

## **CABINET**

**18 JANUARY 2011**

### **GATEWAY 4 CONTRACT MANAGEMENT: LEARNING PLATFORM**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Les Wicks, Children's Services

Report from: Rose Collinson, Director of Children and Adults

Author: Jacqui Moore, ICT Adviser

#### **Summary**

This report seeks approval for a 1 year extension to the contract with Uniservity for the provision of a Learning Platform, from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

#### **1. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 1.1 The original procurement was completed in response to the Government's priorities and targets. Specifically, it targeted the 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 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.

#### **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.
- 2.2 27/2008 The Cabinet approved the selection of Uniservity as the preferred tenderer for the provision of a Learning Platform.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The original contract term was for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2011 and the contract contains provision for it to be extended for a further period of up to 2 years. If this one year extension is approved the Council will retain the option to extend the contract term for a further period of one year.
- 3.2 The contract with Uniservity ensures that all young people can have access to a Learning Platform to support their learning.' A learning platform is a collection of tools that are designed to support learning, teaching, management and administration.'
- 3.3 Medway teachers and students use the Learning Platform tools to great effect, for example one primary school is using the internal messaging system as a means for students to contact their teachers if they need extra help with their work. Other schools use after-school time limited forums for students and teachers to discuss homework tasks. A number of schools have also amalgamated their conventional website with the Learning Platform to achieve cost savings and provide a unified web presence. Reluctant writers are being encouraged to develop their literacy skills by creating individual 'blogs' and publishing these to their teacher and class. Other built-in tools such as wikis and quizzes are used regularly in the classroom to support learning. As the Learning Platform is Internet-based, teachers and students can access it outside of school hours, which greatly enhances its accessibility and usefulness.
- 3.4 The implementation of the learning platform was planned to support in:
- meeting government targets
  - 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 programmes in a range of centres across Medway
- 3.5 The project requirement was therefore to specify and procure a Learning Platform for Medway schools, allowing for functionality within school and collaboration between a range of educational centres in Medway.

### **4. MANAGEMENT OF THE CONTRACT/ BENEFITS REALISATION**

- 4.1 The project has been managed within budget for the past three years. Formal client & contractor monitoring meetings take place bimonthly. Aspects of the contract which are reviewed include:
- Response times and compliance with the requirements of the SLA
  - Usage: number of total users & number of unique user logins
  - Disk space used versus capacity available
  - Service availability

- 4.2 In addition the following aspects are covered:
- Review of implementation and training
  - User issues/grievances/requirements
  - Future planning
  - Product updates
  - Development requests.
- 4.2 During the implementation phase of the project, the progress of the roll out against plans was reviewed to ensure targets were being met.
- 4.3 In addition to client & contractor monitoring meetings, schools' progress in using the Learning Platform has been reviewed and where necessary additional support provided to ensure that the Learning Platform has been used effectively to support learning in Medway.
- 4.4 Since implementation, client & contractor monitoring meetings have ensured that Medway schools have received the best possible continued support. Members of the project team have also attended regional user-group meetings where they are able to positively influence the development of the Uniservity Learning Platform. In particular, Medway is now involved in the development of 'Life', the next generation version of the Uniservity product. Two of our schools are testing a pre-release version of the product and one of our headteachers is on the teacher development group. This will help us to ensure that the product meets the needs of our schools even more closely.

### **Cashable savings**

Cashable savings are difficult to define financially as the Learning Platform has added value and enabled schools to approach projects in different ways.

- Schools have taken on collaborative projects for which previously the cost would have been prohibitive. For example for two schools to meet together and work collaboratively would traditionally have necessitated the hire of a coach and time spent by school staff carrying out risk assessments and making arrangements. The Learning Platform makes it possible to run such events from home schools, negating the need for actual travel and helps to support partnership working across the authority. An average cost for organising an off-site activity such as this is approximately £410 per day.
- The potential costs for schools of procuring a learning platform on an individual basis would be significantly higher than a Medway-wide procurement exercise. For example Medway schools will be able to save approximately 70% on the standard pricing if they procure the Learning Platform via Medway LA, providing excellent value for money.
- As the Learning Platform is hosted centrally by Uniservity, schools do not need to invest in specialist IT equipment and do not need a full-time IT professional to manage the system.
- A school can use its Uniservity Learning Platform as a conventional website. This can negate the need for the school to pay for external website design and management fees.

