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Internal Evaluation of the project platform



Leonardo da Vinci WBT WORLD, RO/02/B/F/PP 141053
Internal Evaluation of the Project eLearning Platform



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide an internal evaluation of the WBT project's eLearning platform. It is a synthesis of the separate evaluations took place by the partners responsible in the consortium for that specific task. Those partners were

- ECCA
- INFINITY
- TEMPO
- UTBv
- VISIOLINK Ltd

The present report refers to the internal evaluation as stated above in addition to the external one which took place by independent experts.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The methodology followed can be characterised as effective and realistic as it was based on the selection of partners by the consortium decided in the relevant meetings. The evaluation based on a checklist developed by IONIAN Technologies Ltd. On a 0-4 system of noting (0 – unsatisfactory 4 – excellent). The specific checklist, which can be found in the Annexes Part of this report, covered the whole platform and each separate subsystem. The parts consisting the questionnaire are :

- System General
- Administration Facilities
- Communication Facilities
- Content development and delivery
- Assessment process
- User management
- Navigation and Interface
- Support and Training
- Other Features
- Performance and scalability

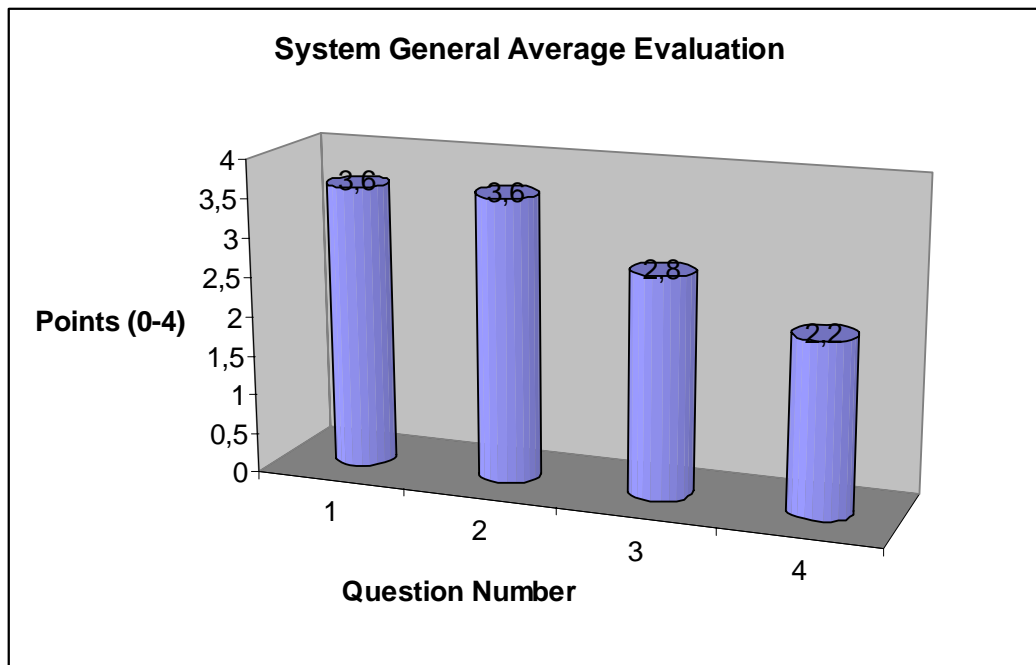
2. Evaluation Results

2.1 Evaluation of System part

This part of the evaluation consisted of a number of question aiming at answering to a number of general question of software infrastructure questions as well as the compatibility with a number of required add ons in order a user to easily access the eLearning platform.

The general overview was positive and partners were satisfied by the absence of special requirements in order to successfully run the eLearning platform.

In the following chart are the average grades of the answers to the questions in the General Part of the Evaluation Questionnaire.



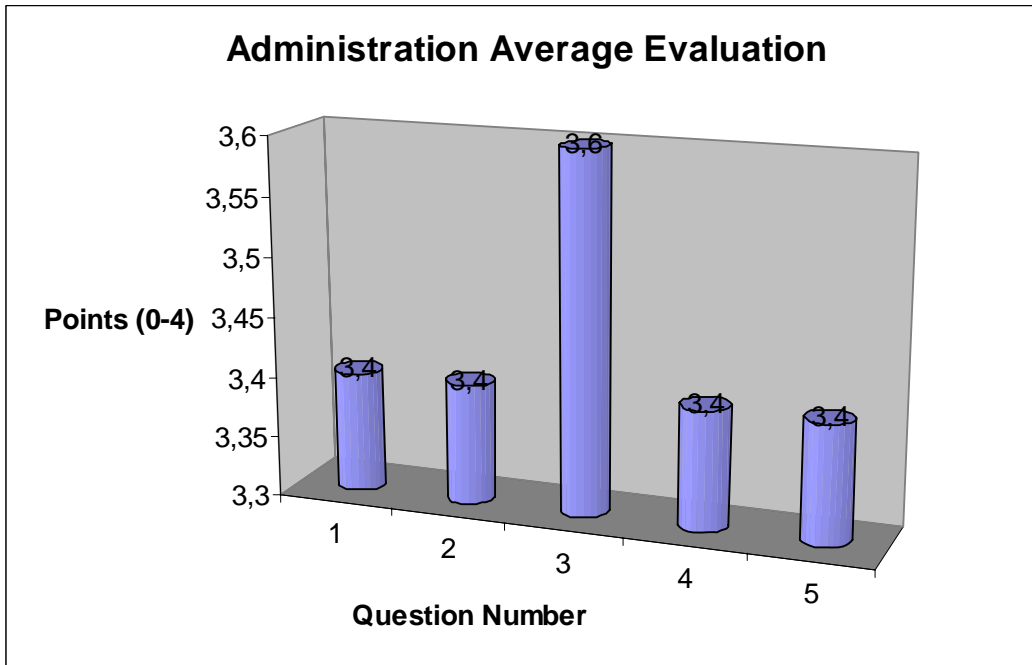
As we can clearly understand from what the evaluating partners responded that they are quite happy with the ability to run the platform both from MS Windows and Linux Platforms and that the functionality of the platform is not affected by the browser used.

