

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Formative Evaluation Framework

Introduction

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has commissioned a formative evaluation of the Managed Learning Environments (MLEs) for Lifelong Learning Programme (01/01) through independent consultants Glenaffric Ltd. The evaluation will take place in Phase 2 of the programme, which is covered under the 01/03 Call: MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Phase 2.

This Phase of the programme expands the scope of issues being explored, specifically in the use of the IMS Learner Information Profile (LIP), and includes links to organisations external to FE and HE.

The Formative Evaluation Project covers the continuing formative evaluation of the two Phase 1 projects, SHELL and NIIMLE, as well as the nine new projects in Phase 2 which started in July 2003. Both Phases of the programme will be completed by July 2005.

Phase 1

Under Phase 1 of the programme, an MLE Evaluation Team of experts and associated JISC developers was established to oversee the formative evaluation of the projects. The team also undertook the role of Steering/Advisory group and some additional activities:

- Attendance and participation in programme meetings
- Buddy visits to projects and feedback to projects
- Review and feedback on reports and project outputs
- Development of ITTs for supporting studies and the circular for the 01/03 Phase 2 call
- Marking and selection of proposals for supporting studies and projects under the 01/03 Phase 2 call
- Development of the programme evaluation framework

The team established an aim and objectives for the programme:

Aim:

To explore the issues related to developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across sectors and institutions

Objectives:

1. To establish cross institutional architectures to transfer student record data
2. To establish cross institutional architectures to deliver learning
3. To explore the use of student learning profiles
4. To measure and record the impact of cross-institutional systems on business processes of institutions
5. To identify and address the implications for staff development
6. To provide a formative development and dissemination process throughout the lifetime of the project which will engage the (JISC community) HE/FE sectors

From these a logframe of the planned outputs from Phase 1 was derived. The logframe can be a useful tool for planning and evaluation purposes. However, logframes can be difficult to understand and this, combined with a certain inherent rigidity, can result in the simplification of complex social

processes¹.

Phase 2

The MLE Evaluation Team was instrumental in the development of Circular 01/03, the call for the Phase 2 projects. The objectives for this Phase are:

1. To explore the learning, teaching and administrative implications of implementing MLE activities to support lifelong learners on cross-institutional programmes of study
2. To explore interoperability for lifelong learning, specifically in the areas of linking learner information between managed learning environments and awarding bodies, external learning organisations and employers.
3. To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile.
4. To explore and test the use of learner information packages to support seamless learner transition between institutions. This work will build on the outcomes of the phase one projects.

The programme has four themes based on these objectives. The diagram at Appendix A illustrates the boundaries of these themes and their relationship to each other. A matrix of the programme objectives and planned deliverables is at Appendix B. This includes a mapping of the individual objectives from all of the Phase 2 projects as well as the two Phase 1 projects. This matrix was checked by each project at the first Phase 2 Programme meeting in October 2003 at Birmingham.

The objectives from Phase 1 map to the Phase 2 objectives. Staff development issues are not explicitly stated in the Phase 2 objectives but may be addressed through learning and teaching implications. The sixth objective from Phase 1, concerning the formative development and dissemination process throughout the lifetime of the project that engages with the HE/FE sectors, is addressed through this Formative Evaluation Project and the dissemination strategy currently under development. Both of these will draw on the work of the individual projects.

All of these activities are now overseen by the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme Steering Group. This group will meet four times a year and receive reports from the Formative Evaluation Project. In addition the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) Generic Support Project will provide support for the operationalisation of LIP and capacity building in project teams. Communication and consistency between these supporting activities will be ensured through the MLEs for Lifelong Learning Support and Evaluation Group (SEG) that meets regularly and includes representation from the Programme Steering Group and the JISC.

Formative Evaluation Project

The aim of this project is:

To provide a formative evaluation of the Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning Projects which maximises the synergy between projects and the long term benefits for the JISC community.

