

JISC



Remote Authoring of Mobile Blogs for Learning Environments

Final Report

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The team is grateful to Simon Brown for developing the Pebble blog server, which lies at the heart of the blogging activities; and also to Robert O'Toole at Warwick University's E-Learning Advisor Team for sharing a great deal experiences about blogging in the educational context.

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1. Executive Summary

The aim of this project has been broadly to enhance support for learner reflection in their Personal Learning Environment (PLE), their own evolving, individual learning space, in such a way that they can share and receive selected response to their reflections in institutional e-learning systems. The project has been able to make significant steps to fulfil these aims through connecting the use of Web logs (blogs) as a reflective authoring activity with Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs).

The specific objectives have been:

1. The creation of a new blogging component that will allow Web log content to be incorporated and viewed in Bodington, an open source VLE.
2. The provision of guidelines on how similar components could be developed for other e-learning systems.
3. The provision of guidelines to set up and support the off-line authoring of Web log entries on a PDA, the subsequent uploading to a Web log server and the incorporation in a VLE.

The project has largely achieved this by adopting a component-based view to facilitate the relation of PLEs with VLEs, in which there was separation of concerns – the moblogging, the blog hosting and the sharing in the VLE.

A new component has duly been produced that allows blogs to be integrated into Bodington via syndicated feeds from blog servers, which has been successfully tested by groups of Undergraduate students. This tool is expected to become part of the core distribution of Bodington by Summer 2005. Documentation has been provided for PDAs running Palm OS and Windows Mobile to support the off-line authoring of Web log entries on a PDA, the subsequent uploading to a Web log server and the incorporation in a VLE.

Further, a detailed analysis of blog servers, particularly configuration issues, has been provided that indicates how such a service can be scaled. The main issue for institutions to address appears to be how to handle privacy – adopting a component-based approach places an onus to have in place proper institution-wide authentication and authorisation systems served by web services.

In conclusion, RAMBLE has demonstrated that mobile blogging (PLEs) can be practically incorporated in VLEs, but to go from a small scale to large scale requires careful consideration of such a service within institutional structures and enterprise systems.

2. Background

Remote Authoring of Mobile Blogs for Learning Environments (RAMBLE) has investigated the use of Web logs (blogs) as a reflective authoring activity in an educational context. The project is particularly relevant to Higher or Further Education.

A large part of the educational process is that of reflection and internal distillation; this needs to take place independently of the classroom, whether on or off campus, in what may be termed the *Personal Learning Environment* (PLE), their own evolving, individual learning space. In order to facilitate continuity in the learning process, the project has focused on support for experiential reflections offline, and when subsequently online, their incorporation in the setting of a *Virtual Learning Environment* (VLE), typically provided by an institution.

The means for such activity have been *Weblogs* (or just *blogs*). Blogs are a highly popular means for publication on the Web, allowing both reflection and engagement through linking and comments. In the few years they have been around, they have been widely adopted and it may be argued that they may even bridge the 'digital divide' because they make it very easy to publish information online. They are also of demonstrable educational merit at different stages in the education system – such as stimulating social connections in primary school¹, helping to develop ideas and invite feedback at secondary school², and giving students full control and ownership over their online content in HE³.

In this way blogs may be seen as complementary to the more institution-oriented *delivery* of courses, whether face-to-face or online through VLEs etc. The personal experiences of the learner in this case relate to both online and face-to-face teaching and may express connections that only make sense in the wider context.

A lot of student reflection and deliberation takes place off site, such as the consideration of lectures and the provision of feedback. Furthermore, there are existing patterns of activity that are underused but are likely to be very amenable – such as the habit of SMS text messaging, which can be any place, any time. Hence, in order to best realise working off site, the blogging needs to be mobile, i.e. we need *moblogs*. A *moblog* is defined as: "A mobile weblog, or *moblog*, consists of content posted to the Internet from a mobile device, such as a cellular phone or PDA."⁴ This flexibility is particularly advantageous to people studying in more than one institution and for different types of qualification, vocational or academic.

However, although blogging has become a popular activity and the ubiquity of mobile phones has stimulated the development of moblogging solutions, there has been little to support more substantial reflective authoring. Many technologies are immature and are oriented to instantaneous capture of the moment, of limited reflection.

