

About this Newsletter

Newsletter 2, January-February 2006

The e-Framework for Education and Research is a joint initiative of JISC (UK) and DEST (Australia)

For any questions or proposed input into future newsletters please email [The Editor](#)

ePortfolio update

Developing a reference model of an ePortfolio capable of providing and receiving services from other ePortfolios in other episodes of learning is one of the key aims of the ePortfolio for Lifelong Learning (eP4LL) project. Building consensus around core terminology associated with service components and aggregations is also necessary. The notion of (an) ePortfolio has attracted much discussion and debate in recent years.

In the following update from Peter Rees Jones it is clear that "ePortfolio" can designate an artefact, and application, and a service.

Successful "Brick Adopters" Meeting

A report from Christina Smart on the e-Framework service factorisation meeting that took place in London on 24th January is now available. The meeting was attended by representatives from the e-science, e-admin and e-learning communities. Its aim was to discuss how to develop and document the e-Framework services, to update the service descriptions and definitions and decide who would be looking after which services. Read more ... (http://www.elearning.ac.uk/news_folder/brickmeeting)

The Practicability of ePortfolio for Lifelong Learning

[An update from Peter Rees Jones ...](#)

There is broad consensus in the UK about the potential of ePortfolio to improve learning and establish lifelong learning but is ePortfolio for lifelong learning practicable? If so, ePortfolio could deliver key parts of the eLearning Strategy,

such as personalised learning.

"...this is a really important point; we will have to re-engineer the data so that wherever you are in the education system the individual learner can demonstrate to another institution, an employer, or to a parent, what they have done, how they are succeeding and who they are. (Michael Stevenson head of DfES Technical Group January 2006
http://www.tes.co.uk/search/story/?story_id=2166552)

"e-portfolios...are personal online spaces for students to access services and store work. They will become ever more useful as learners grow up and start moving between different types of learning and different institutions."
(Secretary of State for Education, January 2006)

The e-Framework offers a way of reducing a complex problem to simpler terms in which it becomes capable of resolution. This allows the complex processes using an ePortfolio to be broken down into strings of components. It also allows the monolithic specifications currently required to pass information between systems to be broken down into lightweight interfaces.

In March 2005 JISC funded a Reference Model of ePortfolio in terms of the e-Framework. The working definition is that: "ePortfolio is best defined in terms of the services making use of it". This goes with the grain of many practitioners who see the process of using ePortfolio as often being more important than the product itself.

The University of Nottingham has supported the development of a "passport" of information that students can take with them from school to college and into university. In schools and colleges the development and execution of "Individual Learning Plans" are a key part of the process of preparing a student for the transition to college, university or work. An abstract model of the process was developed expressed as a flow of "services".

Please refer to the picture below. An assessment service (1) notifies a student of a result through his ePortfolio. A personal development service (2) recovers the information the student needs to understand the significance of the result, for example in terms of his goals (4) and holds the student's reflection on its importance. At this point a student is very likely to talk things through with his friends: the Reference Model has been useful in identifying such gaps. The student makes some of his reflection available to an advisor and negotiates a plan, in this instance to apply to university.

This flow helped with another problem. JISC had hoped to produce a Reference Model of PDP but this was not thought practicable. By breaking out a PDP process into distinct service domains it became possible to scope the web services required for each domain and therefore for the process. The abstract model could be instantiated in many ways. Web services and service domains within this planning process could be reconfigured for another purpose, for example private reflection not leading to a plan.

In other words the model reduces a problem to simpler terms without constraining practice. Rather, it increases options; for example specialised versions of a service domain or web service can readily be substituted to meet accessibility needs or preferences.

Although Nottingham has proved that information can be exchanged from an ePortfolio in one episode of learning to another, the use of monolithic specifications such as IMS LIP is complex, therefore costly and probably impractical within current resources. The same interfaces between the ePortfolio and each service in this e-Framework flow could pass information into the

ePortfolio for the next episode of learning, reduce complexity and hence cost. More probably a service in an episode of learning might look back to the last ePortfolio. The e-Framework makes ePortfolio for lifelong learning practicable.

The next step is to provide a demonstration of the ePortfolio working with the XRCI Reference Model to demonstrate the viability of the approach for a key part of the UCAS application to HE process and in this way open the way to large scale pilots and full implementations.

More information: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/epreferencemodel/>

Elsewhere in Europe ... early activities associated with the [TENCompetence project](#), a four year EU-funded project led by the Open University of the Netherlands, are now underway. This project is aiming to develop a service-oriented approach to competence based lifelong learning. A [workshop](#) focused on the building blocks for the development of an open source services infrastructure will be held in Sofia, Bulgaria on March 30-31. Anyone wishing to submit a paper for consideration should do so before 6th March.

