



# External Evaluation for the BCE-CT Project

## STRAND 1:

Effectiveness of project activities and processes

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## Background

### *Purpose & aims*

The BCE-CT project has been undertaken in the context of increasing emphasis on collaboration across traditional boundaries, both within institutions, between institutions and with external business partners and local communities.

*“The project addresses a complex, commercially and socially valuable process: the effective transfer of technology and innovation from the University research base into real use by business – particularly for economic regeneration and social impact.” (Leeds trial project final report)*

*“The aims of the project were to create a collaborative online community of practice (COP) linking masters level students, aspiring entrants to the profession, established practitioners and key industry institutions. .... The intention for this community is to try to break some new ground, come up with some new insights or models for the future.”*

While face-to-face contact may provide the initial thrust, a growing majority of BCE work is heavily dependent on virtual collaboration through email, telephone or web-based tools and resources (JISC, 2007). Co-creation and co-production can be especially effective through the medium of shared online resources and tools. However, in a study on social media in BCE, web2.0 technologies were found to be greatly underexploited among BCE practitioners (JISC, 2009).

The BCE-CT project picks up this theme and a previous JISC User Study set the premise in which the institutional trials have been conducted:

*“One key theme was the strength of feeling behind the belief that face-to-face is often the best approach. In some contexts this view was held in the absence of any significant evidence to the contrary, through lack of experience of available collaborative tools. However, the importance of personal contact and the establishment and maintenance of relationships is a key criterion for engaging with partners. Any further work should not attempt to contradict this, but acknowledge it, and work to find and demonstrate examples where tools can enhance.” (Rob Allen, JISC User Study, 2007)*

On the one hand, the knowledge transfer/exchange area and the employer engagement/work-based learning area in particular are now fairly established as professional fields in their own right and CPD provision is evolving to meet both formal and informal roles. On the other, the tools and infrastructure used to support collaborative activity can be far from strategic. Implementation is often rather ‘hit and miss’ based on what is available, which inevitably results in poor fitness-for-purpose, and subsequent abandonment in many cases.



The BCE-CT Project is concerned with enhancing both the *use and awareness* of online collaborative tools to support BCE. We have focused strand 1 of the evaluation specifically on data concerning project effectiveness in working with stakeholders and trial teams rather than technical implementation elements. A second strand will examine more closely the critical factors in choosing tools for collaborative BCE activity and a final strand (to be undertaken in Sep/Oct) will draw out how well wider strategic objectives have been supported.

The project aims to enhance use and awareness of online collaborative tools in a demonstrable manner, enhancing and empowering BCE collaboration among practitioners, between institutions and between institutions and external partners, through:

- the testing and piloting of selected web technologies, tailored as appropriate, in specific BCE collaborative contexts;
- the testing and piloting of techniques for collaborative BCE open source software development;
- the provision of structured advice and guidance on effective use of web-based tools for collaboration for the range of BCE practitioners, deriving from the experience of the trials.

### *Project design & intended outcomes*

Commencing in July 2008, the two -year project has comprised three phases:

Phase 1: Scope and plan trials (6 months) ensuring that a range of contexts are represented:

- departments and disciplines within an institutions (including on one example combining arts and sciences);
- different institutions within and across regions (including one example from Lifelong Learning networks);
- institutions and their external partners (including one example of collaborative open source software development).

Phase 2: Implement project trials (18 months) focussed on web-enabled collaboration to support strategic BCE.

Phase 3: Analysis and synthesis of trials (6 months) to create structured advice and guidance for BCE practitioners.

Emerging knowledge and understanding has been fed into two of the other projects within the programme – ‘Awareness and Education’ and ‘Training and CPD’ - including through our own cross-project liaison and support to the BCE programme.



The criteria for 'success' offered in the original project plan span the three phases:

- There are expressions of interest submitted that meet the criteria for funding.
- The proposals span a range of BCE activities and contexts that are of interest to a wider audience.
- Institutions commit sufficient resource to complete the trials.
- The institutions' IT infrastructure allows the full functionality of the tools and so enables collaboration with external partners.
- There is project buy-in from the Institutions' external partners.
- Trials are open with regard to barriers, issues etc in order for the lessons learned to be shared with the wider community.
- Outcomes are sufficiently rich to provide case studies, advice and guidance to the wider community.
- There is sufficient interest by the wider community for the showcase event to take place.

These criteria have provided a sound checklist for the project through its lifecycle and against which to reflect critically upon strengths, limitations and key lessons learned in the final project report.

There is a wealth of thoughtful reflection documented from cluster meetings<sup>1</sup> and in update reports, as well as via the monitoring of project processes we have undertaken (albeit lightly). Indeed, the themes for the series of cluster meetings were decided by the project team's analysis of trial progress reports and the outcomes from individual visits in 2009. Trial projects have submitted their final reports, although one or two were still in draft form only at the time of analysis and only three case studies were available. We feel that this synthesis is adequate for the purpose of this first strand of the evaluation in evidencing project effectiveness without the need to produce fresh data directly. Close-out interviews with the project team for strand 3 of the evaluation will offer an effective and efficient means to further draw out experiences and other critical success factors.

## About the evaluation

### *Focus & scope*

This first strand of the external evaluation explores how the BCE-CT project has met its aims in enhancing the use and awareness of web technologies in collaborative practice to support business and community engagement across a range of institutional contexts in HE and FE. The key question addressed here is how effectively have project activities and institutional trials succeeded in meeting their objectives.

The work expands upon an initial review of project activities and approaches undertaken and reported to the team in April/May. Additionally, we have monitored

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<sup>1</sup> As cluster meetings were held under Chatham House Rule references have been anonymised.



project progress, provided support activities to institutional trial projects for evaluating their activities and outcomes and undertaken an analysis of their final outputs.

Our aim for the strand 1 evaluation has been to identify evidence of direct and indirect benefits in relation to original objectives and what has worked well at the level of project design, management and communication. As part of our evaluation support and synthesis work, we produced advice and some examples to help projects identify suitable evidence of outcomes/benefits, and to document/illustrate these in their final reports.

Direct benefits would include implementation of collaborative tools software, successful collaborative activities with partners, identification of new BCE opportunities, improved awareness and perception of BCE within the institutions involved, and improved skills and expertise. Indirect benefits would include organisational and attitudinal changes that can sustain the direct benefits in the longer term.

