



**Interoperability Pilots II
(Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland –
SWaNI)**

Formative Evaluation Report

**Glenaffric Ltd
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Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1 Introduction.....	4
2 SWaNI in context.....	4
3 Methodology.....	5
3.1 Evaluation Framework.....	5
3.2 Evaluation Objectives.....	6
3.3 Interviews.....	7
3.4 Evaluation visits.....	7
3.5 Programme Meetings.....	7
3.6 Data Analysis and Reporting.....	8
4 Findings.....	9
4.1 Project management activities and systems.....	9
4.2 Vendor relationships.....	10
4.3 Consortium working.....	11
4.4 Organisational factors.....	11
4.5 Programme management.....	12
4.6 Impact and benefits.....	12
4.7 Cultural differences.....	13
4.8 Lessons for MLE and other interoperability initiatives.....	14
4.9 Summative evaluation themes.....	14
5 Commentary.....	15
5.1 Project management structures and processes.....	15
5.2 Programme management and JISC support.....	15
5.3 Developing relationships with vendors.....	17
5.4 Organisational factors.....	17
5.5 Impact of the formative evaluation.....	18
6 Recommendations.....	19
6.1 Capacity.....	19
6.2 Communication and collaboration.....	19
6.3 Cultural change.....	20
6.4 Summary of recommendations.....	21
Appendices.....	22
Appendix A – Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	22
Appendix B – Summary of Projects.....	22
Appendix C – MLE Programme Overview.....	23
Appendix D – Interview Schedules.....	24
Appendix E – Visit Schedule.....	26
Appendix F – Coding Frame.....	28
Appendix G – Vendor Involvement.....	28
References.....	29

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Executive Summary

A formative evaluation of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Interoperability Pilots II Programme (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – SWaNI) was commissioned by the Programme Steering Group with the aim of maximising the long-term benefits to the sector, and synergy with the concurrent Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning programme.

The formative evaluation framework proposed a qualitative approach focusing on the ‘softer’ aspects of programme experience. Evaluation data was gathered from reports and documents, interviews and discussions, visits to project lead institutions, and presentations, discussions and exercises at Programme Meetings.

SWaNI projects used various models for project management, including external appointment, internal secondment and collaborative approaches. The programme identified the development of project management skills for the sector as a key issue, and the need for realistic specification of project scope, aims, objectives and work packages.

Vendor engagement with SWaNI projects was mixed, with some vendor organisations providing extensive support and others only limited engagement. The programme helped to develop positive relationships between vendor organisations, colleges and the JISC. A shared understanding was reached of the market forces and commercial drivers affecting vendor involvement with funded programmes.

Different models of consortium working were explored in SWaNI. There was general agreement that consortium working generally leads to productive collaboration, whether the consortium is based on shared interest, geographical proximity, or both.

Organisational factors identified as affecting project activities and outcomes included the relevance of projects to organisational strategic plans and operational activities. It was apparent that levels of maturity with regard to the implementation of MLEs and their various components varied across the sector, and groups of staff within institutions indicated different levels of understanding and appreciation about the implications of MLE implementation for learning and teaching practice, and the development of administrative structures.

There was little inter-project collaboration outside scheduled Programme Meetings. Projects acknowledged the supportive role of the Programme Manager and the Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards (CETIS).

In terms of impact and benefits, SWaNI has helped to raise further the profile of MLE developments in the sector, has facilitated the national development of collaborative networks, and helped to develop a process for sector-wide negotiation with vendor organisations. Some institutions highlighted the role of SWaNI in helping to build internal communities of practice. Individuals have benefited in terms of increased technical knowledge and management experience.

SWaNI has played an important role in further developing JISC’s understanding of and relationship with the FE sector. It has also highlighted the need for shared understanding of the short term operational requirements of FE colleges in the context of longer term, process oriented research interests of the JISC community as a whole.

To a limited extent, the SWaNI projects were able to build on the interoperability mechanisms and the project experiences of previous MLE programmes. However, SWaNI has facilitated the development of technical experience and expertise, and enhanced organisational awareness of the issues and challenges of MLE development, for the FE sector as a whole.

The formative evaluation makes specific recommendations for key stakeholders based on generic issues identified in terms of capacity, communication and collaboration, and cultural change.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)¹ Interoperability Pilots II Programme (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – SWaNI) is part of a larger programme of work on the development of Managed Learning Environments (MLEs) in further and higher education. The MLE programme covers a range of projects and information services that seek to evaluate and pilot information and communications technologies (ICT) for learning and teaching, and promote the uptake of ICT-based applications to improve student support systems. The situation of SWaNI in the wider context of the ongoing JISC MLE programme is outlined in Section 2 below.
- 1.2 The SWaNI programme ran from September 2002 until July 2003 and consisted of seven funded projects, three in Scotland and four in Wales. Funding for an eighth project based in Northern Ireland was rescinded as a result of delays in the procurement of a national student record/management information system for that country. Information and materials to support the development of MLEs in FE institutions were also developed through SWaNI. A Steering Group was established to oversee the programme, and a Programme Manager appointed. A summary of the projects is included in Appendix B.
- 1.3 A formative evaluation of the SWaNI programme was commissioned in October 2002. The main aim of the commission was:
- To provide a formative evaluation of the SWaNI projects which will maximise the long-term benefits to the sector and synergy with the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme (01/01).

The broad evaluation objectives set out in the commission were as follows:

1. To develop an evaluation framework
2. To identify common themes across the two programmes
3. To undertake formative evaluation activities with the SWaNI projects
4. To undertake an analysis of common themes with the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme (01/01) and SWaNI projects
5. To provide feedback in the form of a detailed report.

The formative evaluation commenced in November 2002 and was undertaken by eLearning consultants, Glenaffric Ltd.

2 SWaNI in context

- 2.1 SWaNI is one of a number of MLE programmes due for completion in July 2003, including the Building MLEs in Higher Education programme (7/99) and the first phase of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Building MLEs across FE and HE programme (01/01).² A diagrammatic overview of the JISC MLE programme is included in Appendix C.
- 2.2 The MLE programme sits in the wider context of a range of JISC initiatives to support the use of technology for learning and teaching in the further and higher education sectors. The Exchange for Learning (X4L) and Linking Digital Libraries with VLEs (DiVLE) programme circulars make explicit reference to the ongoing work of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme.
- 2.3 SWaNI had the specific aim of building on the experiences and outputs of the Interoperability Pilots in FE programme (11/00). This programme was established in

¹ A list of abbreviations and acronyms used in this report is included in Appendix A.

² For a strategic overview of the JISC MLE programme see Sarah Porter (2002), 'How to manage the widespread use of learning technology: Managed Learning Environments', <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ascilite/proceedings/papers/077.pdf>

November 2000 to explore interoperability concepts within MLEs in the further education (FE) sector in England. Projects ran for nine months from April to December 2001.

- 2.4 At the end of the 11/00 programme, it was recognised that further work was required to achieve fuller systems integration across the FE sector, and to ensure that the needs of colleges in all parts of the UK were met. SWaNI aimed to establish interoperability between MLE systems using application profiles based on specifications developed by the IMS Global Learning Consortium, with extensions appropriate to the FE sectors in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Four interoperability strands were specified: VLEs and student records systems, VLEs and content repositories, VLEs and library/learning resource systems, and lifelong learning logs.
- 2.5 In March 2002, a report on the work of the JISC Managed Learning Environments Steering Group was published³. This report contained a number of recommendations for various stakeholders that are relevant to SWaNI.

