



International Learning and Research Centre



LEARNER PROFILE EVALUATION

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Learner Profile Pilot Evaluation

Context

A small scale pilot of the Learner Profile has been implemented in The Sir Bernard Lovell School during 2007 - 2008. The Headteacher commissioned an external evaluation of this pilot from the International Learning and Research Centre

Background

In 2005 the International Learning and Research Centre funded and led an e-learning research and development project that resulted in the prototype Learner Profile tool. This project focused on pupil voice to guide the design and function of the tool, so that it was a truly pupil-centred aid to independent learning. Pupil opinion was sought on target-setting and the content of an e-learning space. The key messages on target-setting were that targets should be personalized and directly related to their learning; accessible, achievable but challenging, goal orientated, students' own targets and allowing students to monitor their own progress. The targets should not be imposed by teachers, be too many or conflicting with each other.

The key messages on the content of an e-learning space were;

- games to help students revise concepts and learn new skills, in each subject area
- a note pad or journal where they could jot thinking or questions
- an electronic diary with course deadlines and homework dates, this should also contain student timetables and extra curricular school-based activities
- a record of achievement space, where both at school and at home achievements could be recorded
- a space for students to set their own targets and monitor these for themselves; students wanted to be able to assess these for themselves and note when they were achieved
- a chat room to discuss work with peers and teachers (it was thought this would be particularly useful during holidays or revision time)
- a space to store online addresses for useful websites (similar to 'my favourites' on the internet)
- a photo album to store photographs showing students' achievements
- the students thought that the buttons should look like books that could be taken down off the shelves and opened¹

Further observations in the report suggested that students were unclear about how the tool would support their learning, even concerned that it would impose more targets and external management of their learning that would not be more useful than already existing systems. The fact that they had little experience of managing their own learning may have been the source of this concern, implying that careful induction and guidance would be essential.

Students interviewed were excited by the prospect of a personal, customisable e-space that provided support through overviews and summaries of lesson content and the facilities to submit work and get feedback electronically.

¹ The Learner Profile; an e-learning research and development project, Clare Stead, The International Learning and Research Centre, 2006

The conclusions from the report stressed ‘the need to ensure that the Learner Profile becomes a student owned and managed resource relevant to their needs;..... Students are discerning and they will only use a tool that enables them as learners..... For the Learner Profile to be used effectively, it will initially require some input and direction from teachers. If teachers enable the students to use the areas of the Learner Profile effectively then the students, and all those involved in the students’ learning journey, will have gained a potentially powerful tool to use on their life long learning journey.’²

As a result of this research project the tool was further developed for trial in The Sir Bernard Lovell School in 2007-2008. For this trial the aims of the Learner Profile were developed beyond those of the original project.³

Aims and rationale for the Learner Profile 2007-2008

- to enhance student’s personalised learning
- to encourage ownership by students of their own learning
- to provide supportive on-line frameworks that help students and teachers manage learning
- to encourage Assessment for Learning in student’s personal learning
- to facilitate student collaboration with others who can help with their learning

Main Findings

- **The Learner Profile offers great potential as a tool for effective independent, personalised learning. It can provide the vehicle for explicitly developing attitudes and learning skills that will progress students towards independent learning. This will, however, take time and can only be a gradual, managed process.**
- **The tool promotes significant motivation to experiment, using popular and user friendly functions to allow students to begin to manage their own learning in a concrete way. Technically it is sophisticated enough to provide for, and allow, students to manage valuable and meaningful targets and feedback in an e-environment.**
- **Increased maturity and responsibility can be encouraged if students receive clear, consistent and sustained messages about the purpose and use of the Learner Profile’s various functions. The time for students to develop sufficiently intellectually and for the Learner Profile to shape their attitudes to their learning must be taken into account.**
- **Intensive, initial staff induction together with regular, sustained training will be essential. In order to achieve the tool’s full potential it will require a significant attitudinal shift and a change in pedagogical practice. This will involve in-depth training about the nature of independent learning, the setting of clear and effective learning targets that truly develop students’ learning skills rather than simply advancing content acquisition and the knowledge of how to teach students to set and evaluate their own targets. Only then will staff be able to model the use of the Learner Profile before being able to hand over to students to manage the tool for themselves.**

² The Learner Profile; an e-learning research and development project, Clare Stead, The International Learning and Research Centre, 2006

³ The Learner Profile; an e-learning research and development project, Clare Stead, The International Learning and Research Centre, 2006

- **An innovation needs a clear protocol for its use, especially one where responsibility for its use is to be handed over to students. Allowing this freedom must be phased and guided within clear parameters which have been successfully explained. Real responsibility for the tool's use by students requires them to understand and subscribe to appropriate expectations for its proper use. It also requires staff to trust students and allow them to use the tool. This protocol should be developed before any further trial.**
- **While technically sophisticated with huge potential, there are significant issues of functionality to be addressed; for example, the structure of the Learning Plans, the consistency of terminology used (eg rungs and targets) and the monitoring systems through the class reports.**
- **This can be judged to be a successful small-scale pilot of a potentially exciting and beneficial development in pupil learning. It was not, however, without problems arising from technical difficulties of hardware availability, internet access and software upgrade. In a larger scale pilot, which is to be strongly recommended, it would be essential for strategic leaders to ensure the preparation of appropriate and sustained favourable conditions to allow an uninterrupted pilot to be implemented. This is essential in order to minimise the frustrations felt by staff and students in this pilot.**

Scope of the trial

The updated Learner Profile was trialled purely for technical functionality with a year 10 class in the autumn of 2007. The early feedback from the teacher and students was promising. Minor refinements were made before the small scale pilot started in January 2008. The pilot took place in one class, 7S, a mixed ability year 7 class. It was used in the Personal Development Curriculum, approximately 20% of the students' timetable, for which they have one teacher for an integrated theme-based curriculum incorporating Religious Studies, English, Citizenship and Internationalism and Modern Foreign Languages in the form of Spanish. The Personal Development Curriculum also has a strong skills-based focus; Literacy, Social and Emotional Literacy, Thinking Skills, ICT, and Drama.