Objectives:

1. To develop an evaluation framework which will encourage synergy and sharing across the projects
2. To identify common themes across the projects
3. To undertake formative evaluation activities with the projects
4. To liaise with and service the MLE Support and Evaluation Group
5. To provide feedback in the form of detailed reports at regular intervals

¹ Earle, L (2003) Lost in the Matrix: The Logframe and the Local Picture. Paper for INTRAC's 5th Evaluation Conference: Measurement, Management and Accountability? 31st March – 4th April 2003 The Netherlands Available from: <http://www.intrac.org/Intrac/docs/LEarle.pdf>

Given the formative nature of the project, the approach will need to exhibit certain features:

- Focus on the 'softer' side on project activities – relationships, processes, organisational context, change processes and management
- Focus on the implications of MLE development for lifelong learning – encourage relation of project activities to learning and teaching practice
- Encouraging reflection on activities and processes
- Providing constructive feedback on project activities and progress
- Encouraging synergies and cross-fertilisation across projects

The evaluation framework for the MLE programme draws on some of the recent work on the practical application of some key theories of formative evaluation to educational technology programmes. This work includes the EFX evaluation toolkit developed by CERLIM for the evaluation of the JISC X4L programme². This toolkit is based on logic models³ and theory-anchored evaluation strategies⁴. These approaches are concerned with the identification and articulation of project outcomes of interest, not in terms of progress against targets, but in the context of a developing understanding of stakeholder goals, challenges and expectations.

Methodology

This is an evaluation of the programme not of individual projects. This distinction is important not least because the projects will also be undertaking formative evaluation activities of their own. The Kellogg Foundation⁵ has identified three levels of evaluation:

- Project level – evaluation throughout the life of the project that assists project staff to make effective decisions to continuously improve the project
- Cluster – grouping similar projects to bring about systemic change by learning from other similar projects
- Programme and policy making – evaluation at the macro level to assist decision-making for programme funding and support

Formative evaluation is primarily concerned with gathering information about a project while it is in progress to help improve its chances of success. Summative evaluation happens at the end and is concerned with demonstrating the project's success and disseminating the results to others. Summative evaluation may also be conducted as a retrospective review, particularly to explore project impact which can be difficult to evaluate during the project's life or on immediate completion.

For this evaluation project, this levelled approach is relevant as it allows themes of interest to be explored at different levels, with different clusters or groupings, and by key experts where appropriate. In this way expertise from the MLE Evaluation Team can be drawn and built on in this Phase. The programme is also phased over time which enables particular themes to be explored at

² <http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/projects/efx/toolkit/index.html> The EFX evaluation toolkit is a development from the Tavistock Guidelines for eLIB Project Evaluation, available at <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/papers/tavistock/evaluation-guide/intro.html> on which Glenaffric Ltd based the SWaNI Formative Evaluation Framework (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/SwaniEF.doc)

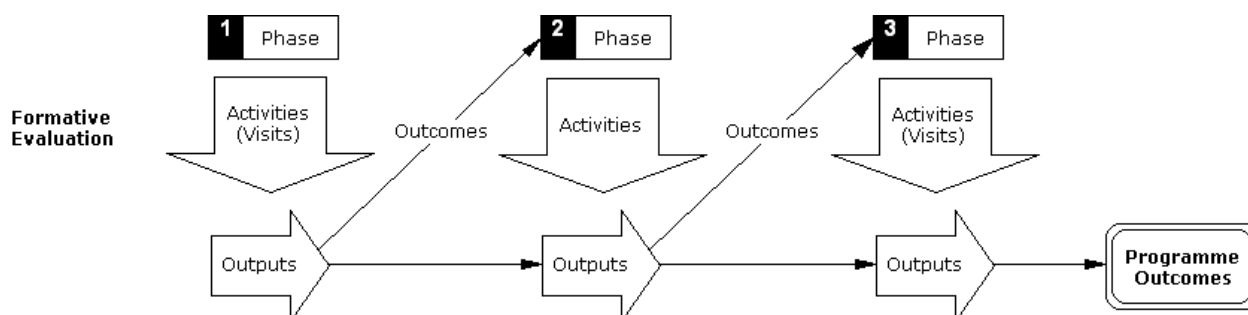
³ See McClaughlin, J.A., & Jordan, G.B. (1999) Logic models: a tool for telling your program's performance story. Available: <http://www.pmn.net/education/Logic.htm>; also Nash, J., Plugge, L., & Eurelings, A. (2000). Defining and evaluating CSCL (Computer Supported Collaborative Learning) projects: managing towards evaluation. Paper presented at the European Conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (ECSCCL 2000), Maastricht, Netherlands

⁴ See Strömdahl, H., & Langerth Zetterman, M. (2001). On theory-anchored evaluation research of educational settings especially those supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish Learning Lab

⁵ <http://www.wkcf.org> WKKellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook

specific points which are relevant and appropriate to the programme. The basic model for this approach with themes can be seen at Appendix B.