The overall evaluation therefore draws on the trial project reports as the main source of new data, as well as our previous review based on project aims, plans, activities, reports and interviews with the project team, trial project visits and other observations and incidental contacts. We have analysed the documentation thematically to draw out key aspects of practice, unique characteristics, strengths and limitations.

### *Design & methodology*

Given one element of the BCE-CT project activities is its approach to evaluation, it seems appropriate here to document our own methodology and the context in which we have designed and undertaken our activities.

An important early task in designing the BCE-CT project evaluation has been to identify and agree those elements that are primary and secondary or peripheral to the project, and what the project and its trial case studies can most significantly contribute to the larger evaluation. Taking a ground approach to the evaluation as a whole, we have used consultative opportunities throughout to review and adapt our approaches and triangulate the data to help to define a coherent overall evaluation methodology and final plan.

As outlined in our original proposal, the evaluation framework for the BCE programme prepared by WM Enterprise covers a very wide and detailed set of criteria and impact indicators. While a programme level evaluation has not yet been established, the BCE-CT team have usefully indicated on the WME impact diagrams where the project is likely to have an input.

At another level, there is an existing 'BCE' infoKit and case study template, as well as the standard JISC reporting templates used as a basis for trial project final reports. Our evaluation has draw upon and helped to remodel these, based on our initial review of the work. We have incorporated the opportunity to test, discuss and refine our evaluation framework and tools with some very key internal stakeholder groups, such as the BCE-CT project team, other JISC BCE projects, JISC programme managers &



advisory services, as well as institutional trial members. The resultant tools, frameworks and templates will be useful in informing a bespoke infoKit for BCE-CT.

There is inevitable and very valuable overlap between what the evaluation seeks to explore at the strategic programme and project level and ‘in the trenches’ institutional level. This means the type of advice we gave to trial projects regarding the kinds of evidence they should be gathering has been guided by their particular activities and experience of evaluation, but with a backdrop of practice across the BCE programme as a whole.

Our review activities for strand 1 have included analysis of the following data:

- Project documentation, cluster meeting notes, blog posts and reports to the JISC programme team;
- A detailed interview with the BCE-CT project manager;
- Observation at cross project & interim meetings and discussions with other JISC projects and advisory teams and programme managers;
- Discussions via email and site visits with key trial institutional representatives on their projects, issues and experiences, evaluation approaches;
- Short interviews with 12 members of the JISC innovation fund;
- Final reports & case studies (where available) from the 8 trial projects

Much of the ‘support to trial projects’ activity (funded separately) is naturally, therefore, integrated into the main evaluation work of reviewing tools and developing research instruments so that the data gathering and analysis undertaken by trial projects is a coherent fit. This is a critical point for future bids, in that this may have been more challenging had the work been split between two evaluation teams. For instance, we had many interesting and informative discussions during trial project site visits that informed our initial review work and the tools and frameworks developed for strand 2 of the evaluation.

In particular, the complexities of the institutional trials in terms of evaluating outcomes and impact were hugely underestimated. This point was strongly supported by data from short interviews with 12 members of the JISC Innovation Forum (conducted as part of our strand 3 evaluation) and summed up well by the Leeds team in their final report:

*“The construction of the project, and more so its practice, has been complex. ... This complexity is a reflection of the attempt to integrate ‘open’ and ‘online’ approaches into a genuinely complex and business-critical commercial KT.”*

*Firstly, it is not always easy to disaggregate the positive drivers from those that have little or no impact (that is: to what extent is it possible to identify the extent to which successes were due to ‘process re-engineering’ versus the extent to which they are simply a result of the use of online tools). Secondly, it may be a bit early to determine which of those components will and will not work.*



During trial project visits, we discussed the nature of evidence against various intended outcomes and explored ways in which teams might capture direct, indirect and unanticipated benefits. From our review of evaluation frameworks, we have identified Engestrom's 'activity system' as a reasonably tight fit with the organisational context of these projects. This is further discussed below in terms of the context for BCE and developed more fully in the output from Strand 2 evaluation.

## Findings

### *Context & contribution to BCE*

The contribution of the BCE collaborative tools project to the BCE programme is mainly in exploring how technologies can be used to enhance collaboration and co-operation between HE and FE institutions, business and the community and to facilitate fruitful and sustainable partnerships for knowledge exchange.

A key feature is that the use of online tools may enable new partnerships to take place that otherwise might not have happened, so the project is in some cases a lever and the tools an enabler of BCE engagement. One aspect of our evaluation support has been to encourage projects to capture any evidence of online tools facilitating relationships that would have been conducted differently, less effectively, or not at all, without them.

In the trial projects, it has become clear that internet procedures, both institutional and those of external partners, need to become less restrictive for effective collaboration to take place. This can be theorised in terms of "readiness" to use online tools for collaborative activity. Four aspects of readiness were apparent in update reports and discussions with trial sites:

1. Staff have the **information literacy** type skills to use collaborative tools, or to use them in a BCE context.
2. Technical policies and procedures allow **external access** to collaborative spaces.
3. Individuals' perceive business and community engagement as a part of or **legitimate extension** of their academic role, so tend to make themselves available to external partners and to pro-actively identify BCE opportunities.
4. Institutions have **experience** of working effectively with different types of online community.

While we intended to capture evidence of change in these aspects over the lifetime of the trial projects, many were not yet sufficiently developed to make this a fruitful exercise at this time. Most projects experienced significant setbacks due to circumstances beyond their control, such as restructuring, cutbacks, staff redundancies, staff shortages, as expressed eloquently by one trial partner:



*“The rapid down-turn on the economy and its impact both on the capital markets and then the public purse, had a very direct, and disruptive, effect on the collaborative partnership.” (Leeds trial project final report)*

However, it is evident that those same budget reductions are likely to reinforce the impact of the project in the longer-term as institutions are forced to *“achieve more with less”*. What is clear is that across all four aspects of readiness there is a common cultural and perceptual factor: a willingness to engage in collaborative activity with external partners in industry, business and the community, and to perceive this activity as a legitimate and valued aspect of institutional business.

