

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name	Designs on Learning, Ravensbourne College
Report compiled by	Miles Metcalfe
With contributions from	Adam Burt, Roger Rees, Remmert de Vroome
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Section One: Summary	
<p>The project is in the final stages of its development phase. Significant achievements so far include a growing wiki on blogging tools and techniques ranging from “getting started” to more advanced topics. We have committed some bug fixes and modifications to the open source Blojsom weblog server project, and have made some minor changes to Moodle 1.6. All source code is available from our project wiki. We have launched our blogging service for pilot programmes and are gathering our first round of case studies.</p> <p>We have moved somewhat from our initial emphasis on tools for creating learning content. Although several project participants have certainly made interesting use of tools, we have found an overly formal approach to learning design has hindered adoption. Whilst we anticipated some problems of this sort, we have been surprised by how much difficulty we encountered. To some extent, this reflects a distinction between more technical, or technically “savvy” project members, and the institution at large.</p> <p>Despite the surprise over tool use, institutional interest is considerable, with even members of senior management signed up for staff development sessions on integrating blogging into teaching and learning.</p> <p>We have recently added a review capability to our project wiki, and are keen to encourage input from the wider community. We have found the wiki a valuable tool, and we’re very pleased with the results. This, combined with project blogging, creates a more lively dynamic – as well as reducing the pain of website updates.</p> <p>In our attempts to be rigorous about using new technology as a communication and collaboration platform, we believe we have gained clear insight into some of the pros and cons of these tools on a practical as well as conceptual level.</p>	
Section Two: Activities and Progress	
<p>The significant change in approach has been to limit activities around learning content packaging and formal design. We found that formalised approaches were a significant brake on adoption of blogging activities. We will make a final review of this at the conclusion of the pilot stage, and advise at that point what technologies we may be dropping.</p> <p>We were overambitious about the project itself using the kind of communications tools we are ourselves advocating. We have fallen back on emails and “corridor meetings” in favour of collaboration tools. This is a significant disappointment. We are addressing this through audio recordings of face to face meetings to create podcasts, and a more ambitious campaign of internal dissemination to encourage staff bloggers and wiki users.</p> <p>By contrast, our implementation documentation has been successfully blogged. Unfortunately, this has led to haphazard and hard to mine documentation. We are reviewing approaches to this, and are considering both folksonomic approaches, and, simply, a re-presentation of our documentation in more narrative format. We will review our communication and collaboration guidelines accordingly to reflect the eventual decision.</p> <p>Because of the challenges of introducing new technology, we are working on a visual redesign of our blogging front end. We have also produced some “screencasts” and some more visual support material to assist with user training.</p>	
Section Three: Outputs, Outcomes and Deliverables	

The gateway to our activities is through the project wiki. This is a rich and growing resource:

<http://confluence.rave.ac.uk/confluence/x/eBU>

Blogs created so far are aggregated at <http://blogs.rave.ac.uk/blojsom/blog/>. There's still a small bug with the aggregation which causes duplicate entries to be displayed, and a meta-data parsing bug which causes meta-data to be visible to the aggregator (though correctly interpreted on individual blogs).

Our project rests on some presuppositions about the desirability of "show" or "performance" in vocational, creative, practice-based education. This has raised some IPR issues. Although the College has responded constructively to our post-hoc comments to Academic Board regarding IPR policies, we would advise early tackling of these issues.

We underestimated the amount of effort required to introduce unexceptional new technology. So far, only considerable face to face, small group support has been effective. Our early aspiration was to deliver more of this support through elearning. Achieving the balance between inclusiveness and advance has actually proved surprisingly difficult. We are now quite cautious about opening up a "digital divide".

Section Four: Dissemination

Adam Burt including details about the project at his presentation at the JISC RSC elearning Jamboree in the summer.

We have had had some positive comments on other educational blogs, but we acknowledge the need to make more effort to publicise our work.

Section Five: Evaluation

Evaluation thus far has concentrated on functionality and usability of the systems and tools.

We have not been surprised to discover that web-based interfaces to blogging are problematic for serious use. We have not yet settled on a College standard alternative.

We were surprised by the number of testers who wanted a blogs-wide search capability. Although this was not in our original plans, we have implemented a rudimentary search feature.

Section Six: Issues and Challenges

The most significant issue we face is daily fragmentation. Project team members have other duties outside the project, and demand is variable, making the scheduling of work occasionally somewhat difficult. These are inevitable consequences of working in a small institution. However, we had placed a lot of faith in electronic systems to overcome this, but we have come to the view we were over-optimistic. We are addressing this with more formalised regular face to face meetings that are recorded for podcast. We are also promoting instant messaging for ad-hoc contact during "fragmentation time" as this produces written records of conversation. This latter technology presents significant adoption hurdles, though.

Whilst we were experimenting with a moblogging plugin for Blojsom, we found it had some rather extreme bugs. We patched the bugs, and have discovered that we have a rather useful general purpose email-to-blog tool. Adam Burt has successfully demonstrated podcasting from a photocopier! This hints at a range of interesting and significant uses for a blogging server application that has a well-defined API, and also an interface to email.

As we move further along the evaluation track, we would welcome input on successful methodologies.

Section Seven: Support

We have met the team from Glenaffric – unfortunately the JISC team were unable to come along. We are making a concerted effort to attend events this term, as we feel we have worthwhile things to contribute.

We have been guilty of lurking in the various e-support activities, and intend to address this.

We would be interested in events or activities with a practice-based focus.

