



CONSOLIDATION & EXTENSION PROJECT  
"Using ICT to support distance learning"

# **E-LAMP<sub>4</sub>: Strengthening links between Traveller children and their base schools**

**A report on the progress of Strand 'A' of the  
E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> Project: updated version**

**(February, 2008)**

## **Executive summary**

*This report sets out to assess aspects of progress during the fourth phase of a sequence of 'e-learning and mobility projects' aimed at enhancing the provision of distance learning for mobile Traveller children whilst they are away from school during the main working season.*

*The projects have explored the use of ICT to bridge the gap between home and school, and Strand 'A' of E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> was a consolidation phase; building on and spreading successful practice from previous projects. The report is not therefore concerned with discussing the value of the approach per se,<sup>1</sup> but rather with how plans to consolidate have worked out, as well as with the identification of new, or continuing, issues. The evaluation exercise also targeted two specific themes which are reported here : the use of school-family learning agreements and the experience of using a consultancy model to support partners who were new to this phase of the project.*

*In general this report demonstrates good consolidation across the 21 Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) which were involved and highlights the value of both learning agreement initiatives and the consultancy structure. It also highlights a small but important set of issues, including problems with datacard accounts, which are now being addressed within the next phase of the project (E-LAMP<sub>5</sub>). In addition, it confirms important messages from earlier stages of E-LAMP in relation to coordination within schools.*

*Work to expand and develop the use of learning agreements, and to reinforce this with a parent training programme, is also a central theme within the next phase of E-LAMP, and the consultancy model is similarly being used as a basis for continuing mutual support amongst new partners.*

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<sup>1</sup> This is the focus of the reports which are available for E-LAMP<sub>2</sub> and E-LAMP<sub>3</sub>

## **A short introduction to the E-LAMP projects**

E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> was the fourth phase of a series of initiatives coordinated by the National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT). Day-to-day coordination has been the responsibility of Marion Rowlands, chair of the NATT ICT working group. The initiatives began with a research-orientated project funded by the Nuffield Foundation in 2003.<sup>2</sup> This then formed the platform for practice-based pilot projects, largely funded by the DfES (now DCFS), and aimed at exploring the creation of an e-learning bridge between mobile Traveller youngsters and their over-wintering (base) schools.

The first such pilot, E-LAMP<sub>2</sub>, was aimed at 20 primary-aged children from the Fairground community and took place during the 2004 travelling season. E-LAMP<sub>3</sub> had a broader remit and involved a further 50 families. It explored work with secondary base schools as well as the beginnings of distance learning support for children from other Traveller communities. Both projects were based on the provision of laptops and datacards<sup>3</sup> to the pupils and their families. Both proved successful in showing the potential of providing learning continuity and support by linking pupils with their teachers whilst the family was away from base during the travelling season. They also played an important role in highlighting key success factors and in identifying effective practice. Reports from both projects are available on the NATT website ([www.natt.org.uk](http://www.natt.org.uk)). A good flavour of the work can also be gained by accessing the Teachers TV programme 'Travellers in Education: Distance Learning' (use the search facility on [www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv))

E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> set out to consolidate this approach by increasing the number of schools and families involved (Strand 'A' of the new phase), and by producing both a good practice guide<sup>4</sup> and a list of electronic learning materials which had been recommended by earlier partners.<sup>5</sup> It also set out to disseminate good practice and encourage further development across English LAs

In addition the project began to explore a new area of work (Strand 'B') focused on the challenge of the large numbers of Key Stage 4 Traveller pupils who have, in effect, disengaged from schooling. This report focuses on the consolidation of work with base schools (i.e. Strand A) of E-LAMP<sub>4</sub>. A separate report on the other strand is also available on the NATT website.

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<sup>2</sup> The report from this research is entitled 'Traveller Education: changing times, changing technologies' and is available from Trentham Books [ISBN 1 85856 351 8]

<sup>3</sup> Devices which link a laptop to the internet via GPRS mobile telephone networks.

<sup>4</sup> Published by the DfES and available via [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications) (use the reference 04073-2006DOM-EN in the search facility)




<sup>5</sup> Available on the NATT website [www.natt.org.uk](http://www.natt.org.uk)

## Section 1 Progress in work with families and base schools: the new participants

The expansion made possible by E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> funding has meant that 21 local authority based Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) have now begun to be involved in e-learning with schools and mobile communities in their areas. Details of these services and the stages at which they have become involved with the E-LAMP initiative are set out in Appendix 1 and indicate a broad geographical spread across England. Some of these TESS have a consortium structure so that approximately 40 local authorities now have direct access to experience of emerging practice.

