

Annex A

Cover Sheet for Proposals to Circular X/06: Learners Experience of e-Learning Programme	Bid for a: A) The Learners' Journeys project
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Name of Institution/Organisation: University of Hertfordshire
Name of Partners Hertford Regional College
Name of Proposed Project: <u>STROLL</u> - <u>ST</u> udent <u>R</u> eflections <u>O</u> n <u>L</u> ifelong e. <u>L</u> earning
Full Contact Details for Primary Contact: Name: Amanda Jefferies Position: University Teaching and Learning Fellow Email: a.l.jefferies@herts.ac.uk Address: Blended Learning Unit, University of Hertfordshire College Lane, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB Tel No: 01707 284390/01707 281318 Fax No: 01707 284303
Length of Project: 24 months
Project Start and End Dates: March 2007- February 2009
Total Funding Requested from JISC: £120,000
Funding Broken Down over Academic Years:
Total Institutional Contribution:
Outline Project Description <p>This project proposes a longitudinal view of capturing the learning journeys for up to 48 students across two years and three academic cohorts; from FE students through to graduating students at the end of their 3 year BSc/BA programme. The University's Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Blended Learning Unit, was set up in April 2005 and the proposed project builds on studies already carried out at the University of Hertfordshire into e.learning provision and students' interaction with a variety of learning environments. We have already collaborated with our own Students Union into investigating the student e.learning experience (ref: Open All Hours) and now seek to collaborate further with one of our Associate Colleges (Hertford Regional College) to investigate the students' views of e.learning provision at FE and through their transition to HE. The quality of our earlier collaboration was praised by the QAA in the 2006 Collaborative Audit.</p> <p>The University's robust and mature Managed Learning Environment (StudyNet) offers broad opportunities to engage with learning online and will be key to supporting this project. All campus based programmes include a blended learning approach. The University has engaged actively in the widening participation agenda. It has a gender intake similar to the national profile of university students, with a wide ethnic diversity reflected in the student body. The University looks forward to building on these strong foundations to carry out the Learners' Journeys project.</p>

STROLL-Student Reflections On Lifelong e.Learning

1. Introduction

This project proposes a two year longitudinal view of the experiences of e.learning from March 2007 to February 2009, for up to 48 students across three cohorts, from FE students on a Foundation degree programme through to graduating students at the end of their 3 year BSc/BA programme. It builds on a number of studies previously carried out at the University of Hertfordshire into e.learning provision and students' interaction with a variety of learning environments. Some of these have been disseminated already and others are scheduled for wider dissemination in 2007 (The Student Video Diaries project).

The University has a robust and mature Managed Learning Environment (StudyNet) which offers wide opportunities for staff and students to engage with learning online. For example group work is facilitated through private virtual spaces for groups and the MLE provision now includes blogs for groups and personal use. Recent additional functionalities to StudyNet enable staff to monitor individual student access of a programme's resources. Up to 20,000 students are currently enrolled for campus based programmes, which all include a blended learning approach. An increasing number of students participate in fully online programmes from an overseas home base. The University has engaged extensively in the widening participation agenda and has a gender intake similar to that of the national profile of university students. It is proud of the wide ethnic diversity reflected in the student body. The University has an agreement from Hertford Regional College to support students from their Year 0 programme and Foundation degrees to participate alongside students based at the University campuses in understanding their own Learners' Journeys.

Much of our proposed methodology builds on the previous studies carried out in the Phase 1 Scoping, and Support and Synthesis and LEX projects. We suggest that the regular use of blogs and webcams over the length of the study will allow for the capture of the students' personal e.learning history, knowledge and narratives and thus support the identifying of aspects of the diversity of how students use learning technologies in their formal studies. Use of reflection in this way will be encouraged and will also allow students to articulate their beliefs and intentions. This proposed work will build on a major study carried out at the University into students' expectations and experiences of technology prior to starting their programme of study (ref: Designing Learning for the iPod generation).

2. Project Description

2.1. Identifying the learners and the project duration

The project will sample users across the FE/HE divide and carry out the study over 3 academic years at 4 key points, within the 24 month timescale of the project. It will be particularly useful to identify the differences in experiences between students in FE compared with those in HE. By including students approaching the end of their undergraduate careers and into postgraduate life, it should be possible to identify any added value to their employability prospects from the use of high quality e.learning facilities through their undergraduate experience.

The project will include between 15-20 students from each of the following year cohorts. Within the student groups suggested below we propose to ensure the sample includes those who have identified a disability to the university as well as a mixture of backgrounds to include mature students and those with family commitments. The large number of students available for sampling across this multidisciplinary institution should ensure there is no difficulty in including those with pre-existing high level technical e.communication skills as well as those in FE and HE from non-traditional backgrounds.

