# Virtual learning environment (VLE) review news

The University of the Highlands and Islands has been using the Blackboard virtual learning environment (VLE) to underpin its distance and blended learning programmes since 1999. Over the years this has been supplemented and supported by other technologies such as Blackboard Collaborate, Blackboard Mobile, Mahara, Medial Video Streaming and Office 365. A formal review of the service was undertaken 2006/7 confirming Blackboard as the institutional VLE for all higher education delivery. Blackboard is also used to support and deliver further education across the academic partnership.

In line with the recommendations of the 2006/07 review John Smith, Head of Integrated Technologies and Resources and Andy Brown, Head of Academic Development have maintained a watching brief in VLE development. The following developments now necessitate a formal review:

1. Changing requirements in pedagogy, technology, student expectations and strategic initiatives, e.g. the university's requirement for more flexible modes of delivery.
2. Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges has determined that Blackboard’s status as a sole supplier is no longer valid under procurement regulations and introduced a new procurement framework agreement in April 2017. The outcomes from that process were presented to the university in May 2017. The four options available in the framework are Blackboard (<http://www.blackboard.com/>), Canvas (<https://www.canvasvle.co.uk/>), D2L (<https://www.d2l.com/en-eu/>) and Moodle provided by Synergy Learning (<http://www.synergy-learning.com/moodle/>).

The review will lead to the implementation of a flexible learning environment suited to the institution’s tertiary educational needs and requirements, thus future proofing fully online and blended curriculum delivery. The results of the review will be part of a formal submission presented to the relevant committees within the university to enable an informed selection of an institutional VLE or VLEs. Key to this process is a staff and student survey of current use and future requirements.

The review is being conducted through an open, transparent and consultative process. The results of the review will be part of a formal submission presented to relevant committees to enable an informed selection of an institutional VLE or VLEs. The project will deliver a recommendation for a stable institutional VLE or VLEs; achieve a longer term view of VLE provision; implement the selected VLE(s) and provide a benchmark for a systematic and planned review of VLE provision in 2021.

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