In response, the project has taken some steps towards ensuring that experiences are captured more fully and related appropriately to the given e-learning structures by the design of reflective moblogging activities in tandem with the development of a new tool for the Bodington VLE⁵, which can now act as a container for blog entries.

¹ **The seven-year-old bloggers**, Giles Turnbull, BBC News online, 14 June 2004
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3804773.stm

² **Logs prepare to go on a roll**, Stephen O'Hear, Guardian Unlimited, Education
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/elearning/story/0,10577,1233425,00.html>

³ **Content delivery in the Blogosphere**, Richard E. Ferdig, Ph.D., and Kaye D. Trammell, University of Florida

<http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/articleprintversion.cfm?aid=4677>

⁴ **word iQ: definition of Moblog**
<http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Moblog.html>

⁵ **Bodington VLE**
<http://bodington.org>

The VLE offers a number of advantages: it can restrict access to selected groups of users, add meta data, and be set in particular contexts, such as a course or tutorial. In Bodington, a student may be permitted to build a richer study space around the blog, including supporting documentation and tools for collaborative working, e.g. inviting feedback through questionnaires. In this way, the tool ties in closely blogging activities and e-learning in VLEs.

3. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project has been broadly to enhance support for learner reflection in their PLE in such a way that they can share and receive selected response to their reflections in the context of VLEs. The project has used Web logs (blogs) as a vehicle for the reflective authoring.

The specific objectives were:

1. The creation of a new blogging component that will allow Web log content to be incorporated and viewed in Bodington, an open source VLE.
2. The provision of guidelines on how similar components could be developed for other e-learning systems.
3. The provision of guidelines to set up and support the off-line authoring of Web log entries on a PDA, the subsequent uploading to a Web log server and the incorporation in a VLE.

These remained constant throughout the project.

4. Methodology

Although the focus for DEL E-Tools was very much on producing the software with core functionality fixed in the bid document, the newness of this area required at least some kind of input on what other functionality should be provided in the software. Hence, the overall approach adopted in RAMBLE was to adopt a fairly standard lifecycle model in which a tool was developed incrementally informed by user and system requirements. The DEL E-Tools round placed a lot of emphasis on standards and interoperability, which were addressed at the outset of the requirements gathering process.

As blogs and newsfeeds are new areas, the development was not carried out in isolation. The whole process was designed to inform not only technical development but areas of mobile learning connecting with our institutional VLE, which was of keen interest to the departments participating in the requirements gathering.

The software development was carried out within the wider context of Bodington development at Oxford and the Bodington community at large, a community that currently spans about a dozen developers and thousands of end users (staff and students) across several HEIs.

At Oxford, code is placed in the local CVS repository and developed as an iterative process, with updates going into the CVS Head. It undergoes a succession of tests – normally on a developer PC and then a test server, where it is subject to wider review by the VLE Team.

When the code is deemed sufficiently robust and stable, a *Stable* branch is made from which is built the Web application to be deployed on the live server. Additionally, if there is new code that is deemed ready to release, it can be folded from CVS Head onto the Stable branch. Not all code in the Stable branch need be for general release. New tools, including RAMBLE's blog and RSS resources are typically put on probation by being only available to particular groups of users. After further user testing and feedback, the tools are further refined, tested again and then may be approved for general release.

At the same time, there is the wider iterative process of Bodington development in which new code is developed along similar lines. Code that is developed locally gets discussed and voted on. If approved, it will go into the main Bodington CVS HEAD and eventually become part of a standard release. This is expected for RAMBLE.

Being part of a wider development process provided larger scale support in other areas – for instance, the project could be informed by usability analysis carried out in WebLearn shortly before the project started.

5. Implementation

A lot of consideration was given in the project bid as to what should be achieved in terms of the tool and mapping out the steps to lead to its production. As the project duration was short, it was felt that there wasn't much room for deviation and the core functionality was kept simple, viz, to read and render syndicate news. So what was carried out reflects fairly closely what was spelt out in the work packages.

Day-to-day project management was carried out using dotProject⁶, a very functional open source tool that was found especially useful for its task management and generally keeping all materials in one place. Being Web-based, it provides a very convenient means to quickly view the status of the project. For project communications a mailing list was used. Meetings were held once or twice a month.