The class teacher was supported for the duration of the pilot by the school's e-learning manager in each lesson, either through team teaching or by splitting the class. Four hours per week have been allocated, sometimes taught in doubles or triples. Internet access was not available for the whole of this time, and early in the pilot there were significant restrictions on hardware availability. This delayed the progress of the pilot.

The target period for the pilot was originally January-March 2008.⁴ Following the limited access, due to hardware availability, the pilot was extended until the end of May 2008. In April 2008 kingswoodonline underwent an upgrade which removed access for several weeks interrupting the pilot. Following the upgrade some functions did not seem to work in the same way and the evaluator could not access class reports of pupil use, or individual pupil logons to review progress and effectiveness. The upgrade also seems to have blocked out some of the 'books' on the home page. There are lessons to be learnt about the consequences of an approach

⁴ See Appendix 1 Timetable for Development and Implementation

to learning, heavily reliant upon an ICT-based tool and subject to restriction of access due to maintenance/technical issues and timing of upgrades.

Criteria for Evaluation

This report evaluates the following aspects of the project;

1. Effectiveness of the Learner Profile as a tool to aid pupil learning through

- a) the functions of the Learner Profile selected for the trial
 - i) The Learning Plans
 - ii) The Blog
 - iii) The Notes
 - iv) How am I doing?
 - v) Messages
- b) encouraging independent learning skills
- c) enhancing personalised learning
- d) encouraging the use of Assessment for Learning in personal learning
- e) enabling pupil management of learning

2. Ease of use for students

- a) communication with staff
- a) access to ICT, in and out of school

3. Ease of use for staff

- a) monitoring of pupil work
- b) communication with individual students
- c) population of the Learner Profile with materials – gradual

4. Staff and pupil induction (students as co-researchers)

5. Conclusions and recommendations for future development

1. Effectiveness of the Learner Profile as a tool to aid pupil learning through

a) the functions of the Learner Profile selected for the trial

i) Personal Learning Curriculum book containing the Personal Learning Plans

The Learning Plans are the main vehicle for the students to manage their learning through the Learner Profile. There have been twelve Learning Plans published during the course of the trial and they have experimented with the flexibility of the functions within the plans and their use by students. Some have therefore been extended plans with multiple contributions expected from pupil and teacher over a period of time in and out of school, and some more limited, in some cases to use in just one lesson. Some have been purely intended to familiarise users with functionality, others have encouraged independence of learning and reflective analysis of the quality of work.

As a result of this, at least in the early stages, use was rather inconsistent across the class for some of the plans. For example, the *Travel Writing* plan was used well by many students with several notes added by students and some constructive ones added by the teacher, but completion of the targets (or at least marking as complete

online) was inconsistent, with 7 students not having marked any targets complete. Some students had uploaded their own work successfully, but others not despite teacher request.

In evaluating it is unfortunately not clear as an observer looking at the online report whether all that should have been completed has been, as targets can be added. The correlation on the class list between the columns 'Targets', 'Completed' and 'Notes' is unclear.

The subsequent *Narrative Structure* plan showed development in the maturity of the user response, with more teacher participation and some constructive dialogue through the notes between teacher and pupil. Most notes by students are of the form '*I can + the target paraphrased*' with little analysis of how or how well they achieved the target. Again some students successfully uploaded work for the teacher to see. One pupil seemed to be using the notes as a place to write the work, suggesting some confusion in the purpose of the plan.

The *Reviewing my work so far this year, 2007-8* is a summative Learning Plan of all the topics covered in the Personal Development curriculum during the course of the Learner Profile trial, with three identical steps within each rung of Social and Emotional, Literacy and Thinking and Enquiry. This plan was completed during a lesson (1 hour) as an experimental exercise in the use of the Learner Profile as a reflective tool. Review of the results, in terms of the quality of pupil contribution, suggests it was insufficiently focused as pupil notes about the three pillars were rarely based on the topics of each rung and were too repetitive and generalised to provide much more than a vague assessment of students' development. One pupil, when asked about the effectiveness of the targets, commented '*I don't really know about that because they are all the same, like it says are you good at this? And I say yeah I'm good at this*' and another, '*But basically it's all the same questions all the way through*' both of which appeared to refer to this plan.

The plans associated with the Superheroes were more focused in their targets and more demanding of students, asking them to add their own targets and rungs. Following the first lesson introducing this plan, 8 students had accessed it and 6 added their own targets, 1 with an uploaded photo, showing increased sophistication and thought. These plans also produced more and more notes to the teachers and of better quality, in content if not always in the level of English.

