



Project Document Cover Sheet

Project Information			
Project Acronym	e-Reflect		
Project Title	Making Assessment Count		
Start Date		End Date	
Lead Institution	University of Westminster		
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Partner Institutions	None		
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Programme Manager	Lisa Gray		

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Access	<input type="checkbox"/> Project and JISC internal		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X General dissemination

Document History		
Version	Date	Comments
Final draft	August 2009	Subject to amendment in light of feedback from Programme Manager
Final	November 2009	Amended by Project team in light of comments received from Programme Manager and external evaluators.

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name	<i>Making Assessment Count, University of Westminster</i>
Report compiled by	<i>Professor Gunter Saunders</i>
With contributions from	<i>Mark Kerrigan, Mark Clements, Yanitsa Nedelcheva, Federica Oradini, Andy Bond</i>
Reporting period	1 October 2008 - August 2009

Section One: Summary

Key Developments

1. Derivation of a tripartite model of student motivations and activities (figure 1) on which current and future methods of delivering and assessing the use of student feedback can be attached.
2. Development of an online system designed to help students make more effective use of the feedback they receive on their coursework. The process, named e-Reflect comprises an online questionnaire which students complete for each piece of coursework after they receive the associated 'subject' feedback. The completed questionnaire generates a report for each student which comprises 'operational' advice for approaching the coursework concerned and future assessed items of coursework. Students then complete a reflective blog (online learning journal) based around the report and their subject feedback, which is shared with their tutor and comments (strategic feedback) are written to the student. The online components of the system potentially allow personal tutors to liaise with module teaching teams over the collective feedback that their tutees receive.
3. The system outlined above was piloted with a group of approximately 70 level 4 undergraduates and 10 academic staff in semester 2 of the 2008/9 academic year. The system will be 'rolled out' across the Biosciences provision for the start of the 09/10 academic year involving ~300 1st year undergraduate students and all personal tutors (~40 staff) in the School of Life Sciences (recently renamed and formerly the School of Biosciences).
4. The pilot e-Reflect online questionnaire and reporting system was based on the use of Excel and associated macros to 'process' the student questionnaires. This was not a scalable solution and also led to delays of up to 24 hours in students receiving their questionnaire derived reports. Central Computing Services are working with the project over the summer to develop a new system that links directly into the University student record system via RSS (supported by another JISC project called TWOLER) and produces reports by SQL services. This new process will ensure stability, increased throughput and future expansion.

Deliverables/Outputs

1. [Project plan](#)
2. Initial [review](#) of good practice in the use of technology to support student reflection/feedback on coursework
3. Functioning [e-Reflect](#) process
4. [Student Guide](#) to Using e-Reflect
5. E-Reflect Process [Handbook](#) for Staff
6. Conference papers and presentations (see links in section 3 below)
7. Project [website](#) and [blog](#)
8. A [summary](#) of current practice within the Biosciences provision in relation to feedback and its generation by staff/use by students
9. Student centred model for the generation/management of feedback on coursework by students and staff (see figure 1)

Key Achievements

1. Successful (as determined from initial evaluation) piloting of e-Reflect
2. Buy-in from staff in the School of Life Sciences for 'roll out' of e-Reflect across UG programme
3. Buy in from central computing services with future development of scalable 'corporate version of e-Reflect

4. Presentations given at numerous UK e-learning events thus raising the profile of the project.
5. Development of a working model for the generation/management of feedback by staff/students

