



## JISC Final Report

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# **Higher Education Lifelong Learning Opportunities HELLO**

**Lucy Stone, (Leicester College), September 2010**  
**Professor Harry Tolley, (Nottingham University), September 2010**

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- Maggie Galliers – Principal, Leicester College (Chair)
- Professor Harry Tolley – School of Education, Nottingham University
- Phil Lester – Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- Martin Fisk – Assistant Principal – Teaching and Learning and Higher Education (HE), Leicester College
- Tracey Kinsley – Assistant Principal – Employer Engagement, Leicester College

We acknowledge the work of the HELLO Project Team whose contributions over the 18 months of the project have been integral to its success:

- Paul Chapman, Project Lead, Leicester College
- Lucy Stone, Project Manager and Researcher, Leicester College
- Dan Vaughan, Learning Technologist, Leicester College
- Marco Salotti, HE Coordinator, Leicester College

Many thanks to the thirteen academic staff from across the HE curriculum at Leicester College and the 200 plus learners who took part in the data gathering activities, particularly the learners on the Foundation Degree Photography and Video part-time and full time, Foundation Degree in Performance (Dance) and Foundation Degree in Artistic Makeup and Special Effects.

Many thanks to James Coles of Cole's Nurseries, Leicester for volunteering his time to be our "Business Expert".

## b) Report Summary

### ○ *Project Overview*

The HELLO Project was created with the **aim** of tackling three important development issues facing Leicester College:

1. The accommodation project and subsequent 'new build' resulted in a loss across the whole college<sup>1</sup> of 65% of students' social space, thus creating the need to provide an alternative in the form of a 'virtual social space'.
2. The need to provide bespoke e-learning training opportunities for teachers and to actively engage with known pockets of inactivity with regard to e-learning across the college.
3. The need expressed in Focus Groups to establish a 'Higher Education (HE) identity' among staff and students within an institution that is predominantly devoted to the delivery of Further Education (FE).

With a view to achieving these aims, two major developments were initiated by the HELLO Project within the framework of its overall strategic plan:

**Development One:** The use of a **Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)** to build a Higher Education Student Community Site. This became a portal for all HE learners and tutors to meet in order to open up discussions and to receive regular information from the HE Coordinator. Fourteen course level virtual common rooms were created – learning spaces that were tutor driven. This innovation was of particular success with the part-time learners who were now able to carry out 'keeping warm' and formative assessment activities week to week, and to use the common room area for peer learning activities.

**Development Two:** The adoption of **Mahara**, an open source e-portfolio tool to enable learners to build their own personal profiles, form groups and take ownership of their own space. The Mahara system was used to form links with a business expert and student mentors from De Montfort University. These innovative elements of the HELLO Project are still ongoing as some development issues are still being addressed. Nevertheless, some positive outcomes have already been achieved through the use of Mahara including the participation of learners in a 'keeping warm' (or 'maintaining contact') project through the summer vacation using the blogging feature and drawing on a theory session on deeper, reflective thinking and writing skills.

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<sup>1</sup> The College with a student population of over 26,000 has three main campuses across Leicester City Centre including the newly built Abbey Park Campus and the extensively refurbished Freeman's Park and St Margaret's Campuses,

○ **Project Outputs**

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>URL</b>
Externally facing project site	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk">http://hello.lec.ac.uk</a> (Login as guest to access)
<b>Project Outputs - Reports</b>	
Baseline Report on institutional processes and practice	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Reports/Baseline_Report_for_HELLO_site.pdf">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Reports/Baseline_Report_for_HELLO_site.pdf</a>
Progress Reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June 2009</li> <li>• December 2009</li> <li>• June 2010</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=94">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=94</a>
Interim Reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• September 2009</li> <li>• March 2010</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=95">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=95</a>
Final Report	To be added
<b>Project Outputs - Implementation</b>	
Developing Moodle Communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• Areas developed</li> <li>• Examples of good practice</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=238">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=238</a>
Developing Mahara Communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Mahara environment</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Issues</li> <li>• Supporting resources</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=239">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=239</a>
Learner Inductions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Inductions carried out</li> <li>• Induction lesson plan</li> <li>• Induction activities</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=68">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=68</a>
Engaging with external stakeholders – Employers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer Engagement Wiki</li> <li>• Employer Engagement Assembly</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=194">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=194</a>  <a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=10">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=10</a>
<b>Project Outputs - Research</b>	
Baseline Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Questions Asked</li> <li>• Responses</li> <li>• Analysis</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=237">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=237</a>
Focus Group Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Card Template</li> <li>• Findings with learners</li> <li>• Finding with staff</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=240">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=240</a>
Ad-hoc data gathering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show and Tell</li> <li>• Responses from Learners</li> <li>• Measuring the Impact</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=241">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=241</a>
Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff interviews</li> <li>• Learners interviews</li> </ul>	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=243">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=243</a>

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Project Dissemination	
Articles	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=92">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=92</a>
Internal Events	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=71">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=71</a>
External Events	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=72">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=72</a>
HE Net Project	
HE Net Project site	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7</a>

**Table One:** Project Deliverables

## **2.3 Impact and Benefits to the Community**

### **2.3.1 Impact on Learners**

1. Access to online, scaffolding exercises to help improve academic writing
2. The VLE *“contribute to the sense of community...[giving learners] the mean of growing their relationships online”* which was seen as beneficial to the learners
3. Meeting the desire of learners to have technology as a key part of their social life inside the College environment.
4. Through the “Show and Tell” activity learners were given opportunities to seek the advice and support of their peers.
5. Learners have access to alternative forms of learning that were not present at the start of the Project

### **2.3.2 Impact on Lecturers**

1. Improvement to the retention rate of a course
2. An opportunity to *“keep learners “warm” in between sessions...to further their learning”*
3. Not to look at the *“VLE as a filing cabinet but to integrate subtle forms of learning that were fun and engaging but either reinforcing things covered in that traditional contact time or in a sense enhancing their preparations for topics...”*
4. Translate good classroom practice to be accessible any time of the day
5. Interactions with learners online provided opportunities for ongoing, formative feedback
6. Engagement with the technology has been flexible and one lecturer has been able to combine two roles within the institution without compromising either role
7. Staff have been able to receive training on the use of Moodle and Mahara platforms and continue to develop their courses independently of support from the Project Manager and the Learning Technologist.

