

PROWE

(Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment)

- understanding the OU user perspective

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1.0 Executive Summary

This report tracks the process of information seeking which culminated in the production of the outline matrix for system functionality (Appendix One) for the Open University part of the PROWE project. Focus groups and questionnaires were used and generated a wealth of information about potential users, their relationship with technology, their perceptions of tools which might support their continuing professional development, and their wishes for functionality within any system which the project might develop. The implications for PROWE environment design are summarised in terms of user attitudes and behaviours, and of design issues. Further comments are offered too on the significance of potential users' personal resource management strategies (PRMS)

2.0 Introduction to the PROWE project

The Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment project, PROWE for short, is a JISC-funded digital repositories project focusing on the potential of repositories at the informal and individual levels. The project's overall aim is to develop an understanding of how current technologies can, and are, being used to support communities of part time distance tutors. In particular, the project will establish the role that individual and group repositories play in informing professional practice and facilitating (part-time) staff development. The project has a central research question:

"In what ways could wiki and wiki-type environments be useful and useable as personal and informal repositories to support professional development within part-time tutor communities of practice?"

Two institutions, The Open University (OU) and University of Leicester (UoL), are involved in the project. Both institutions make extensive use of part-time tutors although tutor duties, and thus associated professional development needs, vary quite widely.

3.0 Developing a user perspective - methodology

Open University tutors are distributed across the UK and parts of mainland Europe and they may never have need or occasion to visit Walton Hall campus. Consequently there is no single easy method of obtaining user views. The tutor population is equally diverse in terms of the kinds of courses they are supporting – all courses are part of distance programmes but may be delivered by print, online or a combination of differing degrees of both systems. It was therefore decided that multiple methods should be used to seek views from potential users of any wiki or wiki-type environment. These methods included focus group meetings at Walton Hall, and e-mail questionnaires as well as ad hoc information gathering from meetings with University support staff and, once the project was underway, with individual Associate Lecturers (ALs) as the Project Officer encountered them in other contexts such as conferences or training initiatives.

Although PROWE is a research project there was deliberately no attempt to consult with a representative cross section of ALs. Firstly, mapping the full range of AL backgrounds in order to do this would have constituted a whole research exercise in itself. Secondly, the purpose of the consultation was not to establish a single way forward but, rather, to explore the potential of new communications technologies to support continuing professional development for part time distance tutors. Within this aim there was an inherent assumption that this might sensibly occur in multiple ways, especially given the diversity of the potential user base. Furthermore at this stage in the project it was important to keep development of the project as wide as possible in order not to eliminate any potentially useful tracks forward.

3.2 Focus Groups

Two face to face focus groups were held at Walton Hall for ALs who were interested in the PROWE project and who could easily reach Milton Keynes. All those attending were asked to complete a short questionnaire prior to arrival to give some idea of their background in terms of teaching experience, technology experience and interest. This information can be summarised as follows:

Time as Associate Lecturer: range from 6 months to 15 years

Courses taught for OU in last 3 years: Lot of T courses; M, D and A courses*. Also range of Openings courses

Other institutions you have taught in: Mix of old and new universities; FE and 6th form colleges; NEC; one freelance trainer and one with Univ. experience in Switzerland and Canada

Type of Internet access e.g. dial-up, broadband etc: Only 1 of 14 on dial up all rest on Broadband/ADSL

Any experience of learning repositories? – YES – 1, NO - 13

If YES, please give details: evaluation for use in schools

Do you use any other technologies e.g. i-Pod; Palm, Blackberry etc. ? Several use mobile phones, 3 with sophisticated mobile internet/software. Two Palm users, one i-Pod user and one IPAQ mobile messenger.

How do you organise any digital resources you may use in your teaching?

Via own web pages, hard disks and folders on hard-drives

Do you transfer digital resources across teaching contexts e.g. between OU and any other institutions? If so, when and how do you do this?

Mainly First Class and USB pen drives. One uses bookmarks and four use chiefly paper copies of handouts. One uses blog for storage/transfer

Do you like to reuse teaching materials? If so, when and how do you do this? Most yes but in terms of recycling own material only, albeit perhaps from more than one job (several of these people are 'serial ALs' or multi-institution workers)

*see 3.3 question 1 and 4, page 6, below

3.2.1 Focus group core questions

Each focus group began with the facilitator briefly outlining the aims of the project. Thereafter the facilitator worked through a series of core trigger questions as follows:

1. How do you share ideas and resources with others right now?
 - ditto – with other ALs?
 - ditto – with your students?
2. How would you like to do this?
 - ditto – with other ALs?
 - ditto – with your students?
3. In an ideal world what would most help you do this?
4. If you had access to an AL community wiki or blog – what would you consider the most important things that it should be able to do?
5. What would you expect to be contained in the community policy/ground rules for use of the wiki/blog?
6. What is the most important aspect of interacting with other tutors?
7. What materials would you like to share with other tutors?
8. What kind of files, such as Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, etc. would you want to upload?
9. Would you like others to be able to edit your work/contribute to collective writing?
10. How would you expect to access the wiki/blog?

Two rapporteurs recorded AL responses and discussion. This material was later integrated with material from the short questionnaire and the summary below was prepared. Responses formed the first inputs to the matrix of user requirements the first version of which is reproduced as Appendix One to this report.