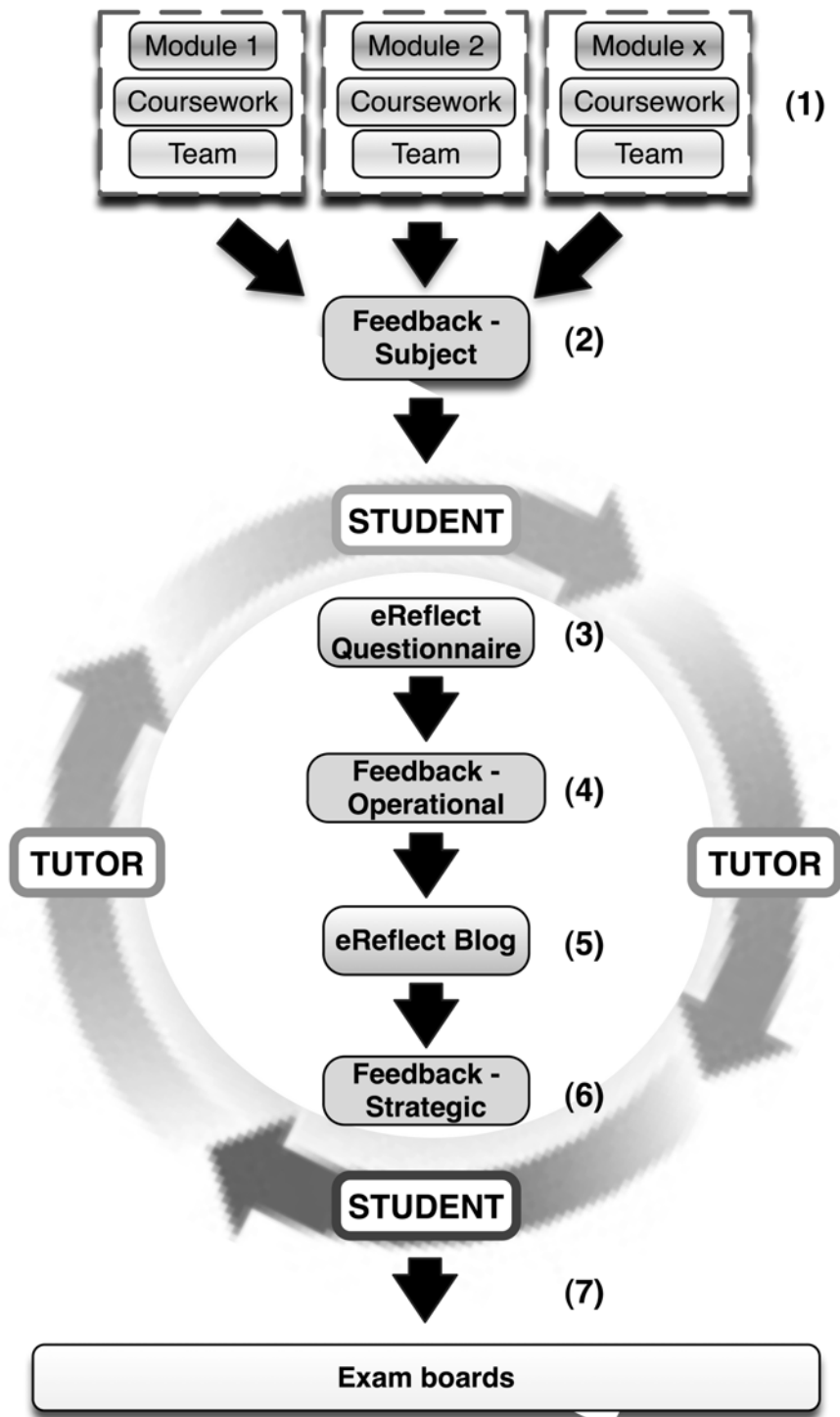


Figure 1 Model of the e-Reflect process

Section Two: Activities and Progress

The main operational objectives for the reporting period were to:

1. Develop a process (e-Reflect), supported by online technologies, that supports the aim of enabling students to make better use of the feedback they receive on their coursework.
2. Pilot the process with a representative number of students and staff within the Biosciences provision of the School of Life Sciences
3. Work, through the initial stages of the project and the pilot, to achieve 'buy-in' from staff for a wider roll-out of e-Reflect across the Biosciences provision of the School of Life Sciences
4. Begin to re-design the e-Reflect process for the roll out in light of feedback received from staff and students (including those not directly involved in the pilot)
5. Gather baseline data on the generation and use of feedback by staff and students to inform current and future evaluation activities
6. Begin to disseminate the 'idea' of e-Reflect and any preliminary data obtained

All of the objectives above have been either fully completed or, where an objective will run through into the next reporting period, activities designed to achieve them are underway. The project team has worked with student and staff feedback to develop the e-Reflect process and have tested the process with students and staff prior to the more extensive test of the pilot. Evaluation with participants in the pilot (as well as further collection of views from those not engaged in the pilot) is currently being used to develop the second version of e-Reflect. The pilot was conducted in semester 2 of the 08/09 academic year and included up to around 70 students and 10 academic staff. The pilot was voluntary and just over half of the students concerned took some active part. The project team provided training events and guidance materials to both students and staff prior to the pilot.

