
LEX

Project report

August 2005

This is the first project report from the LEX project. By agreement with the JISC programme manager the report is being delivered in August rather than end July.

Project management

This section looks at how the project has been set up and is being managed.

Staffing

As set out in the project plan staff working on the project are Linda Creanor (GCU), Doug Gowan and Carol Howells (OLP). A further appointment is being made by GCU to Linda Creanor's unit and the appointee will also contribute to the LEX project.

Project plan

The project plan is iterative and is now in version 1.3. The workplan being followed is that shown in the project plan, attached as appendix 1.

Partnership agreement

A partnership agreement has been drawn up between GCU and OLP. The agreement draws on JISC guidelines although it is simplified to meet the needs of this project. The partnership agreement is in appendix 2.

Working methods

Project communications are handled in a number of ways:

- regular telephone conferences are held to progress the project and discuss emerging issues. Action points are issued following each conference.
- occasional face to face meetings are held in London or Glasgow
- a project website has been set up in Moodle. This site contains key project documents, discussion areas and Wikis, and will in future hold voice files from interviews and focus groups.
- we have agreed a standard for hardware and software for interview recording, using a digital voice recorder and DSS files. This approach will help with storage, sharing, transfer and analysis of the interview data.

Activities

Project activities so far have focused on preparation and start up and we are now entering the piloting phase for interviews and focus groups.

Evaluation matrix

An early focus was on development of the evaluation matrix through collaboration with the scoping study team. We are pleased to note that JISC have offered a new contract to the team as their contribution has proved of great value.

Key contacts

A second output has been the production of a project contact list, with inputs from the JISC team, the scoping study team and the project tender. The key contact list is iterative since we need to balance contact availability and practicality with the need to cover a range of sectors and geographical areas.

Permission statement

A further output is a standard permission statement for use with learners. In line with the learner-centred approach of the project the statement invites participants to choose how their views are to be represented (for example whether anonymous or not) in any reports. The statement draws on advice from the JISC legal team and is now in use for pilot interviews.

Interview questions

The approach developed by the project is to focus on the learner voice and not to adopt a top-down derived from an underlying theory. Interviews will therefore be flexible based on learner priorities and responses. However an interview framework has been developed, with valuable input from Helen Beetham, as a way of prompting. Terry Mayes will also provide support and a workshop focusing on IPA methodology is currently being arranged.

Interview pilots

An early start has been made on arranging pilot interviews to test and refine the interview and evaluation frameworks. Adult part time learners on a new online course developed by the TUC Education Service, 'Getting Ready for e-learning' (GREL) were first invited to take part in an online discussion on their experience and then to volunteer to be interviewed. Four candidates have been selected and the first pilot interview will take place in the week beginning 22 August. We expect the pilot interviews to be influential in developing the research methodology.

Phase 1 data collection

As set out in the project plan we have divided data collection into two phases. The first phase has now commenced with the GREL interviews. Because of learner availability issues we plan to include further adult part time learners in Phase 1 since they are not affected by academic year timing. These learners will include ESOL, level 1 and 2 literacy and work based learners. In addition an undergraduate group from GCU which will be involved in the SHEFC-funded Re-engineering Assessment Practices in Scottish HE (REAP) project has been identified. Interviews and focus groups for phase 1 will be scheduled from now until end November.

Next report

The next project report is due end January 2006.

Appendix 1



LEX project

Study on learner experiences of e-learning
for the
Pedagogy strand of the JISC e-Learning Programme

Project plan

Name of lead organisation Glasgow Caledonian University
List consultants/partners Linda Creanor – Glasgow Caledonian University Doug Gowan – the Open Learning Partnership
Full contact details for primary contact Name: Linda Creanor Position: Senior Lecturer (e-learning) Email: l.creanor@gcal.ac.uk Address: Academic Practice Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University, 6 Rose Street, Glasgow, G3 6RB Tel: 0141 273 1323 Fax: 0141 270 1318
Total cost to the JISC: £85,750
Outline project description This research study covers all post-16 sectors, including FE, adult and community learning, work-based learning, and undergraduate and postgraduate learners. The project will be carried out by senior project staff with extensive experience of e-learning research, development and evaluation, and also of running and evaluating JISC and other e-learning projects. Research methodology will deploy an 'Interview Plus' approach, encompassing individual learner interviews and homogeneous focus groups combined with other appropriate instruments such as observations, reflective diaries, tracking data and e-portfolios. A number of online discussions with learners will also be held. The methodology will be flexible in order to respond to the wide variety of learners but will always be bottom up and related to interpretative phenomenology. The outcome of the project will be a series of reports and usable materials of value to e-learning designers, authors and tutors covering how learners approach e-learning tasks, their strategies to

overcome problems, together with their expectations and experiences of e-learning. The project will work closely with the JISC team and build on the earlier scoping study. The project will also work closely with any team appointed by JISC to collect audiovisual materials to feed into e-learner case studies.