The lower scoring of the two other questions can be understood by the fact that are actually identifying the absence of any special requirement for extra software for the access of the platform.

2.2 Evaluation of the Administration Part

This part of the evaluation consisted of a number of question aiming at answering to a number of more technical questions having to evaluate the administration of the eLearning platform, the flexibility of the administration role, the interface design and rich set of tools for administration of the platform, navigation issues of the specific part of the platform, ability to create reports and deal with user accounts, flexibility of user roles etc.

The general overview was again quite positive and partners were satisfied as it is clearly shown by the following relevant graph of the average of the answers received.



The key findings of the Administration evaluation part of the platform are that the role of the Administrator is greatly facilitated by the tools provided by the platform itself. The ability to create users with different roles and therefore different functionality is one of the strongest points of the platform. The reporting functionality is also one key aspect of the platform itself as it can provide valuable information about for a number of certain aspects of the learning procedure.

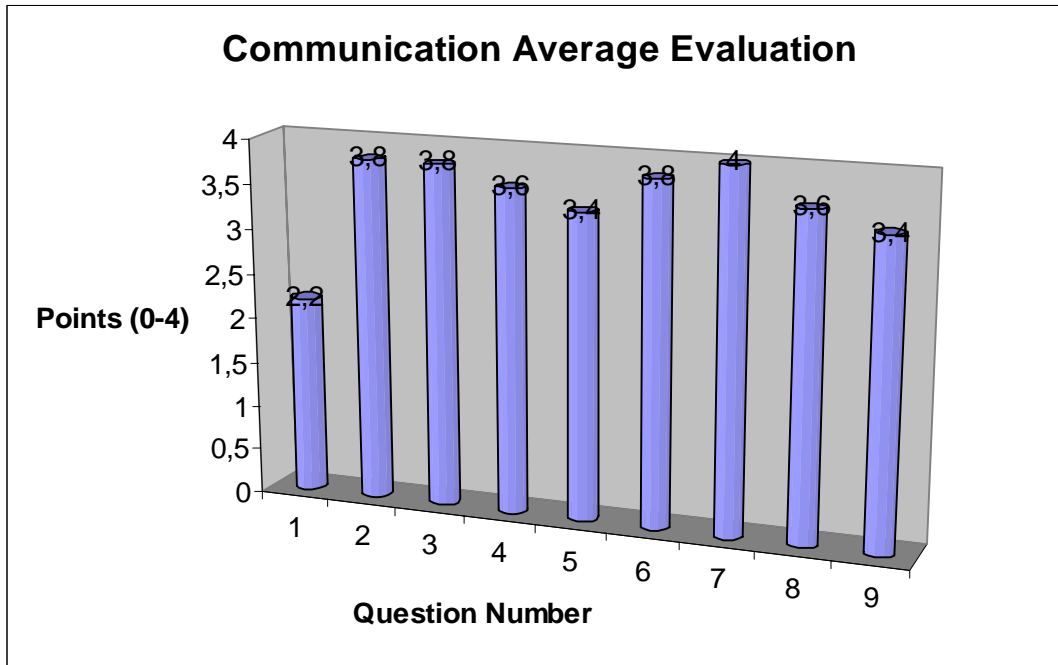
Last but not least is the fact that the interface of the project's eLearning platform was successfully evaluated with an average of 3.4 points which means that it assists the role of administrator and through the clear and concise interface it has, it is considered as of prime importance for the successful operation of the platform as a whole.

2.3 Evaluation of the Communication Part

That part of the evaluation consists of nine questions aiming at examining the ability of the platform to provide tools for communication between the internal entities of the platform as well as the ability to communicate with the outside world.

The questions covered a wide range of tools and its existence and functionality. The existence of chat modules, the ability of email integration, the use of bulletin boards and forums, the possibility send messages inside the platform and the possible types etc.

The evaluation of this part sent also very positive messages as it is clearly shown in the following diagram.



The Partners gave very high grades to all parts of the evaluation of the communication part which greatly identifies the ability of the system to communicate internally and externally.

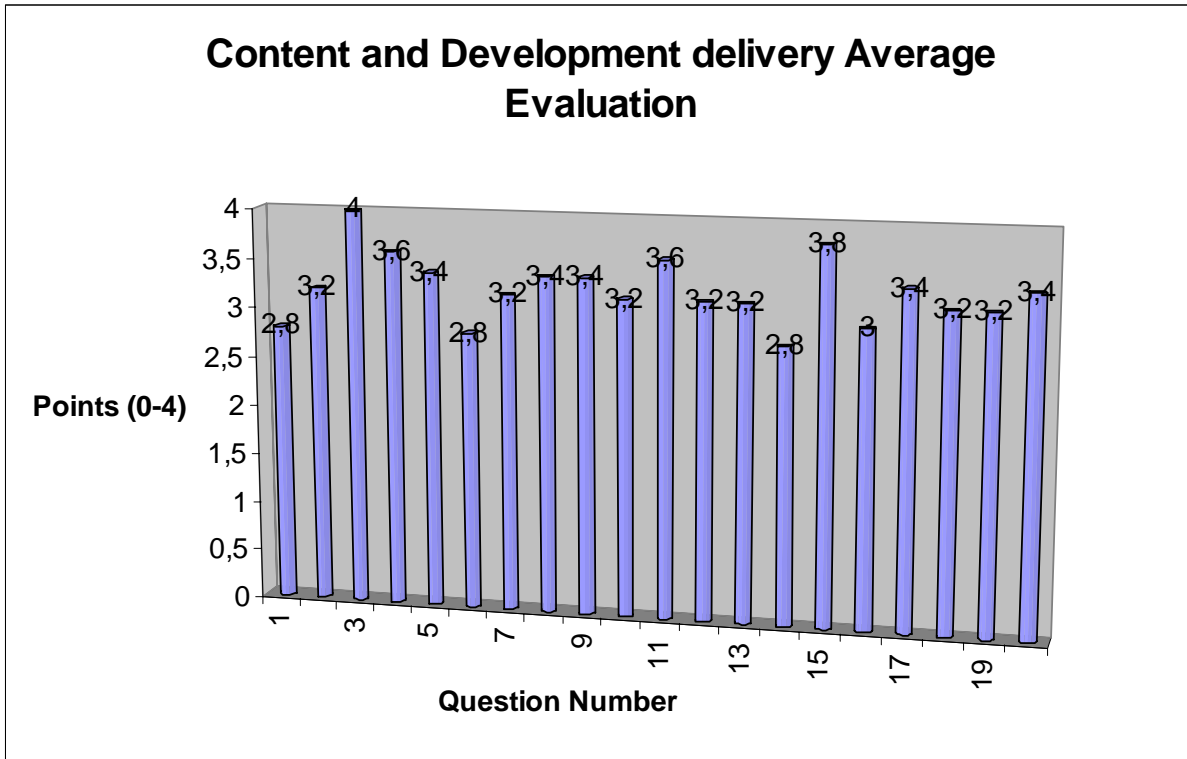
Specific attention must be given to the fact that the platform has a high level of email integration. It has also a powerful board system which can be accessed differently by each user of the platform according to the category he belongs to.