The context and activities at play are represented in Figure 1 below. The black headings (down the centre) are final report headings and trial projects were guided to reflect upon the dynamics processes going on at each stage (represented by shaped arrows). IT and HR support is not shown explicitly, but plays a critical role in maximising or minimising implementation of online tools and the effectiveness of BCE communities of practice at the ‘process’ levels. Their involvement as a key stakeholder ‘input’ and their ownership in the ‘outputs’ is believed to be essential for an effective, efficient and sustainable organisational BCE-CT activity system.

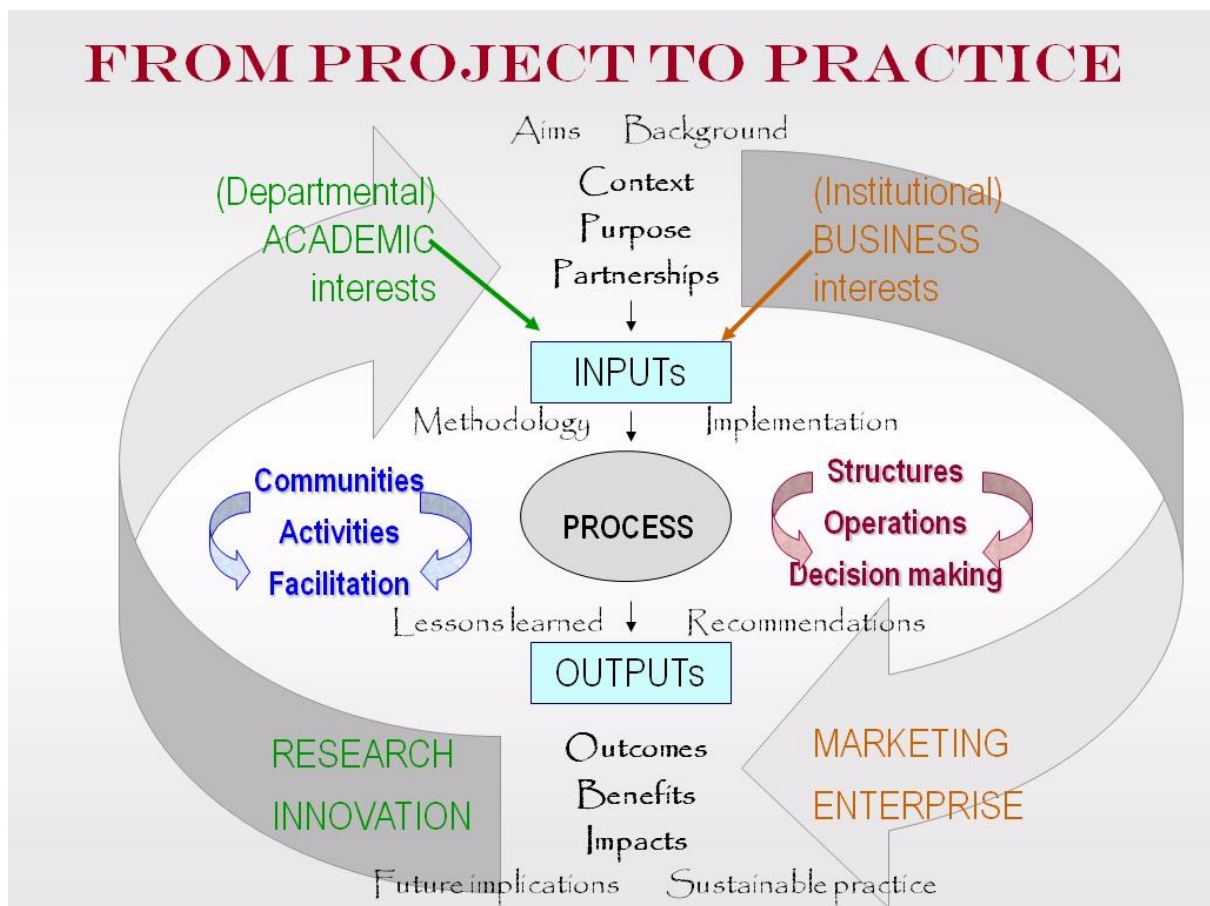


Figure 1: A representation of the BCE institutional operational context



Future evaluation might therefore aim to capture further evidence of perceptual and strategic change at both individual and organisational (institutional, departmental & external) levels as a means to understand more fully the complexities of, and interplay between, institutional academic/business processes.