3 Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Framework

- 3.1.1 A formative evaluation framework for SWaNI was developed and refined following consultation with the Steering Group. Various models of formative evaluation were considered and reviewed in the development of an appropriate framework model for SWaNI, including the EFFECTS evaluation framework⁴, the Tavistock Institute 'Guidelines for eLIB Project Evaluation'⁵, and the EDNER Project (2002).⁶
- 3.1.2 The formative nature of the evaluation project meant that the framework reflected the need to focus on the 'softer' aspects of the SWaNI programme, exploring views and experiences with the project teams and encouraging them to identify and implement strategies for addressing ongoing issues. The framework therefore proposed an essentially qualitative approach to evaluation data gathering, analysis and reporting. An iterative process of consultation, reporting, presentation and feedback at key stages in the formative evaluation was proposed.
- 3.1.3 The framework included two main sources of evaluation data – documentary evidence and key respondents. Documentary evidence included the following sources:
- JISC reports from previous MLE activities
 - Documentary outputs from 01/01
 - SWaNI project bids
 - JISC and project websites
 - Project interim progress reports
 - Notes of programme meetings
- 3.1.4 The framework identified a number of stakeholders with direct or indirect involvement in the SWaNI programme and interest in the programme experiences and outcomes. From these stakeholders, key evaluation respondents were identified as those who may have information, ideas and experiences relevant to the overall aim of the evaluation:

³ Managed Learning Environments Steering Group Report, JISC, March 2002, available at <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

⁴ M Oliver et al, 'The EFFECTS Evaluation Framework: a transferable model for collaborative projects', BP ELT report no. 7, 1999, University of North London, available at <http://www.unl.ac.uk/tltc.elt.elt7.pdf>

⁵ See <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/elib/papers/tavistock/evaluation-guide/intro.html>

⁶ The formative evaluation framework was published on the JISC website at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/SwaniEF.doc

Key Category	Description
A	SWaNI programme manager, project leaders, project partners and other project workers
B	Lead institution senior manager ideally with a strategic role in the provision of information systems, support and management within their institution
C	Administrative staff who may be involved with the newly interoperable systems within their institution
D	Academic staff who may be involved with the newly interoperable systems within their institution
E	Vendors of the interoperability system technologies
F	Agencies with an over-arching, supportive role

The evaluation methods proposed were designed to capture feedback from these groups of key respondents and hence provide valid information for all the stakeholders in SWaNI.

3.2 Evaluation Objectives

- 3.2.1 Through consultation with the SWaNI Programme Manager it was agreed that a set of specific objectives for the formative evaluation would facilitate the evaluation process, and enhance its relevance for both the individual projects and the programme as a whole. At the same time, the process of evaluating the 01/01 programme was being undertaken by an MLE Evaluation Team, and detailed discussions took place with representatives of this team on the scope of the SWaNI formative evaluation, as well as common themes and synergies with 01/01. Initial themes and issues which formed the basis of the evaluation objectives were also raised and discussed in telephone interviews with the project managers.
- 3.2.2 A set of nine specific objectives for the formative evaluation was established:
1. To identify the project management activities and systems that are most effective in achieving project objectives
 2. To explore factors influencing effective relationships with vendors and how these relationships may be sustained
 3. To explore the models of consortium working used in the projects and evaluate their effectiveness
 4. To identify and explore the organisational factors that are influential in determining the impact of project deliverables
 5. To identify the aspects of programme management that most contribute to project activities
 6. To investigate the overall impact and potential benefits of the SWaNI programme
 7. To explore the extent to which cultural differences influence the achievements of the SWaNI programme
 8. To establish the lessons that can be learned from the SWaNI programme with relevance to the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme and for future interoperability initiatives
 9. To suggest themes, indicators and methods that may inform the summative evaluation of the SWaNI programme

3.3 Interviews

3.3.1 In addition to regular informal contact, structured interviews with SWaNI project leaders and managers (Key Respondents Category A) took place at two key stages – at the start of the evaluation process to discuss and agree initial issues of interest, and towards the end of the programme to discuss experiences and to identify any ongoing issues with regard to implementation and dissemination. Interviews were also conducted with JISC MLE Programme Managers. With one exception, representatives from all the vendor organisations were interviewed during the process (Category E). Interviews were also held with representatives from various support agencies (Category F), including the relevant JISC Regional Support Centres (RSCs), the Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards (CETIS), the Scottish and Welsh Funding Councils, and the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU). Most interviews were conducted over the telephone, by prior appointment. Some took place face to face. After the evaluation visits (see 3.4 below), some follow-up telephone interviews were held with consortium members and senior managers. A total of 40 structured interviews were conducted over the course of the formative evaluation as follows:

Key Respondent	No. of interviews
Category A (Project staff etc)	22
Category E (Vendors)	10
Category F (Support agencies)	8
Total	40

3.3.2 On the basis of the programme and project documentation and the evaluation objectives, a set of interview schedules was devised for each of the categories of key respondent. Open questions were used to elicit constructive views, ideas and experiences, and respondents were encouraged to be frank and open in their opinions. In order to maintain validity and reliability, the same basic schedule was used for each category of key respondents at each stage of the programme. A full list of interview schedules is included in Appendix D.

3.4 Evaluation visits

3.4.1 A series of evaluation visits to each of the project lead institutions took place in March 2003. The main objectives of the evaluation visits were as follows:

- To explore project management activities and experiences
- To discuss project relationships with vendors
- To gauge institutional and programme support for the project
- To explore project impact and unexpected benefits
- To discuss the project's effect on institutional strategy and operational activities.

3.4.2 A proposed visit schedule was sent to each project leader in advance of the visit, including meetings with the whole project team, representatives from academic and administrative staff in the lead institution (Key Respondent Categories C and D), and representatives from college senior management (Key Respondent Category B). With some minor adjustments, each visit followed the same broad schedule. To maintain validity and to gain maximum benefit to the evaluation process from the visits, one evaluator asked the questions while the other noted the responses. The evaluation visit schedule and list of questions is included in Appendix E.

3.5 Programme Meetings

3.5.1 Given that this was a formative evaluation, aimed at enhancing the ongoing experiences of the project teams and the overall achievement of the programme, regular feedback to

project teams on emerging evaluation issues was central to the process. Ongoing evaluation findings were discussed with the project teams, vendors and other representatives at the three SWaNI Programme Meetings in December 2002 (Glasgow), March 2003 (Cardiff) and May 2003 (Edinburgh), and with the 01/01 project teams at their Programme Meeting held in Belfast in February 2002.

- 3.5.2 At the Cardiff Programme Meeting in March, the evaluators gave brief feedback on the main issues reported by projects and vendors arising from vendor involvement in SWaNI. This was followed by a meeting with vendors, led by the Programme Manager, which discussed and made recommendations on issues of communicating with vendors, clarification of intentions and programme scope, and overcoming constraints on vendors working with JISC funded projects.
- 3.5.3 An exercise on articulating project outcomes of interest with a view to understanding theories of change was also undertaken with project teams at the March Programme Meeting. This 'History of the Future' exercise was based on the approach adopted by EDNER (2002) and was intended to help project teams with:

... 'surfacing' the assumptions embedded in their own work. The point of carrying out such an exercise is to reveal such assumptions, so that differences within and around the project team can be aired, consensus improved and the internal logic of the project enhanced.

Feedback on the exercise was provided to project teams informally after the meeting, and formally at the subsequent Programme Meeting in Edinburgh in May 2003.

3.6 Data Analysis and Reporting

- 3.6.1 Regular reports to programme management were made throughout the formative evaluation process. Operational and programme management issues arising through discussion, interviews and the evaluation visits were signalled to the Programme Manager for action as appropriate. The SWaNI Steering Group received regular feedback on the ongoing results of the formative evaluation throughout the programme, including an Interim Report and presentation in April 2003.
- 3.6.2 A summary transcript was produced of each interview, of the evaluation visits and of the evaluation sessions at the three Programme Meetings. Transcripts included notes and comments from the interviewers and evaluators. A colour coding system was used to differentiate in the transcripts between the comments and responses of the interviewees and the methodological or contextual comments of the evaluators.
- 3.6.3 The transcripts and interim project reports were then coded according to the coding frame outlined in the evaluation framework for clarifying the meaning and scope of the key themes that were identified for analysis, using qualitative analysis software, NVivo⁷. A process of co-coding was used to try to ensure objectivity, and to maximise the potential usefulness of the data. In the course of coding the data, as is to be expected with a qualitative approach, other previously unidentified themes and issues emerged, and were entered into the coding frame as 'free nodes'. The final coding frame is included in Appendix F. The Findings section (Section 4) of this report is a summation of these themes and issues as they relate to the evaluation objectives expressed in the evaluation framework. Words and phrases which have come directly from respondents or project reports are noted in quotation marks in the text.
- 3.6.4 The commentary section that follows the findings offers a critique of the evaluation process, and contextual observations on the findings. This contextualisation includes relating SWaNI to the JISC MLE programme as a whole. The report concludes with a number of recommendations arising from the formative evaluation process. These recommendations relate to generic issues which are then targeted specifically for future projects, for the sector, for vendor organisations and for the JISC.

