

Completion Report Template

Each project is expected to submit a completion report *instead of* a final project report. It should be written with reference to the project plan, as in effect, the completion report closes a process that started with the project initiation document.

Project Name	STROLL, University of Hertfordshire
Report compiled by	Amanda Jefferies with Peter Bullen and Ruth Hyde
Project team members	Amanda Jefferies STROLL Project Director/ Blended Learning Unit CETL(BLU) Evaluation Coordinator Peter Bullen Director of BLU Ruth Hyde STROLL Research Assistant/BLU Research Assistant
Acknowledgements	<u>Steering Group Members (external) :</u> Eddie Gulc (HEA) Catherine Bone (JISC RSC Eastern Region) <u>Steering Group Members (internal):</u> Jon Alltree , Director of Learning and Teaching Julian Boyce , Lecturer Hertford Regional College (HRC) Ruth Shinebaum (HRC) Liz Mellor , Project support Colleagues in the Blended Learning Unit and University of Hertfordshire's Learning and Teaching Institute The project was part-funded by the JISC under the Learner Experiences of e-Learning Phase 2 theme (Circular 05/06) of the e-Learning Pedagogy Programme. Particular thanks are due to the Programme Manager, Sarah Knight, and all the members of the Support and Synthesis team; Ellen Lessner, Rhona Sharpe, Helen Beetham, Greg Benfield and Eta De Cicco, for their support, enthusiasm and guidance. We would like to acknowledge the support of the Faculty Champions across the University who helped us to recruit such a varied group of students to take part. Special thanks to Julian Boyce and Sam Kennedy at HRC for their help in organising their timetables to enable the students there to take part in the project. And finally... we are really grateful to all the students at the University of Hertfordshire who took part in the STROLL project with such interest and enthusiasm and reflected so thoughtfully on their uses of technology to support learning
Date of report	February 2009
Section One: Executive Summary	

Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

The STROLL (Student Reflections on Lifelong e-Learning) project was a 2 year Learners' Journeys project which captured a range of learners' experiences in their HE journeys. Students were already enrolled at either the University of Hertfordshire (UH) or Hertford Regional College (HRC) and the project focussed in particular on the students' engagement with technology to support their learning. Participants started the project as BA/BSc undergraduates at UH or were enrolled on a Foundation Degree at HRC to complete their honours programmes at UH. The University of Hertfordshire's bespoke managed learning environment, StudyNet is central to the e-learning provision and strategy at the university.

Project Aims and Objectives

As a longitudinal project the aim was to examine the changing nature of the student learning experience with technology over a longer elapsed period of time than was being measured by the other LXP2 projects.

The main research question was:-

- How do learners experience change through their learning journey?

Additional research questions were:-

- How do students use and make choices about their time?
- How do students use e-learning tools to support their learning?
- How do students use their personal technologies?

Overall Approach

The STROLL approach was learner led and focussed on the collection and analysis of qualitative data through the use of video and audio diaries from students' own regular recordings about their changing learning experiences. The diaries were recorded for a week at a time at approximately 6 monthly intervals to provide a snapshot of their experience. Students could choose to use camcorders, webcams or digital audio recorders.

Of the 54 students recruited to join the project, 40 completed at least 3 diaries. In addition telephone interviews were held between the 1st and 2nd diaries to provide clarification of the analysed data and a series of focus groups were held midway through the project. The methodology paper is available at www.tinyurl.com/5vvgom.

Findings

The learners taking part in STROLL were enthusiastic users of all sorts of technology to support their complex social and study lives. All had mobile phones, 74% owned their own computer and 88% accessed the internet daily. Those who were registered as full time students were likely to have at least one and often more part-time jobs.

- All accessed the internet regularly for learning support and most expected to be carrying on their studies outside the 9-5 Monday to Friday window when classes were held.
- The busier the students lives the more likely they were to be highly organised about the use of their time (whether as parents or in paid employment) and using StudyNet strategically for completing their studies, often through the evenings.
- Students moving from FE to HE recorded a much increased workload and an expectation of needing to work independently
- All the students, except one, commented highly favourably on the provision of the MLE StudyNet and how essential it was for providing online support for their learning.
- Students demonstrated a growing maturity in their choices of technology and their use of online tools to support their learning towards the end of their courses.
- Students used their own technologies such as mobile phones and mp3 players creatively as an integral part of learning.

