JISC Project: Field Testing the JISC XCRI Self-Assessment Framework University of Lincoln End Project Report

This project report documents findings from the University of Lincoln in field testing the JISC XCRI Self-Assessment Framework. The project was to trial the Self-Assessment Framework before it was made available to a wider audience in order that JISC could validate or, if necessary, make revisions to the Framework and supporting material.

The University of Lincoln's situation before conducting this field test was that an XCRI-CAP feed was in place from a course marketing database system. This course marketing database was not connected to an academic programme management system, and in fact the University did not have an academic programme management system. The course marketing database existed to feed course information on the University's website, and the XCRI-CAP feed from it was essentially a pilot conducted as part of another project. The work for that existing XCRI-CAP feed had generally been driven bottom-up rather than by institutional policy or strategy.

At the time of the trial, the University was tendering for an academic programme management system with the intention that it would feed or replace the course marketing database, and contain the source data required for an XCRI-CAP feed. The Self-Assessment Framework would provide a useful benchmarking tool in order for the University to determine what needs to be put in place, either as part of the academic programme management system or after it, for a permanent XCRI-CAP feed encompassing all programmes and modules.

Approach

A group was assembled to undertake the self-assessment, and to review the framework and knowledge base. The group consisted of representatives from the web, quality, student management and admissions teams at team-leader level. Senior management was not engaged as part of the process of self-assessing, due in large to the short time available to conduct the assessment, but the project was sponsored by the Head of ICT who maintained an overview of progress.

A workshop was held to introduce the group to XCRI-CAP and go over the purpose of the project. The Self-Assessment was conducted in a workshop as a group to allow for discussion to take place on each question. This proved to be an effective way of conducting the process and encouraged the group to consider points that, without the self-assessment, may not have been consider or may have been considered much later.

The knowledge base was used when further information or background information on some questions in the self-assessment was needed, and for assembling source material for introducing

XCRI-CAP to the group. It was also used when reviewing the output of the Self-Assessment Framework to establish what work needs to be undertaken by the University, mainly where questions contained links to particular parts of the knowledge base. Use of the knowledge base was not extensive, but it was a useful resource to be able to refer to.

The presentation of the summary as a RAG status provided simple assessment of the XCRI-CAP maturity without the need for explanation. One slight difficulty encountered was that questions range from the technical which need answering by developers-type staff, to high-level policy that may need responses from senior managers. One possible approach to tackling this is to hold two workshops, one at strategic policy level and one at implementation level.

Success Factors

The University of Lincoln is currently tendering for an academic programme management system. Assuming this project proceeds as planned, the project itself will bring about improvements in relation to course management processes and data flows. These will be defined in the project and achievement of objectives will be monitored and reviewed. As part of this, or after the project, the implementation of a long-term XCRI-CAP feed could be undertaken. The XCRI-CAP Self-Assessment Framework would be a valuable tool in that implementation. A baseline could be taken of the current position and a roadmap for implementation developed from the summary information presented from that baseline. Appendix A provides a brief list of activities or items that have been identified so far from conducting the self-assessment, and these would be more fully investigated to develop the roadmap.

The framework would also allow regular reviews of progress to take place which could be compared against the baseline or subsequent reviews to chart and monitor progress, identify where gaps are present, and to highlight potential areas where more effort is needed. Furthermore, if it were possible to use the framework to benchmark against the sector it could provide the institution with even more relevant targets.

Although the University already knew its XCRI-CAP maturity level was not high, the framework provided a method of quantitatively measuring it. By implication this also means that progress towards improving XCRI-CAP can also be measured.

Lessons Learnt

Performing the self-assessment as a group exercise was certainly worthwhile. Although it could be done individually with somebody collating responses, with a final agreed version eventually being delivered, it is unlikely that such an approach would provoke the same discussions. The questions prompt individuals to consider points that may not otherwise be thought about, and group discussion also promotes better awareness of the challenges that others involved in implementing XCRI-CAP face, with the possibility of better, quicker solutions being developed as a result.

It was evident to the group that, ideally, more time would be set aside even just to create a baseline summary from question responses, and certainly to develop a more detailed roadmap. Even finding times for a group to meet can be difficult and need to be planned several weeks in advance to get

the right people in place, so to get the most from the exercise allowing sufficient time is essential. Certainly the University of Lincoln would have benefited from having longer to undertake the trial.