The project architecture of three main components (blog clients on mobile devices, blog server, and VLE), around each of which were oriented a number of activities, summed up in Figure 1, which has become very valuable, both as an easy means to conceive the processes, and as a focus for discussing the options for implementation.

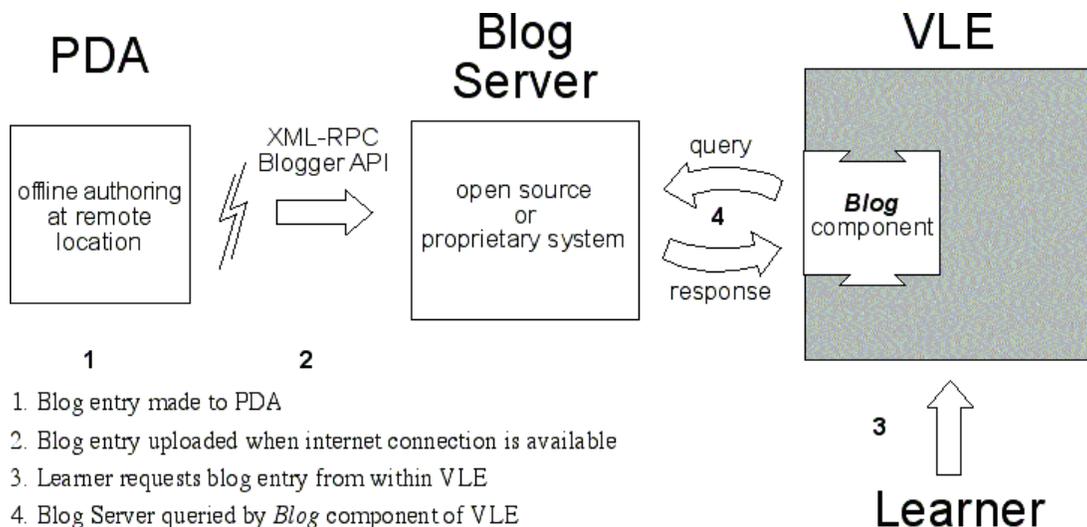


Figure 1: Component-based view for RAMBLE

The independence of each component allowed these to take place in parallel, which was necessary to achieve the workplan in time. The activities have been recorded in detail in the Project Blog, as can be quickly gleaned in a summary list⁷. We note here only a few particular points.

Many activities were carried out rapidly at the beginning to set up the requirements gathering – PDAs, keyboards, moblogging software and blog server solutions were surveyed, ordered, downloaded and installed; supporting documentation was authored for staff and students. There was little time to do this very formally or thoroughly as students were available only in a particular time frame between

⁶ dotProject

<http://dotproject.net/>

⁷ Summary List of Project Blog entries

http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blogs_proj_all.html

October and December. Although the official start was the second week of September, it was realised that the schedule could only be realised by starting the process in mid-August.

The requirements gathering involved two groups of students - first year Chemistry undergraduates provided feedback on lecture courses, practicals and tutorials, whilst Year 5 Medical Science undergraduates on 2nd Year clinical rotation recorded personal learning experiences for Obstetrics and Gynaecology. A special effort was made to state clearly what was involved and that participation was optional for everyone. For one group the process was formalised by having participants sign a declaration of understanding.

The private nature of the reflections imposed constraints on the setup of the servers, for which authenticated access was required through the Web from public locations, whilst not exposing the content. For access to this material via a VLE, there is first the authentication for the user's login and then secondary authentication (machine – machine) for requesting private blogs. In summary, extra constraints on privacy and security, especially where multiple components are involved, require more effort in setup.

The core development also needed to start early to provide a sufficiently realistic prototype as to enable feedback. The feedback was elicited through questionnaires – paper-based for one group and online (using the VLE) for the other. Coding started later than planned, delaying its availability, leading to more restricted feedback.

