



Project Document Cover Sheet

Project Information			
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Lead Institution	Coventry University		
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Partner Institutions	n/a		
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1.0	5/10/09	Version 1 of COWL Interim Report prepared by L G-W
2.0	20/11/09	Version 2 of COWL Interim Report prepared by L G-W

Interim Reporting Template

Project Name	Coventry Online Writing Laboratory (COWL), Coventry University
Report compiled by	Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, Project Director
With contributions from	Professor David Morris, Project Board Chair; Penny Gilchrist, Project Manager; Dr. Mary Deane, John Tutchings, and Dr. Christine Broughan, workpackage leaders; and Fiona Secondino, CU Business Development Office.
Reporting period	1 st November 2008 - 30 th September 2009 (budget report to September 2009)

Section One: Summary

Across the HE sector, students, lecturers, researchers and managers now recognise that university students benefit greatly from being taught how to write in disciplinary genres. To HE staff involved in writing development, it is also clear that academics need support in cascading the teaching of writing into modules and degree courses.

In 2004 Coventry University made a pioneering investment by establishing a Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) that specialises in researching and teaching tertiary writing. A cross-university unit offering scholarly writing support to students at all levels from Foundation Degree to doctoral work, CAW also provides support to academics in teaching writing in the disciplines and in their own writing for publication. By enhancing CAW's provision through the use of technology, the COWL project is set to have a major impact on the work of CAW, both in terms of the scalability of CAW's writing support services and of student and staff access to these services.

As of September 2009 the COWL project is on course to develop a comprehensive, integrated platform of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanisms to be trialled at Coventry University and disseminated for further evaluation and use at other UK HEIs. The 'project definition' phase is complete. During this phase the project team conducted baseline research into best practice in online writing tutoring at other institutions in the UK and overseas; mapped the current CAW delivery model and outlined its benefits and shortcomings; researched existing technologies to be used for delivering online writing support; researched and developed appropriate pedagogies for conducting online writing support; developed a projected new delivery model; produced a detailed project plan; and began disseminating information and findings.

The project has now entered its 'pre-pilot preparation and pilot implementation' phase. The project team has laid groundwork for the COWL pilots, which will commence on 12th October and will involve 230 campus-based first-year Economics students and 30 first-year distance-learning Paramedics students. We have selected technologies and pedagogies for delivering online writing tutorials, prepared the COWL website and Moodle module interfaces, and begun training the staff who will be delivering the online writing support. We have also set an advance schedule for synchronous and asynchronous appointments for students and have begun briefing two key stakeholder groups—the students who will be involved in the pilots and CAW's Academic Writing Tutors.

Despite potential setbacks (detailed in Section Seven), the COWL project is running to schedule and the project team and stakeholders are looking forward to putting theory and technology into practice during the pilot phase.

Section Two: Activities and Progress

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

As detailed in Section One and in the project workpackages (attached), progress on the COWL project has been steady. The Project Board, Steering Group and Professor Peter Hartley, our Critical Friend, have met regularly. Three members of the project team attended the first cluster group meeting in April 2009. Project activity over the summer months has focused on laying groundwork to enable COWL's pilot phase to proceed productively.

COWL's overall approach and Project Plan remain current apart from four minor adjustments:

- The project team is developing new approaches to using online conferencing software (e.g. MegaMeeting and SKYPE) and video/audio commenting software (e.g. Riffly). We are not planning to develop new approaches to using social software tools to enhance Academic Writing support (as we suggested we might in the project plan) because members of the project team have already investigated and helped to produce a successful example of using a social software environment to support the writing of third-year dissertation students through JISC's AWESOME Dissertation project. At the start of the COWL project we considered that we might develop writing provision within a social software environment, but as the project took shape, we decided instead to focus on adding another type of technologically-enhanced writing support mechanism into the HE arena by adapting online conferencing software for the teaching of writing.
- Student numbers on the Economics pilots have increased from 80 (as stated in the project plan) to 230. This increase, in conjunction with a short-term staffing shortage of Academic Writing Tutors in CAW, has necessitated the decision to pilot asynchronous writing consultations only (not both asynchronous and synchronous) with the Economics students, and to train an Economics lecturer to read and respond to students' texts.
- Moodle has replaced CUOnline (Blackboard) as Coventry University's learning environment.
- Moodle has replaced PebblePad in this project in providing students with a personal digital space to store, develop, share and reflect on their writing assignments.