3.2.2 Focus group summary:

3.2.2.1 Who are they?

From the outset it was clear that there is no 'typical' profile for a part-time tutor. They share many issues and imperatives but few commonalities. The diversity that is 'the part-time tutor' can be elaborated as follows:

3.2.2.2 Employment and teaching experience

Many tutors in this project are employed full-time in addition to any tutoring work they may do for either of the partner institutions. A few work full-time for one of the partner institutions. Some tutors work in further or higher education, possibly but not necessarily, teaching the same subject that they tutor part-time. Some tutors work in other education contexts e.g. management or administration. Others work in professions unrelated to education and tutoring is their only teaching activity. Some tutors are retired education or other professionals and yet others are best described as full-time part-time tutors or educators. This latter group most often work across multiple institutions. It was noticeable that many of the early volunteers for testing the project fell into this latter category, as did some of the most technologically innovative individuals - although it was equally interesting that the project simultaneously drew the attention of a number of self-confessed 'technophobes'. With regard to any training which tutors might have for teaching in higher education, some were education professionals formally qualified to teach - albeit not always trained at higher education level - many were not. Some were taking advantage of fee-waiver schemes whereby tutors could also enrol on university programmes in education whilst also tutoring. The length of time that focus group participants had been working as ALs ranged from 6 months to 15 years. The courses they taught on covered all faculties and a few had taught in more than one faculty.

3.2.2.3 Technology – access and use

Somewhat surprisingly, all but one of the volunteer tutors attending the initial information collection focus groups at the OU had broadband access to the internet at home. This was true even for those tutors who reported using the internet for email and basic level online discussion groups only (OU tutors all have email addresses provided by the university). At the other extreme there were some tutors who had experience of using wikis and other online tools, a few had personal blogs and one had a website of resources which he used to provide his students with access to online resource materials. Most tutors reported storing their teaching resources, tutorial notes, handouts etc. on their home PCs, some used key or stick storage devices, web pages or hard drives and one reported using only hard copies in an offline folder. Only two tutors had any previous experience of mobile learning devices such as Palms or PDAs, one was an i-Pod user and one had an IPAQ mobile messenger although many were mobile phone/text users.

3.2.2.4 Teaching and tasks

The range of teaching or tutoring and associated tasks performed by tutors is as diverse as the tutors themselves. For most tutors marking assignments, known as 'TMAs' are a large part of any individual tutor's workload. This marking is a task which increasingly happens online. The other aspect of their work is providing tutorial support – either face-to-face or by telephone. Some OU tutors do not undertake tutorials but work exclusively through online discussion boards in First Class. Interaction with other tutors is largely confined to discussion boards designated for such activity or to email although some OU tutors teaching on popular courses may have joint meetings and briefings arranged in the geographic regions in which they are teaching. OU tutors also have a university-wide gateway to web based resources through TutorHome, a series of web pages offering advice and guidance on issues related to tutoring for the OU.

3.2.2.5 Wishes and issues for interaction with other tutors

The tutors involved in the focus groups all expressed the wish for more interaction with other tutors and for more sharing of resources. Many reported a lack of time for collaborative activity and, equally, a concern over ownership issues for shared materials. Likewise, who would hold copyright for original, reused, re-versioned or collaboratively authored materials? In particular, an issue arose over the ability to retain original materials whilst also offering them up for others to develop in new directions. Some were concerned about how they would continue to access materials they would share and expressed the view that they would wish to store them on their own PCs.

There was a great deal of optimism about the possibility of developing a shared resource or repository but, as one OU tutor expressed it, the success of the project would, for him, be measured by whether the facility became an icon on his desktop. This implies that ease of access and integration with other tutor activity (and the software that that activity uses) are critical. Simply put, in order to become an integral part of AL life, using any new environment must become an effortless and integral part of the normal work of being a tutor and it must better serve existing needs, or real needs that are not yet being met.

Regarding the content that might be developed in a shared space, this would relate to common issues for tutors. At the OU specifically this would include, for example, supporting younger learners or those in prison. Any shared space would have to allow the setting up of smaller special interest groups in order to cope with the range and diversity of the user population and their interests. There would be a need for thematic groupings (and thus for material to be searchable that way too) to allow for issues to be (potentially) divided by subject, or level of study, as well as encompassing issues that extend across disciplines. Likewise it must be acknowledged (and accepted) that some issues will attract contributions from many tutors, others from very few.

3.2.2.6 Tutor concerns about technical issues

Software solutions already exist for most of the activities that tutors would wish to undertake. However, not all are available in any one particular wiki environment. Or, where they are there are overriding issues to be considered – such as security, authentication or storage. Most wikis are completely open, accessible to any one, and thus are liable to interference or spam attack. This vulnerability makes them unsuitable for stable, long term repository type use. Wiki technology also makes it difficult to store multiple versions of documents concurrently, which would be required to ensure that contributors do not lose control of their original contributions. Even if versions are stored, referencing them is an inexact science. The auto storage that does happen in wikis does not allow for easy searching, nor does it make it easy to retrieve specific versions. A related problem is that storage systems cannot identify versions which are obsolete. Wiki-type environments, on the other hand, seem to more easily accommodate user needs – often by providing more closed environments but there is a consequent loss of access beyond a fixed group of users. There is thus a fine balance to be struck.

A major challenge for PROWE, therefore, is to develop an environment which will offer enough security (i.e. which respects access and the integrity of inputs) to inspire the trust and confidence of its users in order to ensure that they contribute to it. It must also be flexible enough to encourage the widespread uptake needed to, in turn, ensure that it endures as a stable, secure and supportive environment. Another aspect of this challenge for the project is to link the development of repository deposited resources to individuals and not just to the institutions in which they are presently teaching. This will be essential to ensure sustainability and achievable by offering users incentives to contribute by providing long term personal satisfaction and continued professional development over a career which will span a number of different courses and probably also multiple institutional affiliations.