### Selecting and supporting trial projects

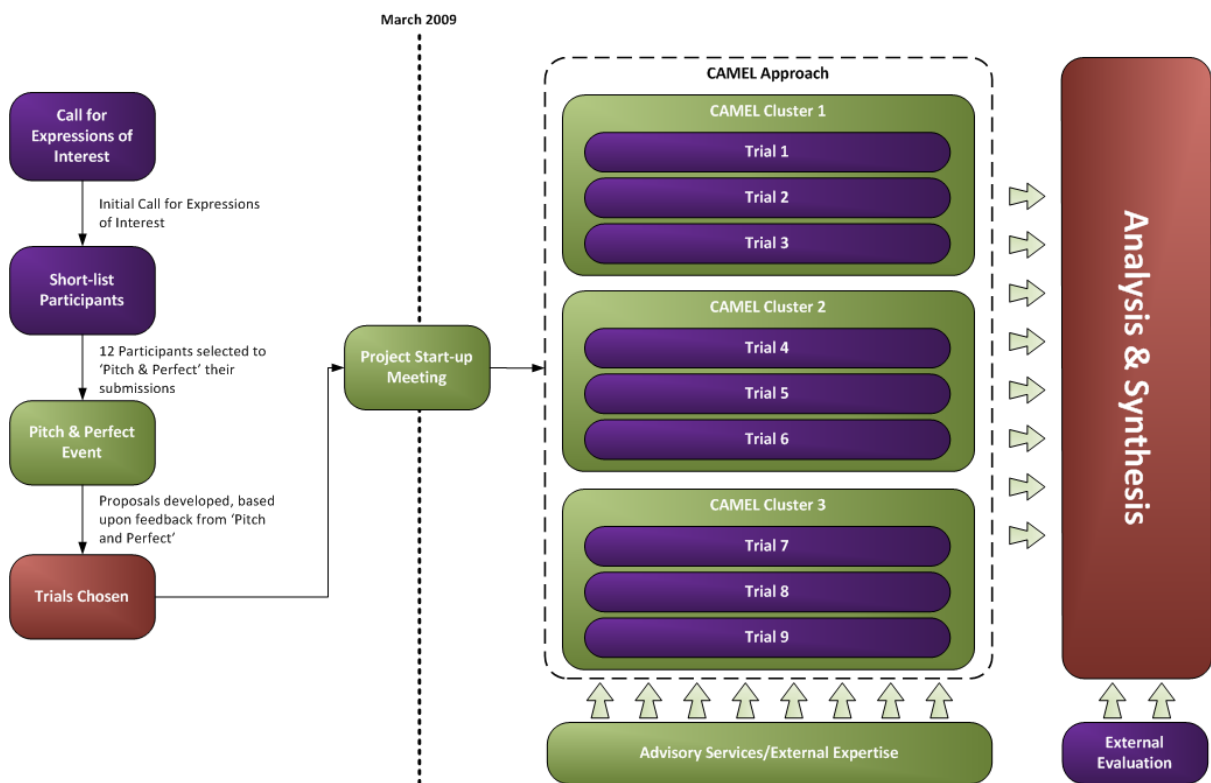
#### Selecting trial sites

The project team identified pilot sites using an efficient and supportive 'CAMEL' like process following a comprehensive selection process involving: Expressions of Interest, Shortlisting, Presentation ('Pitch & Perfect'), Selection and Start up (Figure 2 below).

Feedback on the process on both sides was very positive.

*"I think the call for expressions of interest (EoI) went quite well and resulted in 19 submissions." (cf. <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bce/collaborative-tools/index.html> BCE-CT Project Team member)*

*"All those attending [the 'Pitch & Perfect' event] found the process to be very supportive and useful in clarification of their ideas and those of the Project Team." (Project Short Progress Report, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009)*





*Figure 2 (from original project plan): BCE-CT project activities leading to the trials and the relationship between the trials, CAMEL clusters, the Advisory services and the support of analysis and synthesis running for the duration of the trials.*

Eight out of nine trials were secured, despite some initial difficulties and adjustments to partnerships resulting in one institution having to withdraw. The BCE-CT team indicated they had underestimated the workload in announcing successful/unsuccessful trial projects. As one member stated (email correspondence): *“Any project doing this in the future would do well to plan 2/3 days for feedback on EoI.”*

Nevertheless, the BCE-CT team successfully met the requirements of involving a variety of institutional types and links with external organisations, such as lifelong learning networks (see table produced by the project team in Appendix 1). Each trial project is summarised in Appendix 2 in terms of partnerships, technologies, strengths and constraints. The table presents an initial view of the 8 trial projects, their partnership arrangements, the strengths and constraints of their operational contexts, the distinct BCE-CT approaches and tools adopted. Trial Projects were organised into clusters for initial mutual support and general management.

### **Progress against plans**

Overall, the BCE-CT project and its eight institutional trials appear very well managed and supported. Despite setting reporting deadlines, the team experienced the usual challenges of pinning down busy academics in trial institutions to produce outputs. As one team member remarked:

*“No matter how far in advance dates were published projects still found it difficult to meet certain deadlines. The project had a project calendar, highlighted upcoming tasks in various meetings, emailed reminders via the mailing list and yet people still managed to miss things. I’m not sure what the answer is to this but it was extremely frustrating.”*

As with their BCE roles, this kind of activity is often peripheral to the main ‘day job’ of research and teaching, although in some cases the trial work did shoehorn very well into existing learning enhancement interests and activities.

Within individual trial institutions, the project plans were complex. Many institutions choose more than one type of online tool to trial, one trial partnership was developing software in-house, some projects incorporated staff development in the use of online collaborative tools as a key element of their trial objectives. For example:

*“The project focused on one business, one community group and one training provider for the research. This meant that the project was managed across three separate project teams with very different aims and objectives for each of focus areas of the projects.”*



*"[Our] trial is perhaps unique. Whereas other trials were focused on assessing different software packages to meet a specific purpose, KH attempted to customise a specific piece of software for different purposes."*

Some institutions trialled a single platform (such as Elluminate) and focused more on how to establish and nurture a community, and (as one project final report put it) *"to find ways of spanning structural holes between these communities"*. Many were examining the utility of several very different tools, as indicated in one trial final report:

*"A variety of Web 2.0 tools were recommended for use across the three strands of the project. These included: online conferencing tools, social networking (Facebook), podcasting and vodcasting and use of blogs and wikis."*

Trial projects made satisfactory progress against their plans; they have been well supported in adapting and adjusting activities well to deal with the issues and challenges that innovative projects like these inevitably face. While some projects struggled to get a full cycle of BCE activity underway, others succeeded in several iterations and could deduce what and how technologies were playing a part in the efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

### **Trial project support**

The trials teams comprised people in very different institutional roles, but, as the Project Manager stated they all *"share an energy"* and a *"real commitment and belief in what they are doing"*, both in terms of BCE and in terms of the enabling technologies. Trial members appear to have good relationships with the BCE-CT project team. The majority appear to be engaged, effective and reflective in their activities. This resulted in good levels of participation at national events and should generate a rich set of illustrative case studies.

It is evident from final reports that the trial teams felt more than adequately supported during their projects. Many expressed gratitude for the level of support available from the JISC:

*"The support of JISC through their contact and events has been much appreciated. The body of knowledge is vast and all the JISC team were ready, willing and able to help."*

*"The support given by the JISC team was exceptional. The workshops were superb and really helped to contribute to the success of the project."*

### *Networking with wider stakeholders*

The project team incorporated a number of opportunities to tap into the wider perspectives and utilise expertise outside the trial project network. Some examples identified from progress reports and trial visits include:



- The steering group represented a wide cross-section of HE/FE & BCE communities (although it is not clear from documentation how the group stakeholders were engaged and involved in the project individually or collectively).
- The project team attended a number of JISC programme meetings, cross-project events and JISC services away days and are actively communicating across the sector.
- The project start up meeting included a session by the JISC BCE CPD project.
- The Perception Toolkit from Embedding Project to be made available to Trials.
- Trial members were supported to host and/or attend external events, including staff development workshops such as to support project management.
- The project team supported one trial leader in Team in his application for National Teaching Fellow.
- Events hosted by the project or BCE programme were consultative in nature and enabled BCE and related practitioners to engage in the emerging ideas.

