
Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 28 September 2009
Subject: Use of Harnessing Technology funding to support transition to web based MIS in schools
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: To agree use of Harnessing Technology funding to support transition to web MIS.

Contact Officer: Cathy Piotrowski, ICT/MIS, Learning & Support
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Reason for urgency (if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To approve the recommendation that Harnessing Technology funding is used to support schools in the transition to a web based Management Information System (MIS).**

Background

1. There is a national requirement for schools to integrate their management information systems (MIS) with the learning platform (VLE) and to provide online reporting to parents (Secondaries from 2010, Primaries from 2012). The data requirements for online reporting are prescribed to include attainment, progress, attendance, behaviour and special educational needs where appropriate.

These data integration and online reporting requirements offer an opportunity for the local authority to take an innovative and co-ordinated approach to MIS development.

The e-Learning Strategy team has consulted with schools on an MIS strategy for schools and the LA which:

- a) responds comprehensively to the challenge of these national requirements;
- b) supports the developing Transforming Learning and Teaching agenda;
- c) recognises the need for appropriate, timely data in effective monitoring, analysis, decision-making and intervention; and

- d) promotes online reporting for senior management teams in schools and for local authority staff to support the authority's key objectives of narrowing the gap and raising attainment.

This MIS strategy advocates two key objectives:

- i) establish one web-based MIS system for all schools which will, in due course integrate with the learning platform and with the local authority's Tribal central pupil database; and
- ii) achieve online reporting for parents via the learning platform, i.e that parents alongside their children access the same learning platform for information irrespective of which school the pupils attend.

- 2. There are two main management information systems in use in schools (Sims.net and Integris). Schools have traditionally paid for their MIS from their own school budgets. The main MIS holds standardised pupil and attendance data. Assessment, behaviour and SEN data are held in a variety of different software.

Contractual arrangements, individual preferences, transition and ongoing maintenance costs, and in some cases, resistance to change, have been prohibitive factors for schools in switching suppliers/systems and achieving best value for money.

Update on progress

- 3. We are now approaching the end of a year long consultation period with schools. Feedback from this consultation suggests that the Lower/Nursery phase schools are in a far more ready state of acceptance of the need to transfer to a web MIS than the Middle/Upper phases. Additionally, web MIS for the primary sector is far better developed and tested than that for the secondary environment. Upper schools will not transfer to a web MIS unless all the critical functionality is available (eg; timetabling; exams).

Schools also reported their reluctance to change without effective central support from the LA to deal with transition and training needs. Many schools are not prepared to take on the high level of risk associated with implementing a change of MIS system on their own as an individual organisation when they are reliant upon their MIS to perform a number of statutory returns each term.

Schools also acknowledged that data and access security is of paramount importance. The technical expertise required to appropriately manage the security aspects of data integration and accessibility cannot be realistically resourced by each individual school.

- 4. Currently, work is being undertaken to renew the schools broadband network. It is envisaged that this work will be completed by December 2009. This new network will give all schools a unique connection to the core allowing greater bandwidth and better resilience.

The majority of lower schools and all the nursery schools use the classic Integris software as their main MIS. It is anticipated that software development for this MIS will cease from Summer 2010.

5. The MIS Strategy objectives and intended outcomes were presented to the by the CFL Management Team meeting on 11th August 2009. The meeting approved the strategy and agreed that a portion of the Harnessing Technology Grant should be used to fund the transition costs on behalf of schools for the first year to help schools with the transition.

It was also agreed that implementation of a web MIS for the lower and nursery phases should be pursued in the first instance. A review of the web MIS software for the secondary phase will be undertaken once suitably tested software is available.

The retained element of the Harnessing Technology Grant for 2009-2010 amounts to £705K. It is envisaged that an approximate cost of implementing a web MIS for Lower and Nursery schools will be in the region of £155K. This amount falls within the savings accrued since April 2009 through negotiation with suppliers for aggregated purchasing.

Harnessing Technology Grant

6. The Harnessing Technology Grant is directed by BECTA on behalf of the DCSF and is designed to support a step change in the way technology is used to improve and develop services in response to the needs of children and young people.

The fund is explicitly for supporting purchases of ICT infrastructure and equipment or upgrades, as well as software and digital curriculum resources according to local priorities. As a reminder of the scope in which the funding can be used to achieve ICT targets, the spend criteria is reproduced below for information:

- Broadband services
- Learning Platforms, email services and personal storage areas
- Simplified sign-on for users
- Parental reporting
- Integration of learning and management systems
- High quality digital learning resources
- ICT Mark and Self-Review Framework

7. In March 2008, the Schools Forum (under the previous Bedfordshire County Council authority) approved the recommendation for the LA to retain 60% of the Harnessing Technology funding to allow for greater efficiencies from aggregated purchasing on behalf of schools for the 3 year funding cycle.

The Harnessing Technology Grant has funded the purchase of the Netmedia learning platform for all schools and the deployment of central support resources to help schools effectively implement and develop this step change in teaching and learning.

Notably, the LA has achieved national recognition for this approach.

8. The initial investment in securing a single MIS system as a single, uniform and consistent data source for all Lower schools will help to maximise benefits of future investments with regard to achieving data integration, single sign-on and parental reporting. Taking this approach will also maximise benefits for majority of schools and for the local authority in achieving economies of scale through joint working.

Using the Harnessing Technology funding for this purpose will also meet BECTA's recommendations in the following areas:

- purchasing carried out at a local authority level achieves better value;
- schools are best supported when 'buying in' to a managed service based solution which incorporates support for transition, implementation, helpdesk support and maintenance;
- schools can focus valuable school resources on teaching and learning rather than managing and supporting ICT; and
- joint ownership between the schools and the LA of the management and co-ordination of software development to achieve better efficiency and effectiveness in linking MIS to raising standards.

Next Steps

9. Once Harnessing Technology funding is secured:
 - a decision is made as to the most appropriate web MIS for lower schools;
 - a Project Initiation Document which outlines the transition plans is drafted;
 - resources for central support; and
 - commence a phased implementation.

Appendices: None