Achievements

The main achievement of this project is the unique set of diary transcripts and the related summary mind maps which record the students' quotes from their answers to the research questions. From these have been developed the project findings which will be of use to support and academic staff and will help to inform strategy decisions in the use of e-learning technologies for HE. Given the small amount of prior research into the use of video diaries with HE students, the methodology developed by the STROLL team will also provide guidance for future projects

Conclusions

The outcomes of this longitudinal study provide a unique view of learners' changing uses of technology at a time of rapid change, highlighting students' growth and maturity in making decisions about using e-learning tools in their complex lives.

Section Two: Project Outputs

Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

List the project outputs with reference to the agreed outputs lists at

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Types> and indicate where they can be accessed.

The following agreed outputs will be available on the STROLL project website from March 2009
www.tinyurl.com/5vvgom.

- Analysis of findings report including key messages on change, transition and development
- Methodology paper with critique of methodology
- Professionally edited video interviews with 4 STROLL students, providing a sample of typical views about their use of e-learning on CD and streamed from UH STROLL website
- Informal diary clips of students views on the key research questions on CD and streamed from the STROLL website
- Guidelines for institutional managers paper

During the course of the project a range of additional outputs has been produced, as listed below.

- Initial Survey Results for participating learners, supplied to the Support and Synthesis project
- Strategies for data analysis

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Dealing+with+Data>

- Practical support for the use of video diaries
- <https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Video+Diaries>
- Practical help for recruiting and rewarding learners

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Recruitment+and+Retention>

- An example set of mind maps for supporting data analysis provided for the JISC Learner Experience Workshops

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/stroll/Selected+Mind+Maps+from+STROLL+Research+Questions>

Account for any variance between this list and the intended outputs listed in the project plan (additional outputs that were not initially foreseen or planned, amendments to the list of intended outputs as the project progressed).

As agreed at the meeting with the Support and Synthesis project team in December 2008, the STROLL deliverables now include 2 sets of detailed video interviews with 4 students for disseminating online. The original 36 case studies are presented via the informal diary clips

Consent has been obtained from the relevant learners for text and video diary extracts to be used in dissemination outputs. Please note that learners may request that their materials are to be removed from such activities and outputs at any time in the future.

All data is currently stored digitally on a secure central server to which the project team have password protected access. Paper copies of transcripts are kept in a locked filing cabinet in a private office

Section Three: Project Outcomes

Briefly summarise the main outcomes as a result of the project activities. Specify the contribution the project has made to each of the programme level themes.

The project has collected a large amount of rich data from the learners who took part in this study, which was been analysed and the findings are summarised in the report on the project wiki and from the STROLL webpage.

Theme: Change and Transition

Students experienced change over time as they matured in their learning from the STROLL project and commented on an increasing use of technology in every part of their lives. The sheer quantity of different pieces of technology and websites accessed daily by the most technically adept of the students was a surprise to the team.

One student had not had access to a computer before coming to university was an enthusiastic user when he took part in the STROLL diaries. He had received plenty of support both through his course and the Learning Resource support staff. Many students relied on their informal network of friends, family and colleagues to give them technical support if they required it.

"I wouldn't say it's [technology] changed as much as I have developed using it...I am becoming more dependent on it I suppose and I'm using it more."

Induction was noted for its introduction to the learning support available but students often used the online guides at a later stage, when they needed to know how to access something.

Theme: Beliefs and Expectations (How do students use e-learning tools to support their learning? How do students use their personal technologies?)

The University of Hertfordshire students reflected on using technology increasingly as a ubiquitous part of their complex learning and leisure lives. They used social networks avidly at the start of the project in 2007 but use of e.g. Facebook was less marked towards the end of the project. MSN and mobile phone use were their preferred ways of contacting other students. Email was noted as rather slow and a more formal way to keep in touch with academics.

The University's MLE was heavily used and highly prized by the students for accessing study materials, taking part in discussions and keeping in touch with other students and academics.

Students expected and demonstrated their use of e-learning 24/7 on and off campus.