Being in the position of having a pilot (undergraduate only) XCRI-CAP feed in place whilst intending to implement an academic programme management system in the near future create some difficulties in deciding on how to answer some questions. Should questions be answered purely on what is currently in place, or instead on what is intended for the future (which may be very different)? This may be a fairly unusual position, but it is worth documenting anyway. For example, question B6 asks "Nature of XCRI feed: How will the institution physically/technically generate the XCRI feed?". There is already a feed in place as a pilot, but this may change substantially when a new system is implemented – the University decided to base this on the future system and answered 'Unknown'. Similarly question B4 asks "Storage: How and where does the institution currently store the course advertising information to be used in the XCRI implementation?". The advertising is currently in a single database, but in the future with a new system the answer may be different. Perhaps some guidance could be issued, and it may be that the N/A option should be used in these circumstances.

There was some confusion over the terms "common identifiers" and "permanent unique course identifiers" in questions B3 and D3:

- B3: "Course identifiers: Are common course identifiers used in all of the proposed sources of course advertising information?"
- D3: "Permanent IDs: Does the institution use permanent unique course identifiers in its main courses information system?"

The knowledge base was searched for specific definition of these terms, but nothing definitive found. For example, is it referring to URI identifiers for courses, or simply internal course IDs that are permanently assigned to a course (e.g. ABC123)? The link to the knowledge base in the summary for question B3 contains information about URIs but it is still not clear how and in what circumstances it should be applied. A further question arose about whether IDs should be assigned permanently to the sessional or static elements of the programme; i.e. the same programme will evolve over time, perhaps changing some content from year to year, but keeping the same title, duration, etc – should each version (session) have its own ID, or should it keep the same programme ID over different versions (sessions)?

Recommendations

The following specific suggestions are made of how JISC cold amend the the XCRI Self-Assessment Framework and XCRI Knowledge Base:

1. Allow more time to undertake the self-assessment in future projects.
2. Modify the self-assessment framework to allow a baseline answer set to be saved, and then subsequent answer sets to be saved in order that a history of progress can be maintained.
3. Add more links from questions to specific parts of the knowledge base.

4. Emphasise the benefits of considering and answering the questions in group workshops.
5. Provide some guidance and additional knowledge base information for the terms “common identifiers” and “permanent unique course identifiers” in questions B3 and D3.
6. Check the RAG status response for question A3 – responding positively with a “Yes” generates a red status, but this should likely be a green status.

Appendix 1 – Items to be Included in a Roadmap

The following simple list identifies activities or items that have been identified so far from conducting the self-assessment. These would be more fully investigated to develop the roadmap.

- Institutional strategic policy:
  - Fully identify third-party course collecting organisations that could be served from XCRI-CAP implementation.
  - Fully identify internal uses for XCRI-CAP implementation.
  - Define retention policy.
  - Finalise depth of marketing information to be in XCRI-CAP outputs.
  - Agree a policy for electronic access from, or integration with, other systems within intuition.
  - Agree a policy for electronic access to the information externally from other organisations.
  - Create a policy statement on whether any charges will be made for third-parties to access course marketing information.
  - Agree frequency of updates to course marketing information for each type of course.

- Planning the output:
  - Decide on long-term approach to technically generating XCRI feed.

- Management Implementation:
  - Formally agree on extent of centralisation of course information to be included in XCRI implementation.
  - Agree any changes to the processes of creating and maintaining course marketing information for an XCRI implementation.
  - Agree how updates to the course marketing information will be tracked.
  - Agree how the XCRI implementation will be managed, including who will be responsible for it.
  - Identify resources to sustain XCRI in the long term.
  - Ensure quality of course marketing information is addressed – accuracy, completeness, integrity, accessibility, timeliness, transferability, transparency, provenance, transportability.

- Technical Implementation:
  - Ensure Content Management System supports an XCRI implementation.
  - Ensure there is a Management Information System that would support an XCRI implementation.
  - Ensure permanent unique course identifiers are used (in URI form). ???
  - Ensure all necessary data is available from the source system.
  - Ensure both programme and module level course advertising information is available (currently only programme level).
  - Determine and implement software needed.

- Determine and implement process changes necessary to gather required information for XCRI-CAP.
- Determine and implement interface changes between systems to support XCRI implementation.