## **Non-cashable savings**

- Ease of access to learning and teaching materials and tools for staff and pupils: The Uniservity Learning Platform is Internet based and so is accessible from any computer or device such as a mobile phone or I-pad with a broadband connection, at school, at home or on a school trip.
- Opportunity for pupils to share their work easily with their parents.
- Collaboration: As the vast majority of Medway schools use the Uniservity Learning Platform it is possible for them to collaborate in a number of special projects. Additionally, schools that do not currently use the Uniservity Learning Platform have taken part in our projects, as this makes it possible for them to collaborate more easily with other Medway schools.
  - The 'How Green Is Your School' project enabled 19 Medway schools from a wide range of phases and types 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, supported by 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. The project produced measurable results as each school that took part attained the Eco-Schools Bronze Award. A further run of this popular project is planned for 2011, where schools will be able to progress further and achieve the Eco-Schools Silver Award.
  - A new project 'Unlocking The Secret Code' focuses on the life and work of the renowned 12<sup>th</sup> Century Italian mathematician, Leonardo of Pisa, more commonly known as Fibonacci, to support the learning of Gifted & Talented students in different key stages. The project challenges the students in literacy, numeracy, history, art and music.
  - 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 the 'China Link' project, which has been running for over a year.
  - 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.

## **5. VARIATIONS REQUIRED DURING CONTRACT TERM**

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

## **6. PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 Overall, the contractor has performed well throughout the term of the contract. Where issues have occurred we have worked closely with the contractor to resolve these and minimise the impact on Medway Schools. For example, between May and August 2010, some schools experienced slow performance from the Learning Platform. Uniservity, Children's Services and Corporate IT, in conjunction with a targeted group of schools, worked collaboratively to identify the source of the problem and to resolve it. Since September, schools have reported good performance, but we have retained our programme of testing and conference calls to ensure that any further issues are quickly identified.

## **7. LESSONS LEARNED**

- 7.1 The opportunity to manage completely the training of school staff would have enabled us to be more accurately aware of the levels of progress of individual schools. In the schools that Medway trained directly we were able to identify quickly any slowing of momentum and intervene to reinvigorate the project.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 Future Variations / Amendments Required:
- The pricing structure has been renegotiated for the extension of the contract
  - It has been agreed with Uniservity that the fixed annual project management fee stated in the contract will be removed. This fee was relevant in the implementation period of the contract, but now that this phase is complete, the project management fee is no longer appropriate.
  - This procurement was originally graded as high risk; this was predominately due to the wide variation in costs of learning platforms at the time of the original procurement and also the unknown level of take up from schools prior to the contract being awarded. The proposed 1 year extension to the contract will be fully funded by schools. For all schools renewing this would amount to an annual total of approximately £100,000. We are requesting consideration of a change of risk level for this project from high to medium risk for the remaining term of the contract and any extensions for the following reasons:
    - The contract has now been successfully running for almost 3 years with a proven track record of growth of interest from schools.
    - There is a known cost, which will be charged to schools.
    - There are no implications from the Schools White Paper 2010 – 'The Importance of Teaching', which will affect this procurement.

## 8.2 Contract Extension Required

- A survey of all Uniservity schools' opinion of how the Learning Platform is performing was conducted in September 2010; 56 out of 97 schools returned completed questionnaires (57% return rate). The questionnaire asked questions relating to four main areas:
  - Features
  - Performance
  - Value for money
  - Impact on teaching and learning

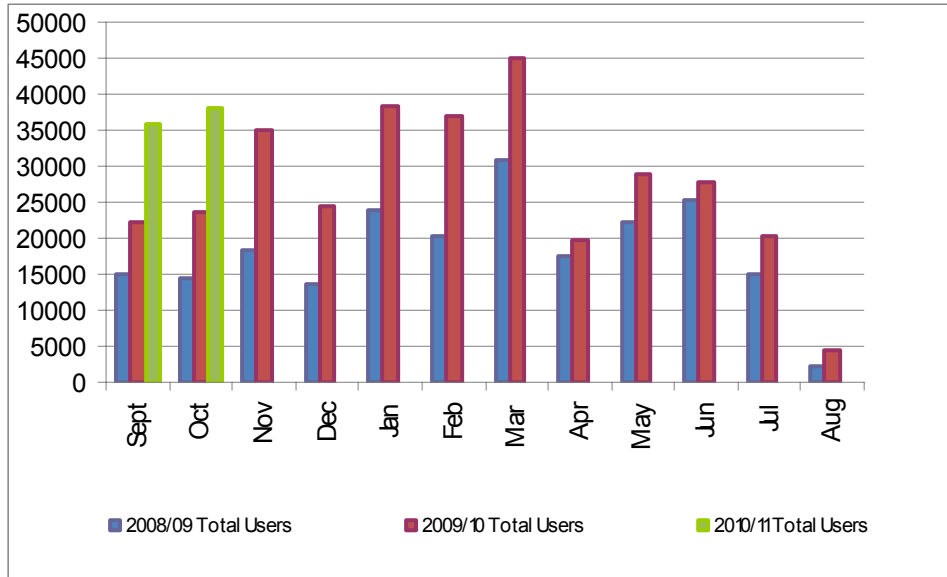
The survey responses showed that the Uniservity Learning Platform is performing as expected and is delivering the objectives of the original procurement.