⁷ NVivo is available from <http://www.qsr.com.au/products/nvivo.html>

4 Findings

4.1 Project management activities and systems

- 4.1.1 There were a number of different project management models in operation across the seven SWaNI projects. Each model has implications for project success in terms of effective reporting, clarity of communication lines, progress against targets, project drivers, benefits and institutional ownership.
- 4.1.2 Most projects were managed by an individual member of staff in the lead institution on internal secondment. This was usually as an additionality to his (there were no female project managers in SWaNI) normal post, with little evidence of remission from normal duties in real terms. Banff & Buchan tried but failed to appoint an external project manager for the project. Following some internal difficulties, the Perth project appointed an external consultant as project manager some four months into the project.
- 4.1.3 All teams had a nominated lead contact, who in some cases had the role of project director overseeing the work of an appointed project manager undertaking day-to-day operational issues. In all cases, the project director/lead contact had regular, ongoing involvement with the project activities. All projects also appointed a Project Board. In most cases, the Project Board seems to have had detailed involvement with operational issues.
- 4.1.4 Some projects were tightly managed, with team members working to specific work packages and reporting on progress against tasks and objectives (notably the Perth project following the appointment of an external project manager). Others, such as Menai and Falkirk, seemed to be more loosely based on apparently collegiate and collaborative principles, which raised issues about overall control and responsibility for the project. This was particularly problematic for the Falkirk project which involved a large consortium of college partners. The Ystrad Mynach project was led nominally by a college representative but was effectively managed by one of the project partners from a vendor organisation, which raises questions about the significance and impact of the project on internal college operations.
- 4.1.5 There was a general recognition of the need to scope projects from the start in terms of aims and objectives, and technical specifications. Teams acknowledged retrospectively that some projects were not specified sufficiently tightly and robustly, and that some may have been too ambitious in what they set out to achieve in their project bids and initial plans. Many projects acknowledge spending too much time at the start getting staff in place and up to speed, and wrestling with the specification of what they were trying to do. There seems to have been little proactivity on the part of the projects following bid acceptance to enable them to 'hit the ground running'.
- 4.1.6 Project management in SWaNI has been a steep learning curve for most of those involved. There was frequent reference to 'naivety' in the managers' descriptions of some of their actions and inactions, particularly early in the lifetime of the projects. This included underestimating the time commitment for project management activities, the level of technical knowledge needed, and the level of institutional commitment required to support ongoing project activities and promote implementation. Part of the learning curve for project managers and teams has been coming to terms with a new vocabulary and terminology. Issues of semantic confusion and differing terminological interpretations have arisen, particularly with regard to use cases and application profiles.
- 4.1.7 One of the keys to successful project management in SWaNI was identifying and making early contact with the 'right people' in the institution, ensuring that the appropriate college departments and activities were represented on the project team, and that the Project Board had the experience and knowledge necessary to make an informed contribution to the ongoing success of the project.
- 4.1.8 Most projects reported that they held regular project meetings, with varying degrees of formality in terms of management and documentation. Project Board meetings were generally more formal. Projects have differing views with regard to the perceived impact

and importance of regular project reporting. Some found it an unnecessary burden, while others found the discipline of setting out progress against targets and reflecting on the process very useful. Videoconferencing was used with varying success for project meetings, with most respondents acknowledging that the use of VC is key to multi-agency projects covering large geographical areas. The Sir Gar project particularly tried to use VC to encourage vendors to attend project meetings.

- 4.1.9 Most project managers noted that they had learned a great deal about managing projects and people through SWaNI. It was felt that this would stand them in good stead professionally, and that their organisations would also benefit from the management skills and experience they had acquired. Some senior managers expressed awareness that while short term expediency in some instances required the engagement of an external manager to oversee the project, the host organisation and indeed the sector as a whole was benefiting from the development of project management skills through this programme.

4.2 Vendor relationships

- 4.2.1 The SWaNI programme highlighted many issues with regard to working with commercial vendor organisations on developmental projects. A total of eleven vendor organisations were involved with the seven SWaNI projects (see Appendix G). Many of the project teams established good working relationships with their vendors in the course of the programme, and acknowledge that much was learnt about working with commercial organisations. Others experienced difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships with their vendor organisations, which had a detrimental effect on the success of some of the projects. SWaNI has highlighted varying degrees of vendor openness and commitment to participating in a community of developers with a view to moving the whole sector forward. At one end of the spectrum, Fretwell Downing effectively ceased communicating with the Llandrillo project within which they were a key vendor, and the project was unable to achieve the intended interoperability. At the other end, Scottish Ufl (learndirect scotland) provided dedicated technical expertise to ensure the successful interoperation between its Skillnet system and the Banff & Buchan College intranet.
- 4.2.2 One key aspect that developmental projects and programmes need to be aware of is that of the drivers involved and risk factors faced by commercial organisations. The main drivers identified by vendors for getting involved with SWaNI included responding to customer need, and building and maintaining relationships in the marketplace. Some of the vendor companies have their origins in research and development in higher education, and are explicitly interested in pursuing research. However, commercial considerations are their fundamental driver, and some vendors are therefore reluctant to commit to speculative short term developments with potentially limited wider market applicability. Vendor relationships may also have been influenced by wider market forces outwith the scope of the SWaNI programme.
- 4.2.3 There is a perceived 'kudos' among vendors in being involved with JISC projects in general. It was candidly acknowledged by some that they could not afford not to be seen to be involved in such development work. However, they were risking their reputation in the marketplace if their commitment to the projects was perceived as inadequate. Some noted that they were also aware of competitor organisations 'sitting on the sidelines' while they themselves were committing time and resources to developing products which would then reside in the public domain.
- 4.2.4 As with internal project management, there was an issue for project teams with regard to communicating with the 'right people' in vendor organisations. Key respondents from other groups (eg programme management and the support agencies) often had a different perspective, from their communication with management, on the extent to which vendor organisations were committed to SWaNI than was apparent to project teams on the ground. There was therefore a growing recognition of the need to ensure that appropriate levels of vendor commitment to project development work at strategic level

were reflected in the support that the project vendor contacts were able to bring to bear in terms of time, resources and capacity. Some vendors acknowledged that they were more likely to respond to being chased, harried, hassled, chivvied and leant on than to being asked nicely.

4.3 Consortium working

- 4.3.1 Three of the SWaNI projects were formally consortium based. The Falkirk consortium was formed from the Scottish Technical Users Group (STUG). The Sir Gar consortium drew on an existent consortium in South West Wales. The Perth consortium called on colleges within the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHI), along with a neighbouring college with corresponding VLE/SIS interoperability requirements. The Ystrad Mynach project was based on a partnership agreement with a private company within a wider consortium. Each of these consortia predated SWaNI, and was founded on shared interest, partnership working and/or geographical proximity.
- 4.3.2 Agreements between the project partners were based mainly on the delineation of roles outlined in the project bid documents, or by work packages derived from the project plans. None of the consortia seems to have drawn up a formal SWaNI-specific agreement. It was noted that some of the commitments expressed in bid documents had not apparently been signed off by project partners, and there are some questions over the validity in real terms of the formal letters of commitment from consortium partners.
- 4.3.3 There was general consensus among consortium partners that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts, and that consortium working leads to a significant level of sharing and collaboration on the ground. In some cases, this collaboration extended beyond project teams to other sections of the organisations. This was particularly relevant to technical staff, and to teaching staff in the Sir Gar consortium which was concerned with developing learning objects for shared access.

