



Monitoring both the academic performance and behaviours of students is a pivotal role for every educational institution. Information is critical. Effective monitoring of an individual's performance and behaviour can assist teachers in identifying issues in performance or behaviour, and intervene fast.

Yet the growing emphasis on the personalisation of learning means that the challenges faced by schools and colleges of being able to track and assess an individual student's progress against their own personal goals are increasing.

Unfortunately, the approach adopted by schools and colleges has often been ad hoc, typically relying on excel spreadsheets or paper based files. The take-up of electronic management information systems to maintain student portfolios or records of achievement is low. A mere 27% of further education colleges, for example, have them in place according to Becta research. This is despite good evidence to suggest that this type of ICT improves student attainment. The Department for Education's report *Harnessing Technology* lays out the top priorities for reform, one of which is for 'every institution to offer a personal online learning space to store coursework, course resources, results and achievements ... making it simpler for learners to build their record of achievement through their lifelong learning'.

This inability to access and analyse data in any meaningful and personalised way causes frustration for teachers, and can prevent them from using information to have a real impact on their students. So what can schools and colleges do to ensure they are gathering and assessing the right information to help support individual needs and aspirations without having to spend hours each term and year trawling through spreadsheets and pieces of paper? And, given the thinking behind the Government's latest proposals for online reporting and enabling parents to get more involved throughout the school or college year, how can they make it easier to share this information on a daily basis rather than once a term?

Exploiting the benefits that technology can bring in using data to track achievement and set individual targets as well as link teaching to pastoral systems to identify behavioural issues is an obvious route to take.

2007 saw several technology based tracking systems brought to market, all claiming to make life easier for educational institutions when it comes to tracking the individual performance of students. While they are all web-based, they are all very different so we decided to take a closer look at three of solutions available and compare what they offer.

The three systems we viewed were: eTracker developed by VLE Support; iLP developed by Amazing Learning; and my-iPlan developed by Nord Anglia eLearning and Wolverhampton 14-19 Development Team.

my-iPlan

my-iPlan is very much pitched at the 14 to 19 year old learner – empowering them by enabling them to participate more actively in the planning and evaluation of their own learning according to the website. The design is certainly funky and appealing to the target age-group.

The design team promote the fact that in accessing personalised support and guidance in their everyday learning, students can plan and progress towards post-16 education – helping to raise the aspirations of learners who had not previously considered further or higher education. A key feature is the portability of access so regardless of where the learner studies or if they move school or college, my-iPlan stays with them.

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24/7 secure web access for learners, teachers and learning providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No option for the institution to host itself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appealing interface and good navigation making it very easy to use for everyone. Customisable interface themes with content presented through a set of five my-iPlan boxes: Welcome, Notices, My Current CV, My I-Plan News and My Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves a lot of manual input – including the initial data import, assigning students to groups and entering courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides individual learning plans from Key Stage 2 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners set access to staff and selects the permissions to determine who, from all involved in their learning, can see what they're doing and provide input and reviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers regular progress updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have to validate everything the learner enters in the system, which could be a huge job for those with large numbers of students to monitor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portable so learner access is transferable from school to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system has a no facility for tracking students' course assessments, progress and performance. It cannot keep track of criteria scores for units, modules and topics.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to upload video clips, photos and other documents so that learners can use as evidence of what they've been doing and allow their teacher to evaluate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system relies on text rather than graphics to provide an indication of where the learner is in terms of progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My-Aspirations – an area that allows learners to keep track of the things they want to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no facility to monitor attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners can log their work experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No disciplinary process

and build their CV from data in the site, including scanned certificates and so on	
• Provides dual log-in to facilitate learner / teacher review sessions	• No photo of the student so a bit impersonal
• Can utilise the action review templates preferred by the relevant local authority	• No UCAS application logging

iLP

Amazing Learning prides its products on being user-friendly, intuitive and fun – good for those who don't have great IT skills. From the online demonstration, we would agree that iLP is easy to navigate and provides a clear and easy to use interface.

It does appear to be pitched more at the institution rather than the learner. While it clearly lays out the benefits to the student in terms of helping them control their future and keep on track towards achieving their goals, it does position itself as helping schools and colleges overcome the problem of scarce resources, conflicting priorities and constant cost pressures faced in trying to deliver personalised learning.