Wiki-type environments can be attractive to time pressed tutors since they allow those individuals to develop support communities, feel a part of a group and get feedback on their ideas and issues, whilst producing new forms of knowledge. Experience with informal repositories may also serve as an introduction to the use of more formal repositories, and to a culture of sharing and reuse. Where common technical platforms can be developed this new knowledge and peer support are not confined to use in one institution (where they originated) but can move with individuals across institutions as their careers evolve. The challenges to ensuring sustainable communities are less technical than social.

3.3 Questionnaires

The questionnaire was developed as a text-based version of both the questions sent to focus group participants before they met face to face, and of the trigger questions used at the face to face sessions. It was sent to over 40 ALs who had responded to a message on TutorHome explaining the project and asking for anyone who wanted to be involved to get in touch. Some had volunteered for focus groups at Walton Hall but were eventually unable to attend due to distance. 15 responses were received and are documented here. Obviously, these responses do not represent an exact microcosm of the whole AL community. This is not a major concern since the purpose of the study is to investigate ideas and boundaries for what is, and might be, possible, not to establish the statistical significance of actual occurrences.

Question 1 Course code(s) for all courses on which you are currently teaching,

AND

Question 4 Courses taught for OU in last 3 years:

Faculty or subject code	Course code
A - arts	103
	210
	297
B - business	200

	615
	713
	722
	820
	830
<i>E- education</i>	301
	303
<i>EK</i>	310
<i>EZX</i>	836
<i>K – health/social welfare</i>	260
<i>M – mathematics and computing</i>	150
<i>MU</i>	254
	120
<i>S- science</i>	103
<i>T- technology</i>	172
	175
	209
<i>U- interdisciplinary</i>	210

Comment: The spread is broad, although within the spread there is - probably inevitably - a bias in favour of those tutoring on courses which have already adopted IT use and/or those tutors with a predisposition towards using IT solutions within teaching and learning.

Question 2 OU Region

Region code	Number of AL participants
1	1
2	2
3	0
4	0
5	2
6	1
7	0
8	1
9	3
10	0
11	2
12	1
13	1

Comment: This provides a good spread considering this is a self selecting group

Question 3 Time as Associate Lecturer:

No. of years	Number of AL participants
1	0
2	1
3	3
4	0
5	0
6	4
7	1
8	1
9	1
10	2
15	1
20	1

Average = 7.4 years

Comment: Again, the sample provides a good range of experience levels - from newly-appointed tutors to those with a wide OU experience.

Question 5 Type of Internet access e.g. dial-up, broadband etc:

Type of connection	Number of AL participants
<i>Dial-up</i>	1
<i>Broadband</i>	14

Comment: Fortuitously, this exactly mirrors the profile of the focus groups. However, it is not clear how typical broadband use is across the whole AL population. And, despite evidence that over 50% of UK households with Internet access have broadband¹, it will be necessary, in the course of development of the project tools, to bear in mind that not all ALs will have fast connections.

Question 6 Do you use any other technologies e.g. i-Pod; Palm, Blackberry etc? (If yes, please give details)

Technology	Number of ALs using this
<i>None</i>	3
<i>Laptop</i>	2
<i>Palm</i>	1 (1 recently given this up)
<i>iPod</i>	2
<i>UMTS</i>	1
<i>PAD</i>	1
<i>Mobile phone</i>	3
<i>MP3</i>	1
<i>IPaq</i>	1
<i>VLE</i>	1
<i>Blackberry</i>	1

Comment: Figures relate to use in a work i.e. tutoring, context.

Question 7 How do you organise any digital resources you may use in your teaching?

Method	Number using this/comment
<i>None</i>	2 (one claimed he had none to organise)
<i>Index list on web page</i>	1
<i>Blog</i>	1
<i>Electronic files/folders on laptop</i>	2
<i>Electronic files/folders on First Class</i>	2
<i>Electronic files/folders on hard drive</i>	5
<i>Powerpoint/Word/Excel</i>	1 (not clear if question understood)
<i>USB pen drive</i>	1
<i>CDs</i>	1
<i>Collect URLs, disseminate by email</i>	2
<i>Beamer</i>	1

¹ See National Statistics online: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=8251>

Comment: The pattern is very similar to that found within the focus groups. "Old habits die hard" seems a useful adage here. The project may have to ask itself how to inspire confidence in new options, just putting out a new tool will not work. Users will need to feel that any new tool is what best helps them do what they already want to do (not what others might want them to do)

Question 8 Do you have any experience of learning repositories? (If yes, please give details)

Experience/type of repository	Number of ALs
No	7
VLE central links collection	1
VLE (no details specified)	2
Don't understand question	4
Shared "teaching drive" at workplace	1

Comment: Half have never used a repository and four do not even know what one is. There may be a perception problem here and/or a need for some marketing of the concept and some attempt to relate it to present practice. It is also interesting that instead of being seen as an interactive/dynamic phenomenon the VLE is seen by three respondents as being a storage facility.

Question 9 Do you transfer digital resources across teaching contexts e.g. between OU and any other institutions? If so, when and how do you do this?

When/how	Number of ALs
Never	11
Via First Class storage area	1
Email URLs	1
Via disk/CD/USB drive	1
Via VLE video conference	1

Comment: It is not clear how far this reflects what tutors would wish to do – in focus groups several expressed the opinion that they were not allowed to use resources across institutions because of IP and copyright issues. PROWE needs to establish clear guidelines as to what is and isn't acceptable use and to develop robust terms of use for materials.

Question 10 Do you like to reuse teaching materials? If so, when and how do you do this?