4.4 Organisational factors

- 4.4.1 Senior management in all of the SWaNI project lead institutions confirmed their support for the project activities and outcomes. In some cases, SWaNI project aims were explicitly underpinned by organisational strategic objectives, and project activities were enhanced by other ongoing strategic developments within the organisation. In some colleges, notably Llandrillo, there was significant senior management enthusiasm for and understanding of the potential of technology to enhance business processes and the role of the SWaNI projects in that wider context.
- 4.4.2 However, strategic support for SWaNI project outcomes did not always translate into general operational application in terms of staff activities and the learner experience. Senior managers at Ystrad Mynach expressed reservations about the contractual implications for staff of the learning system proposed by the project. Staff at Coleg Menai had misgivings about the pedagogical implications in operational terms of a system designed to generate statistical information for which there is great enthusiasm at strategic level because of Funding Council requirements.
- 4.4.3 Levels of maturity with regard to VLE operation also impacted on the extent to which learning and teaching staff were to perceive benefits of SWaNI. There were examples of considerable and fruitful efforts by project teams to engage positively with learning and teaching staff and enhance curriculum development, notably Banff & Buchan, Perth, Llandrillo and Sir Gar. There were also indications in some institutions of limited understanding by staff of the implications of SWaNI for interoperability and elearning, and little evidence across the board of embedding VLE access in the mainstream curriculum.
- 4.4.4 While respondents were generally aware that JISC project funding is designated for action research with sector-wide benefits and not for mission critical operations within individual institutions, this does not always sit well in the results-oriented context of FE. Most project institutions were eager to implement the results of their SWaNI project in

organisational systems. On the one hand, this gives the SWaNI programme an urgency and an organisational imperative in terms of project deliverables. On the other hand, project teams with an eye only on the deliverable product were less interested in highlighting and reflecting on the development process in research terms.

4.5 Programme management

- 4.5.1 This objective covers the specific role of the SWaNI Programme Manager as well as the support available to projects from JISC agencies and other supporting organisations.
- 4.5.2 There was generally warm appreciation of the role and activities of the SWaNI Programme Manager, including the responses from the vendors. Some project managers admitted to having been overwhelmed by the volume of programme information at the start ('death by email'), which was possibly due to a lack of experience in sorting and prioritising information, and a concern to 'get things right' in what was the first experience of JISC project involvement for many. Because of this, the role of Programme Manager in SWaNI was perhaps more 'hands-on' and interventionist than with other JISC MLE programmes. Much of the Programme Manager's time was spent trouble-shooting, chasing projects and others for reports and updates, and passing on information about potentially interesting activities and reports from elsewhere. Project teams also seemed to need regular reassurance that they were 'doing the right thing', and that their projects were not failing even if their initial objectives were not being fully met.
- 4.5.3 Project teams generally acknowledged that they should have made more use of additional supports available to them. The teams seemed initially to require a significant amount of direction, and lacked the time and confidence to be proactive in searching support for themselves. There was very little horizontal interaction between the projects outwith the scheduled Programme Meetings, even those in close geographical proximity to one another. As the programme progressed, however, there was more evidence of engagement with the CETIS Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and some contact with the English interoperability pilots on which many of these projects were building. There seems to have been an early expectation that JISC and CETIS would be more interventionist in terms of direct contact and negotiation with the vendors on behalf of the projects. Some projects felt that once the colleges had specified their use cases, CETIS should have dealt directly with the vendors on how these can be implemented rather than relying on individual colleges/projects to negotiate procedures.
- 4.5.4 As the programme progressed, projects were able to view contact with CETIS and the SIGs as a huge opportunity to connect with a larger community, to learn from the knowledge of experts, and to overcome perceived isolation in terms of technical awareness as well as geographical location. Projects generally viewed CETIS as an immensely valuable source of technical expertise and advice. There were indications that some project staff and vendors alike felt overawed by the volume and content of some of the technical documentation they encountered through SWaNI, and by the volume of emails about CETIS SIG events. There are also indications that working with CETIS in SWaNI has helped colleges with other work and projects, and broadened horizons with regard to what colleges can achieve and the contribution that the FE sector can make in the wider context of MLE development.
- 4.5.5 The project websites were of variable quality. Some improved considerably through the lifetime of the programme in terms of the project information and links that were made available online. The Perth project made particularly effective use of the project website as a means of communicating with the consortium partners and the Project Board.

4.6 Impact and benefits

- 4.6.1 The impact and benefits of the SWaNI programme have been considered in terms of national impact on the FE sector in the three countries, of the impact on the project institutions, and of the individual impact on project managers and other project staff.

- 4.6.2 In terms of the impact on and benefits to the sector, it is apparent that SWaNI has further facilitated the development of national collaborative networks and consortia. The programme has also helped to develop a potential process for sector-wide negotiation with vendor companies, and has prompted some vendors to make generic improvements to their products.
- 4.6.3 For many of the SWaNI project institutions, this was their first formal involvement with a JISC-funded programme. This experience has therefore raised awareness and opened opportunities for networking that can inform and have a wider impact on institutional strategy and organisational effectiveness. SWaNI also offered institutions a strategic opportunity to get involved with vendors with a view to improving the impact of the vendor product on business efficiency. Some institutions reported that they had been able to develop a more informed and productive relationship in general with their vendor organisations.
- 4.6.4 Some institutions specifically highlighted the role of SWaNI in helping to build a community of practice. Participating in the programme has helped to develop a critical mass of knowledge and expertise which generates confidence to bid for further projects. Participation in SWaNI has also facilitated the exploration in some institutions of synergies between different programmes, strands and activities. Some follow-up commercial commissions have also been awarded on the basis of SWaNI project work. SWaNI has also generated enthusiasm and raised institutional awareness of the potential use of technology to enhance learning, teaching and assessment and improve business efficiency.
- 4.6.5 In the course of the programme, there was little indication of specific interest in ongoing SWaNI project activities by the rest of the sector was particularly interested, or of wide uptake of the dissemination information available on the project websites. However, as the programme neared completion, many project teams were involved in disseminating their project activities and products through flyers, seminars and conference presentations. These included SWaNI presentations at JISC RSC events in Northern Ireland and Wales, and at some CETIS SIG events. It was recognised that to be effective, dissemination of SWaNI outcomes and experiences needed to be targeted and context-specific, including taking account of geographical distance, perceived sectoral relevance, and product-specific interoperability issues. Materials and outcomes for dissemination from SWaNI dissemination can relate to generic project experiences as well as specific technical outputs, and emphasise the organisational benefits that should accrue from seamless and secure systems interoperability.
- 4.6.6 There is little evidence yet of SWaNI project activities impacting significantly on the staff and learner communities in the organisations. However, most projects are aware of the need to enlist the support of 'champions' and early adopters on the staff to help promote the benefits of SWaNI in particular and interoperability in general.
- 4.6.7 Many SWaNI project managers and team members commented that the programme had provided significant individual benefits to them in terms of the experience and expertise gained, particularly technical knowledge and project management experience. SWaNI had also provided opportunities to develop a network of national contacts and expand individual as well as institutional spheres of influence.

4.7 Cultural differences

- 4.7.1 Findings in this context relate not only to national and regional cultural differences, but also to differences in working practices and institutional drivers between the various organisations and sectors involved.
- 4.7.2 There is no doubt, from the perspective of all the key respondent groups, that SWaNI has advanced the JISC's understanding of the FE sector. This includes awareness of FE management requirements, of the issues involved in working with many and various awarding and accrediting bodies, and the varied learner profiles and learner requirements in FE. It has also highlighted a fundamental issue with regard to

speculative project work. FE colleges do not generally have much spare capacity to devote to research projects with no guaranteed business benefit in operational terms. It was suggested that in fact working practices in FE have more in common with vendors than with HE, particularly in terms of commercial drivers and results orientation (although there was criticism from one project that a vendor organisation, unlike the FE staff, refused to work over a weekend!).

