

An Introduction to Phoebe



What is Phoebe?

Phoebe is a Web-based *pedagogic planner tool*: that is, a purpose-built application that guides teachers through the construction of designs for courses (modules) and/or individual learning sessions. Intended initially for practitioners working in FE, HE and ACL, Phoebe brings together the key components of a learning design (or lesson plan), prompts teachers' thinking, allows them to record ideas and requirements, and makes it easy to cross-reference components as they design the activities that make up a learning experience. It offers both flexible and guided paths through the planning process, and provides access to a wide range of models, case studies and examples of innovative learning designs.

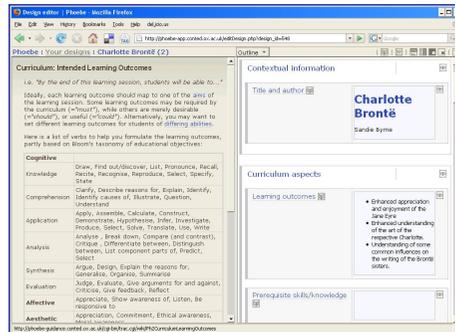
Phoebe was developed from 2006 to 2008 by a team from the Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning Unit at Oxford University and Oxford University Computing Services, with funding from the JISC Design for Learning programme.¹

How does Phoebe work?

Phoebe provides a simple authoring environment which allows the user to create learning designs from pre-defined templates. As the user works through a design they are supported by access to context-specific help, wider guidance and resources.

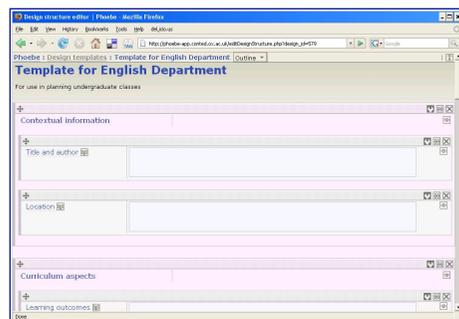
All learning designs created in Phoebe can be either kept private or shared with other users, and can provide the basis of, or inspiration for, other designs.

Currently, Phoebe outputs designs either in tabular format or as simple XML code that can be easily modified for a number of purposes.



Customisation in Phoebe

Recognising that both individuals and organisations differ in their requirements and preferences, we have designed Phoebe to be customisable in two ways: through the creation of bespoke templates and the ability to easily adapt or replace the supporting materials.



Templates give users complete freedom to define the structure they require for their learning designs, whether to meet institutional requirements or to suit personal preferences. Phoebe includes three "built-in" templates, from which users can create their own.

Phoebe's **guidance and support materials** are maintained in a wiki which is independent of the planning

interface. They can easily be replaced by alternative materials for specific groups of users, created either as additional pages in the Phoebe wiki or as an entirely separate set of Web pages.

¹ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/elp_designlearn.html

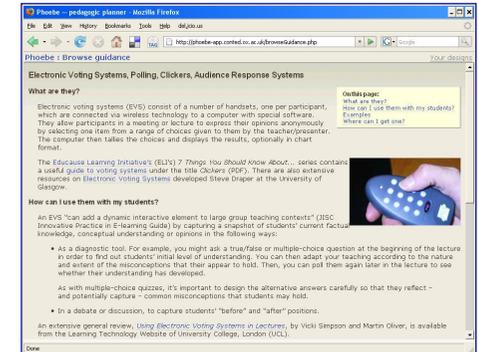
Towards a community of learning designers

Through its customisation features, and by providing access to a wide pool of shared designs, Phoebe has the potential to act as a focus for a "community" of learning designers. Since the tool does not yet contain the functionality needed to support such a community, key areas for investigation in this respect will include a more sophisticated "search" feature and richer forms of social ("Web 2.0") interaction, such as tagging and recommendations.

What people are saying about Phoebe

Since Autumn 2007 we have introduced Phoebe to a broad range of practitioners at workshops on staff-development and teacher-training programmes. Here are some of their comments:

- "It's the first planning tool of its kind that I can actually imagine using myself and recommending to colleagues."
- "I think this is very much the future of teaching and it makes lesson planning easier in the long term."
- "Having so much information in one place is an invaluable resource, especially to those who are not IT aware."
- "Guidance notes were particularly useful for enforcing theory behind each field in the planner."
- "It makes me think about lesson planning in a more structured way and could be used to give more guidance to other tutors teaching the same module on different sites. It also acts as a reminder of exactly what I did, while the reflections section offers a reminder to note what worked well and what needs revision."



Scenarios of use

Discussions with our evaluators have yielded a number of possible scenarios in which Phoebe might be used, including:

- An institution customises Phoebe in order to output plans in its in-house format, and to adapt the guidance so that users know exactly which tools they can use and the named individuals who can assist them.
- A subject centre customises Phoebe to support learning design within that particular domain: for example, to provide access to example learning designs for specific topics.
- A course team uses Phoebe in order to co-design, with students, a module of a Master's course in which students set their own learning objectives.

Phoebe in the present and future

Designing a pedagogic planner tool poses considerable challenges. However, by rooting our design in field-based research, and by deliberately focusing on a limited set of functions that tap into the current working practices of many teachers, we have developed in Phoebe a tool that can be used now to promote effective practice in learning design. Moreover, through evaluating Phoebe in the field, we are able to track real-world learning design practice and thus use it as a proving ground for future, more sophisticated, tools.

Further information

You can access the Phoebe tool at <http://www.phoebe.ox.ac.uk/>. For information about development, visit <http://phoebe-project.conted.ox.ac.uk>. For all other enquiries, please contact phoebe@conted.ox.ac.uk.