When/how	What	Number of ALs
Successful materials	Handouts	2
	Tutorials	3
	Various/all	6 (1 using Lyceum, 1 using CD-Rom)
Materials from other universities	Various	1
Materials from others teaching same course (T175)	Various/all	1
No response		2

Comment: In the light of issues raised around responses to Q9 it seems reuse occurs much more often with successive offerings of the same course i.e. reuse is concentrated in the same teaching/learning context, rather than being used for the development of new contexts

**Question 11 Who do you share ideas and resources with others right now?
With other ALs? With your students?**

With Students	Number of ALs	With ALs	Number of ALs
Yes	8	Yes	9
		<i>Shares with a mentor/mentee</i>	3
		<i>Sends handouts back to Region as requested but "I have no idea what happens to them there"</i>	1*
No	2	No	2

*good example of how PRMS develop in response to externally imposed rules

Comment: Clearly, although the PROWE project is about sharing between tutors and building tutor networks, for tutors, sharing with students is as important as sharing amongst themselves. A system which had multiple levels of access could allow for sharing with a range of groups, this would eliminate the need for tutors to store materials in different locations in order to share with different groups. It would also allow multiple identities for users and thus tutors could also have identities as learners in their own right. This would reinforce the professional development aspects of the system for tutors whilst also simplifying their personal resource management needs.

Question 12 How do you like to do this?

Technique	Number of ALs
<i>Don't do it</i>	1
<i>Class website and/or blog</i>	1
<i>First Class conference(s)</i>	6
<i>File exchange</i>	1
<i>Email</i>	8
<i>Telephone</i>	1
<i>Presentations</i>	1
<i>Print out and mail</i>	1

Comment: Responses reflect the most tried and tested methods. Use of First Class is unsurprising since it is the OU's present standard. However, it is worth noting that many at the focus groups (and doubtless amongst this group too) were unaware that First Class will be superseded by Moodle in the near future. They were also generally pretty unaware of the features available in VLEs other than First Class. Again, this implies a marketing/PR need within PROWE.

Question 13 In an ideal world what would most help you do this?

<i>"Webpace (preferably allowing database driven sites via ASP or similar) + appropriate secure ftp access+blogging software accessible easily via a webinterface"</i>
<i>"FC works fine but I guess a shared space like a wiki would be useful for this"</i>
<i>"Common file servers"</i>
<i>"if all students were online, I still have some without computers. more time"</i>
<i>"The application of videoconferencing would be of enormous help in the courses I tutor"</i>

"Can't think of anything"
"Not sure"
"Seems to work as it is"
"All students to have easy and regular Internet access"
"Don't know but I am keen to find out what is possible"
"Having a virtual place where all the information is stored in a way that is easy to find"
"More shared areas for sending and receiving tutorial materials"
"For students, I think that if the members of a teaching group were linked together electronically, through use of an electronic desktop, this would remove some of the sense of isolation which students feel. It would also mean that a tutor could share and communicate with all students more transparently - materials, suggestions, advice would, unless there were a particular reason to maintain confidentiality, be open to all."
"Sending attachments to students with OU's e mailing system"
"Unsure. It is rather ad hoc"

Comment: Issues of interoperability are paramount. They relate closely to ease of use and ease of access for any system, as well as a 'wish list' for a world where all students would have equal and easy access to common hardware and software.

Question 14 What kinds of materials would you like to share with other tutors?

<i>Tutorial outlines</i>	8
<i>Exercises and activities</i>	7
<i>Presentations (inc. but not just .ppt)</i>	4
<i>Handouts</i>	2
<i>Pictures</i>	2
<i>Diagrams</i>	2
<i>Seminar recordings (audio/video)</i>	1
<i>Hints and tips sheets for students</i>	4
<i>Video clips</i>	1
<i>Marking schemes, guides and templates</i>	3
<i>Web links</i>	1
<i>Conference ideas</i>	1
<i>Ideas in general</i>	5

Comment: Responses reflect what tutors tend to re-use already. PROWE will need to stress that this is only a fraction of what can – potentially – be reused, reworked, stored, developed etc. There is an opportunity for PROWE to stress latest and innovative practice.

Question 15 Would you like others to be able to edit your work/contribute to collective writing?

<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Number of ALs</i>
Yes	6
Possibly	2
"Up to a point"	1
"Depends on who I am working with"	1
"If I still have some control"	1
"as an editor yes"	1
"Depends on the purpose"	1
"Yes if within a shares secure place"	1
"If I am on a course team yes, if as an AL no"	1

Comment: The implication within these responses seems to be that there is a certain level of concern over advisability/security etc of collaborative activity. Safeguards need to be built into any recommendations for PROWE which recognise peoples' concerns. This further implies a need for a system(s) that saves multiple versions of documents or other resources, and/or marked up versions, as opposed to simply keeping the latest version and most recent changes. This implies that a bliki/blog with a whiteboard area for collaborative writing as a side tool (or a link to Writely), might be more effective than a pure wiki.

Question 16 What kind of files, such as Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, etc. would you want to upload?

<i>File type</i>	<i>Number of ALs</i>
<i>Word</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>PowerPoint</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Sound files</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Drawings</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Mind maps</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Adobe</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Text and diagrams</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Star office</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Excel</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>.jpeg</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>HTML</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Video</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Collective calendar</i>	<i>1</i>

Comment: These results reinforce the view expressed above that tutors are quite conservative in approach in their views about what can usefully be shared or further developed upon. It also probably reflects a reality that materials are usually prepared using 'lowest common denominator' technology/inputs. See also comments for items 12 and 14.

Question 17 If you had access to an AL community wiki or blog - what would you consider the most important things that it should be able to do?

