Virtual learning environments

Eleven case studies of effective practice

Case studies

Links and further info

Have your say

Introduction

This element of our e-portfolio is a selection of case studies of colleges and other learning providers that, in our judgement, use virtual learning environments well. This is just a sample, so for instance we may not have returned to providers that have only recently been inspected. However, we hope that in these examples you may glean some ideas on how a virtual learning environment could be presented in an interesting way that engages learners and effectively supports their studies. You will see a mix of 'home-designed' material, links, professional software, and learner involvement; each one has its merits for its particular audience.

We have not drawn conclusions from this very small sample, except that the better virtual learning environments seem to be the result of inspired staff, and that even in those institutions, which have strong virtual learning environments, coverage is not comprehensive.

The format of this publication is intended to replicate that of a home-designed VLE using simple Word software. It is designed primarily to be viewed online with navigation buttons to help you move to the relevant sections of the document.

Click on any of the boxes in the grid to go to the relevant case study

BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

moodle

bournemouth & poole the college

Moodle @ Bournville COLLEGE

Leeds College of Building

mc Middlesbrough College "Driving Ambition, Inspiring Success"

Nescot Weblearn - Your Virtual Learning Environment

NORTH WEST KENT COLLEGE

pbd the e-portfolio training company

PREMIER LEAGUE

City bit College Southampton

Teeslearn

Home   Case studies   Links and other information   Have your say

Birmingham Metropolitan College: a strategic approach to learning

The learning provider

- Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet) is a large general further education college. It has three main campuses, one in the city centre, one in Great Barr and one in Sutton Coldfield. It also works in the community and on employers' premises. The college has provision in 14 subject areas, the largest of which are preparation for life and work; business and administration; health, public services and care; and science and mathematics.

The virtual learning environment

- Birmingham Metropolitan College's virtual learning environment (VLE) is an important part of the college's strategic approach to learning and it hosts innovative and engaging resources in many subject areas.

- The VLE is a vital element of a three-year college-wide 'technology-enabled learning strategy', which also forms part of the overall 'strategic framework'. Both are linked with the college's teaching and learning strategy. The e-learning strategy is driven by 'pedagogic considerations' with student success as the primary focus.

- Innovative strategic developments include working with IBM to create a technology-enabled learning experience entitled 'Classroom in the Cloud' using IBM's 'Smart Cloud for Social Business' technology. The aim is to move from being simply a VLE to create a collaborative social learning environment. It is also planned that as the VLE evolves it will support international learning, as part of the college's strategic vision.

- The VLE can be accessed through any web-based mobile telephone, using a simplified mobile-friendly view. Moodle, a common open-source software package, is the platform which provides access across the 10 college sites. The system is overseen by the director of teacher training supported by the manager of information and learning technology and an e-learning and a web-services apprentice.

- Tutors are offered immediate support by a network of colleagues acting as local champions. All staff are issued with tablet computers, partly to encourage development of online skills and technology-enhanced learning.

- Staff and student inductions include an introduction to the VLE, and staff are provided with regular development sessions including 'An introduction to Moodle' and 'Moodle assessment'. Students are introduced to individual Moodle subject areas by the relevant tutor.

- The VLE has a very high level of activity, with between 3,000 and 4,000 users logging on each month during term time, although to some extent this reflects the use of the VLE for the submission of assignments and subsequent feedback. Higher level and higher education courses, and the students on those courses, tend to make most effective use of the interactive parts of the VLE.

- The most active BMet Moodle courses in 2012 were (in descending order): Level 3 sports and exercise sciences: Communications technology (unit 10); Introduction to functional skills IT, Digital graphics (unit 30); Communications and employability skills (IT); Systems analysis and design; Extended diploma in IT – networking and IT – Discovery 1; DTLLS year 2 e-learning unit; and BND unit 1

- Resources range from basic word documents and slide presentations, to quizzes, games, links and interactive work. Students respond well to the more interesting and well-populated courses. Some of the more engaging examples are outlined below.

Examples from Birmingham's VLE platform

- The 'diploma in teaching in the lifelong learning sector' year 2 e-learning unit has a lively interface shown in image 1 at the end of this case study. Units are laid out logically so that learners can follow the course in some detail, accessing resources and links in a way which encourages them to learn independently (image 2). In image 3, learners design their own VLE pages, with some entertaining results!

- One of the course sites that is particularly well used by students is level 3 'sport and exercise', which has over 56,000 page views a year. Good use is made of assignments, with resources shared between staff and students and a wide range of links to facilitate extension work. Image 4 shows an extract from a page on the site. Sports' staff use the new tablet technology well. In particular an application called 'Nearpod' provides, among other things, questions to students through mobile devices, controlling the speed at which

students can access the next question and providing immediate feedback to tutors.

- Staff work hard to keep their VLE innovative, including utilising new developments in social-networking systems outside the VLE. A new initiative this year has been the introduction of related Twitter and Facebook sites for students and teachers on the AS/A2 politics course. Use of these is optional, but a minority of AS students, and a majority of A2 students are 'followers' and/or 'friends' on the sites. The sites are also open to other tutors including those from other colleges, with 24 external tutors on the teaching network, which is arguably the main function of the initiative. Among other things, the 1,800 'tweets' on Twitter have included links to current news stories to make the A2 and AS courses relevant, distribution of 'bite-sized' revision points and reminders to students of course-related events. Twitter and Facebook have been useful in identifying relevant political articles and stories, which are then added to the VLE for future years.

- Further extracts from the colleges' VLE can be seen in image 5 (which relates to the politics course) and image 6 (a human physiology course which is well used).

Image 1: Diploma in teaching in the lifelong learning sector interface

Image 2: e-learning units are laid out logically

Image 3: An example of a learner-designed VLE page

L3 Sport & Exercise Sciences / Sport (Performance & Excellence)

Welcome to the Moodle pages for L3 Sport & Exercise Sciences / Sport (Performance & Excellence). You will find many resources to help you with your course and studies.
If you have any suggestions on any resources to add or you find web sites that have helped you and could help others please email me. Thanks everyone. Now get learning!!