Appendix 2 – Self-Assessment Summary

A - Institutional Strategic Policy

(1)	Stakeholders: Has the institution identified key stakeholders who are involved in setting its course marketing policy?	Yes - fully
(2)	Collectors: Has the institution identified key third party course collecting organisations (for example UCAS) that could be served by the XCRI implementation?	Yes - partially
(3)	Your website: Has the institution agreed whether the XCRI implementation will be used to drive the main institution website?	Yes
(4)	Other internal uses: Has the institution identified other internal uses for the XCRI implementation (for example, publication on faculty websites, integration with non-course information)?	Yes - partially
(5)	Retention policy: Has the institution agreed a policy for the long term storage and management of the information, including a policy for the length of retention?	No
(6)	Coverage: Has the institution agreed the coverage of the XCRI implementation in relation to the types of courses it offers (for example undergraduate, postgraduate, taught, research, CPD, full time, part time, and so on)?	Yes - fully
(7)	Depth: XCRI does not prescribe how detailed the course marketing information should be. Has the institution agreed on the depth of information that will be included in the XCRI outputs?	Yes - in draft
(8)	Integration: Has the institution agreed a policy for electronic access from, or integration with, other systems within the institution?	No
(9)	External access: Has the institution agreed a policy for electronic access to the information externally from other organisations?	No
(10)	Charging: Has the institution a policy statement on whether it will be making any charges for the provision of course marketing information to third parties?	No
(11)	Update: Has the institution agreed a policy for the frequency of update of its course marketing information for each type of course?	No
(12)	Business case: Has the institution identified the business case for XCRI implementation?	Yes - fully

B - Planning the Output

(1)	Mapping structures: Can the current courses data structures be mapped and/or transformed readily to the XCRI information model?	Yes - fully
(2)	Mapping fields: Can the current courses data fields be mapped and/or transformed readily to the XCRI information model?	Yes - fully
(3)	Course identifiers: Are common course identifiers used in all of the proposed sources of course advertising information?	Yes
(4)	Storage: How and where does the institution currently store the course advertising information to be used in the XCRI implementation?	In a single system
(5)	Extra data: Has the need for extra data for the XCRI implementation been identified but not yet sourced?	N/A
(6)	Nature of XCRI feed: How will the institution physically/technically generate the XCRI feed?	Unknown

C - Management Implementation

(1)	Sources: Has the institution identified the authoritative source or sources of course marketing information that could be used in an XCRI implementation?	Yes - fully
(2)	Centralisation: Has the institution agreed on the extent of centralisation of the course information to be included in an XCRI implementation?	Yes - partially
(3)	Volume and complexity: Has the institution considered the issue of the volume and complexity of its provision, and whether and how this will be reflected in an XCRI implementation?	Yes - fully
(4)	Process changes: Has the institution reviewed and agreed any changes to the processes of creating and maintaining course marketing information for an XCRI implementation?	No
(5)	Tracking and auditing: Has the institution agreed how updates to the course marketing information will be tracked (for example via an audit trail recording date and staff involved)?	No
(6)	Lines of responsibility: Has the institution agreed how the XCRI implementation will be managed, including who will be responsible for it?	No
(7)	Time scales: Has the institution assessed the time scale that will be required to implement XCRI?	Yes - fully
(8)	Finance: Has the institution identified and sourced the financial resources that will be required to implement XCRI?	Yes - fully
(9)	Non-technical skills: Has the institution identified and sourced the non-technical skills that will be required to implement XCRI?	In house
(10)	Technical skills: Has the institution identified and sourced the technical skills that will be required to implement XCRI?	In house
(11)	Resources: Has the institution identified the resources (i.e. time, money, technical and non-technical skills) required to sustain XCRI in the long term?	No
(12)	Relationship with other projects: Has the institution considered how the XCRI implementation will relate to other projects addressing courses information (for example, validation, approval and assessment systems, student relationship management systems, Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) implementation, and so on)?	Yes - fully
(13)	Quality: Has the institution addressed the quality of its course marketing information - accuracy, completeness, integrity, accessibility, timeliness, transferability, transparency, provenance, transportability?	Yes - partially

D - Technical Implementation

(1)	Support from CMS: Has the institution a Content Management System or Document Management System that would support XCRI implementation?	Yes - partially
(2)	Support from MIS: Has the institution a Management Information System that would support XCRI implementation?	No
(3)	Permanent IDs: Does the institution use permanent unique course identifiers in its main courses information system?	No
(4)	All data available: Can the institution's current data provide all of the requirements of the major target consumers of XCRI?	Partially
(5)	Programme / module: Do the institution's information systems support the provision of both programme level and module/unit/component level course advertising information?	No
(6)	Equipment and software: Will new equipment or software be required?	Yes - software
(7)	Application and / or process change: Will changes be required to applications or processes to gather the required information and to implement an XCRI feed?	Yes - apps & processes
(8)	Interfaces: Will changes be required to applications or processes in order to build interfaces between systems to support the XCRI implementation?	Yes - apps & processes