

What is Flexible Service Delivery?

Briefing paper

February 2010

Introducing flexible service delivery

Flexible service delivery is about universities and colleges joining up their disparate corporate information and academic systems, and considering new modes of service provision, such as shared services, so that they can deliver improved and cost effective administrative and student services.

By unlocking data and 'service enabling' systems, such as research management, virtual learning, finance and student records systems, coupled with optimising business processes, institutions can:

- Make efficiency savings by business process improvements and sharing of data, capabilities and services within and across institutional boundaries
- Improve access and management of corporate and student information to support confident decision-making
- Become more agile and responsive to changing demands and priorities
- Improve the student experience by offering more flexible and seamless services

Why JISC believes flexible service delivery is important today

Demand to deliver more for less: institutions are seeking greater efficiencies due to significant budget cuts, whilst students' expectations about ICT usage continue to rise and they are seeking greater value for money.

Demand for flexible learning: which requires systems and processes that can continuously keep pace with changing requirements and priorities.

Demand for better business intelligence and decision support: for senior managers, the focus is on improved access to, and exploitation of, information across their corporate information systems. This enables them to

Streamlining service provision and saving money while avoiding unpopular cuts in essential services

There is an active flexible service delivery community with over 30 further and higher education institutions sharing knowledge and experience

measure performance, discover trends, provide insights and deliver findings for rapid, intelligent decision making in an increasingly competitive, resource-constrained educational environment.

Shared Services on the UK higher education political agenda: Shared Services has attracted significant recent interest from all major political parties and as such is likely to appear in policy following the general election.

A changing and increasingly competitive environment: institutions need to be responsive to changing priorities shaped by both internal and external drivers and need systems and processes that can keep pace with rapid change.

What problems could a flexible service delivery solution solve?

Large monolithic solutions with long-term supplier lock-in

Currently, many institutions contend with monolithic and disparate products from competing suppliers. They typically host them locally and provision them as the core or only solutions to support complex sets of processes. Maintenance is often expensive in terms of ongoing support and licence costs. Long term supplier lock-in also means that service provision may lack the flexibility to keep pace with changing demands and priorities.

Data and process integration issues

System users often face frustration and carry out ineffective and expensive practices around the manual manipulation of data between systems. Poor integration also introduces errors and inefficiencies associated with duplication of effort.

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Locked in data

Data is often locked into a single system and is therefore not sharable or easily exploitable. This means that the same data is often maintained across different systems, making it very difficult to access information for decision making.

Supporting a flexible and cost effective approach to service delivery

To facilitate this initiative, JISC has launched the Flexible Service Delivery programme, which is running from July 2009 to March 2011. This innovative programme offers help and support to those involved in strategic and IT management in navigating the step by step processes of implementing flexible service delivery across an institution, or consortium. It is also of interest to suppliers who wish to be responsive to the changing needs of the sector, and provide competitive, flexible and 'best of breed' offerings as part of a mixed economy.

There is an active flexible service delivery community in further and higher education, involving over 30 institutions. The majority of these are participating in the programme through the delivery of pathfinder and pilot projects.

Pathfinder projects

Pathfinder projects are leading the way by identifying and progressing through the stages that institutions will need to go through to support the organisational and process change needed to improve service delivery and flexibility and to reduce costs.

Pilot projects

The pilot projects are working with suppliers and are testing the practicalities of operating particular functions as shared services across institutional consortia.

Adopting flexible service delivery

The programme has defined four key building blocks in the process of adopting flexible service delivery:

Senior management buy-in

Before proceeding, it is essential to build the business case for adoption to present to senior institutional management. Like any kind of change process, investment in flexible service delivery must be guided by strategic priorities and demonstrate a measurable impact via performance indicators.

Service-enabling disparate legacy systems

To integrate legacy systems it is essential to raise skills and knowledge in service-oriented approaches (soa) and Service Oriented Architecture (SOA). With SOA, rather

Supporting organisational change and improvement, and aligning ICT strategy and implementation with organisational strategy

than using bespoke software to join different applications and data sources together – the 'spaghetti' of integration – data and applications are linked by a service layer. In addition, IT solutions are broken down into distinct services, choreographed to support defined processes. This approach is intended to enable existing applications to become open to combination and allow for re-use of common data and software in different ways at much lower costs. In addition, SOA offers the flexibility to meet new business requirements without the need to acquire additional bespoke packages, allows for a 'best of breed' selection of services and the possibility of sharing those services across consortia.

Cost baselining and modelling

Knowing the cost of running services and processes is essential, in order to assess where the cost savings and process improvements can be made.

Opening up the market

Flexible service delivery has the potential to unlock the current market inertia of single supplier solutions and to provide:

- Modular products that have been disaggregated into defined units of functionality, which can be sold as discrete interoperable services, based on open or recognised interface standards
- Business models that support flexible and shared service arrangements so that institutions can choose to switch between supplier offerings to meet changing institutional needs and priorities

This briefing paper was written by Alex Hawker, Flexible Service Delivery programme manager.

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Further Information

Flexible Service Delivery programme
www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/flexible-service-delivery

Enterprise Architecture Information Portal
www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/flexible-service-delivery/ea

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