- 4.7.3 There is a perception that there may have been some naivety in CETIS at the start of SWaNI about FE management requirements, specifically the need for interoperability between multiple assessment and certification agencies. Some of the projects were critical that CETIS seemed to be driving the standards agenda more through research interests than by needs-based intervention.
- 4.7.4 SWaNI was explicitly designed to explore interoperability issues in three specific national contexts. The timing of national sectoral developments did impact significantly on the scope of project activities, particularly the ongoing procurement of a national student information system for Northern Ireland (NICIS) but also the launch of a national lifelong learning record for Wales (LLWR). In Scotland, each FE college had been awarded funding for the procurement of a VLE in 2000.
- 4.7.5 There may have been an expectation that SWaNI project institutions would collaborate with one another programme-wide on the basis of a shared cultural understanding. In effect, there was little in the way of inter-cultural communication on the 'Celtic fringe' outside the scheduled Programme Meetings. It was not until the March Programme Meeting in Cardiff that there was any real evidence of informal cross-project collaboration and sharing. Within the three countries themselves, there are marked differences in the apparent levels of collaboration between colleges. Two of the three projects based in Scotland were consortium-based and demonstrated a high level of inter-institutional collaboration. The interconnectivity of FE institutions in Northern Ireland is exemplified in the joint procurement of the NICIS. There is a successful consortium of colleges in South West Wales. However, there is little evidence of any strong collaborative links between institutions in South and North Wales, and indeed suggestions to the contrary of perceived barriers to communication and collaboration that are not simply determined by geography. There was also a strong suggestion from respondents of competitiveness and commercial protectiveness between some institutions in North Wales that lie in relatively close proximity to one another.

4.8 Lessons for MLE and other interoperability initiatives

- 4.8.1 From meetings with the 01/01 programme management and evaluation team, and the presentation and discussion at the 01/01 Programme Meeting in Belfast, it was apparent that the objectives derived in the SWaNI evaluation framework were also relevant to the 01/01 projects. Two key issues that emerged from discussion with 01/01 were the implications of interoperability projects for learning and teaching, and the potential distortion of organisational business processes. The implications of these synergies and emerging issues for the MLE programme and other JISC interoperability initiatives are addressed in the Commentary section below.
- 4.8.2 There was a general acknowledgement from the vendors, support agencies and JISC staff who were involved in the English interoperability pilots as well as SWaNI that the management of programme activities and dissemination of information was much improved with SWaNI. It is also apparent that many SWaNI project institutions were keen to build on the experience and expertise gained through SWaNI, both through the in-house development of systems and processes, and through other externally funded projects and programmes.

4.9 Summative evaluation themes

In the course of the programme, the Steering Group reviewed its initial plans for a SWaNI-specific summative evaluation. It was noted that the formative evaluation process had not only provided information and insights relating to ongoing programme

activities, but had also highlighted a number of issues and themes that could merit further exploration and evaluation in the context of a wider review of JISC MLE developments. This would obviate the need for a summative evaluation of SWaNI. The ongoing themes and issues are discussed in relation to SWaNI in the Commentary section below.

5 Commentary

These comments relate to the opinions and views expressed by the respondents during the formative evaluation process, and to observations made by Glenaffric Ltd. They are organised in terms of what the evaluators consider to be the key areas of interest for MLE programmes that emerged through SWaNI:

- Project management structures and processes
- Programme management and JISC support
- Developing relationships with vendors
- Organisational factors
- Impact of the formative evaluation

5.1 Project management structures and processes

- 5.1.1 Many of the SWaNI project managers emphasised the development of project management skills as a key benefit of their involvement with SWaNI. While it was acknowledged that it may be necessary for reasons of short term pragmatism to buy in external project management skills, there is a recognised need to nurture and develop these skills within FE in general, and SWaNI clearly played an important role in this. While this development is indisputably welcome, it does indicate that project management experience at the start of SWaNI was in some cases inadequate for the task in hand. The short programme timescale led to problems with recruiting external project staff. Perhaps also due to the short timescale, most project boards seem to have concentrated on operational issues rather than strategic direction.
- 5.1.2 Project teams need a balance of people with experience, institutional strategic influence and technical expertise. If the projects had been encouraged to undertake a skills audit at the start of the project, this might have highlighted some staff development and personnel needs. Similarly, undertaking a risk analysis might have obviated some of the difficulties and delays that were experienced. For example, problems relating to vendor commitment could have been foreseen and exit strategies amended accordingly, and project teams could have been better prepared to take positive messages from apparent situations of failure. Encouraging project managers to revisit their project aims and objectives in the light of experience might have injected more realism into some of the overly ambitious project plans, and promoted more ownership of the project aims and objectives on an ongoing basis.
- 5.1.3 Project teams generally acknowledge that they should have done more to contact the English interoperability pilot institutions, and to communicate with other SWaNI projects. There is an obvious issue here about the appropriate scoping of projects and the allocation of project time and resources at the bidding stage. There is also a more subtle issue about the extent to which projects were able and interested to learn from the experiences of others, vis-à-vis the need to own the experience and hence the understanding of project challenges for themselves.

5.2 Programme management and JISC support

- 5.2.1 There is general agreement that the SWaNI programme helped to maintain the momentum for JISC of positive engagement with the FE sector that was developed in particular through the English interoperability pilots, not just by extending the geographical scope but also by enhancing the qualitative nature of the engagement.

However, there is a residual sense of differing perceptions about what the programme was actually trying to achieve. For the project teams, SWaNI presented an opportunity to develop particular processes or tools that were required for operational purposes. For JISC, SWaNI presented an opportunity to explore those processes in the more abstract interests of academic research, and in the wider context of the MLE programme as a whole. This highlights an emerging conflict at the nub of JISC's activities with FE with regard to project funding aimed at moving the whole sector forward being applied in respect of mission critical operations within FE colleges.

- 5.2.2 Project staff and vendor representatives frequently commented on feeling pressures of time in SWaNI. These included references to time spent at programme meetings, often involving significant travel, and the time pressures caused by vendor involvement in multiple projects. Some projects felt that they never recovered from underestimating the lead-in time required for effective project management at the start. Most were unable to carry out any useful implementation and testing of project outputs by the time they were required to submit their formal final project reports. It was suggested from a number of quarters that JISC programme timescales should be more sensitive to the pressure spots of the academic year in FE, and the long-term developmental programmes of vendor organisations.
- 5.2.3 JISC programme information makes explicit recognition of the need for interaction and connectivity between MLE programmes and other initiatives concerned with the use of technology for learning and teaching and learning resource management. Links between the MLE programme and the X4L and DiVLE programmes were seen to be particularly relevant. SWaNI project staff who participated in CETIS SIG events were able to make contact with representatives from other programmes, and representatives from X4L projects and the 01/01 programme were invited to SWaNI Programme Meetings. However, there was little cross-project discussion at these meetings, and a missed opportunity at SWaNI Programme Meetings to update projects on other related JISC activities. Not only would this have been a useful dissemination exercise for JISC, it would have helped the projects understand and appreciate the significance of their specific activities in 'the bigger picture'.
- 5.2.4 One of the key findings of the 7/99 projects was how little is understood or documented in institutions about their current data flows and organisational relationships. Building on this key finding, SWaNI employed the use case methodology to ensure the development of meaningful application profiles for each of the projects. While the project teams generally understood and appreciated the usefulness and appropriateness of this process, there was a grumbling perception that the requirement for use cases and application profiles was a surprise that was sprung on projects. It was seen to a large extent as an academic exercise for JISC that suited JISC's purposes and timescales, but impacted adversely on ongoing project activities. There may be many reasons behind this perception, including existing project management problems and delays, a fear of the unknown and technically challenging, and an unwillingness to admit lack of understanding and seek help. Nonetheless, perhaps JISC and its agencies need to be more circumspect and overtly supportive when introducing apparently complex and abstract methodologies to project teams.
- 5.2.5 In the main, the role of the SWaNI Programme Manager was interventionist rather than consultative, involving more operational trouble-shooting than strategic advice. The projects were exploring new and untested ideas and technologies, the project teams and institutions were relatively inexperienced in managing JISC-funded projects, the vendor community in SWaNI was wide and generating a number of significant challenges, so the Programme Manager had to carry out a lot of chasing, reassuring and mediation on a day-to-day basis. The SWaNI Programme Manager was also close to some of the projects in terms of physical location, and close to them all in terms of direct understanding of the FE context in which they were operating. This understanding was demonstrably of considerable advantage to the JISC as it continued to develop an effective working relationship with the FE sector through SWaNI. However, remoteness

from the hub and the critical mass of JISC MLE developments presented logistical and operational challenges for the SWaNI Programme Manager.