Student Cohort Group	Starting Level and Background	Stage at Point 1 May 2007	Stage at Point 2 October 2007	Stage at Point 3 May 2008	Stage at Point 4 October 2008
1	Year 0 Foundation Degree Students at Hertford Regional College	Year 0	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2
2	Year 1 Undergraduate students at UH	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3
3	Year 2 Undergraduate Students at UH	Year 2	Year 3	Year 3	Post graduate

2.2 Developing the methodology

For this project a mixture of data capture methodologies will be used including the iterations of concentrated data collection shown above. These are:

- The use of video-diaries via webcams over a short concentrated period of time, typically one teaching week, on 4 occasions as indicated above, The University has already completed an internal project from its CETL funding where five students compiled a video diary of their learning experiences over a week. Webcams are considered more usable because they are more easily attached to the student's computer. Their use of the video diaries will be focussed by giving the students specific areas to reflect on during each week of use as detailed below in the research questions.
- Regular use of the existing 'blog' provision through StudyNet and to encourage reflection by individuals on their learning, especially when the webcams are not being used. The regular monitoring facilities on StudyNet gather information on students' use of available learning resources
- One to one interviews with the students at 2 key stages in the project, to ensure that all areas of the research questions have been covered

2.3. Contribution to themes

By following the methodology outlined above it will be possible to address from this small sample the following research questions. This will identify aspects of these learners' journeys and it is intended that the results will then help to inform and improve practice elsewhere.

- How do learners access learning with technology, including ways not specifically supported by their institutions?

Method: Personal interviews and reflective blog plus automatic monitoring of use of StudyNet for internal use of institution provided facilities

- How do learners *describe* their experience of learning in technology-rich environments?

Method: Webcams used at selected points in the project and regular use of their blog to be encouraged

- Is there a relationship between learners' conceptions of learning and their success?

Method: Review of blog and webcam reflections combined with monitoring of success in assignments

- What critical *choices* do learners make in their use of technologies for learning and what *consequences* do these have in their personal journeys?

Method: Individual interview and focussed questions during webcam use.

- What *skills* do different learners bring to e-learning, including highly skilled e-communicators? How do their experiences differ?

Method: Use of prior questionnaire from study undertaken in 2005-06 (cf Designing learning for the iPod generation) to identify prior skills and experience

- What *barriers and difficulties* do different learners perceive in their learning with technologies? What *opportunities* do they perceive? How do their experiences differ?

Method: Use of personal blogs and webcams over the course of the study and individual interviews at key stages. Targeted students will be invited to participate according to information provided to University's disabilities officers in line with the university ethics procedures.

- How are learners *personalising* their learning tools and environments, and how are they involving 'personal' technologies in their learning? What kinds of personalisation and adaptation would they value in their learning?

Method: Individual interviews and the regular webcam use should provide answers to these

We will provide a financial incentive in recognition of the time given up by the students for each concentrated week of the study plus a bonus on completion to encourage them to continue with the project through the 18 months of their participation in the project. The project will be carried out in accordance with the university's own ethical guidelines and the confidentiality of the participants will be assured in any published data.

2.4. Project deliverables

The following will be delivered at the end of the project:

- A series of not less than 36 scenarios describing the learners' individual journeys and the role technology has played in them;
- A DVD including clips of the student reflections organised according to the research themes
- A summary report detailing how the scenarios shed light on the research questions especially in relation to differences in the learners' experiences and including a set of recommendations and additional guidance for colleagues in peer institutions
- A short methodological report outlining the tools and techniques used and the transcripts produced
- A critique of the chosen methodology to identify its strengths and weaknesses

**Outline Project Plan
Academic Year 2006-07**

March/ April	Employ RA and Liaise with SU and HRC for identifying potential students and recruiting students
April/May	RA to meet with students and arrange technical support and informal discussion re: project and start of blogs
May	1 st round of Student reflections and student experience questionnaire
June /July/August	Analysis and write up of first set of data and blogs as students receive results

Academic Year 2007-08

September	Continue preparations for next set of data gathering and plan interviews with students on induction process
October	Liaise with students – continue blogs, 2 nd round of concentrated student reflections
November/December	Analysis of second set of data and blogs continue student interviews (all 1 st stage interviews now completed)
January /February	Write up 2 nd set of results, submit conference abstracts
March/April	Prepare for 3 rd set of student reflections
May/June	3 rd set of data collection and start analysis, complete interview of leaving students
July/August	Analysis and write up of 3 rd set of data and blogs as students receive results +conference attendance

Academic Year 2008-09

September	Prepare for final set of data gathering, +conference attendance expected
October	Liaise with students – continue blogs, 4 th round of concentrated student reflections
November/December	Analysis of final set of data and blogs, 2 nd student interviews now complete
January /February	Final write up of submissions

2.5. IPR and sustainability issues

All our results and methodology will be available in the public domain subject to participant confidentiality. The project builds on the university's current and previous work of using student participation to identify student experiences with e.learning technologies. The CETL funding for BLU, including its Student Coordinator role, will continue for another year after the end of STROLL. The university itself is keen to continue to support research into the use of learning technologies that support student engagement.