Open Repositories 2006

Presentations from the Open Repositories 2006 conference held in Sydney in early February are now available – a quick way to be up-to-date on developments and issues that span the broader repositories space.

Making Sense of SOA

Looking for some further reading on Web Services and SOA? There's a burgeoning amount of literature now available. The links below provide some great resources:

ZapThink

<http://www.zapthink.com/>

For example, Jason Bloomberg comments on the strategic importance of [getting SOA governance right](#) form the outset:

"building a governance framework is a critical early milestone on the road to a successful SOA implementation – not a governance framework for the SOA implementation specifically, but rather, a framework that outlines governance best practices across the organization that will leverage the power and flexibility of the Services that form the core of the SOA implementation."

SearchWebServices

<http://www.searchwebservices.com/>

In previewing where [Open Source might trend in 2006](#) Marc Fleury of JBoss says: "SOA is 80% a business approach and 20% a technical approach"

While observing that "the end-user community ... is barely starting to adopt SOA" he advocates a modular and iterative approach to its adoption and, "SOA is about coordinating different divisions, that's the most difficult thing to do in corporations. SOA will fail if you don't coordinate"

[Read more >>>](#)

Elsewhere on SearchWebServices Michael Meehan says: "In April [2005], Forrester Research Inc. found that 70% of large enterprises, 28% of midsized companies and 22% of small companies were adopting SOA. By the end of the year those numbers rose to 77%, 51% and 46%, respectively."

[Read more >>>](#)

And: "Standards lie at the heart of the service-oriented architecture movement. Without them, the entire loosely coupled model falls apart. In 2005 much of the progress made in Web services standards revolved around getting SOA off drawing boards and ready for enterprise-level work."

[Read more >>>](#)

Recent JORUM Reports

For those stakeholders watching the repository space two recent [JORUM reports](#) should prove useful reading.

Repository Systems Watch

This report considers developments in international e-learning repository initiatives and commercial systems that support these.

Technical Frameworks and Infrastructures

This report provides a survey of technical developments and architectures affecting the JISC e-learning programme and JORUM.

JORUM User Service Now Available

The User Service, providing access to the resources, is now available. All UK Further and Higher Education institutions who sign up in the New Year will be able to search, preview, download and reuse the learning and teaching material found in the system. Institutions must register first before staff can gain access. Institutions can register free for the JORUM User Service on the JISC Collections Website.

GrangeNet Gallery

<http://www.grangenet.net/researchgallery/index.html>

Check the GrangeNet Gallery for a selection of research activities benefiting from connecting to Australia's first gigabit bandwidth research and education network, GrangeNet (Grid and Next Generation Network).

Standards Watch

Joint IEEE LTSC and SISO work on Simulation Interface Standards

<http://ieeeltsc.org/wg11CMI/cmi-sim/>

In a joint activity with the Simulation Interoperability Standards Organization (SISO) the IEEE Learning Technology Standards Committee (LTSC) will evaluate the rapidly changing instructional standards and simulation standards environment and to look at whether additional standards are appropriate and feasible for interfacing instructional systems with simulation systems. It will also determine whether interface standards can help to facilitate the instructional aspects of simulations both by shaping the learner's experience in the simulation to achieve instructional goals and to extract appropriate instructional assessment data from the simulations.

The first meeting will take place February 2-3, in San Diego, USA.

IMS General Web Services Final Specification

January 12, 2006: IMS publishes version 1.0 of the [General Web Services](#) Base Profile which aims to promote interoperability for Web Service-based implementations on different software and vendor platforms. The Base Profile focuses on a core set of Web Service specifications and the most common problems experienced implementing the identified Web Service specifications. It is not a goal of the General Web Services Base Profile to create a plug-and-play architecture for Web Services or to guarantee complete interoperability. The General Web Services Base Profile addresses interoperability in the application layer, in particular, the description of behaviours exposed via Web Services.

IMS Releases QTI 2.1 Public Draft

January 27, 2006: IMS publishes the Public Draft version 2.1 of [Question & Test Interoperability \(QTI\) specification](#) which describes a data model for the representation of question (assessmentItem) and test (assessmentTest) data and their corresponding results reports.

International Plugfest II

International Plugfest II was held, in conjunction with the 2006 International Conference on SCORM 2004, January 16-19, 2006 on the Tamsui Campus of Tamkang University in Taipei, Taiwan. International Plugfest II focused on content, tools and LMSs that are implementing SCORM 2004. Presentations are now available for download on the site.

Acknowledgements

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