Changes to the project team and steering group are as follows:

- Sharon Simkiss has left the role of Project Manager as a result of University restructuring. Penny Gilchrist, CAW Centre Administrator, has taken on this role.
- The COWL steering group now has representation from all Schools and Faculties, the Library and Student Services. Two external members have joined: Brett Lucas (Learning Technologist: HEA Subject Centre) and Dr. Colleen McKenna (Lecturer in Academic Literacies, UCL). The project team is considering adding a representative from CAW's Academic Writing Tutors, the Economics writing lecturer, and student representatives.

An update on the Projected COWL Delivery Model is as follows:

- A 'Process Map of the Current CAW Delivery Model' and a 'Process Map of Projected COWL Enhancements to the CAW Model' were produced as deliverables for workpackages one and two. The extensiveness of the second map was a result of the project teams' enthusiastic brainstorming of numerous potential services that could be offered by a virtual writing centre. Feedback from the project's Critical Friend and other colleagues at the June 2009 Steering Committee meeting suggested that we split the planned COWL delivery model into two maps: one outlining projected online writing lab services that fulfil the COWL project plan, and a post-project one outlining additional projected online writing lab services that are beyond the scope of the current project. The content of these two maps has been decided, but due to other workload pressures the Project Director has not been able to finalise the electronic copies. These will be completed and uploaded to the COWL website as soon as possible.

Section Three: Outputs and Deliverables

The outputs and deliverables arising from the COWL project will inform internal processes at CAW as well as institutional processes for developing student writing at Coventry University. They will also benefit other HE institutions interested in developing university-wide systems for supporting student writing; the international community of Academic Writing teachers and scholars; and the JISC research community. Key amongst COWL's planned outputs and deliverables are: user guidance on online writing tutorials for staff and students; an exemplar institution-wide roll-out plan for online writing tutoring provision; a Good Practice Guide for institutions seeking to establish Online Writing Labs (OWLs); session plans and materials for a training course for writing tutors on online writing tutoring techniques and pedagogies; and resources and faculty-based workshops on working with students' writing online for lecturers in the disciplines.

The majority of outputs and deliverables produced since the start of the project are available as documents on the COWL project website (<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/>). These include the process map of the current CAW delivery model, the baselining Practice Review Report, the Project Plan, the first version of a map of CAW/COWL's blended delivery approaches model, the Project Evaluation Plan, the Pedagogic Approaches Report, the Pedagogic Tools Report, and the Pre-Pilot Synopsis. Other outputs and deliverables produced during the reporting period are a new job description and person specification for CAW's Academic Writing Tutors incorporating online writing centre work; a refereed conference presentation on the COWL project (<http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/eataw2009/Documents/EATAW%20B%20of%20A%20FINAL.pdf> page 40); a cluster group presentation given in April 2009; benefits and shortcomings tables for CAW's current services and COWL's projected enhancements to these services; a COWL website and Moodle module for conducting asynchronous and synchronous online writing tutorials; and a Guidance Report on Implementing Technologies.

Other outputs identified through use of the JISC mapping tool include: the final project report; materials to illustrate and exemplify the new practices introduced by COWL (e.g. screen shots of online writing tutorials and resources, photos and videos of staff and students using these materials, learner-created content including a CAW Academic Writing Tutors' forum, writing tutorial record sheets, student feedback comments, and examples of student writing that have been commented on synchronously and asynchronously); Academic Writing learning and teaching resources (e.g. updated CU Harvard Referencing Style resources); an evaluation report and evidence including statistical data collected through surveys and through Accutrack (CAW's electronic record-keeping system); one or more journal articles; and paper presentations and promotional activities at academic conferences.

In terms of technical outputs and system integrations, a Single Sign On (SSO) has been developed as a generic method of joining up the various applications in COWL. Due to variations in the type and quality/richness of the feedback required between the asynchronous and synchronous online writing tutorial systems, two different systems will be tested in the online writing tutorial pilots. The asynchronous system will use a product called Riffly (<http://riffly.com>) that allows for audio and video to be recorded directly in the web browser and saved on the internet without the need to use any other software. Because there is a face-to-face element to the synchronous feedback it does not require such a rich feedback mechanism as the asynchronous method. Two synchronous web conferencing applications will be trialled during the COWL pilots: MegaMeeting and Skype. MegaMeeting is a Flash-based web conference application that runs on a wide range of browsers and operating systems and does not require an account with an external company or provider. Skype requires an external account and the installation of an 'extra' called Mikogo to allow desktop sharing (e.g. of writing assignments), but as many students and tutors are already familiar with Skype the project team have decided to trial it as a comparison to MegaMeeting. Whilst COWL's synchronous system has been set up within a Moodle module, the asynchronous system has been written in asp.net. With more Moodle knowledge gained during the project the asynchronous system could be developed to sit in Moodle as an 'Activity', therefore integrating the two systems into one platform. Please see the workpackage four update on technology for further information.