- 5.2.6 Given that JISC's mission is 'supporting further and higher education in the use of information and communications technology', it is surprising that more use is not made of videoconferencing for regular communication between and among colleagues who are located at some distance from one another. Videoconferencing was not always available for Steering Group meetings either, and not always used effectively to ensure that those joining the meeting from remote sites were fully engaged in proceedings.

5.3 Developing relationships with vendors

- 5.3.1 There is no doubt, from the responses of all key respondents including the vendors themselves, that SWaNI helped to consolidate and enhance working relationships not just between the colleges and their system vendors, but also between the vendors and JISC. To some extent, the strains on vendor relationships with JISC came to a head through SWaNI. The Cardiff meeting provided a forum for the airing and sharing of grievances and concerns, after which a shared understanding of the organisational needs and drivers of the vendors, the colleges and the JISC seems to have been reached. The proposed establishment of a vendors' forum and ongoing efforts to engage vendor interest in the activities of the CETIS SIGs may help consolidate positive working relationships between vendors, educational institutions and JISC.
- 5.3.2 Vendor organisation representatives are keen to point out that they are a fairly close-knit community, and that they talk to one another about their activities and experiences with JISC-funded programmes. The extent to which this communication results more in increased frustration or fruitful collaboration is not certain. There is a possible tension between the desire to share in a community of experts and the drive for business success in an increasingly challenging commercial context.

5.4 Organisational factors

- 5.4.1 It is apparent from SWaNI that most projects have taken place in what Boys has defined as a 'parallel' or 'autonomous' approach to organisational change. Developments have taken place in parallel to other initiatives, without explicitly defined outcomes for 'joined-upness', or have concentrated in one independent area of institutional development⁸.
- 5.4.2 Most projects were planned, developed and implemented on a small scale within the institutions, with little real analysis and cognisance of the place of the project in overall organisational strategic direction. It was apparent in some instances that there is a marked disjunction between strategic planning and operational reality with regard to MLE development and implementation. Administrative staff were interested in project activities and their potential, but seemed generally reluctant to change their current, usually paper-based, systems for internal audit and quality control. Some senior managers themselves, while highlighting the strategic importance of MLE development and the place of this in the published organisational strategic plans, did not seem to have made the conceptual leap required to apply this strategy to their thinking on staff flexible working and contractual arrangements.
- 5.4.3 That said, some of the SWaNI institutions are quite advanced in their thinking about e-business, and the strategic significance of technology management. Others are using SWaNI as a lever to encourage more business process streamlining and reduce the paper audit trail.
- 5.4.4 Levels of maturity in using a VLE varied across the SWaNI institutions, as did the extent to which project teams were concerned with the pedagogical implications of what they were trying to achieve, and engagement with learning and teaching staff in project activities and outcomes. There is little apparent use of college VLEs in mainstream

⁸ See Jos Boys, 'Managed Learning Environments, joined up systems and the problems of organisational change, a JISC report, March 2002, http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=mle_related_joined

learning and teaching, and significant resistance from some quarters to the implementation of technical solutions without due cognisance of the human and social effects of the technology. Some of the SWaNI project teams engaged learning and teaching staff directly in project activities. Others were set apart from core business activities, and were developing technical solutions to problems that would have only marginal application. Others still were developing technical solutions to mission-critical problems without engaging or consulting the core learning and teaching staff who would be involved in their implementation. There are clear implications here for both project management and the operationalisation of organisational strategic thinking.

- 5.4.5 SWaNI interoperability initiatives highlighted a key dilemma for the sector as a whole in terms of the potentially detrimental effect on core FE business of the imposition of statistical evidence-gathering processes.

5.5 Impact of the formative evaluation

- 5.5.1 The process of formative evaluation was designed to add value to the project activities and programme outcomes by concentrating on the 'softer' aspects of the experience for the project teams and programme management. Project staff were initially uncertain about the role of the evaluators, and some assumed that the process would be one of external auditing and verification, a 'valuation' in the sense of 'putting a value on something'. Considerable efforts were made to ensure that project staff could understand and engage positively with a process of 'e-valuation' in the sense of 'bringing forth the inherent value of something'.
- 5.5.2 There was a significant amount of ongoing feedback and iteration in the course of the programme between the evaluators and the key players in SWaNI, including project staff, vendor representatives, support agencies and programme management. This included semi-formal interviews and visits, presentations at Programme Meetings and to the Steering Group, and informal discussions. The extent to which issues initially raised through this process were aired and discussed more fully in the course of the programme suggests that the formative evaluation process had a considerable impact on the ongoing development of programme activities and project outcomes.
- 5.5.3 Feedback from the project teams indicates that they appreciated the opportunity provided by the formative evaluation process to stand back and reflect at key stages on their project activities. The process had an enabling role, encouraging open and frank exchanges of views among project team members. The review of the 7/99 JISC-funded projects about MLE development in HE⁹ notes that project teams in the main had more technical expertise than project management experience and so tended to be solutions-focused rather than reflective on, or analytical of, general development processes. The formative evaluation process in SWaNI actively encouraged reflection on an individual and team basis. Individual project team members often had different perceptions of what the project was trying to achieve, and formative discussions and team exercises are seen to have enhanced cohesive progress towards project outcomes and achievements.
- 5.5.4 Feedback on the 'History of the Future' exercise was mixed, but generally very positive. Project staff who did not like the exercise were generally those who did not have a clear understanding of what their project was trying to do. There were suggestions that the exercise should have been carried out with project teams at an earlier stage in the programme, then revisited. This could have generated greater clarity about individual and collective project roles and responsibilities, and overall project aims and achievements.
- 5.5.5 More emphasis should have been placed on providing written feedback to the project teams on the evaluation process. The feedback discussion in a scheduled session with project leaders following the evaluation visits did not provide projects teams with a formal

⁹ Boys, Jos (2002:2), Learning Lessons from MLE Development Projects: a review of the 7/99 JISC-funded projects, August 2002, http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=mle_799_review

note that they could use internally to highlight their ongoing project achievements. The importance of this external validation to project teams was overlooked by the evaluators.

- 5.5.6 Given the complementarity of the formative evaluation process and operational programme management activities, perhaps more effort should have been made to formalise feedback mechanisms and dovetail approaches and methods. In particular, the programme management visits and evaluation visits should have been planned and co-ordinated to minimise impact on project time and to maximise the benefit of both visits for the projects.

6 Recommendations

This report reflects the extent to which SWaNI is able to demonstrate the implementation of many of the recommendations of the March 2002 MLE Steering Group Report, and hence the ongoing development of JISC MLE activities for the sector. It also emphasises the specific validity for the FE sector of previously published JISC recommendations for organisational change¹⁰. Building on these previous initiatives, the formative evaluation of the SWaNI programme has given rise to a number of recommendations for the key stakeholders.

These recommendations are organised generically as follows:

- Capacity
- Communication and collaboration
- Cultural change

Specific recommendations for the key stakeholder categories are then summarised in tabular form.

