

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Service Statement for Institutional Virtual Learning Environment

Approved by Information Policy and Strategy Committee (IPSC) on 26 February 2014

The core elements of the service are: academic technologist and Moodle support roles; Moodle e-learning platform; associated technical infrastructure (storage, identity management, hosting)

The Moodle platform was selected after considering a number of criteria: maturity and feedback from HE sector; alignment with partner institutions; vendor/community structure and approach; compatibility with existing technologies; cost. It was viewed as a dynamic, community driven solution with teaching and learning at the core of its development ethos. It came with a reputation for meeting HEI needs and with demonstrable success in a number of similar institutions.

In proposing the initial solution, (it was always envisaged that an initial implementation would be continuously developed once the user community became established and more familiar with operational issues), the importance of creating a number of support roles was emphasised. This resulted in the creation of a Moodle support team, complementing other, (more generic), roles in the Academic Technology team.

The core technology platform and support team became fully operational in November 2012.

Subsequently, the team and platform have developed significantly. Integration with other systems (especially the student records system SITS, web sign-on, SiteBuilder, various directories) has grown and is expected to continue. The support team has grown and it is anticipated that it will grow further as demand and uptake increases.

Investment in the platform and team is substantial and the whole service is now considered a core part of University capability. Continuation of the service is assumed within the 5 year plan submitted by IT Services. The use of the Moodle platform is also assumed and there is no prospect (barring seismic shifts in the software landscape) for any move away from this platform. For the next 5YP round IT Services are proposing additional resource for the Moodle team – plus further investment in a number of complementary products (e.g. Mahara portfolio software).

The early success of the approach, and anticipated further investment in it, should not mask the fact that there are some areas of disagreement and operational concern. In recommending investment and improvements in the institutional virtual learning environment, no mandate or obligation was made to departments on the adoption or selection of VLE tools. Some departments expressed a desire not to adopt Moodle, or even not to adopt a VLE at all. This presented a further problem in as much that some administrative processes, touching on teaching activities, required urgent attention (e.g. coursework management). Therefore additional administration focused solutions were developed. There is some overlap of functionality between these tools (mainly the Tabula product) and Moodle and this has caused some confusion for departments – especially those wishing to use Moodle - over which product to use for certain functions. Outside of this area of duplication and some confusion – there are also disagreements on retention policies, pedagogical practise, activity/performance monitoring etc. However, it should be stressed that while such disagreements do exist, they are more the symptoms of a maturing capability rather than a fundamental problem. While the institution continues to prefer a combination of

'requirement' to carry out certain processes but leaves an element of choice on how those operations are carried out (e.g. there must be a systematic approach to coursework management, but the choice of system is left open), then it will be necessary to provide a number of solutions to meet departmental needs ("we want a systems solution to coursework management, but we don't want a full VLE").

It should be made clear that, within the IT Services team, there is no confusion or uncertainty over the importance of, or commitment to, the Moodle platform. It is recognised as a powerful, valuable, strategic platform. However, it is also recognised that, like all other software solutions, it does not solve all problems and there is a need to supplement the product with other solutions (especially for those departments not using a VLE or Moodle). Our responsibility is to provide the solutions needed by the whole community, within the resources provided by the University.

Mike Roberts
Director of Campus Services and IT
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