Podcasts and 'vodcasts' where these were recorded by academics of lectures or seminars and then posted for the students to access were highly praised.

Students reported accessing general information such as news online rather than necessarily watching television or reading a newspaper.

Students accessed material from other academic sites and picked and chose what they felt would be useful and interesting to them.

As they commented on their maturing learning students increasingly used on-line journals and academic search engines to support their learning.

Personal technologies whether laptops or mobile phones or mp3 players were used extensively and creatively by students

Section Four: Dissemination

Internal Dissemination

An update on STROLL was given to members of the University's Learning and Teaching Institute in October 2007

A half page colour photograph and article on the STROLL project appeared in the University's monthly newspaper Horizon in November 2007.

An article written by Amanda Jefferies about the STROLL project was published in the UH Learning Technology Development Unit's Update in February 2008

A presentation was made to the UH Governors on June 17th 2008

A presentation of the STROLL findings was made to the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor took place on February 23rd 2009

A project review seminar is planned for March 23rd 2009 with an Elluminate link

The STROLL website showcases video clips and the project outcomes at www.tinyurl.com/5vvqom.

External Dissemination

Early findings from STROLL and links with the other Learners' Experiences projects have been presented at the Shock of the Old conference in Oxford on April 3rd 2008

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/events/shock2008/>

A presentation on the JISC Learners' Experiences projects was made as part of a session entitled 'Unlocking the full potential of technology in student learning' at the HEFCE conference for Vice Chancellors at Warwick on April 8th 2008

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/events/annconf/2008/>

A joint symposium paper with the LEaD, PB-LXP and BLUPs projects was presented at the Networked Learning Conference in Northern Greece on May 5th /6th 2008 by Amanda Jefferies.

<http://www.networkedlearningconference.org.uk/conferenceprogramme.htm>

Rhona Sharpe shared a set of video diary clips from STROLL in her keynote speech at the University of Greenwich E-learning conference on July 8th

A student representative from STROLL, Mabel Agbenorto took part in:

1. A learners' panel session to represent students' views on using learning technology at the JISC Next Generation event on April 29th
2. 'Bridging the Gap' at the JISC Innovation Forum on July 16th

'Mind the Gap Workshop' at 14th ALT-C in Leeds with members of the Support and Synthesis Group shared STROLL students' video diary clips on September 10th 2008

A paper written by Ruth Hyde and Amanda Jefferies : 'Listening to the Learners' Voices in HE- how students reflect on their use of technology for learning?' was presented at the 7th European Conference on e-Learning in Cyprus November 6th/7th 2008

<http://www.academic-conferences.org/ecel/ecel2008/ecel08-call-papers.htm>

An interview was given to the Guardian newspaper by Amanda Jefferies and published on December 2nd 2008 as part of the JISC digital student report

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/digitalstudent/good-news>

A presentation "The Learners' Journeys: the STROLL experience" was given by Amanda Jefferies at the JISC/Support and Synthesis National workshop, London, 20th January 2009

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/National+workshops>

The book proposal by Helen Beetham and Rhona Sharpe for Listening to Learners includes book chapter currently in production.

- J Hardy and A Jefferies, "How learners change: critical moments, changing minds", in "Listening to Learners in the Digital Age" by R Sharpe, H Beetham and S de Freitas, eds.,

Dissemination details from local, national and international events

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Papers>

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2/Presentations>

Section Five: Key Messages

Briefly outline the key messages from your project which you would like to see inform future work. Be bold and ambitious in making recommendations for:

- Policy and practice in further and higher education sectors

Reliable, accessible personalised portals to the students' learning materials are highly prized and widely used.

Embedding an e-learning culture across an institution takes time but the incoming generations of students expect to have e-learning access and support for their courses and praise its benefits.

Some academics may need additional support to produce online materials.

Students use informal social networks extensively for their social lives and generally prefer to keep these separate from their learning and networks provided by the institution.

Many students are connecting enthusiastically with technology but those who have not previously had the chance to go online need to have the support provided.

Providing easily available local targeted support is important for those who are hesitant users of technology so they do not fall behind in their learning. This may include but is not necessarily limited to mature learners and those who missed out on ICT skills at school/college.

