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HEA/JISC Final Report

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1 Acknowledgements

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2 Project Summary

The Making Digital History project at the University of Lincoln (UoL) involved getting students to use the Xerte tool to produce online resources that teach others about the work they've been doing in the curriculum. It has been assessed across all levels of the curriculum, in different types of module and through collaborative and individual work. The key aim of the project was to shift students from consumers to active producers/ communicators of historical knowledge to audiences beyond academia, in line with the University's 'Student as Producer' approach to learning and teaching and digital literacies.

3 Main Body of Report

3.1 Project Outputs

Output (e.g. report, publication, software)	Brief Description and URLs (where applicable)
Project website	Includes details of Making Digital History and other digital history projects in teaching and learning at UoL: http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/ (note: click the 'news' section for project updates, including included news and feedback on other HEA events and projects beyond history at UoL)
Project Twitter account	https://twitter.com/MakDigHist
Project Facebook account	https://www.facebook.com/makingdigitalhistory
Documentation store	Includes links to all documents relating to the Making Digital History project (updated on an ongoing basis): http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/projects/project-documentation/
Xerte support materials and links	Includes materials created to support student use of Xerte and links to resources elsewhere on the web that may be of use: http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/learning-design/xerte-guidance-and-faq/
Gallery of student-authored Xerte objects	Includes all edited and published student-authored Xerte objects that were published as part of the project (updated on an ongoing basis): http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/learning-design/xerte-guidance-and-faq/xerte-gallery-by-students/
Gallery of staff-authored Xerte objects	Includes gallery of all staff-authored (including those made by student ambassadors) Xerte objects that were made during the project (updated on an ongoing basis): http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/learning-design/xerte-guidance-and-faq/xerte-gallery/
Module list	Includes list of modules which have made use of Xerte, with links to specific Xerte objects (updated on an ongoing basis; note that this also includes links to other digital history-related modules at UoL): http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/modules/

3.2 Project Outcomes

Outcome Type (e.g. practice change, production method)	Brief Description (and URLs where applicable)
Curriculum development	Introduction of Xerte across History curriculum at Lincoln
Curriculum development	Increased awareness of need for and potential of digital tools for developing teaching and learning in History at UoL
Staff skills development	Establishing a group of members of staff with expertise in using Xerte and in the use of technology to support teaching and learning more generally
Student skills development	Establishing increased expertise in Xerte across the entire History student body at UoL (as all first years have now used Xerte, as have a number of second years and MA students) – as these students move through the degree (and new first years experience Xerte) this expertise will spread and deepen, in all likelihood.
Students as (paid) partners	Recognition of the important role that students can play as partners in curriculum development and of the importance of rewarding them for their efforts. Students are producers as well as consumers and producers should be rewarded fairly for their labour.
New project/ funding	<i>Xerte Talking: students producing interactive learning resources:</i> A project funded by the UoL Fund for Educational Development that aims to share what we have learned with other disciplines at UoL; two workshops will be run at the end of June 2014 and will bring in other project holders from the DLinD funding programme to share their expertise: http://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/projects/xerte-talking-students-producing-interactive-learning-resources/
Partnership working across the institution	Recognition of the vital importance of professional educational developers and technical support in project development, especially at the early stages. We could not have completed this project without the expert support of colleagues in the Centre for Educational Research and Development.

3.3 How did you go about achieving your outputs / outcomes?

Aims and objectives

Our overall aim was to enable students to experience actively roles as co-creators of historical knowledge (appropriate to their level of study) rather than as passive consumers, and to share the learning from that experience within the institution, discipline and beyond. In more detail, our aims at the start of the project may be summarised as follows:

- To provide students with opportunities to work in partnership with staff and thereby learn about their discipline from the perspective of teacher as well as learner;
- To involve students directly in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project as a whole, through a paid intern role as well as via the evaluation process
- To enable students to develop skills in the use of technology for (a) developing research skills, particularly in information literacy, i.e. finding and evaluating relevant sources; (b) improving their disciplinary knowledge; (c) working collaboratively and (d) presenting their work in engaging ways to others;
- To develop the digital literacies of students and staff;
- To develop pedagogic approaches that encourage students to think explicitly about the audience for their work (rather than just writing for an anonymous marker), especially audiences that extend beyond the boundaries of academia;
- To build on the findings of earlier HEA- and JISC-funded projects at the University of Lincoln (see below);
- To make specific resources created by student and staff partnerships in the test modules available, where appropriate and with agreement from all parties (including copyright holders),

available to (a) the HEA; (b) colleagues in other History departments; (c) other disciplines; (d) other students; (e) the public;

To maximise transferability within History discipline by creating *both specific* resources that can be reused *and generic* pedagogic templates; the second of these should also promote transfer to other disciplines, especially within the Humanities. Evaluation of the development of disciplinary and generic skills and knowledge will facilitate this objective and will focus in particular on the contribution of the pedagogic approach to developing graduate attributes.