In particular, the 'Cross Project' meetings were very well attended by the Collaborative Tools team with a representative at every meeting, giving them the opportunity to highlight progress and learn from others. Interaction with higher levels of the JISC programme team was felt to be a key strength of these events. As one member of the project team commented:

*"The most important aspect in my opinion was the interaction with the programme manager."*

Forward planning and prolific advertising of project events appears to be a key strength of the BCE-CT team, utilising a wide variety of lists/websites across the sector (GINNN, JISC BCE external mailing list, AURIL, UCISA, SCONUL, JISC BCE Blog, ALT members and digest, Higher Education Academy). As one member stated (email correspondence):

*"I think rigorous planning really helped us in being successful. .... We're actually over subscribed for the showcase event!"*

*"The use of a collaborative online space was very useful for planning too as each member could add ideas, tasks and updates e.g. Huddle."*

To avoid trial teams working a vacuum, activities and progress have been shared, debated and improved. This is a definite strength of the team's liaison and monitoring processes. Reflections from most events were written up and disseminated via the blog and announced via broadcasts to the relevant email lists.



Conference proposals have been submitted to appropriate events. Where it was not feasible to attend conferences, BCE flyers were taken to a whole host of events (see Project Status Update 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009 for a list).

### *Opportunities for trial partners to share and learn*

The BCE-CT team have been especially strong in establishing a range of opportunities for exchanging ideas as well as formal dissemination both internally and externally facing. The project plan incorporated many occasions for trial partners to share what they were doing and learn from each others' experiences, to trial online sessions with other sites (e.g. two Elluminate sessions hosted by Huddersfield was attended by other trial institutions (*Project Status Updates 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009 & 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009*), and for the team to tap into the wider BCE expertise through cross-project involvement. As with the BCE activity itself, these events supported classic community of practice activity, providing a good example of the combined use of face-to-face and online tools for collaborative activities.

*"...sharing tacit knowledge via interaction and informal learning requires processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching and apprenticeship"  
(Wenger et al, 2002)*

However, evidence from trial site discussions and observation at events indicated that activities that were perceived to have worked best are the cluster groups and interim meetings. These were a key mechanism for sharing and updating across the trials and with other members of JISC Advance. Although many online facilities were established and utilised well to some degree, these were, ironically, less successful in generating engagement and co-production than the face-to-face events (see Online tools section below).

### **Start up and interim events**

The project team were diligent in their planning and preparation for these core events, which were very well attended by both JISC Advisory and institutional trial team members and appeared to be of immense value to participants. With a response rate of 45% the overall impression of the event was 4.33/5. In summary, one member of the BCE-CT project team remarked:

*"The start-up meeting was fantastic, an absolutely brilliant day. It gave us an opportunity to highlight key milestones, get to know the projects (and them each other) and introduce projects to the range of services available from JISC Advance."*

*"For anyone else running a similar event Speed Networking appeared as our top session 4.27/5. It involved one person from each project explaining what their project was while the other person moved around the room in 5min intervals."*



When asked what were the most valuable aspects of the meeting, participant responses commented on increased awareness of JISC services and resources, good networking with others and a shared feeling of enthusiasm, as well as getting a sense of the bigger picture, and evaluating success.

*“networking and understanding more about what JISC has to offer”*

*“getting to the know the projects - the Speed Dating idea”*

*“meeting the team and seeing how the whole thing fits together.”*

*“what does success look like / how to evaluate”*

The event resulted in a number of projects receiving change/project management workshops from JISC infoNet and two institutions actually ran the event in-house. One suggestion for improvement was to have information about the other projects available in advance, and this might have been an excellent platform for getting the blog posting going.

Support for documenting briefings and outputs appears very well organised with dedicated persons for both note-taking and video who were able to capture experiences, lessons learned and “top tips”. Opportunities were taken outside of formal events to assist in capturing practice, for example recording a slidecast of a presentation at the Leeds trial site. At the interim meeting, an external team were employed to facilitate activities, leaving the BCE-CT team free to participate fully with their trial partners. Extensive planning was evident and the event ran smoothly and effectively to meet its intended objectives of drawing out approaches, issues and solutions across the trials as well as celebrating success.

The wider JISC Conference seemed to go very well with contributions from the BCE-CT team and three of the eight trial institutions.

### **Evaluation support**

Building evaluation support and synthesis into the project’s design has also been very beneficial in cross-fertilisation of frameworks used - and notably as a good example of using collaborative tools for co-creation, as reported at the Cross Project meeting in May 2010:

*“The evaluators have met with all the Trial Projects to discuss their individual needs re TP evaluation and to start the process using templates and tools that they have devised. They have also been involved with the design of the TP final report and case study templates. Huddle has been very useful in our communication with the evaluation team.”*

As part of the evaluation support to trial projects, we encouraged them to reflect on, and represent in some way, the dynamics of their particular 'activity system'. This is intended to provide a common framework for BCE-CT yet allow specific contexts and



practice to be illuminated in their case study narrative and rich media resources. For example, in one trial institution, the team captured and produced “flipbites” and podcasts based on very professional video interviews with trial members and leading industry figures.

It is evident that the support provided by the BCE-CT project team has proven highly successful as a means to capture trial institutions’ approaches and experience in a very rich and engaging manner. Through our own observation and participation at the most recent interim meeting, it was clear that these ‘stories’ may not necessarily have emerged from trial teams working in isolation. Many of the issues and factors raised came about as a direct result of the group brainstorming and interactions facilitated on the day.

Furthermore, the ‘spirit’ of enthusiasm, despite all of the challenges and obstacles being raised, was far more evident during the live event than might have been captured had trial members created diagrams, videos and podcasts ‘back at the office’. The majority of trial projects’ final reports took a rich and illustrative approach to their narrative, providing the BCE-CT project with an excellent set of resources for on-going dissemination.

### **Online tools**

A BCE-CT blog and BCE-CT twitter stream were put in place to support the project’s sharing of news and progress. These appear to have worked in complement to the Huddle web-based site, which was reasonably effective as a project management tool, acting to announce events, document progress and to deposit resources, rather than as a major way to reflect or interact across trial teams or beyond the project. Nonetheless, the team have been highly proactive in following up and capturing practice in the form of blog posts, podcasts, video clips.