2.4 Evaluation of the Content Development and Delivery Part

This part of the evaluation consisted a number of questions aiming at evaluating a number of more technical aspects of the WBT's eLearning platform.

The total number of questions is 20 and covers a wide range of aspects and different matters of flexibility of the platform itself. There were questions about course design, upload of course files online, capability to hide courses, design of course based on the existence of templates, Java/Javascript compatibility, support of various commonly accepted plugins such as Flash, RealMedia etc, ability to reuse existing course materials, possibility to backup the course content etc.

In the following diagram there is the average grade of the answers received by the partners evaluated that part of the platform.



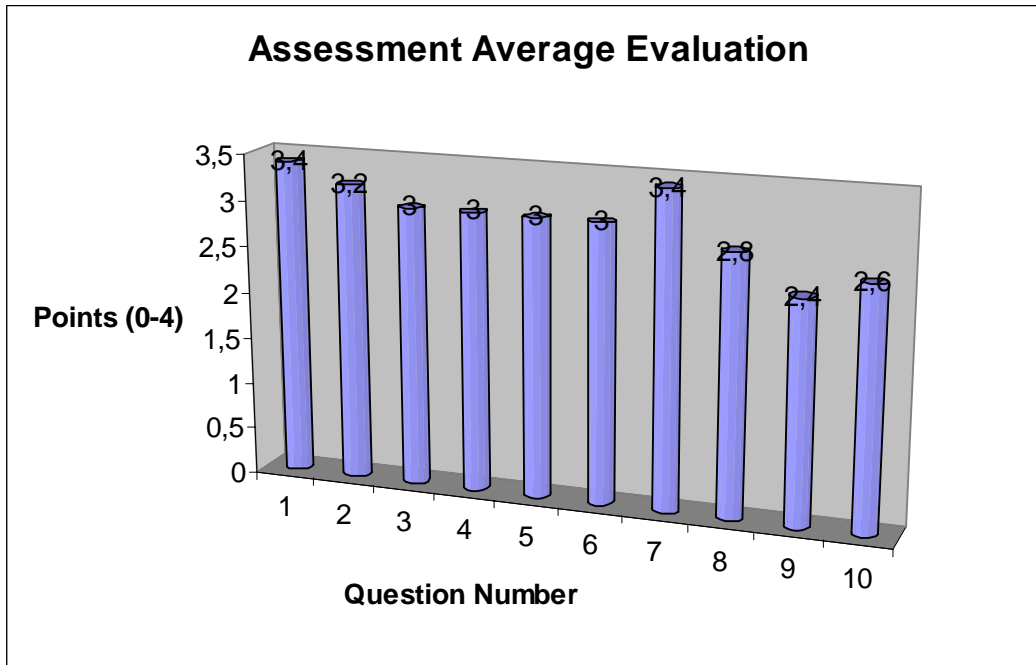
The overall impression from the evaluation of the content development and delivery part of the platform is positive and more than 80% of the average answers scored above 3. That is a very important point as it clearly identifies that the platform is flexible and provides many opportunities to handle different types of courses.

2.5 Evaluation of the Assessment Part

The Assessment part of the platform is the next part we assessed during the evaluation process. It deals with a highly important aspect of every eLearning platform and its evaluation is considered as a major weight factor.

That part of the evaluation included questions concerning the ability of the lecturers to create groups of students, to provide feedback to students, if the test creators can store and select questions for further editing, if there is the possibility to have randomly selected assessment questions, if there are time restrictions for tests etc.

The following table presents the average of the Evaluation of the Assessment part of the eLearning platform.



The overall impression is again positive and partners recognized the flexibility of the platform assessment system. Some important aspects which gained high scores from the evaluation partners concerned the ability of the system to provide feedback to the students of the eLearning platform and the possibility of the assessment materials to be incorporated into the course materials