Methodology

Installation, initial staff training and creating support resources online (Summer-Autumn 2013): We received the full support of the Centre for Educational Research and Development at UoL from the start of the project. Contacts there arranged for the installation of Xerte on a development server and met with the Project Manager to establish how the project would proceed. They were available throughout the project to consult on technical and pedagogic matters. Meetings were then held with the project team to facilitate learning about Xerte and what it could do. Everyone produced at least one mini-Xerte object and we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the tool. Further support resources were created and uploaded to our website.

Implementation with students (Autumn 2013-Spring 2014): We used Xerte across a range of modules (see below for details), but followed the same basic pattern in each. Students were introduced to the tool and how to use it in a hand-on training session in a computer cluster in the University Library, where they were required to make a 'Postcard from Lincoln' Xerte object, which involved learning how to make use of some of the basic elements of the tool (creating an object, manipulating text, uploading a picture, making a multiple choice question, publishing the object). In all of the workshops every student managed to make a 'Postcard from Lincoln' Xerte object within about 45 minutes. Students were then asked to complete the specific activities relating to Xerte for the specific module (see resource links above) and were directed to the website and student ambassadors for further support (they could also ask lecturers in usual office hours/ teaching time); in reality, very few students made use of the option of consulting staff or student ambassadors for support and preferred to use online resources or problem solve by themselves or with the help of peers.

Module overview: we introduced Xerte-based activities as assessed elements of five modules in the History department at UoL. These modules are of varying level, size, type, focus, chronological period; and the students were asked to use Xerte in different ways in each module (collaborative/ individual; compulsory/ elective); while the value of the work in relation to module assessment also varies. Modules included the following:

- East meets West (Jamie Wood and Antonella Luizzo Scorpo), a first year core module in semester A with over 100 students. Xerte was used as part of a compulsory source analysis assignment in which groups of students (3-5) were required to create a Xerte object with between 8 and 10 'pages' that offered an audience of their peers (students at other universities who will eventually be able to access the content online): (a) a brief introduction to a specific primary source from the medieval Mediterranean; (b) an concise explanation of some short extracts from that text; (c) links to further resources which are already available online (e.g. articles on the BBC website; podcasts by academics); (d) a short annotated bibliography; (e) at least two interactive elements. (COMPULSORY; GROUP use of Xerte)
- Representing the Past (Erin Bell; first year; semester A) in which 10 students (from a cohort of over 90) chose to use Xerte to present their individual independent research into the different ways in which history is and has been presented to the public. (OPTIONAL; INDIVIDUAL use of Xerte)
- Urban Life and Society in the Middle Ages (Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo; second year; semester A; 20 students) in which small groups (2-3) of students created Xerte objects that explored specific aspects of medieval urban societies using a case study approach. (COMPULSORY; GROUP use of Xerte)
- Research skills in Medieval Studies (Joanna Huntington; MA; semester A; 10 students), required students to individually create a Xerte object that incorporated their reflection on a research project that they had done in the past and provided advice (and links to online resources) to help undergraduate students avoid 'making the same mistakes as I did'. This replaced a reflective piece of writing in the assessment portfolio. (COMPULSORY; INDIVIDUAL use of Xerte)

- Gender in 19th century Britain (Kate Hill; second year; semester B; 20 students) students were given the option of producing a Xerte object rather than writing a standard primary source report. 2 students took up this option. (OPTIONAL; INDIVIDUAL use of Xerte)

Publication of student work (Spring-Summer 2014): Once Xerte projects had been assessed for credit, students were emailed and told that the intention was to publish their work on the project website. They were informed about the conditions/ licences under which such publication would take place and given the opportunity to opt out if they wished to do so. So far we have published around a dozen student-authored Xerte objects (only one student has so far withdrawn permission for publication), out of approximately 50 completed objects. Staff members edited the Xerte objects for style and spelling errors (but not content) before they were published on the website. Our aim is eventually (and with ethical approval and the students' permission) to publish all examples of student-produced resources online.

