

**Prepared by:** Uwe Matthias Richter

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## 1. Aim

This VLE Update summarises progress made during the current academic year in the development of the new VLE. It lists the VLE's current capabilities and those that are under development and due to be added during the remainder of the academic year. It contains brief reports on the progress in the "closed" and upcoming "open" pilots, then summarises the implementation strategies being developed in each of the five Faculties. The report concludes by identifying some of the continuing issues that are or require further attention

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The VLE Implementation Project started early last year with the objective to replace the current dated Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (WebCT 4.1) with an up-to-date and evolving Learning Management System (LMS). Our university took the decision to develop the new LMS as part of its IT infrastructure strategy based on the Microsoft SharePoint document management system and other Microsoft based or compatible applications.

## 3. Proposal

- 3.1 This is an update on the development on the new VLE so far and an outlook on the planned developments for this academic year.

## 4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is asked to **NOTE** this report and add further comments as necessary.

Name: Uwe Matthias Richter  
Title: Associate Director, INSPIRE

## VLE Update (January 2010)

### 1) Summary

This VLE Update summarises progress made during the current academic year in the development of the new VLE. Initially, it distinguishes work that falls within and out of scope of the University *VLE Implementation Project*. It lists the VLE's current capabilities and those that are under development and due to be added during the remainder of the academic year. It contains brief reports on the progress in the "closed" and upcoming "open" pilots, then summarises the implementation strategies being developed in each of the five Faculties.

The report concludes by identifying some of the continuing issues that are or require further attention. They refer to:

- Faculty staff
- Face-to-face Training and Online Support
- Blended and distance learning
- Developing VLE functionality
- E-assessment
- Integration with SITS
- Current WebCT users

### 2) Introduction

The VLE Implementation Project distinguishes between its three development phases:

**Phase 1:** Closed and Open pilots (September 2009 to August 2010)

**Phase 2:** Live System (September 2010 to August 2011).

This phase involves implementation on the live system with all functionalities developed and includes the transition from WebCT to the new VLE, integrated and tested during Phase 1. While WebCT will be available for the continuation of delivery of existing modules on WebCT, for new modules the new VLE is used. Academic staff currently using WebCT are expected to move to the new VLE as part of their Faculties' implementation strategy.

**Phase 3:** Post WebCT (September 2011 onwards). All modules are expected to be delivered using the new VLE. WebCT will remain only as archived provision for resit purposes and will be closed by the end of 2012.

The development of our University's learning technologies provision centres around the VLE Implementation Project. Alongside this, there are a number of developments that are not in scope but are being developed elsewhere.

- e-assessment in general including policies and guidelines and summative e-submission and e-portfolios in particular
- Online Module Definition Forms (MDF) and Module Guides
- Online Module Evaluation
- Processes around SITS and SITS data generation
- The use of technologies introduced as part of the VLE for wider university use e.g. the synchronous communication functionalities introduced with the Office Communication Server and the use of the media server beyond the limited VLE use.

In providing an update on all of these issues, it should be noted that there is no budget or resources currently earmarked for work that falls out of scope of the VLE Implementation Project.

### 3) VLE Technical Specifications - current

The current closed pilot version of the new VLE consists of the following functionalities:

- An editable homepage providing a template for basic module information and communication (module description, announcements, calendar) and a menu providing access to
- A Module Guide repository (intended to include the module guide and other module information)
- A Module Document repository
- Module Content (based on a website created with a wiki)
- A Shared Document repository (allows students to upload and share documents)
- A Discussion Forum
- A Wiki
- A module Blog (additionally, the closed pilots have also used student blogs)

### 4) Anticipated VLE Capability for September 2010

We are currently developing the following VLE functionalities and features:

