

**Interim Reporting Template**

<b>Project Name</b>	Support and Synthesis Project/Oxford Brookes University
<b>Report compiled by</b>	Rhona Sharpe and Ellen Lessner
<b>With contributions from</b>	Eta De Cicco, Greg Benfield and Helen Beetham
<b>Reporting period</b>	15 April 2008

**Section One: Summary**

Provide an overview of the project to date, highlighting key developments, deliverables/outputs and achievements for the reporting period. This section may be used to inform the Programme Advisory Group, and may also provide the basis for an update to inform the sector about the project.

The Support and Synthesis project has completed its first year and we have now delivered the final 2 (out of four) support workshops and contributed to 6 dissemination events. We continue to respond flexibly to a variety of requests and suggestions: we altered the emphasis of the last workshop in February after feedback from the October workshop, we have been able to contribute to a number of dissemination activities in the wider community and the wiki was substantially upgraded to provide a public area as well as a private area for the projects to continue to share information. The autumn visits included a number of consultants who were able to provide additional expertise to specific projects. Given the late date of the February workshop, it was decided to change the date of the third visit to the projects from March to May/June. This will give us the benefit of reading the interim reports and allow projects time to have uncovered emerging themes from early findings which will contribute to the pilot of the dissemination workshops, now scheduled to start in October 2008.

The communication within the project continues to be through monthly meetings, normally a teleconference, and the project leader and manager have a regular time to talk, normally twice a month. The project manager continues to send monthly updates to the LEX projects and keeps in touch with people informally by email.

An amended work package is included with this interim report and items which have been altered are inserted as comments.

Overall, we are meeting our objectives in supporting the seven projects. The evidence is from the workshop feedback in October 2007 and February 2008 which has 'agreed', or 'strongly agreed', with the usefulness of the majority of the workshops and the event organisation. Comments in the feedback indicate that the projects value the face to face contact to discuss ideas, make connections with other projects working on similar themes and to learn. For example, "Useful to catch up with other projects, structured activities helped to focus discussion in a useful way, timing good too given where we are as projects." Is a comment from the February workshop feedback.

We benefit from a good relationship with the Programme Manager, Sarah Knight, who has been clear in her guidance and supportive with her time and expertise. Research into the learner experience of e-learning continues to be of interest across the sectors and we are likely to be helped by our involvement with ELESIG - Experiences of E-Learning Special Interest Group for those involved in investigations and evaluations of learners' experiences of e-learning (funded from January- July 2008 by The Higher Education Academy).

**Section Two: Activities and Progress**

## Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

Report on activities in support of project objectives for the reporting period.

Briefly explain any changes to the overall approach outlined in the project plan. Note any changes to the project team, aims, objectives, deliverables, milestones or the Project Steering Group. If appropriate, attach an amended copy of the relevant sections of your project plan.

What data have you collected to date? Please attach any data collection tools not previously submitted. What analysis are you undertaking? When do you expect to be able to report on your findings?

**Project management:** The Project Manager attended a helpful JISC InfoNet day on project management on 4 December 2007. Support and Synthesis meetings were held on: 6 November 2007 (telephone), 11 December (telephone), 11 January (at Oxford Brookes University), 26 February (on train to Edinburgh) and 5 March (telephone). Notes from these meetings are stored on the project team's JISCmail file store. The Project Leader and Manager have a teleconference at least twice a month and the Project Manager has occasional teleconferences with the JISC Programme Manager.

**Support Workshops:** All four scheduled support workshops have now been completed. In this reporting timeframe:

- ⇒ 16 October – Quantitative and qualitative data analysis (held at The Open University)
- ⇒ 26/27 February 2008 – Planning dissemination events and activities (held at the University of Edinburgh)

Feedback from the workshops demonstrates that they fulfilled their aim. The overwhelming majority 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that both workshops were useful and the comments included, 'Great – want more formal Nvivo training' 'Lots to cram into a short time as we have so much to discuss and share', 'Just a general comment that I have found the workshops very helpful, and a good way to make new contacts and friends that will, hopefully, last beyond the lifetime of these specific projects'. The feedback shows that the workshops have been key to promoting a culture of cooperation and collaboration among the projects. Comments from the last workshop included several which said 'I personally feel that the projects would benefit from another meeting to discuss results' Evidence for co-operation includes:

- The idea of having a two day workshop (February) came from the projects themselves. The feedback from the data analysis workshop in October included a number of comments, which can be summed up in this one, 'Lots to cram into a short time as we have so much to discuss and share'.
- Holding the workshops at participating projects' universities was also useful and we have appreciated the work that the host projects were prepared to do on behalf of these workshops.
- Links have been made between projects in several areas, e.g. between LexDis and LEaD and e4L on accessibility and disability and between STROLL and LEaD on the use of video to record learners' thoughts and feelings.

