



### PROJECT UPDATE JUNE 2005

The NIIMLE project is approaching the end of its JISC funded period and has successfully trialled a range of web based services to students in every FE and HE institution in the region. Students have been able to access their personal data, run a learning pathways search and discuss courses with a class tutor online. They have also viewed their personal record (including transcript) and piloted a PDP / e-ISLA service to reflect on and update their current skills and competencies.

The project represents a unique collaboration between FE and HE institutions with a focus on the needs of the lifelong learner. The NIIMLE services are designed to support and guide learners' academic progression across courses and institutions.

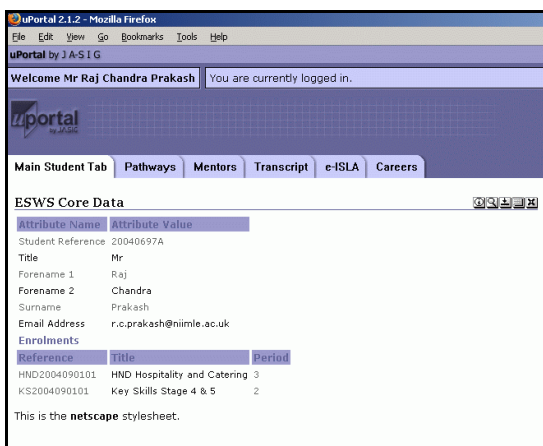
NIIMLE was awarded 'Highly Commended' status in the national UCISA-Sungard SCT Award for Excellence 2005. The aim of the UCISA award is to recognise and highlight levels of excellence and best practice that currently exist and are demonstrated in the area of systems integration and administration by UCISA members within the UK higher and further education sectors. Full details can be seen at: <http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/activities/awards/2005/excellence>

The project has implemented an infrastructure whereby all the institutions in the region communicate with the central NIIMLE portal using the IMS Enterprise webservices specification. This innovation has been recognised by IMS who are planning to publish a case study based on this work.

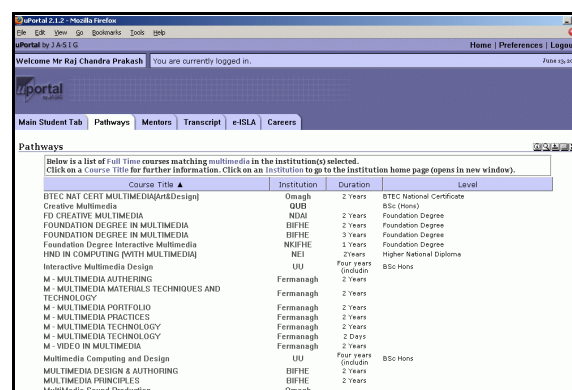
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#### Pathways

Learners can use the Pathways service to search for courses in any FE/HE institution in the Northern Ireland region. The learner enters a keyword relating to the area of study they are interested in and selects one option from the drop down list under Mode of Attendance. One or more institutions can be selected simultaneously. Courses matching the criteria the student entered are displayed as a list showing the course title, name of institution, duration and level of course. The name of the institution is also acts as a hyperlink to that institution's homepage.



Main view of the NIIMLE Portal



A Pathways search on the NIIMLE Portal



Clicking on the course title will return further information relating to the course such as location, description and entry requirements. The major advantages of this service are that students can search for and compare courses from different institutions without the need to search through multiple online or paper prospectuses.

### **Mentoring**

Through the mentoring service learners can view FAQs relating to courses of interest and post queries to a discussion forum. Responses can be posted by academics associated with each course to the forums. Other learner queries can be read on the forums along with the relevant responses.

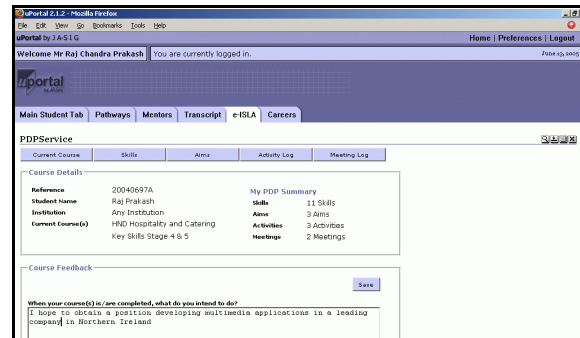
Academics can use the service as a means to promote their course to a wider group of students. The mentoring service provides academics with the ability to create FAQs relating to their course, eliminating the necessity to repeatedly answer the same questions from students by phone, email or letter. Funding bodies and institutions can benefit if student retention is enhanced.