From the start of the project work has been going on to integrate the 'ideas' of e-reflect into mainstream activities within the Biosciences provision. Through meetings with key staff and then larger gatherings of staff and through the Project Steering Group (Chaired by the PVC Learning & Teaching and including the Dean of Biosciences) we believe that meaningful change has already taken place. Specifically staff in the Biosciences area have been provided with an annual time allowance to use e-Reflect and there is a growing and real connection being made between e-Reflect and the personal tutoring system.

The project team are currently working with central computing services (who were not involved in the design/realisation of e-Reflect version 1) to produce e-reflect version 2. This version will be more of a 'corporate' application with links to student records and should improve the efficiency and thus the effectiveness of the 'information technology parts' of e-Reflect. Feedback obtained during the evaluation of the pilot suggested that the time delay experience between completing a questionnaire and receiving the consequent report was a significant factor in student engagement. Version 2 of e-Reflect should address this with reports being sent to students within minutes of questionnaire submission.

The project team have gathered baseline information from students on their perception of the feedback that they receive and to find out more about what students do with the feedback. This has been done through a combination of questionnaires (typically completed at face to face events) and focus group meetings with students. In addition we have surveyed and spoken with individual staff with the Biosciences provision in order to be able to compare how staff perceptions of the use of feedback compare with the students and also to determine how staff currently go about generating and delivering feedback.

The project team have now presented at 3 national/international conferences on e-Reflect and a further presentation will happen next in early September at ALT-C 2009. There have also been numerous internal dissemination events and we are experiencing significant interest from other areas in exploring e-Reflect as well as discovering other practices which encompass some or all of the objectives behind e-Reflect.

There have been no major changes to the overall approach outlined in the project plan. The aims, objectives, workpackages, deliverables and milestones remain largely unchanged. Similarly the core project team remains the same. However the evaluation to date has shown some mis-alignment between what staff believe students currently do with feedback and what students say they do with feedback. Consequently this mis-alignment is becoming something of a focus for the project team in

trying to ensure that e-Reflect ultimately determines and addresses the 'real' issues around the use of feedback.

The technical solution rather than approach is however planned to change. The first version of e-Reflect, whilst fit-for purpose and meeting all objectives, was not readily scalable as it was based on downloads of data from student records and the use of Excel macros to process the online questionnaires submitted by students. Version 2 of e-Reflect, to be used in the implementation across the entire undergraduate degree programme within the Biosciences provision in Life Sciences, is essentially 'becoming' a corporate application. Version 2 will automatically gather data from student records via RSS and the ultimate use of an SQL database behind the system will ensure faster processing and report delivery to students and facilitate the expansion of the process to other schools.

Section 3 – Outputs and Deliverables

Expected Outputs from the Project

See attached mapping tool.

Expected technical outputs/system integrations

E-Reflect will mainly use existing technology (e.g. blogs within Blackboard, Google forms). However the diagnostic questionnaire that students complete after each coursework in e-Reflect version 1 is processed using Excel macros. The macros used are freely available. In e-Reflect version 2 it is currently planned that the questionnaire will be linked to an SQL database and student data from the student records system will be integrated with that database using RSS feeds, enabling more efficient and questionnaire processing and report generation.

Outputs produced in this reporting period

- Detailed project plan and associated evaluation plan (accessible from project website at: <https://sites.google.com/a/staff.westminster.ac.uk/mac/>)
- Overview report on other national and international projects (including those funded by the JISC) investigating aspects of feedback and its use by students and contextualised in relation to the aims of e-Reflect and the issues emerging from the initial implementation of e-Reflect ([see 'Overview of other projects with reflection/feedback theme' on project website](#))
- Functioning e-Reflect process
- Student and staff guides to using e-Reflect version 1
- 4 conference papers/presentations (at [BbWorld 09](#), the [Blended Learning Conference University of Hertfordshire](#) and [E-learning 2.0 at the Brunel](#). In September the project is due to present a paper at [ALT-C 2009](#). A copy of the paper accepted for the proceedings of the Blended Learning Conference at Hertfordshire [can be downloaded from the project website](#)).