140 new children and their families became involved for the 2007 travelling season which means that, including siblings, a total of something like 400 young Traveller pupils now have access to laptops and the internet. It has also been pleasing to see the involvement of some 70 new schools.

The E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> phase has also proved successful in beginning to widen participation across the different Traveller communities, and the following table illustrates this. Whilst e-learning is continuing to become an established option within the Fairground and Circus communities, the take up for secondary-age 'Gypsy' pupils is particularly marked and encouraging.

	Fairground and Circus 	'Gypsy'* 	New Traveller. 
Primary	45	7	3
Secondary	52	30	3
Total	97	37	6

\*'Gypsy' is here used in a generic sense. This column includes Travellers of Irish Heritage and Scottish Travellers as well as Gypsy and Roma children

## Section 2 Early progress in work with families and base schools: preparation and early feedback

As part of the evaluation process information was sought about the progress of all new families and schools during November 2006, March 2007 and May 2007. The November checks asked for information about plans to prepare pupils and families. They also asked about arrangements being made by TESS to support the necessary coordination of distance learning by new partner schools. In addition these early checks were intended to monitor progress with the purchasing of laptops and other equipment within LAs.

The March checks sought confirmation of preparatory progress just before the start of the 2007 travelling season, and it was noted that 90% of children and families were felt by TESS partners to have had a sound preparation in terms of ICT skills and their new involvement with e-learning. This figure had improved further by May and the few remaining problems related to situations where new families were replacing original ones which had withdrawn from the project, for a few 'challenging' pupils, and where there had been issues with particular schools.

By March, 85% of the new schools also had reasonable plans and arrangements in place, again with further improvements by May. However.....(see below).

The May checks also offered the opportunity to develop a profile of ICT use amongst the young learners as well as seeking early opinions about e-learning progress and the impact of ICT on progress. The following table is based on 131 responses and shows the proportions of children using different aspects of potential ICT enhancement to their distance learning.

Using software provided	Using a LE (school)	Email exchange with school	Some work exchanged electronically <sup>6</sup>	Using the Web
80%	31%	82%	53%	76%

As these figures illustrate, there were variations but the majority of pupils were using educational software provided by their schools or TESS, were keeping up regular email exchanges with school, were making planned use of the World Wide Web and also had a mechanism for exchanging some work with school electronically. This includes the 31% with access to a learning environment (LE),

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<sup>6</sup> Normally as email attachments

pointing the way to the future potential of such environments in school-supported distance learning contexts.

TESS partners were also asked to liaise with school-based staff and make an early assessment of e-learning progress and this progress assessment exercise was repeated in November, 2007, just as pupils were returning to school.

The following table reflects an encouraging picture which mirrors feedback about experiences from the earlier phases of the project, and suggests some consistency over the travel period. [This contrasts strongly with experience of work with traditional home learning packs where there had normally been a significant dip in pupil progress during the latter part of the season, especially for the autumn term]. Respondents also confirmed the impact of ICT enhancement on this pattern of progress (reporting a 'strong' impact for 63% of the families and a 'reasonable' impact on another 30%)

PROGRESS	Disappointing	Satisfactory	Good
Progress made May '07 scores (n=112)	5%	43%	52%
Progress made Nov '07 scores (n=116)	6%	41%	53%

The November survey also provided the opportunity to assess the impact of the E-LAMP approach on reintegration. Traveller pupils come back in the autumn to a new year group, new teachers and sometimes to a new school; for some a difficult, and sometimes even traumatic, experience. Respondents were therefore asked to seek the views of partner schools about the impact of the project on reintegration. As the following table shows, there appear to have been very positive results for most of the 84 pupils who had returned to school at the time of the November survey.

REINTEGRATION	Disappointing	Useful	High
Impact of ELAMP support (n=84)	6%	36%	58%

Table 4: Impact on reintegration

13 of the 84 were in a school transition year, and here the impact was even more marked, mainly due to efforts from the new school to make and keep contact with families. 10 of the 13 gave a high impact score, two a useful impact score and only one a disappointing score where the problem appears to have been pupil, rather than school, commitment.

### **Section 3    New and continuing issues identified by partners**

The checks carried out during the project year also offered the opportunity to identify problems and issues and, based on previous experience, partners were encouraged to report back on (a) purchasing and technical issues and (b) any problems in their attempts to work with partner schools.

#### ***Purchasing and technical issues***

As in previous phases of the project, there were a small number of instances where there were significant delays caused by LA purchasing processes, and in one case the delay meant that the children concerned were not able to participate during the 2007 travelling season even though they had received the necessary training and supportive arrangements were in place.