Evidence from the focus group interviews suggested students were quickly familiar with how to use the plans, as much through independent experimentation as formal induction. They also appreciated the clarity afforded by the ladders, '***Which parts have been most useful to help you learn? Why? - The Learning Ladders and rungs, because then we know what things we have done and what things we need to work on.***' Key to this clarity appeared to be the way in which the Learning Plans broke the topics down into manageable parts, with the added flexibility of each pupil being able to add their own targets to further break down the topic. '*it splits it up into sections, like the superhero task is split into ordered steps so you know how to get from one to the next one*'.

The ability to tick targets completed, comment and receive comment was appreciated. Some comments revealed the need for explicit training in the ownership of the whole tool and the plans themselves, as students reported common misuse of ticking the targets as complete. *'Some people tick it anyway even if they haven't done it – Mr. B says try and tick as many as you can so lots of people just tick it anyway, whether they have done it or not.'* This is not a negative reflection on the tool, all tools can be misused, but an indication of the **need to make clear that students are using the plans for their own learning and are being encouraged to take responsibility for that learning. Indeed the Learner Profile provides an excellent vehicle for teaching this important lesson. This has significant implications for staff training, especially for a larger scale pilot, as students will need to be given a consistent message.**

The important facility of students adding targets is indicative of the gradual emergence of the Learner Profile's potential. In the early stages of the use of the tool the targets added by students were neither particularly numerous, nor particularly sophisticated. They often related to incidental targets such as presentation or spelling rather than targets integral to the Learning Plan. It is clear that students will need to become more mature and reflective, and practised in thinking about their learning before they will be able to add more constructive targets. Again the Learner Profile can provide the vehicle for this development over time.

Many students commented that it was technically easy to add targets, but were not sure what to put in them. *'When targets are set for us it's better because we don't know what's going to be there so we don't know whether we have achieved it or not. If you put it yourself it's mostly targets about what you have achieved, you don't really put things about what you haven't.'* **This has implications for staff training as clarity about what is an effective target, and how to set and evaluate a target need to be established with the staff in order for them to be able to model the process before expecting students to be able to take ownership of this process.**

Students strongly valued the ability to add their own targets, and to manage their own targets which were easily accessible. Their understanding that completed targets needed evidence also grew steadily throughout the pilot. *'And sometimes Mr B and Mrs F might disagree with what you've put, say you'd ticked a target that they disagreed with, they would actually say why do you think you have completed it, and you would have to comment back to say why you think you have...or upload a file to show what you have done (you can upload photos as well) and try and provide evidence for why you have ticked it'*

'I think it is good to put your own targets sometimes because you can tell yourself what to remember and it's typed down on the computer and you can keep going back and looking at it until you think you can tick it when you have done it.'

This pupil also felt it was much more convenient being able to refer to all her targets in one place to see her progress. Also noted was the function allowing all the notes to be viewed on the same screen to see progression.

ii) **The blog**

This feature was very popular with the students, although after initial trials with full use, its use was limited to initial pupil posting with no response feature. This was due to concerns regarding the monitoring of postings, and was the source of the most negative feeling from students. Once a blog is published there is the facility for anyone in the class to respond and contribute. Initial publication can be easily approved by the teacher but responses cannot. As a result this facility is currently suspended, so some limited, guided in-class blogging took place on one occasion. This has not happened since. There has been some negative feedback from students about having been given something positive and interesting and then having it taken away.

The headteacher was concerned about public access to the content of the blog and the need to monitor postings, but was also mindful of the impossibility of teacher monitoring due to time. The public face of the school that will be accountable is at odds with the pupil perception of the free informality of a blog in terms of the content and mode of expression used. The class teacher wanted a journal of work done in lessons, ie not formal work for assessment, but was also insistent on use of correct language and grammar use. She was also keen on providing for quiet students who may not contribute in class having an alternative forum of expression.

The potential to publish their work was a huge motivator. All students spoken to were excited about the blog facility, and keen to show their contributions to it during a class observation. They felt the opportunity to comment on each other's work would be constructive, *'Is it good to see other people's work as well? - yeah because you can get other ideas, and people's comments so you can actually learn from it'* One pupil was disappointed that the blog did not check spelling as he was used to this function with other word-processing. Given that concerns over the quality of the writing appearing on a potentially public platform was one of the reasons for limiting the blog function, this is a perceptive comment.

This tension regarding the blog exemplifies the necessary shifts in attitudes and practice that will be required from all parties if the tool is to be successful. **Giving students true responsibility for their own learning and the tools with which to manage it require a school and its staff to grant them the gradual freedom to use them how they wish. This can be done in a managed and guided way as a valuable, educative process in itself, but this process will require careful planning, clear criteria and expectations and an extended timescale. It will be important to achieve clarity in the understanding of publication issues with both students and staff.**

iii) **Notes About My Learning**

The ability to add notes to the Learning Plans has been popular with the students and a motivational factor when they get responses. The reverse can be true when they don't get responses. Some of the students commented on the lack of teacher response to their notes, or the repetitive nature of teacher's notes, *'The ones we get are kind of the same, like, 'can you write anything more about why you've achieved it?''* Again this is not a judgement on the tool itself, but there is an issue about the feasibility of a class teacher responding meaningfully to the potentially huge number of notes posted. Students also liked the fact that notes were more private than in

books, and that they could be all seen together and instantly rather than having to flick back through an exercise book. **The potential for constructive interaction is exciting and there were some good examples of developing pupil-teacher dialogues.** Most of the notes, however, were of the form *'I can + the target paraphrased'* with little analysis of how or how well they achieved the target.