Evaluation (Spring 2014): All students who had used Xerte were asked to complete a post-module questionnaire online using Google Forms. Due to the fact that it was the biggest module in terms of student numbers and Xerte objects produced (and because both module leaders were part of the project team), for the East meets West module we also inserted several questions about Xerte onto the module evaluation questionnaire (paper copies are distributed at the end of all modules). These will form the basis of presentations and publications at the end of the project.

Dissemination (throughout the project): Since the inception of the project we have engaged in a range of dissemination activities, including: presenting at workshops and conferences, funding staff to attending training and networking events (and blogging about it afterwards), writing reports for other HEA and QAA projects. We will also be presenting a paper at the HEA Annual Conference in July 2014 and at two events at the UoL in June 2014. Finally, we will be writing at least one paper for publication, which has already been accepted under the following title: "Making historians digitally: online approaches to inquiry-based learning in history in higher education in the UK", *Inquiry-Based Learning for the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: A Conceptual and Practical Resource for Educators* (eds. John Carfora and Patrick Blessinger; due out by the end of 2014. All of these are (or will be) listed on the project page on the website.

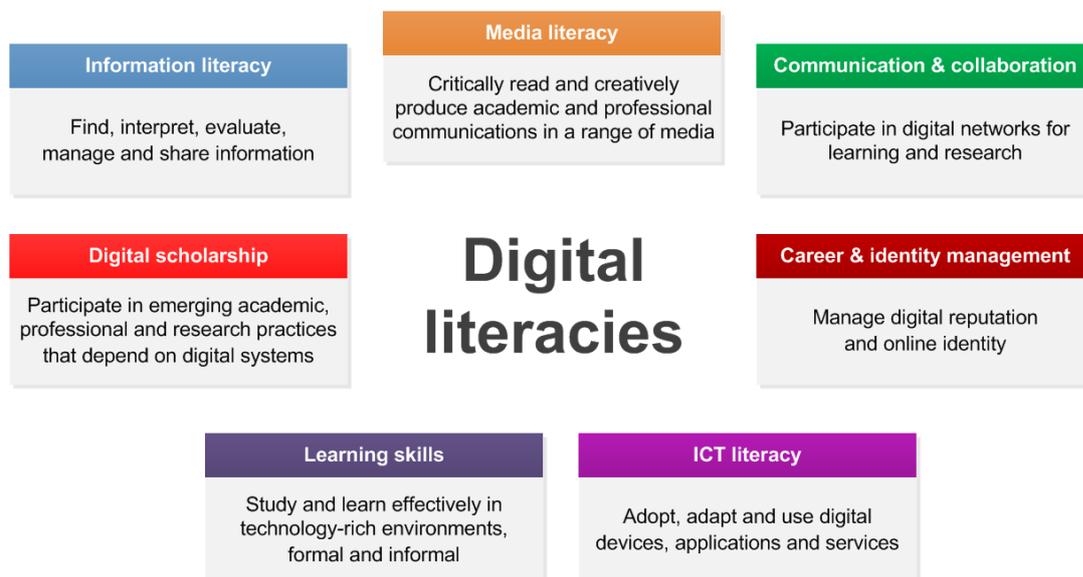
3.4 What did you learn?

Value of the Xerte Online Toolkit approach

The Xerte tool is not as intuitive as some sites with which staff and students are familiar (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). Some of the terminology is confusing (e.g. 'publish' also means 'save') and the layout can be confusing for the students at first. However, once trained in the tool, with a bit of trial and error, and some supporting resources users can pick up how the tool works relatively quickly. Overall, Xerte Online Toolkit compares quite favourably to tools such as Blackboard and Wordpress, which can be equally, if not more, bewildering to the uninitiated.

It's very useful to have a local server (and local technical support). In fact, I think this was vital to getting the project started quickly and efficiently. It also meant that we had more rapid access to technical support (although the Xerte mailing lists were also very helpful when called upon).

How were the staff and students digital literacies affected/developed?