<i>"A wiki in an academic environment needs some appropriate checks on academic material, so not a free for all"</i>
<i>"Be open only to ALs in order to protect privacy and intellectual property"</i>
<i>"Exchange files, have access to other tutors groups, discussions"</i>
<i>"Support for the geographically isolated, quicker updates for course resources"</i>
<i>"Provide a supportive network of colleagues within particular disciplines and subjects"</i>
<i>"No experience"</i>
<i>"It would help me feel more part of a community"</i>
<i>"The journal aspect of the T175 website is like a journal for students – certainly at this early stage it isn't clear what it is useful for. At this present time I can't see how a wiki or blog would add any value, but am willing to listen to ideas."</i>
<i>"On a course-by-course basis, allow ALs to share experience of what topics students misunderstand and how to help them get that understanding"</i>
<i>"Get into contact, share documents, have live collaboration if wanted"</i>
<i>"I would like students to design pages as TMAs and submit photos"</i>
<i>"I am not sure about blogs, as they seem to be, generally, full of opinionated comments. For ALs, email seems fine for instant communication. The wiki idea might be a very fast method of creating and sharing materials among ALs. I have insufficient experience of wiki to be sure. Worth exploring for teaching materials, suggestions and plans for tutorials within particular course based communities."</i>
<i>"Encourage wider collaboration between tutors on same course re planning of tutorials,"</i>

<i>assessing TMAs etc."</i>
<i>"Have an effective search facility and easy access"</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comment: Interest in community development and collaboration is tempered by concerns over IP and copyright, ownership and access. Implies a need for marketing of potential of any wiki or wiki-type environment with practical content from early adopters/peers etc., in order to maximise visibility of that potential and stress its immediate relevance and usefulness to all.

18 What would you expect to be contained in the community policy/ground rules for use of the wiki/blog?

<i>"Some OU branding and appropriate policies re diversity & opinions - however it is in the nature of blogs to be personal, so that would need some care. Also the OU centrally could take steps to make such material available to students requiring assistance e.g. text reading etc. The wiki if it is to be academically significant will need some validation."</i>
<i>"Netiquette, university computing use regulations."</i>
<i>"Security"</i>
<i>"there may be some difficult issues about confidentiality and terms of employment, however rules should not discourage open use and constructive criticism."</i>
<i>"respect for the views of colleagues and for their right to express those views even when they might not accord with one's own. It should be a safe and comfortable environment in which colleagues can ask for and offer help to each other and share their knowledge, raising current issues, discussing new developments and finding new ways of approaching the stuff that it always with us."</i>
<i>"No experience "</i>
<i>"Not sure as I am not used to these sort of communities"</i>
<i>"I don't know enough about how these would dovetail into what we already have, so no comment at this stage"</i>
<i>"?"</i>
<i>"Equity, Fairness, Helping each other, copyright, a friendly tone"</i>
<i>"Tutor should be able to moderate entries "</i>
<i>"No anonymity; all use of materials and entries for teaching and any external (to the blog) use to be explicitly acknowledged; normal (face-to-face) codes of professional conduct to be observed in all interaction"</i>
<i>"Usual conventions "</i>
<i>"Appropriate credits for the resources "</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comment: In addition to netiquette, respondents' chief concerns can be summarised as: control; validation; respect for others and for the right to express differing viewpoints. A need to establish trust is also apparent. All of these points imply a need for an environment with structure and 'getting to know you' features rather than an open, 'free for all' environment. This raises the issue of whether or not there should be a moderator which in turn raises sustainability issues.

Question 19 What is the most important aspect of interacting with other tutors?

<i>"Some face to face work on design stages, + focused groups for particular courses reflecting a variety of approaches"</i>
<i>"Knowing you are not alone"</i>
<i>"Time"</i>
<i>"Mutual support and advice. The more experienced can learn things from the new just as much as the other way round. I see such interaction as offering a valuable input to the mentoring scheme, for example, which at the moment seems a very good idea that is dealt with in a rather casual and piecemeal fashion"</i>

<i>"Sharing good practice"</i>
<i>"Sharing experiences and givin support (practical and emotional). This helps to make all of us more effective in our work."</i>
<i>"Helping peers and learning from peers - essential for continued professional development. In OU terms it definitely helps to cut down on the isolation felt by ALs - problems with course material and/or students are more manageable when shared with other tutors. I've had some good ideas provided to me on how to cope with a Tourettes Syndrome student in a tutorial - common sense really but very helpful indeed"</i>
<i>"Removing the sense that each tutor works alone - much increased these days now that the OU seems to have stopped running course conferences"</i>
<i>"Having a fair, enjoyable and effective communication. It would certainly help with feeling "far away" as an AL in CE [Central Europe] sometimes ☺"</i>
<i>"Sharing teaching materials and not re-inventing the wheel. I would like to share materials with students - see my T172 blog at http://ecofootprinUextamerica.com/ I use this with my students on T172"</i>
<i>"Stimulation, awareness of gaps and undue emphases within one's own teaching and feedback to students, increased confidence to engage proactively with course content."</i>
<i>"Finding out how others are approaching a particular task etc and being able to compare practice"</i>
<i>"sharing resources, discussion"</i>
<i>"support, ideas and information exchange"</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comment: Aspects of community predominate (e.g. support of peers, removal of isolation, sharing, communication etc.) but also recognition of the value of peers experiences and knowledge and potential usefulness to self. It will be necessary for PROWE to develop strategies to maintain the momentum of initial interest beyond the first stages - when there is a lot of activity which serves to motivate more activity – to sustain community longer term.

Question 20 How would you expect to access the wiki/blog?