- Future learner experience research
 - Future research could consider which skills students really do need.
 - Is it a case of just maturing as learners (developing graduate skills) or are there more specific skills that should be taught?
 - Pedagogy must continue to drive the use of technology to enhance learning.

- Other JISC projects

The learning literacies project LLIDA seems to build on this work in understanding how students can be equipped to use learning technology to become effective learners

Section Six: Synergy & Sustainability

There has been a clear synergy with LEaD in LXP2 and our joint book chapter is awaiting approval.

The workshops of the Support and Synthesis group have provided an excellent opportunity to meet and share ideas and to learn from the research practice and methods of the other LXP2 projects. It has been a very good experience to work alongside the other projects. The project wiki has also been useful for keeping in touch and hearing about dissemination opportunities and other methodologies.

There is probably more we can share as projects between LEaD and STROLL about the use of video diaries and the possible development of a joint methodology for managing the large amounts of data to be analysed.

The local outputs will be fed back into the strategy and dissemination of the Blended Learning Unit at the University of Hertfordshire, through their national membership of the CETL network and in the University's continuing strategy to promote and support students' use of learning technologies for future employability. The University's annual International Blended Learning conferences will provide an ongoing opportunity to discuss this project's outcomes.

Section Seven: Issues and Challenges

Report on issues or problems that impacted on the development and implementation of the project.

Some of the issues which arose and were overcome

Fewer than expected numbers of FE students taking part

When the first set of diaries was recorded there was a lower than expected number of students from HRC taking part. In order to ensure there were more for the 2nd and subsequent diary rounds we were introduced to the key module leaders at HRC and then made extra trips to meet the students in class.

We also invited students enrolling from other FE colleges to join the project just prior to the 2nd round of diaries and this way we had a variety of student experiences from FE to record.

Illness of a critical member of the team

This was overcome by drawing in extra help from colleagues in the Blended Learning Unit and made possible by rescheduling other activities of the project team in the short term.

Video streaming for the clips from the students and using Creative Commons licence

The original intention was to provide a DVD of clips and although other websites may offer video streaming we had not expected to offer the STROLL data in this way. Sorting this out was much more time consuming than expected.

Setting up a Creative Commons licence is a relatively easy task but it is the permissions and discussions which need to take place initially to agree what can be posted which took the time.

What advice would you give to others embarking on learner experience projects?

Keeping in touch both formally and informally with your participants was crucial to the success of keeping the relatively large number of students engaged with STROLL over the 18 months of the project. We used a mobile phone to text them and set up a discussion forum on StudyNet to create a group identity. We also provided lunch for the focus groups and an easily available office with an open door policy so they could drop in to find out about the project progress.

What advice would you give to anyone undertaking learner experience research within their institution?

- Investigate ways of acknowledging the students' contribution. We used vouchers for each diary and the added incentive of a bonus voucher for those who stayed committed to the project to the end. Because we had budgeted for buying webcams for the diaries the students were able to keep these at the end of the project and this was an extra incentive.
- Provide plenty of friendly and accessible technical support for those who are hesitant about using unfamiliar technology for recording.
- Maintaining contact with your participants when you want them to participate on several occasions is very important. Keep them informed about the project so that they buy-in to its success. STROLL's Research Assistant took this on as part of her role and was very successful in preventing students drifting away from the project because she made sure they knew their views were valued.

Section Eight: Support

Please comment on the value to your project of the Support and Synthesis team, workshops, visits and activities. What did you most value? What would you have liked to be different?

The joint project workshops and meetings created an overall project identity and were collaborative and very helpful. The programme of workshops, visits and activities was designed for sharing material and support across the projects and kept the projects aligned with the aims and objectives. We valued the regular email contact and updates from the other projects and the enthusiasm and interest that was generated across the programme.

Section Nine: Financial Statement

Provide a final financial statement, accounting for any variance from the agreed budget.

Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

Total Grant	£120,000	Duration of project	24 months
Reporting Period	Final report February 2009		

Budget Headings	Total budget allocated	Expenditure this reporting period	Total expenditure to date	Further information
Staff				
Travel & Subsistence				
Equipment				
Dissemination activities				
Evaluation activities				
Other (please specify)				

Please note that the Completion Reports, including attachments, will be made available on the JISC website and on the programme wiki with the budgetary information removed.