The class teacher also commented, *'it is great to see a dialogue developing, particularly with students who you wouldn't necessarily speak in this way to in class. They seem to feel 'safer'.'*

iv) How I am Doing.

This allowed students to cross-reference their targets and notes, although its main intended function of using imported assessment data is not yet active.

v) Messages.

Some students discovered the now very popular message facility without being shown it, suggesting they had experimented with the functions on the Learner Profile. The initial use of the messaging seen was about the work, but only in a very superficial way. The teacher suggested that they should be free to use the messaging as they wished in order to give them the responsibility to use it constructively. Evidence from the students suggested that it has positive benefits for learning, *'You can message your friends as well if you don't understand something, because everyone is on laptops you can send a message to someone and they will reply back and help you – it's easier than chatting across the room or getting up'* but can also be misused, *'When we were in the OLC with the laptops everybody was writing messages to each other and that's like MSN and things, but not like in conversations or things you just type whatever ...that's very naughty....'* This comment suggests students could be mature enough to be involved in drawing up a protocol for the appropriate use of such functions.

b) encouraging independent learning skills

Though students concurred they found it hard to articulate why they were able to work more independently using the Learner Profile, confusing convenience or motivation with independence, *'I think it's a more fun way than just writing and writing in your books which is a bit boring and if you are on the computer anyway and you remember you have got to do homework you can just go on LP and do it – its more helpful, I prefer it', '... and I can listen to music and stuff at the same time.'*

The teachers have **commented on the improved structuring of learning provided by the Learning Plans impacting on the organisation of many students, and the strong motivation of using the tool resulting in improving the focus and raising the quality of the work of some students.**

The emerging confidence of some children to begin to shape their own Learning Plans shows independence will come gradually, *'If you're split into groups and some groups are doing something different to what your group is doing you can add your own rung for your group, and then you won't get all confused.'* *'...sometimes we don't need as much help from the teacher because we've got the LP, it's a bit like kind of a teacher on your computer'*

One pupil implied greater independence through working at a computer *'I think I can concentrate more if I'm on my own with the computer, like not with everybody else talking to me at once'*

c) enhancing personalised learning

There is evidence of some reflection about their own learning through some of the personal targets and notes posted. Most are short and factual 'I have finished this' but there are increasing numbers which are evaluative. The first targets set by students were about improving handwriting or typing faster rather than related to the context of the topic, and so were not truly examples of personalised learning. However, the later Learning Plans encourage greater personalisation through students setting their own targets related to the task. **The setting of a too open-ended plan (Heroes and Icons) showed the need for structured target setting within the framework of a starting point and an ultimate goal, allowing students to plan their own route. This again highlighted that the road to a truly effective personalised learning tool will be gradual and reliant on training students to build up their critical thinking skills, planning skills and the self-confidence to manage their own learning.**

d) encouraging the use of Assessment for Learning in personal learning

The class teacher recognised *'After 4 months, they are now understanding how to provide relevant evidence to demonstrate the targets met.'* She also recognised the potential for developing it as a tool for peer assessment.

There was some evidence of reflection about students' own learning in comparison to others through some of the notes posted.

Target Judging quality

Teacher - How does your work compare to the work of others in your group?

Pupil - i dont think my work is as good as others but i try to do my best and i like the joke

Pupil - i think i should get better at punctuating my work and make my handwriting neater

Pupil - I should try to check my work more

Pupil - I think my work dosent get looked at in my group as much as every one elces and I feel a bit left out=[

Teacher - Hello *pupil*, this is a really good comment and I like the way you are using the Learner Profile to draw attention to your feelings about your work so well done. As you are obviously quite keen to use kingswoodonline to communicate, why not show us some of your work in published form here in future? We will be very pleased to look at it and give you feedback online (as well as in class). I have also confirmed this target for you.

There was insufficient continuity between successive Learning Plans, and insufficient work uploaded to allow for much assessment for learning of work produced through the medium of the Learner Profile. The potential in the tool is there, with the huge power of tagging and cross-referencing of uploaded work, to allow comparison of an individual's successive pieces of work, or with work from other students in the class.

Without the use of the data importing or formal marking within the Learner Profile there was no evidence of its use to inform teaching and learning. Again, there is the potential for this if the function is developed and trialled.

e) enabling pupil management of learning

Early in the project the teacher said that only about half the students had added their own targets. It was felt that they were only experimenting with the tool at that stage rather than enhancing their learning. She felt it was essential for students to build up understanding and trust of the tool before benefits are seen. By the end of the trial she

felt it *'had definitely helped some students. Boys generally like being able to store and organise their work in this way.'*

The ability to cross-reference mentioned in 1(a)i above was also recognised by many students. *'It's better on the computer because if you're in your book, when you open it you don't always check back, but when you're on the computer you can always click on one target and you can always see what they have put recently, you just click on it and it just comes up.'*

Undoubtedly a factor in pupil management of their own learning will be the motivation to do so. Traditionally students do not expect to, or see any reason to do so. The Learner Profile provides a tangible and visible vehicle to do this, which students actively enjoy using. **There was overwhelming evidence of the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the students in using this new tool.** It is quite likely that the novelty factor plays some part in this, but the enthusiasm was sustained and growing. **There will still be a need to make explicit why students taking responsibility for their own learning is a positive step, although explanation of this abstract concept will be made easier through the concrete example of the Learner Profile.**

2. Ease of use for students

a) Communication with staff

There is evidence of considerable use by most students, with some very constructive notes and communications between students and teachers, including 'virtual Kitkats' for particularly good work! Students are ticking the targets when they have completed a piece of work and adding a note for the teacher. From some of the comments made there is evident motivation gained through direct and personalised communication with the teacher, as well as many practical advantages perceptively discussed.

