

MLEs and VLEs Explained

This paper explains the terms now being used to describe the various components in which learners and tutors participate in the learning experience within the college or university environment.

What are VLEs and MLEs?

While recognising that the world at large will continue to use terminology in different and often ambiguous ways, the term Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is used to refer to the “online” interactions of various kinds which take place between learners and tutors. The JISC MLE Steering Group has defined VLE as the components in which learners and tutors participate in online interactions of various kinds, including online learning.

The JISC MLE Steering Group has defined the term Managed Learning Environment (MLE) as the whole range of information systems and processes of a college (including its VLE if it has one) that contribute directly or indirectly to learning and the management of that learning.

What does a VLE do?

The principal functions that the complete VLE needs to deliver are:

- Controlled access to curriculum that has been mapped to elements (or “chunks”) that can be separately assessed and recorded
- Tracking student activity and achievement against these elements using simple processes for course administration and student tracking that make it possible for tutors to define and set up a course with accompanying materials and activities to direct, guide and monitor learner progress
- Support of online learning, including access to learning resources, assessment and guidance. The learning resources may be self-developed, or professionally authored and purchased materials that can be imported and made available for use by learners
- Communication between the learner, the tutor and other learning support specialists to provide direct support and feedback for learners, as well as peer-group communications that build a sense of group identity and community of interest
- Links to other administrative systems, both inhouse and externally

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MLE Landscapes

As shown in the diagram below, the VLE will act as a “portal” to online Curriculum Mapping, Assessment, Communication, Delivery, Tutor support and Tracking facilities.

The VLE makes up only one part of the college’s overall systems (both computerised and non-computerised). Interfacing between these systems is possible by “connecting up” the constituent parts by the use of interoperability standards such as IMS (+FE extensions). Examples of these are between the Student Record Systems and the VLE and between Learning Resources (or content) and the VLE. Other areas of these specifications also exist (beyond the scope of this briefing paper, but see the MLE Web site).

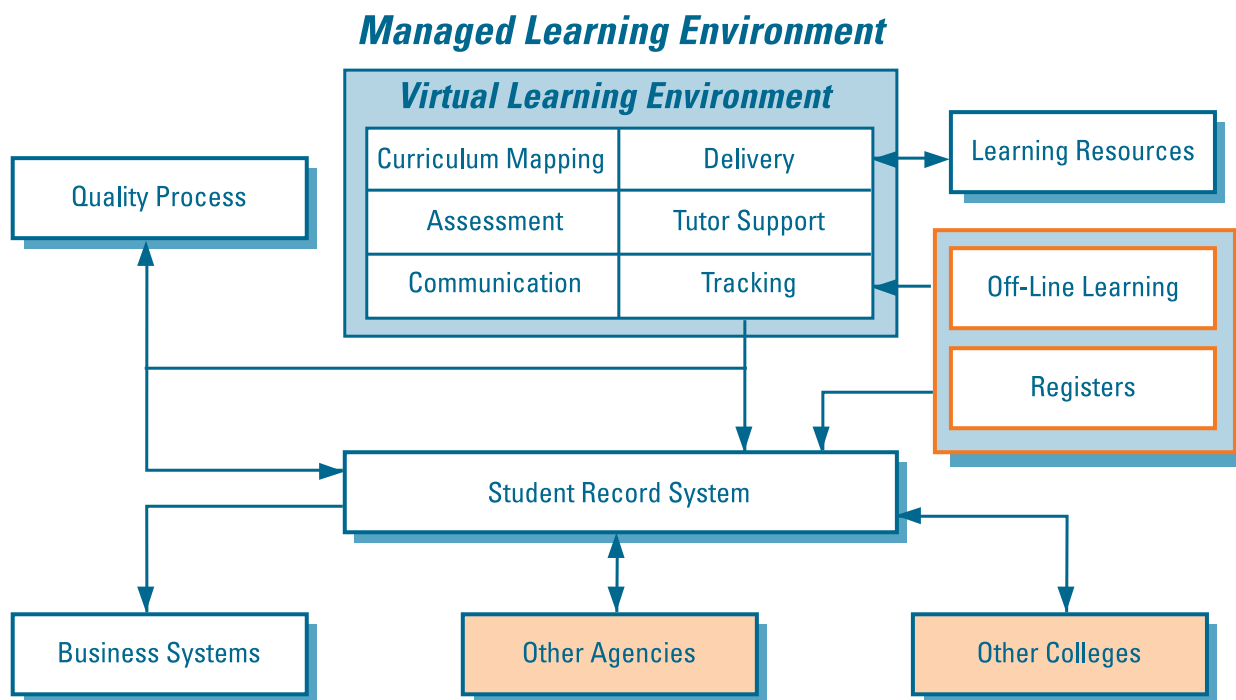
In conjunction with the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), the MLE Steering Group has recommended that in procuring systems the sector should only source IMS (+FE extensions) compliant systems.

About the Author

Richard Everett is the MLE Co-ordinator for the JISC. He works to the MLE Steering Group, a strategic body that advises and guides the FE and HE community in the implementation of MLEs.

Richard was the Project Manager for the Western Colleges’ Consortium for Online Learning. This collaborative project installed the infrastructure for an extranet and also sourced and configured a VLE. It also started the process of collaboration between colleges in the sourcing and production of materials for use on the VLE.

Previously Richard worked as a Programme Leader for BTEC National Computing at Trowbridge College and before that he was a Key Skills Co-ordinator at Soundwell College. He also has considerable experience as a Project Manager implementing computer systems for organisations in the public sector.



The VLE as a sub-system within the college MLE

Further Information

MLE Steering Group Circular.
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/pub00/c07_00.html

MLE Steering Group Requirements for a VLE.
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/pub00/req-vle.html>

See also the Learning Technologies area of the FERL (Further Education Resources for Learning) Web site.
<http://ferl.becta.org.uk/>