An unexpected output at this stage of the project will be the planned delivery of a corporate and therefore more readily scalable version of e-Reflect for use in phase 2 of the project (roll out of the e-Reflect process across the biosciences provision within the School of Life Sciences). This basically has involved linking the questionnaire part of e-Reflect to an SQL database integrated with data from student records. This output is arising as a direct consequence of interaction with and use of output from the [TWOLER](#) project funded by JISC through the institutional innovation programme.

Section Four: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Key problem/challenge

We believe that the key problem as outlined in the original application, that of ensuring that students are able to make the best possible use of the feedback they receive on their coursework, remains unchanged. The challenge ahead is really around getting students and staff to 'buy into' the process that is being developed with a view to ensuring the future development of e-Reflect as a system that is of real value.

How the project will enhance curriculum delivery

We believe that if it is possible to get a good level of 'buy-in' on both sides that the e-Reflect process will help student performance to improve. The potential for exchange and sharing of information between student, personal tutor and module teaching team will help to develop a broader learning experience for the student based around the feedback they receive on their coursework. In turn this should lead to a more personalised learning experience for the student in large part through helping academic staff, and especially personal tutors, to gain a better grasp of their tutees successes and problems.

Assessing the impact

The project has a detailed evaluation strategy ([accessible via the project website](#)) which is being used to guide assessment of the impact of the work that is being done. In the short term measures of success, beyond the numbers of students and staff actively engaging in the e-Reflect process, will be largely qualitative. We have already collected significant baseline data from both staff and students on their current views of the use and value of feedback. An example transcript from student focus groups organised to obtain student views on the pilot of e-Reflect can be viewed on the project website – [see sample transcript from student focus group](#)

The baseline evidence collected so far is summarised in the paper submitted to the Blended Learning Conference and is attached. Of overall interest is the fact that whilst staff believe that students do not currently make use of their feedback, students tell us (through the questionnaire surveys and interviews) that they do pay attention to the feedback and actively try to use the feedback in improvement strategies. This significant miss-alignment needs to be addressed and therefore has become an important focus for the project team.

Emerging outcomes/lessons

It is clear that staff and students are already under immense pressure to deliver courses (staff) and learn (mainly students). It is very difficult to convince either to try something new especially if the benefits are not immediately clear, obvious and real. Although we were encouraged by the participation rate in the pilot which was voluntary (approximately half of the students involved took some part), participation rate will need to be higher and depth of participation deeper if a widespread transformation in curriculum delivery is to be achieved. It is clear that there are very few incentives to participation (such as prize draws, social events) that work, other than need and drive from the individual to take part and benefit.

The evaluation of the pilot phase has led the project team to conclude that through e-Reflect a joined-up learning environment that focuses attention on individual needs can result. By the integration of the SOS feedback model (outlined in figure 1) and the closer links between staff and students that result, students can have greater opportunities to develop skills in reflection and better understand their own learning approaches. Staff can benefit by being able to get information on learner needs and potentially adapt teaching practice based on actual individual student information.

The evaluation of the pilot phase did however highlight the need to better embed e-Reflect into existing mainstream activities in order to avoid seeing e-reflect as some 'bolt-on' additional activity (for both staff and students). In the light of these findings there was significant discussion about making e-Reflect compulsory. However that is not the path that phase 2 within the School of Life Sciences is going down. The approach to be taken, led and supported by the senior staff, is seeking to integrate e-Reflect more closely into other activities. So for example, all staff in the School have now been given an identified yearly time allocation to use e-Reflect with their tutees (in turn linked into the personal tutorial scheme within the School) and identified timetabled classroom sessions will focus on getting students to complete two cycles of the e-Reflect process. In principle this approach should work better than a compulsory one as we feel that students taking ownership of the process and thus becoming intrinsically motivated will be more beneficial than a 'top-down' compulsory approach.

Two extremely important and unexpected 'things' (one an opportunity and the other a framework/model) have arisen through the course of the project. The opportunity has arisen because of a link with another JISC project (TWOLER, a project funded through the institutional innovation programme) it is likely to prove possible to develop e-Reflect as a corporate application linked to data in student records. A consequence (in addition to making it easier for other Schools to use the process) of this should in the medium/long term be the ease with which reports can be generated that represent a student's performance across their degree, with information that goes well beyond a compartmentalised collection of marks.