'The computer is better because you can write something and the teacher responds and you can have a conversation about the work and what you've done it's a lot easier than doing it in the book.'

'Well it is better because normally in the books you just leave it and you don't talk to the teacher, but on the computer you can like type back and comment about it and what they said to you.'

'In your book you can't actually go back and have a conversation, and sometimes they don't mark your book until you've done your homework or you're on another topic and they wouldn't see it until like a couple of weeks, but on the LP they can look at it the next day and we can type back, it's kind of like a conversation'

'With the LP sometimes it's better because in your book if you've done a piece of work they may put a comment underneath it then you'd underline that and think it was part of your work and just do the next part, whereas on LP it has lines underneath one of which is the target which keeps all the notes ...'

'And there might not be enough space to comment back in your book'

'Also on the LP you don't need a new one, whereas in your book when you need a new one, all the targets that were in that book you don't remember...oh yeah, yeah!'

The class teacher echoed these comments, enthusing about the ease of giving quick feedback.

b) Access to ICT, in and out of school

Extended work from times beyond the lesson, or from home, was encouraged gradually although not as a 'set expectation' because of possible difficulties with access at home for a few students. The activity logs show that the percentage of students logging on from home gradually increased throughout the trial, and many did so during the holiday period. Several students added in great detail and contributed considerable written and visual materials and ideas for their next topic through adding comments to targets.

The very limited access to computers, less than originally planned for due to delays with new hardware, delayed the trial and caused frustration for teachers and students. It is essential for the success of such a tool that regular access is provided so that precious curriculum time is not wasted regularly re-familiarising students with the tool's functionality.

All students were interviewed at the start of the trial and all students, except two, had access at home.

Around the middle of the trial, analysis of the logon times showed that for most students between a third and a half of logons were out of school hours. This was at a time when use of the Learner Profile to complete homework was optional. This suggests a strong positive motivation to use the tool. Unfortunately, although there is the potential for the system to record duration of logon which would give valuable data, it is dependent on users logging off rather than simply closing the window, which most students do.

This review of pupil use showed total logons since introduction to the tool averaged 18.7, with a maximum of 41 and a minimum of 6. This wide discrepancy could be accounted for in terms of repeated logons. It was noted that for many students there were several consecutive logons at short intervals, suggesting students flitting between programmes. Analysis of resources accessed showed an even wider discrepancy, average 26, with a maximum of 67 and a minimum of 8. Again this may be due to varied ICT skills, where one pupil may have a low frequency of accessing a resource because they are working more efficiently and saving it to their userspace or e-locker to work on, rather than repeatedly accessing it from the Learner Profile. A low score may, therefore, be perceived as better.

Analysis of use by boys and girls showed significantly higher use by girls; all but two of the boys were below the average for numbers of logons, whereas 11 out of the 16 girls were above the average. This may not be entirely reflective of constructive use, as a single extended logon may be more productive than several short logons, but is perhaps indicative of motivation to use the tool.

Unfortunately, a similar comparative analysis of use at the end of the trial was not possible as the facility to review class summary reports was lost in the upgrade. This would be an important feature for monitoring that should be reinstated.

3. Ease of use for staff

a) Monitoring of students' work

The class teacher reported ease of accessing and monitoring of pupil work, although with some significant reservations. Assessing extended writing, as it is difficult to do 'on the spot', annotation and reading of all the notes and looking at all the evidence was very time consuming. She felt that careful thought was needed about when the Learner Profile is used to suit the assignment and type of assessment necessary.

As the evaluator with a teacher logon, it was confusing initially because of the complexity of the cross-referencing provided by the huge number of links between Personal Learning Plans, notes, resources and class reports. Once familiar with the system this is, however, a strength, as the **amount of data available and the scope for flexibility in managing work for both teacher and student is immense. To harness the full potential intensive initial induction and continued training and support for students and staff will be required.**

As already identified, there are also issues to resolve concerning the monitoring of student use.

b) Communication with individual students

Adding notes to a pupil's plan is easy and instant, and allows for attaching files, as demonstrated by the sending of 'virtual Kitkats' (photo of a chocolate bar) as rewards by one teacher. This could be extended to generic support documents, supplementary materials tailored to performance in the target or links to further information such as web links. The facility for the pupil to view the notes either in the context of the Learning Plan or all together to see progression is an added flexibility. **There are significant issues of workload for teachers.** The expectation of the receipt of notes is generated by the number of notes posted by the students who not unreasonably want a reply. This may be addressed by an understanding that only pupil notes that are questioning, analytical or developmental will be answered. The vast majority of pupil notes surveyed were of the sort, *'I've done this'*. Again, expecting a level of greater sophistication from students will require time, training and maturity.

c) Population of the Learner Profile with materials

The issue of the creation of Learning Plans by staff not delivering the curriculum has reduced effectiveness. The class teacher felt it would be better in future for those teachers delivering programmes to be creating and populating the Learning Plans with resources. She also felt there was an issue of time management, *'For this pilot it has doubled my workload as I've had to prepare paper materials and then adapt for LP. I suppose once a bank of resources is built up this will improve.'*

The e-learning manager, who has been creating the plans, has been working closely with the class and teacher, as a result the quality and success of the plans has improved over the course of the trial.