**Wiki:** The public area of the wiki is now available to people who want to know more about the Phase 2 LEX projects. There are links to project websites, dissemination activities and suggested background reading. The area for the projects is accessible by login only. This acts as a repository of information, including the four workshops and their materials, the Project Manager's updates and copies of presentations to groups or conferences. There is a calendar where anyone can add events or meetings. The challenge is in making the use of the private wiki space collaborative. We scheduled time at the Edinburgh workshops for projects to add developing themes emerging from their research and are prompting projects to contribute information concerning aspects of running their projects (Ethics committee approval, ideas about video transcribing). Eliciting this information from projects is going to be important in the coming months and we recognise that some of this will need to be drawn out of projects through personal interactions as well as providing a wiki.

**Analysis of data from the initial profile:** We have received one set of data to date and intend to follow up on this in the third visit.

**Production of other materials:** During this reporting period, there were no plans for any materials to be produced. We are on schedule to begin producing short draft guides for the researcher, the IT Manager, and the learner, as well as discussing the benefits of a case study or scenario approach for supporting practitioners understanding of LEX. The guides will be based on information and findings as they emerge from the seven projects and will be one element of the resources available for the 4 dissemination workshops which are due to start in October 2008 and finish in February 2009 (see revised work package).

**Visits:** Patsy Clarke (from the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development), delivered a session at the October workshop on Nvivo and as a result, was asked to provide dedicated workshops on Nvivo to PB-LXP(December 2007) and E4L (30 November 2007) , which was also attended by LexDis.

The second support visits to the projects were completed in November and December 2007 by members of the team and as with previous visits, notes were circulated to the Support and Synthesis team after approval from the project concerned. We offered to bring external consultants to all the projects and 3 agreed; Alistair  
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McNaught from TechDis visited LexDis , Kyriaki Anagnostopoulou visited LEaD and, Marten de Laat and the JISC Programme Manager joined in the visit to BLUPs. We noted that there was some confusion with a few of the projects about the purpose of the visits; some felt that the visit was a 'checking up' process rather than a support visit. To help overcome this, we have decided to preface the next visit with a short teleconference to talk through any current issues as well as discuss any progress against the agreed action plan from the previous visit...

These visits have helped strengthen the relationship between the Support and Synthesis project and the 7 research projects and have offered us an opportunity to discuss a range of subjects, as well as understand and help with difficulties. Although these visits might appear to be expensive in terms of time and distance travelled, they have proven themselves to be an important aspect of the design of the support we are able to offer, either ourselves or through the suggestion of a consultant or critical friend.

**Monthly Updates:** These continue to be written by the Project manager, emailed directly to the 7 research projects and stored on the wiki and the JISCmail file store.