Section Four: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The following key messages have arisen from our baselining process and may be of interest to the wider sector:

Key challenges in curriculum delivery within CAW and Coventry University, as well as for higher education nationally and internationally, are the accessibility and scalability of writing support services, and it is on overcoming these challenges that the COWL project has focused from the start. COWL will greatly enhance the accessibility of CAW's services to students and academic staff by offering and extending CAW's services online. In terms of scalability, we have trained an early career academic who is teaching on the first-year Economics module to conduct the asynchronous tutorials with the Economics students during the pilots. This has proven to be a valuable opportunity to address the scalability issue inherent in the model of offering writing tutorials from the centre by trialling a cascading of online tools and pedagogies for lecturers in the disciplines to use in supporting students with their writing. The pilots will also enable the Economics students to learn and practice peer review of writing assignments using COWL technologies, and this use of the pedagogically-sound practice of peer review will further address the scalability issue without compromising the quality of the students' learning experience.

The COWL project will enhance curriculum delivery within CAW and Coventry University in light of the Practice Review Report, Pedagogical Approaches Report and the Pedagogical Tools Report that were conducted as baseline activities of the COWL project.

To assess the impact of enhanced curriculum delivery on the range of stakeholders within CAW and Coventry University, we will make use of Kaplan and Norton's (1998) 'Balanced Score Card' method. During the pre-pilot preparation, pilot implementation, and post-pilot, we have and will continue to use immediate and delayed feedback mechanisms and student profiling data to gather feedback on the experience of engaging in online writing tutorials. Please see Section Six of this report for an outline of the BSC method and these evaluation activities. The project team is still considering extending a 1:1 tutoring research project model that CAW has developed as a method of collecting data, but we have hesitated as this could prove to be a complex research project in itself which might be better undertaken post-project once the online writing tutoring services and materials have been fully integrated into CAW's services.

An important lesson that has been learned during this reporting period can be passed on to other projects. The lesson learned from a key set of stakeholders calling into question the use of online writing tutorials is that project teams should not assume stakeholder engagement, and should instead plan ahead by brainstorming scenarios of potential resistance toward project aims and/or technologies, in order to be as prepared as possible to understand reasons underlying various stakeholders' concerns.

An opportunity that has emerged during this reporting period is the eagerness of lecturers in the disciplines to be involved in online writing support. Once lecturers at Coventry University began to hear about the COWL project, we had a list of lecturers interested in taking part in the pilots in order to offer more writing support to their students. Hence, it is already clear that lecturers across the university will be interested in the online extension of CAW's writing support and Writing in the Disciplines activity. The project team, therefore, is now even more committed to making COWL simple and useful for lecturers and students to use. Our aim is to achieve a balance of stand-alone self-help resources that students and academics can access through the COWL component of CAW (e.g. Academic Writing FAQs, guidance on writing in various genres, guidance on teaching writing in the disciplines) and interactive writing resources that can be utilised by CAW's Academic Writing Tutors, lecturers in the disciplines, and students (e.g. synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorials: involving Academic Writing Tutor-student, discipline lecturer-student, and student-student).

Section Five: Communications and Dissemination Activities

During the project definition and pre-pilot preparation stages of the COWL project, communication and dissemination activities have focused on self-generated publicity. The project team has been pro-active in identifying opportunities for publicising and seeking feedback on COWL, through exhibiting at ELATE (Coventry University's annual staff development conference) and iPED (an annual international conference on pedagogic research); sending COWL flyers to the Alt-C conference (the conference of the Association for Learning Technology); and presenting on COWL at EATAW (the biennial conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing). A questionnaire survey capturing Academic Writing developers' experiences of online writing tutoring and virtual writing centres (and publicising COWL) was also conducted at the EATAW conference.

Section Six: Evaluation

The COWL project's baselining and evaluation activities are progressing well. The early mapping of current CAW processes and of potential COWL enhancements to the CAW model (undertaken for workpackage one and two) have served as crucial baselining activities that have enabled the project team to identify weaknesses and growth areas in CAW's current practice and to envision what types of added value an online writing lab component of CAW might best offer. In terms of specific evaluation activities, the workpackage seven update included with this report provides a detailed breakdown of the progress of COWL's evaluation workpackage team in gathering baselining data.