### **2.3.3 Impact on the Institution**

1. Developments of the HELLO Project became a key part of the validation process as the institution looked at converting existing HNC and HND provision to Foundation Degree.
2. Evidence from the HELLO Project is being used as a “driver” for change whilst an assessment of the use of e-learning and ILT across the organisation is carried out.
3. Using the work developed in one area where the HELLO Project developments have become fully embedded in the curriculum delivery and course requirements as a “Gold” standard to be achieved by individual tutors, programme areas and curriculum areas.
4. HELLO Project work feeds into possible future projects looking at deeper learning and building resilience in our learners.
5. E-Learning has progressed in areas with little or no engagement in this area and identified in the e-Learning Strategy.

### **2.3.4 Impact on External Stakeholders**

1. The HELLO Project can offer clear guidance and resources on building learning communities within an educational environment offering FE, HE in FE and Adult Education programmes of study.
2. The HELLO Project can provide a number of working 'demonstration sites' across the college of good practice in the use of the interactive features of a VLE.

## **2.4 Main Lessons Learnt**

- The importance of targeting externally funded e-learning interventions like the Hello Project on clearly defined development problems within an institution and in so doing building on the existing IT infrastructure and organisational systems.
- The 'usability' of Moodle and Mahara - in both cases in terms of their 'fitness for purpose' with regard to what each of them had to offer as e-learning tools for use in helping to address the development issues facing the college.
- The need to support practitioners (in the case of the Hello Project college staff) by 'contextualising' the use of e-learning tools such as Moodle and Mahara so that it is easy for them to be adapted and used. This means recognising the realities of particular situations, tackling problems identified by staff and students, drawing practitioners into the development process so that they have a sense of ownership of the innovation.
- The need to encourage staff to adapt, reuse and repurpose their own resources in order to fully exploit the potential offered by Moodle and Mahara and to support them in that process.
- The project recognised that asking staff to incorporate e-learning into the delivery of their courses required them to change their conceptions of teaching and learning. It responded to this challenge by providing them with support customised to their individual needs, active participation in the Hello Project being a means of furthering their college-based professional learning.
- Whilst advantages were to be derived from encouraging staff and students to work within existing 'communities of practice' such as course teams it was also important to encourage the building of new communities i.e. to exploit the potential offered by Moodle and Mahara to extend professional and social networks and in so doing develop new purposes for those relationships.
- In seeking to affect transformational change it should be remembered that it is often a case of 'out of little acorns grow' i.e. the Hello Project deliberately built on what initially were modest achievements by using early 'converts' amongst the staff and students to 'champion' e-learning innovations, and subsequently to use them as the basis for building easily accessible 'demonstration sites' that can be used by the college for the purposes of dissemination, staff training and CPD.

## **c) Main Body of Report**

### **3.1 *What did you do? (Methodology)***

#### **3.1.1 The Aim of the HELLO project was to:**

Address three development challenges facing the College:

- The need to provide an alternative to the 65% of students' social space across the whole college as a result refurbishment and re-building by creating a 'virtual social space'.
- The need to provide bespoke e-learning training opportunities for teachers and to actively engage with known pockets of inactivity within the college with regard to the use of e-learning.
- The need to establish a 'Higher Education (HE) identity' among staff and students within an institution that that hitherto had been mainly devoted to the delivery of Further Education (FE).

#### **3.1.2 The Objectives of the HELLO project were to:**

- Build a network of support, advice and guidance to the HELLO community for educational and social purposes.
- Provide students and tutors with Moodle course sites and HE Community Site to support the delivery of teaching and learning and pastoral support services online.
- Provide the HELLO community (i.e. students, staff, businesses, industry experts and HEIs) with the training needed to enable them to make effective use the e-learning opportunities that were being created.
- Provide the HELLO community with the tools needed to network; communicate in a Web 2.0 environment.
- Facilitate interactions that would meet the needs of the different stakeholders in the HELLO community including employers.
- Provide technical support to ensure participation in the network and on the Moodle and Mahara platforms.
- Provide wider audiences/communities of practice with information on running an e-learning project, including models of implementation, key lessons learnt and research findings.