6.1 Capacity

- 6.1.1 Staff need to develop their skills in understanding and interpreting calls for projects, producing realistic and meaningful project bids, developing project plans with appropriate work packages, activities, milestones and monitoring criteria, writing project reports and providing effective dissemination.
- 6.1.2 Institutions should carry out a realistic appraisal of internal project management skills, and ensure that appropriate time and resources are available for staff engaged in project work.
- 6.1.3 Projects should carry out a skills audit at the start to identify any gaps in the mix and range of skills, knowledge, expertise and organisational influence available.
- 6.1.4 Projects should carry out a risk analysis to identify potential issues affecting project achievement and devise strategies to overcome these.
- 6.1.5 Vendor organisations should ensure that project contacts have the range of skills and expertise needed to contribute effectively to project activities.
- 6.1.6 JISC and its agencies should ensure that appropriate supports and guides are available for project teams when complex technological methods and approaches are introduced.

6.2 Communication and collaboration

- 6.2.1 For all project and programme activities, appropriate, discerning and reasonable use should be made of a range of telecommunication methods, including email, telephone and videoconference.
- 6.2.2 Project plan and consortium agreements should include a clear and coherent model for communication, including communication methods, transport mechanisms, and a forward schedule of meetings.

¹⁰ Boys, Jos (2002:1), op. cit.

- 6.2.3 Projects should be actively encouraged to communicate regularly with one another on a geographical or thematic basis as appropriate.
- 6.2.4 Collaboration within the overarching MLE programme should be encouraged, and awareness raised of the wider context of JISC activities and initiatives.
- 6.2.5 Wider use of the services of various support agencies should be encouraged.
- 6.2.6 Mechanisms should be in place for ongoing dissemination of project activities, both internally and to the wider sector. Projects should receive written feedback on any external appraisal of their ongoing activities to facilitate this.

6.3 Cultural change

- 6.3.1 All stakeholders need to be aware of the context of organisational cultural change in which project activities are taking place, and within which project outcomes will sit.
- 6.3.2 Awareness raising should take place about the various drivers for change, and the impact of change on core business practices.
- 6.3.3 Project outcomes and activities should be linked to organisational strategic aims and objectives.
- 6.3.4 Consideration should be given to the implications of relating project outcomes and activities to ongoing operational developments within organisations.
- 6.3.5 There should be recognition within institutions of the wider benefits of involvement in funded projects beyond the achievement of explicit project outcomes.

6.4 Summary of recommendations

	For projects	For the sector	For vendors	For JISC
Capacity	<p>Undertake skills audit to ensure teams have the right range and mix of expertise</p> <p>Ensure project leaders have appropriate project management skills</p> <p>Undertake project risk analysis and devise risk management strategy</p>	<p>Recognise and support the need for developing project management skills</p> <p>Ensure appropriate time and resources available for project staff</p>	<p>Ensure project contacts have appropriate level of technical understanding</p> <p>Engage as appropriate with JISC and the sector for strategic planning of research and development</p>	<p>Co-ordinate provision of appropriate staff development opportunities in staff development and organisational capacity building</p> <p>Introduce supportive processes and guides to accompany complex technological methodologies</p>
Communication and collaboration	<p>Develop and implement a communications strategy in project plans and consortium agreements</p> <p>Actively seek out collaboration opportunities with other projects and initiatives</p> <p>Make appropriate use of the services of support agencies</p> <p>Consult JISC website and other sources of information regularly to keep informed about relevant developments and initiatives</p>	<p>Encourage greater use of a range of communication methods and techniques within and between organisations</p> <p>Encourage appropriate use of the services of support agencies</p>	<p>Advise and consult internal management as appropriate about issues relating to project activities</p> <p>Support activities of product user groups</p>	<p>Develop and implement a communications strategy for programmes</p> <p>Lead by example to encourage use of audio and video conferencing for programme communication</p> <p>Co-ordinate provision of staff development and implementation of communication strategies</p> <p>Encourage appropriate use of the services of support agencies</p> <p>Broker inter-project collaboration by encouraging geographical or thematic clusters</p> <p>Actively inform projects about other related developments and initiatives</p>
Cultural change	<p>Recognise potential impact of external factors influencing project activities and outcomes by conducting a SWOT analysis</p> <p>Ensure project activities are linked to organisational strategic aims and operational objectives</p> <p>Conduct internal dissemination and keep managers informed of project activities</p>	<p>Raise awareness of various drivers for change, and impact on core business processes</p>	<p>Maintain levels of information about ongoing developments through contact with SIGs</p> <p>Raise awareness within organisation of the national context for products and systems</p>	<p>Continue research, reporting and dissemination of cultural change processes and implications</p>

Appendices

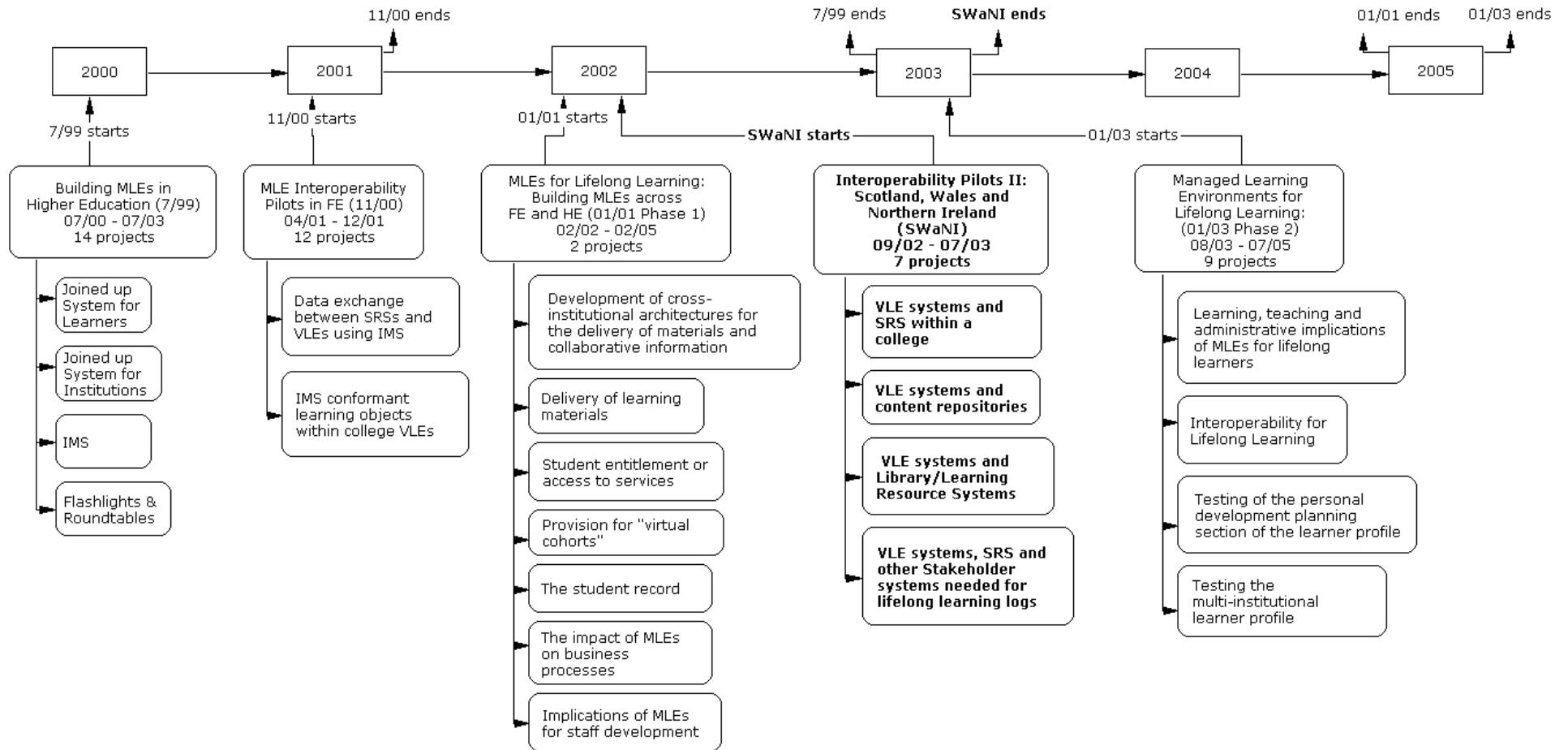
Appendix A – Abbreviations and Acronyms

CETIS	Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards
CRA	Centre for Recording Achievement
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
MLE	Managed Learning Environment
NICIS	Northern Ireland College Information System
RSC	JISC Regional Support Centre
SFEU	Scottish Further Education Unit
SWaNI	Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – Interoperability Pilots Programme II
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
X4L	Exchange for Learning – JISC-funded programme about repurposing content