It may be worth noting that the project plan set out a number of technical risks for which risk management provided a reasonable buffer in case of problems. However, they did not take much account of change, which even for a short project should have been made explicit and factored in. Some elements of change are listed below:

1. *Moblog client*: Client becomes no longer supported (operating system upgrade) – Pocket Blog was the client adopted for Pocket PC, originally tested for Pocket PC 2002, but for running under Windows 2003 it required backward compatible runtime environment.
2. *Standards* – news feeds are subject to revision and the new tools would need to keep pace. Many feeds are not formal standards, but *de facto* standards. As it happened, for the duration of the project there was no major change in the standards or their adoption, though the Atom Publishing Format and Protocol is getting nearer to becoming a standard.
3. *Bodington VLE* – At the start of the project, development was being carried out against a version of Bodington VLE based on 2.1.1 Stable 1. By the time the project was ending, it had evolved to version 2.4.0. To ensure that RAMBLE development kept up-to-date, JUnit tests were applied to verify functionality was preserved.

6. Outputs and Results

The main output that has been delivered is the software, which consists of two new *resources* for Bodington, *Newsfeed* and *Blog*. These tools provide means to read feeds from external sources in a variety of standards-compliant formats and render them in various ways.

Specifically, the tools enable users in the VLE to read feeds in Really Simple Syndication (RSS) 0.91 through to 2.0 and Atom 0.3. Details are documented in a 'Quick Start' guide⁸.

⁸ **RAMBLE Quick Start guide**
<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/docs/quickstart.html>



Figure 2: Display of blog in Bodington

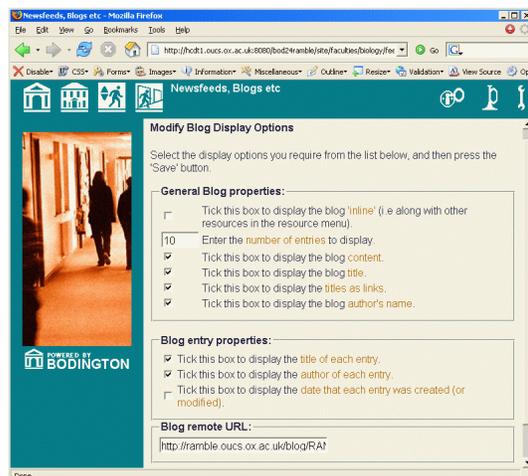


Figure 3: Display of blog options

Further, the blog resource tool provides a limited means for supporting private blogs, also documented⁹. The code has been released on SourceForge and is expected to be incorporated in the next major release of Bodington (2.6).

The other main outputs, as listed in the Work packages, consist of a series of documents that together provide broad coverage of the processes and setup required to support independent reflection from moblogging through to hosting of blogs on blog servers, and the subsequent incorporation in the VLE. The moblogging-related documents are:

- Report on hardware selection (PDAs, keyboards) for requirements gathering use cases.
- Report on selection and installation of blogging clients on a range of mobile devices
- Documentation for staff and students on carrying out offline blog creation and publication.

The blog server documentation:

- Report on selecting, setting up and configuring a blog server for internal institutional use

The VLE documentation:

- Blog Resource Requirements Gathering Questionnaire
- Documentation on installation and configuration of RAMBLE software
- A basic Bodington User guide for Blog resource
- A basic Bodington User guide for Private Blogs

General project documentation

- Project Web site
- Project blog

Owing to the component-based architecture, many subsets of the documentation can be used and could be applied to other scenarios not envisaged in the project. For example, the documentation concerning blog servers can inform consideration of institutional blog hosting.

Blogs were maintained by students over a period of several weeks, typically writing entries of several paragraphs 2-3 times a week. Findings from the requirements gathering have been reported in blog

⁹ **RAMBLE: Using Private Blogs in Bodington**
<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/docs/privateblogs.html>

entries, especially, 'Chemistry students give their responses'¹⁰ and 'Medics provide feedback on their blogs for Obs & Gynae'¹¹.