### 3.1.3 Developmental Work

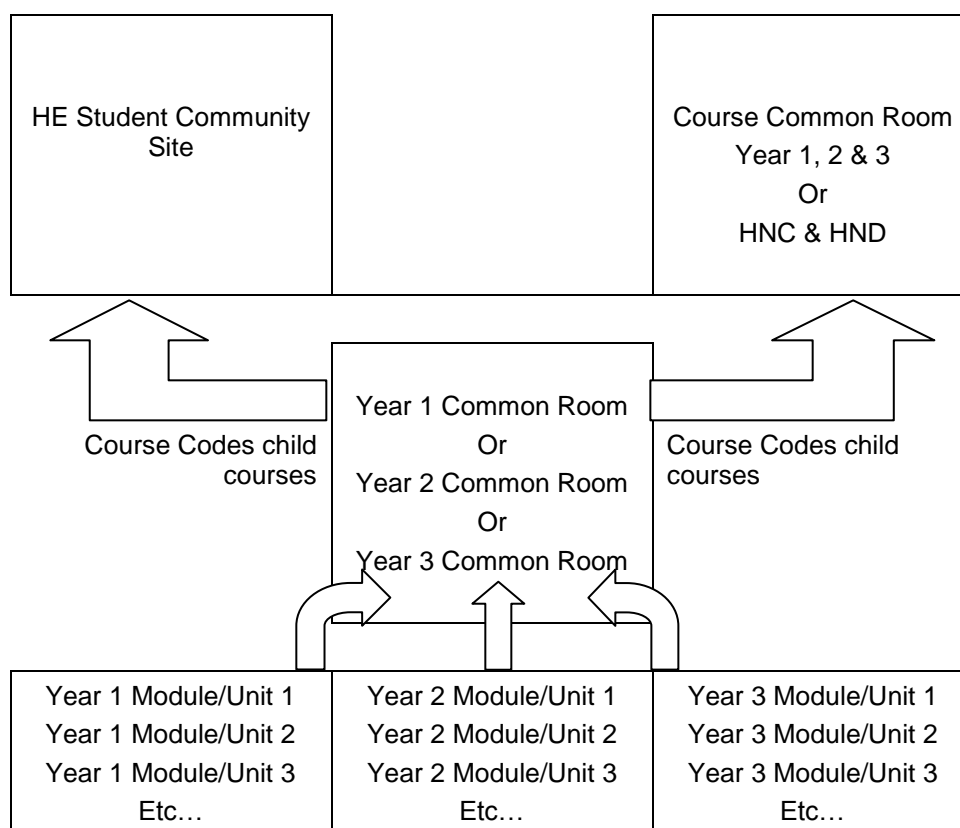
#### 3.1.3.1 Building Moodle Communities

The first action taken by the HELLO Project was to initiate the development of new Moodle Courses in readiness for the induction of learners at the start of the autumn term 2009 and to adapt those, which already existed. The initial intention was that 8 courses would be involved in the project, but after a presentation given at an HE Away Day (information to be found on the Project Site under 'Project Dissemination') the staff from a further 5 courses recognised the advantages to be gained from participation in the Hello Project and asked if they too could be involved.

Further, in addition to the developments originally planned, Moodle was used to build a Virtual HE Staff Room along with an IQER Virtual Base Room. This was achieved through engagement with the HE Coordinator, who is also Course Manager for the Foundation Degree (FD) in Photography and Video part-time and a member of the Steering Group. Evidence of these developments can be found on the project website under:

<http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=238&page=Developing+Moodle+Communities>

The chosen structure:



**Diagram One:** Structure of developments on Moodle

### **3.1.3.2 HE Student Community Site**

The purpose of the HE Student Community Site was to provide all HE Learners and their Tutors one point of contact or VLE portal. This ensured that discussion postings and information could reach everyone who accessed the site regardless of their participation in the HELLO Project. All codes from Course Home Pages were assigned to the HE Community Site. In Moodle terms the HE Community Site became the 'child course', with all the Course Home Pages becoming the 'meta courses'.

### **3.1.3.3 Course Level Common Rooms**

Within this overall structure, Course Level Common Rooms were developed to enable learners across a particular provision to have a shared space or meeting place e.g. Year One and Year Two of a Foundation Degree, or HNCs and HNDs. The Course sites developed as part of the HELLO Project were as follows:

- HNC and HND in Business
- Foundation Degree in Footwear
- Foundation Degree in Fashion and Costume Craft
- HND in Travel and Tourism
- Foundation Degree in Artistic Make-up and Special Effects
- Foundation Degree in Photography and Video (full time)
- Foundation Degree in Photography and Video (part time)
- Foundation Degree in Graphic and E-Media
- Level 5 Subject Specialism:
  - ESOL
  - Numeracy
  - Literacy
- Foundation Degree in Performance (Acting)
- Foundation Degree in Performance (Dance)
- Foundation Degree in Creative Music Technology
- HNC and HND in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering

### **3.1.3.4 Year Level Common Rooms**

Tutor driven, year level Common Rooms were designed as the main meeting place for a whole year of a course. From the Year Level Common Room page learners were able to link to individual module pages.

It was important to include activities for the Induction within the Year Level Common Room that would be of benefit to both learner and tutor. A self assessment of study skills was set up as part of the WoLF Project and carried over to the HELLO Project in light of its usefulness for gathering data about learners very early on in their course. Using the Feedback module in Moodle, the created question set provided the tutor with a whole class profile as well as individual responses. It also introduces learners to the features of responding to Feedback in Moodle.

### 3.1.3.5 Common Features across all developments

All the Moodle developments contained “common features”. This contributed to the need to have an “identity” running across all the courses developed. Initially all levels of the developments from the HE Student Community Site, Course Sites and Year Sites were the same colour scheme. It was agreed that this was confusing and that each level should be a different colour. Common Features included:

- Link to E-Library
- Link to the Technical Issues Discussion Forum <sup>2</sup>
- Student Services Moodle site
- Notifications (one way information from tutors)
- General Discussion Forum
- Link to a Chat Room

### 3.1.3.6 Examples of successful activities

**Show and Tell:** The Show and Tell discussion forum was set up to enable some of the part-time Photography and Video learners to upload images they had taken in between the weekly sessions with their tutors, and to invite responses to or critiques of those postings from their peers. Examples of Show and Tell can be found at ([http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?wid=35&userid=0&groupid=0&page=Show and Tell](http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?wid=35&userid=0&groupid=0&page=Show%20and%20Tell)).

The Show and Tell discussion forum was set up within the first three weeks of the Autumn Term 2009 after a normal face-to-face class. On-line activity began immediately with no formal guidance or instructional lead from the tutor, suggesting that the induction process had been effective in terms of introducing learners to the idea that they should log on to the Moodle site at various times each day, and making them aware of how they might participate. Once initiated, activity on the Show and Tell discussion forum continued throughout the year and is now being ‘showcased’ on the Course Common Room for new first year learners to access and study.

