

# Section 2

## Information for Learning Technologists and Educational Developers

### Introduction

This section of the WebPA Resource Pack is aimed at learning technologists or educational developers who are managing/ supporting/involved in the installation and pilot of WebPA. It also provides some guidance on the support required for embedding WebPA into the department/institution.

### Is WebPA the right tool?

WebPA is an award winning peer assessment tool that helps support group work activities for formative or summative assessment. WebPA supports academic tutors by alleviating the problems traditionally associated with the assessment of group work, often replacing an existing paper-based method and saving time.

WebPA is suitable for use by any academic who uses group work in their teaching as it helps academics undertake peer moderated marking of group work. It is usually used to reduce some common problems associated with group work and also helps academics to allocate individual marks for a single product resulting from group work.

It could be that your institution has decided to introduce more group work into the curriculum and in this case WebPA can often be a good tool to support academics in this process.



## Relevant references

If you would like to find out more about the issues associated with group work see <http://webpa.ac.uk/?q=node/107> .

More detail on how WebPA can alleviate these issues is given in Section 1, also see the effective practice guide <http://webpa.ac.uk/?q=node/578> .

Try a demonstration version of WebPA to explore the features at <http://webpaos.lboro.ac.uk> .

## How does WebPA fit within institutional policy?

The fit of WebPA with your institution's policy is dependent on that policy and its wording. You will need to identify the appropriate policy/policies for your institution. These may include:

- learning and teaching
- assessment
- group work
- e-learning.

It may also be prudent to consider departmental procedures and guidelines and drawing together all this information regarding policy to provide a basic FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) which can be used with all the relevant stakeholders.

## How does WebPA fit with the QAA?

As with other assessment practices, the acceptance of the QAA is important. Based on section 6 of the Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (Assessment of students, see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section6/>) “the use of peer assessed activities [...] enables students to understand assessment criteria and deepens their learning in several ways.”

## What evidence is there that the tool is effective?

WebPA has been developed over a number of years and is based on sound pedagogical research that has been undertaken by those using and supporting the use of the tool. Due to the continued research, findings have been reported regularly and cover topics such as the validity of the peer marking process, the acceptability of the tool with both academic tutors and students and the evolution of the tool.

One of the key published papers to read is ‘The development and evolution of an online peer-moderated-marking tool: WebPA’ (Loddington, S., Pond, K. Wilkinson, N. and Willmot, P., 2009).

See Section 4 (Publications) for other published journal and conference papers that relate to the publication of the research findings.

*“While the University does not wish to discourage tutors from using their own self and/or peer assessment approaches which are tailored to the needs of specific modules, it would also encourage departments to consider the use of WebPA.”*  
*University Policy Statement on Group Working – Minimum Requirements, Derek Blease, October 2006, Loughborough University*

## How do I convince academics and senior managers to use WebPA?

### Working with academic tutors

You may have to convince a colleague to adopt the tool as a trial. In this case you will need to champion the tool and possibly approach a number of academic tutors. It is easier to begin with tutors that you know are currently using a paper based system to allocate individual marks for group work.

You will need to begin a dialogue covering the benefits of the tool. In addition, you may have to challenge well-established beliefs, for example: who should assess the student work? Generally, once you explain the benefits to both the students and the academic tutors, the tutors can see the need for such a tool and are more willing to participate in a trial. It may be that you will need to agree that the marks will not be used to moderate the final group grade until the tutor is comfortable that the outputs are

reliable and realistic for individual students.

Within this pack you will find a briefing paper in the back cover wallet, specifically written to target the academic tutor which is useful when introducing the tool to them. Once you have the academic tutor on board for the pilot you may want to point them to Section 1 (*Information for academic tutors*). They may also find the enclosed case studies helpful.

Attracting more academic tutors in the future will be easier once you have completed a successful pilot and have a champion who is able to share his experiences and expound the benefits that he has found.

### Working with senior managers

Gaining support from senior managers is always beneficial when introducing a new tool. How you gain this support will really depend on the senior managers and their associated roles and interests. In order to assist you in presenting your case you may want to show them the relevant briefing paper located in the back cover of this pack. In addition,

you may also need to keep them informed of the progress of any pilot that takes place and of any final outcomes.

