

CABINET

28 SEPTEMBER 2010

GATEWAY 4 CONTRACT MANAGEMENT - LEARNING PLATFORM

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Les Wicks, Children's Services

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Summary

This report seeks to detail the management of the Learning Platform contract to date and how the project is meeting the intended objectives.

1. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

1.1 The objective of this procurement was to procure a learning platform in response to government policy and targets. Specifically it targeted this Learning Technologies Priority for 2007 -2008:

'Personalising learning: pupils in every school should have access to an online personalised learning space that has the potential to support e-portfolios by March 2008.'

1.2 The following expectation was also set by the then DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). It should be noted that the DCSF has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DfE):

'By spring 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) expects you, the local authority, to have ensured that all of your learners have access to a personal online learning space. You have been given the responsibility (and the funding) for ensuring that this initial element of a learning platform is made available to all of your schools.'

1.3 For the purpose of supporting local authorities, Becta completed an OJEU process to set up an EU compliant 'Learning Platform Services Framework'. Medway carried out a mini competition using this framework to select the most appropriate contractor to fulfill the requirements of Medway schools and to offer best value.

1.4 As a result of this process Uniservity were awarded the contract. Uniservity are now supplying a learning platform to 83 primary schools, 6 special

schools, one secure training unit and 12 secondary schools. Of the remaining schools 2 primary schools are yet to implement their platform and 5 secondary schools have chosen to implement an alternative platform.

1.5 This project has been classified as high risk, therefore, this is a matter for Cabinet.

2. RELATED DECISIONS

2.1 185/2007 The Cabinet agreed the procurement of a learning platform for Medway Schools using the Becta (British Education, Communication & Technology Agency) Learning Services Framework.

27/2008 The Cabinet approved the selection of Uniservity as the preferred tenderer for the provision of a Learning Platform.

3. BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

3.1 What is a learning Platform?

‘A learning platform is a collection of tools that are designed to support learning, teaching, management and administration.’

3.2 Some examples of the tools available within a learning platform are:

- Forums which provide a space for online discussion.
- Wikis, an online area where learners or staff can collaborate and contribute to the joint collection of information/knowledge. These are very similar in function to Wikipedia.
- A survey tool, which is very useful for obtaining opinions of learners – pupil voice.
- A blog tool, an online diary which can be used by pupils to reflect on their learning.
- A quiz tool, which can support the checking of pupil understanding before, during or at the end of a topic to allow the teacher to address misconceptions.
- Weblinks, which provide a quick and easy way for useful websites to be made available for learners.
- The podcast and sound clip tools allow the creation of sound files which can be published or listened to online.
- The task tool which allows the setting of timed tasks with associated resources for learners and the opportunity for learners to hand in and teachers to record marks electronically.
- A range of learning resources in different file formats can be loaded onto the learning platform for learners, for example still image, video, sound, word processing, spreadsheet and presentations.

3.3 Objectives of the procurement

3.3.1 This report sets out to provide information on the contract management and post project review for the Learning Platforms project.

3.3.2 The implementation of the learning platform was planned to support in:

- meeting the targets set at the time by the DCSF
- providing a set of tools to enhance learning and teaching in Medway schools with a particular reference to personalisation
- enabling efficient and effective delivery of 14-19 Diploma programmes in a range of centres across Medway.

3.3.3 The then DCSF had set the following targets:

'Personalising Learning; Integrated learning and management systems; each school should be planning to provide an integrated learning and management system that conforms to Becta guidance, with their full implementation by 2010.'

3.3.4 The project was therefore to specify and procure a learning platform for Medway schools, allowing for functionality within school and collaboration between a variety of centres in Medway.

3.4 Procurement process

3.4.1 For the procurement process, a mini competition was carried out using the Becta Learning Services Framework suppliers.