7. Outcomes

Outcomes have emerged that are immediately beneficial both at an educational and technical level. These may be summarised with respect to the three components as follows:

- **Offline authoring (moblogging)** on PDA - initial indications show that the two requirements gathering exercises have been very successful in drawing on learning as a continuous process, both have provided very rich sources of content, much of it original in nature and portraying especially the wider context. The entries have cast light on *inter alia*:
 - how students respond initially to lectures, workloads and the patterns of working that they subsequently establish
 - what are the concepts that they find difficulty with, how well they are conveyed by the lecturer or tutor
 - how students absorb and gradually refine their understanding and of concepts and develop enthusiasm for the subject matter
 - the relationship between tutorials and lectures – whether or not they support each other or are out of sync
 - timetabling issues – may reveal a long series of lectures in the morning followed by lengthy labs means a heavy burden on students
 - as students move around, particularly abroad in work placements, awareness is raised of cultural aspects.

The content of the blogs authored by the students has been copious and can evidently enrich the learning in a very real way:

"It was great to use an informal format - it meant that I wrote down and reflected on lots of ideas that would usually not be 'relevant' - e.g. effectiveness of health care systems, attitudes of doctors towards patients, my feelings about activities."

The learning experiences recorded by the Medical Science undergraduates has informed research in how students record learning experiences; and the feedback from the Chemistry students relating to the quality of teaching, practicals, course organisation etc. is being actively considered by the department.

- **Blog server** – The investigation into blogs servers and, particularly, the adoption of the Pebble multi-user blog, has opened up many possibilities, prompting considerable internal discussion about institutional blog hosting. It has shed light on key issues, particularly privacy and security, providing further motivation for a more service-oriented approach to IT across the institution.
- **Bodington VLE** - The new tools (*blog* and *newsfeed*) are firmly established in the Bodington development cycle and have already been able to display in the VLE blogs that were authored during the requirements gathering. The software is in the process of being deployed on WebLearn, the University's centrally supported VLE. They are expected to enter the mainstream over summer with the next major release (2.6) of Bodington.

Thus RAMBLE has delivered what it set out to do and stimulated a great deal more. The moblogging requirements gathering for the new tool have demonstrated that moblogging can be practically incorporated into VLEs, whilst also yielding tangible benefits for both the participating departments.

¹⁰ **Chemistry students give their responses**

<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/RAMBLE/2004/12/19/1103480959000.html>

¹¹ **Medics provide feedback on their blogs for Obs & Gynae**

<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/RAMBLE/2005/01/16/1105911277000.html>

Early versions of the new tools were used in the VLE, demonstrating a workable means to share the blogs among participants: staff were able to aggregate the blogs and set them in the context of their departmental areas in the VLE. However, the embedding thus far in the VLE is only as a consumer, with little to distinguish between the two new tools. Further development is needed in terms of creating, responding, commenting and otherwise contributing to blogs from within the VLE before it can be more confidently expected that blogs will have a major impact in the VLE.

Nevertheless, the groundwork has already been done, so that the following is a realistic expectation of benefits in the future.

- **Students** – They will be able to maintain private blogs and share them securely in the VLE with peers and tutors, allowing some groups to view, others to comment etc.
- **Tutors** – Indications from the requirements gathering indicate a very rich seam of learning experiences and feedback can be generated from moblogging, not captured by other means. Tutors will be able to see and respond to this feedback that has hitherto not been available.
- **The institution** – The project has highlighted how information may flow from PLE to VLE using freely available software components, stimulating work relating to newfeeds and blog services. Indeed, At Oxford, the introduction of the new tools in the VLE has informed a plan that is currently being presented for an institutional RSS service, embedded within a portal project. This will eventually mean a central store of news and notices whilst devolving their management to local stakeholders in administration, departments and colleges.

A great deal of experience has been shared, much of which is described in the project blogs, and more formally in documentation in newly emerging areas relating to blogging that have relatively little coverage in academic setting, particularly for HEIs.

8. Conclusions

In this project, it has been shown that a component-based approach works well to support connections between PLEs and VLEs through the activities of moblogging and their integration in the VLE via a dedicated blog server. It offers great flexibility in terms of technical solutions – platforms, operating systems and standards.

Blog server software is freely available for supporting multiple users who need support for moblogging activities in addition to usual blog authoring through the Web. Blogs may be variously configured to support both public and private blogs. By providing syndicated newsfeeds, blogs can easily be made available to consumers, such as the new newsfeed and blog resource tools developed in this project for Bodington. However, sharing private blogs across a number of components requires a lot of planning at a wider level before it can go beyond proofs of concept.

