

IT Solutions

17 December 2014 to 30 June 2016

Associate Professor Michele Fleming, University of Canberra

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Modifications: Changed to meet WCAG 2.0 accessibility requirements.
Alternate text inserted for all images. Minor typographical errors corrected.

Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP)

2014 National Priorities Pool FINAL REPORT

IT Solutions

17 December 2014 to 30 June 2016

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In accordance with the Conditions of Grant, you must submit to the Department a **Final Report** (Clause 6.1 of Part A) and an **Acquittal Report** (clause 6.4 of Part A).

To meet this obligation, please submit:

- the completed **Final Report** template, in Word and PDF
- the completed and signed **Declaration** form, in PDF
- the completed **Acquittal Report** template, in Excel and PDF.

All documents must be submitted to equity@education.gov.au by 31 March 2016.

If you require additional guidance or clarification please contact equity@education.gov.au.

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1. PROJECT SUMMARY (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2(a)-(e) of Part A)

Objectives

Indicate the extent to which the Project Objectives specified in clause 3 of Part A of the Conditions of Grant were met. Where obligations established in the Conditions of Grant were not met, please identify these and provide an explanation of circumstances and consequences.

Table 1: Project objectives

IDENTIFIED OBJECTIVE	EXTENT TO WHICH THE OBJECTIVE WAS MET
Employ an IT based solution that assists students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access, participate and succeed at university	<p>The project objective was met, as the IT based solution was employed to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds at the University of Canberra (UC). The key details of how this objective was met are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were identified via several mechanisms including survey responses, biodata analysis and via the UC inclusion & welfare database. • The IT solution (the Pearson <i>MyWritingLab</i> and <i>MyReadingLab</i> products) was tested and customised prior to students being granted access. • The identified students were given access to the products on 30th April 2015. Students were notified of their access to these products via email and in face-to-face information sessions. Reminder emails were sent at key times throughout the year. • An evaluation of student usage of these products was performed in February 2016. Feedback was obtained from users.

Project Activities, Milestones and Key Performance Indicators

Below, please specify whether:

- all project Activities specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were completed
- all Project Milestones specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were completed
- all Key Performance Indicators specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were met.

Where obligations established in the Conditions of Grant were not met, identify these and provide an explanation of circumstances and consequences.

Table 2: Project activities, milestones and KPIs

TIME FRAME	PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES COMPLETED	IDENTIFIED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OUTCOME
31/12/2015	Trial Pearson <i>MyReadingLab</i> and <i>MyWritingLab</i> online learning supports for disadvantaged students	<p>Feb 2015 – April 2015: 4000 seats in total (2000 for <i>MyReadingLab</i> (MRL) and 2000 for <i>MyWritingLab</i> (MRL) were purchased. Both products were customised prior to student access (see highlights and issues section for details). The students to be granted access to these products were identified (see highlights and issues section for details), and were granted access to both products on 30th April 2015. A further 535 students enrolled in a large first year unit were identified as needing writing support and were assigned seats in the <i>MyWritingLab</i> program.</p> <p>May 2015 – January 2016: The student group was encouraged to use the programs throughout the year, including during university breaks when their workload was reduced.</p> <p>February – March 2016: Usage of the products was evaluated, and feedback was sought. Unused seats in the MWL and MRL products were made available to additional UC students, as the seats expire in March 2016.</p>	Successfully deliver an online reading and writing support programme for approximately 2000 students from disadvantaged backgrounds that assists in supporting their participation, retention and success at university.	The online reading and writing programmes were customised prior to student access to enhance useability for the identified student group. A total of 1820 seats were assigned to the disadvantaged student group across both of the programmes (MWL and MRL). A further 535 students from a large first year unit were assigned seats in the <i>MyWritingLab</i> program. This gave a total of 2,355 seats assigned to 1,445 students by May 2015. Students were informed of the benefits of the programmes and how to access them via email, website postings and in face-to-face information sessions during 2015. In February 2016, feedback was sought from student users, and access to both programmes was opened to all UC students due to the number of unused seats with an expiry date of March 2016

Highlights and Issues

Highlights

- Customisation of both products was performed prior to student access being granted. The default setting for both products required users to complete an extensive diagnostic test prior to being able to access the support functions of the program. Prior experience found very low numbers of users completed extensive diagnostic tests for voluntary support programs, and so the diagnostic tests were removed. The contents of both programs were also revised to make all modules accessible on an as-needed basis rather than having to be completed in a sequential manner.
- The method of identifying the disadvantaged student group to be granted access to these online supports was identified via several mechanisms, including survey responses, biodata and via the UC disability database.
 - An online Student Readiness Questionnaire (SRQ) was sent to all commencing UC students. Biodata was obtained for the survey respondents, including the student's residential address, which was used to determine low SES status (based on postcode). Students were also asked two questions to determine if they had moved from a low SES area in order to undertake their studies. Furthermore, students were asked whether they were first-in-family to attend university. Additionally, student from disadvantaged backgrounds as recorded in the UC inclusion and welfare database. These students were either humanitarian visa holders, regional and rural students, Indigenous students or students with disability.
 - A number of students found that the online programmes were very useful in improving their reading and writing skills.