A significant step has been the decision of the evaluation workpackage and the project team to make use of Kaplan and Norton's (1998) 'Balanced Score Card' method of evaluation to provide a framework for evaluating the COWL project. The BSC method can be used to examine the 'connectedness' of, for example, the influence and needs of stakeholders, internal University/writing centre processes, and staff development perspectives. This method can help evaluators to develop greater transparency between the various contributions of segments and their links to the project's overall goals. It can also help to provide a balanced view of the critical drivers of performance in order to examine whether improvement in one area may be being achieved at the expense of another.

The key evaluation activities the project team will undertake in the next six-month period will focus on the COWL online writing tutorial pilots. Utilising immediate feedback mechanisms (e.g. post-tutorial feedback questions and interviews), delayed feedback mechanisms (e.g. telephone interviews and focus groups), and student profiling data, the evaluation workpackage team will aim to gather feedback on the experience of engaging in online writing tutorials. This data collection will provide insight into students and Academic Writing Tutors' experiences of both the pedagogies and technologies of synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutorials, and will be enriched with the perceptions of the Economics and Paramedics lecturers in whose modules the online writing support will be trialled. Pre-pilot data collection to capture the Academic Writing Tutors' experiences with the online writing tutoring took place during the Tutor training session in August 2009 and is also scheduled to take place during the Tutor training session during the second week of October 2009. Data-collection and evaluation activities during the pilots will occur between October-December 2009.

Section Seven: Issues and Challenges

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

The COWL project team has had to overcome a number of unexpected challenges:

- **Changes and additions to the project team.** A major challenge has been the repercussions of Coventry University's decision to disband its academic staff development unit from May 2009. As a result, Sharon Simkiss had to resign from the role of Project Manager. She was replaced by Penny Gilchrist, the CAW Administrator, and a 'hand-over' period was conducted in July and August 2009.
- **Changes to CAW's Academic Writing Tutor Contracts and staffing.** One important consequence of the COWL project has been to introduce online writing tutorials into the work of CAW's Academic Writing Tutors. Over the summer, the Academic Writing Tutor job description and person specification had to be rewritten to incorporate the ability to communicate with and respond to students on their writing in an online environment. The CAW Co-ordinator, Dr. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, had already been negotiating a change of contractual status for the Academic Writing Tutors, to move them from temporary hourly-paid contracts to permanent salaried contracts. These formal changes to the Academic Writing Tutor contracts were approved by the University and took place during July and August 2009. Two Tutors decided not to accept the new contract. Another Tutor chose to take a job related to his PhD research in September 2009, leaving only three experienced Academic Writing Tutors at CAW, just as the COWL pilots and the busy Autumn term were due to start. Interviews for the vacant posts will be in October 2009 but the new postholders will not be trained in time to be involved in COWL's online writing tutorial pilots. The project team has had to compensate for this short-term effect on the project by deciding to pilot only asynchronous writing consultations (not both asynchronous and synchronous) with the 230 economics students, and to train an Economics lecturer to read and respond to the Economics students' texts online.
- **Exponential increase in student numbers on Economics pilots.** In March 2009 the Economics course leader, John Guest, advised the COWL Project Director to expect approximately 80 students for the Economics pilots. However, student numbers increased to 120—and then to 230—for reasons of equity in offering the same level of writing support to all students on the first-year Economics module and due to an increased intake of Economics students for 2009/10. Although the COWL project remains committed to conducting the pilots with this student group, we adapted to the increased student numbers by taking a decision not to attempt to offer synchronous online writing tutorials to the Economics students. Due to unexpected staffing shortages in CAW, it also was no longer feasible for the COWL project to offer Academic Writing Tutors' support to the Economics students. A positive consequence of this situation is that it has led us to introduce the concept of student peer review of writing in Economics and to rely on an Economics academic to provide asynchronous feedback to the students on their writing, providing a key opportunity to develop the 'cascading' of writing support within a discipline and thus to address the scalability of online writing tutorial technologies and pedagogies.
- **Limitations of online conferencing software.** The project team discovered during the Academic Writing Tutor training session in August 2009 that MegaMeeting web-conferencing software is not able to do straightforward desktop-sharing as we had thought. This leaves two options in using MegaMeeting (ideally the student uploads his/her draft and can work on it during tutorial, but as a default the Academic Writing Tutor uploads the student's draft and can make comments on it during the tutorial and save it for the student to access). This experience with web-conferencing technology led to a decision to pilot Skype as well (the plan is to introduce Skype mid-pilot once staff are confident in using MegaMeeting).
- **Academic Writing Tutors' Initial Lack of Engagement with New Technologies.** Partly as a result of the MegaMeeting web-conferencing software not being fully operational during the Academic Writing Tutor training session in August 2009, some of the Academic Writing Tutors displayed resistance to conducting online writing tutorials. The Pre-Pilots Synopsis Report on the COWL website provides more detail on the outcomes of this training session. This issue contributed to the decision to trial Skype (the Academic Writing Tutors' stated preferred method of conducting synchronous online writing tutorials) in conjunction with MegaMeeting. It also caused project decisions about technologies and accompanying deliverables (e.g. user guides and the website and Moodle module for accessing the tutorials) to be put back by a few weeks, but these are now on track and will be ready as planned for the start of the pilots.

