ALPS digital objects and repositories project

The aims of the project were to

- Explore currently available tools for the production of assessment objects that can be used in conjunction with a mobile device for delivering the assessment scenario.
- Identify appropriate tools for the packaging of the assessment objects, to include the addition of metadata, prior to uploading and storage within the Endeavor Curator repository.
- Explore aspects of the application of metadata to digital assessment objects.
- Establish procedures for digital rights management.
- Test the connectivity between the Endeavour Curator digital repository and WebCT VISTA and the retrieval and delivery of assessment objects to the VLE and/or mobile device.
- Implement and evaluate an authentic prototype assessment in a mobile test environment.
- Apply formal usability testing to the assessment objects, and to any delivery processes, to identify issues for subsequent incorporation into revised object design and delivery processes.

Progress so far:

- Tribal learning My Learning Author tool is being used to develop suitable assessments for delivery on mobile devices.
- Reload has been selected to produce IMS content packages including addition of metadata.
- The ALPS WebCT server is now operational running WebCT CE 6.0 with the powerlinks module and provides a vehicle for testing and/or developing connectivity with target repositories.
- The original plan was to test links with the Endeavor Curator repository at Leeds University. Endeavor has now merged with Ex Libris and Leeds now, plan to migrate to their repository Digitool. This has meant that the Curator Powerlink connector will not now be produced. As connection with digitool will require programming resources outside of the timescale we now intend to investigate links with Documentum and, via our project partner, Intrallect, explore links with JORUM.
- The project is utilising the ECIS federated search tool supplied by our project partner Synapps and we are exploring how this tool can be used in conjunction with WebCT.
- Work has been completed within ALPs to produce a competency map for “communication skills” and this will be used to develop a taxonomy for object retrieval informed by information specialists from the library.

JISC DeL Enhancing Learner Progression 1 project

This was a collaborative regional project, part of the JISC Distributed eLearning (DeL) programme, with the University of Bradford and the University of Leeds. The aim of the project was to implement and evaluate e-portfolios to support students through their life long journey, with particular emphasis on ways that e-portfolios can provide support at key points of transfer.

The main focus of the project is to implement at two crucial transfer points:

* moving between School/FE and University

* moving from University and the workplace (relating to both placement and first career positions in Health).

Ourselves and Bradford focussed on moving between School/FE and HE and used the PebblePad e-portfolio system. Leeds Met worked with the "Progression Module" and student cohorts from Thomas Danby College and Wakefield College. This uses a paper based portfolio as the method of assessment which was transferred onto pebblePad. Leeds used the Bodington logbook tool and worked on implementing e-portfolios at both transfer points.

ELP Key Findings summary Jan 2007

Institutional & Tutor Findings

E-portfolios are more effective if the activities are designed to take advantage of the additional benefits offered by the online environment. This means that careful consideration needs to be made when converting existing paper-based portfolios to e-portfolios.

Local teachers/tutors/supervisors/mentors are in the best position to support their students in engaging with the e-portfolios.

Staff using e-portfolios with learners need to be involved at the early stages of any new initiative to get their buy-in.

Staff using e-portfolios with learners need to have training and support. This includes the need for preparation time for staff to plan how best to use the new technology most effectively with learners.

Findings related to change

With any new e-learning technology, it seems preferable to have keen volunteers to try it out first. They are less likely to get frustrated with difficulties as you pilot the use of the technology.

Resistance to change is always a barrier particularly where existing practice is successful and no big driver exists to move away from existing practice. The additional benefits of such technology would need to be clearly stated and demonstrated.

Try to implement one change at a time. Changing both established practice and introducing new technology at the same time can be problematic.

Findings related to assessment

Electronic assessment of portfolios will be new practice for most staff. Some will be very resistant to giving up be able to flick through paper portfolios. However, others will find it easier particularly in terms of being able to mark in multiple locations with the need to carry bulky paper portfolios. It would appear that the reaction of staff to marking online depends very much on personal preferences.

It would appear that making the e-portfolio optional, especially as part of assessed courses, will not help take up of new technology. Students are acutely aware of the importance of assessment and do not like to feel that they may be at a perceived disadvantage (real or otherwise) because the way they are preparing their work differs from what other students are doing.

Findings related to the learner

The use of technology is not a barrier for learners in using the e-portfolio. Most did not find the e-portfolio difficult to use.

It is the content and purpose of the e-portfolio that dictates the level of usage not the technology.

Learners and staff felt that using an e-portfolio in helping to think about transition to University was useful.

Support for the learners e-portfolio activities from tutors / teachers / mentors was an important ingredient in helping learners.

Top tips

Introducing new technology such as e-portfolios should be treated like any change management situation.

The role, support and attitude of learner support staff is critical. Consider a range of factors to get this support, such as consultation before introducing e-portfolios, proper training for staff and the opportunity for them to have time to think about how best to use the new technology tools.

There has to be a clearly understood purpose for using an e-portfolio.

Consider the advantages and benefits to the learner and make them explicit. Hopefully this will motivate them to use the tool.

Consider the assessment strategy if e-portfolio work is going to be assessed. Giving learners a choice about using e-portfolios for assessment may seem an easier way to proceed but it may not work.

Confidentiality is important to the learner especially if they are recording and reflecting on personal experiences. The privacy and security of their e-portfolios needs to be clear and explicit for the learner.

Technical issues need to be checked before learners use the e-portfolio but inevitably technical issues will occur during use and so prompt support and resolution of these is important.

JISC Enhancing Learner Progression 2 project

This project has just commenced will extend and build on the successful outcomes of the JISC DeL Enhancing Learner Progression project by:

- Establishing the impact of Individual Learning Plans (ILP), required by 2008, on regional lifelong learning initiatives and identifying ways in which the integration and interoperability issues can be addressed by these social network technologies. Our particular focus is on ensuring that ELP2 partners' WP initiatives integrate effectively with our partner schools and colleges as they start to implement ILPs. This is an important regional issue that will affect all schools, colleges and universities.

- Extending the provision of widening participation opportunities to a broader range of learner groups beyond the 16-19 group in full-time formal education that was targeted in ELP, through the use technologies that support more informal approaches to learning. These would include mature learners, excluded and isolated learners, learners from BME and other priority groups, and individual learners following non-traditional entry routes.

- Demonstrating how social software can enhance the capacity of learner groups and other stakeholders within the region to form support networks which can provide peer and mentor support, engender a sense of a wider community of learners and create a regional pool of shared knowledge, advice and guidance.

- Establishing the extent to which social software engages and motivates learners and enables them to develop the skills essential for effective lifelong learning, eg self-analysis, reflective skills.

- Completing a longitudinal evaluation of the experiences of ELP participants (and subsequent cohorts) that have transferred from School/FE into HE, and HE into workplace settings as they progress in their lifelong learning journeys.

Progress so far:

A range of tools will be investigated. Initial Leeds Met groups have been set up are as follows:

- REEMAP BME group: Continued use of PebblePad including the blog tool and Google groups
- Microbiology WP groups are using ELGG
- Community partnership mentors group are using Wikispaces.
- The project team is using a pebblePad blog to record progress

Mark Power from CETIS will be facilitating an event for the JISC ELP2 project on 25th April to give a detailed overview of potential web2.0 tools that can be utilised by the project.