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
• Clear, easy to use interface presenting content through the screens: Learning History, iLP Dashboard, Target Scratchboard, Learning Style Results, Target Scratchpad and Tutors Dashboard	• No option for the institution to host
• Nice use of graphs to show log-in and tutorial stats rather than relying on text	• Manual upload CSV files to import students and have to individually add people who join after the initial import completed
• Good archive and advanced search facility	• Students have to manually enter all their previous qualifications and personal details, as well as a photo if they wish
• As part of the profiling process, students complete 2 short assessments to help identify their learning style and approach to work, which helps tutors to set personal targets with these results in mind	• Doesn't appear to include any course criterion or assessment tracking, and no progress bars to indicate how well a student is progressing against targets, nor does it track performance.
• 'Scratchpad' area where students compile their thoughts and set their own targets	• Doesn't allow uploading of photos or certificates etc

• Nifty comment pad for both teachers and students to log conversations	• No CV component for students and no ability to enter any specific careers information or keep a log of it as an activity
• Dual log-in to facilitate learner / teacher	• There is no facility to monitor attendance

target setting and review sessions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy for teachers to send students messages using the system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No disciplinary process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No UCAS application logging

eTracker

eTracker is intended both as an information aggregator and a bespoke database application, visible to teachers and students alike. The system provides managers with a global view of students' assessments as well as individual assessment criteria. Equally important, parents can be given secure access to their child's record so that they can monitor academic progress and behaviours. This can, however, add to the level of administrative support and there are Data Protection issues to consider when children reach the age of 16. The system is pitched as being designed by teachers for teachers – the design team are themselves educators and simplicity, versatility and ease of implementation appears to be their guiding principle.

A key differentiator from the other two systems is that eTracker is hosted on the school or college's own site and integrates with the institution's own MIS database. It can be accessed remotely through various web browsers including Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox. If preferred, it can be hosted externally by VLE Support at extra cost.

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option to host on the school or college's own site or via VLE Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VLE Support needs to install it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runs in behind Active Directory so that once logged into the network, users won't need to log in again to access eTracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site hosting means that the institution could have to purchase a dedicated server
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulls in live data such as address details, groups, courses, attendance, enrolments, previous qualifications, and automatically imports student photos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some processes could seem confusing if not done in the right order
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks students' performance against targets set incorporating an attendance, conduct and performance traffic light system supported by charts. Provision for the upload of e-Portfolio collections of documents and media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be hard for staff to use if the hierarchy of permissions is not set up correctly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows teachers and students to view previous academic years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could provide more reports and logs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are automatically assigned to courses through enrolments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of information on the screen at one time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmentalised for courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could benefit from being able to expand or contract certain views
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Templates for courses and criterion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No student approval process when

	setting their own targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculates BTEC scores/points and A-level grades automatically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No CV component for students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains course criterion scores and student progress is shown graphically 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good statistics screen 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good search facility - by course or student 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMART targets set in an action plan 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers can carry out subject reviews and progression audits 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates a detailed individual learning plan for each student 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress of all students visible to all teaching staff 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good at handling disciplinary issues 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to navigate and use with a good user guide to help both teachers and students 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with GCSE, NVQ, BTEC, A Level and many other qualifications. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can keep notes on work experience, job applications and general careers information 	

All three systems would seem to be driven to support personalised learning – helping both students and teachers monitor the progress being made against individual goals and aspirations. The iLP assessment to identify individual learning styles and approaches to learning is a nice touch. my-iPlan is probably the most appealing to students in terms of its look and feel. It's difficult to say how much help this system would be to school or college management, but both iLP and eTracker seem to provide an awful lot of data that would undoubtedly take an enormous effort to compile if reliant on manual systems – so clearly providing time and cost benefits to the institution.

In terms of cost, all three systems offer different pricing structures (excluding VAT).

- iLP is priced per student on a sliding scale depending on how many students attend the institution. At the time of conducting this review, it costs £7 per student per year for fewer than 1000 students and reduced down to £5.75 per student for more than 2000.
- eTracker is purchased on a yearly licence basis and it is a flat fee, regardless of the size of the school or college. The first year is charged at £4,500 which includes installation. The annual licence fee thereafter is £3,000 and any updates to the system are included automatically as part of the fee. To include the Traffic Light and/or ePortfolio module, add £500 per year per module.
- my-iPlan is also charged on an annual licence basis and the current cost is a flat £3,500 a year.

Of the three systems reviewed, it would appear that eTracker has greater functionality and certainly provides more data both on behavioural issues as well as academic progress. Whether students would find it as 'funky' as my-iPlan is worth bearing in mind, however perhaps page design versus information delivery should not be a key concern. The fact that the system is designed to allow tracking of students' performance against targets set, on an academic basis as well as the pastoral facility and provide secure access to parents is, however, another key consideration for schools and colleges to think about.

Each system is certainly worth investigating further, and there are certain to be upgrades introduced to each one over the coming months – as well as new solutions coming on to the market. Information is of crucial importance to the day-to-day running of any educational institution to improve individual student development. It is certainly time for managers and teachers to harness the benefits that technology can bring to help increase the personalisation of learning and help their students achieve their own individual goals.

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