The process of the formative evaluation is iterative as shown in the diagram below:



Details of the timescale and associated activities can be found in Appendix C.

Data will be acquired from three main sources:

- Documentary evidence – any written or graphical outputs from the projects and programme support staff including JISC reports from other related activities
- Evaluation activities – at each programme meeting there will be an activity designed to explore a particular aspect of the evaluation themes. For example, at the first programme meeting the History of the Future exercise⁶ was used to explore the project teams' logic of their proposals
- Key respondents – summary transcripts resulting from meetings and interviews with those persons who have some involvement in the programme and its projects, summarised in the table below:

Key Category	Respondent Group
A	01/03 programme manager and other JISC staff
B	Project leaders, project partners and other project staff
C	Lead institution senior manager ideally with a strategic role in the provision of information systems, support and management within their institution
D	Administrative staff who may be involved with the effect of the project within their institution
E	Academic staff who may be involved with the effect of the project within their institution
F	Vendors of the technologies used by the projects
G	Support staff and other related groups (eg CETIS, CRA, SIGs, RSCs, JISC InfoNet)
H	Agencies with an interest in programme outcomes (eg UCAS, DEL, HEFCE, SFC, ELWa, DELNI)

Much of the data is qualitative in nature and will be analysed using techniques derived from a grounded theory approach which facilitates identifying and exploring emerging themes on an ongoing basis.⁷ Where appropriate the outputs from different groups of key respondents will be cross-referenced to both inform and validate findings.

⁶ See McClaughlin et al, op cit

⁷ See Strauss, A. and Corbin, C. (1990), Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, Sage

Areas of interest

The following areas of interest were identified in the ITT for this formative evaluation:

- Methodologies for business process re-engineering
- Organisational change
- Benefits for:
 - participating colleges
 - vendors
- Implications for:
 - lifelong learners
 - all staff across institutions
 - staff development
 - PDPs/using VLEs in HE and FE
 - synergy with external organisations
- MLE models and approaches to developing architectures

Initial activities with the projects has revealed some practical issues that the projects face at the start:

- Staffing
- Project plans
- Institutional engagement
- Evaluation
- Use cases
- Data protection
- Learner Profile
- Capacity
- Working with vendors

These lists are by no means complete and are likely to change over time as the projects develop and progress. Some will be tackled by the programme manager but the majority will fall to either the Generic Support Project or the Formative Evaluation Project. Consistency and the avoidance of duplication will be addressed through the Support and Evaluation Group's regular collaboration.

Stakeholders

All evaluations have multiple stakeholders, that is any person or group who has an interest in the project being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. Where formative evaluation is concerned they key stakeholders are the project teams and the programme manager. However, others do have an interest in evaluation outcomes during the life of the programme. The distinction drawn elsewhere⁸ between the local, performance related evaluation undertaken by project teams, and the programme level formative evaluation is also relevant to this framework.

⁸ Oliver, M., Conole, G. Phelps, J. Maier, P. Wilkinson, D. and Bailey, P. (1999) The EFFECTS Evaluation Framework: a transferable model for collaborative projects, BP ELT report no. 7, University of North London. Available from: <http://www.unl.ac.uk/tltc/elt/elt7.pdf>

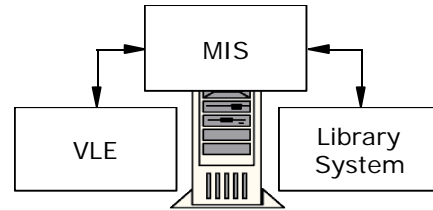
Identification of key stakeholders is an essential aspect of any evaluation strategy but would be incomplete without some consideration of how their various interest might be satisfied. Primarily this will be done through reports for specific groups and presentations at programme meetings.