Dave Slayter - Programme Manager for Level Three BTEC Sport

BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN

Respiratory System
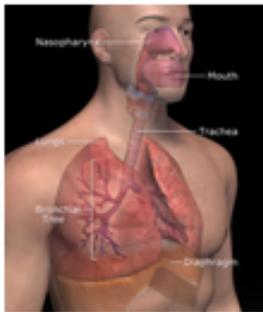
📑 Respiratory System Notes Powerpoint presentation
📑 Respiratory- neural and chemical control Powerpoint presentation
📄 Interactive Respiration webpages file
📊 Spirogram file

Useful Apps for Android / Apple platforms
📄 Speed anatomy (Android) file

Assessments for the Sports Science Students
📝 Anatomy Assessment 1 (Sport & Ex) - Yr1 Single Semester Word document
📝 Anatomy Assessment 1 (Sport & Ex) - Yr1 Assignment
📝 Anatomy Assessment 1 (Sport & Ex) - Yr1 (L3 Cert) Assignment
📝 Anatomy Assessment Forum
📝 Anatomy (Skeletal Assessment) - Assessment 1 Assignment
📝 Blank Skeletal Chart - for assessment one (bones) Word document
💬 Chat on assessment one - Bones
📝 Anatomy Assessment 2 (Sport & Ex) - Yr1 Word document
📝 Anatomy Assessment 2 (Muscles) - Year Long Word document
📝 P3 (1) Muscle Chart (Blank) - use for assessment 2 Word document
📝 Blank muscles table: Location, origin, insertion, action Word document
📝 Anatomy Assessment 2 (Muscles) - FINAL Submission Assignment

Image 4: A page from the well-used 'sports and exercise' site

Image 5: The politics site has over 200 resources to support learning

Topic 1 - Democracy

Defining politics Resource
Democracy and citizenship. Resource
Powerpoint 1.1.1 - Rights and responsibilities Powerpoint presentation
Advantages of a democracy Word document
Referenda questions handout Resource
Switzerland's referendum system - direct democracy file
Extra activities on referenda Resource
Democracy powerpoint 1.1.4 legitimacy and referenda. Powerpoint presentation
Powerpoint - Democracy 1.1.5 - Exam structure and sample questions Powerpoint presentation
Powerpoint Democracy 1.1.6 - representative democracy Powerpoint presentation
Democracy presentation 8 - Sample exam question Powerpoint presentation
Handout - representative or Parliamentary democracy Word document
Referenda - arguments for and against by Andrew Heywood (Chief Examiner) Resource
Assignment 5 - answers file
Political participation and apathy file
Is 16 too young too vote? file
Compulsory voting in Australia file
AS Democracy revision booklet Word document
Daily Mail on Falkland v EU referenda file
MPs criticise referendum question file
Low support for directly elected police commissioners file
Is the UK run by a remote elite and is federalism the solution? file

Image 6: The level 3 'access to higher education human physiology' unit attracted over 8,000 page views during the 16-week course

Welcome to Unit 2 - Theories & perspectives in Human Physiology.
This Unit has the following objectives, for the learner to:
1.0 Show knowledge and understanding of some of the main characteristics of biochemistry and metabolism
2.0 Demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in gathering ....
If you have any questions as you progress on this unit, please ask me or participate in the 'chat' facility below.
This advanced biochemistry unit is demanding and I hope you enjoy it. ☺
Regards,
Supinder Singh Varaitch
email: xxxxx@bmetc.ac.uk

- Any Question About Unit 2 Chat
- Human Physiology Syllabus PDF document

w/c 12/09/2011
Summary:

1. Outline the nature of atoms and describe the Bohr model
2. Relate the sub-atomic characteristics of atoms to their position in the Periodic table
3. Explain the patterns and arrangement of elements in a Periodic table and describe their electron configuration (using s, p, d and f notation)
4. Demonstrate the bonding mechanisms of Carbon (C) with an atomic model
5. Apply the knowledge learnt to describe covalent and ionic bonding
6. Explain the differentiation behind organic and non-organic chemistry.

- Worksheet 1 Word document
- Periodic Table PDF document
- Lesson One Lecture Notes file

w/c 19/09/2011
Summary:

1. Use Lewis and Dot diagrams to represent bonding paradigms
2. Introduce the concept of balancing equations
3. Introduce the hydrocarbons, giving examples of the Alkanes and Alkenes
4. Introduce and construct structural formulae
5. Using models, introduce the concept of isomers and stereo-isomers
6. Using empirical formulae introduce functional groups

- Lesson Two Lecture Notes file
- Worksheet 2 Word document
- Balancing Equations Tutorial file
- Balancing Equations Answers

Home   Case studies   Links and other information   Have your say

Bournemouth and Poole College: Improving teaching and learning through the use of a virtual learning environment

The learning provider

- Bournemouth and Poole College is a large general further education college located on five sites in Bournemouth and Poole. Most of the provision is at the two main sites at Lansdowne, Bournemouth and North Road, Poole. The college offers courses in all 15 sector subject areas.

What is the college trying to achieve with its virtual learning environment?

'Providing excellent teaching and learning is central to what we do; and harnessing the potential of existing and emerging technologies to deliver better, more personalised and innovative teaching, learning and assessment is a priority. Our students rightly expect us to equip them with the skills they will need to make their way in the modern world. Therefore using information learning technologies is a must if they are to be able to work flexibly and creatively and we must be the examples and inspiration for them.' Sharon Collett, Vice Principal.

Overall approach

- One of the aims of the college is to make information and learning technology (ILT) and teaching and learning seamless, wherever this takes place – in the classroom, workshops, or remotely. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is central to this; it is designed not only to support and enhance independent study but also to complement teaching and learning.

- At an institutional level, and in terms of day-to-day structure and use, responsibility for the VLE lies with the quality improvement and innovation team, aligning it closely to improving teaching and learning. Like other college functions, it is subject to the systems for monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement; it is therefore integral to teaching and learning and not additional.

- Much of the development of the VLE and ILT is the result of the college seeking students' views on courses they find most difficult and reasons for this; how they learn best and their views on the uses of technology in learning.

- Induction for students raises their expectations about the use and importance of ILT and the VLE. This is in line with what the college expects of staff, which is expressed clearly in the college's Information and Learning Technology policy: It is the responsibility of teachers to:

    – integrate ILT into their lessons

    – identify opportunities for e-learning

    – provide a more differentiated learning experience for students.

How the virtual learning environment improves teaching, learning and assessment

- Students have good access to ILT and the VLE, with help and support available. Teachers show students how the VLE can help them to support themselves, which raises expectations. For example, students can access resources, assignments and extension materials remotely that are specifically tailored to their own courses. They can monitor their own progress and goals in their individual learning plans. In short, learning is more personalised.