Project Plan

1 Project overview

1.1 Background

The project is closely linked to the *Learner Scoping Study* and will continue to work closely with the team who produced that study. The focus in this project is on understanding the learner perspective on the role of ICT in learning, with the underlying aim of supporting the development and use of learner-focused environments.

The project is situated within the broader JISC *e-Learning Programme*. The *e-Learning Programme* is supported by the JISC Learning and Teaching committee and runs until August 2007. It focuses on four areas: e-learning and pedagogy; technical framework and tools for e-learning; innovation; and distributed e-learning.

The *e-learning and pedagogy* strand has focused on practitioner needs and design for learning. This project marks a clear recognition that learners will have a different perspective and should be considered as experts on their own learning experience. Some prefer close guidance by tutors, while others prefer self directed and peer learning. Some have little confidence in using ICT, while others may be frustrated at the limitations of learning environments which do not live up to their expectations of communications technology. How can we understand these learner differences better in a way that helps us improve learning tools and learning design?

2 Aims

JISC supports programmes and activities that promote and support the use of e-learning. The aim of these activities has been to identify how the use of e-learning tools can facilitate learning, and to advise on how these approaches can be implemented.

This project therefore marks a new focus within the e-learning and pedagogy strand. The broad aim is to get a better representation of the voice of learners who are experiencing e-learning – or who have dropped out after not becoming engaged. We want to know what words and ideas learners use to describe their motivation, successes, frustrations, and points of breakthrough when they engage with e-learning.

Analysing this learner focused experience will help us to better answer questions such as:

- *How can we support learners better with their use and understanding of e-learning opportunities?*

- *How can we promote the development of models and systems that improve learners' access to and choice of e-learning opportunities?*
- *How can learning environments be developed to ensure that we can better meet learner expectations and provide for differentiation between learners?*

3. Overall approach

The methodology will be based predominantly on the conduct and analysis of individual interviews supported by other appropriate artefacts and outcomes including for example observations, reflective diaries, tracking data and e-portfolios, which will be used as prompts to encourage deeper reflection on the learner's experience and approaches. A number of focus groups will also be conducted, initially to refine the research focus and question types, and subsequently to ratify and probe issues which have come to the fore during individual interviews. The approach will be bottom up – starting from the words and experiences of learners rather than a theoretical base. It will draw on research disciplines developed for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Conversation Analysis, and Grounded Theory. Advice will also be taken from JISC expert advisers and consultants. The development of the research methodology will be documented and updated as the project progresses, to inform both the project team and any future JISC studies in this area.

The focus groups will in most cases be hosted in or close to the learning venues themselves – college, university or community learning centre. The groups will be homogeneous for each type and sector of learner for example:

- FE based learners on a foundation degree
- community based learners in a neighbourhood ICT centre
- work based learners in an employer's premises
- undergraduates involved in blended courses, online PDP and e-assessment activities
- Postgraduate learners undertaking fully online, masters level modules
- basic skills learners doing online diagnostics and tests in a learndirect centre
- Teachers doing online Cert Ed course

In all cases two consultants will manage the focus groups. Times for the groups will need to be carefully chosen, especially for the community and work based groups. Some sessions may need to be planned for lunchtime or early evening.

The individual learner research will deploy a number of techniques:

- Face to face and telephone interviews of up to an hour on each occasion. Repeat interviews may be requested with interviewees. Interviews will be digitally recorded to help transcription and analysis and for possible re-use in reports as audio clips
- Learner observation in learning centres such as those outlined above
- Reflective diaries, learning logs and other appropriate instruments

- Discussions with learning support staff and e-tutors to gauge the course context, learning outcomes, success rates, effectiveness of learners etc.

We plan to use an additional method of gaining feedback from learners – online discussion groups to encourage reflection as learners progress through their learning activities during an online course. With the agreement of tutors, these discussion groups will be set up as part of the learners' e-learning course rather than as artificial groups which would only be of interest to the motivated. These reflections will then be used as artefacts during subsequent interviews or focus groups.

4. Project outputs

The precise nature and format of the outputs will be developed over the course of the project in collaboration with the JISC team and other stakeholders. The emphasis will be on short, clear, readable and usable materials aimed at a variety of target audiences. These audiences will include:

- tutors and support workers wishing to improve the learner focus
- e-learning materials designers wishing to improve guidance, direction and choice for learners
- evaluators and researchers looking at the extended use of bottom-up, learner focused techniques

5. Project Outcomes

Outcomes of the projects will be used in part to inform the development of the next generation of learning tools and services, funded through the Innovation, Technical Framework and Tools, and Distributed e-Learning strands of the JISC e-Learning Programme.

