



**PRIMARY EXEMPLAR  
PROJECT**

"Using ICT to support distance learning"

# The E-Learning and Mobility Project (E-LAMP<sub>2</sub>)

Final report (with supplementary  
information from a parallel project  
in Leicestershire)

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## **Abstract**

*This evaluation report sets out to summarize the experiences of E-LAMP<sub>2</sub>, a project which sought to explore the use of laptops and GPRS datacards to enhance distance learning for very mobile Traveller pupils. It also draws on experiences from a parallel initiative in Leicestershire. Information was collected from participating pupils, families, schools and Traveller Education Support Services (TESS). In general terms the two pilot projects can be seen to have been successful in demonstrating enhancement, but with some important lessons for the future. These relate mainly to the importance of adequate time and appropriate training to prepare pupils and families, to the need to have clear contact and coordination arrangements within schools, and to the need for close and active cooperation between TESS and schools to support the mobile learners and families. The report also highlights the need to design learning activities which take account of both the strengths and limitations of datacard communication, and argues for a more prominent role for home-school learning agreements within future developments.*

## **Acknowledgments**

The steering group of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> project would like to express their gratitude to the Traveller Education Services, schools, parents and children who took part in this pilot project and the parallel project in Leicestershire. The commitment and enthusiasm of those who participated helped to make the project a success, and to demonstrate the significant potential contribution of ICT to support very mobile Traveller pupils.

The group would also wish to express thanks to the DfES, the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, the NASUWT and the mobile phone company O<sub>2</sub> for funding and supporting the initiative.

## **The project steering group**

This project was coordinated by the National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT) which has a long tradition of seeking to improve services for Traveller children and of working with parent groups.

The steering group was chaired by Marion Rowlands (Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service and also chair of the NATT ICT working group). The other members were Valerie Moody, MBE, National Education Liaison Officer for the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, Kornelia Fossett, Chair of the Circus Parents' Association, Anne Walker (Devon Consortium Traveller Education Service), Penny Lenton (Leicestershire, Leicester City & Rutland Traveller Education Service) and Ken Marks from the University of Sheffield.

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## SECTION 1: The context

This report is intended to draw from the experience of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> project, an initiative which set out to explore the potential of using ICT to support very mobile Traveller learners and to link them to their teachers and winter-base schools via the internet. It took place during the 2004 travelling season, a period roughly spanning the months from March to October. A recent survey of all English Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) showed that something like 1300 Traveller pupils were taking some form of learning pack with them whilst travelling. The project was intended to look to the potential of laptops and datacards to enrich and reinforce the learning experiences of such children through a pilot venture. The idea for the project emerged in discussions between the DfES and the steering group of an exploratory initiative funded by the Nuffield Foundation.<sup>1</sup> The project was coordinated by the National Association of the Teachers of Travellers (NATT), with funding from the DfES, the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, the NASUWT and the mobile phone company O<sub>2</sub> which also provided technical back up and support throughout.

The survey indicated that over two thirds of the packs prepared by winter-base schools with support from TESS were designed for primary-age pupils. Traveller parents have come to value aspects of primary education but very many still have reservations and concerns about the secondary sector, and these influence both commitment and attendance. The decline in use of packs with age probably reflects these concerns but the relative complexity of supporting secondary age pupils from a school base with distance learning materials may also be a factor.

As E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> was intended as a basic exploration of potential, the project was targeted on pupils at Key Stage 2 (KS2) within the primary sector and for families which already had established experience of learning packs. The intention here was to explore the use of ICT to enhance, rather than replace, traditional packs. In practice the children involved were all drawn from the Fairground sector, although it did subsequently become possible to involve one KS3 Circus pupil and one KS4 Irish Traveller pupil.<sup>2</sup>

Four TESS and base-school partnerships participated in E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> :

- Bolton TESS (working with Bolton Parish Church School)
- Surrey TESS (working with Lingfield Primary School)

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<sup>1</sup> This initial venture was concerned with a broad assessment of ICT as a means of enhancing distance learning for Traveller pupils, and was focused on both policy and practice issues.

<sup>2</sup> Distance learning is more firmly established in the Fairground community. The TESS involved with the project were selected from 11 applicants and it was interesting, if frustrating, to note that all the 11 applications were focused on Fairground children.

- The Avon Consortium TESS (working with St John's Mead Primary School)
- Cambridgeshire TESS (working with Wilburton Village Primary School)

Each school had four or five KS2 pupils with experience of using distance learning packs and each family was loaned a laptop and a GPRS datacard<sup>3</sup>, and had a monthly mobile datacard allowance with O<sub>2</sub>. Each family also had a combined printer/scanner unit and an individualized selection of CD-ROMs and other software chosen by their schools and intended to enhance their pack-based learning. Each school had funding for a half-a-day staff cover per week to release appropriate teachers.