Some partners also had early issues in setting up internet accounts with datacard providers, and a significant number expressed concerns about aspects of the ongoing use of datacards. In particular:

- The lack of an accurate mechanism to monitor traffic (i.e. student use of GPRS)
- Problems with some datacard account providers including poor communication, delays and mistakes in invoices
- Unanticipated 'background' traffic streams adding to the amount of data transfer and potentially impacting on costs

These issues were discussed further at a project review workshop for all partners in July, 2007. Almost every partner had agreements for capped monthly traffic volumes, which meant extra charges for any excess usage. The lack of a monitoring facility and the possibility of 'uninvited' extra traffic had created a climate of uncertainty. Some partners also reported that their pupils' connections seemed to become active automatically when the laptop was started up, and that connections sometimes remained open when the user thought they had disconnected; removing the card then being the only safe way to disconnect. These issues, compounded by invoicing mistakes from some providers, had made it difficult for partners to budget with any confidence and impossible to give pupils and families sensible advice about accessing the internet; i.e. finding ways to encourage full use of the internet as a learning resource whilst avoiding overuse. It was agreed that further discussion with providers was a priority and a small working group was set up to meet early in the autumn term.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In the event the project was able to link with a Becta procurement framework, 'Computers for Pupils Connectivity'. This will provide a managed service for 31 LAs through a company called Synetrix. NATT has now been formally added as a partner alongside the LAs. Synetrix were represented at the autumn term working group meeting and their service offer appears to meet most concerns about process and cost.

The other key issue identified from the project checks concerned internet safety. Partners had been using different approaches (e.g. via Securus, MacAfee and Panda) and their feedback was sometimes critical, suggesting a need to share and explore comparative experience with the different safety packages. This was agreed as an item for the next full ELAMP partner meeting in the autumn term<sup>8</sup>.

The other main issues reported by TESS partners echoed feedback from earlier project phases. A small minority of families had experienced connectivity blackspots and/or very slow data transfer rates. Similarly a small number were affected by problems with equipment whilst away from their base, or where schools had made changes to email addresses or LE configurations. Here TESS staff had been left with the challenge of providing support and advice at a distance. [The connectivity issues are, of course, inherent in the approach with its dependency on the coverage and capacity offered by datacard providers and points up the need to warn families about this and to continue to include off-line learning software in the packages prepared for children. Similarly technical support and advice at a distance is always going to be a challenge in distance learning contexts, highlighting the importance of both advance planning and secure back-up arrangements for communicating with families]

### ***Issues in working with partner schools***

As noted above, more than 85% of the new schools involved with the project were felt by TESS partners to have reasonable coordination and pupil support plans in place for their Traveller pupils by the start of the travelling season. Unfortunately a small number, having shown initial enthusiasm, failed to agree such plans and alternative supportive arrangements had to be made within the project. In addition some schools, again a small number, made something of a start but failed to deliver on what they had agreed, leaving TESS to step in to the breach.

These 'commitment' issues are problematic and may also reflect broader comments made by some respondents. The enhanced form of distance learning support, unlike the traditional exchange of packs, requires a continuous and active orientation within schools. This new challenge seems to have raised issues about time, resources and responsibilities within several schools, as well as questioning the balance of school-TESS roles.

The other major thread of questionnaire feedback from TESS about new partner schools was concerned with logistics and resonated with experience from the earlier E-LAMP pilots.

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<sup>8</sup> The Synetrix arrangements described in footnote '7' also provide the possibility of a filtering system based on 'Netsweeper'. Partners subsequently agreed to adopt and explore this option at the autumn term meeting.

- Coordination of overall arrangements, collation of workpacks and timing of workflow were all issues in some school settings.
- Communication within some schools, especially secondary schools, had sometimes proved a difficult issue in itself.
- Changes in key school personnel could be a setback; sometimes having to 'start all over again'.
- Class/subject teachers sometimes didn't know enough about available supportive software and websites, and may not have time to get to know!
- KS4 coursework and exam commitments had added a whole new dimension to logistical challenges within secondary schools.