6. Stakeholders

Stakeholders of the project include:

- JISC and project staff working within the e-learning and pedagogy strand and the e-learning programme generally
- the JISC Experts Group
- e-learning materials designers
- e-learning systems designers
- tutors and support staff working with e-learners
- most importantly, e-learners themselves

7. Risk Analysis

I = Impact / P = Probability/ R = rating

Risk	I	P	R	Measure
Too few participants well	5	1	5	Contacts already established in all key sectors
Key staff leave task	2	2	4	Team approach to will allow cover
Budget overrun project experienced	2	1	2	Strict control over budget by finance staff
Project delays	3	2	6	PID kept under constant review
Lack of cooperation from partners links	3	1	3	Good partnership already established
Data loss procedures	3	1	3	Secure backup established
Unexpected priority changes review	2	2	4	PID kept under review

8 Standards

This is not principally a standards based or standards development project. Standards that will be used include:

- standards for IPA research
- readability standards for reports promoted by Plain English Campaign
- accessibility standards across the range of project outputs

9 Technical Development

The project will work with digital audio files to assist collaboration, coding and transcription. A collaborative website will be set up for project staff and partners to share documents, conversations, and allow access to tools including Wikis.

10 Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual property rights created by the project will be allocated under the grant conditions. Information provided in project reports will become the property of HEFCE on behalf of JISC and the other funding councils.

Permission will be sought from all interviewees and focus group participants for their views to be captured and stored using standard permission forms.

Project Resources

11 Project Partners

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is a post-92 higher education institution with approximately 15,000 students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. It has an established reputation for widening access and aims to be both inclusive and entrepreneurial in approach. To meet the needs of its diverse student profile, GCU offers a range of flexible learning opportunities including work-based, blended and fully online courses.

The Open Learning Partnership (OLP) is an educational charity with trustee membership from three further education colleges in North London. OLP specialises in e-learning research, development and support in further, adult and community education and supports projects in London, UK wide, and in Europe.

The two organisations cover all areas of post-16 learning in the UK and are therefore capable of covering all aspects of this research study. We have direct current experience of e-learning activities with: postgraduate, undergraduate and foundation degree learners; FE learners at all levels including ESOL and Skills for Life learners; learners who are workplace-based; and learners based in community learning centres.

12 Project Management

The Project management framework is simple and does not involve complex committee structures. A consortium agreement between GCU and OLP is in the process of finalisation.

GCU is the contract holder and will disburse funds under its standard internal control procedures.

Doug Gowan of OLP is project manager.

13 Programme Support

Requests for programme support will be made directly to programme management staff following discussion. Support has already been requested for example on permission statements and data protection issues.

Ongoing support and guidance on the research focus and methodology will be provided by members of the Scoping Study team based on their review of the literature and research experience.

The methodology and theoretical framework for the study will benefit from input by Professor Terry Mayes, particularly on the implementation of interpretive phenomenological analysis, and also by the Experts Group and Programme Steering Committee.

14. Budget

The attached Budget follows the format set out in the tender for the project.

Detailed Project Planning

15 Workpackages

A simplified delivery plan is attached at Appendix B.

16 Evaluation

Evaluation of the project will be largely formative and will be carried out through interaction with stakeholders including the programme team, scoping study team and the expert group.

Interview and focus group participants will be asked to complete feedback questionnaires on their participation in the event and the conduct of the researchers.

Outputs of the project will be assessed through post-project user feedback.

17 Quality

See above under evaluation, which also covers quality assurance issues.

18 Dissemination

Dissemination of the project will be fully coordinated with the e-learning programme generally. Details of dissemination methods will be determined once decisions have been made about the format and nature of the final materials.

We understand that JISC is considering the commissioning of audio visual materials on the learner experience. These materials are likely to have considerable impact on dissemination methods and impact.

19 Exit and sustainability

The project is designed to inform the JISC e-learning programme and to suggest fruitful areas for the further development of the programme, as well as providing usable outputs in its own right.

Appendixes

Appendix A. Project Budget

Budget		
Staff costs		
Activity	Consultant days	Cost
Project and programme meetings	12	£6,000
Piloting interview questions/techniques	6	£3,000
Focus groups	36	£18,000
Interviews and observation	60	£30,000
Analyse data	25	£10,500
Draft report	10	£5,000
Dissemination	4	£2,000
Non staff costs		
Travel		£5,000
Focus group costs		£3,000
Phone		£450
Printing		£1,000
Small equipment		£1,800
	£85,750	

Appendix B. Workpackages

Both partners will input to all the undernoted activities

May 2005	Outputs	Comment
Activities		
Meet JISC teams	Workplan	
Revise workplan		
Prepare PID	Information sheets	
Prepare project information		
Read recommended literature		Ongoing
Agree methodology		
June 2005		
Issue Project plan	Project plan	
Agree research questions	Revised evaluation matrix	
Agree initial participating institutions	Letter to partners	
Contact institutions		
Agree initial focus group and artefacts	Interview resources, including potential	
interview structures		