In terms of the above diagram, the approach that we adopted impacted positively on students to a large degree in the two following areas (in descending order; i.e. biggest impact first):

- Learning skills
- ICT literacy

Slightly lesser impacts were made on the following areas (again in descending order):

- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Communication and collaboration

There was minimal impact in the following areas

- Career and identity management
- Digital scholarship

Staff members (or at least some of them) were impacted to some degree in all areas, except perhaps 'Career and identity management'.

What specific challenges did your discipline bring?

Encouraging students to (a) develop their ability to search for, critically evaluate and select reliable (and preferably scholarly) online resources; (b) think about online resource creation as a venue for 'proper' history; (c) recognise that they have something interesting and relevant to say that is worth sharing with other people.

Did students have the right pre-requisites for engaging in the challenge? What needs to be done if not? Were assumptions made?

Although we were aware of the potential 'trap' of assuming that all modern students are 'digital natives' and tried to cater for those with low pre-existing digital literacies, it is difficult to cater for all eventualities, especially in the first iteration of any curriculum development project. Some students, for example, are resistant to working in groups (or to working responsibly) in groups. This is a challenge that we encounter when teaching offline too and so what we saw in a limited number of cases were standard groupwork-related problems transferring to an online project.

How did the project impact the public/ the discipline?

Feedback from external examiners on student work and on the pedagogic approach in general has been positive. As noted above, we have disseminated in person and via the web throughout the project. We've seen a lot of interest and re-Tweeting of our work, which is positive, while we know that the HEA discipline lead for History at the HEA and the DLinD project coordinator have been disseminating our work informally and formally. There seems to be a lot of interest and we hope to build on this in coming months/ years. See below under 'Immediate Impact' and 'Future Impact' for further comments in terms of effect within UoL and in the discipline. In terms of impact on the public, we have no concrete indication of this yet – it is hoped that in future we can begin to think further

about how our students can create digital resources with more specific audiences in mind (e.g. museum audiences; school children). It is worth noting, however, that making a Xerte object gives students something that written-only assessments cannot – it enables them to show friends, members of family, etc. something interactive that they made themselves and that does not (or should not, if it is well done!) require a lot of time reading to get the gist of their points, and it based on what they have been learning at university. At its best, it can be a very accessible means of getting across what we and the students are trying to do at university to those outside the institution.

How did the discipline itself influence the approach by the students (and staff)/ What constraints and opportunities did it bring?

We were generally surprised with how effectively the students engaged with the opportunities offered by Xerte. History is increasingly presented and conducted online and we think that the student picked up on this and felt that the projects offered them an opportunity to experience and contribute towards this. Of course, some of the modules, such as Representing the Past, which focuses on History in the public domain, are very well-suited to an online approach, but even students on modules dealing with medieval history were really creative in the ways in which they engaged with and made use of online non-written sources such as images and videos.

In fact, two of the problems which we tend to see repeatedly in written work (not online) actually replicated themselves in the online Xerte objects. The first is an excessive and rather uncritical emphasis on the 'bias' of sources, especially in lower level students. This might have been expected because in many ways it is easier for students to see that some online sources are indeed in some ways biased – in future we might want to do some more work on using this as an opportunity to develop students' thinking about what 'bias' actually is. The second is a failure to proofread adequately and to present material in an engaging way. At the start of the project it was hoped that because the Xerte objects were intended for presentation online, the students might spend more time considering how they were presenting their work. In reality, it seems like a combination of last minute working to the deadline and a failure to adequately check one another's work when tasks had been parcelled up between members of a group. These are aspects of student work that we will address more fully in the next iterations of the modules by making these expectations and common errors more explicit to the students in order to make the most of the opportunities presented by the online nature of the projects.

Can you recognise any hidden digital practices by the students (something they must have done without telling others)?

We are fairly certain that the students solved problems (which we know that they had because a significant minority of evaluations mentioned them) in their use of Xerte via one of two means (or a combination): (1) trial and error; (2) peer support from more skilled to less skilled students. The students also developed working practices that enabled those with a higher level of technical skill to work on putting the objects together online, while the others 'fed' material to them. This was a clever way of approaching the task, although in some cases there was a failure to review one another's work. Tasks were divided up efficiently, but there was a lack of quality control at the final stage.

Did the student exchange skills/practices with other students – has it developed as a practice on its own?