The website/blog in particular was felt by the project team to have been under-utilised and its focus within the communication plan as a whole decreased as the project progressed. From February 10th 2009 the site received 4,534 visits, 2,525 unique visitors that spent an average of 2:05mins on the site. However, there were very few comments/interactions on the blog.

Some personal reflections by the Information Officer suggest some of the likely causes:

*“I’m not sure it really took into account the key messages outlined by the draft BCE communication plan. We lost sight of that as the project progressed although we may well have covered various aspects by accident.”*

It might have helped if the team thought more clearly about what they wanted to post on the blog and assigned roles in a similar way. For example, the spotlight series of posts appear to have worked well.

*“The spotlight series of posts were well managed by [the Project Manager]. JK asked OR to draft the posts before [they were] then signed them off.”*



Highest interest was in those posts that highlighted an upcoming event. These were highly publicised across JISC Mailing lists.

The team also felt the blog might have been easier to manage had they asked trial projects to post up information on the collective blog rather than setting up their own individual areas.

*“It would have been easier for us to manage and measure. I think onlookers may have found it easier too. This could have been done quite easily using JISC Involve.”*

### **Publications & presentations**

There is plenty of evidence that the project team have engaged purposely and actively in the wider communities of practice as well as supporting trial members to attend external events. Examples include presentations at national and institutional events (e.g. Mediating Boundaries 19-03-10), papers submitted to annual conferences (e.g. HE Academy and JISC 2010; Ascilite 2009 paper and poster session).

Overall, the project team have directed trial members towards creating a rich set of data to ‘story tell’ as well as evidence their approaches and experiences. Overall, this represents an excellent resource representing setup and management of using different types of online collaborative tools to support BCE activities across various institutional HE and FE strategies and contexts. This will be of immense benefit to ongoing dissemination and production of the BCE-CT infoKit.

### *Evidence of outcomes*

The project brief outlines the following outcomes as expected from the work as a whole:

- Demonstrable **enhancement in the use and awareness** of web technologies and in collaborative practice among BCE practitioners across different types of institution in HE and FE;
- Demonstrable **business benefit** to collaborative BCE within different types of institution in HE and FE, manifest in efficiency gains, shared platforms reducing cost, service improvements and increased business throughput.

The deliverables of this project are in the form of a media rich set of web resources, case studies, reports, lessons learned and recommendations for future activity. An infoKit specific for BCE-CT is being developed based on trial institutional case studies. These outputs are sufficiently accessible and flexible to be disseminated in a variety of forms through the JISC Advance and InfoNet on-going activities and acted upon as appropriate by the Advisory Services and the BCE Programme Manager.



The project's outcomes rest in the main on the extent to which the sub-projects (trials) succeeded in meeting their own aims and objectives. Institutional trial teams appear to have been very well supported in documenting, capturing and collating their approaches and experiences through their lifecycle and are many examples of evidence to draw from. Undoubtedly, the design of the project's activities in this respect contributes significantly to the evidence base. This has ensured the BCE-CT team have been amply able to demonstrate how its intended outcomes have been achieved through convincing narratives and set of media rich illustrations both from events and trial final reports.

Cluster meetings and interim events in particular, appear to have been a critical component in helping to draw out specific evidence from the trial work. The directed activities facilitated by the Peanut team and analysed by the BCE-CT project team should provide a rich source of data for documenting themes and identifying evidence of outcomes: enhancement, benefits and impact.

The institutional case studies and BCE-CT infoKit will provide an excellent range of operational contexts and external partnerships against which others can 'benchmark' their own situation for strategic planning, implementation and evaluation purposes.

### **Perceptual change**

Issues and outcomes relating to organisational culture, structures and processes were considered as the main focus for the second trial projects cluster meeting. There were some clearly challenges here. One example of how people can be habitual and can resist new platforms is typified by the initial difficulties experienced by one TP:

*"Initially the network aimed Elluminate usage at informal meetings and experienced problems with firewalls and the policies of various institutions, which had the software on their restricted lists.... the key was finding out how to overcome such barriers." (BCEct Cluster Meeting)*

*"The primary objective of proving the effectiveness of the adoption of a much more 'open innovation' approach to University enterprise and knowledge transfer activity has been successful and demonstrated clear, and measurable, advantages." (Leeds: Trial project final report)*

There were also some success stories with regard to changing perceptions of key institutional stakeholders. For example, the support from IT Services at one institution has allowed the trial team to implement the most suitable online tool for their needs, swaying the initial views of the Director concerning access and security when opening up certain systems to students and external users.

*"The work being carried out enabled the Trial Project to work with the Director of IT and this opened doors within the department and helped facilitate the aim of smooth collaboration with external organisations but without compromising the university's systems." (BCEct Cluster Meeting)*



*“This represents a major culture change and a definite success story. One reason for this is the IT department became involved in the project, were consulted and eventually became advocates for it.” (comment by BCE-CT Project Manager)*

There was evidence from trials of increased awareness of end-users of how collaborative tools used in one context might be used in new situations.

*“Many groups based at colleges in the area had not considered using the application despite them having a campus licence to do so (it was primarily used for teaching).” (WYLLN trial project final report)*

### **Institutional change**

The third and final cluster meeting focused specifically on technical and IT barriers faced by trial projects. Parallels were evident in other institutions where servers are locked down, often managed by individuals, not necessarily whole IT departments. There was emphasis on security and maintenance of systems:

*“[One TP Project Manager] stressed how important it was for work carried out to be secure and maintained internally by an institution.” (from Cluster Meeting notes)*

Another TP Project Manager commented that the need to switch tools to overcome problems of usability for some students or partners created tensions (between exploring innovation and developing a service).

*“...as things moved forward, it became apparent that there were better solutions.”*

This was often led by the users and momentum can snowball, causing big concerns for IT services in terms of security and capacity.

For some trial institutions, the main success story in terms of institutional change stemmed from overcoming some of the *“creative tension”* at play. For example at one institution, IT services established a new collaborative server for the purpose of supporting the new online external engagement. At another, prohibitive licensing costs were avoided by adopting open source rather than proprietary software.

