



THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

SiriusWeb

HEFCE Good Management Practice Programme project GMP206

(www.siriusweb.leeds.ac.uk)

Post Project Review

SiriusWeb Project Closure Report

Executive Summary

The staff costs calculator the project developed (www.SiriusWeb.leeds.ac.uk) went live nationally in mid December 2002 and is available to all UK Higher Education Institutions.

40 Universities and Colleges (24% of the sector) have formally subscribed to use SiriusWeb since it was made available nationally.

In financial terms and based on the assumptions in the original bid for funding the project has made a one off saving to date of £1.4m for the HE sector. In addition yearly savings of at least £1m per annum are anticipated.

In short the project has made an excellent return on the original investment (£88k, including £62k from the HEFCE Good Management Practice Programme <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/GoodPrac/fdgmp/>)

In terms of quality 38% of users rate SiriusWeb 'excellent' while 54% rate SiriusWeb 'good'. 92% would recommend it to a colleague.

100% of institutions who replied (14 in total) to the recent institutional survey would recommend SiriusWeb to another institution.

In terms of quality more detail can be found in Appendix 1 'Performance Against Original Bid'

Appendix 2 is a list lessons learned from the project, both technical and non technical

Appendix 3 is a list of institutions currently subscribed to SiriusWeb

Appendix 4 is just to say thank you to all those involved in or who have assisted with the project.

Follow on work

A successful bid for further HEFCE funding for further dissemination work was successful and the project has started; see Appendix 5 for further details

SiriusWeb has been migrated to a more robust technology infrastructure thus enhancing resilience and reliability.

Further dissemination work including various conferences (e.g. the December 2003 HEFCE GMP Conference) and with groups such as the JCPSG is being undertaken.

Andrew Busby

SiriusWeb Project Manager

a.j.busby@adm.leeds.ac.uk; t 0113 343 4032

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Appendix 1 Performance Against Original bid

As part of the post project review a survey of both SiriusWeb users and of the institutions using SiriusWeb was undertaken in November 2003.

Indicator	Target (as per original FMGP bid)	Achievement
Take up by institutions	50-60% of institutions in first year of implementation, growing at 10-15% per year thereafter.	40 institutions (24% of the sector) have subscribed to use SiriusWeb on an on going basis.
Staff time savings	1 FTE per institution per year (though will be dependent on institution size)	The user survey results indicated that the average time saved per person per year was 4.82 days. Extrapolating this across all users indicates a saving of 9640 working days – about 40 FTE in total each year. Saving: £800k (per annum, assuming one FTE costs £20k)
Satisfaction ¹	90%	Based on user survey 92% of users would recommend SiriusWeb to a colleague Ratings by users of SiriusWeb: Excellent: 38% Good: 54%
Systems development savings	Estimated at 36k per institution if each institution tried to re-create SiriusWeb or something similar.	Based on 40 institutions subscribed. Saving: £1440k (one off)
Systems maintenance savings	Estimated at £5k per institution per annum	Based on 40 institutions subscribed. Saving: £200k (per annum)
Total number of registered users	No target set in the original bid	Total users: 2178 (at 20 th November 2003)
Number of registered users per institution ²	3-5% of staff per institution	3 subscribed institutions > 5% 3 subscribed institutions 3% – 5% 21 subscribed institutions 1% - 3% 13 subscribed institutions < 1% (at 20 th November 2003)

¹ based on 104 replies from a survey of all users

² headcount has been derived from HESA academic FTE figures as there are no nationally available headcount statistics available

Number of times the calculator is used each day ³	No target set in the original bid	Average of 282 times per day October to November 2003 SiriusWeb is being used at times ranging from 5.30 am to 10.45 pm and also at weekends.
System Reliability	95-100% up time on a 24*7 basis	Has varied over the last 12 months but has never dropped below 95%

An institutional survey was also undertaken in November 2003. Of the 14 replies every institution would recommend SiriusWeb to another institution and all commented on its accuracy, ease of use and flexibility. Criticisms were minimal.