(See above)

We don't know if this has developed as an ongoing practice, but the group Xerte projects certainly served as a bonding mechanism within some student groups (as, to be frank, did complaining about Xerte). It is to be hoped that this will transfer to other areas of work beyond digital history projects.

How have student capabilities, aptitudes and attitudes been affected? How were digital activities in research & scholarship, professional practice and learning and teaching affected? Did they overlap through any common activities?

Evaluative data suggests that the majority of students and staff felt that the Xerte projects had impacted positively on student learning. Areas of particularly positive impacts included team-working skills (in modules where projects were collaborative), creativity, knowledge of the subject, presentation and communication skills, ability to use the Internet for research. This is not to say that all students experienced Xerte positively, as can be seen in some evaluative data that we present below. Our full findings will be published in a chapter in an edited volume to be published later in 2014 (see below for details).

Nevertheless, the fact that in modules where they were given the option of choosing Xerte, 10% of students chose to do so when given the option, suggests that students were found the tool useful and interesting enough to select it over a more traditional essay. We have also discussed among the team whether Xerte and other online modes of presenting information may be more suitable for students with learning difficulties who struggle with more traditional forms of written assessment.

In terms of marks for assessments, we have not collected data for all of the modules concerned. However, for the East meets West module (the largest module in terms of student numbers), those who scored highest on the assessment married effective use of the technology with careful consideration of the source(s) and its context of production. None of the groups on the East meets West module failed the assessment and all achieved a score over 50%, with most scoring in the 2.1 category.

EVALUATIVE DATA (SELECTED)

Staff responses to the question, Do you think that the tool and our approach to using it in teaching developed your students' creativity? If so, in what ways?

"Yes, I think that it helped (some of) the students to think about how they present information to others, to consider that they might be producing material that engages with an audience beyond the teacher. I think some of them are already aware that the Internet and technology can help them to do creative things and to build up a profile and skill set that might help them in their studies and in life after University."

"Definitively! Some of them really managed to produce excellent and engaging digital objects, relying on excellent materials and creating others from scratch (pictures, for example). Some of the students who had achieved mediocre results in more traditional forms of assessments managed to excel in producing their digital objects."

"Yes. It encourages them to think the problem from an unfamiliar angle, with a view to presenting their thoughts and conclusions in an unfamiliar format. The unfamiliarity was initially a little unsettling for some, but ultimately facilitated deeper and more effective reflection, as they grappled with new ways of presenting information. It was evident that they enjoyed experimenting with possibilities such as the multiple choice questions."

Staff responses to the question, Did you or your students encounter any problems when using the tool? If so, what were they?

"Technical problems, as you would expect with a new online tool. E.g. logins not working, certain page types in Xerte being 'glitch-y'. But these were not massive problems and the students (often without help from us) overcame them. I was surprised by the technical skills of some students (which were very high) and pleasantly surprised that there weren't many students who struggled completely (the group element helped with this). Overall, I think that some of the students struggled more with the group-work element than the technical side."

"Not really. Some managed to work with "higher" technical features when creating their objects, but even the "basic" objects were elaborate enough to include maps, video, images and interactive activities at least!"

"Some elements were unwieldy, such as manipulating images – especially for those who tried to have images as background. Several of the command names are confusing. Whilst all students received excellent guidance, using counter-intuitive command names is not ideal. Personally, I initially found the linear format frustrating, as I would like to have been able to loop back to earlier slides after a diversion. I was, however, trying to do something which was more complicated than is appropriate for the tool at this stage of its development."

Student responses to the question (standard module questionnaire on East meets West), How could the module be improved (including comments on developing the Xerte project)?

"more tutorials for using Xerte"

"allow people to choose their own Xerte groups if they want"

"the module could be improved by making more Xerte projects available"

"group assessment for Xerte (if someone doesn't participate they can be marked accordingly)"

"more "messing around" with Xerte time to find out how it works"

Students from East meets West, in response to a post-module survey delivered online that asked them specifically about creativity and learning (24 responses):