Leicestershire also built on the ideas developed to initiate E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> and worked with the East Midlands Broadband Consortium (EMBC) to set up a parallel project with the same rationale. This proved a useful complement as the Leicester focus was on working with schools which had very small numbers of Traveller (again Fairground) children with packs, typically one or two, and it also proved possible to pilot some work at the secondary level.

This final report is intended to give an overview of experiences from E-LAMP<sub>2</sub>, complemented by information from the Leicester project, and to highlight both success factors and potential pitfalls. This is important in itself but takes on a greater significance as the DfES is supporting an extended NATT pilot for the 2005 Travelling season. Ten TESS from different parts of the country will be involved, supporting some 70 learners, and priority has been given to the inclusion of both secondary pupils, and to Gypsy and Irish Traveller children.

## **SECTION 2: The experiences of the children and their families**

19 KS2 pupils were involved in E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> and a further four through the Leicestershire project which also supported one KS1 child, two KS3 pupils and two KS4 pupils. This meant that 28 pupils were supported across the two projects and potentially throughout the travel season. Subsequently one K3 (Circus) child, and three KS 4 pupils (One Irish Traveller and two Fairground children) were also supported through E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> partners. Several siblings also made use of the ICT facilities, as did some of the parents.<sup>4</sup>

This report will focus mainly on the 23 KS2 pupils but draw in the other children's experiences where this adds to the commentary. Within the core group of 23, there were twelve girls and eleven boys. The majority of the pupils were reasonably close, but on balance below, the expected attainment targets for their

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<sup>3</sup> GPRS is a standardized approach which uses mobile telephone networks but is designed for data transfer rather than voice mail which uses the GSM standard.

<sup>4</sup> This was true for E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> but even more so for the Leicestershire project which had a specific remit to work with families as a whole.

year group. However, eight were noted to be receiving Special Needs support because they were well behind their peers with literacy sometimes cited as a particular issue. Two of these children were also identified as having a specific Special Need which affected their learning.

This gap in attainment has been characteristic for many very mobile families. Traditional learning packs have their limitations in terms of motivating pupils, giving them adequate support and feedback, and in exchanging work with school. Given limited attendance at base-school, normally of the order of ten to twelve weeks during the winter months, the gap tends to increase during KS2 and may be another reason why some families feel uneasy about moving their children on to the secondary sector. Primary/secondary transition is also complicated by the fact that families are normally away from base in September. These are some of the major challenges which the project sought to begin to address through the use of ICT, and from the transition perspective it was interesting to note that seven pupils started the year in Y6, so would be changing schools during the course of the project.

## **2.1 The evidence base**

Evidence was gathered systematically for the 23 KS2 children, and additional feedback was drawn, wherever practicable, from the other 9 pupils involved via E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> or Leicestershire.

Parents were contacted during June, 2004, part way through the season, and also at the end of the project period. A common schedule was used and a mixture of visits and telephone calls was employed. These contacts were made by local school or TESS staff. Children were also asked to comment on their experiences through emails, questionnaires or as school-requested tasks.

## **2.2 Key findings from pupil and family responses**

18 of the 23 core project pupils used the laptop and software provided throughout the season. [The additional nine children also used the equipment fairly systematically and in six instances throughout the whole season.]

Five of the core group of children stopped using the equipment, or used it only occasionally and erratically. They had all been affected by the very tight timescale for the project which meant that preparation and training was condensed into a very short period before their families set out for the 2004 season (see Section 3). All five were also in the group of eight who were receiving additional school support because they were significantly behind their peers in terms of attainment, and in two instances erratic attendance during the winter period was also noted as having been a contributory factor.

The remainder of this section draws from the children who did establish and continue use of the equipment, and here both parents and children reported more school work being completed, in some instances including more work with the traditional pack. The broad weekly picture was of children completing between four and ten hours per week with their packs and ICT equipment. This is reported to be consistent with the amounts of time normally associated with traditional packs but the comments suggest that the children's efforts were more-focused and productive. Tackling schoolwork in the busy trailer environment is a potentially daunting prospect for children. In another sense isolation is a key factor, as pack-based distance learners do not have the immediacy of teacher contact and support. Both circumstances can impact on motivation and progress, and the project set out to explore the benefits of good interactive software and websites, together with enhanced home-school communication.