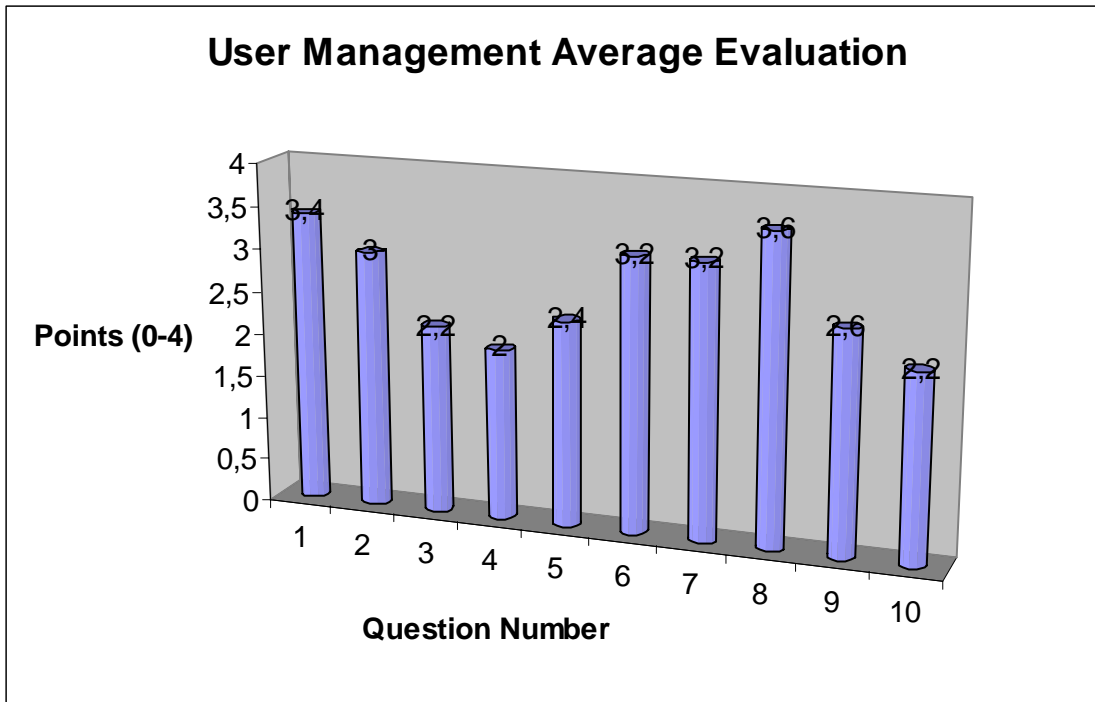
It is worth noting here that the last three questions have an average score below 3 which occurs due to the fact that we did not receive answers from one partner.

2.6 Evaluation of the User Management Part

That part of the evaluation concerned the evaluation of the User Management part of the eLearning platform. It is a technical evaluation but is considered as a core component for a platform and especially for an eLearning one.

The questions included in this part of the evaluation were about the ability of the platform system to create groups, to manage historical data concerning users, to provide reports and graphs with statistical data, the possibility of the platform to export reports to other formats for example in excel, the ability of the staff to monitor individual students etc.

The following diagram shows the average points that each answer received during the evaluation of the User Management part of the platform.



The overall impression of the evaluation is mixed. Half of the answers receive a grade above 3 and half of them under 3. This can be understood due to the fact that the topic evaluated is rather technical and exceeds the simple perspectives of the evaluating parties.

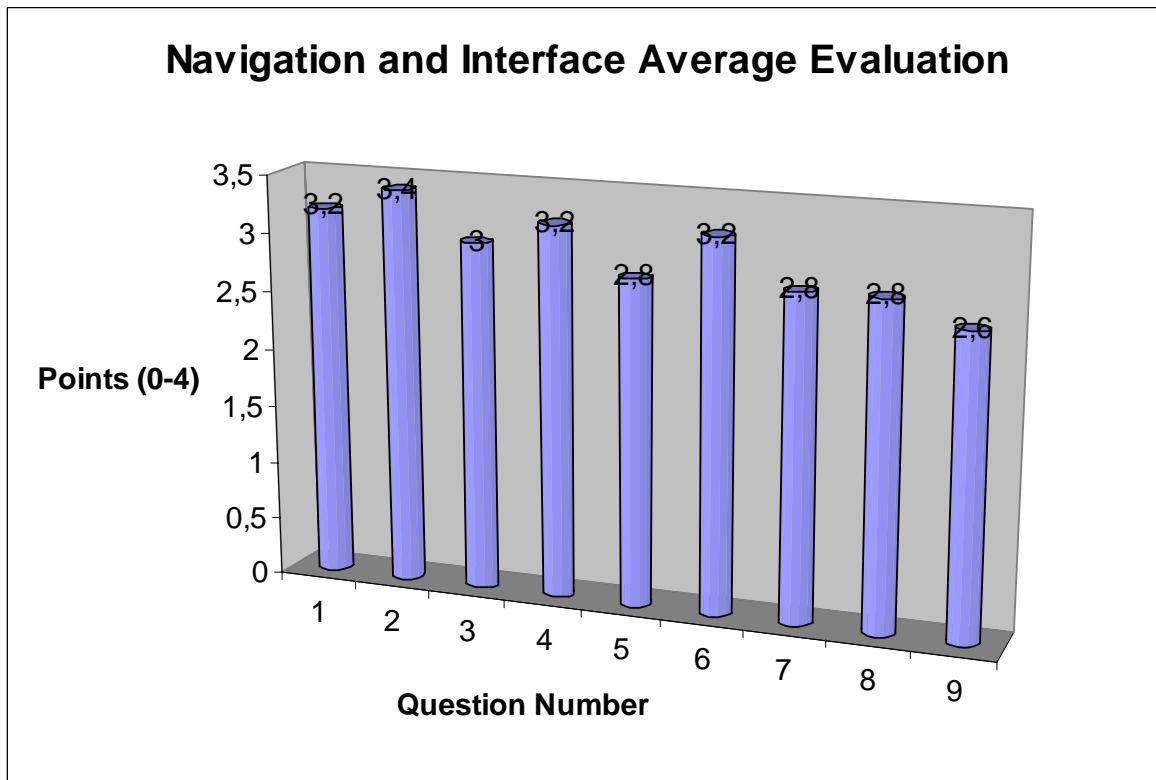
However the important point is that the User management part of the platform needs to take into consideration the points identified as weak and proceed to a redesign in order to satisfy the needs as expressed by the questionnaire.

2.7 Evaluation of the Navigation and Interface Part

That part of the evaluation concerned the evaluation of the Navigation and Interface part of the eLearning platform. It is a very important part of the evaluation because it concerns the interface part and the ease of navigation which should be easy for eLearning platforms.

The evaluation included questions about the easy of navigation in general, the possibilities of interface customization, the ability of the platform to change the interface according to the user needs etc.

The average points of the answers received are demonstrated in the following diagram.



The general overview we have from that evaluation is that the Interface and Navigation Part of the eLearning platform is quite positive. It seems that the customization options of the interface of the platform fulfilled the needs of the users and therefore received average grades above 3.

