

## Interim Reporting Template

<b>Project Name</b>	Learner Experiences across the Disciplines (LEaD) University of Edinburgh
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<b>Reporting period</b>	15 April 2008
<b>Section One: Summary</b>	
<p>This is the second interim report for the Learner Experiences across the Disciplines (LEaD) project. It covers the period 1 October 2007 to 31 March 2008.</p> <p>The main activity during this reporting period has been data collection. Participating students from the targeted disciplines (Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine) have provided a series of reflective diaries over the two semesters of the academic year and a set of focus groups have been held, based around the themes arising from the early diaries.</p> <p>Analysis is still ongoing, but some early findings indicate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most new students arrive with a high level of IT competence and confidence, regardless of the academic discipline that they have chosen.</li> <li>• Many arriving students are relatively conservative in their approach to study, preferring to work at home or in the library and to use books and lecture notes as the primary resource, supplemented by online sources "on demand".</li> <li>• Many students, but by no means all, make extensive use of social networking sites for recreational use. However, there appears to be a clear separation between online learning and online social activities.</li> </ul> <p>Project website <a href="http://www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/projects/lead">http://www.epcc.ed.ac.uk/projects/lead</a></p>	
<b>Section Two: Activities and Progress</b>	
<p>The main activities for this period are summarised below for each of the project workpackages. There have been no major changes to the original project plan. Where there have been minor changes to the detailed implementation of the plan these are noted below.</p> <p><b>WP1 Project management (Mar 07 – Sep 08)</b></p> <p>The project team continued to hold regular (monthly) face to face meetings.</p> <p>The internal project wiki area was migrated from the wiki supported by the Support and Synthesis to the University of Edinburgh wiki service as it is now holds raw (i.e. non-anonymised) student data in addition to other project-related documents (meeting agendas and minutes, reports, presentations, evaluation plan and actions, dissemination activities, useful links, background reading etc.)</p> <p>There has been one change to the membership of the Project Advisory Group; Robert Davidson, Policy Officer, learning and teaching, SFC has replaced David Beards, Senior Policy Officer, learning and teaching, SFC.</p> <p>Meetings of the Project Advisory Group were held on 2 Oct 2007 and 11 Feb 2008. The next Project Advisory Group meeting is planned for May 2008.</p> <p><b>WP2 Setup (Mar 07 – Jul 07)</b></p> <p>This work package was completed in the previous reporting period. No additional work has been undertaken during the current reporting period.</p> <p><b>WP3 Data Collection 1 (Jul 07 – Dec 07)</b></p> <p>Most of the effort in this reporting period has focussed on data collection and preliminary data</p>	

analysis. The first data collection phase spanned semester 1 of the University academic session i.e. Sep 07 – Dec 07. There were three main data gathering activities in this phase:

*Initial Survey*

The initial survey was conducted during September 2007 and was reported in the first project report.

*Personal Diaries*

As a result of the recruitment activities described in the first project report, a total of 24 students were recruited to the project, including 7 from Divinity, 8 from Physics and 9 from Veterinary Medicine.

During semester 1, these students were asked to complete a minimum of three reflective diaries. The themes and trigger points were chosen to reflect significant study-related events; these are summarised in Table 1. Students were asked to focus on the 2 weeks preceding each diary entry, so that they could record their thoughts and opinions “in the moment” rather than through the lens of hindsight.

Reflective Diaries		
	Theme	Trigger
Semester 1	First impressions	Arrival, start of taught courses
	Assessment & feedback	First assessed assignment
	Preparation for exams	End of courses, first exams
Semester 2	Looking back, looking forward	Start of semester & new courses
	Exams revisited	First exam marks returned
	Advice for next year's students	End of first year courses

Table 1 Themes and Trigger points for reflective diaries

*Focus Groups*

Four in-person focus group sessions were held towards the end of semester 1. All of the focus groups were cross-disciplinary, with six students per group.

Three groups were composed of participating students, with Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine represented in each group. The focus group sessions used scenarios based in part of some of the themes and questions emerging from the early reflective diaries. These included:

- Expectations of university in general & IT in particular
- Penny-dropping (“eureka”) moments
- The Student of the future

The fourth group was composed of students from other disciplines. The aim was to use this group as a “sanity check” for findings emerging from the reflective diaries. This was done by basing the discussion around selected diary extracts, grouped under the broad themes of Expectations, Transitions and Uses of Technology

*Student Retention*

Student retention over the whole of the academic year is vital to the success of the study and considerable time effort was expended in this area. Of particular importance were: making the students feel “part of something”; using a flexible and responsive approach to data collection; providing incentives and benefits; and involving the relevant academic teaching staff.

**WP4 Data Collection 2 (Jan 08 – Apr 08)**

Two data collection techniques were used in semester 2:

### *Personal Diaries*

The approach used for the reflective diaries in semester 2 followed the same pattern as during semester 1, i.e. students were asked to complete at least three diaries. Diary formats included video, electronic text and handwritten. The themes and triggers for the second semester diaries are shown in Table 1 (see WP3 above).

### *End of Year Survey*

A short end of year survey was created and delivered. This was intended to complement the initial survey, by eliciting both quantitative and qualitative information on students' perceptions of change and transition over the year. The survey was made available online to participating students only over the Easter break. The response rate to date is over 90% but the survey will remain open until the start of the exam period in April. Unlike the initial survey, the end of year survey was *not* opened up to the whole first year undergraduate intake.