**Software and websites:** All the children had access to word-processing and other presentational software. As noted above, schools were also asked to choose suitable courseware and recommend websites for individual pupils for both interactive reinforcement exercises and for topic-based work. Where comments were received, feedback from both pupils and parents was almost invariably positive. Work was "more interesting" and "more fun." The following quotes give a flavour of the whole:

"It helped me a lot with my spellings and stuff like that... I could check it out" (*pupil*)

"I liked playing the (numeracy and literacy) games" (*pupil*)

"I joined in the 'Number Challenge' day on the web. It was good fun" (*pupil*)

"The laptop has been more enjoyable to use...instead of work being a chore it has been something to look forward to...and has improved my standards"  
(*secondary pupil*)

"They have enjoyed using the laptops rather than filling in books and worksheets"  
(*parent*)

"It has encouraged xxxx to start work, he is not always keen but has liked using the laptop" (*parent*)

"The children are more interested in their work and like talking about school-work more often" (*parent*)

It was also particularly pleasing to see the impact on children with very weak literacy skills, and the following pupil email extracts reflect this aspect of the challenge:

“I like doing the laptop. I like games and storees. I am getting beter at riteing I feel good a bote my work”

“this laptop is so god because it has helpt me and my bruvvers a lot. I look at the words and it lorns me on my sbelin and xxxx likes playing on the word game and it lorns him with heys words”

**Messaging and exchanging work:** For 15 of the 23 core pupils messaging was an important and integral part of the experience. As noted above 5 pupils did not participate effectively in the project. Three other pupils used email at the start of the project but usage dropped off and it was impossible to revisit and reinforce skills with the families moving frequently and in different parts of the country. Again this failure seems to relate to the compressed timescale for preparing and training families, and this also impacted on electronic exchanges of work.

Where children and families had developed a platform of skills and confidence, messaging was being used for contact with staff and for schoolwork, but also in some instances with classmates or named ‘buddies’ within school. There was reported to be an increased mutual home-school awareness, and for the children a sense of still belonging rather than, as one member of staff put it, being “out-of-sight, out-of-mind”. The families liked receiving information from school, “knowing what’s going on” and the children benefited from a sense of community.

“She likes to get emails from school. Makes her feel she’s not forgotten” (*parent*)

“My friends and me have been keeping in touch about where we are going next and stuff like that” (*pupil*)

“It makes them feel that someone is looking at what they’ve done” (*parent*)

“I like to rite letters to my frens”. (*from Traveller pupil email*)

“Hows the traveling going? Where have you visited so far? reply soon, best wishes from the class” (*from buddy email*)

This general sense of bridging the gap between learner and school seems to have been important in itself but there had also been more tangible benefits in terms of learning support. The following quotes have been selected from a range because they illustrate how email communication can help to address three of the classic problems posed by traditional distance learning: what to do when you are stuck, how to get feedback in time for it to be useful, and how to overcome delays in exchanging work with your tutor.

“If there is a problem we can email the school and ask for help. Contact is much quicker” (*parent*)

“If I’m stuck...I don’t need to wait for a teacher to come and help me as I can just email” (*pupil*)

“Its good to get help. I get fed up when I don’t understand how to do things in my pack” (*pupil*)

“I know if I’ve done it correctly, and (I know) quickly” (*pupil*)

“Good to get feedback to encourage him...rather than (waiting) to come back to school” (*parent*)

“(Attachments are)...changing ways of doing work” (*pupil*)

“We don’t have to wait to receive work pack. Work there when needed. (Also)...can send it back as soon as finished” (*parent*)

Messaging also seems to have played an important part in motivating the children to develop their writing skills. This is a theme which comes across in several pupil or parent responses. As one pupil put it “It’s been great for practicing my writing. I really want to stay in touch with my friends so I want to write now”

***A note on the role of printers and scanners:*** A joint printer/scanner was provided for each family. There were concerns about having another item of equipment in the busy trailer environment and reactions from families were varied. Where the equipment was used, printing seems to have been appreciated as a way of making physical copies of instructions and worksheets, and particularly for making hard copies of completed work. Only a few responses mentioned scanning and the context seems to have been pictures rather than for digitizing handwritten work; one of the original suggestions for use of the equipment.

## **SECTION 3: The tutor and school perspective**

Each of the four E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> schools had a named member of staff as coordinator and schools were given the equivalent of a half a day a week cover monies throughout the period February to October, 2004. This was intended to give coordinators time to support both the initial training and family preparation, and to carry through a linking role with families throughout the travel season. Nine schools were involved in Leicestershire, some for just part of the season where children were in their transition year, and here there was a mixed approach to coordination, sometimes with a named member of staff within school and sometimes with the TESS taking a more direct role. As had been anticipated, the preparation of both pupils and families proved critical and is evaluated in a separate subsection (see 3.2, below). The other parts of the school-orientated evaluation were concerned with gathering information about pupil progress, as seen from the tutor perspective, and experiences of coordination roles.

