

Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning

SPIRE

Researching the feasibility of peer-to-peer style working in UK FE and HE.

The JISC funded SPIRE project is working in three strands:

1. *Technical infrastructure:* The project has implemented the open source 'LionShare' P2P system developed by Penn State University. This P2P system is specifically designed for academic use and combines the flexibility of P2P working with the security requirements of a formal institution.
2. *Software development:* The project has developed a proof of concept LionShare plugin for the Reload IMS-LD editor to make the process of finding and using resources in elearning materials more efficient.
3. *Cultural fit:* The project is researching the potential usage of 'wild web' paradigms, such as P2P, in an institutional setting.

Key points arising from the project:

- *Is it possible for a formal institution to 'own' technology with a fluid paradigm such as P2P?*

There is a danger that the process of bringing the technology into the institution dilutes the benefits that the technology afforded when it was in its original open form. Should institutions be looking to have relationships with third party service providers to avoid this problem?

- *Distinctions between forms of P2P:*

1. P2P as a clever networking infrastructure which gets around bandwidth restrictions and 'protects' files by having multiple copies of them.
2. P2P as a social, collaborative principle and a new way of fostering collaboration between groups of people.
3. P2P as a software application which sits on the desktop and allows file sharing and retrieval.

- *Could P2P be an efficient and subtle way of disseminating materials from within the academic community to the wider world?*

It would be possible for a mapped folder on an institutional computer to be part of a live P2P system which automatically made files dropped into that folder live to a large network of users via P2P clients or a web based searching interface. This could be the simplest way of bridging the gap between the hard drive and the web.

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For more information about the SPIRE project or to request a LionShare user account please visit: <http://spire.conted.ox.ac.uk> or contact david.white@conted.ox.ac.uk

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