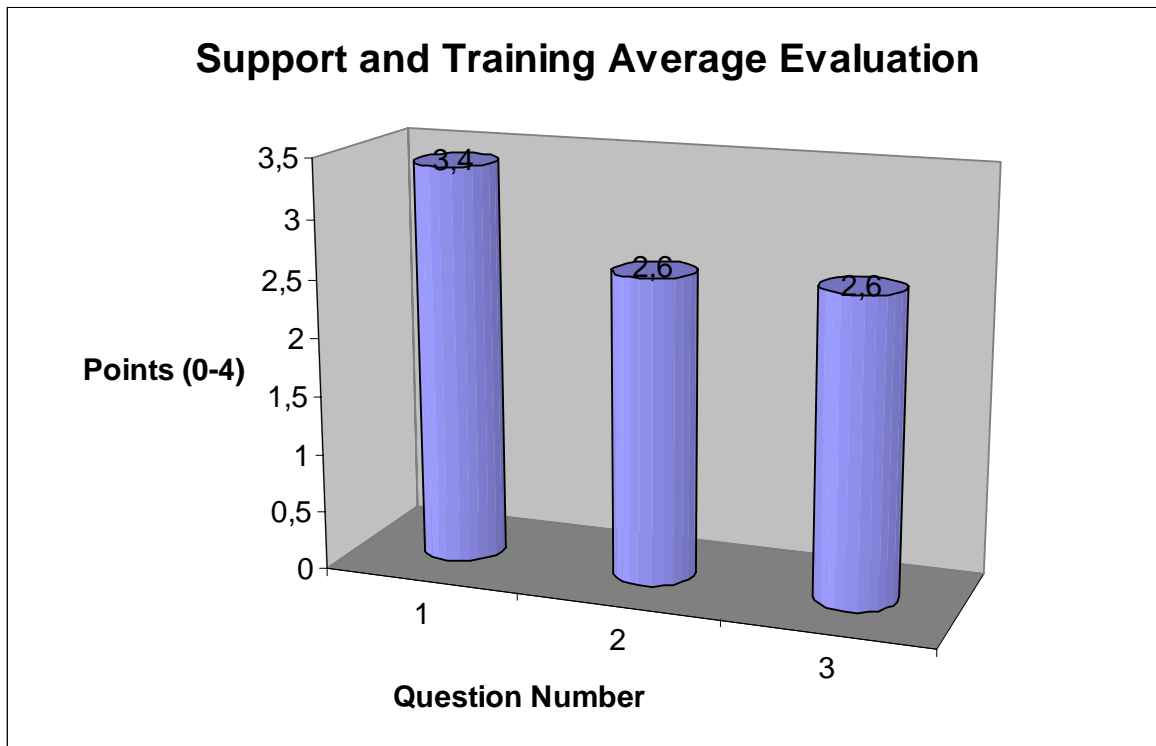
It is note worthy here that the last 3 questions received substantially lower average grades because one partner did not respond to these questions.

2.8 Evaluation of the Support and Training Part

That part of the evaluation concerned the evaluation of the Support and Training part of the WBT eLearning's platform. The questions were three and mainly directed to the receiving of answers concerning the availability of various format for the training materials, the existence of online help and the update of the training materials with newer versions.

We must mention here that the questions 2 and 3 did not receive one answer from one partner respectively.

The following diagram presents the results received be the evaluation process.

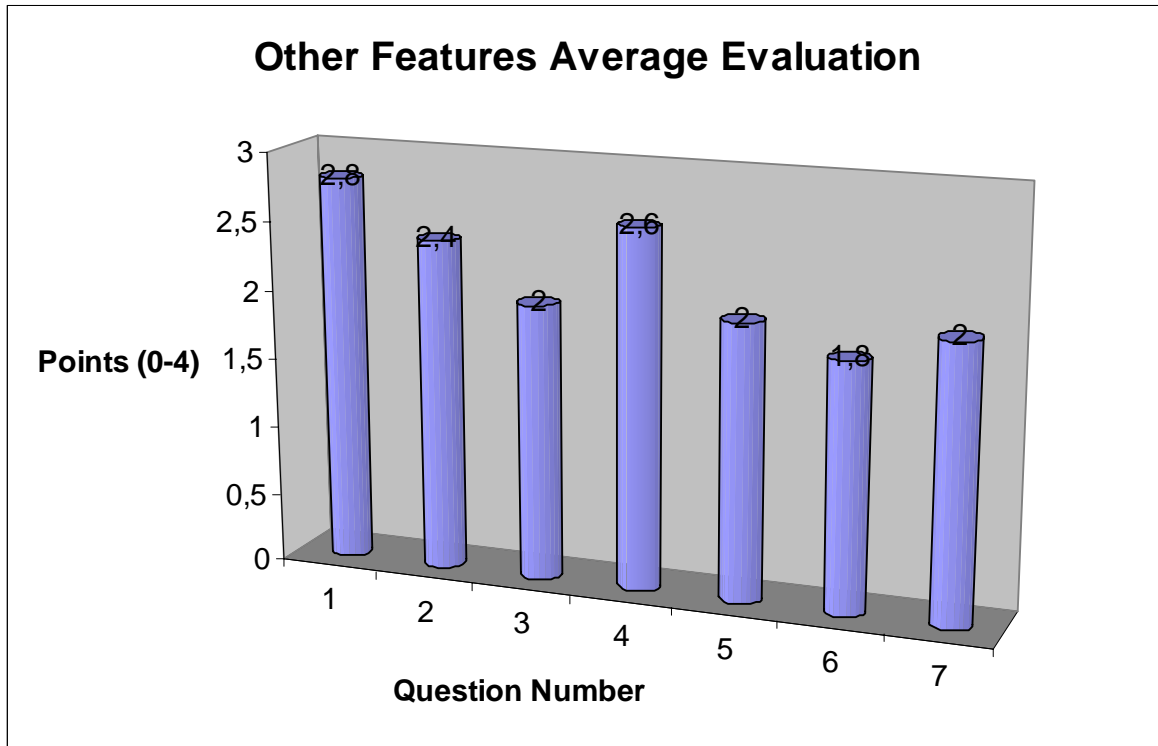


2.9 Evaluation of the Other Features Part

That part of the evaluation concerned the evaluation of the Other Features part of the eLearning platform. It is the part of the questionnaire that tries to assess the support of various add-ons to the eLearning platform of the project.