The team felt a quote from the University of Bath summed up the project well:

“The whole thing is such a good idea – one university producing a tool which is useful to all – would like to see other projects like this funded in future to save us all time & money.”
(University of Bath)

³ defined as a unique usage in 10 minute slots

Appendix 2 Lessons Learnt

Over and above the lessons below the project is happy to provide informal advice for those embarking on similar tasks. Contact the project manager in the first instance.

General (for project managers and HE administrators)

Lesson
Given a specific and standard national requirement the HE sector can co-operate to develop software, delivered via the web, that offers real savings to the sector as a whole. In short, the cost of every University 'reinventing the wheel' is avoided.
When planning web development projects always allow time for consolidation work; for example contingency planning, technical documentation, skills transfer.
On web development projects schedule the building of the core web application first and the web site round it afterwards (the web site being the simpler and less critical part!)
When working on a funding bid environment do take advantage of informal warnings of upcoming bidding rounds and do work in advance.
Do not underestimate the maintenance load of software, even if it is web based.
If you are charging a subscription on a fixed financial year (for simplicity) do allow pro rata charging if subscriptions are taken up part way through a financial year. Avoids arguments and to compensate just up the subscription rates slightly. Also don't forget that VAT needs to be charged on the subscriptions.
Be very careful with dissemination and publicity via JISC e-mail lists, e.g. consult with list owner first, do not write it as if advertising/sales and send only one e-mail and no more.
On a web development project true graphics and design skills are if anything more important than technical skills - the web site & software will be primarily judged on it's look and feel, not on how technically proficient it is underneath. Similarly it is easier to further train a graphics specialist on the technical aspects of a project (dev tools, databases) than to train a pure technical specialist in graphics.

Technical Lessons (for IT specialists)

Lesson
In terms of IT Infrastructure if your application or web site is small enough always use a web hosting service rather than your own individual web server. SiriusWeb adopted this approach by using the University of Leeds ISS web hosting service (see http://www.leeds.ac.uk/iss/bsols/webhosting/) and this proved a significant advantage to the project in terms of reliability, resilience, technical support and financial savings.
Specify sophisticated web usage statistics into web site and web application functionality and ensure they are built in from the start. In other words you should be able to tell who is using the site, when, how often and where they came from. Collecting an e-mail address from a cookie stored on the users machine (created when the user registers with the site) is a very effective way of doing this.
Don't forget performance testing and loading; it may actually be worth buying software to do this rather than trying to do it manually.
Use stored procedures wherever possible to speed performance and maintain structure within the application. Stored procedures are more efficient than ADO for executing SQL statements and navigating recordsets as they are pre-compiled on SQL Server. SQL statements stored as strings within VBScript have to be interpreted by the ADO and this can add to the web server load. Stored procedures also aid maintenance and debugging as code relating to data querying is kept

with the database instead of cluttering the ASP page. Note though stored procedures if used in excess can have a detrimental affect on performance.

The support form should have been 'pushed' to the user as the main means of contact rather than being hidden within the help pages. Users referred to the details within the contacts section for all enquiries, using telephone and email, hence the SiriusWeb team have spent a considerably amount of time manually entering queries into a log that should have been automated by the web form on the support section.

If accessibility is a major factor driving the site's design then use server side scripting for essential tasks such as form validation, error handling and database driven forms. Client side scripting can still be used for adding extra functionality that wouldn't necessarily be required by the user if the clients browser ignores it (e.g. automatic select boxes, image rollovers, etc.).

Appendix 3 Institutions using SiriusWeb

The following institutions have subscribed to use SiriusWeb on an ongoing basis:

Aberdeen
Bath
Bath Spa University College
Birkbeck College
City
Edge Hill College
Exeter
Kent at Canterbury
Leeds
London Institute
Manchester
Oxford Brookes
Plymouth
Reading
Robert Gordon
South Bank
Southampton
Stirling
Sussex
Swansea
UCL
University of Wales Registry
Westminster
Wolverhampton
Bournemouth
Dundee
Essex
Glasgow
Goldsmiths
Institute Education
Liverpool John Moores
London Business School
London Tropical Medicine
Royal Veterinary College
UWE
Warwick
Worcester
Bradford
Leeds Metropolitan
Trinity All Saints College

Appendix 4 Thanks

Thanks should be given to all of the following for working on, advising on or just being plain supportive throughout the past 2 years. SiriusWeb is a credit to them.

