meetings, one of which was hosted at the University of Leicester in July.

3.4 The **outputs** planned at this stage of the project have been created and include:

- **Project Plan.** The draft and final versions of the project plan were submitted to JISC by the deadline set and has subsequently been approved and signed off.
- **The Project Website and BLOG** has been launched. Members of the project team are contributing to the project BLOG.

What has been learned or confirmed through development activities?

3.5 The project team have used meetings with other projects in their cluster to exchange ideas and to learn and develop knowledge and understanding relating to stakeholder engagement and change management.

4. Evaluation of Work Packages 2, 3 and 4

Overview

4.1 These work packages were designed to review current course delivery structures and existing approaches to online learning, teaching and assessment, gather data relating to student satisfaction and progression to allow comparison and ensure that key stakeholders were engaged in the project. The Work packages were scheduled to run between January and March, March and May 2009 and May and July respectively.

4.2 Evaluation has focussed on:

- the extent to which the activities in the work packages have been completed satisfactorily;
- provide evaluative commentary on outputs from the project;
- Identifying key learning points from this work.
- providing the project team with formative feedback in the form of recommended actions that are intended to help the team maximise outputs and/or, enhance evidence in support of outcomes;
- providing formative feedback in the form of recommended actions that are intended to inform future project planning and prioritisation;

What have we done/built/achieved, to what quality and how efficiently?

- 4.3 The research team are working with the Psychology and Education course team/ teaching fellows delivering the MSc in Occupational Psychology, MSc in Psychology of Work by distance learning and the MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL by distance learning. The Research Associate has a good relationship with the teaching teams/Teaching Fellows and has developed a good understanding of the structure of the three masters programmes.
- 4.4 Course Team members from both Schools are participating in the project and are attending monthly project team meetings.
- 4.5 Course Teams have started planning ways in which technologies will be used to innovate their curriculum delivery models. Both the Psychology and Education course teams have prioritised podcasting but are exploring ways to incorporate e-books and Second Life into curriculum delivery in a second phase of development.
- 4.6 The project team are effectively using deliverables from the Informal Mobile Podcasting and Learning Adaption (IMPALA)³ to provide course teams with guidance in the production of podcasts.
- 4.7 The Psychology course team have already developed and introduced Podcasts to their programme. Podcasts are being used to offer enhanced support and advice for course assignments and to provide enhanced advice and support for the Dissertation modules offered in the MA programmes. The Podcasts are used with a comprehensive Dissertation Handbook that has been developed by the team. Both are designed to provide advice and guidance to students tackling a work-based dissertation.
- 4.8 The Psychology Team have started to use Podcasts to support course delivery and provide assessment feedback to students. The range of Podcasts that have now been developed include:
- 17 Dissertation Podcasts
 - 4 Assignment Podcasts for Module 4 of the course
 - 10 Research methods podcasts
 - 12 Podcasts providing assessment feedback

Others are in development including Podcasts explaining module assignments, more research methods podcasts, podcasts to support the Selection and Assessment Module.

- 4.9 The Education Team have developed three different types of Podcasts in:

³ <http://www.impala.ac.uk/index.html>

- World English
- History of English
- Phonetics/Phonology

Examples of podcasts that have been incorporated into the Language, Discourse and Society' module include:

- 2 Introductory Podcasts
 - 1 podcast on Language change and variation
 - 2 podcasts on Standard English
 - 3 podcasts on World English
 - 1 podcast on Bilingualism and Language Choice
 - 2 podcasts on Analysing Talk

Further podcasts are in development including an Assessment Feedback podcast, podcasts to support a Materials Development Module and guest lecture podcasts

4.10 The **outputs** planned at this stage of the project were:

- **to have a clear understanding of the current course delivery structures and existing approaches to online learning, teaching and assessment.** To aid understanding, the Research Associate has been collecting relevant student satisfaction and student progression data for the courses involved in the project and examining trends. She has also conducted online surveys with existing distance learning masters students in both disciplines. The data collected is currently being analysed and will be used to produce **baseline reports for both disciplines**. The baseline reports are nearing completion and will be finished **by the end of July 09**. These reports are now ready and will be reviewed as part of the next stage of the evaluation.
- **To have a clear understanding of stakeholder needs in the disciplinary contexts.** There is evidence to show that the Research Associate has consulted with course teams and learners. There is also evidence to show that consultation with Employers are taking place. To date employer interviews have been conducted with three employers in the psychology profession. These include an interview with the British Psychologist Society, the Managing Director of a Psychology Consultancy company and a senior Occupational Psychologist working with the Northern Ireland Police. Further interviews have taken with employers in support of the Education programme. These have included two employers from the University of Chile and the Cambridge ESOL Centre Examination Manager in Uruguay. The views of employers have been incorporated into the project's baseline report and are being used to inform the design of new curriculum delivery models.