- Support staff and teachers have received appropriate continuing professional development to develop their skills in blended/e-learning and producing e-learning and assessment materials. This has enabled them to improve their understanding, confidence and capability in making effective use of the VLE and incorporating this into their teaching, assessment and course materials.

- Dan, a lecturer and senior practitioner, says:

    'It is not a chore, it is easy to use and we have lots of help from the Learning Resource Centre team.'

- There is a simple folder system for all courses on the VLE, each with its own logo for recognition. The VLE is not only for storing resources such as PowerPoint presentations, handouts, music clips and videos; it has a wide range of other functions to enhance teaching and learning, such as online tests, forums for discussions, and interactive quizzes. Students and teachers like these facilities and talk enthusiastically about how useful they are in the learning process.

- Information and learning technology champions and the professional support staff, work with teachers to make integration into teaching and developing resources simple, and to encourage them to be innovative. For example, in the pre-vocational areas teachers personalise National Learning Network materials and help learners to modify the materials for themselves, to suit their own level of understanding and pace of learning. Several courses in the areas of sport, technology and creative industries have adapted or produced practical demonstration video/DVD clips to illustrate practical tasks or

performances. One hairdressing student commented: 'I like the video clips that show me in detail what I should be doing because I can watch and learn at my pace'. By using the VLE to enable comparison and analysis with professional standards at the pace and level suitable for students, teachers have made ILT an essential aspect of teaching and learning.

- Students expect to find help and resources on the VLE and, as a result, are engaged more effectively in taking responsibility for their learning. The facility to be more interactive in assignments and the immediacy of feedback are the main reasons for this. Online assessments and end tests for the BTEC diplomas are regular features, and good examples of the different ways that assessment is being developed and linked to students' course markbooks and calendars. Tracking ensures that issues do not arise over 'lost' work. One student said: 'I rarely print work nowadays as I know where it is and I can see it more or less wherever I am – also I know it won't get lost!'

- Achievement has improved. Not only is learning more engaging, it is more fun. The ability and facility to take part in constructing, modifying and devising learning captures the attention of students more cogently; they become more active in developing their skills and more adventurous in what they undertake and in sharing work and ideas through 'Glogster' a digital presentation resource. Ongoing training makes good use of the interactive SMART board, including advanced use in some courses such as 'applied computing and computer animation'. Although not every course or curriculum area is at the same level, there is widespread use of interactive quizzes and questioning to test or reinforce learning. A programme called 'Qwizdom' is linked to PowerPoint. It enables students to participate using different levels of questions and gives immediate feedback on results. Other examples of enjoyable and popular VLE activities which involve students actively include polling, forums and video tutorials.

- Consolidation of learning in readiness for tests or examinations as part of revision and for reflection enables the independence and control over learning that teachers seek to develop in students. E-safety is a priority and staff and students receive regular updates and training.

Impact

- Courses that are below minimum levels of performance have improved as a result of the support offered, through direct observation and working with ILT Champions. For example, five out of six such courses improved success rates in the period 2009/10. Retention has risen because students are able to catch up with their coursework if they cannot attend for any reason.

- Finally, teachers themselves say that their professional competence and confidence with ILT have improved which has had a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Bournville College virtual learning environment

The learning provider

- Bournville College is a large college in southwest Birmingham, located in a new purpose built campus in Longbridge. The college offers courses for school leavers, adults, employers and international students. Qualifications include A Levels, BTECs, NVQs, Apprenticeships, Higher Education and bespoke training for businesses.

What makes this virtual learning environment good?

- This virtual learning environment (VLE) has:
  - a wide range of interesting resources with good use of high-quality material, including a significant proportion from outside sources
  - a clear strategy supporting a pragmatic approach to the VLE as blended learning to support teaching
  - good engagement with enthusiastic teaching staff. The virtual learning environment

- Bournville's VLE is based on Moodle. About 65% of courses now have resources in their area. Routine support is provided by an e-learning technologist working for the professional development manager with technical support provided by the IT network manager. Support for tutors is provided by advanced practitioners and continuing professional development staff.

- The approach to making the VLE effective has been based on working initially with the more enthusiastic staff. And they have built on that, promulgating good practice and, to some extent, relying on student demand to drive change as they experience and benefit from courses with a good VLE presence. Good practice is shared through newsletters and routine continuing professional development and is recognised through the award of 'Moodle Medals' for the more effective courses. (The 'award' is hidden from students, so that they are not concerned if their course is not 'gold standard'.) While there are some very good examples of helpful resources, and plans to take the VLE international, the college encourages the VLE to be used as a practical aid to learning, rather than requiring extensive stand-alone courses.

- The VLE is, unusually, not used for submission of assignments at present. However, many students do submit them by other electronic means; the college is investigating whether the VLE might be used routinely for submissions in future. The messaging facility is not available; an understandable decision based on concern about safeguarding, including how it could be moderated, and a feeling that another communication system ran the risk of overloading students.

- Most courses are laid out in a normal 'Moodle' style, but they are particularly effective as they are carefully divided up with a clear structure based on course units or sessions. For instance, in AS business studies, each section has a short and helpful introduction; this makes it much more engaging and more of a course rather than just a set of resources.

- Other courses offer more interaction. For instance in the level 3 extended diploma in media, students and tutors engage in a blog as they explore aspects of film making – with a set of interesting links to relevant material. This aids the development of assignments. An extract from one blog is shown in image 8 below.

- Tutors make good use of external links. Access to higher education courses have a helpful set of links to such things as sites for personal statements (see image 9).

- Tutors provide, or find, the majority of the material on the VLE. A significant number use external materials that are generally of a high quality, but are carefully chosen for their relevance to the course. For example, the use of BBC 'Bitesize' cardiovascular GCSE material shown in image 10.

- Relevant games engage learners in the VLE and reinforce concepts. A simple 'hangman' game in business studies is particularly popular and makes learners think about terms used in budgeting or enterprise.

- Much of the material consists of documents produced by tutors, or standard course material. There are also a large number of PowerPoint presentations, many of which have been used in lessons.

