

Jisc Institution as E-Textbook Publisher project

Challenges in publishing e-textbooks

1. University of the Highlands and Islands and Edinburgh Napier University

Did the creation of the eTextbooks go smoothly or did you encounter challenges? If so, what challenges?

At the time of writing, the creation of the second eTextbook has mostly gone smoothly, its proposed timeline setting realistic objectives, from the outset. But the commitment of time has been the primary issue in the development of the project's written outputs. Last year's report identified that delays in completing the authoring of the first eTextbook had caused a knock-on effect of delaying its publication. The technical management of content, too, caused some slippage. Calibre proved to take some time to use to its full potential, and completing the accompanying web materials, to be released only when the eTextbook was made available, required more time and iteration.

Last year's project report anticipated the release of the second eTIPS eTextbook in the first quarter of 2016. The schedule has now moved to the beginning of June 2016, a delay caused, in part, to issues in sourcing effect content, but minimised by a greater and earlier focus on the authoring process, and by a more connected approach to the roles that members of the team have.

Instructional Designers and the Graphic Designer play a central and open part in the creative process – attending writers' sprints (Fig.13) and working directly alongside authors to edit content and accompanying material. The process of creating and publishing the first eTextbook has encouraged and motivated colleagues to further improve not only their individual technical and authoring skills, but also towards a more combined team-based approach to working. Guidance from the Project Board has, too, offered the project a sense of legitimacy, and colleagues have felt encouraged by positive reaction to the first publication.

Project colleagues had envisaged that they would draw into the authoring stage of the second eTextbook, its illustrations and accompanying web materials, existing content from a range of sources across Edinburgh Napier University and UHI. Despite interest in the project, academic colleagues and professional staff have been slow to engage in creative and evaluative eTIPS activities. This is disappointing – the project had hoped to draw on a diverse range of knowledge, and from a broad collection of existing content in order to test the model most effectively. The idea of contributing to an eTextbook has been well received across both institutions – indeed, a number of colleagues have suggested that they would wish to explore the idea with eTIPS, for their own work.

(In UHI / Edinburgh Napier Annual Report 2016, pages 18-20)

2. University of Nottingham

Did the creation of the Applied Ethics e-textbook go smoothly or did you encounter challenges? If so what challenges?

The Applied Ethics team reported that the creation process went smoothly but identified the main challenges as being difficulty in finding the necessary time during a busy term, so the schedule was delayed slightly. They also reported that in retrospect the original timetable of allocating one week for the preparation of each chapter was optimistic (especially for the chapter written from scratch).

How could the process be improved according to feedback from the Applied Ethics team?

The Applied Ethics team reported that the key to any good process is constant communication between the team members, and this can be difficult when the team members are physically separated at other ends of the campus. But this was not a particular problem in this case – the project manager was very good about keeping in touch.

Where authors have other commitments (e.g. teaching, research work) there is a potential for these to delay things. In this regard it is always preferable for the writing period to cover a period where there is no teaching (e.g. Easter, summer vacations) – but obviously this is not always possible.

Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability in Practice: Creation Process, challenges and feedback on improvements to process

Dr Paul Caulfield, academic lead for the 'Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability in Practice (CRSP)' e-textbook, has produced a video that discusses the creation process and provides an update on this aspect of the project. The video includes information on the creation process, challenges faced and feedback on how the creation process could be improved.

The video is available to view here: <https://icrsbook.wordpress.com/2015/05/14/ebook-report/>

The transcript for the video is included below:

"So when we first starting thinking about the e-book what we wanted to try to achieve is something a little more interactive as a learning tool. One of the benefits of some of the new tools that are available through e-learning is you can create an experience that is much more interactive than the typical text book; that allows people to navigate the content at a time and in an order that suits them and allows them to feel a little bit more individual in their experience of reading or experience learning through the e-book.