**Changes to planned project activities:** Work package changes (attached):

1. WP 2.4 – date for third visit now May/June 08 instead of March/April 2008. This was changed because the two day workshop in February provided information and contact and it was felt that a slightly later date would encourage projects to explore their emerging themes and findings. Date and format for the final visit, originally scheduled in Autumn 2008, is being discussed. One option is to offer projects one day of somebody's time to read through and comment on draft reports and other outcomes instead of a visit.
2. WP 2.6 – Fourth workshop was originally going to provide a place to develop and pilot ideas for the dissemination workshops. After the October workshop, it was agreed that the projects wanted more time to work together and to explore emerging themes and output types. At the February workshop there was useful input from Sarah Knight, as Programme Manager, and Ros Smith, as communications consultant to JISC, on dissemination, communication and accessibility issues as projects began to think about their proposed outputs.
3. WP 3.2 – Guide for practitioners – After discussion, it was thought that practitioners would gain more from a case study or scenario approach. We aim to have a pilot of a case study or scenario approach ready for the first dissemination workshop in October 2008.
4. WP 3.3 and 3.4 – A4 guides are now aimed at learners, researchers and IT Services/Managers. The first draft date is July 2008 and will contain information gathered from the projects' interim reports and specific questions from the third visit.
5. WP 3.5 – Scoping of online evaluation toolkit for JISC – We are now looking at updating the LTDI Evaluation Cookbook' edited by Jen Harvey.
6. WP4.6 – The dates for the 4 regional dissemination workshops have been moved to start in October 2008 by agreement with the JISC Programme Manager. Because of the longer timescale of these projects, the initial findings from the research will appear later than anticipated so it made sense to move the workshop dates as well. This has also allowed time to look at arrangements for the location and funding of the workshops, which was not part of the original bid by the Support and Synthesis team. The Support and Synthesis team will be making a separate bid for the funding required to prepare and deliver these workshops.

### Section Three: Outputs, Outcomes and Deliverables

What deliverables are you expecting to arise from the project? How do they differ from your original plan?

What are your key findings so far? Which themes do you expect to be able to make a contribution to?

- We expect to continue developing the wiki as a public resource as well as an internal means of communicating and collaborating on project findings and outcomes
- We expect to provide 1 further project interim report to the JISC (October 2008) and the final project report in March 2009.
- We are planning to do a first draft synthesis report on the basis of the initial findings in June 2008.
- We would like to deliver a closing event for the projects and will explore ways to fund this with the Programme Leader.
- We are in the process of preparing a team bid to host and deliver 4 national workshops to communicate findings from the programme.
- We have begun work on 3 guides (briefing papers) which will form part of the resources for our dissemination workshop; an A4 guide for the learner, a researcher and for an IT Manager.
- We will allocate one member from the Support and Synthesis team to oversee each of the following outputs from the programme as a whole:
  - Case studies (HB)
  - Completed learner profiles (HB)
  - Literature review (RS)
  - Survey results and analysis (GB)
  - Guides (briefing papers) (EdC)
- We will support the JISC to produce a high-quality video output, drawing on clips from the projects, to be disseminated as a resource for staff development and potentially for use with learners.
- We have held discussions with Jen Harvey, who edited the LTDI Evaluation Cookbook, who would like to be involved with producing an updated version. This has been a hugely successful 'brand', with both print and web versions, and would provide an accessible resource to run alongside the workshops.
- We have suggested that the JISC might fund a small-scale external evaluation of our approach to programme support, building on the feedback we are collecting from projects.

### Section Four: Dissemination

## Learners Experiences of e-Learning Programme

Provide details of any activities or events which have involved liaison or collaboration outside the project consortium, including key project stakeholders. Attach or provide URLs for any appropriate dissemination or presentation materials.

Outline any publicity the project received during the reporting period.

Building on the work from the Edinburgh workshop, what dissemination outputs do you expect to produce? Specify the output types and audiences your expected outputs will be for.

Demand for information about this programme and the projects remains high and we are grateful that Ros Smith, Communications Consultant for JISC, has been available to support a number of events.

**In addition to the previous 9 dissemination events in the October reporting period, Support and Synthesis team members have contributed to the high profile of the Learner Experience programme at the following events:**

**October 2008 JISC RSC-SE ILT Fair** – ‘The Learner Experiences of e-Learning’ Ellen Lessner

**November 2008 - HEFCW strategy conference** - Helen Beetham was asked to lead a session on 'the learners' experience' for senior managers and policy makers from Welsh HEIs

**March 2008 - ELESIG start up meeting**– Helen Beetham, keynote: 'Who's e-literate now?'

**March 2008 - JISC Learning and teaching experts' group** - An update on the Learner Experiences of e-Learning Programme – Rhona Sharpe

**March 2008** – Oxford University Librarians' Conference – Ros Smith

**April 2008 - JISC Conference 2008** – Helen Beetham, 'Becoming e-literate: practices and requirements of effective e-learners'

**April 2008 - CETL – Impact, Dissemination, Evaluation and Sustainability** – Rhona Sharpe

**April 2008 - JISC: Next Generation Environments Conference 2008** – Rhona Sharpe

A list of dissemination activities, from all the projects, and updated regularly, can be found at :

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

## Section Five: Evaluation

Provide brief details of progress in terms of the development and implementation of the project evaluation plan.