### **3.1 The Evidence base**

E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> tutors were asked to fill in both an interim evaluation questionnaire in June, 2004 and a final questionnaire at the end of the project. A separate overview was provided by Leicestershire. There was also an evaluative day event held in Coventry in June 2004 to allow for a more extensive formative discussion and to review experiences of preparation and training. This was attended by representatives of all the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> partners and by the coordinator of the Leicestershire project who was able to share parallel insights. At the end of the travelling season schools were also asked to comment on the 'progress' of each child. This was sometimes provided via a 'pen portrait' for the child, and sometimes via a brief interview with the child. Finally TESS partners were asked to comment on their experiences of using the internet to ease the transition to secondary school for the seven pupils who started the year in Y6.

### **3.2 Key findings: preparation and training.**

One of the major concerns for both projects was the tight timescale for preparation and training. Confirmation of funding was only finally secured in late autumn, and it was not possible to select participating TESS until December, 2003. Equipment had to be purchased and delivered and initial project training (for staff) undertaken in January 2004. Staff in Leicestershire worked within similar timing pressures. This meant that preparation and training for families and children could only start in February and many families began their annual 'run' in early to mid March. This had an impact for several children, particularly in their

ability to master relatively complex tasks like sending email attachments<sup>5</sup>, and some families from two of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> schools seem to have had more fundamental problems in developing the skills to use the equipment with secure confidence. Adequate time for training was cited as a key future success factor by all respondents. In addition, some rural schools experienced poor signal quality with the datacard (see Section 4, below) and this also impacted on some aspects of training.

In practice, each E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> school/TESS had arranged a structured series of sessions for the children and had involved parents along the way. Pupils had to master basic computer skills, learn to begin to use the software, courseware and websites, and to practise messaging skills. Parents meetings were held to go through the Home-TESS agreement (see Section 4 below) and to talk about ways of supporting the children. Given the distributed nature of the pupils taking part in the Leicestershire initiative, some of the parallel training input had also been school-based, but some involved family (trailer) home visits. The project coordinator had also taken the lead in primary schools but with more school involvement for the secondary pupils.

Different combinations of school and TESS staff were involved in training across the two projects, and this seems to have been generally more effective where TESS and base-schools were able to adopt an integrated, rather than complementary, approach to training and supportive follow up. It also proved to be important for school and/or TESS staff to be proactive with encouragement during the early weeks of family travel periods, for example by maintaining regular mobile phone contact.

There was also a strong degree of commonality about other recommendations for the future:

- Training should include provision for class teachers. These developments involve a “new way of thinking” for most staff, and implied a “steep learning curve”
- (More) parental involvement should be strongly encouraged, and separate ICT sessions for the parents would also be beneficial
- It would be useful to produce some sort of illustrated written notes (ideally a sort of manual with a visual emphasis) for the families to take with them when they travel.

### **3.3 Key findings: school perceptions of progress**

Feedback from teachers and schools suggests that those children who used the equipment throughout the travel period had all benefited, to varying degrees,

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<sup>5</sup> Leicestershire children were using learning environments which allowed work to be put in folders so the sending of email attachments was not an issue for them.

from the enhanced approach to distance learning. Comments about individual pupil's gains in confidence and commitment to school work, and their much more positive attitudes to learning and their school communities, proved a common thread throughout. The following extracts are again illustrative:

"Both (my class) pupils returned after extensive breaks between April and November and I have been pleasantly surprised by how well they have fitted back into the work routine and friendship groupings within the class. I had expected their work to have 'taken a backward step' but both have been able to pick up where they left off and have positive enthusiasm towards learning in class. In past experiences this has not always been the case."

"Despite xxx's literacy difficulties he has come back to school.....trying very hard. He is reading every night with his mother and is running through the reading levels. He has integrated well with the class and has many friends. His class teacher is pleased with his (renewed) attitude to work"

"xxx has low self-confidence but has enjoyed and covered all the Maths that was set for him and has come back to school more confident in this area"

"On returning to school she settled in very quickly and showed much more commitment to her work. She is very keen to have a laptop and datacard again next year"

"xxx's school history showed disaffection resulting in poor attendance and achievement.....However he showed excellent commitment and motivation in the project. On returning to school he has showed a massive rise in confidence and self esteem. He has been attending regularly and his attainment is increasing rapidly"