Stakeholders	Interests
Project Teams	Any aspect of project management and development that can assist them in successful outcomes
JISC Programme Manager	Any aspect of programme management and development that can assist the projects in successful outcomes
JISC MLE Development Team	Synergies between this and other related programmes
Institutional Managers	Institutional interventions that can assist their project
Institutional Administrative Staff	Administrative activities that may be affected by the project
Vendor representatives	Synergies between projects that may be mutually beneficial
Academic staff	Academic activities that may be affected by the project
JISC Executive	Synergies between this and other related programmes that are beneficial to the JISC as a whole
Other JISC (JISCInfoNet, RSCs)	Synergies between this and other related programmes that are beneficial to their particular remits
Lifelong learners	Impact of projects on the learner experience
FE/HE Community	Wider messages about developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions
External Bodies	Interim outcomes that are relevant to their particular remits

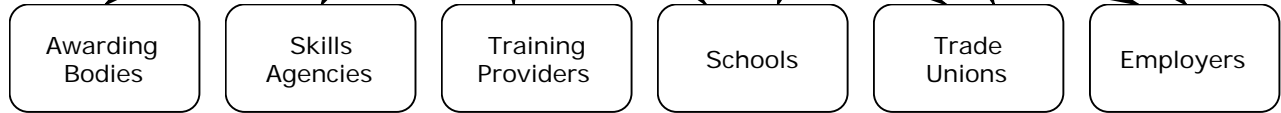
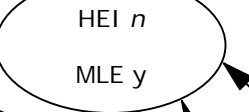
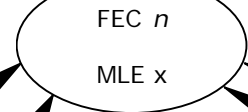
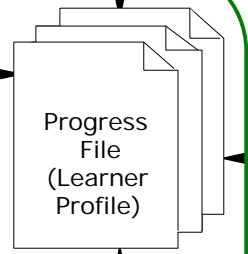
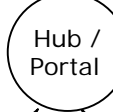
Activities and Reporting

The formative evaluation team will gather and analyse data from and about the projects on a regular basis. The principal sources of the data are the activities listed in Appendix D. The significant events, from an evaluation perspective, are the programme meetings, the project visits and the key respondent interviews. In order to ensure that the formative focus of this project is maintained, timeous reporting of these various events is essential. The reporting cycle is summarised in the table at Appendix E. Following each round of activity, reports will be made to the projects, the Programme Manager, the Support and Evaluation Group and the Programme Steering Group as appropriate. Care will be taken to ensure that reports are in a form and style suitable for the primary audience.

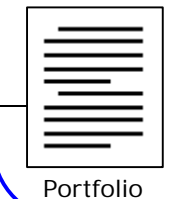
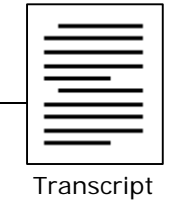
Theme 1: Learning, teaching and administrative implications of MLEs for learners



Theme 4: Testing multi-institutional Learner Profile



Theme 2: Interoperability for lifelong learning



Theme 3: Testing PDP section of the Learner Profile

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning: Phase 2 Objectives

Aim: to explore the issues associated with developing learning environments to support the seamless movement of the learner between and across education sectors and institutions.