- a. **Do you think you were creative in developing your Xerte artefact?**
 - i. Yes: 11
 - ii. Somewhat: 11
 - iii. No: 2
- b. **Do you think that Xerte encouraged you to be more creative, or did it hinder your creativity?**
 - i. More creative: 9
 - ii. As creative as I was before: 11
 - iii. Hindered creativity: 4
- c. **Do you think your creativity has changed as a result of developing the Xerte artefact? If so, how or how not? [some select quotations]**
 - i. "Thinking outside the box more. Making more of an effort to satisfy the audiences needs in creative/interesting/interactive way."
 - ii. "It made me think about the different techniques and methods I could use to to support and enhance my written work. But I'm not sure how I would put them into practice outside of the Xerte program."
 - iii. "Challenged my idea that historical sources are just texts, made me consider pictures, photos etc."
 - iv. "Not entirely, the programme was quite hard to manoeuvre in terms of the design and look of the object. There were some interesting different mechanisms, but overall it was hard to find appropriate ones given that it was a group project."
 - v. "I found that Xerte was unnecessarily complicated and did not have the functions to enable the user to be overly creative. I think the group found they were putting in more time/work into trying to comprehend the software than they did working on the object's content. However, the ability to input media and have a slideshow within a page is a positive."

Student identities – did they present via their own or create new online identities?

Student work was presented via their own identities. On the East meets West module we did a group-formation exercise at the start of the course, where each group had to come up with a team/ group name and some students used these names on their final Xerte objects alongside their own names. When the Xerte objects are published, the students are given the option of having them published with their names on or anonymously. So far, most students have chosen to have their names included on the objects and seem, on the face of it, to be quite proud of what they have created.

Reputation – risks to participants/ Institutions e.g. copyright

We have been careful to make sure that student work is not presented online without being checked by a member of staff and edited if necessary. We have made the conditions under which their work is being published clear to the students. In future we need to pay more attention to issues around copyright and training students in things such as finding copyright-free resources and Creative Commons Licensing.

Were the challenges digitally authentic? Were the students developing skills and literacies for future work?

Yes, there is now a Xerte strand running through the History curriculum. We hope to develop the digital content of the curriculum as a whole over the coming years so this may extend to other modules using other digital tools and perhaps even to final year projects (see below under 'Future Impacts' for more details). For example, students on Dr Liuzzo Scorpo's third year module on medieval chivalry will be given the option of using Xerte to make and present online portfolios of work.

Did this type of challenge provide new ways to develop digital skills and literacies within student activities? If so, how? Will you persist with this practice and develop it further? What would you modify for next time?

Yes, the approach is entirely new in our department and within the discipline, as far as we know. We will continue to develop the approach for the future, and look to embed other digital approaches across the curriculum. The student as producer of digital history content has strong potential for further development, e.g. in the area of achieving research 'impact' and creating genuine public engagement with History online. See above for various thoughts on how it might be developed further next time. All modules that used the approach will use Xerte again, modifications will be in terms of providing students with more specific guidance and examples about what is expected of them and

what challenges to expect – these could only be known after the first iteration, which as provided valuable opportunities for learning about Xerte, about digital approaches to teaching and learning in History and about enabling students to experience roles as producers of history online.

EXAMPLE: SUMMARY OF PLANNED CHANGES FOR EAST MEETS WEST (2014-15)

- providing the students with at least one seminar in which they can present their plans for the Xerte object and receive feedback;
- introducing a small mid-point assessment (10% of module grade) in which students will have to submit a plan of their Xerte object (this will also enable us to identify students who have not been in contact with their group);
- publicising the support that is available online and elsewhere more widely and providing more direction about common mistakes to avoid (which we now know about having marked the first set of assignments);
- increasing the assessment weighting for the group Xerte project from 30% to 50% (including the 10% mid-point assessment just mentioned) to reflect the amount and quality of student work;
- developing a peer-assessment element in order to encourage engagement with the group work process.

3.5 Immediate Impact

The project has been received positively within our department and the institution as a whole (see the next section for more on the departmental impact). In terms of the institution, there is interest in making fuller use of Xerte, because it is free to use and also meets criteria for accessibility. In January 2014 we secured some funding from UoL's Fund for Educational Development to run workshops with other disciplines across the institution. These will take place in June 2014 and we have invited colleagues from other institutions who worked on the DLinD programme to contribute. If there is sufficient interest across the institution, we hope to push for the roll-out of the Xerte tool and for its movement from the development server at the Centre for Educational Development to the main servers (supported by ICT): this should aid further development activity and raise the profile of Xerte across UoL.