The model/framework has arisen through the work suggested by the Programme manager in terms of modelling what currently happens re: feedback generation and use and what we envisage could happen in the future. This has led to the SOS model (see figure 1) for feedback generation and management. In this tripartite model students receive feedback at three levels (subject specific, operational, strategic) through a student centred process. We feel this model is significant in that it encapsulates the best of intentions in relation to the objectives of feedback across most, if not all subject areas.

Section Five: Communications and Dissemination Activities

A presentation about e-Reflect was made at the Higher Education Academy Assessment and Feedback workshop held on the 1 April 2009 (see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/01_April_Assessment_and_Feedback_Workshop_event)

Since then the project team have presented details of the e-Reflect process and baseline data results at 3 national/international conferences (at [BbWorld 09](#), the [Blended learning Conference University of Hertfordshire](#) and [E-learning 2.0 at the Brunel](#)). In September the project is due to present a paper at [ALT-C 2009](#). A copy of the paper accepted for the proceedings of the Blended Learning Conference at Hertfordshire is attached.

Internally at Westminster the e-Reflect project has been presented at 2 departmental staff awaydays (the School of Integrated Health and School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Languages) and at the annual Learning & Teaching Symposium. A summary publicity sheet for e-Reflect has been produced mainly for internal use at this stage (see the project website - [Overview of e-Reflect](#)). We plan to work with the University's Marketing & Development department soon to develop dissemination materials along the lines of the attached that can be distributed externally as well as internally.

Considerable internal interest has been raised by these presentations and a number of individual staff in the different departments have indicated they would be interested in trying e-Reflect. Indeed, as part of the roll-out in October 09 we will be piloting e-Reflect with small groups from three other Schools across the University.

Section Six: Evaluation

A detailed evaluation plan has been prepared with the help of external consultants ([see the project website](#)) and we have been following the plan closely. We have found that the plan has been appropriate and is of considerable use. This was especially so when we suddenly found ourselves with a very limited timeframe within which to catch key stakeholders at critical points in the pilot phase of the project. The evaluation approach has so far involved questionnaires to students and staff involved in the pilot both before the start and near the end of the pilot phase. In addition members of the project team have interviewed individual students and staff on their general views about feedback and its use as well as the utility of e-Reflect. We have also employed a current undergraduate student to interview other students and to help with the conduct of student focus groups.

The main difficulty has been encouraging sufficient returns of questionnaires and of gathering students together for focus groups. The best questionnaire participation rates have been obtained face to face in timetabled classroom sessions. Focus groups have tended to be linked to other events (e.g. in a recent event set up to provide students with feedback on their examinations it was possible to gather large enough groups to obtain meaningful feedback on the e-Reflect pilot, (transcript of focus group attached).

The roll out of e-Reflect across the biosciences provision within the School of Life Sciences will start in mid-October 2009 with staff training scheduled for late September/early October. We will renew evaluation activities then, face to face with staff and through questionnaires in October with new

undergraduate students, gathering baseline information from them (as we did with the students in the pilot) on their experience and views of feedback and how they use it. The reason for this activity is to generate fresh baseline data on students' previous experience of feedback on their work and approach to using it.

Starting early September we plan to gather data on the methods used across the University to engage students with feedback. Already, through the limited dissemination activities that have taken place to date we have unearthed a very interesting example of the use of reflection of feedback in another School and doubtless there are more examples to be found. This work will be done to inform the later evaluation of the rollout in late October and help with plans for wider dissemination of e-Reflect across the University. Initially an online questionnaire will be used for this but will be followed by 1:1 interviews with staff or with small groups of staff to discuss approaches further.

The first rollout phase will last from October through to January. At various points in that period we will seek feedback from students and staff on the ease of use of the newly designed e-Reflect system and monitor closely the uptake and use of the system by the new cohort of students. The rationale for this is in part obvious but is also inherent in the operational support that the project needs to provide. However we of course also wish to find out, as outlined in the evaluation plan, through questionnaires at key points, focus groups and by 'walking the corridors and talking to people', answers to the following:

- To what extent do you feel that using e-Reflect has improved active dialogue between students and staff over students' work and development? (**primarily from staff but also from students**)
- Do you think that using e-Reflect has helped you to learn more effectively, achieve higher grades and become better lifelong learners? (Why? How will it help?) (**primarily from students**)
- Has the use of e-Reflect had any impact on the way in which you tutor your students? (**from staff**)

Section Seven: Issues and Challenges

Issues and problems

The biggest problem, at least in the pilot, has been gaining sufficient staff and student engagement. This project is basically seeking to get ALL staff and ALL students in the School to buy in to a single process. This is always inevitably going to be hard especially when most staff are used to doing things their own way and perhaps using their own tools or systems. Change is always difficult if you didn't start it. Compounding this is the fact that e-Reflect overlaps with (within the biosciences provision) the personal tutoring scheme and this is inevitably leading to issues/questions of 'ownership' of processes and student support procedures.