- **Action Plans for curriculum delivery innovations.** Plans are in place and in the case of psychology and Education, the course teams have run early podcast trials with their current student cohorts.

What has been learned or confirmed through development activities?

4.11 A full evaluation of the baseline reports will be conducted by the External Evaluator once the baseline reports have been completed and made available at the end of July. This will be reported on in the **second interim evaluation report**. However, a few early findings have been confirmed from the work conducted in this work package in relation to the Distance Learning **MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL**:

- **Student participation in the online survey has been low.** Early indications suggest that this is due to little use of the institutional VLE (Blackboard) in course delivery currently. As a result students are not accustomed to checking and using the VLE;
- **students are highlighting that they are feeling isolated** in responses to the online survey
- **A tracking exercise examining progression** of MA Applied Linguistics and TESOL students in the 2003 cohort, who should have completed the MA by the end of 2008, indicates that high levels of students failed to continue study after module one and either exited the programme with an Advanced Certificate or failed/withdrew from the module.

Early evaluation is showing that the podcasts that have been developed by the **psychology team** are impacting positively on the student experience and reducing staff workload. Further evaluation is still needed to gauge the impact on the student experience in the Education programme.

How has the learning been acted on or fed back in?

4.12 The initial findings from **the baseline** surveys and data comparisons have been discussed with both the Education and Psychology Course Teams. The Psychology team are using them to inform ways in which they can re-design their course delivery model to overcome difficulties and issues highlighted. The Education course team are not using these findings, currently, to inform how they might re-design their course delivery model to overcome the difficulties highlighted by students, although discussions are under way to modify the course design from March 2010 to integrate formative assessment into the discussion forum through the use of e-tivities. This is aimed at addressing the major criticisms from students, such as the lack of interaction with other students, the lack of prompt feedback on their questions, a request for more active use of Blackboard, and a request for a greater variety of approaches and technologies in the delivery of the course.

Recommended Actions

- DUCKLING for the **MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL** faces an obstacle in that core learning technologies are not yet embedded and used effectively in the current delivery model. DUCKLING is trying to develop the use of more advanced technologies (podcasts, second life, e-books) in a model that appears still to be in an early stage of development regarding the effective use of core institutional technologies such as the VLE. The Project Director/Project Adviser (Course Design) should discuss the situation with the course Programme Leader and use the dialogue to agree a way forward that might include additional support for the course team. This could include, for example, assistance with the planned learning activity (e-tivity) re-design. This would aim to ensure that technologies were well embedded and used consistently and effectively in the future delivery of the course.
- The DUCKLING teaching fellows should collaborate to ensure that both teams are aware of anything that is potentially transferable from each other's activities. (E.g. Psychology's work on Podcasting for Dissertations may be a useful model for Education.)
- The Research Associate should work with the psychology course team to ensure data is collected (within the scope and deliverables of the project) that will enable insight into the impact the use of podcasts is having on:

Student dissertation and assignment grades;

The quality of dissertation first drafts/extent to which students avoid common pitfalls when writing dissertations;

The impact on staff workload;

The impact on student retention;

The impact on the number of Distance Learning Students choosing to suspend studies.

5. Benchmarking

- 5.1 The benchmarking of DUCKLING against other “dual-mode” universities has been identified as a key part of the process for measuring the impact of this project on the effectiveness of the curriculum delivery methods being used. The Beyond Distance Research Alliance team under Professor Gilly Salmon’s leadership is in the process of establishing a benchmarking group with the University of Liverpool and two overseas universities. The overseas universities are still to be finalised. The group is likely to include a Swedish University, and universities in either New Zealand, Australia and/or Canada.
- 5.2 Benchmarking will be undertaken using the “pick and mix” methodology that was introduced to the team during their recent involvement with the HE Academy benchmarking pilot. Paul Bacsich from Matic Media Ltd will continue to support the team.
- 5.3 Benchmarking activities are expected to take place in September/October.

Recommended Actions

- The External Evaluator will review progress with benchmarking when he visits in September/October.

