



Interoperability services for learning launched during iLearning forum, 29-31 January 2007

iLearning Forum 2007 will see the launch of a new service by EIFEL to support its members and partners in the implementation of interoperability services:

- **Community of professionals**
- **Diagnostics** of information system against state of the art interoperability systems
- **Tailoring existing specifications** to community needs (application profiling)
- **Conformance testing** against existing specifications and standards

These services will exploit the current state of the art technology to serve the needs of the different communities who require a conformance model catering for their unique needs, while providing continuing interoperability with all the information systems involved in the process of education, learning and human resource management.

At a later date, EIFEL plans to deliver certification.

EIFEL (European Institute for E-Learning) launches an initiative dedicated to making Europe a world leader in the use of ePortfolio and learning technologies by providing support to interoperability across a variety of information systems, ensuring the permeability and the security of information flows among the different actors of education, training and human resource development. Such interoperability will be a major contribution to the transparency of qualifications and the mobility of workers in Europe as well as sustainable economic growth: *mobile information for mobile learners and knowledge workers.*

In order to achieve this aim, EIFEL will support a core network of professionals involved in learning technologies research, implementation and practice to support a wider community of professionals who, in Europe, are responsible for implementing ePortfolio and learning technologies.

EIFEL will provide the services required to support interoperability with other European initiatives such as Europass (Mobility, CV, Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement, Language Portfolio) in the different member states. It will initially demonstrate its ability through the implementation of the Europortfolio interoperability framework and build on and valorise the extensive work already carried out in Europe on interoperability of learning

To achieve this vision, EIFEL will address the following issues:

- **Lifelong portfolio for the learning citizen** – how can learners and citizens maintain a single set of data, *under their total control*, that will be accessed by a number of different services from different parties (professional body, employer, colleagues, awarding bodies, etc.) helping them to better plan their learning, value what they have achieved and ideally get recognition for their learning? We see the ePortfolio as the individual's 'personal content management system' allowing him/her to process, produce and share knowledge.
- **Interoperable ePortfolio for individual and organisational learning** – how can the ePortfolio be a tool to value learners, professionals and citizens; how can a network of interoperable portfolios contribute to community and organisational learning? How can various services (e.g. learning, employment) interact with ePortfolios to improve the quality of the service provision.

Interoperability and conformance testing

Ensuring interoperability is the responsibility of suppliers, buyers and authorities working together as a community. If there is no insistence on conformance to the specifications and standards that enable interoperability then the community will be at the mercy of the environment – the way individual developers and vendors choose to

Interoperability

“Different from ‘harmonisation’ which requires everybody to adopt the same solution, ‘interoperability’ is the approach where each party is sovereign over their own infrastructure development but agrees to expose those parts of their standards to others in such a way that adaptors can be

built to facilitate inter-connection. Interoperability does not force anyone to share anything that they do not want to, but rather provides standardised mechanisms by which things can be shared if there is a will so to do”.

Adapted from Peter F. Brown

technologies and ePortfolios.

The choice of the ePortfolio as principal vector for supporting and promoting interoperability in Europe is based on the fact that, while the 'traditional' approach to interoperability in the field of eLearning was addressed mainly as a local issue (how to make contents work 'locally' on a LMS or VLE), ePortfolios raise the issue of interoperability as a 'global' issue (how to make ePortfolios interoperate with a series of services across space and time).

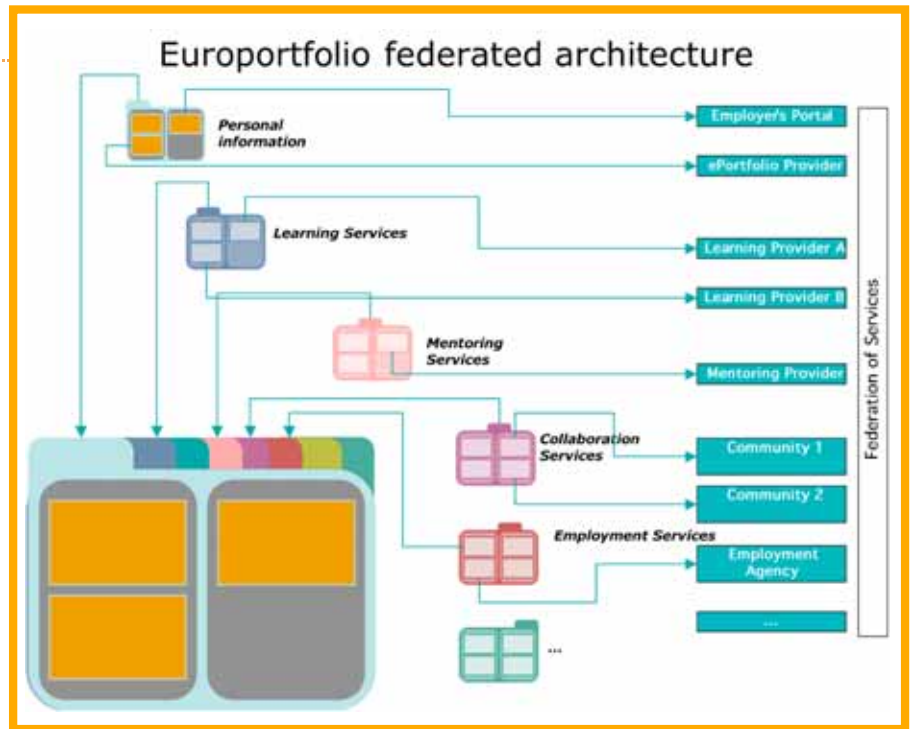
interpret standards.

100% interoperability can only be guaranteed when the products, content or services involved are physically tested working together, for example through a 'Plug-Fest'. Conformance testing against the standard or certification greatly increases the probability of conformant products working together. Because plug-fests involve considerable organisation and cost, test based conformance has become widely adopted as a satisfactory compromise.

Interoperability futures

Initially, the vision of ePortfolio interoperability was explored through a restricted model: an ePortfolio is contained in one place and in one place only. Interoperability was seen as the ability to export and import ePortfolio contents according to recognised specifications. While this functionality might be useful, e.g. when changing hosting systems of some ePortfolio parts, this model is inadequate with ePortfolio systems based on distributed heterogeneous contents, activated dynamically in many different information systems at every one time – education provider, professional body, employer, etc.

EIFEL will provide the services for implementing the ePortfolio interoperability framework (in schools, universities, human resources and lifelong learning) and supporting the community of ePortfolio practitioners in charge of the implementation of ePortfolio and ePortfolio-related systems **to ensure that ePortfolio systems and services are fully interoperable, thus allowing every European learning citizen to have one lifelong and lifewide ePortfolio (one distributed heterogeneous repository, with multiple views).**



Join EIFEL to be a leader in the field of learning technologies through interoperability

The federated approach will allow each member of the EIFEL community to use their own ePortfolio system(s) as a profiling service. This will therefore become a benchmark for interoperability between the different ePortfolio platforms and services – any ePortfolio system implementing all or

part of the interoperability framework should be able to interact with the services provided by EIFEL.

"Interoperability for all"

Making interoperability a reality

You are a school or university...

You are an organisation or company...

You are an eLearning publisher or a service provider

EIFEL can provide you and your professionals with resources and support to maximise the benefits of your learning infrastructure, through interoperability:

- A growing **community** of professionals in learning technologies and HR management interoperability
- **Diagnostics** – data exchange (IMS, HR-XML, Europass), web services, single sign on, federation of identities, federation of services (e.g. liberty Alliance, Shibboleth)
- **Conformance** testing against existing standards and specification
- **Consulting** and support



For more information

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