The potential power of enhanced approaches using ICT is also clearly illustrated by the progress made by the one Irish Traveller pupil who joined the project part way through what would have been her last school year if she had been attending:

"This pupil has had very little formal education but is intelligent and proved highly motivated. Due to a disrupted education she had a reading age assessed at 5.2. She could use everyday Maths effectively but had little experience of written Maths. She quickly mastered email and attachments.....and enjoyed surfing the web where she found lots of websites about Ireland and the Irish, Travellers, and Pop and Film Stars, which she enjoyed. She had been reluctant to write previously, embarrassed by poor spelling and handwriting, but quickly developed an

eagerness to write. She ended up producing several short stories...still a way to go with the spelling but now with a significant increase in self-confidence. She also enjoyed using some primary Maths software. She is now eager to continue to develop her skills and has persuaded her father to buy her a laptop so she can continue to use ICT as much as possible”

### **3.4 Key findings: coordination and cooperation**

The E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> schools each had a named tutor-coordinator responsible for communication and support for pupils. The situation in Leicestershire was more variable, and TESS staff were sometimes more directly involved with coordination depending on circumstances within individual schools.

Where schools had a named member of staff and the role was fully structured into school organization the arrangement was reported to have worked well. It provided a clear focus and gave “the opportunity to communicate with the children, note any work issues and discuss these with their school-based teachers”. Tutor-coordinators or TESS staff also found themselves involved with helping colleagues to “turn classroom materials and ideas into suitable ICT-based distance learning activities” and noted pressures on time generally both for themselves and for class teachers. Hence the suggestions for staff training which are noted above.

Whatever the balance of input to ensure coordination, the other key success factor seems to have been close working relationships between TESS staff and schools. Where TESS continued to maintain proactive contact with schools and families, particularly through the early part of the season, there were fewer problems and fewer children who dropped out or did not make full use of the equipment.

### **3.5 A note about the role of internet access**

As part of the evaluation tutor-coordinators were also specifically asked to give their impressions about ways in which the internet had contributed to the learning experience of pupils. Responses indicated that websites had played an important part for interactive reinforcement activities, and particularly for project/topic work; including some summer holiday projects intended to bridge the long gap between July and September.

Other comments clustered around communication and here the main themes largely mirror those of the children and families:

- Keeping pupils and families “in touch with what is happening in school” and sending out key information, for example about SAT’s arrangements
- Being able to provide speedy feedback and encouragement (including comments about paper-based work which had been sent back by post)
- Exchanging work through email attachments or folders within learning environments
- Exchanging messages to encourage the sense of belonging and to give “the rest of the children insights into the Showman’s lifestyle”

### **3.6 A note about transition**

A total of seven of the 23 KS2 pupils were in their transition year. The parents of one of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> children decided to return to base in September so that their son could be in his new school for the start of the school year. In the other instances TESS staff helped to bridge the gap by encouraging email messaging contact between the Y6 pupils and their new schools during the summer term and then building on this contact in the autumn term. Pupils and families were also sent information about their new schools, so, for example, some parents received electronic copies of school newsletters and some pupils their timetables. During the early part of the autumn term, the exchange of messages sometimes involved new classmates as well as staff. In addition, some pupils were involved in transition projects, returning their work to their new school via the internet and even in one case preparing a presentation (Powerpoint) for the new class which was shared with classmates when he returned at the end of the travel season. As would be expected these bridge-building approaches seem to have eased the transition when pupils finally arrived in school in October. As one TESS tutor put it: “The students arrived in school appearing to be very confident and they settled very quickly”.

## **SECTION 4: Technology, safe access and performance**

The E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> project provided the basic model within the popular Toshiba ‘Satellite Pro’ laptop range (at about £500 ex VAT). Floppy disc drives were also supplied so that children could back up their work if this was felt to be useful. Each school was allocated a spare machine and a contingency budget of £50 per pupil in case there were any problems and the need to return machines under guarantee. There was only one such instance and the mechanisms worked smoothly. Toshiba also offer an insurance scheme for computers used in

educational contexts, and the laptops were therefore fully insured throughout the project period. Both Dell and Hewlett Packard printer/scanners were used with no reports of problems.

The GPRS datacard used was a Dell product, which had been developed in conjunction with O<sub>2</sub>. At the time of writing its current O<sub>2</sub> equivalent is the Sierra card, which is itself now being replaced by a combined 3G-GPRS card.<sup>6</sup> There was only one problem with a GPRS card and this was replaced immediately by O<sub>2</sub>. O<sub>2</sub> also set up special nine month accounts for E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> to fit with the training and travel period, and these were organized within a 'bundle' which effectively averaged out usage across all the pupils involved. The bundle was purchased for the whole travel period, in advance, and allowed for up to 50Mb of traffic per pupil per month<sup>7</sup>. It proved possible to arrange a safety cap against excessive use<sup>8</sup>, and O<sub>2</sub> also provided monthly spreadsheets which showed the pattern of use for all the children. The Leicestershire arrangements were set up independently through the EMBC which covered all costs.