At first the tutor was tentative about providing an on-line forum as a vehicle for peer criticism, and he monitored the discussion forum for signs of potential problems especially evidence of any unnecessarily harsh and hurtful comments. This did not occur, the learners choosing instead to share complex technical information with each other that was on the whole correct, so much so that the forum became an important vehicle for large amounts of peer coaching and learning. The Show and Tell discussion forum became self-managing and self-sustaining with very little need for action/intervention on the part of the tutor.

The idea of a Show and Tell discussion forum has been shared with other HE Staff during the three day intensive training at the end of the academic year 2009-10 and has become a common component of course delivery across the college’s HE provision.

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<sup>2</sup> A technical help forum was developed during the WoLF Project (<http://wolf.lec.ac.uk>) and was used regularly to record technical issues encountered. It was not widely used as part of the HELLO Project and it is felt this was owing to the in-depth Induction given to all learners.

Other examples of successful activities can be found at:

<http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=238&page=Examples+of+Good+Practice>

**Formative Scaffolding Activities:** With a group of part-time learners it was felt that a number of formative assessment activities should be delivered through the module pages to keep the learners “warm” from week to week. One keeping warm assessment was the creation of a feedback activity called “writing about a photograph in an academic essay”. The learner was able to see an image and write very short, one word signifiers. The learner saw the image again, and this time built on the one word signifiers into sentences. The learner saw the image of a third time and constructed their paragraph. This was particularly helpful for one learner whose first language is Lithuanian. The success of formative assessment activities is dependant on the drive of the tutor to express their importance. From the Focus Group activity we identified that learners are still motivated by summative assessment and still need to be pushed to do participate in activities that do not result in a grade.

The “keeping warm” principle was implemented with the full time equivalent course. A group of learners engaged in a formative, summer activity using Mahara. The activity involved the learners being given a theory lesson on deeper reflective thinking and writing skills, followed by an induction in Mahara on how to create blogs and set up views, and to choose who to share those views with. The purpose was for learners to record their research over the summer and share with their peers and tutors.

Examples of Show and tell, writing about a photograph in an academic essay and the use of reflective journals in work based practice can be found at:

<http://hello.lec.ac.uk/mod/wiki/view.php?id=238&page=Examples+of+Good+Practice>

### 3.1.3.7 Development of Mahara Communities

A number of social elements have been created on the Moodle sites including: chat rooms; discussion forums; and, messaging. However, it was anticipated that the learners themselves would drive the development of these Mahara communities – a space on the intranet where they could form their own groups and invite their friends to join. These could be curriculum based or related to individual interests such as social groups or hobbies.

At the beginning of the Hello Project, Mahara was a new system on the Leicester College intranet. It was installed on a test server and the Project team started to test during the 2009 summer vacation. It was anticipated in the original work packages that Mahara would be rolled out together with Moodle during the initial learner inductions during the first few weeks of the Autumn Term. Once the testing had taken place the expectation was that Mahara would be installed on its own server – a process that was dependant on the ‘virtualisation’ project within the institution and the subsequent release of a server. Unfortunately Mahara is still on a test server and it was not possible to roll out the Mahara element of the Hello Project until much later than anticipated i.e. January 2010. Because it is on a test server learners have had to login to another system - though a link to the Mahara site has now been added the HE Student Community Site and on Year Level Community Sites. The delay in implementing Mahara had an adverse impact on the engagement of external stakeholders, business experts and student mentors.

HELLO Project learners were initially invited to participate in the Mahara community by means of messages sent out on Course Common Room pages and on the HE Student Community Site with links to the Mahara site. These messages included

instructions on how to sign in and additional resources. Unfortunately, only one learner accessed it and then expressed disappointment that it had not been populated with activity. The Project Manager and Learning Technologist agreed that it was best to populate the test Mahara with learner information, synchronising with the main College system.

### 3.1.3.8 Employer Engagement

One of the project's strategic objectives was to facilitate employer engagement by means of Mahara with Leicester College providing a portal for external logins for employers and work-based learners. It was anticipated that the former would receive one hour's training on the Mahara system, and that a Discussion Forum would be set up (e.g. 'Meet the Footwear expert'). A past Footwear Student and freelance footwear designer had agreed to pilot the system, but work commitments prevented her from doing so.

At the start of the Project the intention was to base the building of engagement with employers on existing linkages including the validation process for Foundation Degrees which provide an on-going forum for the exchange of ideas about work based practice and for sharing industry updates. It was agreed therefore, that the Project Manager should address the Business Development Managers at one of their meetings and in so doing set out the following ideas for employer engagement:

- An information brochure about the HELLO Project.
- Highlighting the benefits to employers of participation in the Mahara communities in the process of being developed (i.e. what's in it for them).
- An award to be presented at one of the college's 'Business and Industry' events.
- An Employer Engagement Assembly as part of the project, bringing together other projects with the common theme of Employer Engagement.

These proposals were accepted and have been incorporated into future plans for furthering employer engagement, thus making sustainable a development initiated by the Hello Project.

Outcomes of the EE Assembly were:

- To have an understanding of how other projects have engaged with employers
- To share ideas of how to effectively engage with employers
- To produce a "best practice" list of methods to share with the wider community

A document was created outlining the project and why and how business experts could get involved. This was presented at the Business Development Manager's (BDM) meeting. During the meeting the request was made to identify what the learners wanted to gain from contact from Business and Industry, however the Project Manager felt that this was not within the scope of the project or within the time frame and was possibly a separate project in itself. It was noted that the BDMs have little engagement with the HE Provision within the organisation.

