

## Staffordshire University launches JISC funded initiative for federating open courseware using HarvestRoad Hive DR

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Agency: **Bob Little Press & PR**

Staffordshire University is taking part in a pilot study to explore the issues and benefits involved in making its 'stock' of learning content freely available.

The project, made possible by the use of Giunti Labs' HarvestRoad Hive digital repository (DR) allied to the Blackboard virtual learning environment (VLE), is one of seven such projects being funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) – a Government-funded body which supports education and research by promoting innovation in new technologies and by the central support of information and communications technology (ICT) services.

The project involving Staffordshire University involves making some 700 'credits' of learning materials available in various forms, including video, 'hardcopy' notes and so on. These materials, originally kept within the Blackboard VLE, or learning management system, have been migrated to Giunti Labs' DR; then federated to the JISC repository (known as JORAM Open) and made available to learners via RSS feed alerts.

Professor Mark Stiles, the University's Head of Learning Development and Innovation, and a member of the board of directors of the IMS Global Learning Consortium, explained: "We bought Giunti Labs' HarvestRoad Hive – in 2006 – because we wanted flexibility in how we used our learning content. We already had the Blackboard VLE but we wanted to use the content on this system in other ways.

"Moreover, we have some 11 partner colleges – which are part of the Staffordshire Region Foundation. All of these colleges use Moodle – the increasingly popular open source VLE.

"We also have other partner organisations around the UK and, indeed, throughout the world," he added. "We want to share our learning content with all of them – and, indeed, getting academic institutions to share their learning and expertise more widely is in line with current Government policy.

"We are keen to make exposing our content to as wide an audience as possible the norm rather than the exception," Stiles continued. "After all, universities don't sell 'content'.

"Rather, they sell accreditation and access to expertise. So, even if they make their courses freely available on the internet, they should find students wanting to come to the university, for assessment and accreditation.

"After all, you can find all the information associated with an undergraduate course freely available in libraries," he added.

"But the key is the assessment and accreditation of your learning. If you work through the information without tutors, how do you know that you are any good at learning and applying that learning?"

Stiles discussed his university's experience with this project at a conference held in Sestri Levante in Italy on 17th and 18th September. Called 'EdReNe' ([edrene.org/](http://edrene.org/)) the event was a workshop on 'digital repositories for education', bringing together specialists in web-based learning resources repositories, along with content owners and other stakeholders within education.

"Today, organisations exist in an interconnected environment and it is no longer sufficient to merely manage and deliver the information that an organisation owns," commented Fabrizio Cardinali, Giunti Labs' CEO. "This is especially true where this information relates to knowledge dissemination, online learning and training programs.

“Moreover, organisations may have core contents or information held on disparate systems and, so, are unable to leverage any social or community-based content value augmentation practice - thus losing ground and effectiveness against user expectations. In this case, being a ‘Learning Organisation’ is an impossible task to fulfil.

“HarvestRoad Hive consolidates this information into one source, allowing people from all over an organisation to access, use and benefit by it,” he said. “DRs, such as HarvestRoad Hive, can be invaluable in providing not just learning materials but also vital information for business planning, strategy and tactics.

“Ultimately, the HarvestRoad DR solution allows organisations from any business and educational background to evolve in tune with their market requirements, augmenting the value of their content portfolio and ensuring contents are transformed into usable knowledge.”

In at least the case of Staffordshire University, that looks as if it will soon mean ‘freely available’ usable knowledge.

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#### About Giunti Labs

Giunti Labs is a leading Online and Mobile Learning Content Management Solutions provider with global headquarters in Italy and offices around the world.

Giunti Labs provides a wide range of solutions, in response to any content, learning and knowledge management need, covering:

- 24/7 multi language learning content production
- LCMS and Digital Repository Platforms
- Delivery solutions for mobile & wireless
- Consulting and professional services

Giunti Labs is part of Giunti Group, a leading educational and cultural heritage publisher with roots back to 1841. Over the years Giunti has built a catalogue of huge dimensions (over 12,000 titles) and acquired new brands worldwide.

In 2008, Giunti Labs acquired the HarvestRoad Hive digital repository system, which manages any form of content used in online learning, corporate training and knowledge management initiatives. HarvestRoad Hive can interface with practically any ERP, Learning or Course Management System and is already integrated with several commonly used course management systems, authoring and content assembly tools.

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