***Safe and secure use of the internet*** Leicestershire and one of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> schools were able to make use of established learning environments. The other schools used commercial web-based email services and relied on those to screen out viruses associated with messaging. In addition children were also warned not to load or download any unauthorized material. The dangers of unsupervised access to the internet were also discussed with parents as part of the Home-TESS agreement (see below). Clearly future initiatives should look to the use of learning environments wherever possible and should take local (school or LEA) advice about firewalls, virus protection and other options which maximize safe access for children. The parental supervisory role also needs continuing emphasis. The only evidence of abuse came from one learner who had clearly downloaded music files, although the level of traffic for some other pupils became suspiciously high towards the end of the travel period.

***The Home-TESS and Health and Safety agreements***<sup>9</sup> All the families were required to discuss and sign an agreement about care of equipment, and use of the datacards and internet, before equipment was finally issued to them for the traveling season. This agreement was developed from a model provided by the e-Learning Foundation and was intended to reinforce messages about sensible

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<sup>6</sup> 3G services have become available during 2004. 3G has a much faster transfer rate than GPRS but is only currently available in larger cities. The new generation of cards check whether 3G is available to the user, and if not immediately switch to GPRS services.

<sup>7</sup> GPRS (and 3G) services are charged by the amount of data transmitted, rather than for time as with a phone call.

<sup>8</sup> If the limit on the amount of traffic was reached in any one month no pupil could use more than another 10Mb before their account was cut off. In theory usage above the monthly limit was charged at 85p per Mb so the cap effectively meant an extra potential liability of £8.50 per user.

<sup>9</sup> This was an agreement between families and TESS and families, rather than schools and families, because DfES funding was agreed subject to all equipment being owned by TESS and used exclusively for the benefit of Traveller children.

use. It included a section limiting use of the datacard to educational purposes and another which outlined what families should do in the event of the loss or theft of the datacard or its sim card. Leicestershire also introduced a Health and Safety agreement which is strongly recommended for any future initiatives. Both documents are appended. In practice, the only issue which arose concerned the misuse of the datacards. In at least one instance a pupil is known to have downloaded music files and there were suspicions that two others may have downloaded large files from the internet as their individual entries on the O<sub>2</sub> spreadsheet rose rather dramatically towards the end of the project period.

***Datacard performance*** The major mobile phone networks claim 70% GPRS coverage for the UK and in practice this means that most populated areas are covered. Individual companies have different coverage profiles and rural areas may therefore have different patterns of communication blackspot, depending on the supplier. O<sub>2</sub> coverage proved adequate most of the time for most users, but two rural partner schools were directly affected by weak signal strength, and this did impact on the preparation and training of the children concerned. This is something which it is important to check out so that, where necessary, special arrangements can be made during the training period. [Certain building structures also inhibit the use of mobile telephone networks. If there are problems in using mobile phones within a particular school building the same characteristics are likely to be found for GPRS and special arrangements may need to be made during the training.]

Reports from the families (via the questionnaires) indicated that there were some frustrations with gaps in coverage as they travelled, and also that speed of transfer was sometimes an issue. Users 'share' GPRS capacity across mobile phone networks and this leads to variable transfer speeds. However, in spite of these frustrations, most families were positive about their experience with datacards and saw the overall benefits of communication and internet access as a major step forward for their children in spite of any gaps in the flow. On the other hand three of the families which didn't persevere cited problems with coverage as part of their reason for giving up on the datacards.

Most of the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> learners used between 5Mb and 20Mb each month, well below the monthly allowance within the project. There was also an interesting dip in traffic during June and July, still within school term but at a time of year which is particularly busy for the Fairground community. However several individual users did begin to use more traffic towards the end of the project, as more websites were visited and more traffic exchanged, and some children did move towards the 50Mb ceiling. As noted above, three children may well have misused the cards and this reinforces the need to raise parental awareness and to consider a clear statement about cost in Home-TESS agreements.