<i>"Webinterface for editing: I don't mind whether the access is Open to All, or just to OU students. I suppose I do have a slight concern about blogs that are open to all students e.g. all doing A219. What if someone's tutorials 'seem' so much better than mine? Would students read the blog rather than attending? I don't spend much time on what I do at present because it essentially an extra. I can see some value in the Wiki, but again what is its purpose - is it supposed to cover everything or is its scope going to be clearly limited? Is there a danger of pointless competitiveness to produce better entries? Will it become part of the way students choose courses? Or will it be restricted to ALs?"</i>
<i>"From Tutor Home page."</i>
<i>"Via internet explorer and Mozilla firefox"</i>
<i>"Via my pc - I'm not sure what you mean here. I don't know whether it would be possible to add it to First Class, for instance, but that would be useful I think."</i>
<i>"No experience" -2</i>
<i>"Not sure?"</i>
<i>"Not through a completely separate access - so please integrate into Tutor Home and/or access from First Class client"</i>
<i>"Through a browser, Mozilla Firefox"</i>
<i>"Easy ☺ Through the website I guess (I would send a link to my desktop)"</i>
<i>"via tutor home or student home. The one problem I have had with my blog is spam bots there has to be a means of filtering this?! "</i>
<i>"Via Internet Explorer at home? I'm not quite sure what the question means"</i>
<i>"Through First class? "</i>
<i>"Through internet / tutorhome"</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comments: As has become clear from responses to other questions, there is a major concern about having any wiki-type environment fit in with programmes and applications already in use e.g. FC, TutorHome etc. Anything new must become an integral part of tutors' present familiar realities. Anything new must also be simple. There seems to be an implicit assumption that something new might be complicated and this implies a need for the project to ensure that plenty of practical user advice is supplied, that implications and, above all, potential to simplify life, is stressed at all stages. Examples of actual use by people perceived by tutors as real peers would support this aim.

4.0 Implications for OU PROWE design

ALs usually only encounter new tools when they are being implemented as finished products so it was hard to get them to provide a creative view on what might be the potential of what was being suggested. ALs repeatedly expressed disquiet about envisaging an alternative to the FC conferences they already have access to, few had ever thought of the possibility that these might one day be superseded, let alone were aware that a decision to replace them had already been taken and had been widely publicised using normal information dissemination routes. All this having been said, there was plenty of guidance to be drawn from the responses received in the information gathering process. It is summarised as follows:

4.1 User attitudes and behaviours:

- Very diverse user population (3.2.2.2)
- Both innovative users and technophobes (3.2.2.2)
- Wide disciplinary base (3.2.2.2)
- Mainly, but not exclusively, high speed Internet access (3.2.2.3)
- Seeking more interaction (3.2.2.5) but within a controlled environment (3.3. Q18)
- Seeking to share resources (3.2.2.5)
- Lack time (3.2.2.5)
- Concerned about ownership issues (3.2.2.5; 3.3 Q17))
- Concerned about access to own materials (3.2.2.5)
- "Old habits die hard" over storage issues (3.3 Q7) – see section 5 below
- Limited understanding of the potential of new technologies (3.3 Q8; Q12), of the relationship between different ones (3.3 Q20), and of re-use (3.3 Q16)
- Practice of re-use is within same teaching/learning context (3.3 Q10)
- Keen to share with students (3.3. Q11)
- Many are learners as well as tutors (3.3 Q11)
- Concerned about security (3.3. Q15; 3.3 Q17)

4.2 Design issues:

- Ease of access i.e. icon on desktop (3.2.2.5; 3.3 Q20)
- Integration with other tutor tasks (3.2.2.5; 3.3 Q20)
- Integration with other systems (3.2.2.5; 3.3 Q20)
- Meet existing needs (3.2.2.5; 3.3 Q20)
- Thematic access (and search) as well as disciplinary (3.2.2.5)
- Ability to store multiple versions of a resource (3.2.2.6)
- Simple, consistent referencing system (3.2.2.6)
- Secure but flexible (3.2.2.6)
- Link resources to individuals not just to institution (3.2.2.6)
- Just creating a new tool will not work – must be marketed (3.3 Q7; Q8)
- Needs to incorporate IP advice (3.3 Q9)
- Multiple level access and storage to include tutors and learners (3.3 Q11; 13)
- Security and online safety must be apparent (3.3. Q15)
- Need for marketing (3.3 Q12; 14; 17)
- Interoperability of prime importance (3.3 Q13)

- Needs immediate visible usefulness (3.3 Q17)
- Needs practical content from day one (3.3 Q17)
- Needs structure and structured activity to maintain momentum – possibly a moderator (3.3 Q18)
- Needs lots of user help and practical advice (3.3 Q20)

5.0 Personal Resource Management Strategies (PRMS) – a first look

5.1 Overview:

PRMS are as diverse as the populations using them. From contributions to OU PROWE focus groups and responses to a project questionnaire survey, we see that often they are accidental or inadvertently imposed on the individual from outside. They are seldom logical, sensible or effectively sustainable but they may also be keenly defended! For many the idea of changing their practice is courting disaster because it introduces as yet unproven alternative guardians of what is dear to them. This does not mean there is a lack of interest, more a need for transparency and robustness in any new system or proposed strategy.

5.2 Personal:

Highly personal and individual, many practices have arisen in response to experience rather than deliberate strategy. For example, employers have imposed certain practices e.g. some tutors have to send tutorial handouts back to Regional Office as requested but one of them comments: "I have no idea what happens to them there". Another tutor places all materials on a "teaching drive" at one of her workplaces because "that's how we do it".