Outline any emerging evaluation issues of interest.

The supportive nature of this project, with visits, updates, workshops and email contact encouraged by the Support and Synthesis team, continues to promote a culture of cooperation throughout the Phase 2 projects. The attendance at all the Support workshops, and the feedback from the workshops, continues to be very good, with every project sending at least one representative to every workshop. A compilation of the feedback from the 2 day February workshop is attached.

We are currently discussing with the JISC Programme Manager the possibility of involving an external evaluator to look at the model of support we have been offering. This will require additional funding.

In our project plan we noted that measures of success in Year 1 activities would be:

**Perceived quality of support offered to the funded projects** (workshop 4 feedback attached)– We look forward to seeing any comments in the interim reports about the quality of support offered. This will add to the positive feedback we have had from the workshops. We also noted that members of various Phase 2 projects have been happy to help at sector meetings and conferences (e.g. ALT-C 2007, Teaching and Learning Experts' Meeting in Bristol, March 2008, NLC symposium) and that they identify with the overall aims of the Support and Synthesis project in creating a supportive, collaborative environment.

**Quantity and quality of communication between projects** – The monthly updates and informal email contact have continued throughout this first year. Several projects have made independent links because of their interest in disability issues (LexDis and e4L) and output types (STROLL and LEaD). Projects have responded quickly to calls for assistance with dissemination requests (e.g. Gemma Towle went to 2 BECTA student forums) and interest in participating in symposium (NLC) and working together in the future to present a symposium at ALT-C 2009.

- **Quality of methodologies employed by funded projects** – Several projects received intensive support from team members during the development of their methodological approaches, which has resulted in strengthened planning for and execution of research methods, as well as more consistent use of tools such as the data profile. Projects have also consistently reported benefit from the methodological elements of the collaborative workshops, with particularly positive feedback for the NVIVO workshop facilitated by Patsy Clarke. This was a first opportunity for some team members to use qualitative data analysis software and has resulted in significant enhancements of their plans for data analysis.

## Section Six: Issues and Challenges

Report on issues or problems that are impacting on the development and implementation of the project. Detail what impact any issues may have on the achievement of project targets, and set out how you plan to tackle these issues. Report on any unexpected project achievements.

What issues have arisen for you around the analysis of your data?

What issues would you like to discuss at your next visit from the support and synthesis team?

The challenges will be:

- eliciting information from projects (the plans to do this are via output type clusters and 3<sup>rd</sup> project visits)
- moving from a private wiki 'brain dump' to polished materials suitable for public website
- not having any more support workshops when the projects still want them
- responding to the high demand for dissemination
- evaluating our model of support
- keeping the project visits supportive
- demands to continue the visits – we will try to promote this through ELESIG
- continuing to balance the time allocated to individuals with the unforeseen interest in many aspects of the Support and Synthesis project; the 7 projects' interest in collaboration, the development of high quality resources, the dissemination activities and individual requirements to produce articles for academic publications.

### Section Seven: Support

Please comment on the value of the support workshops.

What other contact have you had with the programme manager, or with the synthesis and support team? Please comment on the value of this.

What other contact have you had with other projects in the programme? Please comment on the value of this.

Do you have any specific requests for the support and synthesis team - perhaps to be addressed at your next visit?

We have had excellent support from the JISC Programme Manager:

- ⇒ There have been a number of useful teleconferences with the Programme Manager and the Project Manager
- ⇒ The Programme Manager has been able to participate in the October and February workshops and has enabled Ros Smith, in view of her considerable experience as a communications consultant to JISC, to participate in the dissemination themed workshop in February, giving us valuable feedback on communication strategies.
- ⇒ Funding the two day workshop in Edinburgh in recognition of the need of projects to get together for a longer session
- ⇒ Acknowledging the excessive demands for dissemination by proposing a creative brief to cover this demand along with the dissemination workshops which were not part of our original bid.

Because a 'Support and Synthesis' project is a new model, there has been some confusion over our role – support and synthesis or project monitoring? We look forward to the Programme Manager's response to our request to evaluate our model of support.

**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.**