## SECTION 5: Looking to the future

The following general comments from E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> tutor-coordinators and from Leicestershire echo the more detailed feedback outlined above and reflect the overall success of the two projects. Clearly ICT-based enhancement can have a significant impact, but it is also important to learn from the small number of 'failures' associated with this pilot work, as well as from the successful experiences of families, schools and TESS. This final section is therefore intended as a summary but written as the basis for future development. It will also pick up on one of the broader themes, the potential role of parental agreements, drawn from the earlier Nuffield funded project.

"In all cases the child's confidence in his or her ability to communicate effectively through text has soared. All these children were formerly reluctant writers who are now confidently exchanging news and information"

"The pupils were so enthusiastic that it was sometimes difficult to keep up with placing work in their folders. The motivation to succeed and return work, which could be marked and emailed back when it still had meaning to the pupil was a key success factor for our pupils"

"It has been staggering just how much the pupils' confidence has increased. They are much more motivated to write and record ideas generally and have made the transition back to school better than ever"

"The children have come back into school wanting to show what they have achieved and feeling good about it. It has increased their self-esteem. No formal assessment has been made but reports from teachers suggest that they have not slipped back as they have in previous years and are very motivated and engaged in class work"

### 5.1 Training, coordination and support

Best practice was clearly founded on **good preparation for pupils and families**. The lead in time for the pilots was very tight and ideally the purchasing and testing for any new initiative should take place well in advance with planning and developmental work building from this in November, as soon as families have returned to school for the winter period. The experience also suggests that training should include awareness raising for class teachers, and separate

provision to help parents develop supportive skills; i.e. not just going through and discussing Home-TESS and Health and Safety agreements. The suggestion for a simple visual manual should also be noted. In addition the most successful practice was based on **integrated approaches** where TESS staff and schools were both involved in training, and where **TESS then remained proactive in supporting children and schools**.

The **named tutor-coordinator role**, within school, was felt to have been pivotal for ensuring effective communication between the families and schools, and it proved important **to maintain supportive contact by mobile phone** particularly at the start of the travelling season.

Each of the five children who gave up were noted to be in the group receiving Special Needs support in school because they were significantly behind their peers. On the other hand, the remaining three children in this group were each reported to have made good progress and each seems to have received better ongoing support from their schools and TESS at the start of the season. The message here may be that schools need to take **particular care with this vulnerable group**, both through adequate preparation and through effective patterns of communication to give encouragement and reinforcement.

## 5.2 The communication technology

Datacards proved a practicable solution to the challenge of establishing a basic level of internet access and communication from the trailer environment. However, there are clear limitations on speed of transfer, which will only be partially addressed by 3G developments. There are also potential coverage problems where Traveller families spend part of their season in rural settings, and, as noted above, this coverage issue may affect aspects of training in some rural schools.

These realities of datacard performance suggest that **the core of the learning experience needs to continue to build from the traditional pack, albeit enhanced by appropriate software and courseware**. Websites can then offer a valuable additional resource, but with work tasks designed to allow for possible gaps in internet access. In the same way, **work packages need to be designed to make good use of the strengths of asynchronous communication**, with messages and work exchanged on a regular basis, but allowing for possible localized gaps in the process.

It is difficult to comment on costs as they are shifting with markets and competition, but at present (January, 2005) it is possible to set up a contract which allows for 50Mb of traffic per month at a cost of about £25 (i.e. about 50p per Mb). Prices are falling and 3G is currently offered at the same price as GPRS which adds to the attractiveness of this form of enhancement for Traveller

children and their families. The **50Mb monthly ceiling proved adequate within the E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> project** and more than adequate for most pupils. It is probably a safe starting point for costing future initiatives and should allow for a generous pattern of visits to websites, as well as the regular exchange of emails and modest attachments (such as simple worksheets and non-embedded pictures and graphics with suitable resolutions). However, as noted above, the system is open to abuse and it may be important to raise parental awareness by writing something into Home-TESS agreements, as well as arranging safety caps with GPRS service providers

### **5.3 Parental agreements**

It was interesting to see that, in general, children were spending the same amount of time on their 'homework' each week, but that the amount had increased and the quality generally improved. The experience seems to have provided stronger intrinsic motivation for the children. On the other hand some of the pupils were still only completing about four hours each week, and this is a concern if the objective is to close the gap and allow children to maintain the same progress as their peers in school, at least in core subjects.

The new enhanced approach would therefore seem an excellent opportunity to revisit the idea of school-parent learning agreements, already used within some TESS with traditional packs. The rationale for these agreements is to encourage parents to be involved in target setting for their children, and to create regular and realistic time and space within the trailer environment so that schooling activity becomes part of the pattern of life. These kinds of agreement have been dogged by the demotivating problems associated with traditional packs, but the positive reactions of many of the project parents suggest that they could have an important part to play in future.