These various challenges were discussed further at the July workshop where participants shared their ideas about working productively with partner schools, and it was encouraging to note a series of ideas which again resonated with earlier project experience. These included:-

- (i) Being prepared to develop a flexible relationship with schools; encouraging school staff to take the lead in developing the new approach over time but having a regular and proactive pattern of contact to offer direct support and advice about providing suitable ICT-based work, and trying to ensure that there was effective electronic communication with families whilst they were away.
- (ii) Wherever possible, making sure school staff were involved in the preparation and training events set up for families. Also offering separate awareness raising and, as necessary, training for the teachers
- (iii) The identification of a key member of staff in school (e.g. from the senior management team) to take overall responsibility, but also someone who was responsible for day-to-day coordination. Here it was encouraging to note that some schools have begun to embed coordination responsibilities within the job descriptions of key non-teaching staff. This follows the successful approach first developed in Hertfordshire where a senior learning assistant acts as the hub of communication and support, and may offer an important signpost for consolidating future developments.
- (iv) Using learning agreements and logs, and getting parents as involved with school as possible (see Section 6 for more detail)

## **SECTION 5 Consultancy and mutual support**

Given the significant number of new partners involved with E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> it was decided to introduce a supportive consultancy structure so that five existing and

experienced TESS partners each took on responsibility for a small group of new partners from the early autumn of 2006. Individual consultants were asked to develop a supportive approach which took account of the varied circumstances of new partners. Feedback was then sought about the efficacy of these arrangements during June, 2007; with separate questionnaires sent to the five 'consultants' and to the new TESS who were involved in the process. In general terms the approach seemed to have worked well for most partners. The questionnaires also sought recommendations for future good practice which were then shared at the July workshop. These remain necessarily broad but clearly enshrine some important principles:

- Have an early face-to-face meeting; where this was organized it proved really helpful. Try to set up further 'sharing' meetings if this is practicable in terms of time and geography. [The 'sharing' rather than 'expert/learner' emphasis was felt to be important as consultants found they also benefited significantly from the exploratory meeting(s)]
- Input and advice from experienced colleagues on a just-in-time basis is invaluable via phone and email. Make sure this is integral to any future arrangements
- Such reactive communication worked well. However, it helps if the consultant also takes the initiative by checking with the other partners at times. The initial meeting is a good opportunity to agree some dates and targets. These can then provide a framework for a thread of more proactive communication focused on progress rather than problems.

## **SECTION 6 Experience with learning agreements and logs**

One of the targets set for E-LAMP<sub>4</sub> was to take forward earlier work with the development of learning agreements and logs and examples of these are included in the DfES guidance document mentioned above. Partners, especially existing partners, were encouraged to develop ICT-based approaches to this important area, which is effectively the contractual dimension between schools and families. Learning agreements have generally set out to detail work to be completed, time to be spent on schoolwork and timescales for return, as well as frequency of contact with school. They also commit schools to setting and sending work and to giving feedback as well as responding to messages from learners. The logs are then generally a means of recording work done and time spent, with such records to be returned regularly to school along with completed schoolwork.

Nine project partners responded to this request. Some were already using agreements and/or logs. Others had introduced them for the 2007 travelling season. Feedback was sought from each of these partners by means of telephone interviews, with the schedule of questions sent to respondents in

advance. The following subsections cover comments made about structure and process, as well as drawing together views based on partner experience.

### ***Learning agreements***

In almost every instance the TESS had designed an initial format and then amended this in discussion with individual schools.

As would be expected there was a consensus that the key elements to be considered within an agreement were:-

- Time to be spent on schoolwork,
- Commitment to regular (normally weekly) messaging exchanges via LEs or direct email, and
- Some indication of how work would be chunked over time together with targets for completion, return and school feedback.

Most respondents also highlighted the need to separate out pack-based work which would be returned by traditional means and work which could be located on LEs or returned electronically as attachments.

Some respondents also included a commitment to keeping and returning logs within the agreement itself, and most emphasized the importance of adding key school and TESS contact details. Two respondents also felt it important to add family contact details, in particular mobile phone numbers, and one had added a clause saying that a member of staff would contact the family by phone if there was an unexpected gap in email communication (after a fortnight).

### ***Logs***

Again most TESS respondents had designed a draft, but this had sometimes been amended by schools and occasionally by pupils themselves. Whether or not the logs were explicitly mentioned in a learning agreement the expectation was normally that they would be returned regularly and electronically; often weekly, sometimes monthly.

Logs could be designed to record both traditional pack-based work and materials to be tackled on the laptop and exchanged with school, and there was some variation in the information to be recorded. Such information normally included a record of time spent, normally each day when the pupil was active and sometimes broken down by subject or topic. In some instances there was also space for details of when this work was (or would be) returned to school, or a 'tick column' when it had been returned. Some designs also had open 'columns' to enable pupil comment. There was an interesting tension across responses. Almost everyone commented that it was vital to keep the log simple, but there were good arguments put forward in favour of the value of each type of heading in use and about adequate levels of detail to be recorded.

