

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name	Phoebe, TALL
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Section One: Summary

The Phoebe project is on track to develop a “proof of concept” pedagogic planner, focussed on planning at the “learning session” level in a wide variety of contexts. This will be done by i) developing a tool that will offer users both flexible and guided paths through the planning process and enable them to access a range of models and examples of innovative learning designs, intended to encourage them to explore new approaches and tools in their pedagogy; and ii) user-testing the planning tool for functionality and usability.

In this phase much useful work has been done in four main areas:

1. Scoping the tool, through research and interviews with practitioner informants (PIs)
2. Developing a functioning prototype by adapting an existing open source wiki tool, Trac
3. Developing the content to populate this tool.
4. Identifying resources to which the tool might link.

Phoebe is being developed as a wiki with tags to ensure flexible data structures that can adapt to handle unanticipated needs. This also allows for easily extensible content and, potentially, “socially” developed content that can be customised for different contexts of use.

From the project plan, outputs in this period were: an approved work plan; an evaluation plan; a requirements spec; and a functional spec. It was also intended that a working prototype would be substantially developed. In respect of all of these the project has delivered or is on track to do so.

Section Two: Activities and Progress

The main activities in this reporting period have been the design and development of the tool. The design process has been based on a combination of 3 approaches to ensure the tool meets the needs of the community:

1. Desk research to ensure the project builds on previous work in the JISC and elsewhere.
2. Interviews with practitioner informants.
3. Wider consultation with practitioners through the Pedagogy Experts’ forum.

The tight timing for this project, together with the adoption of an “informant design” methodology, has meant that the design process has been iterative. That is, there has not been a bounded specification phase followed by a development phase; rather, the team has worked to facilitate close communication between the technical developer and educational researcher to ensure that the latest thinking from both perspectives feeds into development. Ultimately, this approach should lead to the best possible tool in the time available.

In terms of developing content to populate the tool, this is not has not progressed as we might have wished, for a number of reasons. The creation of scenarios from the PI interviews took longer than anticipated and we have changed our design process to incorporate greater input from the community into the content and its structure of Phoebe (this is covered in more detail below).

The project team has been successful in identifying many existing resources, as well as future outputs from the Design for Learning programme, to which Phoebe may link. However, we are still

exploring the exact content to be incorporated. Again, this forms part of the consultation process in which the project is currently engaged.

Thus the overall approach as outlined in the project plan remains essentially unchanged, with the exception of the different stress on the role of evaluation in terms of feeding into design. Overall, though, Phoebe has achieved its objectives in the reporting period. The work plan which was slightly amended after the evaluation meeting and resubmitted to JISC remains current.

Section Three: Outputs, Outcomes and Deliverables

The majority of the outputs of the project thus far are available on the project wiki at <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk>. However, a few documents are not available due to potential confidentiality issues. Documents of interest include:

- The evaluation plan - <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/Evaluation>
- Outputs from interviews with practitioner informants - <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/PractitionerInformants>:
 - Interview transcripts (not available online)
 - Profile of informants' e-learning expertise
 - Eight scenarios of practice, developed from the interview transcripts in order to build an understanding of *representative* contexts in which the pedagogic planner might be used (not available online; can be provided on request).
- Requirements spec - <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/RequirementsSpec>
- Functional spec - <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/FunctionalSpec>
- Project content development - <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/ContentDevelopment> and <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/wiki/ExpStructure> ("Designer's Sandpit")
- Research links - <http://del.icio.us/oxphoebe>

In terms of lessons learned so far, our experience has underlined the requirement for a highly flexible and iterative design and development process when developing an innovative prototype tool in a tight timeframe.

Section Four: Dissemination

So far the project has mainly tapped into the excellent existing dissemination opportunities developed by the Pedagogy strand and the Design for Learning programme.

Through this Phoebe has been involved in a symposium held at ALT-C http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2006/timetable/abstract.php?abstract_id=1037 for which TALL produced a handout about the project <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/trac.cgi/attachment/wiki/WikiStart/phoebe.pdf>

The project is also presenting Phoebe at the Pedagogy Experts' forum on 26th October and using this as an opportunity to test our ideas about the direction that the tool should take (as indicated above).

The project has also initiated a joint submission, with other projects in the Design for Learning programme, to CAL 07 <http://www.cal-conference.elsevier.com/>.

Through her involvement with the Construct2Learn, DeSILA and eLIDA CAMEL projects, Liz Masterman is endeavouring to establish inter-project synergies, identifying areas of common

interest and opportunities for cross-pollination.

Section Five: Evaluation

The informant design approach emphasises the potential users as quasi-partners in design. Hence, although the interviews with PIs did elicit some feedback on early UI prototypes, the interviews themselves were deemed part of the design process, rather than of the evaluation process (the distinction is somewhat subtle, but important).

No formal evaluation activities involving users were envisaged in the period leading up to this report. However, the team has a strong awareness of HCI issues and is reviewing the emergent UI internally throughout the design phase (as envisaged in the [evaluation schedule](#)).

It was decided during the project visit by JISC and Glenaffric that the original evaluation plan had been too ambitious in terms of our plan to evaluate Phoebe in CPD and ITT contexts. This is because the eventual tool (as a proof-of-concept artefact) is unlikely to be sufficiently developed in terms of both functionality and content to allow for rigorous testing in a naturalistic setting. We are building in more input from “informants” in the community at earlier stages (notably, the consultation activity at the JISC Pedagogy Experts’ meeting on 26th October).

Section Six: Issues and Challenges

Identifying the right piece of open source software to develop Phoebe from proved initially problematic, as the wiki which we initially identified proved unusable after we had invested considerable time in it. It also took longer than anticipated to write up the PI interviews, although we obtained excellent data from them. Both issues have been resolved and will not affect the achievement of Phoebe’s aims.

The main challenge that Phoebe currently faces is developing a content model that matches the complex needs of our target audience. Up to this point we have been modelling the content across the whole tool in a shallow way, but now feel we need to model one area in its entirety as a more effective artefact for realistic feedback. This should be in place by the end of the month and will act as the basis for the next stage of consultations. As mentioned above, the prototype will use tags as one method of data organisation, and both this use, and the possibility of “socially” constructed content for different scenarios of use are something we would like to explore in this phase for possible implementation in later versions of Phoebe.

It has been gratifying to find that some of the issues we have identified have been echoed by the other projects in the strand, especially the Mod4L project and the parallel planner project.

Section Seven: Support

We have had excellent support from the programme co-ordination team with all questions and issues resolved promptly. The project evaluation team, Glenaffric, have also been very helpful, and the evaluation visit in August proved very useful as an opportunity to discuss progress to date and future directions. We have now had a phone conference with the support project and a proposed a visit has been agreed for early December.