Key features of this VLE

- Key features that make this VLE an effective aid to learning include:

  - a dedicated e-learning technologist who supports staff and monitors the VLE

  - a clear code of conduct that, among other things, covers the design and layout of content in order to produce consistency of materials

  - direct (email) access to the technologist for students as well as staff

  - advanced practitioners who act as champions for VLE development

  - work with external bodies, such as an NHS Trust, to develop courses

  - detailed learner survey questions to help guide VLE development

- significant use of video, either embedded or linked
- routine 'spring cleaning' by both tutors and the e-learning technologist
- the opportunity for students to access material in other courses, for personal development or to see what might be involved if they enrol
- good individual support rather than relying on large training sessions for staff.

Image 8: An extract from a student/tutor blog

Re: Early editors
by Tutor - Saturday, 31 December 2011, 09:05 PM

Some good research but how about discussing the examples beat by beat and telling me about how their techniques are used?

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Re: Early editors
by Student - Monday, 16 January 2012, 09:46 PM

La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon (Workers leaving the Lumiere factory)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI63PUXnVMw

This film is a single scene which shows workers leaving the Lumiere factory. There are three different versions of this film, often referred to as the "one horse", "two horses" and "no horse" versions, in reference to the horse-drawn carriage which appears in the first two versions (pulled by one horse in the original and by two horses in the first remake). This link is the two horse version.

This 46-second movie was filmed in Lyon, France, by Louis Lumière. It was filmed by means of the Cinématographe, an all-in-one camera, which also serves as a film projector and developer. This film was shown in 1895 at the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, along with nine other short movies. As with all early Lumière movies, this film was made in 35 mm format with an aspect ratio of 1.33:1, and at a speed of 16 frames per second. At that rate, the 17 meters of film length provided a duration of 46 seconds, holding a total of 800 frames

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Re: Early editors
By Student - Monday, 16 January 2012, 10:36 PM

L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dgLEDdFddk&feature=related

This film shows a train pulling into a station in the French town of La Ciotat. It was filmed in one continuous shot and there is no intentional camera movement. Its first public showing was in January 1896. It was filmed by means of the Cinématographe, an all-in-one camera, which also serves as a film projector and developer. As with all early Lumière movies, this film was made in a 35 mm format with an aspect ratio of 1.33:1

A significant aspect of this film is that it contains a long shot, medium shot and a close-up. The long shot is at the start of the film and the medium shot and close-up occur as the train moves closer to the camera.

Although some historians doubt it happened, there is a story which says that when this film was first shown, the audience became so overwhelmed by moving image of a life-size train coming towards them, that they ran to the back of the room, screaming. This shows the contemporary reaction to the film.

Information found here:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Arriv%C3%A9e_d%27un_Train_en_Gare_de_la_Ciotat

Image 9: Access to Higher Education courses have helpful set of links to such things as sites for personal statements

Bournville COLLEGE

Welcome to the **Access Tutorial** area.

This course area contains information and resources which will assist you in your studies on your course at **Bournville College**.

http://www.studential.com/personalstatements/default.asp

Progressing to Higher Education

- Guidance for the Progressing to Higher Education Assignment
- A Guide to Writing Your Personal Statement
- Sample Personal Statements
- UCAS guide to Personal Statements
- Writing a Personal Statement [2]
- The Student Room file
- Progression Agreement - Health
- Progression Agreement - Teaching
- Progression Agreement - Combined Studies.

Image 10: An extract from BBC 'Bitesize' GCSE materials

AMSPAR Diploma in Medical Administration

BODY SYSTEMS

- Locomotor
- Cardiovascular & Circulatory
- BBC Human Body
- BBC Bitesize - Cardiovascular

Home   Case studies   Links and other information   Have your say

Leeds College of Building

The learning provider

- Leeds College of Building is a medium-sized general further education college that specialises in construction education and training. It is the only specialist construction college in England. It is based on six main sites and satellite sites in Leeds and the surrounding area.

Background to the virtual learning environment

'The VLE was born out of the initial Centre of Vocational Excellence and since then the college has ensured that all sites, classrooms and most workshops have VLE access, together with learner access from outside the college. It is an invaluable resource to support new and existing tutors in the delivery of teaching and learning, providing standardisation in delivery while allowing tutors to use a variety of media to support interesting and stimulating teaching. It also brings together teams in the joint production and development of teaching and learning resources, reducing duplication of effort and, more importantly, significantly improving students' experience and learning.' Derek Whitehead, Deputy Principal and Executive Director, Curriculum and Quality.

The virtual learning environment

- Development of e-learning is led by an information technology and e-learning manager supported by a small team of specialist staff. There is a strong culture of developing and using e-learning to support and engage students. The high level of commitment from senior staff permeates the college. Tutors, supported by the e-learning team, work collaboratively to develop and upload teaching resources and manage their individual courses. The college also works collaboratively with a wide range of other institutions to access funding to enable joint development of resources and materials, drawing on the respective strengths of each partner in the design and development process.

- A well-developed and populated VLE provides students with access to an unusually wide range of resources. For many students the VLE is an intrinsic part of their learning, with the resources being used extensively within classrooms and workshops. Learners also appreciate being able to reinforce their learning in workshops through the extensive range of videos showing them how to complete practical tasks, such as the branch weld in image 11 below.

- Students have good access to a comprehensive range of materials to develop their knowledge of aspects such as equality and diversity, health and safety, and sustainability. Care is taken that such resources are contextualised to ensure their relevance to students. Examples from the health and safety and sustainable building sections can be seen in image 12.

Using the virtual learning environment to support staff

- In addition to providing students with a wide range of resources to support their studies, the VLE is also used particularly well to develop and improve teaching and learning practice. The tutor support section for teachers includes links to many resources and support materials to help staff meet the additional and individual needs of their students. One section is used to share the outcomes from the observation of the teaching and learning process, enabling good practice to be shared across the college and providing effective opportunities for all staff to gain from the process. An extract from this section can be seen in image 13.

Impact

- Many students move around the region working on different building projects and the VLE provides access to materials when they are unable to attend in person, improving the retention of those students. The extensive range of workshop video clips available to students ensures that they can review techniques outside workshop sessions to develop and refine their practical skills and underpin their knowledge. For staff it has enabled collaborative working across sites to provide materials of a consistently high quality; utilising the expertise and knowledge of different staff reduces the time and effort needed from individuals, giving them more time to concentrate on delivery. The VLE also helps and supports teaching by engaging and enthusing students with resources that would not normally be available in a formal classroom, encouraging discussion and debate.

