



NORTHERN IRELAND INTEGRATED
MANAGED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Portal Evaluation

Version 1.1
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Portal Choice

In order to get a feel for the types of portal products in the current market, the project team chose four portals to evaluate and compare. The portal products selected were:

1. Oracle Portal
2. UPortal (Open Source)
3. CleverPath (Computer Associates)
4. SharePoint (Microsoft)

Each of these products was evaluated against a rubric. The rubric was based on the San Diego State University Rubric for rating commercial portal vendors. This helped identify and quantify the different portal options. Paul Browning at the University of Bristol had completed the rubric with regard to uPortal and Oracle portal and these scores were incorporated into the evaluation. The rubric was split into sections regarding key areas including:

- Front-end look and feel
- Security
- Personalisation
- Support
- Standards
- Administration
- General

Each of these has been divided in to sub-categories and a points scale attached for the differing scales that can be attained. Each sub-category has an associated weighting value, which is used to produce an overall mark. All of the portals selected have been given a score for each sub-category and this has been totalled up to give an overall mark. When each of the portals was evaluated against the rubric, the following scores were achieved:

Portal	Score
uPortal	150
Oracle Portal	143
SharePoint	136
CleverPath	135

As can be seen from the table, uPortal has come out on top and it is therefore the portal that the project team will recommend. There are several reasons why uPortal has emerged as the front-runner and is being recommended by the project team. The portal will be required to display student information that has been extracted from several different MIS systems. This will involve working across several different architectures and platforms. Some of the portal vendors products were advantageous when working on a single, specific platform but uPortal is considered the most flexible in terms of working across different operating systems and applications.

The major advantage and strength of uPortal is that it is specifically designed for higher and further education and has many examples currently running within this environment. Channels have been developed for HE and FE applications, which are off the shelf and portable and therefore are of great benefit to the project.

uPortal aims to implement open standards where possible and it is open source software. The cost implications are therefore less of an issue than with other products. Since it uses open standards, such as WSPR, anything developed will be portable to other applications that use the same standard. Other portals develop channels using their own formats and provide ready to use channels in these formats. An additional benefit of the open source nature of uPortal is the cost reduction in terms of support. There is a good network of support for developers coming from the Java in Administration Special Interest Group (JA SIG). This was initially just a U.S. group but due to the interest and application of uPortal in UK projects a JASIG-UK has been established.