The Managing Director of a local garden nursery offered his services to participate on Mahara and to instigate some discussion. A one hour training session took place and he set up a profile and a discussion. No learners engaged with him in a discussion forum although he did have some learners "lurking" in the background. Information of his online presence was sent out on the HE Student Community Site on individual sites including Business. It is felt that this element of the project was unsuccessful owing to:

- Lack of formal, institutional links with business and industry through College system
- Delays in implementing Mahara
- Loss of Project Business Expert

### 3.1.3.9 Training programme for staff

**Moodle training:** Moodle training was delivered by the Project Manager and Learning Technologist on request to all the staff involved in the Project. Training was delivered on a one-to-one basis or to a small group. Training was adapted and delivered in response to an idea that the member of staff wanted to implement but needed customised IT support in order to be able to do so. Towards the end of the Hello Project in July 2010 two days of intensive in-service training was delivered to the Project staff. This training programme covered: an introduction to Moodle; sharing good practice from across the college (i.e. what has been successful in other curriculum areas); and, reviewing the curriculum in order to identify alternative modes of delivery and consider ways in which Moodle could be used to enhance teaching and learning.

**Mahara training:** Owing to the delays in the implementation of Mahara, training was offered to staff when a need and use for Mahara was identified. This included the group of learners and staff from Graphic Design who were using Mahara to contact De Montfort University online peer mentors as part of the HE Net Project (<http://hello.lec.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7>) and the Foundation Degree Photography and Video learners and their tutors who were involved in a summer blogging exercise.

A day of training was given to all the Project Staff on the use of Mahara in July 2010. This training programme covered: the difference between a VLE and E-Portfolio; creating groups; creating blogs; creating and sharing views.

## 3.1.4 Research Activities

The HELLO Project adopted an approach based on the principles, which underpin action research methodology i.e. its aim was 'to bring about practical improvement, innovation and change within a social practice' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) and to use feedback from its actions formatively to guide future development. The starting point for this process was a baseline study that established the need for a virtual social space. Subsequent research activity has attempted to provide an evidential basis evaluating the impact of the project's developmental activities.

### 3.1.4.1 Baseline Survey

A survey questionnaire was created on the Moodle HE Student Community Site (using the Feedback module) and during the induction process with the HELLO learners, they were asked to complete this. A total of 179 learners answered the survey questions and the resultant data provided insights into the way learners engage with new technology both in their everyday lives (e.g. when at home) as well as in College.

### Summary of the Responses:

- 179 learners responded to the survey.

### Using technology in the home:

- 97% of learners said that they had Internet connections at home.
- 1 learner did not have access to any technology at all.
- 31% of learners questioned had accessed the College Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) from home.
- 91.5% of learners used their home computer to undertake research on the internet<sup>3</sup>

### Using technology in College:

- 27% of learners said that they use social networking (social networking is only enabled on specific machines in the library areas and is currently being reviewed in classrooms).
- 80% of learners make use of College computers.
- 37% of learners access the College Moodle VLE.
- 79% of learners carry out research via the Internet.

### Other technology:

- 85% of learners reported that they participate in social networks of which 81% said that they use Facebook.

How does technology make you feel?
<p>79% of learners reported that they saw technology as being a positive aspect of their lives, with the breakdown being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33% commented that technology was a positive or 'OK' aspect of their lives.</li> <li>• 21% commented on technology being a tool to connect to friends and the outside community/world.</li> <li>• 18% commented that technology was essential to their everyday lives.</li> <li>• 13% commented that they were happy with technology as long as it worked.</li> <li>• 2% commented that they were happy with technology as long as they had the necessary skills.</li> </ul>
<p>6% of learners saw technology with a sense of indifference.</p>
<p>6% of learners reported that they saw technology with a sense of fear or anxiety. Words used to describe this feeling were: 'resentful', 'nervous', 'confused' and 'stressed'.</p>
<p>Only 9% of the learners questioned did not respond to this question.</p>

**Table 2:** How does technology make you feel? – Survey responses

<sup>3</sup> Leicester College Library provides learner support on effective researching on the Internet. However, further study needs to take place to see if these skills are embedded in the curriculum by tutors.

### If all the technology you use was taken away from you...how would you feel?

84% of learners commented that the removal of technology would impact on them in a negative way:

- 55% commented that the removal of technology would have a negative effect on them, mostly boredom
- 34% commented that the removal of technology would impact on them feeling isolated, lost, alone and disconnected from others
- 9% recognised there would be an impact but came up with practical solutions to resolve the issues, including reverting back to paper-based activities
- 1% commented on the implications on their time

8% of learners viewed the loss of technology as positive. Comments were made about being liberated, taking up more sports, and engaging with other people face-to-face

8% of learners did not respond to this question

**Table 3:** If all the technology you use was taken away from you...  
how would you feel? – Survey responses

#### 3.1.4.2 Group evaluation activities

Two evaluation activities were run with a view to obtaining feedback, firstly with learners studying for the Foundation Degree in Performance (Dance), and secondly with a small group of staff. On both occasions the purpose of the activity was to get the participants to reflect on and discuss how the use of technology fitted in with their time at College and what their personal priorities were. Rather than run these activities as conventional focus groups with a facilitator asking questions and a recorder noting the responses, the participants (divided into small groups in the case of the students) were given a set of 14 cards. On each of these cards was a statement relating to different aspects of the use of technology in relation to teaching and learning.

The groups were instructed to read out each statement and then as a group to sort them into 'discard' statements (i.e. the ones they regarded as unimportant or incorrect) and 'save' statements (i.e. the ones they accepted). They were then asked to discuss the statement they had agreed to save and from them to select their top five and to put them in rank order starting with the one they regarded as the most accurate/important.

The activity therefore, had elements of the Nominal Group Technique (Cohen, et al, 2000) but it was based more on the idea of creating a situation in which the participants could engage in a form of creative 'academic play' (Creme, 2008) in which they enjoyed greater freedom to explore and exchange ideas and opinions.