Image 11: the virtual environment uses videos to demonstrate practical tasks

Division of Services Craft Studies

Leeds College of Building

Setting up a Branch Weld

Menu
1 Cut the branch pipe
2 File off Swarf
3 Mark branch outline with chalk
4 Centre punch and re-chalk
5 Cut out pipe
6 File off Swarf and paint
7 Position branch on pipe
8 Tack branch to pipe

View the complete 4 minute movie (32 Mb)

Click on the links on the left to see video clips of the process of setting up a branch weld.

MAIN MENU Step 1 Step 2 Step 3 Step 4 Step 5 Step 6 Step 7 Step 8 Complete Movie

Image 12: examples from the sustainable building section

Image 13: an extract from the tutor support section for teachers

Home   Case studies   Links and other information   Have your say

Middlesbrough College

The learning provider

■ Middlesbrough College is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the Tees Valley. In August 2008, the college relocated from four sites across Middlesbrough to a new campus close to the town centre. The college offers further education courses in 14 of the 15 designated subject areas; A levels; apprenticeships; employer training; and higher education franchised from Teesside University. Courses are also offered to school pupils aged 14 to 16. A new sixth form centre is due to open in September 2012.

The college's commitment to a virtual learning environment

'We are committed to deliver an effective learning and technology strategy that proactively supports teaching and learning and provides a platform to drive the development of new and innovative technologies to enhance the quality of teaching and the learning experience. Through implementation of this strategy we will work to ensure that location, time, ability or resourcing will not be a barrier to the delivery of learning through the use of ICT.' Steve Brady, Assistant Principal Student Services.

The virtual learning environment

■ There is a detailed strategy for developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support individual learning needs across all areas in the college. Technology is used very well in curriculum areas such as hair and beauty, engineering and computing, and travel and tourism; in other areas use is a more limited. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is used well by students to extend learning beyond the classroom. They are able to access a wide range of information to support their learning.

■ College data show that the majority of usage comes from people actually within the college premises, rather than working remotely. Visit times average around seven-and-a-half minutes.

■ The e-learning team is based in the learning resource centre. This ensures that the development of ILT within the college is closely aligned with developments in other learning resources.

How does the virtual learning environment improve teaching, learning and assessment?

- The VLE acts as an information hub for communicating with students and as a one-stop shop. It is a critical part of students' induction into college life which includes a virtual induction into the learning resource centre and the learning resources available. The VLE is central to the strong emphasis on supporting learning both within the college and through independent study. It provides students with good access to a wide range of collaborative tools for the creation of audio-visual content, opening up opportunities for developing some exciting assessment work. Access to e-books provides students with greater choice about when and how they study.

- The e-learning team works well with curriculum staff to develop expertise in creating materials for the VLE and exploring how it can be used effectively. Training has a strong focus not only on the 'how' to produce content but on the 'why'. This ensures full consideration of the pedagogical demands when providing students with an effective learning environment through carefully blending different learning approaches and styles in a cost- and time-effective way.

- Frequent staff training sessions are well supported by good practice and e-learning user forums for sharing ideas and practice. A helpful 'free and easy' monthly newsletter provides staff with information about free online tools that can be used to create VLE content. An example page from that newsletter is shown in image 14 below.

- A recent and popular development has been the introduction of mobile phone technology which increases students' access to the VLE while out of college. This provides not only greater flexibility for accessing the VLE but also opportunities to use social media facilities for communicating with students.

- A very well-used aspect of the VLE is the online assignment submission and grading centre facility. Many students see this as being one of its major strengths. One student commented:

  > 'Being able to submit assignments at a time to suit me is a real bonus. I rarely turn on my laptop at weekends but can now access the grades and feedback from the marked assignment through my mobile phone which is permanently switched on. By the time I attend the next lesson or tutorial I have been able to really take on board the assignment feedback and have my questions ready on how to improve my performance in the next assignment.'

- Opportunities for virtual group work have been well exploited on the Access to Higher Education provision. As one of the tutors commented:

  > 'Not only did it provide greater flexibility in the groups' opportunities to work collaboratively, but it also enabled staff to monitor the contribution of each group member to the finished product more effectively.'

- The quality of the VLE is monitored closely focusing on the content and the extent to which it is used by students. Students' views are collected routinely to inform its future development. Annual audits of each curriculum area show the range of courses and materials available in each subject. These are judged against pre-determined standards and any judged not to meet at least basic standards have to be improved. The college does not have an expectation that all courses or materials will be of an advanced standard. As the e-learning manager, James Wells, said:

> 'It is important that each subject team looks at what is appropriate for their students. In some instances VLE materials meeting the basic standards may be entirely appropriate; in others more advanced materials may be more appropriate. What is important is that we give staff the capability and tools to produce whatever is right for their students.'

Image 14: a helpful newsletter provides staff with information about free online tools that can be used to create VLE content.
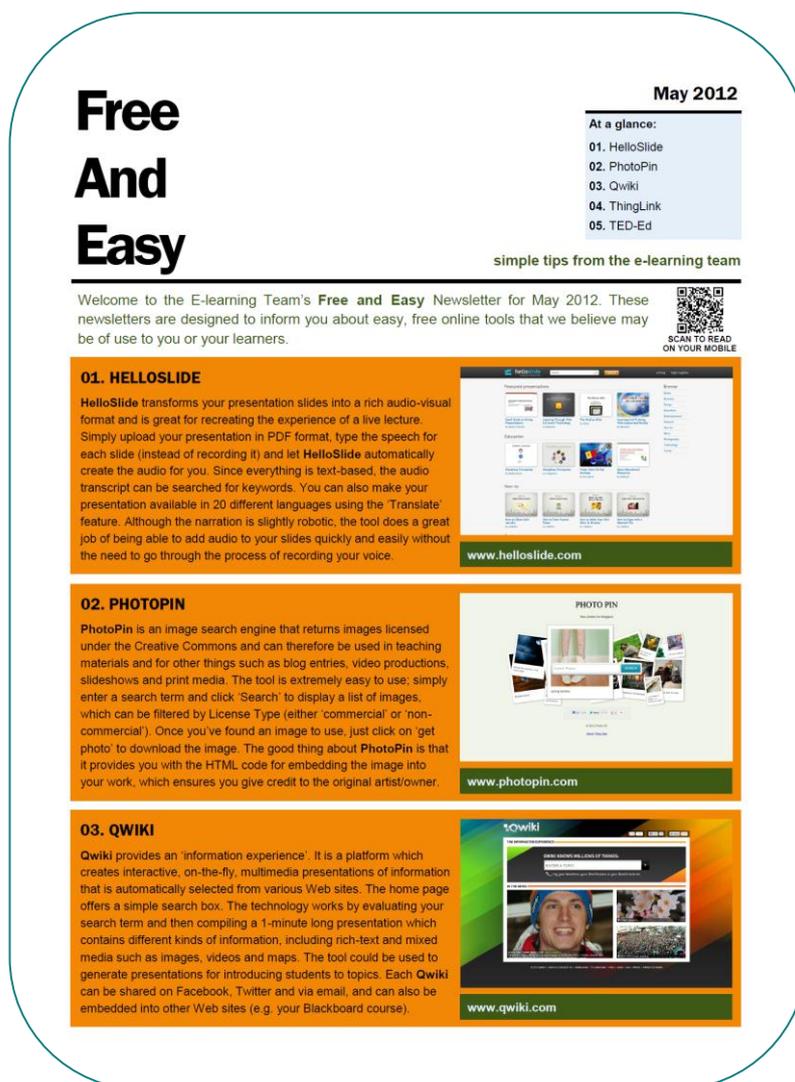
Impact