SiriusWeb Project Team	Scott Hennessy (up to Summer 2003), Lorna Halson, Gary Taylor, Gillian McCarthy (Summer 2003 onwards) (all Academic Planning & Performance Office, University of Leeds) (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/dsu/)
SiriusWeb Project Advisory Group	Project Leader - Andrew Parkinson (Academic Registrar at Leeds) Linda Mortimer Pine (Deputy HR Director, Leeds) Os Finnie (General Manager, Finance, Leeds) Kathy Brownridge (Deputy Director, Research Support Unit, Leeds) Geoff Hope-Terry (Finance Director, Manchester) Pramod Philip (HEFCE) Andrew Malin (HEFCE)
Academic Planning & Performance Office, Leeds Leeds University	All staff, in particular Bridget Carter Ellis (author of stage 2 bid) and David Belk Phil MacDonald (Medicine), Karen Steenson and Michelle Double (both Research Support Unit), Brian Diggle, Terry Screeton and Barry Dickson (all Information Systems Services)
Pilot institutions	Jill Bancroft (Trinity & All Saints College), Rob Smith and Christine Bell (both Leeds Met), Sheila Fry and Kevin Jeeps (Bradford)
Other	Peter Thorpe (UCEA) Fiona Armstrong (UK Research Councils Je-S project) John O'Donovan (Sheffield) Alistair Townsend (HEFCE) Jon Brady (Finance Director, Bath Spa University College)

(Project Leader's note: On behalf of the project team I would also like to thank Andrew Busby, the SiriusWeb project manager, for his excellent work in ensuring the delivery of such a highly regarded project)

Appendix 5 – SiriusWeb 2 Project Executive Summary

Title	SiriusWeb 2	
Description	<p>The purpose of the project is to refine and enhance the existing SiriusWeb software including developing a new version, adding a training package and then publicising this to the HE (and FE) sector via a second free trial.</p> <p>Through this work the highest possible usage of the SiriusWeb software can be achieved and consequently the benefits to the sector maximised.</p>	
Main Deliverables	<p>A post project review for the original SiriusWeb project to survey users and institutions to collect feedback and suggestions</p> <p>Using data collected refine SiriusWeb to produce a 'version 2.0'</p> <p>Develop a 'staff costing' training package (feedback from user surveys indicates a good demand for this - not in particular about how to use SiriusWeb but the theory and principles of staff costing)</p> <p>Publicise the refined version and training package to any institutions yet to take up SiriusWeb plus in addition make SiriusWeb available to the FE sector to maximise its institutional usage</p>	
Key Milestones	Project Planning & Consolidation (non project work) completed	August 2003
	Post Project Review completed	November 2003
	Training Package, V2 completed, second HE free trial started	April 2004
	FE version and free trial	July 2004
Major Benefits	<p>Maximise ease of use, usefulness and efficiency of the SiriusWeb software itself by producing a 'version 2' with minor enhancements based on feedback from the surveys undertaken as part of the post project review</p> <p>Maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the operational support of SiriusWeb itself via refinements based on feedback from the surveys undertaken as part of the post project review</p> <p>Maximise the skill and staff costing literacy of people using SiriusWeb via the training package</p> <p>Maximise the number of HEIs using SiriusWeb via a second free trial</p> <p>Produce a detailed assessment of the project benefits to the HE sector via the post project review</p>	
Value	<p>£13,728 (from HEFCE Good Management Practice Programme)</p> <p>£6,100 (University of Leeds contribution to indirect costs)</p>	
Major Risk(s)	<p>Resources; no one is 100% dedicated to work on this project</p> <p>Clash of priorities between project work and non project work (e.g. links to Research Councils Je-S system, operational support of existing SiriusWeb)</p>	
Project Sponsor	Andrew Parkinson, Academic Registrar, University of Leeds	