FDTL Phase four Consortium
Observation Skills in Psychology

Phase 1: 2003

First report from External Evaluator
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Aim of the evaluation

The aims of the end of year evaluation are as follows:
- To guide the progress of the project
- To ensure that monies are properly spent and that the project is carried out in accordance with the project plan
- To ensure that the goals of the project are achieved
- To revisit the appropriateness of the project goals and plans as the project unfolds
- To inform future educational development work

Ongoing monitoring of the project and provision of guidance

During the course of 2003 I had two meetings with the Project Directors (Professor Vicky Lewis and John Oates), the Project Manager (Sue Martin) and the Project Assistant (Hester Duffy) to review the progress of the project and to consider plans for the next stages of development. The main purpose of these meetings was for the team to update me on their progress and for me to ask questions. The meetings fully achieved this aim but, in addition, I found that they were extremely useful in identifying areas where decisions had to be made about implementation of the overall strategy for Phase 1. In particular, at the May meeting, we discussed the best way to incorporate student feedback about the undergraduate version of fOCUS and ways in which the learning outcomes could be established. In the July meeting we considered alternative ways of structuring material for the clinical psychology version of fOCUS.

In addition to the meetings, I have received detailed written reports about the progress of the project and the Annual Report 2003. I also saw the results of the questionnaire that was sent out to departments and have tried out the first and second versions of fOCUS.

I consider that I have been able to guide the progress of the project in this important phase of development. I have found that the members of the team have had a clear sense of their immediate and long-term aims while showing admirable flexibility in their approach as they have responded to feedback from members of the consortium and to the inevitable problems that have
occurred from time to time as they have developed materials for the fOCUS CD-ROM.

Progress of the project over 2003

At the outset of the project there were clear goals and sub goals for each phase of the project and a clear timetable for the completion of each. In Phase 1 (January 6 2003 – January 5 2004) the main aims were:

- To conduct a questionnaire survey of undergraduate and postgraduate clinical courses in psychology to establish how observational methods were currently taught, currently available resources and the demand for CD-ROM based resources
- To carry out an initial trial of fOCUS in order to receive feedback from students and teaching staff
- To carry out a consultative exercise with representative Clinical Psychology teaching staff on the development of fOCUS for observation and assessment in clinical psychology
- To provide a workshop on fOCUS at the annual British Psychological Conference in order to recruit potential participant partners for Phase 2
- To develop fOCUS in the light of user feedback in order to produce two pilot versions relating to a) observational methods of studying behaviour (intended primarily for undergraduates) and b) observation and assessment in clinical psychology

All of these goals were accomplished in Phase 1 of the project although some aspects of the project took longer to complete than had been originally anticipated. There was a small, but important, change of emphasis as it became clear, following feedback from the first pilot at Leeds Metropolitan University, that more resources would need to be devoted to making fOCUS easier to use and so rather different from the original version. Over the year considerable effort has been expended in revising the structure of fOCUS and in providing the extensive help that is now built into the CD-ROM. The intention has been to make fOCUS usable by an independent learner without recourse to support from teaching staff. I consider that these efforts will considerably add to the utility of fOCUS.

As a result of the more extensive modifications of fOCUS for undergraduate use, the completion of work on the version targeted at observation and assessment in clinical psychology was delayed. Furthermore, following the consultation with potential end users, it became clear that the requirements for a clinical psychology version were considerably different from those pertaining to the undergraduate version. It has also proved challenging to decide on a suitable structure for the materials to be included this version and also to identify suitable video material given that there are clear ethical considerations in showing clinical cases.

Delays in the preparation of the clinical version of fOCUS have also meant that the recruitment of clinical partners for Phase 2 has also been delayed since it was felt that this could not take place until the structure and the content of the CD-ROM were confirmed.
I consider that the decision to develop an independent version of fOCUS for use in the Clinical Psychology training was well-founded since the needs of the undergraduate and postgraduate users are very different. Recruitment of clinical partners for Phase 2 is now well in hand.

**Appropriateness of project goals for Phase 2**

The main project goals for Phase 2 are:

- To trial the new versions of fOCUS with 5 undergraduate psychology courses and 5 clinical psychology doctorate programmes
- To gather feedback from students and teachers to guide revision of fOCUS into its final form
- To fund departments to produce case studies of their use of the fOCUS material in teaching

These goals remain appropriate. A good spread of departments has been recruited for Phase 2 and the feedback that they will provide is going to be crucial to the success of the project. As part of my evaluation of Phase 2, I will be talking to teaching staff from some of the partner departments.

The Annual Report (Section 5.2) notes several minor changes to the project plan. These mainly concern the deadlines for completion of various parts of Phase 2 and they are all realistic. I note that the team has decided to introduce focus groups as an additional strand of the evaluation strategy. I think that this will enhance the feedback that they obtain from end users.

**Dissemination**

I had the opportunity to read a detailed report of the dissemination strategy. This shows that the team has carried out numerous engagements with potential users of the two editions of fOCUS. Notably the project has been presented to Clinical Trainers in Dublin, at the Developmental section Psychology conference and at LTSN meetings. There are plans to make further presentations at the next Developmental section Psychology conference (September 2004) and at PLAT 2004 to continue the task of making more potential users aware of fOCUS. The team has also had extensive meetings with members of the partner institutions.

Overall, the team has made an excellent start in the dissemination of fOCUS as witnessed by their success in recruiting a number of strong departments to act as Phase 2 partners. There are also promising links with NOLDUS.

**Overall evaluation of the project**

The first year of the project has gone extremely well. The development of the undergraduate version of fOCUS has made it considerably easier to use and I anticipate that there will be generally positive feedback from the Phase 2 partners. fOCUS is already well on the way to being a useful and user-friendly tool for the analysis of verbal and nonverbal behaviour and the interaction between communicative partners. It will allow teaching staff to bring computer-based analysis of verbal and nonverbal behaviour into the undergraduate curriculum for the first time.
The development of the independent clinical psychology version of fOCUS is an important extension of the original project and I look forward to seeing the feedback from this in the coming year. As with the undergraduate version, this has great potential both as a valuable training resource and as an important tool for independent research.

Margaret Harris

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