6. Summary of Recommended Actions

- The External Evaluator will use the final external evaluation report due in July 2010 to report on the extent to which DUCKLING is contributing to the strategic aims of the University of Leicester's Strategy for Learning Innovation. This will help the project to demonstrate to JISC the impact on learning and teaching, the student experience and the extent to which the project has contributed to institutional aims and objectives.
- DUCKLING for the **MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL** faces an obstacle in that core learning technologies are not yet embedded and used effectively in the current delivery model. DUCKLING is trying to develop the use of more advanced technologies (podcasts, second life, e-books) in a model that appears still to be in an early stage of development regarding the effective use of core institutional technologies such as the VLE. The Project Director/Project Adviser (Course Design) should discuss the situation with the course Programme Leader and use the dialogue to agree a way forward that might include additional support for the course team. This could include, for example, assistance with the planned learning activity (e-tivity) re-design. This would aim to ensure that technologies were well embedded and used consistently and effectively in the future delivery of the course.
- The DUCKLING teaching fellows should collaborate to ensure that both teams are aware of anything that is potentially transferable from each other's activities. (E.g. Psychology's work on Podcasting for Dissertations may be a useful model for Education.)
- The Research Associate should work with the psychology course team to ensure data is collected (within the scope and deliverables of the project) that will enable insight into the impact the use of podcasts is having on:

Student dissertation and assignment grades;

The quality of dissertation first drafts/extent to which students avoid common pitfalls when writing dissertations;

The impact on staff workload;

The impact on student retention;

The impact on the number of Distance Learning Students choosing to suspend studies.

- The External Evaluator will review progress with benchmarking when he visits in September/October.

**DUCKLING External Evaluation
Structured Questions – First Interim Report**

WORK PACKAGE 1

1. To what extent has activities in work packages 1 been completed?
 - Project Staff in place
 - Course Team Members identified from Education/ Psychology
 - Steering Group setup. How many times has it met
 - Participation in JISC activities – including Programme meetings, Cluster events, Meetings with Critical Friends

**WORK PACKAGE 2/3 – REVIEW CURRENT PROCESSES AND PRACTICES/
CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

What have we done/built/achieved, to what quality and how efficiently?

2. To what extent does the DUCKLING Research Team have a clear understanding of the current course delivery structures and online learning teaching and assessment?
3. To what extent does the DUCKLING Research Team have an understanding of stakeholder needs?
4. Has the current delivery structures been documented – e.g. baseline report?

What has been learned or confirmed through development activities?

5. What have you learnt from the review and consultation with stakeholders?

Extent to which needs of DL students differ from campus students?

Employer's needs

Teaching staff needs

Areas where curriculum delivery could be enhanced/changed

6. Have there been any unexpected outcomes or discoveries?
7. How have you communicated the outcomes of your review/consultations to the programme teams, students and employers? What has the response been?

How has the learning been acted on or fed back in?

8. What has happened as a result of your review/consultation?
9. To what extent are programme teams, students, employers engaged with the idea of changing the way programmes are delivered?
10. How do you plan to continue to communicate and engage with your stakeholders?

WORK PACKAGE 4 – UNDERSTANDING AND CHARACTERISING CHANGES AND PLANNING ACTION

What have we done/built/achieved, to what quality and how efficiently?

11. To what extent have you started to plan changes to the way in which the 3 Masters programmes will be delivered in 2009-10?
12. How have you interested programme teams in the proposed changes? How successful has this been?
13. Who is involved in planning and implementing these changes?
14. To what extent does the planned change address the challenges outlined in Table 1 of the project plan?
15. What technological enhancements have been made to curriculum delivery models? To what extent is the use of e-books, pedagogical podcasts and Second Life Media Zoo embedded into curriculum delivery models and learning activities?
16. To what extent is the implementation of the action plan owned by the programme teams?

What has been learned or confirmed through development activities?

17. What have you learnt from planning changes to the three Masters Programmes?
18. To what extent has the programme teams' knowledge and understanding of different curriculum delivery models and new technologies been developed?
19. To what extent have you been able to answer the research questions in Table 2 of the Project Plan?
20. Have there been any unexpected outcomes or discoveries?

How has the learning been acted on or fed back in?

21. What happens next?

Appendix 2

The following people participated in the interviews:

Individual	Position
Professor Gilly Salmon	Principal Investigator/ Project Director
Jaideep Mukherjee	Project Manager
Ming Nie	Research Associate
Gabi Whitthaus	Teaching Fellow (Education)
Ray Randall	Project Champion /Programme Leader (Occupational Psychology)
Sue Harrington	Course Team (Occupational Psychology)