The questions included in this part of the evaluation were about the ability of the platform system to upload and download files efficiently, to have a repository for the users to handle files, for the provision of calendar etc.

The following diagram shows the average points that each answer received during the evaluation of the Other Features part of the platform.

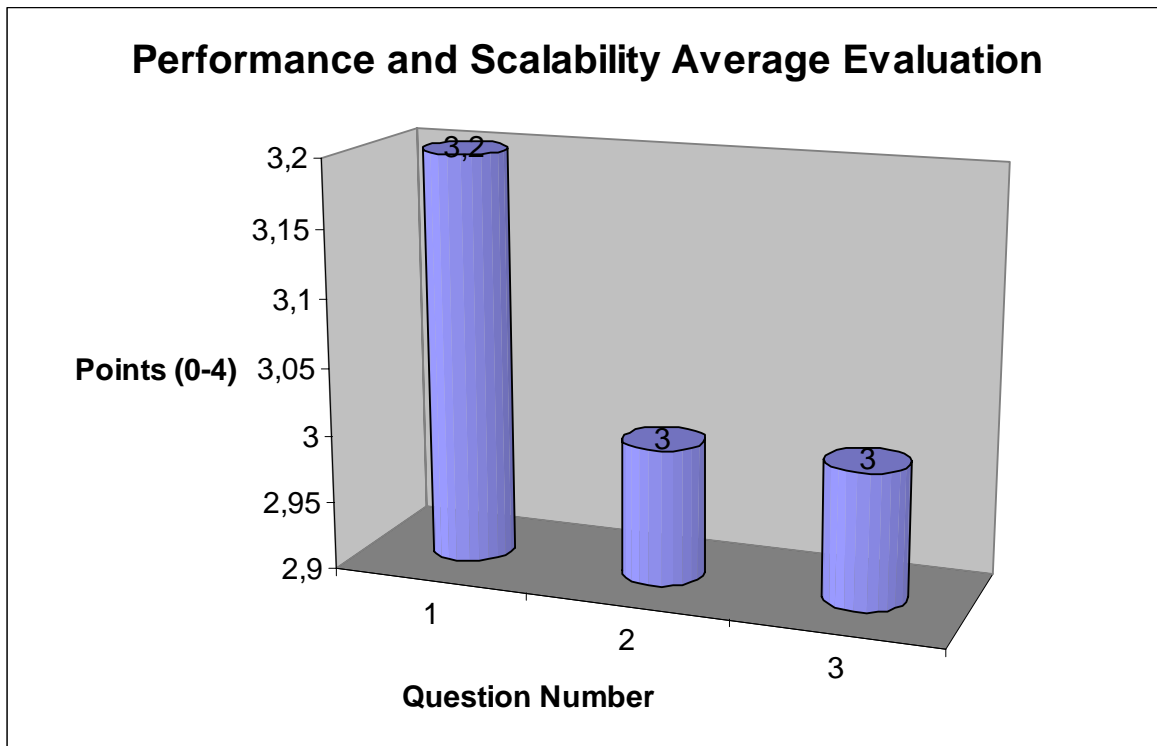


The reason that so many questions received low score is that we did not have answers so they were excluded them from the evaluation.

2.10 Evaluation of the Performance and Scalability Part

That part of the evaluation concerned the evaluation of the Other Features part of the eLearning platform. It is the part of the questionnaire that tries to assess the support of various add-ons to the eLearning platform of the project.

The questions included in the evaluation were about the number of users can be supported by the platform, how the system performance affected by the total number of users connected and general overview about the connection speeds of both the client and server sides.



The overall impression of the users evaluating that part of the questionnaire is positive. The average of the answers were above 3 and that is important, especially in what concerns the ability of the platform to operate under heavy traffic and in what concerns the connection speeds to it.

3. General Overview

The evaluation of the WBT eLearning platform took place by a 10 part questionnaire, examined and assessed all its sections from a technical and user perspective. The overall impression came out of the evaluation of the platform is positive. Almost all of the different parts received an average score of 3 and above, which is crucial for an eLearning platform.

We can provide some general considerations about the overall evaluation process and its findings which are

1. The accessibility of the platform is easy
2. The overall operation and function is sufficient
3. The level of compatibility and the absence of additional software requested is a strong point for the platform
4. The hardware and software requirements for a user to enter and use the platform are the absolutely necessary and minimum, a characteristic which is crucial for users not owing state of the art hardware at the time entering the eLearning platform
5. The interface is intuitive and the navigation system is simple and sufficient

6. The administration part of the platform is rich and not complicated
7. The communication abilities and characteristics of the platform are in a basic level but enough for its operation

All previous conclusions characterize the positive image of the WBT eLearning platform, its function and operation. They are also considered as the ground up for further development.

ANNEXES

Internet Platform Specifications

Main Goals of the platform

- To create a powerful and flexible ICT tools capable of providing to Web Based Trainers all the necessary information and instruction for building and deliver high quality courses.
- To assure a virtual frame for supporting interactive teaching, creation of new distance education courses, change of information and good practices on e-Learning.

Detailed main objectives in fulfilling the goals for the educational platform

- The platform will include the specific tools to a **learning management system**. Minimum requirements are: tools for control and organize the access of users (“actors”) to e-Learning services, using a data base server. The system allows access to on-line courses and to applications for manages the groups of users. The system also includes communication tools: e.g. internal messenger, discussion forums, chats between group’s members. Supplementary desirable facilities: electronic whiteboard, basic video-conferencing facilities.
- The platform will include a **module for content creation tools**: tools for editing, organizing the course text and multi-media contents and automatic generation of information database objects, and tools for on-line assessment system.
- The platform constructed for the project will be installed on the server at the Transilvania University of Brasov – the coordinator of the project. The platform could also be installed on every project partner of the project, for further local course delivery.
- On-line assessment system will contain an engine for randomly selection of different test question types. The tests are selected from a set stored in database at the creation of the course. The course-coordinating professor must have tools to select the number of randomly selected test.
- The on-line assessment system will process automatically the responses, will display the result obtained, and for wrong responses will suggest the paragraph of the course for the correct response.
- The requirements for platform server: Linux operating system, Apache web server, MySQL
- The platform defines the main actors that will use the platform and the specific rights.
- The platform will have the general structure: (i) *public pages*, with general information about offered educational services, course offered and condition for enrolment, and (ii) *private pages*, for enrolled user.