### **Tangible benefits**

The capacity and benefits of institutions and their external partners in developing and using collaborative environments is very apparent across the trial sites. For some, benefits arise simply from exchanging information and providing students with access to remote experts/professionals (cf. ANNIE project: <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ETS/ANNIE/>). Gradually as awareness of further possibilities and skills in using Web2.0 technologies increased, more ambitious activities involving dialogue and co-creation have been successfully implemented.



A significant proportion of the students involved in the trials as part of curriculum delivery were very positive about their experience. Module leaders commented on the benefits to giving students, not only in gaining access to international professionals but also in organising and structuring shared content:

*“Our graduates will need to be able to operate in a cross-cultural setting.”  
(Northumbria final report, podcast)*

*“... [The activity] gave my students confidence and provided value to what they did. ... It increased students’ broader digital literacy skills.”*

For the majority of partners, the BCE-CT trials have enabled significant professional development, not only in the use and awareness of technologies through evaluation and/or practical application, but also in the operational context. This goes well beyond the skills developed in setting up tools, running webinars or online communications and co-production at a practical level.

Notably, many staff interviewed during the evaluation support visits demonstrated high levels of knowledge in how communities of practice between institutions, business and/or community groups are best established and nurtured. One trial institution referred to an *“increase in the internal social capital of those academic staff interested in innovation and knowledge transfer”*.

The project team must ensure that this understanding and experience is not lost amongst guidance on the technical utility of various online tools explored across the trial sites.

There is a wealth of technical experience and know-how gained from the project, which will be of value to the JISC in informing other developments. For example, one trial site created and tested a bespoke BCE-CT system that is flexible for use in different situations. The team have produced a roadmap of its implementation, evaluated the merits of the system as an open source approach, and offered some recommendations and potential improvements.

*“A roadmap was produced to formalise the results of the trial. The roadmap enumerates all of [our trial’s] recommendations and assesses the level of effort involved in implementing them.” (KnowledgeHouse trial project final report)*

Another emphasised how the trial demonstrates to other institutions how they can use these online spaces to grow existing external networks aligned with their core business processes.

*“From the outset the intention has been not to create a new isolated institutional or regional network – but encourage maximum interoperability of BCE, KT and Innovation networks, and to demonstrate how this can be done. During the project the growth of many of the legacy KT communities has been notable.” (Leeds trial project final report)*



### **Strategic impact**

For the majority of trial institutions, the incentive has been on the academic rather than business benefits, that of enhancing the students' learning, for example: *"... equipping students with skills for working in globally networked organisations ...particularly the development of skills in intercultural communication and collaboration."* (Trial member, final report). However, one trial partner focused particularly on knowledge sharing and business opportunities, as evidenced in their final report:

*"Information relating to companies, clients and projects is held in one central repository and accessible to different teams at different sites. Users can consult [the system] for historical data relating to a particular company or contact; this helps the universities work together collaboratively, rather than competitively, and ensures that teams do not 'step on each other's toes'."*

Demonstrable evidence of enhancement in use/awareness and business benefit may be premature, as many trials have only completed one cycle of engagement. However, evidence will stem from both institutions and ongoing JISC liaison, such as collection of web usage stats, enquiries, requests for information/presentations; invitations to join advisory groups, visit other institutions; downloading and follow/up of the BCE-CT infoKit to be produced.

Trial institutions have provided a variety of evidence of moving forward with their use of collaborative tools to support BCE. E.g. perceptual changes, institutional policy developments outlined above, but also in time, impact will be apparent from increased BCE related activity, increase in number of partners engaged.

*"As can be seen from the summary of goals and objectives completed, this project has been a short-term success in many ways. We hope, however, that the real impact of the project is still to come, and there are many hints to suggest this possibility." (Leeds trial project final report)*

*"The Response project has been innovative in that it has provided a platform for the NHS and HEIs and FECs to discuss workforce planning and development without time consuming meetings and travel costs." (BMC trial project final report)*

One institution secured a great piece of evidence of success (LCC OPEN-i trial project final report) following their national event with Etienne Wenger, who remarked it was:

*"... one of the 'best examples he has seen of the 'articulation of a masters course and development and support of professional community in a way that serves the needs of both' that uses 'similar technologies so takes advantage of the synergy between the two.'*

*"OPEN-i 'seamlessly broadens the course into an open process of continuous professional development. I would very much like to see his approach recognized and emulated widely in higher education'."*



### **Sustainability**

The majority of trial institutions will continue to utilise the collaborative online tools to support future BCE work. Despite some of the challenges and limitations caused by staff changes, licensing costs and so forth, it is a strong sign of success and 'proof of concept' that activities will be continued beyond the trial funding period. Some examples from trial project final reports:

KnowledgeHouse/Unis4NE:

*"The project has resulted in a stable, flexible and robust system [KHIS] which is now being actively used by the [partner] universities. .... Unis4NE keen to further explore this avenue and is looking to secure funding from various streams to support it. ... KHIS is currently being evaluated by several regional initiatives including the Institute for Local Governance (ILG) [who] is keen to adopt the system."*

OPEN-i at LCC:

*"The project has developed a systematic process for setting up webinars, and promoting them, and a set of guidelines for participants and presenters. Because the community provides such a rich vein of professionally and academically relevant material to the MAPJD course at LCC, the project team believe that the time invested in maintaining OPEN-i is justified in the amount that it feeds back into the curriculum of the course. ... "*

Birmingham Metropolitan College/ Midlands Health Academy:

*"Overall the project demonstrated that this medium can work to share, disseminate and post courses and resources that may be helpful to promote widening participation. It (the project) facilitated a spirit of co-operation and collaboration and sharing of resources."*

G-Blog/University of Glamorgan:

*"G-Blog is still running and although progress has proved to be slow, the remit of G-Blog is widening and the plan is to continue to develop its potential in line with the original plan and use it as a tool for SMEs and micro-businesses to link to the University and each other."*

Leeds:

*"This project has generated an inherent level of sustainability due to its high-level of embeddedness within the lead partner, the University of Leeds, the relationship that Leeds has to many of the core KT professional bodies and networks ... [and] because of the external funding environment and the proven success of the approach. ... the building of the LIN platform has inspired the Commercialisation Service team to revamp its whole KT process. ... staff that are now taking videos and uploading posts as an everyday part of their jobs. "*



## Conclusions

The BCE-CT Project is concerned with enhancing both the *use and awareness* of online collaborative tools to support BCE. There is a good range of evidence to demonstrate that this has been achieved to a high extent across the trial institutions and their partnership networks with many tangible benefits emerging.

