## Why do we need an LMS?

The education sectors all over the world have for some time paid much attention to the issue of Learning Management Systems (LMS) to support teaching and learning through the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies).

What is a Learner Management System? There are many terms and definitions that could be used to describe an LMS. A simple model can be described as supporting the key activities in teaching and learning.
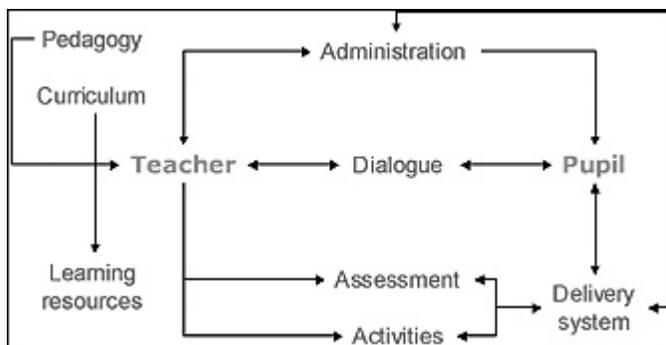
At the centre of learning and teaching is the relationship between the learner and teacher. The teacher draws on knowledge, expertise and resources to construct learning experiences based on the curriculum. These are constructed upon activities and assessment opportunities. Supporting all of this are the administration systems recording progress.

The delivery system is the component that acts as the interface between the learner and the other elements of the system. The key idea is that an LMS in a school context supports the teaching and learning process, rather than replacing it.

What facilities does a LMS provide?

- Searching of course and training product catalog
- Delivery of online courseware in resident and distributed settings
- Delivery of individual learning products such as individual lessons, practical exercises, and supporting material
- Enrollment, registration, and attendance tracking
- Scheduling of course learning events, learners, and resources
- Delivery of student assessments and course critiques and the collection of responses
- Tracking of learner progress
- Virtual classrooms

- Collaboration between learners
- Record of learners' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies

Why are LMS' necessary?

You may ask why an LMS is necessary in the first place. Could not all the functionality listed above be achieved through other means? What about using an intranet and e-mail, for example? The existence of LMS does not suggest that other tools cannot be used to support learners. Indeed, there are many excellent examples of intranets being used to deliver content to learners and simple e-mail supporting effective communication in the learning process.

However, an LMS offers much more to the educator and learner alike.

- An LMS offers a consistent interface, both to staff and learners. It's easy to tailor the experience for different groups. For example, you could choose to make available a discussion list to one group but not to another.
- It is easier to customise content for different groups of students, and for individual students, than it is with an intranet.
- An LMS is integrated - all the functions and services are provided via a single access point, rather than being discrete components as is the case in many intranet solutions. This makes it simpler for the learner to keep focused on the learning task.
- An LMS makes it easier to organise groups of learners, enabling class-based discussions, group work and peer support.

An LMS was predominantly thought of as a tool to facilitate learning at a distance. This view is no longer the case as more examples of their use are found supporting learners in the classroom, mixing face-to-face and online activities.

Functionalities of an LMS in Detail

Student Management
- Create and issue access to the system
- Organize administrators and/or students into groups for reporting and content assignment purposes
- Provide courses using access rights and registration
- Manage all class related resources, including classrooms and instructors
- Integrate appropriate support tools including exercises, reference materials, labs, tests, and opportunities to collaborate.

Content Assignment
- Arrange courses and events in catalogs that are intuitive and searchable.
- Target content to the correct individuals or groups
- Designate selected content as ``required'' learning; allow students to select other courses as they desire

- Create, edit, distribute, and deliver assessments
- Develop personalized learning paths
- Deliver online, instructor led courses in synchronous or asynchronous modes, including course setup, syllabus display, and registration and tracking

Communication
- Enable communication between administrators and learners
- Search and identify learners and deliver targeted courses, news, references, and other information to continually engage them
- Supplement courses by integrating specific learning references into the platform and allowing access to external resources

Tracking and Reporting
- Track and report on student progress and activity
- Track and report professional development progress against a predefined set of learning goals
- Track and report that mandated training has been successfully deployed
- Determine whether knowledge has been retained after training

Proprietary Training Development
- Develop new (proprietary) courses yourself or through a third party
- Use templates to speed development
- Conform to industry standards to improve compatibility between the course and the platform
- Integrate proprietary courses seamlessly into the learning environment