Appendix B – Summary of Projects

Project Name	Lead Institute	Consortium Members	Scope of Project	Vendors involved
Engaging with Skillnet	Banff & Buchan College		Intranet/Lifelong learning	learndirect scotland, SITS
Scottish Teknical User Group	Falkirk College	Fife, Glenrothes, Stevenson, Stow	MIS/VLE	Teknical, Capita, SITS
MLE Interoperability	Coleg Llandrillo		MIS/VLE exchange validation	Teknical, Fretwell Downing
MLE Interoperability	Coleg Menai		MIS/VLE with Welsh language element	Granada Learnwise, Microcompass
Enigma	Perth College	Lauder, Inverness, Lews Castle, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, UHI	MIS/VLE	WebCT, Granada Learnwise, Capita
South West Wales Interoperability Project	Coleg Sir Gar	Swansea, Pembrokeshire, Neath/Port Talbot, Gorseinon	VLE/Content repository	Granada Learnwise, Fretwell Downing, Teknical, Digital Brain, Intrallect
IL3R	Ystrad Mynach	Learning Industries Ltd	MIS/VLE/Lifelong Learning Record	learndirect, Teknical

Appendix C – MLE Programme Overview



Appendix D – Interview Schedules

Initial telephone interview with project managers

Introduce self and Glenaffric Ltd

Explain scope of Programme evaluation

- Looking for general issues and generalisable messages for JISC
- Formative evaluation – to feed into ongoing progress of programme, and MLE programme
- Not overlapping with project evaluation or interfering with project time and resources

Initial contact to get views on how we can all get the most out of the process.

Workshop on 10 December – what are the issues you want to explore with other projects and with us as evaluators?

Ask for initial views on the following key themes:

- Working with vendors
- Support to projects
- Cultural differences, including national contexts
- Organisational issues, including impact on business processes, organisational change
- Impact on the learner experience, learning and teaching
- Consortium working
- Communication:
 - Internal (institutional) awareness raising
 - External dissemination
 - Inter-project communication and collaboration

Initial telephone interview with vendors

Explain scope and purpose of formative evaluation as above.

Main aim is to identify issues for vendors working with JISC and to suggest strategies for overcoming these to facilitate ongoing work of projects and overall success of programme.

Ask for initial views on key themes as above.

Interview with over-arching agencies

Explain scope and purpose of formative evaluation as above.

1. Please describe the role of your agency in relation to the SWaNI programme.

- If no role, should there be one?

2. From your perspective, how is the programme working?

- What's not working so well?
- Any specific projects that stand out?

3. Is there anything in your view that needs to happen soon to ensure the success of the projects?

- Anything that was not anticipated?

4. What advice do you have at this stage for subsequent programmes or projects?

Ongoing interview with vendors

1. What is working well/not so well with the project(s) you are involved with?
 - What do you hope to get out of your involvement
2. What in your view makes for effective working relationships between colleges, vendors and JISC?
 - Explore organisational culture, working practices
3. Is there anything in your view that needs to happen soon to ensure the success of the projects?
4. Is there anything you would like JISC to be aware of at this stage?

Interview with consortium partners

Explain scope and purpose of formative evaluation as above.

- Interest in exploring models of consortium working.
1. Are you working within an consortium agreement?
 - How was this agreement drawn up?
 - Is it effective?
 2. How is the project going from your perspective?
 3. Is there anything you would do differently next time?
 4. Is there anything in your view that needs to happen soon to ensure the success of the projects?

Final telephone interview with project managers

1. How are things going?
2. What evaluation have you been able to do at this stage? What lessons can you draw from this?
3. What has the project achieved? (outcomes and outputs)
 - For this institutions involved?
 - For the individuals involved?
 - For the sector?
4. What would you do differently next time?
5. Do you have any comments on the formative evaluation?

Interview with JISC Executive staff

1. From your perspective, how is SWaNI working?
2. What does JISC hope to get out of SWaNI?
3. Programme management
 - More interventionist than others?
 - Fewer projects to manage?
 - Benefits and disadvantages of this?
 - JISC Central and JISC outposts – use of technology?
 - Use of technology to support projects and encourage interaction?
4. What are the important messages from SWaNI?
 - For other interoperability programmes?
 - For the sector as a whole?
5. How could the formative evaluation have been improved? What should have been done differently? Is JISC getting what is wanted out of the process?

Appendix E – Visit Schedule

Indicative timetable

10.30 – 11.30	Meet with project manager and team Short tour of project offices/workspaces
11.30 – 13.00	Round table meeting with project team, key administrative and academic staff
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch break
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with representative(s) of college senior management
15.00 – 15.30	Concluding meeting with project manager

Visit Questions

(Question numbers relate to the main evaluation objectives to which the question relates.)

Project manager/project team

1. Project management activities

- Explore procedures for project management
- What's working well/not so well?
- What is being done to ensure the project finishes on time, contingency plans?
- What would you do differently next time?

2. Relationships with vendors

- What is the added value to colleges of the relationship with the vendors?

3. Consortium working

- What was the process for drawing up a consortium agreement and how effective is the agreement in operation?

5. Programme management

- What are JISC doing to help?
- Is there any other support you need from JISC before the end of the project?

6. Impact

- What difference do you think the project will make? What positive changes can you see or predict at this stage?
- Where do you think this initiative will be in two years' time?
- Do you think this project/SWaNI will have a national impact?
- Are there any unexpected benefits?

7. Cultural differences

- Who's driving the use cases?
- What can be done to ensure that pedagogical needs prevail over technological constraints and requirements?

College senior management

4. Organisational factors

- How does the project fit with the institution's strategic plans?
 - Information strategy? (copy of documents?)
- What's your core business?
 - How does this technology support that?

- What changes in administrative procedures and learning and teaching practice are envisaged?
 - Has this had any impact on policy, regulations etc?

Admin/academic staff

How will the outputs from this project impact ...

- on administrative processes?
- on learning, teaching and assessment?

Are there any staff development requirements?

- How should these be addressed?

Appendix F – Coding Frame

Categories	Description
Project Management	Progress towards objectives and outcomes Issues regarding costs Ongoing project evaluation
Consortium Working	Consortium structures and communication procedures Issues of responsibility and authority Links with other consortia and working groups
Working with Vendors	Vendor roles, business relationships, boundaries and priorities Issues of availability and commitment
Support to Projects	Issues of internal workload Implications of timescales
Organisational Change	Impact on business processes, planning for change, engagement with administrative and academic staff Dissemination and staff development initiatives
Learning and Teaching	Pedagogical implementation and testing, impact on learning, teaching and assessment, impact on course organisation and quality enhancement
Buy in	Institutional engagement, relation of project to organisational plan/ information strategy
Benefits	Perceived benefits to colleges, vendors, JISC and the sector as a whole Perceived value of programme and individual projects, including value for money
Impact	Individual impact, institutional impact, sectoral/national impact of the programme
Cultural Differences	National educational contexts, policy developments and timing
Standards	Commitment to development and implications
Relationships	Issues of equality or communication
Capacity	Individual or organisational ability or resources to undertake tasks

Appendix G – Vendor Involvement

Vendors	learndirect scotland	Teknical	SITs	Fretwell SIS	Granada	Microcompass	Web CT	Capita	DigitalBrain	Intrallact	learndirect
Banff & Buchan	x		x								
Falkirk (STUG)		x	x					x			
Llandrillo		x		x							
Menai					x	x					
Perth					x		x	x			
Sir Gar (SWC)		x		x	x				x	x	
Ystrad Mynach		x									x

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