- There are many examples where access to the resources provided through the VLE has contributed to the retention and consequent success of individual students. The development of virtual learning has also contributed to strategies to address specific retention issues on some courses. In recent student surveys, well over 90% of the respondents commented favourably on the resources available to them through the VLE. Staff also see considerable benefits from the use of the VLE, including better standardisation in quality of the materials available to students across different sites; they, like the students, feel that the use of the online assignment submission and grade centre has had a very positive impact.

- Middlesbrough's advice to other to others on how make a VLE effective is:

  - ensure that materials and content of the VLE are inspiring and interactive but at the same time appropriate to the specific needs of each student group

  - consider how you will ensure that the content is kept up to date and that old material is routinely removed

  - develop a team culture to improving virtual learning – it should be everybody's responsibility not just a few staff in each section

  - ensure that developing virtual learning has strong support from senior managers

  - ensure you have a strategy for meeting the needs of those students who do not have ready access to computers, the Internet, or mobile phones outside college.

North East Surrey College of Technology: 'Weblearn' virtual learning environment

Nescot
Weblearn - Your Virtual Learning Environment

The college

- North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) is located in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell in Surrey. The college provides education and training for over 12,000 students with around two thirds on further education programmes. Over 80% of these enrol on part-time courses. The college offers vocational courses in 14 of the 15 sector skills areas. The largest numbers of students are in health, public services and care, construction and preparation for life and work.

The virtual learning environment

- Nescot's VLE – known as Weblearn – is based on Moodle. Mahara (an open source e-portfolio) is used for higher education courses and may be introduced for further education students. The college's philosophy is that the VLE should be an effective system for supporting learning and should help teachers to improve their teaching by facilitating blended and flexible learning. The principles underpinning the VLE are:

  - immediacy of feedback

  - individual engagement

  - immediate correction and/or reinforcement

  - enabling students to move forward and make progress

  - integrated with what students know already

  - diagnosing gaps.

- Two full-time members of staff support the system; the Director of E-Learning, IT Services and the Learning Resource Centre Manager. Support from the senior management team is good.

Student engagement

- The VLE is used for a wide range of activities and support. More than some other VLE it is used well for feedback. 'Assignment upload' is popular and ensures effective engagement with students. The 'upload' system increases the amount of

time that teachers can spend talking to students. Assignments are uploaded and then once a teacher has made initial comments, students can immediately review them or engage in a dialogue and do not have to go over the basics in lessons. It allows teachers to engage in deeper levels of discussion and therefore enhances learning.

- The VLE is used for diagnostic testing, and online accessible individual learning plans have also been successful in engaging students. Initial assessments are routinely done online, with outcomes linked to their web-based individual learning plan (e-tracker). As well as enabling teachers to track students' performance against set targets, e-tracker also has an electronic tutorial function built in, allowing teachers and students to carry out activities such as target-setting and performance reviews which are related to the students' personalised learning plan. 'Mindset's profiler' is used to assess key skills, which is also linked to the VLE. When students log in to the VLE they can also access personalised developmental activities available in Mindset.

- A notable feature of Nescot's VLE is the focus on e-safety. Besides being well covered on induction, every time a learner opens the VLE they are reminded to:

> Zip it
> Block it
> Flag it

What difference does it make?

- For the level 2 diploma in beauty therapy, the course team introduced 'assignment upload' to support students during the assessment process in 2011/12. The student course satisfaction rating of 10% in 2010/11 rose to 41% in 2011/12, and retention improved to 92% from 82%. Use of other interactive aspects of the VLE course area by students also increased significantly in 2011/12.

- Weblearn can be accessed by mobile technologies. Some of the applications have quick response (QR) codes, for example with links to community consultation groups such as the Safety Partnership.

Example of a QR code

- Examples of some of the more interesting areas and utilisation of the VLE are provided below.

AAT Level 2 Certificate in Accounting – students learning from each other

- This Weblearn course had a student satisfaction rating of 93% in 2011/12, up from 72% in 2010/11. The retention rate in 2011/12 was 93%. This course provides students with the opportunity to undertake examination practice using discussion forums with immediate tutor feedback.

- Students said that they wanted to improve their examination technique. In response the tutor set up a discussion forum answering questions, giving immediate online feedback to all students so that the whole class could benefit from sharing different techniques and knowledge and see the tutor's comments on the answers submitted. Students liked this approach and reported that it was a good, practical way of helping them understand how to answer questions effectively and improve their examination technique.

BTEC Level 1 IT – students taking ownership

- This Weblearn course had a student satisfaction rating of 88% in 2011/12, up from 82% in 2010/11. The retention rate was 100% in both 2011/12 and 2010/11. A wealth of resources and activities are used to support learning both inside and outside the classroom, broken down into weekly module topics.

- The VLE states:

  'The resources provided by this facility will support your learning on the BTEC level 1 diploma for IT users combined with the Level 1 certificate in work skills. We have lots of links to useful websites for you to do some independent research at home or interact with other students on the course, both in the class and away from college. Share this facility with your parents too!'

- In particular, this course provides students with the opportunity to build up their knowledge of technical terms through the use of glossaries.

- Students are involved successfully in taking control of learning, and developing learning tools for themselves. In this case the use of a glossary to help them understand key ideas and technical terms that are essential for this course.