The main strategy that has proven useful for engaging stakeholders during the pre-pilot stage of the project has been for the project team to listen to users and to acknowledge their apprehensions, and to respond by taking the decision to trial two rather than just one online conferencing software packages and to ensure that training and support are available throughout the pilots.

Section Eight: Collaboration and Support

We have found the JISC programme team to be very supportive. Lisa Gray, Marianne Sheppard and Sheila McNeill visited CAW in March 2009 and met with most of the members of the COWL project team. This meeting was very useful because it enabled us to discuss the project plan in detail. The project's Critical Friend, Professor Peter Hartley, has given exceptional support. Professor Hartley has attended Steering Group meetings and offered helpful, practical advice. He also assisted the transition during the handover of the Project Manager role; for example, by meeting with Penny Gilchrist at CAW in September to offer her support in her new role. Furthermore, as a result of the cluster group meeting organised by Professor Hartley in April 2009, the project team made connections with the Dynamic Learning Maps project at Newcastle University and the Generation 4 project at St. George's, University of London; most importantly in the areas of pilot implementation and data-gathering. Another source of support particular to the COWL project has been the COWL Project Steering Group, which is comprised of Coventry University faculty and student support services stakeholders, external advisors, and COWL's Critical Friend.

Members of the COWL project have attended programme activities including required programme meetings and support events and have contributed to other JISC activities including attending JISC Online workshops organised by TechDis, contributing to the CCDD Circle site, contributing to the ELESIG site and attending the ELESIG meeting. We have also been involved in work on a related project, the AWESOME Dissertation Environment. The Project Director, Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, attended two events during the reporting period that proved useful in conceptualising COWL: JISC's 'Next Generation Technologies in Practice' conference in March 2009 and a one-day seminar showcasing research into online literacy learning (the Digitalits project) at the Open University in May 2009.

In terms of making use of the time available at programme meetings, members of the COWL project team have found working in small groups around specific themes to be less useful, overall, than hearing from external experts on specific themes. We would also be very interested in using the time for project presentations because we think it would be interesting to be updated on all of the projects in the Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme. Project members were introduced to each of the projects nearly a year ago at the initial programme meeting, and subsequent programme meetings could provide useful opportunities to find out about and make connections with related projects as they develop.

Section Nine: Financial Statement

As detailed on the attached Financial Statement, expenditure on the COWL project to date is on track. There is no significant over/under spend for the reporting period. At this time, no significant over/under spend is anticipated for the project. Please see the Financial Statement report to September 2009, attached in PDF format.

Checklist:

Before you return this report:

- Ensure that your project webpage on the JISC site is up to date and contains the correct information. Attach details of any required amendments to this report. Project webpages can be found from: www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdelivery **Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams checked the website details. Penny Gilchrist detailed the necessary amendments on the JISC website template for projects, and emailed this to Lisa Gray on 2nd October 2009.**
- If there have been any changes to the original project plan and/or work packages, ensure that amended copies of the relevant sections of your project plan are attached to this report. **There have been no changes to the COWL project workpackages. As discussed in Section Two of this report, there are four minor adjustments to the project plan. Please advise if JISC would like these to be corrected in the project plan.**

Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology Programme

- Identify and name any areas within this report that you'd like removed before the report is made public (*see below)

***Please note** the interim reports will be made available on the JISC website and on the Circle site with the budgetary information removed. We recognise that projects may occasionally address very sensitive issues. We would like you to present as full a picture in this report as you can as the lessons you learn are valuable to us. We assure you that any issues you identify as confidential are removed before the report is made public. Where such issues do represent valuable lessons for the community we will involve you in further discussion as to how they could be passed on without identifying institutions or individuals.