

Schools

January 2008

Becta leading
next generation
learning

Personalising learning in a connected world

A guide for school leaders



www.becta.org.uk/schools/personalisinglearning

Personalising learning

Personalising learning is critical to the next generation of education. Many of the elements that go into it will be familiar, but it's important to see how those elements fit together to form a bigger picture. In this guide we'll focus on clarifying the role of learning platforms in particular and direct you to the resources you'll need to plan and implement that technology more effectively.



Making it personal

Personalising learning is at the centre of national aspirations for education. It's about creating the means to understand and support the learning needs of every student, monitoring his or her progress closely. It requires the development of learning paths that best suit particular aptitudes, underpinned by a commitment to help every student achieve his or her potential.

'Learning platforms' are critical to these ambitions. A learning platform integrates learning and school management systems. It requires some technology building blocks, but it also demands a refocusing of school administration processes and teaching practices around the vision of personalising learning.

The government wants every school to be making full use of learning platforms by 2010. An interim goal is for learners in every school to have access to a safe and secure personal online learning space by March 2008. This space must offer:

- anytime/anywhere access to the learning resources created and stored by or for the student
- communication tools (email, messaging etc) to enable dialogue between a student's peers and mentors
- management tools to monitor and assess progress.

With a learning platform:

- students can work at their own pace, at the times and in the environment in which they can be most productive
- teachers can work more closely with individual students' abilities and interests, helping to improve engagement even with disaffected students
- co-ordination and sharing of resources with other schools can be simplified
- administration tasks are streamlined, saving time and reducing costs.

You'll find examples of how these benefits can work in practice later in this booklet.



What Becta is doing

Personalising learning and the learning platforms that support the process are about much more than technology. They will bring changes to practically every aspect of school life, for students, staff and management. Because these changes go so deep, each school must have the flexibility to develop the solution that best suits its circumstances.

What we can do is ensure the tools available are fit for purpose and promote the best possible understanding of what effective practice can look like.

Becta is responsible for the technology strategy to support personalising learning. We have developed that strategy and are now taking an active role supporting its implementation, helping to ensure its benefits can be fully realised.

We're co-ordinating the development of a national digital infrastructure. We're working closely with local authorities, regional broadband consortia, educationalists, developers and suppliers. Through this work we have defined the Learning Platform Services Framework, setting clear functional requirements and specifications. By establishing these common standards we can help ensure that schools have cost-effective access to the right tools, products and services.

We're creating practical guidance on issues such as procurement and e-safety.

We're working closely with teaching professionals to develop guidance for teachers, as well as guidance to support the changes in management processes that will allow you to make the best use of these technologies and tools.

More generally we're working with Partnerships for Schools and other government agencies to promote a common vision for the transformation of education through personalising learning. This vision sits at the heart of our continuing engagement with schools and learners to develop a mature understanding of how tools such as learning platforms can work to bring better outcomes for learners.



Personalising learning in practice

Because personalising learning touches on many aspects of education it's not always easy to see the different ways in which it could change what you do in your school. Even when you look for practical examples, no single school's experience is going to offer a complete insight. It's important then to look at multiple ways in which this approach has brought benefits in diverse environments.

- Acklam Whin Primary School joined the Middlesbrough Grid for Learning (a local authority initiative), capitalising on its ability to offer a customised learning platform for each school in the area. The results include more effective communication between teaching staff, and online homework management to the point where "it's not uncommon for pupils to email their teacher to ask for homework".
- Coopers Technology College successfully deployed a learning platform in January 2005. With centralised communication and consistent filing of learning resources, the learning platform created more efficient sharing between students and college staff.



- Crocketts Lane Primary School saw its learning platform as a better way to build and share resources but also as a key technology for enabling home-school links. Their solution uses a combination of products to deliver resources and a fully customisable desktop to all users in each school.
- Eastbury High Comprehensive School moved from an unsatisfactory VLE to a learning platform to unite a range of learning systems into one coherent structure.
- Stratford-upon-Avon High School incorporated the We-Learn system to create an environment where staff could place materials themselves using simple tools, or with support from a full-time virtual learning assistant. The web-based system ensured that pupils, parents and staff could access resources and information from any internet-connected computer.
- For Warren Junior School, curriculum co-ordination among teachers was a significant problem. The school turned to a solution that gave the management control to ensure that staff members were taking a consistent approach. All staff and pupils could also access curriculum content conveniently.
- Whitehouse Common Primary School urgently needed a solution to the communication problems that arose from merging schools. The web-based Birmingham Grid for Learning (BGfL) Plus system offered that solution. Not only did the system create a common resource base, but staff, parents and governors could access information from anywhere at any time.

What you should be doing

The move to personalising learning, a core part of Every Child Matters, The Children's Plan and other initiatives, aims to bring about closer partnerships between school, the home and the wider community.

To realise the benefits of how technology can support personalising learning you need to look closely at your school's current capabilities and incorporate this into your development plan.

This planning should include ways to build the confidence and capabilities of all staff in your school. It's likely to involve early consultation with schools who have already implemented successful elements of a learning platform and who could be working profitably with you on an effective deployment.

This work should be at the heart of your school development plan. It's likely to involve:

- discussion with your local authority or schools networks about their plans for learning platforms
- auditing your current vision, use of ICT and planning for development, assisted by tools such as Becta's self-review framework
- developing a revised vision for teaching and learning with ICT through engagement with the senior management team, teachers, governors, parents and learners
- defining requirements of a learning platform by completing the learning platform functionality tool
- consulting with the local authority to explore the procurement options under the Becta learning platforms services framework
- exploring the support available from the National College for School Leadership and others to manage the change process.

Further information



For all information about learning platforms including functional requirements, implementation and how they can help you

www.becta.org.uk/schools/learningplatforms

Visit our website for guidance about how to get started and to help you make some key decisions on how you are going to engage with the self-review framework

www.becta.org.uk/schools/selfreview

A Becta tool, 'learning platform functionality' enables you to conduct a self-evaluation benchmark against other users and develop an action plan. To access this tool go to our website <http://matrix.becta.org.uk> and click on ICT Infrastructure and then Learning Platform functionality

Leadership programmes from the NCSL offer a wealth of opportunities to reflect on your own practice, work with colleagues, coaches and mentors, visit other schools, carry out research and explore the latest thinking on school leadership at your level

www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes

For information on ensuring effective use of data visit the learning platform and information management community at our website

<http://communities.becta.org.uk/learningplatformsandmis>

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