This proved to be the case because the interactions within the groups were entirely self-managed and required no interventions from the facilitator other than to give reminders of the time remaining for the completion of the activity and to manage to presentation of the outcomes by the groups at the end. Having statement cards to

handle, read out and reject or save not only helped to structure the discussion and decision-making but gave the activity a sense of being a 'game' – a 'space' in which to play guided by the rules that had been set down at the outset. Despite being given the same resources and instruction it is interesting that the student groups and staff group approached the tasks differently. Whilst the students took each statement and considered it in isolation, the staff sorted them into groups and then considered each one of them in that wider context. Their informal ('off-the ball') interactions included considerations of the implications of what they were discussing for future teaching and learning. Whilst the students were prompted to consider wider issues concerning their own individual progression with regard to their on-going education and careers, the staff talked about the implications of what they were discussing for future incorporation of e-learning into their delivery of the curriculum.

Results show the first priority of the two groups to be different; however the subsequent four cards were the same for both (though not in the same rank order):

Group One (Students)	Group Two (Staff)
1. I know what I have to do to complete assessments	1. Technology is a key part of my social life
2. I seek the advice and support of people outside my course about my learning	2. I seek the advice and support of people outside my course about my learning
3. I learn in different ways	3. Access to resources and up to date information
4. Working collaboratively is a key part of my learning	4. Working collaboratively is a key part of
5. Access to resources and up to date information	5. I learn in different ways

**Table 4:** Group priority statements

### 3.1.4.3 Ad-hoc data gathering

When activity on the Moodle sites increased some 'ad-hoc' research was carried out through a discussion forum. In light of the activity on the 'Show and Tell' discussion forum, learners were asked "How does participating in a discussion forum impact on the dynamics of the group"? The responses from learners included the following:

**Response 1:** *I think Show and Tell has been really useful in helping me personally feel like part of the group. It's a great idea that allows us Part Timers to communicate as we're only in college once a week. And for me on a personal level, as I know I can be introverted at times especially when it comes to meeting new people, I feel like its given me an insight to my fellow students that makes 'making friends' that little bit easier! i.e., an actual way of social networking! Also, you can post up your photos without feeling like your showing off and the contributions have been really interesting to read too.*

As tutors became more and more engaged with the Project their uptake of training and the hours spent developing courses and participating in activities varied. Staff were asked "what has the impact of your hours invested in this project had on your learners?"

For the Foundation Degree in Photography and video, the tutor can be seen talking about the impact of the HELLO Project and the Moodle developments, he says:

*“At the start of the HELLO Project I was pretty much a novice with regard to Virtual Learning Environments and without doubt it’s had a tremendous impact to the experience of my students. Potentially had knock on effects, for example the retention rate for this course has been problematic but this year there is 100% retention rate. Now you can’t absolutely put that down to the creation of a Moodle site, but without doubt and in my opinion, it has certainly added to the coherence, the delivery and student experience to the extent that moving into next year it will be a requirement, not an option that students on the FD (Foundation Degree) Photography and Video part time course have to engage through Moodle. So we have gone beyond just the requirement to attend weekly, evening sessions to the point where if people are going to join this course, they obviously need some camera equipment but at interview I am asking if they’ve got PCs at home, Macs at home and have ability to access the internet, and are IT literate in that sense to contribute to forums and stuff like that. So we are heading that up right at the application process and I will monitor usage of Moodle in the same way I monitor attendance.”*

Other tutors responded:

**Foundation Degree in Creative Sound Technology (hours invested 130), impact:**

- *The work based learning component within the FD in Creative Sound Technology relies on the use of an online blog so that students can evidence fulfilment of learning outcomes determined between the employer and the student; each of them compiled a daily blog through MOODLE which I went through with each of them during tutorials.*
- *Students have subsequently networked with other FD students studying at Leicester College through the portal, and this networking has led to cross collaborative work between students from different programmes.*
- *Retention has been very good but the cohort was small so the impact of the hello project may be negligible in this case.*

**Foundation Degree in Artistic Makeup and Special Effects (hours invested 170), impact:**

- *Moodle Photo Gallery- Group Critique: This has been a useful tool to collectively evaluate their peers’ work. The students were able to upload an image of a make-up they had produced, it also combined as photo evidence for work based learning. It was great to see students share their experiences also peers to comment on the image and give either praise or areas for development. As a tutor it was particularly useful as I could feedback on the image on an open platform, so students could learn from the advice given, previous to this tool students used to send attachments via email.*
- *Reflective Journal: Another effective application was the use of the ‘Reflective journal’ . The students were able to reflect on their learning experiences on an online journal. At first the students wrote about lesson outcomes and difficulties they had or areas they enjoyed, in which I could provide more pastoral support on the programme, however I soon felt it was a better tool for them to reflect on work based experiences (as they were out of class time) and document, with support of the ‘Photo Gallery’, their time and evaluate on what worked well, what they learned in industry and ways to move forward. For me as a tutor I could access this at home/work at any time and communicate with my students. I was able to give comments of encouragement and advice. This information was also able to feed into an assignment piece later on the year, documenting their work based learning.*

- Formative assessment - Historical & Cultural studies module: As an experiment we set up an online 'Forum question' posted on Moodle, as a formative exercise. First year Students were given a topic/question:

*'The period 1975-1985 saw vast economic and cultural change in Britain. With reference to this period, explain how notions of display can be seen to reflect socio-economic and/or socio-cultural attitudes'.*

*Students were required to visit the forum at least three times over the duration of the project posting a minimum of 500 words per visit, and must be appropriately referenced (so detailed research beforehand had to be carried out). Then the tutor carried academic tutorials to support their research and put them on the right track. Also the tutor could access the forum and change the direction of the discussion if the responses looked weak.*

*The forum started off well, but some students who were not as confident in using IT found it hard to grasp and needed more support. Also students were afraid of repetition from other people responses, which was very challenging for them. This exercise needed more consideration for those not as confident as it was set in the first term, maybe it would be better as second year task, when they were more used to using on line resources, but it was a lesson learned and a platform for future developments.*

- Moodle site: Overall the course Moodle site is student friendly and great to upload session resources (PowerPoints) for each module. Links to internet sites are posted and suggested reading materials. Also the links (HE community site) to other HE courses will be a useful tool to enable my students to contact each other, particularly this year when my students skill share with the photography students.