One of the things we are very keen to do is to build on experiential learning, so bringing in some of the pedagogies of Kolb & Kolb. Where you allow cycles of learning through action, reflection, re-inspiration, reapplication – those sort of cycles of learning, but going further and bringing in some of the concepts of gamification(?) Think about the way you can make the user experience/the learner experience a little bit more staged, a little bit more exciting; offer challenges, offer rewards. In this case what we have done is we've modelled stages of careers so effectively when completing an e-learning activity you get promotion, so you can build on your career path and express it in stages.

Well because we have got the stages in career what we are trying to do is to build on certain competency sets, so if you are in the early stages of the book or game you have quite basic skills and you have reasonably low-level tasks to achieve in your learning. As you progress through the stages it allows us to build on previous experiences/build on previous competencies; experience slightly more complex scenarios and apply your learning in different types of situation. I think the classic text book would probably be organised around subject matter, so Stage 1 – engaging with stakeholders; Stage 2 – understanding theories of Corporate Social Responsibility – we can actually break through that structure using the e-book format by allowing the reader to experience that situation, apply the tools they have knowledge of at that stage, and then progress and then build on that in slightly different ways, so the content is orientated less towards the theoretical and academic type knowledge. It's more through experience and then, what academic and content knowledge would you need at that time? So it's almost the complete reverse so it's flipped. If I were to talk about this in terms of lecture style I would call it a 'flipped classroom'.

So what we have done with the storyline is we have tried to think about the e-learner's journey as if they were really entering the profession and so it begins attending a short course at the university which brings the basic definitions – that's executed as a MOOC outside of the main parts of the book or running alongside the main parts of the book and as they progress they become an intern; they do some very basic tasks and as they progress and build in their competence and confidence they will end up, at the very end of the book, becoming a director of the company, and at that point they enter further discussions outside the book. They are active in LinkedIn, so in the early stages of the book the learner is able to practice and learn in a safe environment that's behind closed doors and at the end of the book we leave the confines of the book and actually encourage the user to be active in discourse in the professional setting.

What's been good about the e-book is bringing together lots of different authors' work into one storyline; so all of the cases are based on original research or current issues that are happening that we fitted into the story and the experience of the reader, which has been great; so the classic text book as far as I see it is very much "here's theory, here's application" whereas we have pretty much gone from "here's a real world event or real world research" and then "here are the things that can help analyse our situation from the perspective of CSR and sustainability."

Some of the challenges:

Multiple voices, so whenever you work with multiple authors, it is quite difficult to keep a consistent voice – that's something we have had in feedback. It is quite hard to marshal multiple parties all trying to work towards one agenda. So there are some project management challenges.

As with anything of this nature, it always takes you a lot longer than you realise, so time pressures; conflicting interests with day to day work; trying to balance everything has been very challenging but I'm looking forward to seeing the end result.

We have yet to see how technically we can render things. I have no doubt that there will be some challenges there as we really want to push for a very technically rich experience for the user so that

they can really interact, so no doubt that will be another set of challenges that we haven't faced as yet.

I suppose, if I were to redo this as a project, I think I certainly would be mindful of the amount of time that it really needs to achieve. So I think that it needs a dedicated small set of authors working on something like this, in a fixed time frame. I think you can achieve an awful lot more working together rather than working remotely. I think with all of the technical projects of this nature, it is such a symbiosis between the technical solution and the content, so I think anyone working on a project like this would benefit by having a dedicated technical resource literally working within the team from day 1 to see how things could be enriched in a better way. The content is rich in terms of the language and the style, but how could it actually be better done, technically? I think I only have some ideas around that. It would be great to actually have someone literally doing it with us; almost like a website design, as we were doing it.

I think that there is a lot of advantage in working this way around. I don't honestly feel that a learner in the 21st century is served well by a classic text book structure. Certain people have certain preferences – that will definitely work for some people, but in the age of iPads and iPhones (and other non-apple products) people expect a certain level of interaction and I think if we fail to give it to them it makes the product less appealing and therefore harder to learn, so I think that this is not only the way forward, but I would suspect this is the only way forward for a new generation.”

(In University of Nottingham Annual Report 2015, pages 3-5)