2.6. Risk Analysis

Possible Risk	Impact on project 1-5	Likelihood 1-5	Severity rating (Impact * Likelihood)	Solution
Insufficient Students available or students drop out	5	2	10	36 minimum required by proposal. We have increased the number at the start point by 50% to counteract this possibility
Student motivation declines	4	3	12	Students paid for each week of participation (£35)with extra payment (£60) for completing all the data capture weeks
Project manager unwell/leaves university	4	1	5	Other highly qualified members of BLU (CETL) available to take over
Difficulty in employing Research Assistant or employed late	5	2	10	Salary has been pitched to attract an RA of the right calibre. Project start date allows time to appoint the RA prior to first opportunity to include student data

2.7. Dissemination

The Principal Investigator is a member of the BLU evaluation team and has disseminated her research and practice widely in the UK and abroad at e.learning and learning technology conferences in the past 5 years. Promoting the project outcomes and disseminating them widely to partners and other interested institutions

will continue at a selection of events such as the annual conferences for HEA and ALT-C as well as at least one key international conference and publication in research and teaching practice journals. Other modes of dissemination could include workshops, website resources and video, audio & text versions of case studies.

2.8. Value of Project Outcomes to JISC community

This project will provide a response to many of the questions raised following the outcomes of the Phase 1 projects. As the student learning experience now typically extends beyond the traditional 9-5 working day to a 24/7 engagement with learning, the project will provide insight into the way students now use their time throughout the week. It will provide valuable insight into the personal e.learning journeys of the students selected from a variety of different learning backgrounds. As well as the small group of highly skilled e.communicators, the students chosen will offer a snapshot into their own experiences which should be of wider use to other institutions in both FE and HE. While it is not possible from such a small sample to ascribe broad generalities to the whole UK student experience there will be sufficient diversity among those students chosen to participate, to offer examples for comparison in other domains. We anticipate this project will be of great benefit to other institutions as they will have access to the summaries of these students' reflective practice in their use of personal learning technologies. From this institution's point of view the work of the project will further contribute to its well regarded position in promoting a blended learning agenda in FE and HE via their own use of a fully integrated MLE.

2.9. Key Personnel

The **Principal Investigator** Amanda Jefferies, will spend 1.5 days a week co-ordinating the management of the project, liaising with the JISC and other partners, directing, developing material and writing up & disseminating. She will be seconded from the University's CETL where she is an experienced member of the BLU and has disseminated her research and practice widely in the UK and abroad at e.learning and learning technology conferences in the past 5 years. A key part of the role will be regular meetings with the other JISC projects in Phase 2. The role will include attending external meetings and disseminating at conferences and managing the regular activities of the Research Assistant and appointing extra Research Assistance on part time hours to a maximum of 310 as required at critical points.

Research Assistant - Full time (to be appointed). The requirements are for a highly literate and numerate researcher, capable of data analysis and interviewing students as well as working on his/her own initiative.

Our partner in Hertford Regional College, Alan Delliston, HE Manager is fully supportive of engaging in the project.

Further expertise, support and advice will come from regular team meetings with other members of the Blended Learning Unit's evaluation team (Prof Peter Bullen: Director of the BLU, Prof Diana Kornbrot: BLU Evaluation Co-ordinator and Jon Alltree: Deputy Director BLU and the Student Coordinator).

3. Budget Justification

The PI's time will be bought out for 500 hours per annum for 2 years at the standard rate of £35.33 per hour to cover her teaching and other duties while she is seconded from the University's Blended Learning Unit. A full time Research Assistant will be appointed at the top of Research A grade, to carry out the regular tasks of the project. Work will include qualitative analysis of the video data, individual and group interviews with students, student support and routine analysis of the blogs. Based on our previous experience of a video diaries project, each week of student contributions will take approximately 200 hours of analysis on a ratio of 1 hour of student video to 4 hours for analysis. Interviews per academic year will take another 200 hours. Analysis of the student experience questionnaire, the blogs, liaising with student participants and some participation on the dissemination will absorb the rest of the time.

Further Research Assistance will be bought to a maximum of 310 hours for assistance at critical points in transcribing data from the videos, creating the DVD and to assemble material for the final reports.

4. References

'The impact of a university-wide managed learning environment upon staff and their pedagogic practices.' Alltree, J., Jefferies, A., Thornton, M., Jones I. ILTHE/HE Academy Conference, Hertfordshire, June 2004.

'Open All Hours - Do students really want to access on-line learning 24/7?' Jefferies, A. Thornton, M., Doolan, M., Parkhurst, S., Alltree, J. ALT-C 11th international conference, Exeter, September 2004.

'The best of all possible worlds – developing blended learning from lessons learnt in on-line and face-to-face teaching.' 4th European Conference on E.Learning, Amsterdam, November 2005, Barrett,R., Jefferies,A.

'Designing learning for the iPod generation – investigating university students' prior experiences of technology and their expectations of using technology in their studies.' ECER, European Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, September 2006 Jefferies,A.,Quadri,N., Kornbrot,D.,

Web pages demonstrating the work of the Blended Learning Unit, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

<http://perseus.herts.ac.uk/uhinfo/index.cfm?F75DF4EB-DECA-E22D-F857-0ED2A78C1915>

The Video Diary Project 2005-06

<http://perseus.herts.ac.uk/uhinfo/index.cfm?ECF13009-0A5B-C487-3172-B0683FB4651D>