

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name	JISC – Large Scale Implementation Mobiles Enhancing Learning and Support (MELaS) project team the University of Wolverhampton with Pebble Learning and Ultralab
Report compiled by	Professor Alison Halstead – Project Manager
With contributions from	Kris Poppat, Colin Dalziel and John Traxler
Reporting period	First May 1 st 2006 – October 31 st 2006
Section One: Summary	
<p>Provide an overview of the project to date, highlighting key developments, deliverables/outputs and achievements for the reporting period. This section may be used to inform the Programme Steering Group, and may also provide the basis for an update to inform the sector about the project.</p> <p>Procurement, technical development, prototyping, small user trials and staff development took place in the period up to September 2006. The first part of October was used to ensure that student information was accurate and establish the pilot groups of students within the six Schools. The pilots started on Monday October 23rd 2006. The seven academic module leaders have been sending messages to their students, as the need arose until the end of the first semester. The messages have been sent through the University ePortfolio (PebblePad), some to the whole group others to individuals within the group. In this first semester all messages have been administrative information to the students. The messages in the main have been about timetable changes, illness of staff, reorganisation of tutorials, and assessment deadline reminders.</p>	
Section Two: Activities and Progress	

Report on activities in support of project objectives for the reporting period.

Briefly explain any changes to the overall approach outlined in the project plan. Note any changes to the project team, aims, objectives, deliverables, milestones or the Project Steering Group. If appropriate, attach an amended copy of the relevant sections of your project plan.

To date the project is being implemented in line with the project plan.

- 1) In March all partners met with JISC to agree the technical details and delivery plan. Staff were internally selected for the project. Five Schools, Science, Art and Design, Computing, Humanities and Education agreed to pilot with first year students.
- 2) The University hosted the joint innovation project meeting in April.
- 3) The technical group met in April to establish the requirements of the interface needed to enable the student information system (SITS) to be used by staff to send text messages to individuals and groups of students.
- 4) Ultralab identified Esendex as the service provider for the text messages. Esendex provide an sms send and receive service. The messages are automatically sent to the Ultralab software when esendex receives them, via web services. The website that Ultralab maintained for this part of the project was a development tracking site. <http://194.83.41.182/MELaS/>
- 5) An initial trial with staff directly using SITS when evaluated through a focus group revealed that staff felt it was too time consuming and complex to practical to use at the current time.
- 6) Work then started on the interface between SITS to obtain the relevant student information that could go directly into the ePortfolio and to use this to send messages to students.
- 7) A verbal update was presented to the Steering Committee in May that confirmed that the pilot would be conducted through the ePortfolio. The advantage of this decision was that all staff have access to the ePortfolio and many already use it within their modules to work with students. A student within the module or group can be rapidly identified and a text message sent. Students have the option of engaging with the pilot or disengaging through their own eportfolio. The major benefit is the ease and speed of use of an existing and understood University wide tool.
- 8) A sixth school Engineering joined the project in June.
- 9) We had hoped to conduct the pilot through our student management system (SITS) – which is widely used by administrators but unfortunately only a few academic teaching staff. The IT team assured the project team that it was easy! But at the April training session it appeared to be impossible, there were too many screens, it took far too long to identify student/s on a particular module, then their mobile number and secondly the system appeared unable to send a text with its current configuration. The team looked for an alternative and opted for the ePortfolio. Pebble Learning and Ultralab produced a simple working system and staff development was conducted in September 2006. Staff found it straightforward to set up their student groups and to send messages via the ePortfolio.
- 10) A survey of staff and student views of the potential for using text for administration and learning and teaching was obtained from students in engineering - this is currently being written up into a paper for either Teaching in Higher Education or the Engineering Subject Centre journal.
- 11) In October staff identified the following groups for the pilot.
 - 1) Applied Sciences – Level 1 module about 30 students
 - 2) Art and Design – Level 1 skills development group – special needs – 10
 - 3) Art and Design – Level 1 tutor group – 12
 - 4) Computing – Level 1 – personal tutorial group
 - 5) Engineering – Level 1 module – 45
 - 6) Humanities - Level 1 – 50
 - 7) Education - Level 1 - tutor group – 15
- 12) The pilot started on Monday October 23rd.
- 13) The technical group are continuing to develop the interface to enable multi-media messages to be sent for the development of the learning and teaching pilot next semester.
- 14) The Steering Committee will formally receive the first interim report on October 31st 2006.