- When learning new technical terms each student gives their own definition online. The teacher reviews and amends or modifies it. However the key point is that the students first express it in their own language and this helps other students to acquire the understanding; the building of the definitions becomes an 'organic' development of concepts because students have to know what is behind the technical terms.

BTEC level 3 diploma for IT practitioners – listening to students to improve delivery

- This Weblearn course had a student satisfaction rating of 93% in 2011/12, up from 72% in 2010/11. The retention rate in 2011/12 was 90%.

- The course contains examples of:

    – lesson rating

    – unit evaluations

    – online lessons

    – discussion forums

    – assignment uploads.

- To optimise the use of the lesson rating to improve how this particular course is delivered, students are asked to rate teaching by ranking as gold, silver, bronze or poor (four levels). When giving the rating they are also asked to suggest how things could be improved (teacher asks: 'What can I do to improve?'). Where appropriate the teacher then amends the next unit/assignment. For example, one of the suggestions was about explaining the rationale for spellings and use of spell-checker; the teacher then provided an explanation to help with subsequent submissions.

BTEC extended diploma games development level 3 – optimising class time

- This Weblearn course had a student satisfaction rating of 87% in 2011/12, up from 70% in 2010/11. The retention rate was 88% in 2011/12. This course engenders collaboration among students through discussion forums and quick peer reviews of book and documents. This particular approach is used in class as a 'blended tool', with the VLE acting as a vehicle to stimulate discussion for the whole class. It allows students to give their own views, while seeing and listening to the views of other students and learning from each other.

- The students read materials and provide feedback online. Once completed, the discussion is started and the teacher questions each student about their response. Some responses are detailed, others brief (for example 'that's epic!'), but this enables the group to open questioning and commence productive discussions. It is a good 'kick start' activity and uses time well to get to a deeper level of discussion. It helps to maintain the pace of learning and to involve all students.

Diploma in an introduction to the hair and beauty sector – embedding web-learning into course delivery

■ This Weblearn course had a student satisfaction rating of 83% in 2011/12, up from 47% in 2010/11. The retention rate was 84% in 2011/12. This course is broken down into module units and incorporates:

- video content to support practical work in class
- unit assignment upload with tutor feedback
- interactive resources to support classwork.

■ The course has links to videos, YouTube and other presentations to demonstrate relevant hair and beauty techniques. Because students can access these remotely, including from home, they do not fall behind. They can practise at their own pace and do not feel embarrassed if they do not learn skills as quickly as others.

North West Kent College: using the VLE to support missed learning

The learning provider

- North West Kent College is a large general further education college situated on two main sites in Dartford and Gravesend. It offers provision in 14 subject areas, with the largest numbers in health and social care, engineering, construction, sport, performing arts, preparation for life and work and business administration and accounting. It has grown significantly in recent years and is now an almost wholly vocational college. In 2009/10 there were 4,411 full-time learners of whom about 85% were aged 16 to 18.

The virtual learning environment; development and implementation

- The college first developed a virtual learning environment (VLE) in 2004 to offer extended learning opportunities to students and to allow them to access learning materials that they might have missed from being absent from lessons. The following year the VLE was converted from 'Learnwise' to 'Moodle' with which it has since stayed. The current VLE is now part of an overall managed learning environment, using the same platform which many staff use for their courses. There are some 4,800 active users.

- Learners are able to access their own progress data; use interactive and static materials to extend their learning; submit assignments (where appropriate); receive feedback; and locate materials for missed lessons. They also use the Mahara e-portfolio, social networking software and the VLE to embed further learning opportunities and to use reflective spaces such as the Posterous simple blogging platform shown in images 15 and 16.

**Image 15: simple blogging platform**
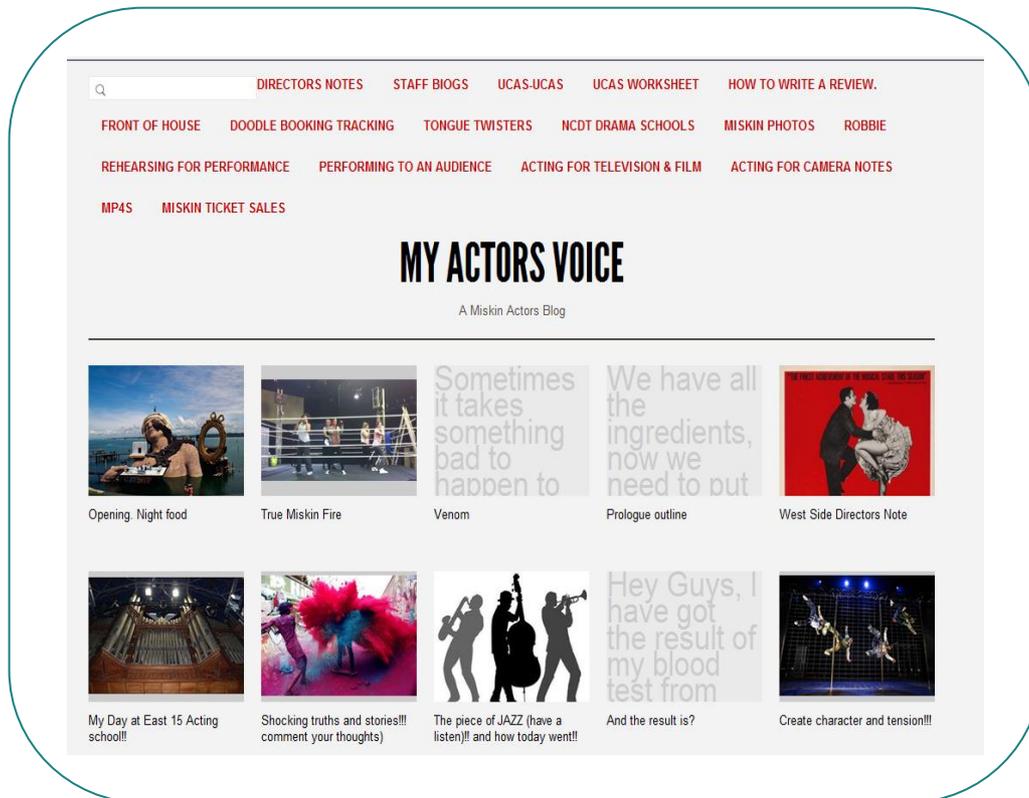
Image 16: simple blogging platform
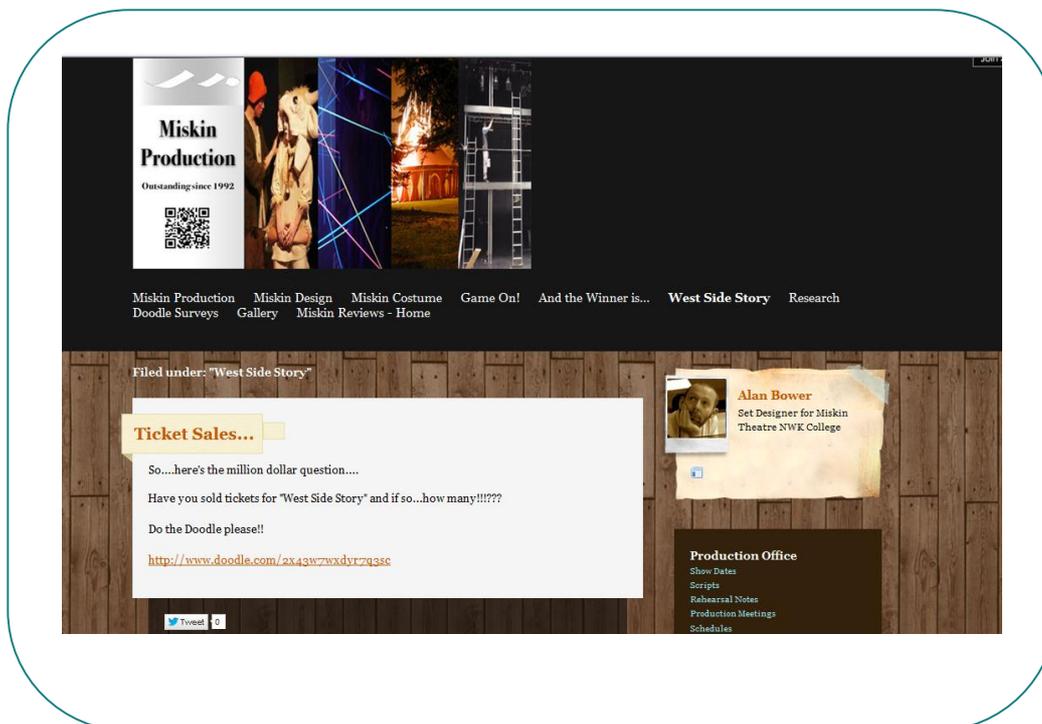
- Assessment handsets such as Optivotel enable greater embedding of the VLE as the 'one-stop shop' for in-class assessment and for tracking students' progress more interactively and in a timely fashion. Further examples of the college's use of Posterous can be found on the Posterous website, including the core space for first year actors and the e-log book for actors.[1,2]