- Access to the platform will be free for public pages with general information about courses (“guest” type user).
- Access to course pages, and tools for learning management is based to a user-name and a password (“trusty” type user), in order to maintain the safety of the educational platform.
- Guest user can submit request to be enrolled. Enrolment will be based on a simple fill in on-line form.
- After “login” every trusty user has a specific, user-friendly GUI (Graphical User Interface) with specific tools (presented as icons and text) and access to specific interactive help.
- The platform will include **specials tool for disabled people**: e.g. magnifier of every current page (100%, 200%, 300% etc.), translation of the written text of course pages in audio format (only in English).

Actors (predefined groups of users) and specific rights

1. **Administrator** (many levels of administration: Institution, Department, Programme of study)

General rights:

- **user accounts**: insert, edit, view
- **courses**: insert, activate / deactivate, view, classroom timetable planning (for synchronous activities), type of activities for every course, enrolling / cancel learners
- **manage the virtual university structure** (allocate courses to professors / tutors, allocate learners to department and programme groups, tools for allocate learners to groups, create templates for courses, curricula, etc.)

Professor. General rights:

- **learners statistic**: view lists for allocated courses, insert / edit partial and final marks, view list of marks.
- **course contents**: view allocated courses, use tools and templates for edit and organize educational information, tools for insertion of multimedia (animated, audio, video) file in course structure, create (external and internal) links.
- **agenda**: insert, view the general agenda for the course allocated
- **assessment**: insert and edit tests and type of responses, tools for classifying the level of difficulty for every test – exercise (e.g. facile, medium, complex), view tests, insert, edit and view questions in course text, select the number of exercises selected for every test.

Tutor (as learning manager, facilitator and learner counselor). General rights:

- **learner’s activities**: edit, view activity timetable, view courses allocated by the administrator, edit agenda for group of learners, access to communication tools with groups.

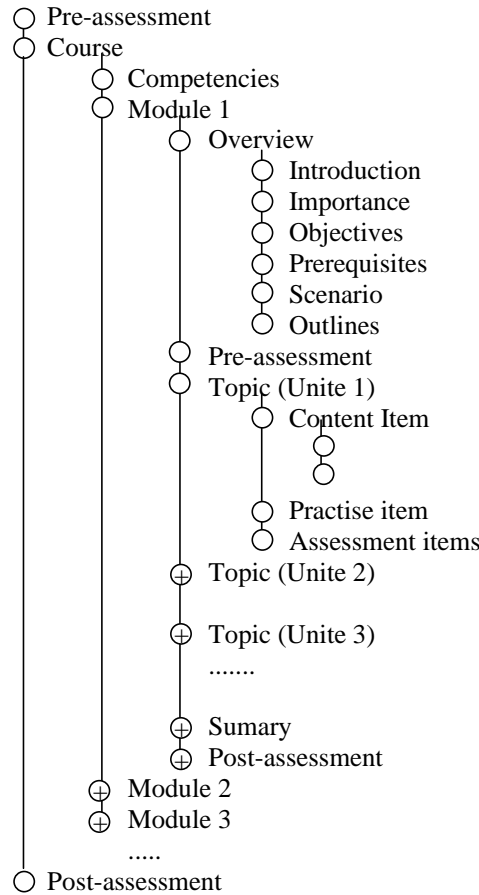
Secretary. General rights:

- **learners statistic**: insert, edit, view list of learners.
- **personal information for learners**: insert, edit fields, view (inclusive CNP, telephone, home address, e-mail address), tools for insert picture, tools for handle the scholar fees and taxes, tools to register materials distributed to learners
- **assessment statistics**: view final marks, tools for generate lists, catalogues.
- **professor and tutor statistics**: view names and allocated courses
- **communication tools**: compose, edit, view general messages for groups of learners and groups of professors / tutors.

Learner. General rights:

- **personal account**: view, edit
- **course tools**: view courses, view personal marks, view timetable and general group agenda.
- **personal agenda**: insert, edit
- **communication tools**: compose, edit, view general messages, communication (e.g. e-mail, chat, forum) with professors, tutors, secretary, other learners from the same group.

WBT COURSE CHART (specification for Course structure)



A. Examples of tools and menus

Example for administrator menu

User (actor) accounts:

Rights allocation upon actor type (local administrator, professor, tutor, secretary):

- Create list of new departments, new programmes, new courses (pre-definition of lists).
- Allocate department (selection from the pre-defined list)
- Allocate programme of study (selection from the pre-defined list)
- Year of study (selection from pre-defined list)
- Course title (selection from pre-defined list)

Classification of rights to groups:

- Professor: rights to allocated courses.
- Tutor: rights to allocated courses.
- Secretary: rights to allocated programmes.
- Learner: rights to allocated programmes, and specific rights (group, year of study) allocated by local administrator.

Insert/ edit new actors, according to a template that include:

- Name, forename, user-name, password, address, telephone, CNP, picture insert, user type.

Insert and edit menus (and files) for specific HELP to all types of users.

Suggested tools for professor to create / edit new courses

- tools for insert text (copy and paste, upload), and after submit automatically generated the specific data base format of the course
- tools for insert picture, animations, audio files, video files that will run on the platform when opened. Multi-media files must have the facility to be downloaded by users and run from local computer, in the case of limited transmission speed.