- Tenders were invited from the 10 contractors on the Becta Learning Services Framework through a mini competition process, therefore ensuring the process was compliant with the Becta Learning Platform Services Framework Agreement. Invitation to tender documents were issued on 14 November 2007. The deadline for submissions was 2.00pm Wednesday 5 December 2007.
- There was a 70% submission rate. Written notification was received from the other 30% of suppliers confirming that they chose not to submit a response.
- The first phase of the tender evaluation process was an evaluation of written responses. The evaluation team comprised of Senior Adviser Secondary, ICT Adviser, representative from Corporate ICT and E Learning Project Officer. As advised in the tender documents issued, the 3 highest scoring contractors were selected to go forward to the second phase of the evaluation comprising of supplier presentations and a product evaluation including learner testing in school settings.
- Supplier presentations: Each shortlisted tenderer was invited to present their solution to a representative selection of stakeholders. Each contractor had the opportunity to present to an audience of primary phase stakeholders and an audience of secondary phase and college stakeholders; this provided the opportunity to tailor their presentations to the specific phase and thereby enable the evaluation to take true account of the solutions across all age ranges. For each audience,

suppliers had 10 minutes to set up (with technical support on hand if needed), 45 minutes to present their solutions and an additional 15 minutes specifically allocated for questions. Sample feedback forms used by the stakeholders had been sent to all tenderers in advance of the shortlisting. Feedback from the presentations was collated and used to inform the revisiting of evaluation scores from Phase 1.

- The following stakeholders were invited to attend the day:
 - Evaluation team
 - Headteacher or their representative from each school
 - Representatives from Mid Kent College and Work based Learning providers
 - A range of stakeholders from a variety of areas of the educational community in Medway including: Connexions, Learning and Skills Council, Diploma Development Managers, 14-19 team, Social Inclusion Manager and The Old Vicarage.
- Product testing - learner evaluation: Each shortlisted tenderer was required to provide pupil logins for Y2, Y6, Y8 and Y10 pupils. Pupils were asked to complete a series of tasks under set conditions, supervised by an evaluator. The range of tasks set had been sent to tenderers prior to shortlisting. Pupils completed a feedback form for each supplier and this feedback was used to inform the revisiting of evaluation scores from phase 1.

3.5 Award of contract

3.5.1 The contract for implementation of a learning platform in Medway was awarded to Uniservity as approved under Cabinet Decision number 27/2008 (29 January 2008).

3.6 Length of contract

3.6.1 The length of the contract is 3 years with an option to extend for up to 2 years.

3.7 Value of contract

- 3.7.1 The value of the contract is made up of two parts,
- the initial implementation costs of £300 000 externally funded from the DCSF grant
 - the annual revenue costs for the service, funded by schools who have taken up the service – this is £60 000 in total for all the schools for the 3 years of the contract.

4. MANAGEMENT OF THE CONTRACT/ BENEFITS REALISATION

How the contract achieved the initial objectives of the business case:

- 4.1 The procurement process and award of contract to Uniservity has enabled us to meet the targets set at the time by the DCSF by ensuring there is provision for all learners to have access to an online learning space.
- 4.2 The tools and functionality offered by the Uniservity learning platform meet the needs of schools very closely in terms of enhancing learning and teaching. Some examples of the ways schools are already using the functionality for this purpose are:
- Forums for pupil voice
 - Wikis for construction of knowledge linked to topics
 - Using the functionality to be able to offer a range of different types of resources to learners
- 4.3 The Medway LA Hub, also known as 'Learning In Medway' has been acting as a focal point for learning, across the authority since September 2009. The hub has sections for curriculum, professional development, partnerships and special educational projects.
- 'How Green Is Your School?' is a very successful project that focuses on ecological issues and is designed to help schools to explore their current 'green' contribution and develop strategies to help to improve their local environment. Additionally, all schools that successfully complete the project will qualify for the Eco-Schools Bronze award, and in many cases will be well on the way to their Silver qualification.
 - A new project for Gifted and Talented students, 'Unlocking The Secret Code' is designed to target a variety of curriculum subjects such as English, Art, Engineering, Mathematics and Music. This project will run from September 2010 and will be open to schools of all key stages. Due to the success of 'How Green Is Your School?' and the high take-up for 'Unlocking The Secret Code' we are planning a longer-term programme of projects to enable schools to continue to support the learning of Medway students in a wide range of schools and key stages.
- 4.4 A Learning Platform 'hub' has been operating for the 14 -19 Diploma lines and has proved invaluable in delivering these qualifications. This public area of the hub is being used as a central resource for accessing a range of resources for parents, employers, teachers and institutions. It is also being used to raise the profile of key resources, for example the Medway 14-19 Area Prospectus, the Medway Individual Learning Plan and the DCSF Diploma Website.
- 4.5 Most schools are now using the 'Medway 2012' Hub across the Authority and those working with it have undergone appropriate training. The Medway 2012 Hub is central to the overall co-ordination of the 'Our Medway: Counting down to London 2012' project and a major part of the developing Medway 'Sports Academy'. The Hub is used to support these projects in the following ways:
- 'Our Medway – Counting down to London 2012': The platform supports the co-ordination of the project through the sharing of key dates, news and information relevant to the organisation of the project. Project co-ordinators are now beginning to use the hub to support each other independently of the universal support.