The Uniservity contract extension was discussed at the recent ICT Policy & Practice steering group meeting. At this meeting schools felt that the Learning Platform was still offering best value and also was adding value to the learning opportunities they were able to offer: They were in agreement that a considerable amount of resource had been put into bespoke training and support for schools, which was greatly valued; the potential costs involved in procuring another learning platform and its associated training programmes could well prove significant if the contract were not to be renewed. Graphs demonstrate that usage has been growing year on year and that there is still scope for further development across Medway schools. The ICT Policy & Practice Steering Group agreed that the current contract provided value for money when compared to other learning platform providers. Additionally, the Medway LA project team have kept up to date with the current learning platform market through their regional and national professional networks. The information obtained through these contacts indicates that Uniservity still provides a service that is at least comparable with other contractors in terms of functionality and price.

## Usage Charts

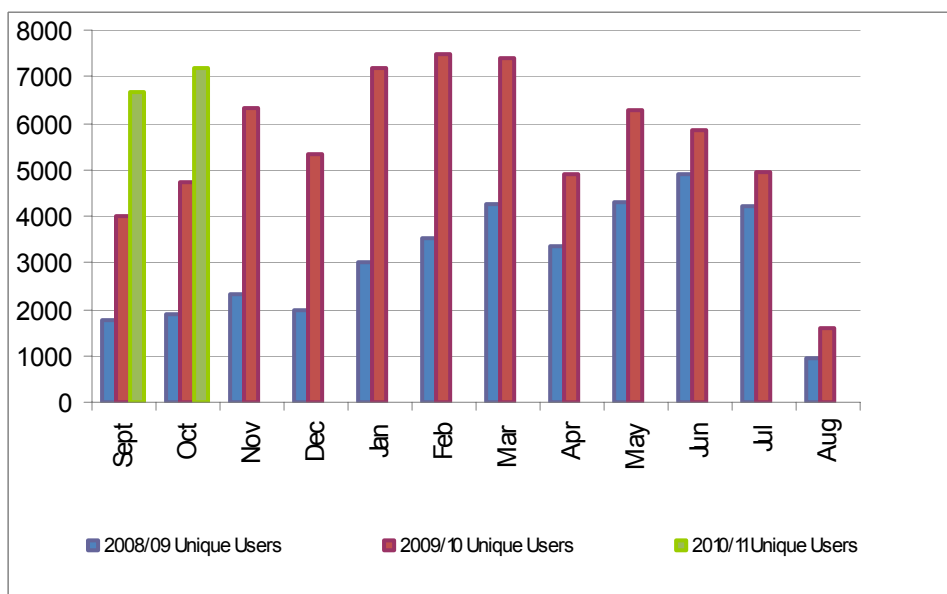
### Total Users

This chart compares the total number of logins to the Learning Platform for the three years of the contract based on the academic year of September to August.



