

# Short-listed entry for Formative e-Assessment



## SIMPLE (SIMulated Professional Learning Environment)

The SIMulated Professional Learning Environment (SIMPLE), developed at Strathclyde University, enables students to collaborate on professional simulations across professions, disciplines, countries and cultures, and at any educational level. The open-source software enables powerful interactions between simulated roles and users, and the completion of professional tasks.

Students learn by doing the professional tasks through innovative and authentic assessment, and by interpreting and reflecting upon their experiences. The result is situated experience that deepens learning, is hugely enjoyable for students, and fascinating for staff because it enables students to learn effectively using sophisticated technology and a constructivist approach to learning and assessment.

One of the initiatives formed was a virtual town, called Ardcalloch. Within this town were located the virtual law offices of postgraduate law students who interacted with resources and online fictional characters in order to complete legal transactions – for example buying and selling property over the web (Conveyancing) or winding up the estate of a deceased client of their firm (Private Client).

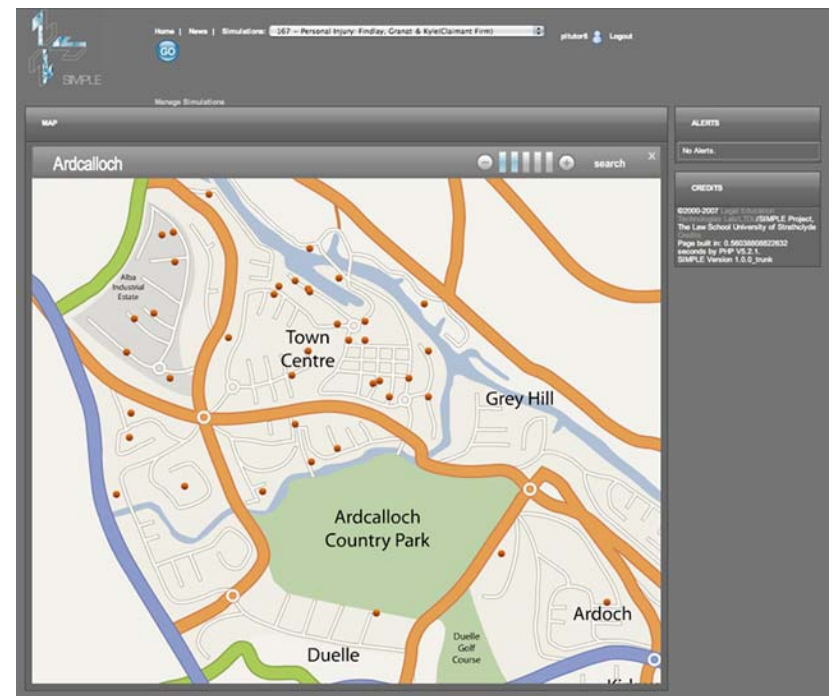


Figure 1: Map of Ardcalloch

In the SIMPLE environment students collaborate with each other on projects. In their collaborative groups (sometimes called 'firms') they are collectively responsible for their work, their transactions, their clients. They work on interdisciplinary client-based matters, communicating with their client, and adhering to ethical principles of good professional practice. They learn by performing transactions in the context of real-time information they receive, and by their own independent resource-based learning, which SIMPLE can support.

They learn from each other in reflective cycles, and with staff in new forms of interaction, eg 'surgeries' (intense, just-in-time feedback and commentary interventions with staff) and above all from the experience of interdisciplinary transactional learning.

We have developed a model of learning that explains and supports this environment - transactional learning. We define transactional learning in the following terms, as:

1. **active learning**
2. through performance in **authentic transactions**
3. involving **reflection in & on learning**,
4. deep **collaborative learning**, and
5. holistic or **process learning**,
6. with relevant **professional assessment**
7. that includes **ethical standards**

The SIMPLE platform requires no proprietary applications on the user's part allowing free/low-cost alternative tools to be used (e.g. OpenOffice.org instead of Microsoft Word), as well as the customizing features of these software tools.

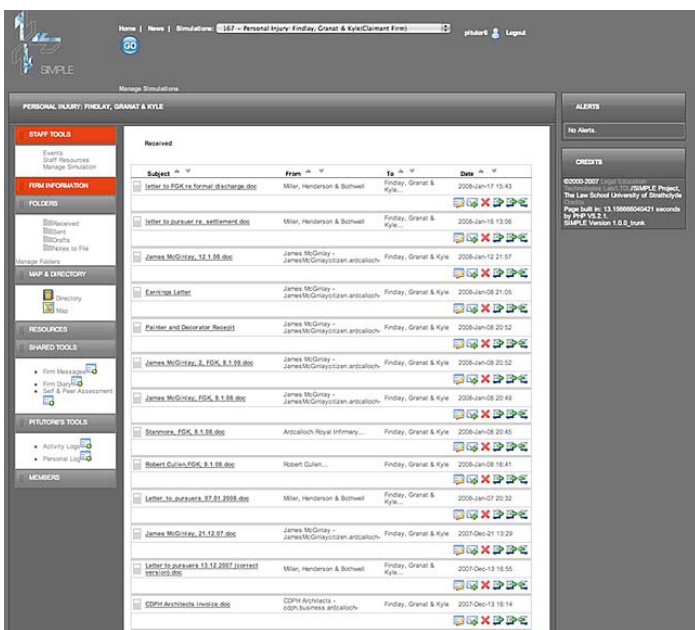


Figure 2: SIMPLE student environment

In addition, as a web-based application, users can access a SIMPLE server from any internet-connected location anywhere in the world. SIMPLE's modest system requirements also enable the deployment of the system in places without the latest hardware options, and in configurations that do not require access via internet (local wired/wireless networks).