Issues

- The biggest issue encountered was the relatively low student usage of the two programmes. Students were informed of their eligibility for these programs via several mechanisms, including email, website announcements, and face-to-face information sessions, and were reminded to make use of the programs during non-teaching periods when their workloads may have been lower.

Did the project lead to implementable outcomes? What changes will result at your institution/nationally? Are there activities resulting from this project that will be continued?

Given the relatively low usage of the *MyReadingLab* and *MyWritingLab* programmes, along with the seats having a one-year expiry date whether or not they are used, it has been decided to not fund any additional seats in these programmes at UC. Student feedback indicated that many of the user group found these programmes to be too time-consuming and difficult to navigate. Alternative means of providing online writing and reading support to disadvantaged students are currently being trialled. These include the use of the online writing support programs *Smarthinking* and *YourTutor*, which allow students to submit assignment drafts for feedback as well as to access online writing help centres. Additionally, a number of in-house online reading and writing support programs were developed in 2015 and early 2016, including interactive modules to help students to with assignment writing and reading skills. These programs are available to all UC students.

The disadvantaged student group identified in April 2015 was enrolled in an overarching programme called UC Belong, which granted students access to a range of pastoral and study support programmes in addition to the online reading and writing supports. The UC Belong programme is being continued in 2016 for all commencing UC students.

Did you undertake an evaluation of your project?

Yes No

Please summarise the findings and attach the evaluation report

Students were granted access to the *MyWritingLab* and *MyReadingLab* programmes via enrolment in specific Moodle sites (the University of Canberra's Learning Management System [LMS]). Students were informed of the benefits of the programmes and the method of access via email, Moodle site announcements, and in face-to-face information sessions for the UC Belong group.

Only 529 of the eligible students utilised the online support programmes. All students who had used the *MyReadingLab* and *MyWritingLab* courses were contacted via email in February 2016. Feedback was sought for the following two questions: "What did you find most useful about the My Reading online service?" OR "What did you find most useful about the My Writing online service?", and "What other feedback would you like to provide regarding the My Reading online service?" or "What other feedback would you like to provide regarding the My Writing online service?".

Feedback from students fell into two main categories, one positive and one negative:

1. Students didn't have time to make use of these extra supports as they were too time-poor and simply didn't have time to navigate the online courses.
2. Students found the supports useful to gauge and improve reading and writing levels and skills.

The navigation of both programmes had been optimised to as great an extent as possible prior to students being granted access. The standard Pearson service agreement for *MyWritingLab* and *MyReadingLab* is for all purchased seats (used or unused) to expire one year from the purchase date (March 2016 in the case of this project). Given the number of unused seats, access to both programmes was granted to all UC students in February 2016 (at the beginning of the new academic year).

As of the 17th March 2016, usage of the programs was low in this expanded user group, with five additional students having accessed *MyReadingLab* and 13 additional students having accessed *MyWritingLab*. Usage of other in-house online support programs developed during 2015 was comparatively high, with 779 students utilising the "Writing an Essay" interactive resource and downloadable handout, 489 students utilising the "Writing a Report" interactive resource and downloadable handout, and 407 students accessing the four in-house reading resources. Usage of the commercial Smarthinking writing support program was also relatively high in 2015, with 520 UC student users.

Where applicable, indicate number of the following resulting from this project:

Student contacts	1,445
Journal (or other publication) submissions	N/A
Conference Presentations	N/A
Websites developed	Internal website for UC students via LMS. Website addresses (Internal UC, login required): http://learnonline.canberra.edu.au/course/view.php?id=13583 http://learnonline.canberra.edu.au/course/view.php?id=13584
Educational or marketing campaigns	N/A
Community organisations engaged	N/A
Schools engaged	N/A

Describe any issues that occurred during the year and any mitigation strategies you implemented.

The key issue related to low student usage of the offered supports. Reminder emails were sent out at key times of the year, including prior to the winter term non-teaching period as it was thought that students may be more likely to participate in voluntary online programmes at that time due to a reduced workload. In February 2016, access to the programmes was granted to all UC students as unused seats were due to expire in March 2016. Usage of these programmes by the additional student cohort was low.

2. OTHER PROJECT MATERIAL (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 (b)-(e) of Part A)

[List the titles of any published reports, pamphlets or other documentation produced in the course of the Project and attach them to this Final Report.]

None.

3. ACQUITTAL REPORT (Conditions of Grant, clause 6.4(e), clause 6.7-8 of Part A)

Have you fully expended the Grant Funds provided under the Conditions of Grant?

Yes No

[If the answer is No, you must state:

- the amount of the underspend, and*
- the reason for the underspend.]*

[Complete the Acquittal Report template and attach it to this Final Report.]

**IMPORTANT NOTICE - Unspent 2014 HEPPP Partnership Grant Funds*

- Grant recipients must fully expend these 2014 National Priorities Pool funds in the project period for which the grant is made and report on this expenditure to the Commonwealth, including the amount of any unspent funds.*
- If a provider fails to spend the full amount granted it in respect of a year, the unspent funds may be recovered by the Commonwealth.*