#### **Level 5 Subject Specialism Courses in ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy (hours invested 170) impact :**

*We've had difficulties getting our group to engage with Moodle. However, students have commented that Moodle is kept up to date and everything is easily accessible as a result. Also, they have had a glossary which has been used to share resources they use/have created to teach their subject. This has been very positive and the group have been able to use each other's ideas/resources and provide each other with feedback. This has been a very positive experience.*

#### **Tutor from Foundation Degree in Artistic Makeup and Special Effects and Programme Leader for Foundation Degree in Footwear (hours invested 140) impact:**

*We tried running a 'live' interactive assignment across the forum...unfortunately this wasn't so successful as some students felt reluctant to partake...This project may have been better delivered to Year 2 when the 'social barriers' have broken down, so to speak...I think on the first year they were frightened of making fools of themselves!! The forum assignment did however get some of them interacting...we were looking at the impact of 1970s economy on Punk style and many were able to share song lyrics to support their argument, or films with appropriate themes. I do think that a 'live' assignment of this type will work in the future as it allows a degree of spontaneity and immediate feedback from anyone else on line at the time...maybe it would be beneficial to write 'access times' into the brief and Scheme of Work so that everyone's on line at the same time?*

## **3.2 What did you learn?**

### **3.2.1 Engagement of reluctant staff**

At the beginning of the project one specific area, originally proposed to participate, were reluctant to engage. The Foundation Degree is a franchised course with the local HEI (Higher Education Institution). The tutor had been told that she had to use the HEI's Blackboard VLE. The tutor felt that her learners would not engage with two separate systems. As there had been such an interest in the HELLO Project from the HE Away Day, it was agreed that this group would not take part. The issue of validating and franchising universities with the other participants was not an issue.

### **3.2.2 The importance of induction**

To engage learners it was important to carry out learner inductions at the beginning of the academic year i.e. at the start of the Autumn Term 2009. Normally, a technology-based induction would be the responsibility of the course tutor. However, as part of the HELLO Project the Project Manager ran learner inductions with all the participating groups. The hour-long induction gave learners sufficient opportunity to:

- Engage with Moodle.
- Participate in a relevant discussion group.
- Make sure that their profile information was correct.
- Carry out a self-assessment of their study skills.

An additional benefit of these induction sessions was that their tutor received a profile of each learner very early on in the course enabling them to put provide any learning support that was required, and to organise further assessments should that be necessary. With the tutors in attendance during the learner inductions it gave them the knowledge and skills needed to carry out inductions with new groups of students in September 2010.

### **3.2.3 Raising the Profile**

Project Team Meetings were organised at monthly intervals throughout the life of Hello Project. The project team consisted of the Project Manager, ILT Trainer, HE Coordinator and a further 13 members of staff who were course managers of the HNCs, HNDs and Foundation Degrees. Notifications were sent out at the beginning of the Project of all meetings dates. However, after the first meeting numbers dwindled and attendance was disappointingly low. Other on-going priorities seem to have been given precedence over the HELLO Project, and this was an issue that had to be addressed. A request was sent to attend Assistant Principal's meetings, hoping that by reaching Curriculum Area Managers and raising the profile of the project would result in improved commitment to it. Unfortunately, this was not achieved as only one Assistant Principals invited the HELLO Project Manager to a meeting. Nevertheless, the Project Manager worked closely with marketing in the production of materials to disseminate project activities within the institution including an article within the internal newsletter.

### 3.2.4 Technical Issues

At the beginning of the academic year in 2009, the Leicester College student enrolment system (EBS) did not automatically populate the Moodle system with student details. Daily data was taken from the EBS system and manually uploaded to Moodle, creating a delay of 24 hours from the point of enrolment.

The Moodle system requires learners to come into college and login to a networked College machine to access Moodle for the first time. This posed some difficulties with students who were distance learners and for those groups whose only access to computers was College provided Apple Macs. It was necessary to make sure that these learners visited the library to initially login to a PC prior to their Moodle inductions.

### 3.2.5 Institutional Dissemination

It became apparent during the Project that staff across the College were unaware of what work was being carried out. It was decided that the Project Manager should work together with the Marketing Department in promoting the project work. The Project Manager spoke at College Leadership Group and requested meetings with Assistant Principals - though only one of the four responded positively. Nevertheless, there are now a number of active 'dissemination sites' across the college where staff and students are making effective use of the opportunities provided by the Hello Project for enhancing teaching and learning. Because of the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and their students these centres of innovation in e-learning are likely to be self-sustaining and will inevitably influence on-going deliberations about the direction of change and the delivery of the curriculum.

## 3.3 Impact

### Impact on Lecturers

The accumulated feedback suggests that the Hello Project has had the following **impacts** on lecturers at the college who have actively engaged with it:

- Improvements in the retention rates of their course.
- Opportunities for them to *"keep learners "warm" in between sessions...to further their learning"*.
- A chance to look at the *"VLE not as a filing cabinet but to integrate subtle forms of learning that were fun and engaging but either reinforcing things covered in that traditional contact time or in a sense enhancing their preparations for topics..."*
- A means by which they could make their good classroom practice accessible to learners at any time.
- Opportunities for interacting with students online as a means of providing ongoing formative feedback on their learning – both individually and collectively.
- Engagement with the technology has been flexible and one lecturer has been able to combine two roles within the institution without compromising either role
- Lecturers have been able to receive customised training on the use of Moodle and Mahara platforms, and to continue to develop their courses independently of support from the Project Manager and the Learning Technologist.