4. Staff and student induction (students as co-researchers)

Pupil questionnaires were carried out at the beginning of February following the introduction of the Learner Profile to students before Christmas. The feedback was very positive for both the concept of an online tool to aid learning, and the way in which it was introduced (Appendix 2). Students were only introduced to certain functions of the tool,

hence some of the negative comments, and some had issues of logon and access which accounted for most of the other negative comments.

During the course of the trial students were actively involved with the research process by being asked to reflect on the use of the Learner Profile. They were asked to feed back ideas to the evaluator through pupil focus group interviews and classroom visits and observation. All the students involved were enthusiastic participants. They were frank and open, and often sophisticated and thoughtful, in their evaluations.

Towards the end of the trial for the final Learning Plans, the teachers asked for pupil volunteers to work entirely through the Learner Profile. Almost the whole class volunteered, testifying to the popularity of the tool.

5. Conclusions

The Learner Profile is evidently popular amongst student users judging by the enthusiasm with which they have used it in and out of school, the comments made in the focus group interviews and the willingness to contribute to the pilot. There is evidence that this motivation is starting to be matched by improved structuring of their learning. There is some evidence of developing personalisation and self-awareness about the processes needed to improve learning.

As with any sophisticated innovation, significant familiarisation, practice and experimentation is required before users become sufficiently confident and comfortable to exploit its full potential. There is enormous functional potential in the Learner Profile tool, some of which has not yet been touched on by this pilot. Making full use of this potential will require continued, sustained use. The pilot shows that students naturally experiment with functions in a digital tool and use broadens with each new logging on. The pupil focus groups attested to quickly picking up new uses such as the messaging, use of the e-locker and exploiting the multitudinous links between the different features to cross-reference their notes and Learning Plans, despite not necessarily having been formally introduced to them. **There is, however, a difference between simply using such functions and advancing their learning through their use. The latter only comes with a mature understanding of how to manage their own learning effectively,** which takes time to develop. The Learner Profile undoubtedly has the potential to aid and give structure to this, and evidence from the trial shows some students beginning to develop this ability.

The nature of the Learning Plans with explicit targets, frequently skills-based objectives, physical ticking off of completed targets and easily reviewable progress and recording, involve students proactively in their learning in a way that traditional teaching does not. This involvement comes willingly and enthusiastically. Taking this engagement beyond merely a system for recording progress towards a **means by which students can manage their own learning will take time, and a major attitudinal and intellectual shift for both teachers and learners will be required.**

Points for consideration/recommendations for future development

Student and staff familiarisation with the potential of the tool

- **There is much evidence** from the pupil comments and through the pupil use of the plans **that significant training is required for students to understand and trust in the**

potential of the tool. This will be necessary before they will be able to take a full and active part in structuring their own learning. **Many of the Year 7 students in the trial appeared too immature and, in some cases, unclear of the aims of taking responsibility for and personalising their own learning.**

- After several months of the trial, and predominantly factual and mechanical use of the targets system, **there was some evidence of students beginning to use target setting in an analytical way and real and constructive pupil-teacher communication advancing learning.** Equally some evidence is starting to emerge of students being prompted to think about how they learn and how they manage their own learning through setting their own meaningful targets.
- **More important than technical familiarisation with the tool is the development of a culture of independent learning that will be supported by the Learner Profile.** Students reported that adding their own targets was technically easy, but intellectually less so. Equally important to teaching students how to produce their own targets is inculcating the culture that this is positive. Revealingly, one pupil said, despite recently having been told in class and on the Learning Plans that creating their own targets was part of the work, *‘We only do that sort of stuff when we are asked to, we don’t go on and do it. If we go on and do it we might get in trouble. When we are asked to we just do it.’*

Key Recommendation

The Learner Profile will only achieve its full potential as a tool for students to manage their own independent, personalised learning if it becomes an integral part of the daily school culture and ethos for staff and students using it over the duration of their school career.

For staff, a secure understanding of independent learning processes and a thorough knowledge of how to promote and develop independent learning are essential.

For students, induction into the sophisticated functions available, training in the ways in which they can best be used and, most importantly, an understanding of why independent, personalised learning through the Learner Profile should be an important part of their education and development are necessary. For most students this will only develop gradually with growing intellectual maturity and confidence.

An extended pilot, preferably including the same students in whom so much time and effort has already been invested, should examine how this process can be further developed. A longer term plan with phased introduction over several years should be considered. For example, the use of teacher-structured Learning Plans with gradual increased sophistication in Year 7, experimentation with adding their own targets to teacher-created rungs in Year 8, experimentation with adding their own rungs to teacher-created plans in Year 9, leading to eventual creation of their own plans for coursework perhaps in KS4. Taking account of individual needs within the context of personalised learning should allow variations in a general scheme according to individual personal development.

