

# The JISC SHELL Project: Connecting Learning Environments in Higher and Further Education in the UK.

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## Abstract

*This short paper aims to introduce the SHELL project, a UK based JISC-funded project which is part of the JISC "Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning" programme. The project commenced March 2002, and aims to facilitate the smooth transition of lifelong learners as they move between places of study through a student centred record (SCR) database using IMS specifications to transfer data.*

## 1. Introduction

There is a clear need to support learners as they move between institutions in Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) in a political climate characterised by a sharpening focus on agendas of widening participation and lifelong learning.

The increasing use of managed and virtual learning environments provides a context in which to explore the benefits of interconnected online systems, a context which led the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to call for projects as part of the JISC 1/01 Programme [1].

## 2. The SHELL Project

The SHELL Project [2] is one of two projects funded by JISC to develop the integration of technologies across a consortium comprising one University and several partner colleges in the UK.

The first phase of this three year project involves the University of Plymouth, Cornwall College, Exeter College, North Devon College and Somerset College of Arts and Technology. In the second phase, involvement will extend to other institutions in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, and Bristol.

The SHELL project aims to develop the integration of online technologies across institutions in support of lifelong learning. IMS standards (such as IMS LIP and Enterprise) will be used to support the automatic transfer of student data between various records systems.

## 3. Project Aims and Objectives

Currently, students who are enrolled on a HE course in a partner college complete 'dual registration' -registration for both the college and the associated University. The SHELL Project aims to replace this cumbersome process with single registration for all partnership students. This requires a rapid and efficient transfer of student data between consortium members.

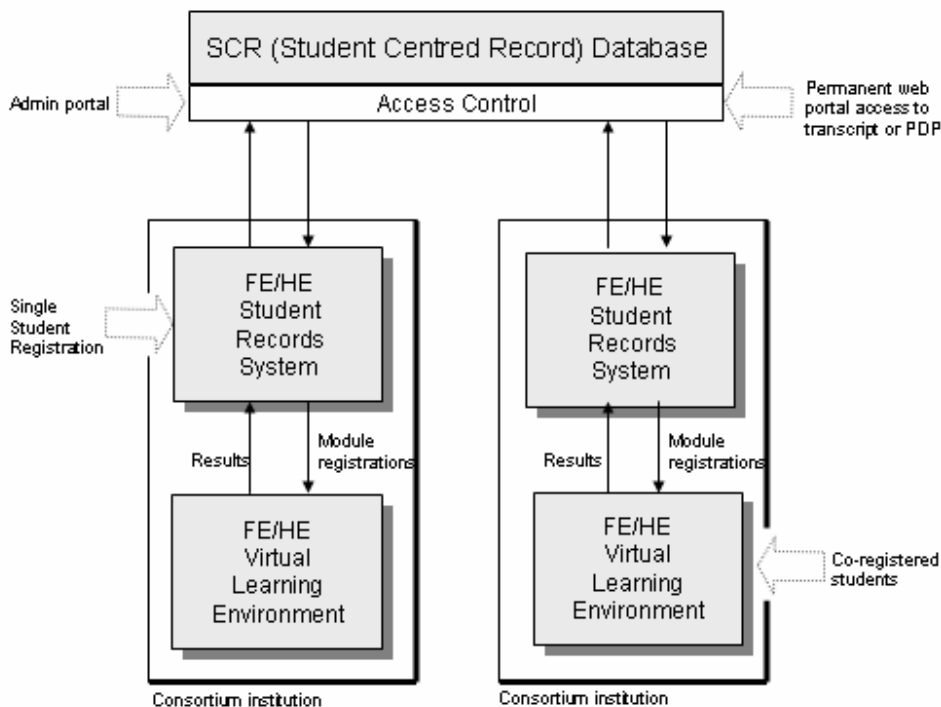
This transfer of student data will be achieved through the development of a Student Centred Record Database (see Figure 1). This database will be protected by security measures which will provide authenticated access to the data in the SCR database, shared by partner colleges and students themselves. Transfer mechanisms will be established to ensure that data in the SCR database is not less than 24 hours behind data held in institutions own student record systems.

Working with software suppliers (such as Capita and Campus IT), the project will also work towards the provision of:

- a framework for integration of Managed Learning Environments (MLEs);
- improved efficiency for the administration of partnership students;
- access to partnership Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) for partnership students;
- a framework for the seamless movement of the learner within FE and between FE and HE;
- a record of lifelong learning within the region for FE and HE students.

A permanent web portal (remaining available even after a student has left the institution) will provide individual students with portal access to online materials from the point of single registration whilst studying.

It will also allow them to have permanent internet based access to their transcripts of formally accredited marks and will facilitate the future storage of other records of achievement, such as personal development records and planning.



**Figure 1: Interconnecting VLE and Student Records Systems**

It is recognised that despite automated and/or new business processes, there will be occasional need for administrative staff to correct errors or duplications in the SCR Database. An administration portal (see Figure 1) will provide access to allow this.

#### 4. The SHELL Project Team

The SHELL Project team comprises the Project Director, Manager and four Team Leaders, supported by a range of staff throughout the consortium. For example, the 'Business Analysis and Implementation' team leader focuses on the business processes within the partnership, working closely with the 'Standards' team leader to develop specifications for data transfer.

#### 5. SHELL Project Phases

Phase one covers the period until Summer 2003. In this phase, the focus is on developing the SCR database and its use within the core partners. This will involve the analysis of business processes, and technical specifications for the interfaces and data transfer mechanisms. A multi-institution transcript which sets out what data is recorded will be developed, in addition to the specification of the multi-institution personal development record (PDR).

Phase two starts in July 2003 and runs until February 2005. In this phase the SCR will be available to the wider project partners, and will by that time include the personal development record.

#### 6. Summary

A number of themes of particular interest in this project will be investigated, spanning aspects of technical implementation, IMS standards, issues of organisational change and staff / educational development. The project will explore and disseminate the experiences of implementing large scale change between the partner institutions, with the potential of serving as a model for information exchange at a national level.

At the heart of this investigation lies an interest in the experience of the learner in a changing environment.

#### 7. References

- [1] The Joint Information Systems Committee 1/01 Programme (2002) [online] Available from: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/mle/01-01/> [Accessed 08/2002]
- [2] The SHELL Project website (2002) [online] Available from: [www.shellproject.net](http://www.shellproject.net) [Accessed 08/2002]