Other influential experiences relate to past misadventures – these can have an influence well out of proportion to the effects of the original misadventure e.g. a tutor who having lost data many years ago persists in printing out anything with reuse potential and storing it in a cardboard folder. Less extreme but similar, there were several tutors who reported that the only place that they felt was safe for storing materials was on their personal PC or laptop hard drives – but these were not necessarily backed up to a level that would actually ensure no loss of the material in the case of any system crash – *perception* of security was paramount and individual.

5.3 Resource:

What constitutes a resource is as personal as the strategies for managing them. One PROWE tutor claimed he had no resources to organise. Others organise using blogs, for example, by turning off the comment feature and using a new post as the repository for all links or materials relating to the latest section/unit/module of the course. For another tutor resource was clearly equated with URL. Several felt the most important and useful things to share were those which would short circuit the time and tedium of tutoring e.g. marking templates and standardised assignment feedback comments which could be recycled for use with subsequent groups. The value accorded to different resources is equally wide ranging as seen by the extent to which different tutors are willing to see their work developed. Some are concerned about how resources might be viewed by others in terms of quality (and thus how well they are perceived as performing) whereas others are concerned that they would not want to contribute anything that was not proven as good (but were assuming that they as individuals – not the potential end users – would be the best placed to confirm the resource as good for someone else's context)

5.4 Management:

Data from PROWE suggest that people do not spend a lot of time actually managing their digital resources in any consistent or targeted way. Once a system is in place there is little likelihood of change – despite whatever new tools might now be available. Some focus group participants felt it was a case of "if it ain't broke don't fix it"; changing systems was inviting

disaster. There was concern over loss of control over original work, it's OK for others to use it but originating authors want to keep track of the original.

5.5 Strategies:

For finding or using others' resources – the flip side of organising their own (as covered above) – these should be sorted according to level; have a search tool which can deal with keywords, and have abstracts but not anonymous reviews. Several tutors suggested an "Amazon.com" star rating system and cross-referencing system "those customers who bought this title also bought...". Overall, presently existing resources were considered to be difficult to access and searching results too variable, and dependent on region and on how many other ALs were teaching on the same course. One tutor summarised three possible outcomes operating at present: finding them is complex, either "like mining nuggets in a land of admin"; or "there is nothing there"; or, you are lucky and "someone collects the good bits and harvests them into a folder elsewhere" – but it's still a gamble as to whether you can find them there.

5.6 Implications for the PROWE project:

The emphasis for understanding PRMS needs to be placed on the "personal" – you simply cannot legislate for how things are done, at least, not completely, the personal/individual element is too strong. Even if you require certain things to be stored/logged different people will exercise the requirement in different ways, not necessarily the most technically sensible. And, attempts to control what happens may lead to shadow or parallel storage systems too. You can take a horse to water, as the saying goes, but you can't make it drink.

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APPENDIX ONE

1 Draft matrix for system functionality

Motivation/Activity	Co-relates to	Generic requirements	Specific issues/Notes
Collaboration	<p><i>Aims – high level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduce isolation - foster sharing culture - support continuing professional development - network building <p><i>- personal level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support for personal endeavour - increase return on personal investment in institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion boards • Internal email/messaging facility • Alerts for new contributions • No anonymous posting • Integration with existing systems • Incorporate inputs from multiple media sources¹ • Generate outputs in multiple media formats • Desktop shortcut • Run on any browser • Run on dial-up • Authenticated and/ or password protected • "New message" alerts and auto-update system 	<p>Possibility to share some resources with students – differential access to same basic resources. NB This likely to be crucial factor in "winning hearts and minds" – a carrot not to be resisted</p> <p>?Facilitation will restrict cross-institutional use??</p>
<i>Intra/Cross- faculty/disciplinary</i>	In particular, support of CPD in dealing with special needs/circumstances e.g. prison education; younger students etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support wide range of subject specific software • Course based communities • Thematic communities 	<p>Requires facilitation?</p> <p>Requires (benign) censorship?</p> <p>NB for OU – cross-regional too</p>
<i>Knowledge sharing (in an informational sense)</i>	<p>Improving institutional information network and social capital</p> <p>Strengthen institutional culture and profile</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve/respect copyright, IP rights etc. • Evidence of transparent peer-review 	
<i>Professional development</i>	Improving teaching standards and improving individual tutors' subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to institutional professional development sites 	<p>Must link to e-portfolios</p> <p>Requires facilitation or strong</p>

¹ See section 3 for full list from focus groups and survey

Understanding the User Perspective – OU - Appendix One

Motivation/Activity	Co-relates to	Generic requirements	Specific issues/Notes
	knowledge	with single login • QA system	institutional input?
Knowledge sharing, creation and development (i.e. collaborative aspects of using knowledge)	Aims: - encourage sharing - encourage re-use		
<i>Co-authored materials</i>	Community building	Wiki or whiteboard or "writely" ² feature (1)	Preserve/respect copyright, IP rights etc (1) must permit the saving of versions
<i>Versioned materials</i>		"comment on" style input rather than track changes so that original author is always evident	
Knowledge management (i.e. storage and repository aspects of using knowledge)	Aims: - encourage re-use, sharing, sustainable use		
<i>Long term collection building</i>	Strengthening individual and institutional profiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support multiple file formats³ • Searchable abstracts • Searchable by usefulness ratings as well as traditional search • Minimal prescriptions in terms of how can be classified • System to require feedback (to original authors) for all reuses 	File size limits???
<i>Easy access</i>	Commitment to open content initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run on dial-up • Variable access permissions • Author changeable access permissions • Bookmarking facility • System structure must be transparent to users 	
<i>Multiple versions</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If over write (as in pure wiki) 	