Management and use of the tool

- **Careful thought needs to be given to a clear protocol regarding teacher-pupil communication.** The positive potential for personalised learning of this function is huge, and the motivation and engagement instilled in students by direct communication with their teachers was much attested to in the interviews and through a review of the notes function. This is matched by the potential frustration and negativity also indicated at of a lack of

expected communication. *'We've been on it for homework, I haven't seen any comments put back yet so I keep waiting for the comments to come back before I tick any more to see if I've done OK on that one'*. There were other frustrations expressed about a lack of teacher notes, or the repetitiveness of teacher notes, even though there were two teachers working very hard with one class for the pilot. There are significant issues of teacher workload, underlined by one of the teacher's expressed concern about the feasibility of keeping up meaningful developmental dialogue with all students.

- There are similar issues regarding the submitting and marking of work. Work can be uploaded to the Learner Profile, but not many students have done so. Some felt it was not easy or appropriate for work other than computer generated work, backed up by the class teacher. Direct annotating of work is also neither easy nor appropriate in many cases.
- The messaging function again has potential for positive use and students enjoyed the possibility of discussing their work in a discrete way with their peers, but there was also evidence that it was being used as a 'social function' in class. This is not necessarily a negative reflection on the tool itself, after all students have always talked in classrooms and not always about the work, but thought needs to be given to its management and impact upon learning.
- **Issues of policy and management of the tool, particularly the blog feature which was one of the most popular amongst students but also the source of greatest frustration at its restriction, need to be urgently addressed.** Clarification of the purpose and audience of the blog, and training of the students in its responsible and accountable use are necessary, in order that it remains a tool for learning rather than a social feature.
- One of the teachers expressed concern about the way in which students were using the tool as a new media that they equated with social networking sites out of school due to their interface similarities. Informality of language and presentation were repeatedly addressed in class and progress made.

Key Recommendations

Clear criteria need to be established for staff and students regarding all aspects of the use of the Learner Profile, what can or must be done using it and what can or must still be done by traditional methods by teachers and students. The Learner Profile cannot, nor was it ever intended to, replace traditional teaching and learning but its use clearly has significant impact on pedagogy. Expectations and understanding about how it is used and the purpose of its use need to be clearly and repeatedly expressed for both staff and students.

Given the fundamental changes in pedagogical practice required, resistance to the use of the tool is expected from some staff. They will need evidence in order to be persuaded of the benefits. It is recommended, therefore, that the facility to examine the impact the Learner Profile makes in developing independent learning is built in to further trials.

Technical issues of the design of the interface

- **The Learning Plans in their current form do not necessarily address well the requirements of the curriculum.** For example, new rungs can only be added at the bottom of the ladder. There is an inherent flaw in the design and concept of the Learning Plan as a 'ladder' because there is a contradiction between naturally scrolling *down* a web page, but climbing *up* a ladder. An attempt to address this was made in the April upgrade by adding text and a link to the bottom of the webpage in order to climb up the ladder. However, new rungs are still added to the bottom of the ladder, so constructing a Learning Plan either has to be done in reverse or the ladder still climbed down.

- It has also been discussed by teacher users that a linear ladder is too restrictive. It is suggested that Learning Plans ought to have the capacity of branching out to allow greater flexibility and ownership by staff and student users. This has been evident in some of the later Learning Plans such as the Superheroes Plan.
- **There was also some confusion arising from differences in terminology between different areas of the interface.** Rungs and targets were confused on the class report so that some students were recorded as having completed many more targets than there actually were. **A common terminology is essential.**
- In the upgrade the very useful class report pages seem to be no longer available. Some books on the home page have disappeared giving it an unsatisfactory appearance.
- Students also reported frustrations in its use arising out of password issues, the change of address causing confusion (only one change, but in pupil minds ‘they keep changing the website, its confusing and you never know which one is which’) and the website timing them out resulting in loss of work.

Key Recommendation

Many of the issues above hold important lessons for designers, managers, teachers and students in the effective management and use of ICT, and therefore are not necessarily a reflection on the tool itself. It is important to minimise frustrations on the part of users, in whatever way possible, to minimise any negativity that will inevitably reduce the effectiveness of the tool. These issues can be overcome through careful planning for design developments, the use of a common terminology pertaining to the tool and improved, continuous training for users.

The evaluator would like to thank the two participating teachers for their professionalism and openness in accepting lesson observations, disruption to their lessons when students participated in interviews and giving of their valuable time to respond to investigations in a positive and constructive way.

