

# ADVICE ON PARENT PORTAL IMPLEMENTATION

Using Moodle to increase parental  
engagement

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## Why is parental engagement important?

As part of any school's overall strategy, involving parents as much as possible is advantageous for a number of reasons:

- To ensure that parents are aware of their child's day to day education, the subjects they're studying and the school's expectations of them as a student.
- To provide parents with relevant information about a child's strengths and weaknesses or specific needs, allowing them to coordinate support.
- To foster constructive communication between a child's parents and teachers.

## Why use Moodle for parental engagement?

A well designed Moodle platform, integrated with the school's MIS software, provides the ideal tool for fostering a high level of parental engagement:

- Parents have access to relevant data 24 hours a day, from a range of Internet devices.
- Anytime access, and regular updates to the data available encourages regular use.
- Communication tools are available in real-time or asynchronously to connect parents with staff.
- Allowing parents to view lesson plans and any work set for their children along with any feedback helps them to support their child from home.
- Storing course materials, grades, important events, etc in Moodle reduces the overhead for teaching and admin staff in communicating this to parents.
- Via EduLink One integration attainment, attendance, and behavioural data can be shared with parents via easy to view reports.

## Cost savings

In order to save money at your school you can share documents through the platform without having to organise a mail merge to contact parents; or having to print out hundreds or thousands of sheets of paper, as well as spend time manually stuffing envelopes.

Within the LMS you can display this information to all parents of children at the school. Parents are able to view past and present letters that have been sent home meaning that they will no longer be lost in the bottom of a school bag.

This can be done through the EduLink SIMS Document Import functionality, the EduLink communicator functionality (Sending messages to parents via SMS or email) or through the use of a number of resources including File and Folder.

You may also wish to use features such as forms for online consent for school trips which should help to streamline the process of obtaining information from parents and to quickly approve any requests made from the school.

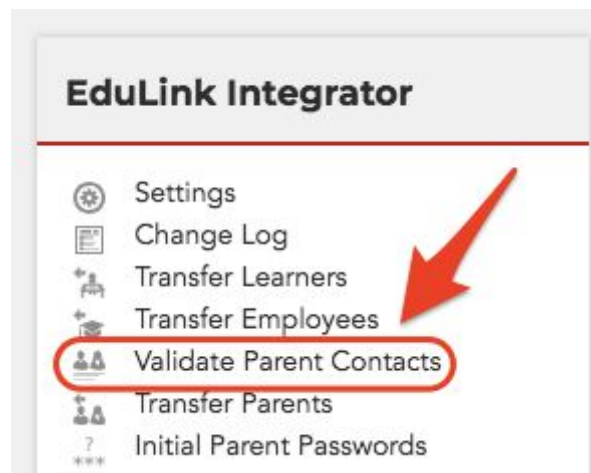
You could also use forms or surveys/questionnaires to collect feedback from parents about school meals, uniform policy or any other important issue around the school.

## Parent release checklist

The following checklist is quick snapshot of the key tasks involved when wanting to grant LMS access to parents. It is based on an LMS utilising EduLink integration, therefore in this case parent accounts are being created using data from SIMS.

### 1) Check MIS data

On the EduLink Integrator block, clicking **Validate parent contacts** will check your existing parent user accounts and inform you of any issues with duplicates, or missing information that would be preventing issues with accessing student data.



Once you have done this and checked on the platform that you are happy with the number of parent accounts that have been created. By clicking **Transfer Parents** on the EduLink integrator block you can import your new parent accounts. You can turn on “**Verbose mode**” and perform a “**Dry Run**” to check the data that is being imported for parent accounts before performing a real import). If there are any issues/errors you will be shown them here.

### 2) Check MIS Portal

It is worth noting that as an admin you are able to login as a parent in order to see the exact view that an account will see. By clicking “**Settings**” on the EduLink Portal block you are able to alter specific settings such as restricting certain behaviour incidents from showing or including late marks as present.