- An enhanced module content provision based on a **Learning Path** approach (linear and managed access to documents, learning activities using different functionalities (e.g. wikis, blogs, etc.) and assessment (quizzes, formative e-submission)). An initial non-managed, basic version followed by an enhanced version (managed) is planned for staged implementation between February and April 2010.
- **Student Management System** which allows tracking of students and performance management. This functionality will be evolving as new and enhanced functionalities are added and integrated into the VLE. The initial version is planned for April 2010
- **Designer / Administration Interface** (building on lessons learned from pilot users), which will make the VLE more user-friendly for designers is planned for April 2010
- **Module Management**, including Automated Module Generation from SITS data as well as other Admin and Rollover/Backup processes are planned for staged implementation between January and April 2010.
- **Dropbox** capability with basic formative e-submission and feedback based on SharePoint workflow will be available by end of January 2010. With lessons learned, further development, and other options - e.g. based on the Assessment Management System – to be explored for further enhancement for staged implementation between January and April 2010.
- **Assessment Management System** – includes Quizzes, Tests and Exams as well as file submission – is planned to be phased in during February and March with final implementation by April 2010.
- **Synchronous Communication** (text, audio and video chat, interactive whiteboard and file sharing, etc.) based on Office Communication Server. This is a separate IT project. The implementation has been outsourced and planned for February 2010.
- **Media and Podcasting Support** – Integrated Podcasting and Media Serving within the VLE is planned for staged implementation between January and April 2010.

- **E-portfolio** – a separate project currently being researched and evaluated by INSPIRE. Implementation of an e-portfolio solution is planned for April 2010 depending on resources. (NB: not scope of the VLE Implementation Project)
- **Summative E-Submission** – currently not in scope of VLE project.

## 5) Phase 1 Pilots

### a) Closed Pilot

The Closed Pilot was established to run in Semester 1 to test the initial functionality of the new VLE. Consequently, a limited number of modules were included.

The Closed Pilot (Semester 1) is finishing and an evaluation process is about to be undertaken to establish successes, failures, opportunities and lessons for future phases.

We only had very few technical support calls which could be resolved. Overall the feedback was positive with the VLE being seen as easy to use with an attractive interface which is consistent with the Anglia Ruskin web presence.

126 students from 4 Faculties (FHSC, ALSS, FST, FOE) took part on this pilot. 16 modules tested the VLE capabilities, with 6 (from FHSC, ALSS, FOE) fully using the VLE for teaching purposes.

A full report of the staff and student evaluation is being compiled by INSPIRE.

### b) Open Pilot

Earmarked for Semester 2, participation in the Open Pilot has been opened to all Faculties and modules. Faculties would identify which modules would be included. The Pilot would test the developing functionality as they became available and the scalability of the live server.

The Open Pilot is now underway involving a wider spectrum of Faculties and teaching staff. Training and planning has either taken place or it is about to under the management of the INSPIRE Team.

Preparatory training for staff in FHSC commenced in December, and some 50 modules (ca. 2000 students) - mostly FHSC and some from ALSS and Education - are already identified to take part in this phase of the pilot with others expected to join following planning activities.

## 6) Strategic Planning with Faculties

1. The Learning and Teaching approach has been developed based on the following:
  - a. Experience and pedagogic planning at faculty management level using a PLAY-PLAN-PROCEED strategy i.e. PLAY (to become familiar with the new VLE), PLAN (to identify the pedagogic imperatives linked to Faculty learning and teaching objectives) and PROCEED (to identify particular Department / pathway strategies and specific training and support needs)
  - b. Identification of strategies suitable for individual departments/ pathways.

- c. Identification and provision of support for pathway teams to ensure a coherent experience for students.
  - d. The development of online training and support to augment face to face training and support.
2. INSPIRE have met or are scheduled to meet all faculty senior management teams to develop full implementation plans.
- a. **Health & Social Care:** A plan was developed in November and training for this commenced in December 2009 and will continue for this year. This includes training at Chelmsford, Cambridge, Fulbourn and Peterborough.
  - b. **Arts, Law and Social Sciences:** Meetings were held in December and a plan agreed and communicated. Training and support for implementation will take place from January and continue during the remainder of the academic year.
  - c. **Science and Technology:** The Faculty is participating in all pilot phases and a senior management meeting in January is intended to develop a full plan for training and implementation.
  - d. **Ashcroft International Business School:** A planning meeting is scheduled for January, where a full plan will be developed. It is anticipated that training and support will commence from February onwards.
  - e. **Education:** A planning meeting is scheduled for January, where a full plan will be discussed. It may transpire that the implementation strategy will roll into other ongoing curriculum developments being undertaken with the Faculty.