- The 2012 Sports Academy: The platform is used to co-ordinate the sports coaches and share information with the academy athletes.
- 4.6 There is also a continuing role for the learning platform supporting Medway's link with China, enabling sharing of resources between schools and links with schools in China that have been visited by school parties.
- 4.7 Parental Engagement
- Uniservity have developed a Parental Portal that will enable any participating schools to engage parents and provide them with online reporting facilities.
 - A pilot of the system is planned to begin at the start of the 2010/11 academic year.
- 4.8 The learning platform is successfully meeting the needs of all phases of education as intended at the outset of the procurement. Some examples of this are:
- **KS1**
 - Using the sound recorder tool to create resources to support parental engagement with the learning and teaching of phonics
 - Uploading multimedia slideshows to celebrate children's work publicly
 - Learners are keen to share what they have been learning in school with their parents. This has had the impact of encouraging parental involvement in some areas where this has traditionally been more difficult to achieve.
 - The learning platform is already showing some impact on the achievement of children with English as an additional language. They are able to record speech into the learning platform in their own language.
 - The learning platform is also supporting young children with their speaking and listening skills. With the sound recorder they are eager to record themselves speaking until they achieve perfection. Children whose reading and writing skills are not yet well developed can talk about and show their learning using sound, image and video.
 - **KS2**
 - Learners have been creating 'hypertext' adventure stories, where those engaging with the stories can make choices about what happens next.
 - Learners have been creating 'Harry Potter' type newspapers where they embed moving images.
 - Using the wiki tool to create a wiki about 'Old Gillingham' and to make this a public resource which can be shared by the community.
 - The survey tool has been used to sample learner opinion of how they feel about school.
 - The forum tool has been used to engage learners with curriculum areas such as mathematics, where learners have been setting

challenging problems for each other to solve and where they can enjoy talking about maths.

- **KS3/4**

- Use of the forums and survey tools for school council groups to collaborate and gauge pupil voice across the school. This allows the group to work together between 'official' meeting times. This has had a positive impact on the self esteem of some learners who often find it difficult to succeed in other areas.
- Use of the task tool to set work for groups of pupils – this includes making available a range of resources, a forum for pupils to support each other and the opportunity for pupils to hand work in electronically.
- In Y12 and Y13, learners have been given a blank wiki at the beginning of each new topic. As they progress through the topic, learners have contributed to the wiki to develop their knowledge. The wiki provides the opportunity for peer assessment in the form of constructive criticism and amendment of others entries on the wiki.
- Learners use forums to discuss the content of GCSE and A Level essays before writing. This has added a depth and breadth of discussion within the essays.

- **14-19 Diplomas**

- Resources, images and videos of work placements are being developed which will be used to support future students.
- Simulating work-based learning, as tasks set can be timed this can simulate the work experience of needing to think on your feet and adapt to different circumstances or information.
- Shared resources, including schemes of work, handouts, blogs, wikis and markbooks can be accessed by staff and students in any institution
- Resources uploaded for learners to share across different schools
- Electronic markbooks are helping to develop collaborative ways of tracking students across institutions. This also makes student assessment easier as student progress can be monitored centrally.
- Using the forums for learners to upload work so that their peers can comment and offer constructive feedback (peer assessment).
- Using the sound recorder tool to offer verbal feedback by the teacher on learners work. Learners often find this much more useful than written feedback.

5. CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

5.1 The project has come out well within budget. Formal client & contractor monitoring meetings take place bimonthly. Aspects of the contract which are reviewed are:

- Service desk reports: whether response times fall within the SLA
- Usage: number of total users & number of unique user logins

- Disk space
 - Availability of the service.
- 5.2 In addition the following aspects are covered:
- Review of implementation progress
 - User issues/grievances/requirements
 - Future planning
 - Product updates
 - Development requests.
- 5.3 During the implementation phase of the project, the progress of the roll out against plans was also reviewed to ensure targets were being met. In addition to client & contractor monitoring meetings, school progress in using the learning platform has also been reviewed to ensure change management issues are being addressed appropriately. The feedback from schools has been positive.
- 5.4 The following cashable and non-cashable benefits were identified in the outline business case:

Cashable Benefits

- Efficient use of staffing between schools particularly for 14-19 Diploma delivery
- Potential reduction of transport costs between sites for pupils studying courses based in other centres. This would be the case where pupils are using the learning platform and no longer need to travel to a different learning institution.
- Collaboration between schools using virtual means and therefore saving costs of time and transport. This would be the case where collaboration opportunities become available that previously were not.

Non-cashable Benefits

- Ease of access to learning and teaching materials & tools for staff and pupils.
 - Opportunity for pupils to share their work easily with their parents.
- 5.5 The fact that the vast majority of Medway schools are now using the Uniservity Learning Platform has made it possible for them to collaborate in a number of special projects and also on a less formal basis.
- 5.6 The second run of the popular 'How Green is your School?' project enabled 19 Medway schools including primary, infant, secondary and grammar to work together on a number of challenges across Medway. Children of different key stages and educational abilities were able to collaborate effectively to achieve their goals over a number of weeks, due entirely to the Learning Platform. Although based primarily on the Learning Platform the project was designed to give students challenges that had to be completed outside of the classroom and we were also able to run two events at Rowan Williams Court that schools could attend. The project also produced measurable results as each school that took part attained the Eco-Schools Bronze Award. One of the great success stories of the project was the designing and building of a

wildlife garden and landscaped area of the grounds at Hoo St.Werburgh Primary School.

- 5.7 International collaboration has also been made possible by the Uniservity Learning Platform. A number of Medway schools are now in contact with Chinese schools via our 'China Link' project, which has been running for over a year.
- 5.8 More special projects along the model of 'How Green Is Your School?' are planned with a new Gifted & Talented project commencing in September 2010.
- 5.9 There is evidence that schools are taking advantage of the facilities on the Uniservity Learning Platform to set up their own links between schools within Medway, which has worked particularly well with the Our Medway – Counting down to London 2012' project and the 2012 Sports Academy.

6. VARIATIONS REQUIRED DURING CONTRACT TERM

- 6.1 During the current year the main contractor changed it's hosting provider and details of this change have been incorporated into the contract. Medway Council's legal department approved this change to the contract.

7. PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Overall, the contractor has performed well throughout the term of the contract so far.
- 7.2 Where performance issues have arisen, we have worked closely with Uniservity to ensure that Medway schools do not suffer reduced levels of service. In April and May this year however, Medway schools experienced slow performance. Uniservity and Medway IT Department have worked collaboratively to identify the source of the problem. The learning platform is now functioning to a much higher level but work is still continuing to ensure that the platform continues to operate within agreed parameters. Medway staff also collaborate with other local authorities regularly to ensure that Uniservity maintain high levels of service, via scheduled regional meetings.

8. LESSONS LEARNED

- 8.1 The main lesson to be learnt from this procurement exercise is that it would have been better to start the procurement process approximately 6 months earlier to allow for more flexibility in the timetable. This will be reviewed and time will be factored and planned more effectively when this contract is retendered in the future. The project has been a success due to the commitment of the project team in working to a tight timetable.

9. NEXT STEPS

- 9.1 Future Variations / Amendments Required:
 - 9.1.1 The contract does not require any future variations or amendments.
- 9.2 Contract Extension Required:

9.2.1 Work on a review of the Uniservity contract will begin in September 2010, to determine whether or not to formally extend the contract (The current contract is for 3 years from April 2008 to March 2011 with an option to extend for 2 further years).

9.3 Service Improvement Plan / Continuous Improvement Plan

9.3.1 Continuous improvement will be sought through the methods outlined in section 8. In addition, Uniservity had provided the following statement which details their approach to service improvement:

'Usage of the cLc Learning Platform has continued to grow over the last academic year. We have seen over 50% increase in usage and March this year saw the highest total logins of over 800,000 for the month. Usage within Medway Local Authority has also grown, with a 42% increase between March 2009 and 2010.