Involving parents in agreeing work to be completed over a period of time and in regular review of progress with teachers during the travel season, would certainly seem an important way of building on the strengths of new ICT-based enhancements to distance learning to reinforce parental commitment and to create a more effective experience for pupils. The family orientation within the Leicestershire approach also offers exciting possibilities both for adult education and for embedding the educational uses of ICT within family thinking. These 'parental' dimensions should be important considerations for future initiatives, and reinforce the need for parental training as an integral part of preparation activities.

## APPENDIX 1: The ELAMP<sub>2</sub> Home-TESS agreement

Pupil:	
Laptop serial no.	
Printer-scanner identifier.	
Datacard number	
Sim Card number	

### OWNERSHIP AND CARE

1. Equipment remains the property of *(Fill in TESS details)*. It is solely for use within your family, and must be returned at the end of the travelling season, or earlier if requested by the TESS.
2. All equipment is provided on the understanding that families will take reasonable care to prevent loss or damage.

The laptop is covered by an insurance policy when it is being used (in or out of school) for study purposes. This policy also assumes that you will take reasonable care. **N.B. the policy for the laptop specifically excludes situations where the laptop was unattended but visible in a vehicle or in the open air.**

Other equipment is **not** covered by this policy but you are again expected to take reasonable care *(families asked to put it on their own insurance if this is possible?)*

3. “Taking reasonable care” also includes:
  - when the laptop is in (any) school, making sure it is kept in a secure place at all times when not in use;
  - when at home, making sure that the laptop and equipment is used in a sensible working area and keeping drinks well clear;
  - being careful with equipment (use the power surge device, never force things into slots, be ‘gentle’ with all equipment);
  - taking care when the laptop is transported that it is as secure as possible (e.g. packed away; never left in an unlocked vehicle; not left unattended on a bus);
  - making sure the laptop is not subject to careless or malicious damage (e.g. as a result of horseplay);
  - reporting any loss or damage (including accidental loss or damage) promptly to the school

- reporting any faults in hardware or software promptly to the school;
- not decorating or customizing the computer or its case, etc, and not allowing it to be subject to graffiti.

ACCEPTABLE USE

4. The laptop must not be used for any illegal and/or anti-social purpose, including access to inappropriate Internet sites and Chat Rooms.
5. Programs other than those provided by the school should not be loaded without prior permission.
6. The ELAMP<sub>2</sub> Project will cover the communication costs of email and exchange of workfiles between home and school. It will also cover the costs of access to websites as recommended by the school.
7. The equipment should not be used to download files from websites, other than those recommended by the school. Such file transfers can prove very expensive. The volume of electronic traffic is monitored centrally for your datacard on a monthly basis. Additional costs related to downloading unauthorized material will have to be recharged to the family as they are not part of the project budget.
8. The laptop should not be used for downloading files for games, except where recommended by your school.

DATA CARD AND SIM CARD.

The sim card supplied by the project must be used with the datacard and **must not be used for any other purpose.**

As with any device using a sim card for connection to mobile telephone networks, the loss or theft of the sim card must be reported back to (*put in the agreed local name and phone number*) **immediately** so that the service can be disconnected. If you cannot contact (*name*), please phone xxxxxx who is the account manager for the project (Tel number xxxxxx). If he is not there leave a clear message on his answer phone.

**PUPIL'S AGREEMENT**

I agree to abide by these terms in my use of the laptop and equipment.

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

**PARENT'S AGREEMENT**

I agree to abide by these terms in my use of the laptop and equipment.

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 2; The Leicestershire Health and Safety document**

### Working safely with the ICT equipment

- **Make sure that all electrical equipment is not near any water.**
- **Make sure that there is no cabling/leads trailing on the floor.**
- **Make sure that the laptop is on a table or firm surface. Do not sit with it on your knee - the laptop can get hot and the data card acts like a mobile phone.**
- **When you are sitting doing your work, make sure your elbow is the same height as the table at which you are sitting, if not sit on a cushion**
- **You need to check that there is not too much reflected light on the laptop screen - either sit facing a window or pull down the blind or pull across the curtain. You can adjust the brightness on the screen.**
- **If you sit for an extended time please make sure that the seat supports your back.**
- **You must not take a drink or food anywhere near to the laptop or any other electrical equipment.**
- **Work when other people will not disturb you and when you will not need to keep getting up from your work area.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (pupil) have read the above information about 'Working safely with the ICT equipment'

**I, as person with legal responsibility for the above pupil  
\_\_\_\_\_ have read the above information.**

**One signed copy will be logged with the Leics. Traveller Education Service and another kept with the laptop.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**