Section Three: Project Partners

Innovative Technologies Projects

Report on work with partners for the reporting period.

Briefly explain any changes to the institutional project partners or subcontractors, and any impacts this has/will have on the project or schedule.

What other institutions or organisations are you or do you plan to collaborate with?

Work with our partners Ultralab and Pebble Learning has been as expected and as set out in the work packages in the project plan. Only two technical face-to-face meetings have taken to place and all the other communication has been by e-mail and telephone. Working relationships are excellent and communication effective. Facilities have been build into the PebblePad ePortfolio system to interface with the Web Service developed by UltraLab. Previously a member of staff was unable to identify a student, group or the whole module and send a text message – they could send e-mail but not text. Now they have been enabled to send both. To either an individual or group of students. The end users attended a short workshop to introduce the texting facility and are finding the system straightforward to use. Support materials have also been created to guide users through the process of sending a message to their students. This guidance is being evaluated and modified by a member of the team who missed the original training. Initially a collaborative blog was set up to allow participants to share their experiences, however to date this has not been well used because staff have in the main shared experiences at the monthly meetings. It will be re-launched at the second stage of the project dealing with learning and teaching aspects.

There have been no changes to our plans and at this stage we will only begin to collaborate with other organisations as we have more results to share and the dissemination phase commences.

Section Four: Outputs, Outcomes and Deliverables

Are there any outputs you would like to share? Please describe, provide URLs or attached documents etc

Outline any lessons have been learned that could be passed on to other projects or future programmes.

The main lesson is that if systems are to work effectively they need to be quick and simple to use. This was the main reason that using SITS didn't but ePortfolio represented a good option. It was also extremely helpful that one member of staff missed the training session. This enabled him to trial the guidelines from scratch which revealed some lack of clarity that the group at the face – face training were unaware of.

Section Five: Dissemination

Provide details of any activities or events that have involved liaison or collaboration outside the project consortium, including key project stakeholders. Attach or provide URLs for any appropriate dissemination or presentation materials.

None has taken place at present.

Outline any publicity the project received during the reporting period.

Times Higher Education Supplement carried an article on the project in August 11th 2006. In addition there was a demonstration of the technologies being used by the team at the EPED Experts meetings on October 26th 2006.

Section Six: Evaluation

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Provide brief details of progress in terms of the development and implementation of the project evaluation plan.

The focus of the evaluation carried out by the project team has involved:

- 1) Staff focus group on the SITS training to evaluate 'What the system could do for module leaders?' the outcome was that the existing system was not amenable to direct use by staff for this purpose. It was too complex and time consuming. Staff identified that they needed to be able to send messages in a very quick and straightforward way.
- 2) A service provider was identified and appointed after Ultralab conducted a comparison of various companies.
- 3) A staff questionnaire issued within Engineering on perceptions of the potential of using SMS in this way is currently being analysed
- 4) A questionnaire issued to Students on perceptions and potential is currently being analysed.
- 5) The functionality of the web services developed between Ultralab and Pebble Learning enabled staff to be trained to send SMS message simply through their own ePortfolios. Staff are trialing the hints and tips guideline sheets to enable other staff to understand the methodology. Feedback from the project team and new staff to be obtained over the next few months will allow the benefits of these guidelines to be evaluated and built into the paper on staff development needs.

Outline any emerging evaluation issues of interest.

Section Seven: Issues and Challenges

Report on issues or problems that are impacting on the development and implementation of the project. Detail what impact any issues may have on the achievement of project targets, and set out how you plan to tackle these issues. At present there have been no setbacks and have prevented progress.

Report on any unexpected project achievements. The original plan was for five pilot groups the fact we have seven is an added bonus.

Do you have any specific training needs, requests or suggestions for supporting workshops for the programme? Not at present