# Appendix 7 Project Director reflections

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## UAL departmental perspective on DIAL impacts and longer term success in terms of stakeholder gains and institutional impact for the report?

**What were the key drivers for undertaking the project?**

Institutionally, there was a sense that digital literacies were a fundamental requirement to progress institutional goals across multiple fields of activity: Heads of Service in HR, Library and IT, and Learning and Teaching, were all focussing on the digital literacies of staff and students as a potential barrier to the success of numerous areas of work. However, there was a sense of frustration around how to take this area forwards. The JISC call for projects seemed an opportunity to break through the impasse we were facing.

**Describe the educational/organisational context in which you undertook your project**

Based on several years exploring Wenger’s theory of Communities of Practice from different angles, I saw the project as an opportunity to test out/realise a number of ideas arising from that theory, which seemed to me to address a number of problems I could see inherent in more conventional approaches to addressing digital literacies.

Problems in developing digital literacies which seemed apparent from my experience:

1. Difficulty in mobilising staff’s motivation and interest to participate in training and apply newly acquired knowledge
2. Difficulty in addressing the logistics and cost of providing training for the number of people who required it, across sufficient applications and processes
3. Difficulty in identifying training priorities and approaches, given the complexity of needs – different people have very different requirements, based on disciplines, roles, and their own preferences and goals. This translates as training needs across many different applications, at different levels of expertise, with different preferences for how the training should take place
4. Difficulty in maintaining currency: the digital world is changing so fast, that training content is out of date very quickly, and staff need regular retraining

It seemed to me that a Communities of Practice Approach could potentially address all of these issues:

1. If communities jointly identify goals and directions, there is more likelihood that staff and students will be motivated to learn, perceiving a purpose, and support, and apply their learning because it is relevant to their immediate community
2. Communities can provide local 1:1 support very readily (e.g. through a 5 minute conversation), which may be the best way to learn many technical skills – in small amount on a need to know basis, focussing on immediate demand and relevance. Communities built of staff and students may well have many of the skills and resources in their midst already, and can deploy them with great efficiency (e.g. over a coffee, or in a meeting for planning a specific session).
3. Communities can prioritise training needs - for certain people or certain skills – more effectively and strategically than an institution can.
4. Communities can be self-sustaining, once they have learnt how to teach themselves the digital skills they need. They will contain different skills sets and different approaches to learning.

The DIAL project was intended to operate according to the latter description. It was very exciting to me to be able to visualise this approach, and then convert the vision into a reality. I felt very lucky too as the SRO to be able to recruit Chris Follows as PM, since he was already working firmly within a Communities of Practice model. He was strongly committed to it philosophically, and also had the connections, contextual knowledge, and personal and professional skills to implement such an approach on an institutional scale.