		Worcester	Blackpool	Glamorgan	Stow	GCal	QMC	Nottingham	Liverpool	L'borough	NIIMLE	SHELL
1	To explore the learning, teaching and administrative implications of implementing MLE activities to support lifelong learners on cross-institutional programmes of study											
1.1	To further develop, explore and evaluate the issues around developing inter-institutional learning environments	X	X	X	X						X	X
1.2	To implement relevant MLE systems and the use of IMS specifications to achieve integration of systems				X						X	X
1.3	To explore and evaluate the impact of the introduction of elements of a cross-institutional MLE on staff and students by focusing upon a learning activity which is shared between institutions, colleges or learning organisations	X	X	X								O
1.4	To explore the impact of introducing MLE activities, changing business processes and embedding them into an existing course that is delivered across a number of learning organisations	O		X	X							
2	To explore interoperability for lifelong learning, specifically in the areas of linking learner information between managed learning environments and awarding bodies, external learning organisations, employers and schools											
2.1	To explore the issues of data transfer (using the IMS LIP Specification) to facilitate lifelong learning				X	X	X	X	O		X	X
2.2	To explore the linking of MLEs to external bodies rather than between FE colleges and/or HE institutions				X	X	X	X			X	X
2.3	To emphasise the development of standards/specifications for interoperability					X		X			X	X
2.4	To explore the wider issues around linking MLEs to external bodies				X	X	X	O				
2.5	To achieve agreement on a specification for interoperability					X	O	X			X	X
2.6	To piloting agreed specification within their own institution/consortium					X	O	X			X	X
3	To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile											
3.1	To explore the learning and teaching implications of using a lifelong learning profile (PDP specification Phase 1)	?	?				X	X	X	X		
3.2	To pilot actual usage of a software system to support use of the lifelong learning profile and involve learning and teaching based evaluation							X	X	X		
3.3	To ensure that the software system used implements the PDR mapping to IMS LIP using an online profiling system that collects the learner profile							X	X	X	X	
4	To explore and test the use of learner information packages to support seamless learner transition between institutions. This work will build on the outcomes of the phase one projects											
4.1	To explore and further test the Learner Profile mapping to the IMS Learner Information Package (LIP) specification for inter-institutional transfer of data						X	X		O	X	X
4.2	To explore and further test the product interfaces and protocols to allow transfer between institutions and infrastructures to support MLEs across institutions							X		O	X	X
4.3	To draw upon the developments of the SHELL and NIIMLE projects		X		X			X		X		
4.4	To explore the implications of the Learner Profile for the organisations, staff and students						O	X		X		O

JISC Deliverables

	Worcester	Blackpool	Glamorgan	Stow	GCal	OMC	Nottingham	Liverpool	L'borough	NIIMLE	SHELL
1A	X	X	X							X	X
1B	X	X	X							X	X
2A				X	X	X	X			X	X
2B				O	X		X			X	X
2C				X	X	X	X			X	X
2D			O		X		X				X
3A						X	X	X	X	X	O
3B						X	O	X	X	O	O
3C	?		O			X	X	X	X	O	O
3D	?						X	X	X		
4A							X		O	X	X
4B			O			X	X		O	X	X
4C						X	X	O	O	X	X

Additional Outputs

Worcester: Guidelines

Blackpool: Longitudinal study on interoperability issues of multi-institutional support

