

<p>EU project: Internetbased assessment (2002-2004): 91894-CP-I-2001-SE-MINERVA-M coordinating partner: Umeå university david.hamilton@pedag.umu.se</p>	<p>'Critical friends' (evaluation) Report based on a two-day visit to Umeå 28-29th May 2004 page 1 (of 4) report received 21st June 2004</p>
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Report on the EU Minerva funded project: Internet-Based Assessment in Distance Education

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Basis for the report

This report has been written following the receipt and scrutiny of a range of documentation including published papers and a current financial report. The 'critical friends' also undertook a visit to Umea where presentations were given by the partners in the project and extensive discussions were held.

Format of the Report

This report will consider the extent to which the project has been successful in meeting its goals, unexpected outcomes and the plans made for dissemination.

Goals

The goals of the project were:

1. to develop material, methods and tools for internet-based assessment.
2. to train teachers in assessment theory and internet-based test construction and test administration.
3. to support teachers in the implementation of internet-based assessment.
4. to develop a web portal with a resource centre to support interested teachers, and to generate new knowledge in this area.

These have been pursued through two main innovative strands:

- ? the development of software that can be used in formative assessment test construction;
- ? development in the field of 'alternative assessment' particularly formative work.

Goal 1: To develop material, methods and tools for internet-based assessment

The project partners have been successful in developing materials and methods for innovative internet-based assessment. Different software has been customised to meet local needs. There has been a creative use of internet-based tools which has led to innovative uses of the medium. Each of the partners has adopted different but complementary approaches to formative assessment to suit the specific context of the courses and institutions. A bottom up approach has been adopted which has led to the development of materials in and through practice rather than working from a theoretical perspective which then informed practice. A

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variety of tools has been developed through the project which range from an online self assessment question database to online student led reflective discussion forums.

The developments have enabled students to self-evaluate their learning allowing them to develop metacognitive skills and greater critical involvement in the learning process. The systems provided students with feedback in different forms. As feedback has had a key role across the partner specifications of the project students have also been given the opportunity to provide feedback to the course developers through questionnaires and semi structured interviews.

Goal 2: To train teachers in assessment theory and internet-based test construction and test administration

Teachers have been trained in two main ways. One approach integrated the use of the technology the process of raising awareness of alternative forms of assessment by using technological means as a platform for discussion and reflection. The other approach conceived the development of the software as an integral part of the way the course was conceptualised and developed. Staff learned through practice and direct involvement in that process. The local development of the project, led to some staff receiving formal induction into how to integrate internet-based assessment systems into their pedagogical approaches in particular subject areas. In some of the examples the software had been used very creatively. For others, the development of course materials and the use of the software were conducted in parallel.

Goal 3: To support teachers in the implementation of internet-based assessment.

The project served to raise awareness of good practice in relation to internet based formative assessment particularly in contexts where the face to face element was valued and considered crucial. The notion of support for teachers was interpreted in different ways by each partner. In Ghent and Sussex the focus was on raising awareness of alternative forms of assessment through the online medium, whereas in Umea the stress was on training for enabling lecturers to develop their own assessment tools for enhancing learning.

Goal 4: To develop a web portal with a resource centre to support interested teachers, and to generate new knowledge in this area

As one of the main outputs of Minerva projects is that sharing knowledge and disseminating examples of good practice the project effectively responded to this objective. While an agreed framework was interpreted and implemented in different ways by each partner, as a result of these implementations the project:

- ? raised awareness of the possibilities of using technology to assist in formative assessment processes;

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- ? raised issues relating to the importance of assessment as part of the learning process and made it practically possible to enable students to receive feedback and become actively engaged in assessing their own learning on a regular basis.

The website www.onlineassessment.nu is highly informative and can be seen as useful resource for other institutions in the wider European context. Furthermore it is the partners intention to maintain it beyond the duration of the project as from the meetings in Umea it emerged a strong sense of a common will to sustain the project at local level.

Strengths of the project

The federal structure of the project led to justified development in context which proved to be complementary and effective in raising a wider range of issues for all partners to consider. The coordination of the project was flexible, non prescriptive and allowed for local development of a common theme. This was a strength of the project - development which satisfied local needs while still focusing on common goals.

The students engaged with the project responded favourably in the evaluations they gave, as did staff for whom the approaches adopted were perceived to be useful.

The planned dissemination programme is varied and intensive with numerous presentations being given at international distance and education conferences. In addition, the partners have an impressive list of outcomes which will be reported in full in their final report.

Non specified outcomes

During the course of the project a range of outcomes emerged which were not specified in the original goals. These have added considerable value to the project. The project has led to the development of a meta-perspective on alternative approaches to formative assessment and the use of the online medium for this purpose. There has been an impact on pedagogy in that reflection on formative assessment practice has changed current practice and may lead to further change in the future. The development of good practice in formative assessment has been crucial in raising awareness. It has sown the seeds for future development rather than simply developed templates for cloning. The project has also been valuable in providing continuing professional development for staff including two research studentships which will lead to PhDs.

Issues raised

The implementation of the project suggests that there are cultural differences in the way in which the innovations have been conceptualised. Further, the prior experiences of the participants within each culture have limited the way that the project could be introduced and implemented. These differences may be related to the specific prior experiences of staff with different types of assessment procedures and ICT; the management structures, regulations and

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procedures within the participating institutions; and the socio-political circumstances within which the institutions find themselves. These all appear to have had an impact on implementation and the partners have exploited this potential to explore these issues in depth. These are key issues to be considered at the level of the European Commission. The project has also served to highlight the tension between EU policies and their implementation at local level. This has implications for generalisability and transferability.

The project has served to highlight the way that online assessment is more enthusiastically embraced by staff when it meets their specific course needs and those of their students. It has also provided a fascinating exchange of discourse between technology, pedagogy, assessment and different models of dissemination and innovation.

The key to the sustainability of the project is the extent to which it has been able to raise awareness and facilitate the development of materials which in the longer term may contribute to the evolution of the pedagogical framework in each institution and further innovative assessment approaches. The future looks promising as the partners were all looking to access local funding to further develop the initiative.

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