## Impact on Learners

Feedback suggests that the Hello Project has had the following **impacts** on learners from across the college:

- The project has provided them with access to online, scaffolding exercises to help improve academic writing.
- The VLE developed by the project has “*contributed to the sense of community...[giving learners] the mean of growing their relationships online*”, which was seen as beneficial by the learners.
- The project met the desire of learners to have technology as an integral part of their working and social lives inside the College environment and beyond.
- Through the “Show and Tell” activities learners were given opportunities to further their learning by seeking the advice and support of their peers online.
- Learners now have access to alternative forms of learning that were not available to them at the start of the Project.

## Impact on the Institution

The evidence suggests that the Hello Project has had the following **impacts** on the host institution as a whole:

- Developments of the HELLO Project became a key part of the validation process as the institution looked to convert its existing HNC and HND provision to Foundation Degrees.
- Evidence from the HELLO Project is being used as a “driver” for change within the college whilst an evaluation of the use of e-learning and ILT across the organisation is being conducted.
- Work developed in one area of the college where developments initiated under the aegis of HELLO Project have become fully embedded into the curriculum delivery, and are now seen as the “Gold” standard to be achieved by individual tutors, programmes and curriculum areas.
- Innovative work undertaken by the HELLO Project is now fed into deliberation about possible future projects seeking to promote deeper learning and resilience on the part of our students.
- E-Learning has progressed in areas with little or no engagement in this area and identified in the e-Learning Strategy.

## Impact on the Wider Community

It is suggested that as a result of its experience the Hello Project is in a position to offer the following to the wider community:

- The HELLO Project can offer clear guidance and resources on building learning communities within FE and HE in FE educational environments.
- The HELLO Project can offer active demonstration sites in the use of the interactive features of a VLE.

## Dissemination

### Articles

Leicester College Connect Newsletter	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/Connect_Article.pdf">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/Connect_Article.pdf</a>
HEA FE in HE Bulletin	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/HEA_Article.pdf">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/HEA_Article.pdf</a>
ICT Skills for Life newsletter	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/ICT_Skills_for_Life_article.pdf">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/ICT_Skills_for_Life_article.pdf</a>
Leicester College Connect Newsletter – Research at Leicester College	<a href="http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/Research_at_Leicester_College.pdf">http://hello.lec.ac.uk/file.php/3/Dissemination/Articles/Research_at_Leicester_College.pdf</a>

### Internal Events

Event	Location	Date
HE Away Day	Beaumanor Hall, Loughborough	5th June 2009
Teaching and Learning Conference	Leicester College	6th July 2009
College Leadership Group	Leicester College	25th June 2010

### External Events

Event	Location	Date
ILT Forum	Online	31st March 2009
JISC RSC-East Midlands E-Fair	Walkers Stadium, Leicester	23rd June 2009
Sheffield College	Sheffield	5th November 2009
Student Retention Assembly	University of Central Lancashire	9th December 2009
ELESIG Symposium - Digital Futures	University of Reading	21st January 2010
Guest Lecture to Masters students - Moving into Research	De Montfort University	16th February 2010
ELFYSE SIG	The Orange Studio, Birmingham	23rd March 2010
ELESIG East Midlands Group	Derby University	20th May 2010
Visit from Abingdon Witney	Leicester College	16th June 2010

JISC RSC East Midlands - E Fair	Walkers Stadium, Leicester	22nd June 2010
Greenwich E-Learning Conference	Greenwich University	7th July 2010
JISC Experts Meeting	Bristol	13th July 2010
ALT-C	Nottingham University	8th September 2010

## d) Conclusions & Recommendations

The **aim** of HELLO Project was to tackle three problems facing Leicester College: the loss of social space available to students; the need to create opportunities in e-learning for its staff including known pockets of inactivity with regard to e-learning across the college; and, the need to establish an HE identity' within an institution that is predominantly devoted to FE. The Hello Project initiated two major developments with a view to addressing these issues.

- **Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)** was developed to build a HE Student Community Site to act as a portal for learners and tutors to meet in order to open up discussions and to receive regular information from the HE Coordinator. As a result there are now 14 course level virtual common rooms open for use thus enabling part-time learners to carry out 'keeping warm' and formative assessment activities week by week, and to use the space for peer learning activities.
- **Mahara** (the open source e-portfolio tool) has been adopted to enable learners to build their own personal profiles, form groups and take ownership of their own space. Positive outcomes already achieved through its use include the participation of learners in a 'keeping warm' (or 'maintaining contact') project through the summer vacation using the blogging feature and drawing on a theory session on deeper, reflective thinking and writing skills.

## e) Implications for the future

### Development of future research and projects

**Keeping Warm:** Through the work of HELLO the need for formative assessment activities to keep both full-time and part-time learners "warm" throughout the week to week contact (part-time) and the long summer break (full time) became apparent. In one instance it was the scaffolding activities developed by the tutor, for example, "writing about a photograph in an academic essay" and the other a request from tutors about another method of asking a group of learners to write about their research throughout the summer break. In this instance the tutors know from the quality of previous work that the learners typed up their formative assignment on the penultimate day of the break. The work was of a poor quality, rushed and had little depth of learning.

It was agreed that we would use Mahara to engage the learners with the idea of blogging throughout the summer; this meant that learners would not be able to leave the work until the last day. However, it was felt that blogging in its own was not adequate with the tendency for learners to just write a "story" about what they did. An hour long lesson on "Reflective Writing and Thinking" was given to the group, two weeks later an hour long practical session was offered on the use of Mahara for Blogging.

Students have engaged over the summer, and analysis of the impact of these two hours will be measured soon. Findings from this will be shared as "good practice" amongst the HE Staff

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Date: 22 October 2010

at Leicester College. It is hoped that further research can be carried out looking at the use of technology together with the theory associated with deeper learning.

## **f) References**

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