The project has been successful in delivering the intended software and actually generated a great deal more than originally expected. It is hoped that further development will follow in many areas.

9. Implications

The findings from project have some far-reaching implications. Personal learning has become increasingly recognised as a flow, with greater importance being attached to areas outside the normal pedagogic spaces. On the basis of the requirements gathering, it may be observed that blogs capture very well the interdependence, show reflections evolving over time, aspects not generally captured by e.g. conventional course feedback mechanisms.

For institutions, the project has highlighted many questions such as:

- How can PLEs be related appropriately to institution-oriented structures?
- What blogs are suitable for hosting locally at the institution?
- If blogs are hosted locally, what are the legal issues and how should they be treated?

Particular questions include:

- Blogs can be naturally very wide-ranging and jump from topic to topic. How can teaching staff, especially, realistically work with this [volume of] content?
- Academics might like to guide the thoughts of students by seeding entries with prompts etc., suggesting categories, but blogs are inherently free in nature, so how to achieve a successful balance?

In the context of the VLE, the technical aspects to a solution will still need to allow spontaneity, yet lead to more structured presentations. This may require the development of various means to revisit entries and reflect on them.

On this basis, suggestions for further development are given below, grouped into three categories:

(1) Extending the functionality of Blog Resource Tool

- Add support for categories – these would be needed to support blogging templates
- Introduce options for the creation of blog entries and also comments on other entries.
- Provide better treatment of secondary authentication for private blogs, investigating integration in intra- and inter-institutional authentication and authorisation, such as a single sign-on system (such as Kerberos, WebAuth) and Shibboleth, with reference to similar projects such as portals (Oxford has implemented uPortal).

These would probably require a twofold development to support Atom as a Web service:

- develop Web service (SOAP or REST) for Pebble blog server
- develop Web service (SOAP or REST) for Bodington

(2) Further development of a platform-independent open source moblog client.

There are still very few moblog clients for PDAs, with no substantial open source client yet found for Pocket PC. Although sales figures for PDAs are currently declining as smartphones become increasingly popular, for the entry of text, they remain far superior.

Yet, blog clients are not so complex - essentially a text editor with support for easy application of mark-up, a caching system, and a means for communication with blog servers. Thus a new client, ideally cross-platform, could reasonably be written from the ground up to support Atom as REST/SOAP. Alternatively, there are a few existing tools that could be enhanced, e.g. Pebble Mo:Blog (J2ME)¹² so that it is more fully featured and runs on Mobiles, Palm and Pocket PC devices.

Further, these tools could be extended to support specific educational requirements, especially through the use of templates, which could, for example, include a selection in IMS Learner Information Package (LIP) format.

(3) PDP

Bodington contains a sophisticated Logbooks tool and work has been carried in SPWS to extend this with support for PDP web services¹³. Logbooks could be further enhanced by drawing on blogs - in each section of a log book a blog entry could be read in and a skills audit applied, where a student could fill in a form reflecting on the skills demonstrated etc. This could serve as a useful way to apply more structures to the free form blogs.

¹² **Pebble moblog**

<http://pebble.sourceforge.net/moblog/index.html>

¹³ **Skills Profiling Web Service**, JISC DEL E-Tools Project,
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=deletspws>

Recommendations

The work carried out by RAMBLE has only skimmed the surface, yet benefits are already evident. The following recommendations should help progress this work:

1. (Bodington development community) RAMBLE code should be incorporated in the next general release of Bodington, 2.6
2. (All communities) The further investigation of moblogging across more subject areas over extended periods of several months or more
3. (All communities) Research into working with blogs and VLEs
4. (Learning Technologists) The specification, design and development of an open source moblogging client suitable for running on Palm OS and Windows Mobile operating systems, with support for Atom as SOAP/REST.

References

These have are collated from the footnotes.