The project is trying to overcome these issues by approaching the engagement of stakeholders in a 'winning over hearts and minds' manner. This has been led from the top with the active involvement of senior staff (PVC for Learning and Teaching and Dean of the School of Life Sciences). Their involvement has ranged from attendance at social events to promote the project through to (by the Dean of Life Sciences) making changes to local working conditions, including the allocation of a fixed number of hours per year for staff to use e-Reflect. There have also been wide ranging discussions via the Project Steering Group and through school focus groups around the best way to achieve high participation rates from students and staff This has led to the proposals which include combining briefings for staff on the operation of the personal tutoring scheme with e-Reflect, as well as integrating some e-Reflect activities into the taught curriculum.

Unexpected project achievements

We see 3 main ones, 2 of which have been mentioned previously in this report. The first is that e-Reflect, if used to its full potential will allow the School to report on student performance and achievement in new and more meaningful ways that may not only help students individually but also inform plans for enhancing the quality of modules and potentially whole courses.

The second is that we have been able to make a real connection with another JISC project (TWOLER, funded through the Institutional Innovation Programme) and are very hopeful of being able to use internal 'know how' and output from that project to make e-Reflect a technically more efficient and effective corporate process with a concomitant positive effect on the user experience.

Thirdly, we did not expect to obtain the extensive input or buy-in that we have done from senior staff which has led to a genuine attempt to integrate e-Reflect into the day-to-day activities of the School and, in the medium/longer term, the institution.

Section Eight: Collaboration and Support

Contacts with the programme manager and support team have been very much of value and we have been able to learn a lot from them and pick up some useful information and suggestion on approach. Of especial value has been the assistance given in preparing the evaluation plan. It is however fair to say that we have not been able to follow up on all suggestions made due to the lack of time available and because this project has required faster implementation of the project plan than perhaps other projects in the programme.

We have found the meetings with the critical friend very helpful indeed and the cluster group meeting that we have had (with the next coming up in mid-September) was of more value than the larger programme meetings that we have attended. That being said contact with cluster group partners between the cluster group meetings has been limited, again primarily due to time. However the value of the first cluster group meeting arose from the common interests and although they may not have been followed up since it is the intention to do this at the mid-September meeting when logically there will be more substance to progress and therefore more scope for exchange of successful know-how.

For programme meetings we favour a small group approach and using as much of the face to face time as possible for reflection on progress, emerging issues, next steps and opportunities for future collaborations. In addition it would be of obvious value to be in groups with universities that are or have been engaged in projects with similar/overlapping objectives. Could this therefore include groups not funded in the current programme but supported previously by JISC or groups within institutions that have done relevant recognised work funded by their own institution or other external funding bodies?

Section Nine: Financial Statement

In this section you should detail the expenditure of the project so far. Against the budget headings you should set out the expenditure for the reporting period, noting any significant over/under spend giving reasons for this. You should also state the total expenditure to date against each budget heading. The table below is designed to help this reporting process. Additional budget headings may be added to fit an individual project's budget. Projects may find it more appropriate to use a spreadsheet to report financial information.

Total Grant	£200,000	Duration of project	2 years
Reporting Period	1 November 2008 – 31 August 2009		

Budget Headings	Total budget allocated	Expenditure this reporting period	Total expenditure to date	Further information
Staff	██████	██████	██████	
Travel & Subsistence	██████	██████	██████	
Equipment	██████	██████	██████	
Dissemination activities	██████	██████	██████	
Evaluation activities	██████	██	██	The external evaluator is not due to conduct their work until the second year of the project
Other (focus groups, project	██████	██	██	The project conference will not take place until late in

conference)				the second year of the project.
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