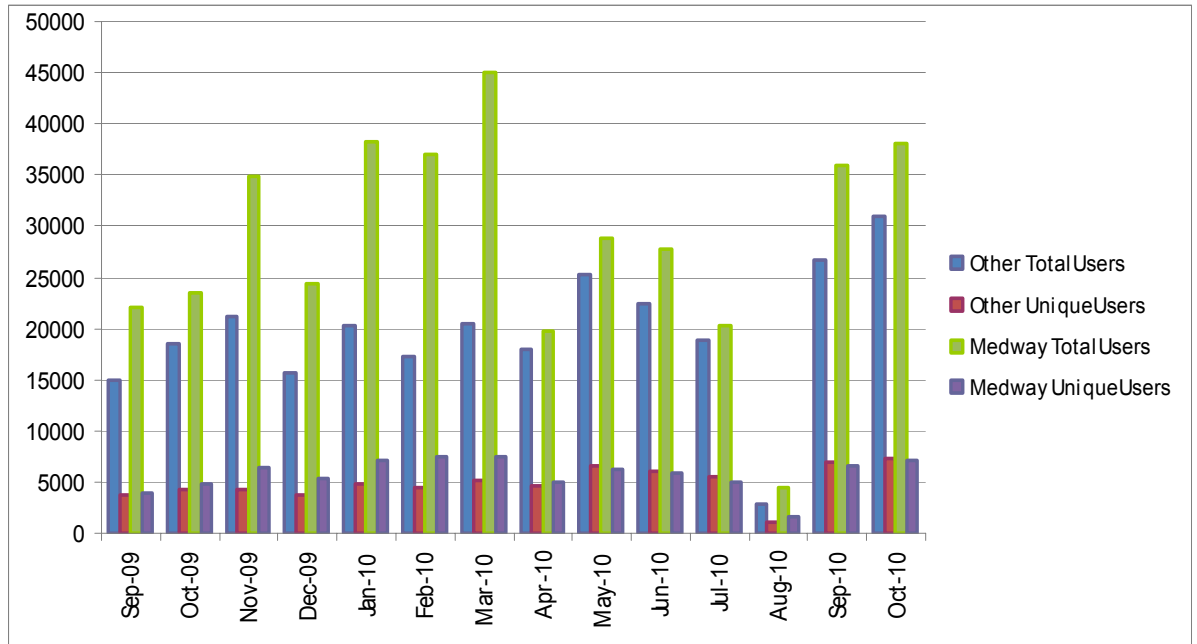
### Unique Users

This chart compares the total number of unique users that have logged in to the Learning Platform for the three years of the contract based on the academic year of September to August.



### Comparison of usage with a similar sized authority

This chart compares the number of total logins and unique logins of Medway LA with a similar-sized authority. The chart demonstrates that each Medway user logs in a greater number of times than users in the similar sized authority.



### 8.3 Service Improvement Plan / Continuous Improvement Plan

- **To continue to support Medway schools in using the Learning Platform effectively to support learning & teaching:** Medway LA in conjunction with Uniservity have provided a continuous training programme to Medway schools throughout the project. Onsite, technical and pedagogical training is combined with regular workshops and surgeries to support schools in ensuring that the Learning Platform is being used to its best potential. A continuing programme of regular workshops and surgeries will run for Medway schools.
- **To continue to provide intervention to reinvigorate use of the Learning Platform where progress is slowing:** Where necessary, Medway have taken positive action to ensure that specific schools continue to use their Learning Platform to best effect. Regular contact with schools enables the Medway project team to identify potential problems early on. For example, one secondary school began to experience difficulties with their Learning Platform project after an initially promising start. Medway staff quickly set up meetings with the school to provide technical, pedagogical and project management support, which enabled the school to get their Learning Platform back on track within a matter of weeks and avoided a complete stall of the project.



- **To continue to foster innovative use of the Learning Platform across a variety of communities and a range of purposes:** Some examples of the range of Learning Platform use are outlined below, we will continue to develop and broaden opportunities such as these.

  - Looked After Children – The Learning Platform has been used to build an online community for looked after children in Medway with the creation of the Big Difference Hub. A key feature of this hub is that the young people have largely designed, built and managed it.
  - Secure Training Unit – This training centre has operated a Uniservity Learning Platform for over a year. Security was a prime concern in the unit’s decision to adopt the Uniservity system, but the Learning Platform has proved secure in operation and continues to be used to support the learning of their students.
  - Road Safety - Medway’s Safer Journeys team have operated a number of pages on the Medway LA Hub for the last two years. The section is used to inform Medway Schools of the work of the Safer Journeys Team and promotes information and events relating to Road Safety. The Medway project team will continue to support the Safer Journeys Team in its excellent use of the learning platform.
  - Children’s Centres - A number of Children’s Centres across the LA have requested to sign up for the Uniservity Learning Platform. The Learning Platform allows them to interact with their parents and can be linked with their associated school. A further programme of Children’s Centre learning platforms is being planned.
  
- **To develop an increased range of collaborative projects to extend learning opportunities for young people:** Medway project team are continually looking for new and innovative ways of using the functionality of the Learning Platform.

The recent disruption caused by heavy snowfall was used as an opportunity to hold a virtual meeting on the Learning Platform by education advisors. The event proved very successful and now plans are being developed to use the Learning Platform in the event of further disruption due to weather. In addition further work will be done to support schools in developing their plans to enable continuity of learning during school closures.

Special Projects such as ‘How Green Is Your School’, ‘Unlocking The Secret Code’ and the planned engineering and design projects bring schools from a wide range of phases together. Schools work with each other during these projects using the tools of the Learning Platform to attempt a number of challenges. These projects have proved very popular and are now offered as part of a regular programme throughout the academic year.