- [1] **The seven-year-old bloggers**, Giles Turnbull, BBC News online, 14 June 2004
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- [2] **Logs prepare to go on a roll**, Stephen O'Hear, Guardian Unlimited, Education
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<http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/articleprintversion.cfm?aid=4677>
- [4] **word iQ: definition of Moblog**
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- [5] **Bodington VLE**
<http://bodington.org>
- [6] **dotProject**
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- [7] **Summary List of RAMBLE Project Blog entries**
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<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/RAMBLE/2005/01/16/1105911277000.html>
- [12] **Pebble moblog**
<http://pebble.sourceforge.net/moblog/index.html>
- [13] **Skills Profiling Web Service**, JISC DEL E-Tools Project,
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=deletspws>

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

- **Atom:** Atom Publishing Format and Protocol is a feed format for representing and a protocol for editing Web resources such as Weblogs, online journals, Wikis and similar content.
<http://www.ietf.org/html.charters/atompub-charter.html>
- **Blog** – short for *web log* or *weblog* – *A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary.* (OED)
http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319399?query_type=word&queryword=blog&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1
- **Blog server** – a server for hosting blogs
- **Bodington:** An open source VLE used at a number of HEIs, including the Universities of Oxford, Leeds and Highlands and Islands.
<http://bodington.org/>
- **Moblog** - a portmanteau of mobile and weblog. A mobile weblog, or moblog, consists of content posted to the Internet from a mobile or portable device, such as a cellular phone or PDA. Moblogs generally involve technology which allows publishing from a mobile device.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moblog>
- **Pebble:** Name of a suite of open source blogging tools, particularly blog server, used in the RAMBLE project.
<http://pebble.sourceforge.net/>
- **PLE:** Personal Learning Environment. An individual's own evolving learning space characterised by personalisation, distinction from any other(s) and continuity from moment to moment. [There appears to be no set definition of PLE]
- **RAMBLE:** Remote Authoring of Mobile Blogs for Learning Environments
<http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/>
- **RSS:** An abbreviation used for multiple syndicated newsfeed standards. The following are *inter alia* the two main strands (with current versions):
Really Simple Syndication (RSS2.0) <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/rss>
RDF Site Summary (RSS 1.0) <http://web.resource.org/rss/1.0/>
- **SPWS:** Skills Profiling Web Service JISC-funded project that provides a web service for PDP with integration into Bodington
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/deletspws.html>
- **VLE** :Virtual Learning Environment (a.k.a. *Learning Management System*) *refers to the components in which learners and tutors participate in "online" interactions of various kinds, including online learning.*
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=mle_briefings_1
- **WebLearn:** the name given to Oxford University's centrally hosted implementation of Bodington.
<http://www.weblearn.ox.ac.uk/>

- **XML-RPC:** *is a remote procedure call protocol encoded in XML. It is a very simple protocol, defining only a handful of data types and commands*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XML_RPC

Appendix B: Questionnaires

Listed here are copies of the questions only, slightly revised to remove particular references.

Questionnaire 1: Completed by Chemistry Students, November 2004

- Q1. How often did you make entries to your blog?
Q2. Was the unstructured nature of blogging helpful or not helpful in
Q3. Did you like blogging?
Q4. Did you use the moblog blogging software on the palm?
Q5. Was installing the software on your PC difficult?
Q6. Where there any problems uploading to the Internet?
Q7. Where there any advantages to using the PDA to write your blogs?
Q8. Where there any disadvantages to using the PDA to write your blogs?
Q9. Where there any problems using the software?
Q10. Where there any problems in using the palm?
Q11. Did you use the keyboard regularly?
Q12. Did you ever write multiple blogs before uploading to the server?
Q13. Where there any technical problems that you noticed?
Q14. Did you make entries to the blog via the Web Browser?
Q15. Where there any benefits to using the web browser interface?
Q17. Would you have liked other people in the group to comment on your blog?
Q18. Would the ability to categorise your blog entry (e.g. Practical, Lectures, Tutorials) have helped you in reflecting on the course?
Q19. How important was the privacy of the blog to what you wrote?
Q20. Would you have like to have seen who read your blog? And when?
Q21. Did you go back to read your previous blog entries?
Q22. What it be useful to you to save the blog in a file format for future use ?
Q23. What formats would you like to save the blog as? (e.g. word doc,email,text)
Q24. Did you show your blog diary entries to friends?
Q25. Did you read blog entries of others in the group?
Q26. Would you have been prepared to write the same entries if they were shown anonymously in a private space in the Weblearn system, where the blog entries were only available to the group and the IT officer??
Q27. If the project was repeated what are the key factors affect the use of blogging? (Time, Privacy, Ease of Use, Motivation etc)
Q28. Which of the following applications on the Palm PDA did you use?
(i) Diary
ii. Tasks To Do lists
iii. Memo
iv. Notepad
v. Voice Memo
vi. Digital Camera
vii. Real MP3 Player
viii. Blogging Tool - Moblog
ix. Calculator
x. Contacts
xi. Picture Catalogue Album
xii. Games
xiii. Calendar
xiv. Any other applications that you installed or tried??