### 3) Parent Username Format

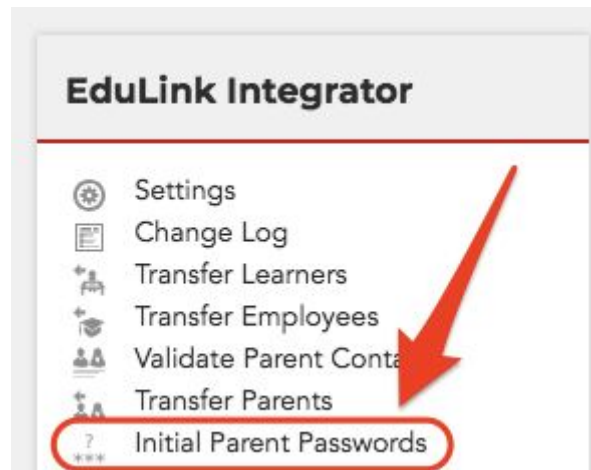
Within the EduLink integration, you can decide on the username prefix for new accounts. Generally this is setup as p\_ . The second part of the username is forenameinitialsurname so for example p\_jsmith. If you have only imported the forename initial then it would be p\_jsmith. If duplicates are encountered then a number will be appended to the end of the username, for example p\_jsmith2 etc.

### 4) Moodle content

Consider which existing courses will be available to parents and what additional courses you could create and share with them to increase the value of the VLE for your school.

### 5) Releasing parent passwords

Possible best practice for releasing your parent accounts and understanding how this can be done through the VLE. For example using a small pilot group to gauge reception. To summarise, you are able to click on **Initial Parent Passwords** and export your parent users to a CSV file. See **releasing credentials to parents** later in this guide for further information.



### 6) Check forgotten password functionality

Ensure that the password reset functionality is working and that you have entered the correct SMTP details into the outgoing mail configuration area. Please see later in this guide for more information on this.

## Ideas for engagement

In order to further enhance the uptake of the learning platform schools often wish to provide parents with user accounts of their own. This way they can log in to the platform and view any general school information and also gain specific information about their children and how they are doing at the school.

Below there are a variety of ways in which the platform can be used to engage parents, the majority of which relate to the display of information via courses:

- **School policies/handbooks**

Displaying general school information such as closures or specific school policy PDF handbooks allows parents to gain access to crucial information much more quickly.

- **School Uniform**

Both costs and uniform policies can be displayed online to parents.

- **School clubs**

Information and bookings, not only to inform the parents how well their child are doing but run parent-centred clubs.

- **PTA**

A course dedicated to members of the PTA at the school to store meeting minutes etc.

- **News bulletins**

Information such as school closures and term dates.

- **Feedback and questionnaires**

Using forms and surveys you are able to gain important feedback regarding any subject of your choice such as "How safe do you find our school?".

- **Ideas & discussions**

Using the Forum and wall widgets allows parents to put forward their ideas and discuss important subjects around the school from e-safety to school trips.

- **Newsletters**

Displaying current and previous newsletters can prevent you having to print off hundreds of pieces of paper and send them home with students.

- **E-Safety/safeguarding**

Communicate to parents about the potential dangers of an online presence along with providing general information about keeping their children safe online. “Think you Know” and other important links and information can be added to an e-safety course in order to help parents understand what is happening in their child’s social media and online world.

- **Prospectus**

Information for new or existing parents can be provided via the platform whether it be a general overview of the school, a virtual tour, or even the headteacher’s blog.

- **Homework support**

Dedicated courses aimed at parents can provide them with help and guidance on how they can support their child’s learning and homework tasks. This could be in the form of videos, images and text.

- **Curriculum information**

Your platform can be used to display information to parents regarding what is being taught in the different lessons and modules on their child’s curriculum.

- **Events**

Communication about upcoming school events (reserving a place) or parents’ evenings will allow them to be subjected to a wealth of important information.

- **Decision Making**

Communicating important changes to parents or asking for parents’ interest in becoming governors or other committee members can be easily done using forms and polls through the platform.



## EduLink Integration - SIMS Children Data

EduLink integration is an extension of the core Moodle platform that allows staff and parents to login and view more in depth information stored about their children in a school's SIMS database. Access to data on their child's attendance, behaviour, attainment and homework is of obvious value to parents and guardians. Consequently, parents will be encouraged to take a more active role in their child's learning journey.

This information includes:


- Assessment
- Attendance
- Behaviour
- Exams Info
- Medical Info
- Timetable Data
- SIMS Linked Documents
- Communicator (Email & SMS notifications)

There are additional features more relevant for teachers such as the ability to take registers through the platform and have these write back into SIMS.