9.3.2 We are continuing to invest in both our products and infrastructure. During April 2010 we successfully migrated www.school-portal.co.uk to a different hosting partner with double the infrastructure capacity.

9.3.3 Uniservity's product vision is "to build the pre-eminent global connected learning community, where all users are empowered to engage fully in authentic personalised learning". The current UniServity Learning Platform "the cLc" has evolved over the past 8 years and throughout this time has adapted to incorporate emerging standards, the requirements of the Becta Learning Platform Framework, customer feedback, as well as incorporating appropriate web2.0 technologies.

9.3.4 Uniservity will continue to support this product for the foreseeable future and make ongoing small changes as and when required. However, we are re-developing our current product and introducing our Next Generation Learning Platform, called "Life", which is based on the latest industry standards, incorporates the best of Web2.0 and social learning technologies, is capable of intelligently responding to individual's personal choices and demands, whilst putting 21st Century learning styles at its core. We offered a sneak preview of some aspects of "Life", at BETT 2010 and the initial reactions were excellent. A managed migration path will be provided from the current technology to the new product and we will be working closely with Local Authorities to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible.

9.3.5 At the end of 2009 we successfully launched our Parental Reporting product, designed to meet the Government's 2010/2012 online parental reporting guidelines. Since then, we have done two further upgrades of the product including lots of customer requests. In May 2010 we will be releasing our Parental Engagement product, designed to not only meet the government guidelines, but also to engage parents in their child's learning by, for example, giving parents a view on their child's ePortfolio and providing extra resources to show the parent how they can further support their child's learning.

9.3.6 Medway Local Authority schools are continuing to provide excellent and inspirational Best Practice examples which we have been sharing with our customers across the world through our innovative teacher's network.'

10 COMMENTS OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- 10.1 Technology is supporting the work of schools in raising standards and supporting the drive for personalisation of learning.
- 10.2 The learning platform initiative represents a new development that provides a real way forward for education in the twenty first century. Learning platforms provide opportunities for children and young people to communicate and collaborate rapidly and effectively and access resources in a range of media (e.g. still image, video, sound).
- 10.3 The first two years of the implementation of the learning platform in Medway schools have demonstrated the impact that this technology is having on the ability of teaching staff to personalise learning resources, opportunities for communication and collaboration between Medway schools and the wider community.
- 10.4 We have also moved beyond mainstream schools and are now providing learning platforms for Pupil Referral Units, Looked After Children and the Medway Secure Training Unit.
- 10.5 This report seeks to detail the management of the contract to date and how the project is meeting the intended objectives.

11. PROCUREMENT BOARD

- 11.1 The Procurement Board considered this report on 8 September 2010 and recommended a review and formal consideration for approval by the Cabinet on 28 September 2010.

12. FINANCIAL, PROCUREMENT AND LEGAL COMMENTS

12.1 Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

The contract is performing within budget and identifying savings and efficiencies as outlined in section 5 of the report.

12.2 Comments of the Head of Procurement

The contract has performed well in accordance with the original specification and requirements. The contract management regime adopted by the internal client has been positive and has thus yielded the positive results as highlighted within this report. Strategic Procurement acknowledges that consideration will be given to extending the contract next May and therefore, a Gateway 4 report seeking to extend the contract will need to be brought to Procurement Board at board date prior to May 2011 for decision.

12.3 Comments of the Monitoring Officer's deputy

The review has identified the fact that the procurement process enabled the award of a contract to Uniservity which has enabled the Council to meet the targets set by the DCSF by ensuring there is provision for all learners to have access to an online learning space. The lesson to be learned of allowing more time in a future procurement process to allow for more flexibility in the timetable is noted.

13. RECOMMENDATION

13.1 The Cabinet is asked to note the successful operation of the learning platform contract.

14. SUGGESTED REASONS FOR DECISION(S)

- The contract is well within budget
- The contract is meeting the original objectives of the procurement
- The Learning Platform is enhancing opportunities for teaching and learning
- Supports Medway core values and priorities

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Background papers

The following documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report: Description of document	Location	Date
None		