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June 2008

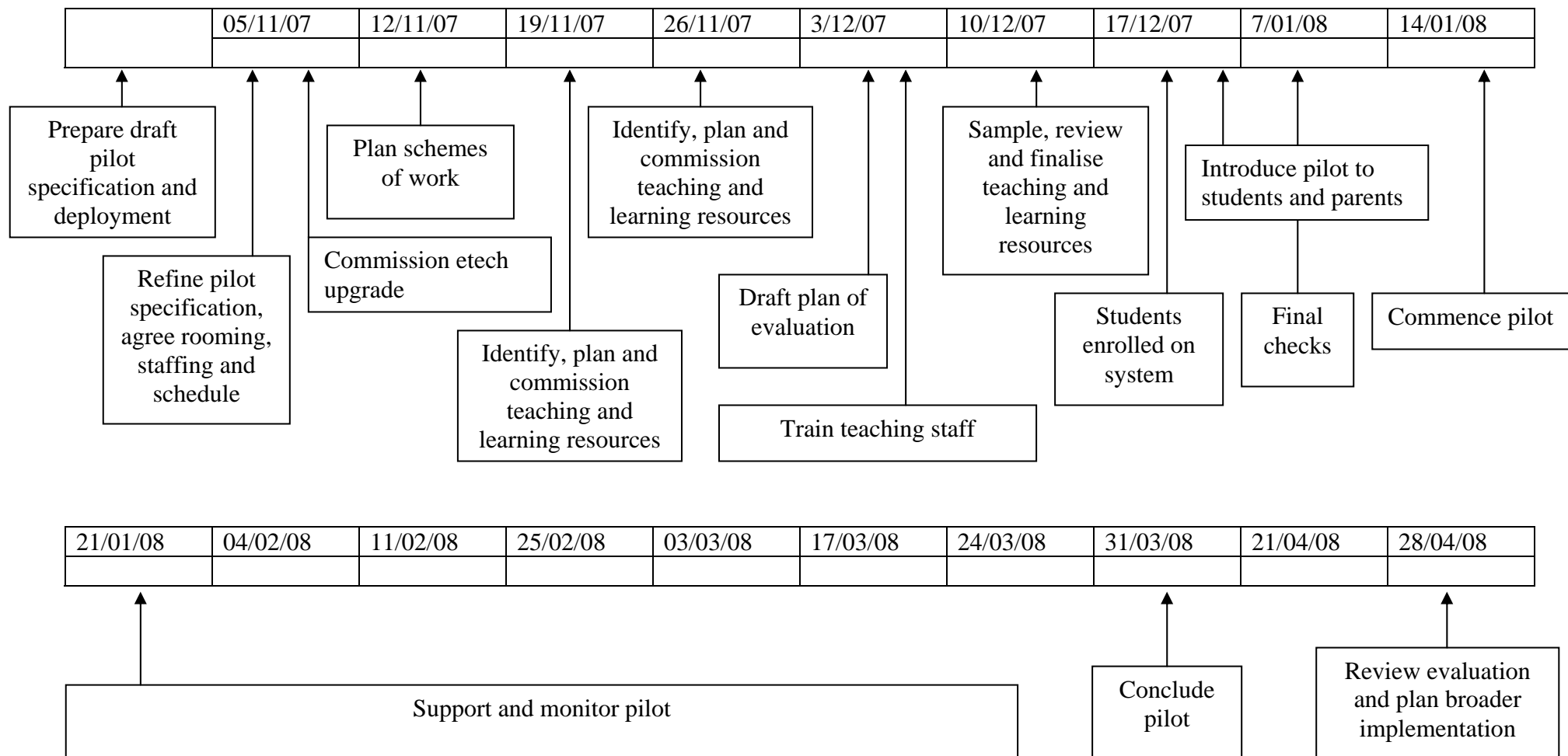
Appendix 1: Timetable for Development and Implementation

Appendix 2: Pupil Induction Questionnaire

Appendix 3: Questions for Pupil Focus Group Interviews

Appendix 4: Learner Profile Staff questionnaire

Timetable for Development and Implementation of the Learner Profile Pilot:



Pupil Induction Questionnaire

Learner Profile Evaluation



1. The purpose of the Learner Profile Tool was explained to me clearly

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

2. I have had enough practice using the Learner Profile Tool since it was introduced to me

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

3. I understand how to use the Learner Profile Tool

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

4. I think the Learner Profile Tool will help me learn

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

5. If you agreed with question 4, how will the Learner Profile Tool help you learn?

Questions for Pupil Focus Group Interviews

Questions are linked to the Learner Profile Aims;

- to enhance students' personalised learning
- to encourage ownership by students of their own learning
- to provide supportive on-line frameworks that help students and teachers manage learning
- to encourage Assessment for Learning in students' personal learning
- to facilitate student collaboration with others who can help with their learning

1. Which parts of the Learner Profile have you used?
2. Which parts have been most useful to help you learn? Why?
3. Has the Learner Profile helped you to work better independently, at home or in school?
4. Have the Personal Learning Plans
 - made the topic you are studying clearer?
 - helped you understand what you have to do to learn successfully?
 - supported you and motivated you to make progress? (Aim 3)
5. Have you added your own information such as your own targets, notes, photos, blog entries, etc?
6. Have you had much feedback from your teachers through the Learner Profile? If so, how has this made you feel? Has this feedback helped you to improve, or just commented on what you have achieved?
7. Have you used the functions that allow you to communicate with others in your class? Have you used them to discuss your learning and progress?

Learner Profile Staff Questionnaire

In your opinion, how far has the Learner Profile met the stated aims?

1. To enhance student's personalised learning
2. To encourage ownership by students of their own learning
3. To provide supportive on-line frameworks that help students and teachers manage learning
4. To encourage Assessment for Learning in student's personal learning
5. To facilitate student collaboration with others who can help with their learning

In addition to the stated aims, has the Learner Profile had any impact on the following?

- motivation
- quality of work
- progress
- organisation

How effective is the Learner Profile as a tool for?

- monitoring pupil progress
- communicating with pupils to give feedback on work
- marking work
- preparing of materials

During your use of the Learner Profile have you encountered problems or disadvantages in its use?