## Releasing credentials to parents

Once you are happy with the parent accounts that are on your platform, you must then consider how you will release these accounts to parents. You are able to export your parent users accounts from Moodle through the EduLink integrator block. This is done by accessing the **Initial Parent Passwords** screen.

On this screen every parent account which has not logged in will be shown. Please note that there is a button at the top that can be clicked in order to show all parent accounts.

 Parents who have already logged in or who had passwords set by other software are not shown. To show all parents, click here.

If a password has a strikethrough it means the user's password has been changed from the initially created password.

The advantage of this initial parent password report is that it displays which children your parent accounts are linked too and also the year group. This can help you to release parent user credentials for one year at a time over a controlled rollout. The fields in this CSV file (at time of writing this guide) are as follows:

- Username
- Forename
- Surname
- Password
- Title
- Legal forename
- Legal surname
- Post code
- Address
- Children
- Associated years
- Associated form groups
- Date created
- MIS ID
- Email address
- Mobile phone

At the bottom of your list of parent users you can choose to export this data to a CSV file.

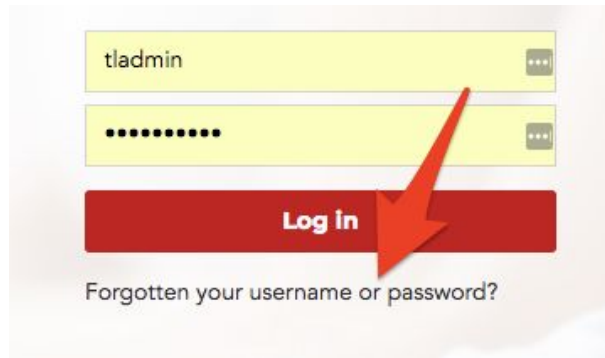
How to release usernames and passwords to parents comes down to the preferences of each school. The most efficient is probably to do so at a parents evening. You could wait until parents evening then give out these login details as each parent "signs in" upon entering the school.

This would allow parents to request their credentials directly from you, then you can search for their user account and give it to them there and then (or print it out for them). It also allows you to have a more controlled rollout for particular year groups so you can collect feedback from a set number of users.

This CSV could also allow you to mail merge these however this is obviously a costly method..

## Resetting Parent Passwords

If a parent forgets their password they are able to reset this themselves.



On the login screen, if they click the “Forgotten your username or password?” button they’ll be asked to enter a username or email address.

To reset your password, submit your username or your email address below. If we can find you in the database, an email will be sent to your email address, with instructions how to get access again.

### Search by username

Username

**Search**

### Search by email address

Email address

**Search**

The success of this relies on you having correct email addresses against your accounts and also ensuring you have entered the correct SMTP details in the platform. These can be found under **Site administration > Server > Email > Outgoing mail configuration**. You must provide:

- SMTP host and port number
- SMTP Security type
- SMTP username and password (for an account with access to send mail)

It is possible to use Google and Office 365 as a mail relay.

## How to Gauge Success

Being able to use the VLE to engage parents is only step one. The important task is then gauging how successful this has been. Not only is it vital to measure this success but also show to parents that you are acting on any feedback/ideas that have been given to the school through any of the means available to them. In order to gauge success schools may wish employ any of the following methods:

- **Feedback** - Through questionnaires and surveys asking for input on how parents feel the use of the VLE has helped them.
- **Parent forum** - Asking parents through a forum on the platform. This will also allow users to bounce ideas off each other.
- **Focus group** - Bringing together a group of parents to review how they feel..
- **Analytics** - Administrators on the platform can look into the course reports available to see which activities in courses they have visited/completed.
- **School phone calls** - Have the number of phone calls to the school regarding attainment, attendance or requesting teacher appointments decreased?
- **Student performance** - Has student attainment increased for users whose parents have been actively involved in the use of the platform? This does come down to exactly how the platform has been used but if the VLE is being utilised well there may well be a visible improvement.

Parental engagement is an important part of any school's strategy for a variety of reasons. Using Moodle, schools are able to bridge the gap between parents and the school in order to help parents engage and communicate effectively. This will provide a healthier collaborative environment for parents to better support their child's educational journey.