One TESS also had a separate 'visit log' which was completed whenever there was contact with TESS staff in any part of the country; an idea which could be extended to include attendance at any schools during the travelling season.

### ***The process: pre and post meetings***

Every respondent commented on the importance of some form of focused individual family or group meeting when learning agreements were first introduced to families attending a particular base school. Where agreements had become established practice these might then be part of meetings set up for other purposes. Most respondents felt that signing these documents during meetings (pupil, parent, school and sometimes TESS) was important in establishing the importance of the agreement from a school perspective.

Feelings about end-of-season review meetings varied. Some felt such meetings to be an essential way of celebrating progress or picking up (constructively) on lack of progress. Others felt that the value of such meetings varied with context, with a need for flexibility, and others again that it was better to use established school links to review such progress, rather than setting up formal meetings. One respondent made a good point about the value of such a meeting where the pupil had been in a transition year. The review could then be an important part of the induction process when the pupil arrived during the autumn term.

### ***Learning from experience***

The general consensus was clearly that learning agreements and logs had had an important part to play in helping to "firm up and focus" family commitment and had also created a climate of "expectation" that schools would be active in regular support. Similarly they had played a part in reinforcing school commitment as well as "raising awareness of the need to accept and support the Traveller lifestyle". The logs, in particular, were a good way to try to "keep families on their toes" and could be especially useful from late summer through the autumn when both schools and Traveller pupils could lose momentum.

However progress had been patchy. There were many good examples given of a secure and productive relationship which had been established between particular families and schools, but this was sadly not yet the norm. It was important to work at reinforcement. Just setting up and signing agreements was not enough. Many families then needed encouragement, sometimes "firm encouragement" to make sure that pupils were following agreed programmes of study. Similarly some schools needed encouragement; in particular they needed to develop a proactive stance, cross-checking logs with completed work which had been returned, chasing pupils where targets were not being met, etc.

In summary the good news is that there are many instances where agreements and logs are beginning to work effectively. The challenge, as one respondent put it, is that some schools and families still need "a shift in consciousness" and this

was felt to be a significant “hurdle”. The TESS role is clearly very important in developing this important area but it was very encouraging that four of the nine respondents now worked with at least one school which had non-teaching staff acting as the hub of the family-school process. As noted above this model is based on positive experience from Hertfordshire and it may well be that attempts to embed agreements and logs need to be combined with efforts to promote posts with job descriptions which include this particular role.

Further work with agreements and logs was prioritised for the next phase of the project (E-LAMP<sub>5</sub>) and has been reinforced with the introduction of a parent training programme so that ‘supervision’ issues can be explored. This latter emphasis is important as heads can now consider crediting a form of attendance, rather than ‘authorized absence’, for Traveller pupils who are part of a structured distance learning programme.

‘Schools can record any pupil as.... (if following an)....’approved educational activity’ whilst on distance or e-learning but only if they are certain that the activity was properly supervised, ...(and)...that the work is being done by the pupil<sup>9</sup>

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[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/raising\\_achievement/gypsy\\_traveller\\_achievement](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/raising_achievement/gypsy_traveller_achievement)

## APPENDIX 1: TESS Partners involved in E-LAMP initiatives

Partners	Involvement in the phases
ACTES <sup>10</sup>	Original E-LAMP <sub>2</sub> partner (from 2004)
Bolton	Original E-LAMP <sub>2</sub> partner (from 2004)
Cambridgeshire	Original E-LAMP <sub>2</sub> partner (from 2004)
Surrey	Original E-LAMP <sub>2</sub> partner (from 2004)
Derby & Derbyshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP <sub>3</sub>
DCTES <sup>11</sup>	Additional partner for E-LAMP <sub>3</sub>
Hertfordshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP <sub>3</sub>
Northants	Additional partner for E-LAMP <sub>3</sub>
Northumberland	Additional partner for E-LAMP <sub>3</sub>
Doncaster	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Gloucestershire	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Leeds	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Leicestershire <sup>12</sup>	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Luton	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Manchester	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Norfolk	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Oxfordshire	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
St Helens	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Sunderland	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
WMCESTC <sup>13</sup>	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>
Wiltshire	New partner for E-LAMP <sub>4</sub>

<sup>10</sup> The Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service covers four LAs.

<sup>11</sup> The Devon Consortium Traveller Education Service covers three LAs

<sup>12</sup> Leicestershire had developed their own project which ran in parallel with E-LAMP and also made a valuable contribution to developmental efforts. The TESS then linked with E-LAMP more formally for the fourth phase

<sup>13</sup> The West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Traveller Children covers 13 LAs