² <http://www.writely.com/>

³ see section 3 for full list

Understanding the User Perspective – OU - Appendix One

Motivation/Activity	Co-relates to	Generic requirements	Specific issues/Notes
		need ability to save copies of versions and for clear differentiation of these in search results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed preservation of original document or item even when new versions preserved • Original author rights to be preserved 	
<i>Easy remote access</i>		Unified institutional access and login	
<i>Coded/search enabled</i>		Metadata – automated as far as possible BUT see below	Relate to OU course codes Issue of code obsolescence
<i>Minimum author coding</i>		Auto-collected metadata to be as comprehensive as possible and/or authors select from drop down lists	
<i>Author code-able</i>		Option to tag/code and create folksonomy(ies) as guide to other users	
<i>Multi-code-able (theme, level etc.) and include resource quality rating</i>		e.g. course code; alternative course code(s); purpose; alternative purpose(s); complexity i.e. beginner, intermediate, advanced, tutor only etc. Star ratings AND comment for quality	Provides "added-value"

2 Detail of feedback from potential users on functionality and other system requirements

System-wide principles (proposed by focus groups)

1. "Opt-in" not "opt-out" tutor membership in order to encourage positive participants and discourage lurkers
2. Authority of speaker/author/institution must be clearly identified
3. All material or discussion input deposited must specify its author and origins in full
4. Time must be available for trainers or implementers to "walk the walk" with incoming users
5. New staff must be helped and encouraged through their initial period until they "find their feet"
6. membership should be on a personal basis so that tutors not currently teaching but still on the institution list for further courses, or simply on sabbatical, are not thrown out
7. A post-end of service grace period must be allowed to enable tutors to find new hosts for themselves and their material

Related comments from questionnaire survey

Question:- If you had access to an AL community wiki or blog - what would you consider the most important things that it should be able to do?

<i>"A wiki in an academic environment needs some appropriate checks on academic material, so not a free for all"</i>
<i>"Be open only to ALs in order to protect privacy and intellectual property"</i>
<i>"Exchange files, have access to other tutors groups, discussions"</i>
<i>"Support for the geographically isolated, quicker updates for course resources"</i>
<i>"Provide a supportive network of colleagues within particular disciplines and subjects"</i>
<i>"No experience"</i>
<i>"It would help me feel more part of a community"</i>
<i>"The journal aspect of the T175 website is like a journal for students – certainly at this early stage it isn't clear what it is useful for. At this present time I can't see how a wiki or blog would add any value, but am willing to listen to ideas."</i>
<i>"On a course-by-course basis, allow ALs to share experience of what topics students misunderstand and how to help them get that understanding"</i>
<i>"Get into contact, share documents, have live collaboration if wanted"</i>
<i>"I would like students to design pages as TMAs and submit photos"</i>
<i>"I am not sure about blogs, as they seem to be, generally, full of opinionated comments. For ALs, email seems fine for instant communication. The wiki idea might be a very fast method of creating and sharing materials among ALs. I have insufficient experience of wiki to be sure. Worth exploring for teaching materials, suggestions and plans for tutorials within particular course based communities."</i>
<i>"Encourage wider collaboration between tutors on same course re planning of tutorials, assessing TMAs etc."</i>
<i>"Have an effective search facility and easy access"</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comments: Interest in community development and collaboration is tempered by concerns over IP and copyright, ownership and access. Implies a need for marketing of potential of any wiki or wiki-type environment with practical content from early adopters/peers etc., in order to maximise visibility of that potential and stress its immediate relevance and usefulness to all.

Question:- What would you expect to be contained in the community policy/ground rules for use of the wiki/blog?

<i>"Some OU branding and appropriate policies re diversity & opinions - however it is in the nature of blogs to be personal, so that would need some care. Also the OU centrally could take steps to make such material available to students requiring assistance e.g. text reading etc. The wiki if it is to be academically significant will need some validation."</i>
<i>"Netiquette, university computing use regulations."</i>
<i>"Security"</i>
<i>"there may be some difficult issues about confidentiality and terms of employment, however rules should not discourage open use and constructive criticism."</i>
<i>"respect for the views of colleagues and for their right to express those views even when they might not accord with one's own. It should be a safe and comfortable environment in which colleagues can ask for and offer help to each other and share their knowledge, raising current issues, discussing new developments and finding new ways of approaching the stuff that it always with us."</i>
<i>"No experience "</i>
<i>"Not sure as I am not used to these sort of communities"</i>
<i>"I don't know enough about how these would dovetail into what we already have, so no comment at this stage"</i>
<i>"?"</i>
<i>"Equity, Fairness, Helping each other, copyright, a friendly tone"</i>
<i>"Tutor should be able to moderate entries "</i>
<i>"No anonymity; all use of materials and entries for teaching and any external (to the blog) use to be explicitly acknowledged; normal (face-to-face) codes of professional conduct to be observed in all interaction"</i>
<i>"Usual conventions "</i>
<i>"Appropriate credits for the resources "</i>
<i>No response =1</i>

Comments: In addition to netiquette, respondents' chief concerns can be summarised as: control; validation; respect for others and for the right to express differing viewpoints. A need to establish trust is also apparent. All of these points imply a need for an environment with structure and 'getting to know you' features rather than an open, 'free for all' environment.

3 Full listing of file/content types ALs wish to use in PROWE system.

From focus groups:	From survey responses:
Word documents	Tutorial outlines
PowerPoint	Exercises and activities
Marking templates	Presentations (inc. but not just .ppt)
eTMA models	Handouts
blog postings	Pictures
Model tutorials	Diagrams
Model feedback	Seminar recordings (audio/video)
	Hints and tips sheets for students
	Video clips
	Marking schemes, guides and templates
	Web links
	Conference ideas