Glamorgan: Briefing papers

Stow: Project Initiation Document, How to Guides

Glasgow Caledonian: Case studies

Queen Mary College: SRS Module, Best Practice Guide, Other reports

Nottingham: Application Profile for UCAS form, UK Learner Profile v1.4

Liverpool: Toolkit for data transfer

Loughborough: Electronic Progress File

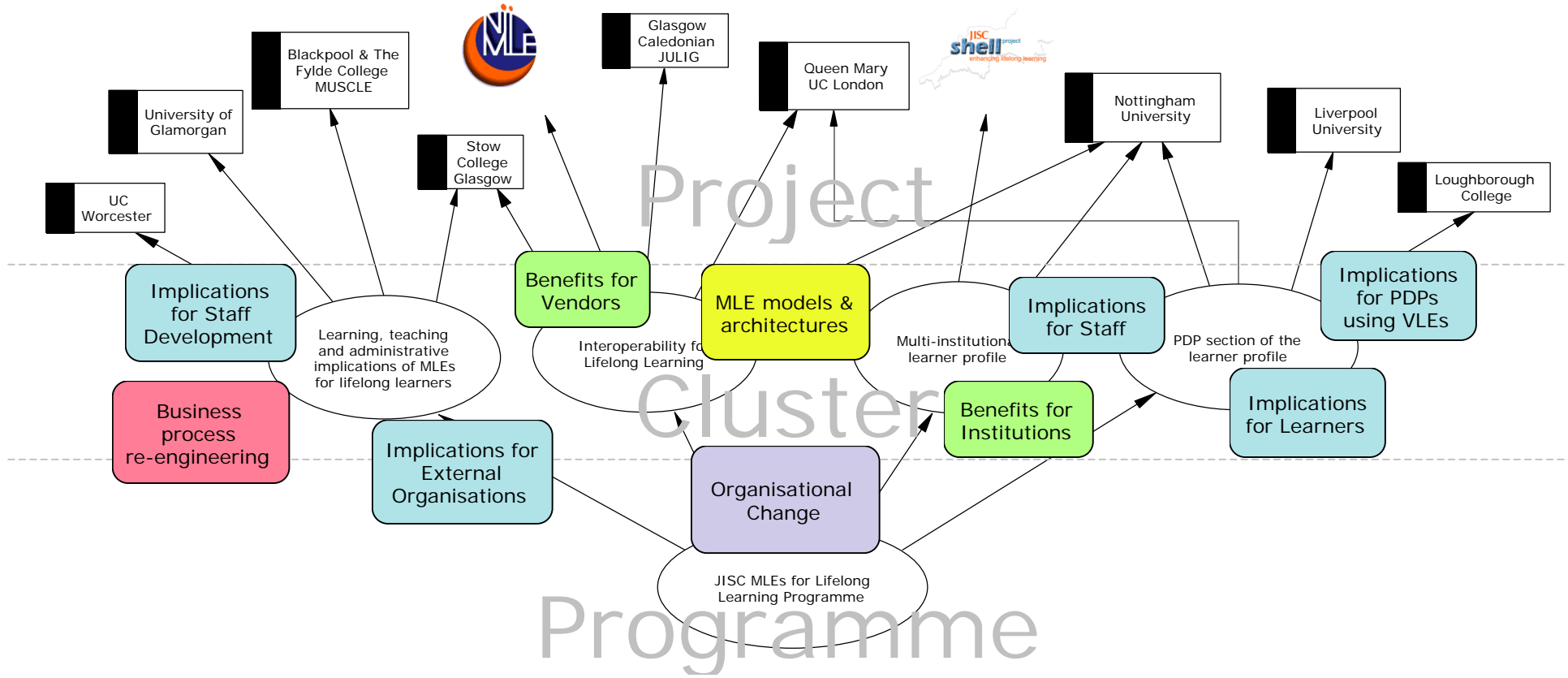
Key

X – Complete coverage as indicated in project bid

O – Partial coverage

? – Should be covered by project but not indicated in project bid

Formative Evaluation Cluster Model



Timescale	Activities
Phase 1: June 2003 – February 2004	
July – August 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial consultation with Programme Manager and MLE Evaluation Team • Analysis of background reports and documents, including relevant research papers and outcomes from related work • Analysis of bid documentation – identification of emerging issues
September 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct initial telephone interviews with project managers • Organise and prepare first project visits
15 -16 October 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – present outline Evaluation Framework • Facilitate evaluation exercise
October 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce draft Evaluation Framework – discuss and revise with SEG
November 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct first project visits • Present Evaluation framework to Programme Steering Group
November – December 2003	Visit feedback and report to project teams and Programme Manager
January 2004	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
25-26 February 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 1 summary and Phase 2 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
February 2004	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
Phase 2: March 2004 – October 2004	
March – May 2004	Conduct telephone interviews with key respondents and project managers
May 2004	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
June 2004	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
September 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise and prepare initial project visits
14-15 October 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 2 summary and Phase 3 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
October 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG • Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
Phase 3: November 2004 – June 2005	
November 2004	Conduct second project visits
November – December 2004	Visit feedback and report to project teams and Programme Manager
January 2005	Produce draft interim Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
22-23 February 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Meeting – presentation and group discussion on Phase 2 summary and Phase 3 preparation • Facilitate evaluation exercise
February 2005	Revise and submit interim programme Evaluation Report
April – May 2005	Conduct telephone interviews with project managers
June 2005	Produce draft final Evaluation Report – discuss with SEG
July 2005	Revise and submit final programme Evaluation Report

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme

Formative Evaluation Project	2003 Phase 1						2004		Phase 2								Phase 3		2005					
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Initial Documentary Analysis	A	A																						
Programme Meetings				PM				PM				UM				PM				PM				
Evaluation Visits				A	AAA	A											AAA	AA						
Project Manager Interviews			AAA						AAA												AAA			
Key Respondent Interviews										AAA	AAA													
Visit Reports to Projects					R	RRR	R										R	RRR	R					
Evaluation Reports							R					R				R								R
SEG Meetings	SM		SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM		SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	

Key:

PM - Programme Meeting

UM - Update Meeting

A - Activity

R - Report

SM - Support Evaluation Group Meeting

Note: Currently this plan does not show the Programme Steering Group meetings