

Free guide: Increasing staff and parental engagement with the Moodle VLE through SIMS integration

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Executive summary

Effectively engaging the school community in using the Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE), presents a variety of challenges. This guide looks at how integration of the VLE with an MIS system such as Capita SIMS can boost engagement among both staff and parents, and ultimately contribute to enhanced pupil achievement, better quality of teaching and more effective leadership and management.

Why is engagement important?

As many schools and colleges have come to realise in recent years, selecting and setting up a suitable VLE, or learning platform, is only the first step in a longer process of implementation leading up to a fully adopted and utilised solution.

All too often, this process breaks down after the initial work of installation and population is complete, resulting in an underused learning platform which has no positive impact on teaching and learning. Ensuring the buy-in of all key stakeholders is essential if the VLE is to fulfil its potential, provide value for money, and enhance the educational experience for the whole community.

The challenges in engaging stakeholders

Resistance to change

It's not uncommon to find resistance to adoption of a new system within an institution, especially if staff are unable to clearly see the value or benefits which use of the VLE would bring. In many cases, lack of adoption by staff leads to the VLE becoming stagnant, or to asymmetrical use of the VLE - where separate departments make use of the system to varying extents.

Perceived difficulty

One common issue affecting adoption of a VLE is the perception on the part of staff that the barrier to entry is high - i.e. that the difficulty or time investment required to learn how to use the platform outweighs the potential benefits of the system.

Lack of 'stamina'

Even where staff are initially keen to be involved and undergo training, unless daily use of the platform becomes a habit, engagement can quickly drop off.

Partial adoption

Another scenario is that the VLE is used by the majority of staff - but not to its full potential, for example, the system may only be used as a repository for the uploading of static content. Once this becomes the 'norm', staff and students alike are likely to underestimate the usefulness of the platform and engage with it only occasionally. This then represents a poor return on investment from the point of view of the school.

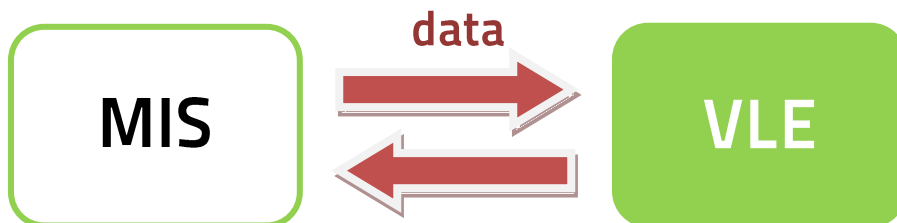
What is MIS integration?

(figure 1: types of integration)

Read only integration



Read-write integration



Integration of a VLE with a school MIS system is generally achieved via a read-only or a read-write interface (fig. 1). The difference between the two interfaces is in the level of functionality that is available.

Read only integration usually enables the VLE to pull certain data from the MIS system, such as details of pupils on roll, attendance data, and behavioural data, which can then be viewed by staff. This allows off-site access to such data.

Read-write integration additionally allows the VLE to send data back to the MIS system. This means staff can take the register via the VLE, upload behavioural notes after lessons, synchronise grades for work with the MIS system, all from any location with web access.

How can MIS integration help engage staff?

Familiarisation with the system

Read-write integration allows teachers to complete pupil registration/roll call via the VLE, and log notes on pupils' behaviour during lessons. Use of the VLE interface for these daily tasks familiarises staff with the system, and necessitates that they log in and navigate around the environment regularly - thereby maintaining engagement with the key areas of the system.

Saving time

Getting staff using the VLE on a daily basis is the best way to illustrate how the system can save them time - which is always an attractive prospect for busy teachers. Once staff become aware of the potential time savings related to daily tasks such as registration and marking, they may be more inclined to explore other features of the VLE, and seek more training on how to use these features.

Convenience

Availability of key MIS data off-site and the ability to update and modify that data via the VLE interface allows staff greater freedom and flexibility in their work.

How can MIS integration help engage parents?

Relevant real time data

Access to data on their child's attendance, behavioural record and attainment is of obvious value to parents and guardians. The ability to view this data in real time allows them to respond to any problems or concerns, or provide praise and encouragement, without having to wait for periodic reports from the school - encouraging parents to involve themselves more closely with their child's educational progress.

Convenience

The convenience of 24/7 web-based access to services is something which many of us have come to expect as standard in fields such as banking, shopping, and travel. Extending this provision to educational data allows parents to access the information they require at their convenience, via a variety of devices, which increases their motivation to use the service.

Self service

Parents who, for whatever reason, may be reluctant to proactively approach staff to discuss their child's progress, or who for reasons of time or geography are unable to meet with their child's teacher as often as they would wish, benefit from the self-service aspect of the data available via a fully integrated VLE/MIS system.

How does this increased engagement benefit schools?

Increasing engagement of staff and parents with the school's VLE benefits the whole community in a number of ways.

- The quality of teaching within school will be positively affected, not only by the extra time teachers gain to spend on planning lessons and creating resources, but by the improved access to key pupil data which allows them to better tailor their teaching to pupils' specific needs.

- Leadership and management is made easier with more options for reporting to parents, and greater visibility of up-to-date data on pupil progress.
- The increased involvement of parents in their child's day-to-day education via the VLE, in addition to the sharing of information between parents and staff, positively affects standards of behaviour and safety.
- A fully populated and well-used VLE system, which is championed by parents and teaching staff alike, is better able to inspire and engage pupils, leading to improvements in pupil achievement.

About Webanywhere

Established in 2003, Webanywhere began as a school website design company. Since then we have expanded our product range to include VLEs, e-portfolios and other e-learning tools, alongside curricular content.

We're an official Moodle Partner and Capita Technical Partner, as well as a Mahara Partner and Google Apps Authorised Reseller. Our product range supports schools in improving key metrics such as pupil achievement, quality of teaching, effective leadership and behavioural standards.

As of the end of 2011, we have delivered VLE and MIS integration solutions to over 300 schools across the UK.

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