Developing & piloting
interview questions

July-October 2005

First progress report due end July 05	First project report
First round of focus groups (7)	Focus group notes
First round of individual interviews (15)	Interview notes and transcripts
Review meeting with JISC	
Agree additional participating institutions	
Contact institutions	

November-February 2006

Second progress report due end Jan 06	Second project report
Second round of focus groups (8)	Focus group notes
Second round interviews (15)	Interview notes and transcripts
Online forum discussions (5)	Online forum files
Attend programme meeting	

March 2006

Review meeting with JISC	
First draft of report	Draft report

April 2006

Second draft of report

May 2006

Project closure meeting	Final report
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Appendix 2

Partnership Agreement

THIS AGREEMENT is made on this 1st day of May 2005 between

THE UNIVERSITY COURT OF GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY
(HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS GCU)

And THE OPEN LEARNING PARTNERSHIP (HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS
OLP)

PARTNERSHIP

1. Purpose of the Partnership

The purpose of the Partnership is to carry out a research study into learner experiences of e-learning, under the Pedagogy strand of the JISC e-Learning Development Programme.

2. Commencement and duration

The Project commenced with an effective date of 1st May 2005 and the Project has a duration of 1 year, unless otherwise agreed in writing by both parties.

3. Over-riding conditions

In all instances, conditions laid down by the JISC or its successor will override any agreement between the Partnership members.

4. Project resources

4.1 Allocation

The total grant funding requested for the Project is as follows:-

Year 1 - £85,750 Total - £85,750

and the budget shall be apportioned between the Parties in accordance with the schedule detailed in the Project Plan (attached as Annex 1).

4.2 Financial Arrangements

Payments shall be made within thirty (30) days of receipt of a valid invoice from OLP, subject to GCU's receipt of funds from the JISC.

5. Responsibilities of the Parties

Each Party undertakes to use all reasonable endeavours to:

- perform on time the tasks identified in the Project Plan (attached as Annex 1)
- prepare and present reports as required.

5.1. Changes in Membership of the Partnership

A Party may withdraw from the Partnership only in the event of irremediable breach of this Agreement or breach of the conditions laid down by the JISC. In the event of withdrawal or expulsion the Partnership will only be liable to meet the cost of any work undertaken up to the point at which an institution ceases to be a member of the Partnership.

6. Intellectual Property

6.1 Ownership

With regard to the ownership of intellectual property, the Parties agree as follows:

- all Materials not incorporated into a Deliverable shall be owned by the Party generating the Material.
- all Deliverables, and the Materials contained therein, not incorporated into a Product shall be owned jointly by all the Parties.

7. Commercial Exploitation

7.1 Procedures

The Parties agree that they shall endeavour to exploit commercially the Deliverables and Products world-wide.

8. Publication and press releases

Procedures for publications and press releases relating to the Project shall be agreed between both Parties

9. Liability

The work associated with the Project will be carried out by each Party in accordance with the highest academic standards and reasonable endeavours will be made to achieve the degree of reliability and accuracy appropriate to work of this kind. However, no Party has control over the use to which the results of the work may be put by other Parties and each Party will therefore be deemed to have satisfied itself in every respect as to the suitability and fitness of the work for any particular purpose or application. In no circumstances will a Party, its servants or agents accept any liability however caused arising from any error or inaccuracy in any opinion, advice, report or deliverable arising from this work nor for any resulting damage, loss expenses or claim, except to the extent that such can be shown to be caused by the wilful negligence of the Party.

10. Miscellaneous

Assignment: Neither party will be entitled to assign this Agreement nor all or any of their rights and obligations hereunder without the prior written consent of the other.

Disputes/Arbitration: All disputes or differences which will at any time hereafter arise between the Parties in respect of the construction or effect of this Agreement or the rights duties and liabilities of the parties hereunder or any matter or event connected with or arising out of the Project will be referred in the first instance to the JISC Pedagogy Programme Steering Group. If the Steering Group is unable to resolve the dispute the Chair shall select an independent third party to act as arbitrator.

Relationship: Nothing in this Agreement will create or be deemed to create a partnership or the relationship of employer and employee between the Parties.

Law & Jurisdiction: This Agreement will be governed by the laws of Scotland. This Agreement is subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Scottish courts to which the parties hereto submit. This clause does not prevent a party from seeking interim relief in any court of competent jurisdiction.

AGREED BY THE PARTIES THROUGH THEIR AUTHORISED SIGNATORIES

For and on behalf of the University Court of Glasgow Caledonian University

Signed.....
Name:
Dated

For and on behalf of OLP

Signed.....
Name:
Dated