

Bi-Annual Report January 2001

Title of project: FAILTE: Facilitating Access to Information on Learning and Teaching Resources in Engineering

Award no: B32

Project Manager: Phil Barker

Project Team: Roger Rist (director); Jenny Slater (project officer); Santiago Chumbe (technical officer); Fiona Lamb (EASEIT-Eng & LTSN Engineering contact); Roddy MacLeod (EEVL contact).

Duration of Award: 08/00-01/02

Period of Report: 08/00-01/01

Lead Institution: Heriot-Watt University

Total amount: £151 400

Total co-funding: nil

Aims, Objectives and Methodology

We aim to create a unified approach to the identification, description, cataloguing and accessing of electronic learning and teaching resources for engineering through the collaboration of three existing projects involved in facilitating the use of such resources. The project objectives are:

- provide UK Engineering lecturers with information about the availability, source and suitability of electronic resources to enhance their students' learning.
- Increase the collaboration between the LTSN centre for Engineering, the EEVL internet resource guide and the EASEIT Eng TLTP project.
- Provide a transferable exemplar, backed up with reports and tools, for the UK library & information and learning & teaching communities on how experience from one can complement the other.

These objectives are being carried forward by the creation of an online database of electronic teaching and learning resources shared by the three projects to be hosted by EEVL as an extension of its service to the UK HE Engineering community.

Confirmation Statement

I confirm that the current research is being conducted under the terms agreed in the initial contract with JISC.

Highlights, Outcomes and Important Findings from project

The project has recruited the necessary staff and completed the first draft of its specification of how resources are to be selected and described and the first draft of the database input and storage software. The project website has been established at <http://failte.ac.uk>

There has been interest from other LTSN subject centres and the LTSN Generic centre in the activity of FAILTE and how it might be applied to other subjects. LTSN Engineering at Loughborough have used their involvement in FAILTE to gain funding to run working groups to look at how well existing metadata specifications serve the needs of describing resources for UK higher education.

Changes to the Original Award

None have been made so far.

Project Staff

***Project Manager:** Phil Barker, ICBL Heriot-Watt University

†Project Officer: Jenny Slater LTSN Engineering Loughborough University. In charge of design and implementation of selection and description policy.

†Technical Officer: Santiago Chumbe, ICBL Heriot-Watt University. In charge of design and implementation of database.

LTSN Engineering Manager: Fiona Lamb, LTSN Engineering, Loughborough University. Line manager for Jenny Slater and point of contact with LTSN Engineering and EASEIT-Eng.

EEVL Manager: Roddy MacLeod, Heriot-Watt university Library. Point of contact with EEVL.

Project Director: Roger Rist, ICBL Heriot-Watt University.

Key: * 60% funded by project; † fully funded by project.

Involvement with Programme

The programme manager visited ICBL at Heriot-Watt in October. The project plan and project information for programme website have been submitted to the DNER office. Phil Barker, Roger Rist and Fiona Lamb attended the Projects Orientation Meeting in Manchester.

Publications and Publicity

The project has featured on the LTSN Engineering website.

Engagement with Potential Outcomes Users

The project website has been established at <http://failte.ac.uk> and it is being used to provide access to reports on developments so far.

Team members have been involved in discussion of the use of metadata for describing educational resources via JISCmail lists and through the involvement of engineering librarians at Loughborough and EEVL who have provided invaluable advice to the project.

We have been in contact with several other LTSN centres about whether a similar approach could be adopted for their subject. In order to address this we have been invited to give a talk on FAILTE to the internal LTSN staff conference in March.

Detailed Progress and Future Plans

The project is currently progressing to plan on both technical and resource description fronts.

The technical officer at Heriot-Watt, working with the project manager examined available options for software which can be used to build internet resource catalogues / web-accessible databases. After analysis of the needs of the project and consultation with other people working in this field it was decided to use MySQL (<http://www.mysql.com>) and PHP (<http://www.php.net>) to implement the FAILTE database. The full reasoning behind this decision is documented and available from the documents section of the FAILTE website (URL: <http://failte.ac.uk/documents/>). An analysis of the functions required in collecting, storing, processing and delivering the descriptions of learning resources lead to a full description of the FAILTE system design, which is also available on the project website.

While this technical work was being undertaken the project officer at Loughborough was undertaking a thorough review of IMS, Dublin Core and other related metadata specifications and the EEVL and RDN cataloguing guidelines. These, along with discussions with engineering librarians at EEVL and Loughborough, lead to the “Draft Guidelines for FAILTE metadata”, which is available from the FAILTE website. We are aware of some areas in these draft guidelines which need further work, namely in deciding on suitable vocabularies for describing some of the pedagogic aspects of the resources. LTSN Engineering have been successful in securing funding from the Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards to set up a working group examining the metadata requirements of the UKHE community which will allow us to explore solutions to these problems with all relevant stakeholders.

The information in the Draft Guidelines about the metadata elements was used to create the tables and structure of a the storage database and a web interface created so that records could be input. A description of the structure of the database is available on the FAILTE website, and the web interface is available to members of the project team. Apart from a couple of minor points which were rapidly corrected, the interface works well, and feedback is currently being gathered from the team which will allow us to enhance its ease of use.

The selection criteria for FAILTE have been agreed and are available from the project manager. These have been used to filter resources listed in EEVL as courseware and which have been evaluated by EASEIT-Eng to draw up a list of fifty resources which are to be the first entered into the database.

FAILTE has planned to commission EASEIT-Eng reviews for selected resources in the database. However, EASEIT-Eng has encountered some difficulty in securing satisfactorily completed reviews, so this process won't as easy as was initially hoped. FAILTE and EASEIT-Eng are currently working together to create a process which will address the needs of both projects. As a result of this it will be necessary to make a change to the project plan by changing task 6 (resource reviews) from two relatively short tasks to a single ongoing background task.

The next major tasks for the project are to:

- Enter resources into the database;
- Implement the search and retrieve interface to the database;
- Arrange that the data can be shared with other databases via relevant interoperability standards;
- Conduct a review of all work so far and use the findings of this to progress current drafts to final versions.