## **9. COMMENTS OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

- 9.1 This paper seeks approval for a 1 year extension to the contract with Uniservity for the provision of a Learning Platform, from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. The contract has run successfully since April 2008, enabling schools to meet the Government's Learning Technologies targets, providing schools with an effective Learning Platform which supports learning and teaching at all key stages. Medway schools will fund the cost of their Learning Platforms from April 2011 and therefore the financial risk to Medway will be low. To date, 96% of Medway schools have chosen to use the Uniservity Learning Platform, the scale of any extension of the contract will reflect the schools' commitment to the project.
- 9.2 The Uniservity Learning Platform provides an online learning space for young people in Medway, offering opportunities to learn in a safe environment and in a variety of ways to suit their learning styles. The Learning Platform has been successful in meeting the needs of the full range of learners and there are examples of exciting uses of the Learning Platform from pupils in KS1 through to sixth form students. The potential of the Learning Platform has also been harnessed to support young people in care in Medway and also young people who have difficulty in engaging with their learning. Schools have been able to work on projects with a range of partners, for example the Safer Journeys Team and the Waste Management Team; the Learning Platform has provided them with an easy communication route with schools.
- 9.3 The Learning Platform has provided a wealth of opportunities for schools to collaborate across the authority either through projects run centrally by LA consultants or through activities developed collaboratively between schools. The implementation of the Uniservity Learning Platform has successfully supported young people to engage in learning across Medway: figures reported demonstrate that the use of the Learning Platform has grown year on year, which reveals the enthusiasm that students have for learning in this way. These developments have ensured that Medway is at the forefront of Learning Platform development, and has been regularly cited as a positive example in regional user-group meetings.
- 9.4 The Medway 2012 Hub has been crucial in maintaining the integrity of the project structure for the 'Our Medway – Counting down to 2012' project. Without the use of the Hub to share project details and organise school project co-ordinators, this project could not have been a success to the same magnitude.

## **10. PROCUREMENT BOARD**

- 10.1 The Procurement Board considered this report on 22 December 2010 and recommended it to Cabinet for approval.

## **11. FINANCIAL, PROCUREMENT AND LEGAL COMMENTS**

- 11.1 The cost of extending the contract for one year will depend on the number of schools that choose to continue using the Uniservity Learning Platform but is estimated at £100,000. The costs will be funded from schools' delegated budgets and will therefore have no impact on the Council's budget. The Uniservity Learning Platform project has run successfully within budget for just under three years. The examples given in this report detail a range of non-cashable benefits that schools have benefited from. Although cashable efficiencies are more difficult to quantify, Medway schools are now able to undertake activities which previously would not have been possible due to prohibitive costs.
- 11.2 Strategic Procurement provided quality assurance support and guidance in respects to the initial procurement process including input into the contract management process to be adopted post procurement award. Strategic Procurement is satisfied that the contract is operating in accordance with the performance management structure as specified within the original procurement specification. The contract has operated well and has delivered savings and the opportunity to deliver collaborative opportunities. There have been some minor performance issues that the contractor has proactively rectified. The client department is advised to ensure that the minor issues are monitored as part of the proposed extension to ensure no further performance issues arise. The current contract makes provisions for an extension and on the basis of the above, Strategic Procurement have advised that the Procurement Board recommend this extension to Cabinet.
- 11.3 The proposed extension is in accordance with the provisions of the contract. The contract will continue to be subject to its current terms and conditions and will also continue to support teachers and young people to engaged in learning across Medway and in doing so should continue to provide value for money to the council.

## **12. RECOMMENDATION**

- 12.1 The Cabinet is recommended to approve a 1 year extension to the contract with Uniservity for the provision of a Learning Platform from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

## **13. SUGGESTED REASONS FOR DECISION(S)**

- The contract has run successfully to date and school usage of the Learning Platform is growing year on year.
- A large investment has taken place in bespoke training and support with schools over the implementation phase of the project, best value can be obtained from harnessing the value of this investment in an extension to the contract.
- Surveys of schools using the product show that it is meeting their needs.
- A 1 year extension will provide flexibility for schools in the current uncertain financial climate.

- A 1 year extension would enable schools to evaluate the new 'Life' product and ensure that it is fit for purpose before committing to a further year.
- The Uniservity Learning Platform continues to comply with original procurement specifications and Uniservity is developing a successor to the current system, which will provide extra functionality to further support teaching and learning from September 2011.

Report Originating Officer:	Jacqui Moore	☎ 01634 338570
Chief Finance Officer or deputy:	Mick Hayward	☎ 01634 332220
Monitoring Officer or deputy:	Julien Browne	☎ 01634 332133
Head of Procurement or deputy:	Gurpreet Anand	☎ 01634 332450

### Background papers

The following documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Description of document	Location	Date
None		