## 7) Ongoing issues

1. **Faculty Staffing:** The implementation of the new VLE in the Faculties will put increased pressure on staffing in Faculties and INSPIRE in order to satisfy the high training and support needs especially in the period from January until December 2010. It is therefore crucial that Faculties have dedicated staff (normally a learning technologist and learning and teaching advisors) to support and lead on this process.
2. **Face-to-face Training and Online Support:** INSPIRE is committed to lead and facilitate the PLAY-PLAN-PROCEED sessions with senior managers and initial sessions with teams of staff, but would then expect to hand over to the dedicated Faculty staff mentioned above. INSPIRE will develop and provide generic training materials in different media format (print-based and online interactive), which can be customised by Faculties. Ongoing training and support will continue with earmarked Faculty staff with implementation responsibilities and, as necessary, with pathway and course teaching teams.
3. **Technology-Enhanced Learning:** The main focus of the initial implementation of the new VLE will be on blended learning. Distance learning will need to be addressed separately as developments in this area are likely to involve higher and tailored training and support needs.
4. **Developing Functionalities:** In order to achieve a fully functional Learning Management System a number of functionalities need to be developed, added and integrated. Some will involve bespoke development by ISMS and INSPIRE (e.g. learning path, student management system, designer / administration interface) whilst others are self-contained systems and applications that need to be integrated (e.g. assessment management system, synchronous communication, e-portfolio, media

server). Each of these developments need dedicated resources. We have therefore prioritised these developments (see under 3).

5. **E-Assessment including E-submission (pilots) and e-Portfolio:**

- E-assessment in particular multiple choice and matching question **quizzes, tests and exams** have been used in our university by a small but active group of academics. However while there is expertise in quiz items (question) creation and test delivery, there are no policies managing the use of summative online tests and exams so far. Additionally support materials and guidelines need to be developed.
- **E-submission** in particular summative assignment submission is a high priority but involves a number of processes currently undertaken by the iCentre and / or academic staff that will need to be translated into an electronic process. This development is normally led by the Academic Office.
- **E-Portfolio** – the need for an e-portfolio solution has been identified to support work / practice-based learning, process or project based assessment, patchwork text assessment and PDP. INSPIRE is currently undertaking a needs analysis to generate the business requirements and intends to run pilots with selected e-portfolio solutions.

(NB: E-assessment is not in the scope of the VLE Implementation Project)

6. **SITS:** In order to automate the setting up of modules on the VLE and populate these with student and staff data, data from SITS needs to be provided in an accurate and timely fashion. There are a number of known problems and addressing these are a very high priority. Similar to the My.Anglia portal the new VLE relies on Active Directory and SITS data to be accessed. A solution will be required to be implemented for the beginning of the next academic year
7. **WebCT:** At present, around 20% of modules make some use of WebCT in support of module delivery. As described in the Introduction, from September 2011 WebCT will no longer be available (apart from as an archive for resit students). Faculties are encouraged to transfer module content from WebCT to the new VLE for the start of the academic year 2010-11; however, in order to assist the focus of attention on developing an online presence for all modules in the new VLE, faculties may wish to retain some WebCT modules during 2010-11. There will be sufficient server space to undertake this; however VLE support and training will be focused on the new VLE.
8. **VLE issues that are not in the scope of the current VLE Implementation Project:** The development of our University's learning technologies provision centres around the VLE Implementation Project. Alongside this, there are a number of developments that are not in scope but in addition are being developed;
- e-assessment in general including policies and guidelines and summative e-submission and e-portfolios in particular
  - Online Module Definition Forms (MDF) and Module Guides
  - Online Module Evaluation
  - Processes around SITS and SITS data generation
  - The use of technologies introduced as part of the VLE for wider university use e.g. the synchronous communication functionalities introduced with the Office Communication Server and the use of the media server beyond the limited VLE use.

Currently, there is no budget or resources earmarked for work that falls out of scope of the VLE Implementation Project. These developments require further consideration.