### **PDP / e-ISLA**

The Personal Development Planning service supports student reflection on educational and career options. By working through the PDP section, the student will automatically be reflecting on skills they have, would like to obtain, their aspirations, skill-based activities and a record of meetings they have with their tutors

There are five sections to the pilot PDP service:

- **Current Course of Study**
- **Current Skills**
- **Aims**
- **Activity Log**
- **Record of Meetings with Tutors**



**A view of the PDP / e-ISLA Service**

### **Portable Courses (COSE)**

This is an area on the portal where academics (and not students) have access to a small number of existing course materials. The NIIMLE project gathered resources from various authors and made them available via the portal. The NIIMLE team packaged these resources using the IMS Content Packaging and Metadata specifications. This means that these materials can then be uploaded to the VLEs in individual institutions. Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education (BIFHE) proved that this was possible by downloading a hospitality and catering course and uploading it into Blackboard.

### **Transcript**

The transcript section of the Portal enables learners to view all the exam / course results they have attained from their current institution. This service could be extended through the use of a Unique Learner Number to provide a lifelong learner record.

### **Staff Development and Training**

During December 2004, academic staff in each institution attended a training session to cover the use of the NIIMLE portal and set up the frequently asked questions and discussions forums for their courses. The same academics were involved in the series of portal trials that took place in December 2004 and Spring 2005 and have been very positive about the NIIMLE and the benefits it offers.



### Student Trials

Throughout 2004 and 2005 three phases of trials have been conducted with multimedia, leisure & tourism and hospitality & catering students in each of the FE and HE institutions.



Hospitality and Catering students at Castlereagh College participating in NIIMLE trials

The feedback from the students and the academics involved in the trials has been incredibly positive. Students were particularly impressed with the pathways and mentoring services whilst academics and senior institutional staff have commented on the potential of both the PDP and transcript.

*"The NIIMLE project trials demonstrated that an integrated MLE is possible and that students would benefit from a system which could help them make informed choices"*

**Rodney McMaster** East Antrim Institute

These achievements are long reaching and they represent a platform on which to develop and support future education initiatives.

### Recent Events

The ANIC conference on 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> May was a very positive experience presenting a great opportunity to catch-up with the sector before the end of the academic year. NIIMLE participated in the exhibition event and are particularly appreciative of all those attendees who expressed their support and interest in the NIIMLE.

Pictured below with John D'Arcy, Chief Executive of ANIC, are Professor Fabian Monds CBE, BBC National Governor for Northern Ireland, Tom Place, Chair of ANIC and Director of East Antrim Institute, Will Haire, Permanent Secretary, DEL and Ed Vernon Head of Business Development BT.



### Key Milestones

- Sep02** Phase one course cohorts selected (multimedia was the test subject area)
- May03** Phase 1 core data transfer: testing in one consortium institution
- Sept03** Phase 1 core data transfer: testing in other consortium institutions.
- Nov03** Invitation to institutions outside the consortium
- Mar04** Remaining FE colleges sign up to the NIIMLE project
- Aug04** Servers installed in all institutions
- Oct04** Academic staff agree to be mentors for their courses
- Nov04** Staff training on using the NIIMLE portal
- Dec04** Pathways & mentoring student trials
- Jun05** PDP & transcript student trials



### **Potential for the Future**

The potential of the NIIMLE lies within the cohesive infrastructure enabling the movement of learner data securely between institutions and thus supporting the mobility of the lifelong learner. This infrastructure can support the cooperation and collaboration of institutions and providers.

Development potential has been clearly identified in:

- Development of a ULN that would enable an individual students' records from different institutions to be combined
- Integration with Classroom 2000 (C2K) that would allow school's data to be transferred to the FE and HE institutions
- Providing a lifelong record of achievement for every learner in the region
- Streamlining business processes for learner enrolment and verifying details
- The development and implementation of an online e-ISLA
- Adding value to significant projects and initiatives such as NIRAN, NICIS and NICATS
- Enhancement and further roll-out of existing developed services

***The project team would like to extend a big thank you to everyone who has been involved with the project, particularly all the academics, students and technical staff who have assisted with and participated in NIIMLE activities.***

In June and July 2005 as the project was approaching its completion date, the team revisited all sixteen FE Colleges to provide a summary of what had been achieved in the three years. These visits gave staff in the colleges an opportunity to hear first hand about the support and the challenges as well provided staff with direct answers.

In May 2005 the team submitted a Final Report to JISC. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the last three years and the processes and methodology that the project team adopted. This final report will be available on the NIIMLE website from early August 2005.

Part of the requirements of JISC is to make the project website available for three years after the completion date of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2005. Updated contact numbers and email addresses will be available on the NIIMLE website.

#### **Contact the NIIMLE at:**

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