An unexpected impact has come from a period of research leave that Jamie Wood has been on at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (Germany), where he has consulted with colleagues at the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte who have decided to make use of Xerte to host 13 learning modules that are one of the outputs of a research project.

3.6 Future Impact

As noted above, we will explore having Xerte installed on the main servers at UoL as part of our Fund for Educational Development project and explore whether other departments are interested in taking up use of the tool.

Over the coming year, two members of the project team will be working on curriculum development projects in History. One involves a reappraisal of first year provision and another of digital teaching and learning across the degree as a whole. Our experiences in the Making Digital History project will prove valuable in supporting this work and it seems that there is genuine appetite for further developing digital and student-as-partner approaches across the History curriculum. The intention is to involve students at all stages of the development of these plans.

We will continue to publish student work (with permission) and maintain the website as a hub for student-authored digital work and a place for staff to disseminate their approaches to digital history teaching. In future, we hope to develop further methods to involve students in the publication of their work (rather than staff taking responsibility for this aspect of the process).

Within History at UoL the impact of these approaches will be tracked via the use of standard module evaluation questionnaires (student-completed) and module reports (staff-completed).

4 Conclusions

The project has led to the creation of a very wide range of resources across a very wide range of different levels, types of modules, historical periods, and pedagogic approaches. This speaks to the flexibility of Xerte and the model that we have developed at Lincoln. The project is operating at a large scale and that has brought challenges in terms of time and resourcing, but also rewards in terms of broader impact (now we have an entire cohort ending first year who are trained in the use of Xerte).

It was important that the History degree was in the process of revalidation at the time that the project was being designed because this created space for innovation. Equally important was the fact that two members of the project team were new and were able to incorporate Xerte from the ground-up in a new module that they were developing (rather than bolting in on).

The approach that we have adopted has had a positive impact on student learning in a wide range of areas. It has developed a range of transferrable skills in research, team-working and presentation/communication, which go beyond digital literacies and should be of use in other areas of study. In fact, next year one of the key challenges will be to develop the digital literacy element further so that students can make full use of the potential of these online projects.

The use of (paid) student ambassadors is an effective method of supporting student work and disseminating the project, but there are inevitable compromises to be made with their academic and other work commitments. Allowance needs to be made for training the student ambassadors and, if necessary, for recruiting new ones.

Support from institutional educational developers/technologists is essential if tools such as Xerte are to be made available, taken up quickly and effectively, and shared more widely across the institution.

5 Recommendations

1. Continue promotion of Xerte: it is a versatile and (relatively) easy-to-use tool, as our use of it with well over 100 students and 5 members of staff has proven.
2. Student-as-partner/ producer approach can be effective and inspiring for students and staff.
3. Establish avenues for students to peer review and publish one another's digital work (as in the case of online student journals, or perhaps as interactive elements of such journals).
4. Ensure institutional support is forthcoming before bids are funded: this is vital to the success of projects.
5. Pay student helpers. Their labour and expertise should be rewarded, not exploited (it's great that they get something on their CV but staff don't just work to improve their CVs, so why should students?).

6 Implications for the future

1. All of the students who have used Xerte in History at UoL have done so for assessed credit, although in some modules they were given the choice of using Xerte or undertaking other forms of assessment. We felt that it was important to reward the students with credit for the work that they had done and that assessment would signal to them that this was a serious activity within the module. More work could perhaps be done on the implications of this approach to assessing Xerte for student learning.
2. Broader digital literacies need to be developed if students are to act as true producers of historical (and other academic) knowledge. So far, our students have produced some great resources but it is still up to us to act as gatekeepers and publish that material. We would need to train our students in using blogs or repository software if we wanted to enable them to disseminate their work too. This has broader implications of their digital literacies, identities and the training needed to support these.
3. It would be good to see a bank of student as partner project resources put online so that colleagues can see what is achievable/ possible rather than assuming that students are not capable of making work of a publishable (in terms of engaging online resources, not necessarily peer-reviewed papers) quality. Although, in future moving towards peer reviewed venues for the dissemination of online student authored work would also be worth investigating.

4. As noted above, it is important that student assistants/ ambassadors are rewarded for their work in supporting these projects. This results in a more professional attitude and an increase in the quality and reliability of their work. It would be worth considering whether this is a principle of all unpaid student voluntary labour in academia, irrespective of resource implications.