- tools for organizing the course, according to a general template agreed for the platform courses.
- tools for insert and edit assessment exercises and self assessment activities.
- tools for insert downloadable documents

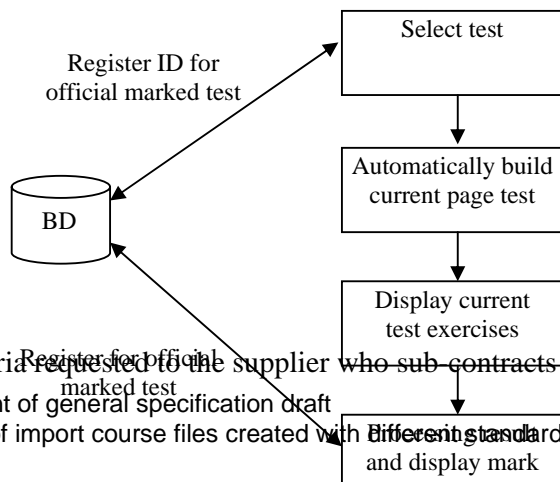
Suggested GUI menus

- The name and logo of WBT project
- Name and forename of the logged user, with the login general rights
- Date and group
- **Agenda/News/Calendar**
- **Course Info:** (for allocated courses) name, course structure, link to access documents, staff names and links
- **Communicate:** tools for e-mail account, group forum, chat, personal information
- **Resources:** links to on-line references.
- **Access to demo-course**
- **Help**
- **Contact:** to a help-desk

Question types included in the on-line assessment system

- *Multiple choice Questions (McQs):* to choose from a list of possible answers. Learners select the correct or best answer from the list given, e.g. on validation boxes.
- *True / False questions:* similar to McQs except that the choices *True* and *False* are supplied by default.
- *Question fill-in the blank:* presents a question or statement with an answer box into which the answer (key word) can be typed. The answer and response are compared in a case-insensitive manner and white spaces are ignored. E.g. "William Shakespeare ", "william shakespeare ", and "WilliamShakespeare " would all be considered equivalent answers.
- *Rating questions:* incorporate a short list of several types of questions with multiple and single choice, and rating. E.g. select from poor, fair, average, good, excellent

Suggested structure of the on-line assessment engine



Main quality criteria requested to the supplier who sub-contracts the platform making

- accomplishment of general specification draft
- the possibility of import course files created with different standardized tools, for flexibility and interoperability
- interfaces to update the structure and functions of the platform to subsequent add new functions
- use for database a object oriented database
- use standardized specifications for creation educational platform (e.g. SCORM)
- insert special tools for disabled people.

Internet Platform Evaluation Checklist

Checklist for the Evaluation of the WBT Internet Platform

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation
System General	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)
Users should be able to access from Windows and Linux desktops	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to run on all supported browsers – Netscape and IE and what is the minimum version of each browser that is supported?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Is there a requirement for additional software compatibility, e.g., Java?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Are proprietary software products required / preferred for use of the system?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
<i>What are the minimum hardware requirements for users?</i>	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation
Administration	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)
Range and flexibility of administrator roles – technical and functional	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Intuitive interface, navigation and tools for administrators	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to create administrative reports, e.g., list of all classes indicating instructors enrolled, number of students	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to create guest accounts	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Range of user roles/views – e.g., administrator, instructor/designer, tutor, marker, student, guest	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation
Communication	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)
Text-based chat	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Email integration – internal, external or both?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Announcements/bulletin board – staff can post messages but read only for students	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to create private and public chat groups	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to create moderated discussion groups	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to add attachments to messages	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Redirection of messages - can users direct email to their own address?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to sort messages by date, thread, author	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Messages marked read/unread automatically, manually or not at all?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation
Content development and delivery	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)
Is there a requirement for HTML expertise?	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Flexibility of course design	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Ability to edit online	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.
Create copy of existing course/page	0. 1. 2. 3. 4.

Upload multiple files simultaneously	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to hide courses/pages	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Content released based on custom-designed criteria, e.g., number of postings, name, etc	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Templates supported	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Content released based on student viewing certain material	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Javascript / java compatibility	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Time restrictions on course material	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Style sheet compatibility	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Course content can be managed automatically according to student performance/progress	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Multimedia/plugins supported: images, Flash, QT, RealMedia, Shockwave – Director and Authorware, others?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reusability of course material	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to set up FAQs	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Content index built automatically	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Lecturers/course creators can back up course content	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to create web links which open in a new browser window	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reusability of material - ability to create materials which can be shared across a range of units	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
Assessment	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)				
Questions can be auto-corrected	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to provide feedback to students	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reusability of questions and question pools within and between courses, creators	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Test creators can store and select questions in/from database according to specific characteristics	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Feedback responses can include links to course material	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Randomised questions	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to link to or from or incorporate into course material	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Time restrictions on tests – access, submit, results/feedback	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Allowance of students to take tests multiple times	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Built in timer for timed tests	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
User Management	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)				
Administrators and lecturers can create groups	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
History and tracking features accessible by students and staff	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reporting includes statistics, graphs	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reporting includes statistics, graphs	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Reports easily exportable to Excel, text, .csv files	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Students can view own grades	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Instructors can monitor progress of individual students	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Users can send message/email to all members of a group	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Staff can view breakdown of time spent on a page/topic for each student	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to create and manage groups and communication independently	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
Navigation and Interface	Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)				
Web accessibility – does the system meet accepted standards?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Intuitive, user-friendly interface and navigation	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Flexibility of customisation - is the look'n'feel completely customisable wrt	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

layout, images, banners or just change of icons/colours?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Users get personalised interface with their courses etc. on entry page	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Customisation by individual users	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Search function	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Flexibility of admin control over interface and navigation – how much customisation can be controlled centrally?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Can a user bookmark a 'page' within the system?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Users can view course map	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
Support and Training					
Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)					
Training materials available – print and electronic – various formats, e.g., Word, .pdf, HTML	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Online user help	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Training and material updated with new versions	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
Other Features					
Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)					
Efficient file upload and download, e.g., drag and drop	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
File repository for users	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Timetable integration	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ability to list who's online	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Calendar	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Add links to calendar entries	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
Students can add entries to course calendar	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.

Evaluation Category	Weight of Evaluation				
Performance and scalability					
Scale of assessment (From 0 = unsatisfactory to 4 = excellent)					
How many users are possible	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
How is the system performance affected by the total number of users connected, etc.?	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.
<i>Speed of operation at server/application and at user end - both network and modem access</i>	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.