Cross project and wider dissemination has been undertaken, this is currently fairly limited in its reach. For example, members of the JISC Innovation Fund we interviewed were not particularly aware of the collaborative tools project or indeed the BCE strand of the programme. However, it is early days and the showcase event planned for September is a key opportunity to generate wider awareness. The intended BCE-CT infoKit should also spur further uptake and implementation of ideas.

The BCE-CT team have been especially strong in initial planning, in support to its trial institutions and in establishing a range of opportunities for exchanging ideas as well as formal dissemination both internally and externally facing.

One of the dominant messages emerging from the BCE-CT is that of complexity, cultural and social rather than technical per se. While the initial brief for the work appears to focus on implementation and evaluation of online tools, there is a wealth of learning from the trial sites' experiences of bringing about change and of developing and nurturing engagement and collaborative activity.

The complexities of the institutional trials in terms of evaluating outcomes and impact remain an area for further examination to understand more fully the complexities of, and interplay between, institutional academic/business processes.

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*APPENDIX 1: TRIAL PROJECTS INSTITUTIONAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS & ALLIANCES*

The document “Matrix of BCE-CT Project Contexts” is included here for completeness of the ‘review’. It was produced by the project team at the commencement of the project to demonstrate and document the required engagements across a range of types of institution and partnerships, summarized below.

	Depts & Disciplines within Institution	Within & Across Regions	Lifelong Learning	External Partners	OSS example	FE Lead	New to BCE	KTN
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS	√	√		√				
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON				√			√	
UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD	√	√	√	√		Partners		
KNOWLEDGE HOUSE		√		√	Investigate			√
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY				√ International				
BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN COLLEGE	Possibly	√	A type of	√		√	√	
NEW COLLEGE, SWINDON	√		√	√	√	√	√	
UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN WALES	√	√	Member of	√		Partners		

*APPENDIX 2: TRIAL PROJECTS INITIAL REVIEW*

INSTITUTION	PARTNERS	TECHNOLOGIES	STRENGTHS	CONSTRAINTS
LEEDS UNIVERSITY	Yorkshire Concept with Manchester & Liverpool universities Reading and Oxford Brookes approaches Leeds to join in. Strong links to KT bodies, e.g. AURIL	Social media tools Linked into the "SOON" platform already in use and used by AURIL (KT body) to support a professional network of people who work in BCE	Strong cross community external partnership model; Different depts and institutions working together; Involvement in key KT bodies; Internal communities of practice between different academic areas; Existing multidisciplinary projects working with outside partners. Can respond quickly to R&D opportunities. Lead person very active in	Institution carries a strong brand so all externally facing activities, including online tools, use of logo need PR review, which caused delay and redevelopment of the system, now sorted. Engagement of academics challenging, trying to sell BCE to a strong research base, requires identifying a different angle for them.



			dissemination and involvement with AURIL.	
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON	Working with a disperse industrial of international photo journalists	OPEN I community website based on NING Using wiki for internal project management WIMBA for online discussion (previously used for T&L)	The partnership existed already as a loose community. Benefit from academic input, students on the course are part of the professional network. Carefully managed site; lead person a strongly respected international figure.	None identified.
HUDDERSFIELD	WEST YORKSHIRE LIFELONG LEARNING NETWORK	Elluminate; live & recorded sessions Elluminate less technical hurdles Bought own licence for trial.	Link to LLL network; IT services on board as proposers; Strong rationale for using BCE-CT lots of partners meeting, needed a tool to facilitate and give sense of attendance	Elluminate existing licence restricted to institutional use not external partners, expensive to upgrade or use in T&L; Partners reluctance to use the tools, perception of being a T&L tool not a business tool and not having the basic kit in place



				(headsets) Access problems due to firewall.
KNOWLEDGE HOUSE	NE University Liaison project	KHIS in-house CRM system already in use for BCE.	Well set up for knowledge transfer partners to use. Good collaboration between 5 north east universities. Industry and business already go to KH as source. Existing "champions" group.	Constraints all overcome. Some people issues with management of change. Comfortable with the system but no longer fit-for-purpose.
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY	Cross-institutional international partnership, 11 groups	The Global Studio open ICT tools Trialled VoIP  Plone explored (open source so IT not keen, see constraints)	Existing BCE relationships, includes big international industry players; Not only collaborative, but co-creation; Existing experience in trialling collab tools, key person very energetic & committed to using technology purposely for T&L;	No significant constraints setting up; Wiki needed too much space and functionality limited; Problems getting externals access due to institution's firewall; Dyslexic student found wiki difficult to use. Switched to wordpress blogging



			Working closely with IT services to instigate policy changes; Cross curricular delivery; Giving student real live project work in a creative industry.	tool based on server, secure and accessible.
BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN COLLEGE	WEST MIDLANDS HEALTH AUTHORITY	Moodle (cheap) Elluminate as a pragmatic choice as had existing licence, but needed to purchase laptops to bypass firewall.	Lots of colleges, big network and large inter-educational community, big external player on board. Creating pathways of learning for health professionals; pulling modules/ units together through collaboration and co-creation.	Health authority policies and procedures can cause delays and hinder innovation; firewall blocks access to externals. Need to agree on curriculum and on providers. Lack of webcams.
NEW COLLEGE SWINDON	South West Lifelong Learning Partnership, Thames Valley CoC	EBS (Tribal) CRM system Ivy League system? Wimba, Gotomeeting & Elluminate evaluated	FE partners not just HE and have a "community" partner (the only one). Dedicated Business	Low experience in using the tools, technically across the college and individuals working on the trial project.



	and Business Link		Dev Manager team. Open to ideas, as not used any kind of technology to work with SMEs and community partners. College keen to grow in their BCE activity; high level support.	
GLAMORGAN	Business Club identified partners	G-BLOG Researching web2.0 tools, what they require and what is available/offered.	Building collaboration between SMEs in South Wales and universities & colleges; Directly working with the SMEs, tapped into local business clubs and local community groups; Good exchange of expertise.	Working well but slower than imagined. Hard work to get going.