## Getting WebPA installed

WebPA can be downloaded from <http://sourceforge.net/projects/webpa/>

If you have the right IT skills and access to an appropriate server then you can install WebPA yourself. You will need to read section 3 for IT support and the documentation for installation <http://webpa.ac.uk/?q=node/30>.

Alternatively, you will need to work with your departmental/central IT support. For a pilot, it should be possible to work with IT support to find space to host the tool on a shared server. There is a briefing note [located in the back cover of this pack] to support you with this.

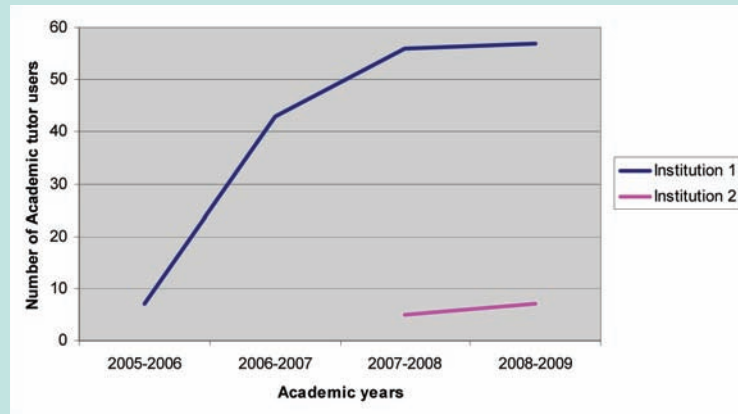


Figure 1. The progress of institutional adoption

## Working with WebPA as an open source system

WebPA was initially released as an open source application in 2007. There is no charge for you to download, install and use the tool. The downloader is granted a licence to use the application and you can find out more about this type of open source licence (version 3 of the GNU General Public Licence, used in around 60% of open source projects) at <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/licencefinder.xml>.

Other common concerns about using open source software such as security and scalability are covered in more detail on in Section 3.

## Getting a pilot up and running

As a learning technologist or educational developer, it is hard to predict your role in the piloting of the WebPA tool. Some academic tutors wish to manage the whole pilot themselves, others might like you to organise everything and simply provide them with access.

The experience of adopters to date is that it is easier to begin with a departmental pilot – only one adopter has successfully begun with an institutional approach. In an ideal world, for a departmental pilot, installation can be achieved in just a few weeks – from the start to making the tool available to academics and students. Realistically, you should expect timescales to be much longer as other factors may also influence how long it will take to get a pilot up and running. These can include:

- resourcing – the availability of people to install the tool, support its use and the practicalities of having a server available
- timing – the current point in the academic year and the point at which the academic tutor would like to use the tool.

This is covered in more detail in Section 1.

## Cost

There is no cost to obtaining the software or the support supplied by the community. However, there may be costs associated with using the time of technical or other support staff in your university, or the purchase of a server if this is required. Cost implications are covered in more detail in Section 3.

## Wider adoption

After the pilot has been evaluated and is seen to be a success, then you will need to decide on the next action to take. The role of learning technologists and education developers often involves working towards wider institutional adoption. Below are some of the things that you might need to get involved in:

- IT implications – installation on central servers, investing time and effort into providing integration with the university's other systems such as student and staff information etc.
- working to change module specifications if necessary





- encouraging your pilot academic tutors to present or write up their work, talk about their use of WebPA, apply for any local teaching awards and so on
- talking to other learning technologists and educational developers, including any central units, to help promote the tool and help identify other potential users
- making presentations or reports to any institutional e-learning committees etc.

Institutional adoption has been documented at two institutions. At the first (founding) institution the tool originated in one engineering department and spread, by a number of methods, into departments across the university. Use has increased from 7 academic tutors in 2005, to 57 academic tutors assessing over 7,500 students in 2009. At the second institution, WebPA has only been installed for 18 months and so the growth is smaller as yet, but it can also be seen to be increasing, see Figure 1.

## Getting support

Join the community of users to get further support – see the related briefing sheet. The Higher Education Academy Engineering and Physical Sciences Subject Centres will also provide a limited amount of support and advice. A special interest group (SIG) of users and developers provides another route for information and support. <http://webpa.ac.uk/?q=node/487> .