The end of year survey did not form part of our original plan. However, this is a low overhead addition to the project which is expected to yield useful additional information.

We had originally intended to set up online discussion groups in semester 2 to complement the semester 1 focus groups. This was not pursued for two main reasons. Firstly, the retention rate for the reflective diaries was almost 100% over the whole year, hence a significant quantity of high quality data has been collected by this route. Secondly, one of the rationales for setting up an online forum had been to help foster a sense of community and identity amongst participating students. In practice this turned out not to be necessary, as this sense of community was achieved by a variety of other approaches (see comments on student retention in WP3).

### **WP5 Data Collection 3 (May 08 – Aug 08)**

Work has not yet started on workpackage WP5, Data Collection 3. However, it is anticipated that this will be very light touch, with most of the effort over the next time period focussed on data analysis and dissemination.

### **WP6 Data Analysis (Sep 07 – Sep 08)**

#### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Data from the initial survey was analysed using SPSS, with some summary charts produced using Excel. To date, this has included summary data for the whole data set and comparative statistics for each discipline, age group and gender.

#### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Initial analysis of the qualitative data from the initial survey, reflective diaries and focus groups was undertaken "by hand" i.e. by reading/viewing, taking notes and then discussing and comparing findings amongst the research team. This approach was chosen because it was very important to get an early indication of both the emerging themes and the quality and scope of the data so that these could be fed back into the later data gathering stages. More detailed analysis, using more formal analysis techniques such as coding, was not considered necessary to achieve this particular objective, and would also have been very time-consuming.

Now that the data collection phase is almost complete, a more detailed analysis of the qualitative data has been started. We are also currently evaluating NVivo 8 (which was released in March 2008), as unlike previous versions this can be used to store and analyse audio and video data in addition to text.

#### *Early Findings*

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data is still ongoing, however some early findings are summarised below in Section Three.

### **Section Three: Outputs, Outcomes and Deliverables**

## Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

The planned deliverables from the project have not changed from those specified in the original plan. In summary, these are:

- *Case studies* based on learner diaries
- *Information sheets/guidelines* summarising key findings and recommendations
- *Project website* to disseminate project findings

The target audience is expected to be academics, educational developers, e-learning practitioners and learning technologists.

At this stage in the project, any findings are necessarily provisional and somewhat tentative.

However, preliminary analysis of the initial survey data and early semester 1 diaries indicates that:

- Most new students arrive with a high level of IT competence and confidence, regardless of the academic discipline that they have chosen
- Many students are relatively conservative in their approach to study, preferring to work at home or in the library and to use books and lecture notes as the primary resource, supplemented by online sources "on demand". This may, of course, reflect their previous experiences of learning and teaching within a school environment.
- Many students, but by no means all, make extensive use of social networking sites for recreational use. However, they prefer to keep a clear separation between online learning and online social activities.

We expect the work to contribute across a number of the Learner Experiences of e-Learning themes, but in particular the themes summarised below:

- Investigate how learners experience learning in technology-rich environments.
- Make recommendations for those involved in the support of student learning.
- Develop methodologies for eliciting the learner experience and promote learner involvement in evaluations.

### Section Four: Dissemination

The major focus for dissemination remains generic and discipline specific educational conferences in 2008 and 2009

Dissemination activities to date have included:

- Networked Learning 2008, 5/6 May 2008. Contribution to "Learners' Experience of e-Learning: Research from the UK", joint symposium between the LEaD, STROLL, BLUPs and PB-LXP projects

The planned dissemination outputs include:

- *Research publications and presentations* e.g. Online Educa Berlin 2008, ALT-C 2009 Target audience educational researchers, learning technologists.
- *Summary information sheets/guidelines* Target audience to include students, teaching staff, learning technologists and infrastructure support services.

### Section Five: Evaluation

Evaluation forms an integral part of each project workpackage. As reported previously, evaluation activities are logged centrally on the internal project wiki. In line with the evaluation plan given in the project plan, the following evaluation activities have been undertaken over this period in addition to those reported previously:

- *Quality of online surveys.* The end of year online survey has been delivered via BOS, which meets disability legislation and accessibility guidelines.
- *Dissemination of reflective diaries.* Unedited diary entries have been made available only to members of the research team. Dissemination to a wider audience has been based on anonymised extracts from text transcripts.

### **Section Six: Issues and Challenges**

There have been relatively few issues affecting the project over this reporting period, as the work has largely been a continuation of the work started in semester 1. The main issue confronting the team at present relates to data analysis, viz:

- *Qualitative analysis tools for video data.* This is currently under investigation, but is likely to be resolved by the use of NVivo 8. One outstanding issue is how best to share analysis amongst the project team, for example by use of a “golden copy” (.e. a single team member controls the master copy), or by using the NVivo teamworking feature.

### **Section Seven: Support**

The support workshops have been a very useful and valuable source of advice and support. In addition to specific suggestions and ideas from other projects, they have helped to ensure that the project stays aligned with the overall aims and objectives of the programme.

Members of the team have had informal contact with the programme manager and support and synthesis team members at the JISC Learning and Teaching Practice Experts Group meetings on 24 October 2007 and 26 March 2008.

**Please note the interim reports, including attachments, will be made available on the JISC website and on the programme wiki with the budgetary information removed.**