Questionnaire 2: Completed by Medical Science Students, December 2004

Survey 1: Blogging - Does it Work?

- Q1. How often did you make entries to your blog?
- Q2. Was the unstructured nature of blogging helpful in reflecting in on your studies?
- Q3. Did you like blogging?
- Q4. Did you use the Pocket Blog blogging software on the iPaq?
- Q5. Was installing the ActiveSync software on your PC easy or difficult?
- Q6. Were there any problems uploading to the Internet (to Pebble blog server)?
- Q7. Were there any advantages to using the PDA to write your blogs?
- Q8. Were there any disadvantages to using the PDA to write your blogs?
- Q9. Were there any problems using the software?
- Q10. Were there any problems in using the iPaq?
- Q11. How much use did you make of the Belkin keyboard in writing blogs?
- Q12. Did you ever write multiple blog entries before uploading to the server?
- Q13. Were there any technical problems that you noticed?
- Q14. Did you make entries to the blog via the Web Browser?
- Q15. Were there any benefits to using the web browser interface?

Survey 2: Blogging - Does it Work?

- Q1. Would you have liked other people in the group to comment on your blog entries?
- Q2. Would the ability to categorise your blog entry (e.g. practical, lectures, tutorials) have helped you in reflecting in your studies?
- Q3. How important was the privacy of the blog to what you wrote?
- Q4. Would you have like to have seen who read your blog and when?
- Q5. Did you go back to read your previous blog entries?
- Q6. What it be useful to you to save the blog in a file format for future use?
- Q7. What formats would you like to save the blog as? (e.g. Word doc, email, text)
- Q8. Did you show your blog diary entries to friends?
- Q9. Did you read blog entries of others in the group?
- Q10. Would you have been prepared to write the same entries if they were shown anonymously in a private space in Weblearn, where you could share the blog entries to individuals of your choosing outside the group?
- Q11. If the project was repeated what are the key factors affect the use of blogging? (Time, Privacy, Ease of Use, Motivation etc)
- Q12. The following questions are more about wishes for future development within WebLearn and refer to working in the RAMBLE project area. So please feel free to offer any ideas to improve this facility. To check things are working, have you been able to view the entries from each blog displayed in the tutor's area?
- Q13. Consider the display of the entries collected together in the tutor's area. At the moment, you should see 1 entry per blog, but we can also display the last N entries. What other entries would be useful? Would it be helpful to show any particular entry or entries relating to a particular topic (category) or month or... ?
- Q14. The following questions refer to your personal area. Please click on the relevant link and keep the window open as questions are asked. First of all, have you used WebLearn before to create/manage your own resources?
- Q15. Take a look at your own blog either by clicking on '<' or the link labelled *Med X's* blog and then modify the display (via Manage and 'Modify Blog properties') to display fewer or more entries, less meta data etc. How easy is this to do?
- Q16. How useful do you find these 'Blog Display' configuration options?
- Q17. Would it be useful to add blog entries from within WebLearn without going across to the Pebble Web site?
- Q18. Would it be useful to allow others to comment on your blog from within WebLearn without going across to the Pebble Web site?
- Q19. At the moment, messages are displayed in chronological order. What other means would be useful? By calendar period (week, month, ..?) X entries per page?

Q20. Would it be useful to include extracts from your blog in other parts of WebLearn? If so, in what ways?

Q21. What other features would be useful for viewing/editing/adding to blogs from within WebLearn?

Q22. Overall, do you think it useful to integrate blogs in WebLearn? If so, why and how could this integration be improved?

Q23 Any other comments?

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JISC Project Management Framework
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