- The college has demonstrated its commitment to the development of the VLE as a major learning tool: at the beginning of the current year, the responsibility for supporting the VLE moved from five teachers with two hours remission each per week, to the information technology (IT) team along with a support service from an external Moodle partner. These now provide full technical support, with a new Learning Technology Department and its centre facilitators team providing support and training to staff in the application of Moodle such as, uploading files, assignments, audio feedback and quiz creation,. A Moodle developer has been appointed in the current year to aid further development of students' personal learning plans (PLP) and you can see a demonstration of the PLP on the website.[3]

- Students can access their performance data (attendance, qualifications on entry, personal and academic targets, and reviews) easily at any port in the college, or through internet access at any time of the day. This has substantially increased usage and 'normalised' the VLE for many students and staff as a tool in teaching, learning and assessment. Access is also currently available through tablet devices and full mobile-device functionality was made available from September 2012.

- The VLE is accessed from outside the institution for over a quarter of the total access time. More than 10% of that access occurs in the evening (after 5 pm) with just under 4% occurring between midnight and 9 am.

- Students enjoy using the VLE because they can learn and work at their own pace and in their own time anywhere, particularly those who have missed lessons. Some use the VLE as a news and discussion forum. It enables them to submit assignments for assessment and receive detailed tutor feedback on progress in a timely manner. It provides a remote support forum for those who do not attend college on a daily basis such as retail apprentices. For many, it provides the tangible benefits of a blended learning experience. A significant number have to use the VLE as part of their studies, for example, when it is where all learning materials are stored, such as in carpentry, or when used for assignment submissions. The VLE is most effectively used by staff where there are computer bays and in classes with Smartboards. It is also used effectively as a reference and access point for materials (videos/audio/presentations/quizzes), task lists, assignment briefs and in-class submission of work. Some areas are 'pushing'

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[1] http://miskinactors2011.posterous.com.
[2] http://miskin-test-book.posterous.com.
[3] http://online.nwkcollege.ac.uk/file.php/1/PLP_tutorials/PLP_overview_October_2011/plp overview v1_1_October2011/plp overview v1_1_October2011.html.

content from the VLE to users using LanSchool (a classroom management system).

■ Curriculum managers regularly review Moodle usage as part of the quality process. A more advanced user-rating of individual content and activities is currently being developed as a custom-built module in Moodle. Students' views about their Moodle experience will then be shared directly with the relevant course teams, which will assist in monitoring the quality of courses as well as facilitating comparisons between areas.

■ The VLE provides teachers with the ability to work 'smarter' by, for example, centralising assessment collection and checking assignments for plagiarism. It offers opportunities for more individualised learning, which in turn leads to improved success rates; for example, in areas such as sport and performing arts. Arguably, the enthusiasm of staff and their ability to use the VLE effectively has a bearing on its impact. The expectations of those students who have experienced effective usage and implementation have promoted the uptake of the VLE as a tool by those who did not previously use it. The college intends to compare the use of the VLE and students' evaluation of its effectiveness, with qualification success and achievement rates in the next academic year.

People and Business Development Limited: Independent learning provider's virtual learning environment

The learning provider

- People and Business Development Limited (PBD) is an independent learning provider that provides training courses for young people and adults employed primarily in the child development and well-being sector. Its learners are employed in most regions of the country.

The virtual learning environment

- PBP is unusual in that it is using a learning management system to support learners in the work place. In areas where there are very small numbers of learners, the implementation and use of effective e-learning and e-monitoring facilities are cost and time effective for both the learners and the provider. They also enable learners with different needs and learning styles to work at a rate and in a manner that is most appropriate for themselves and their employers. At the last inspection, in December 2010, inspectors commented on the particularly good and effective use that the provider made of e-technology.

- Two commercially based software packages are used; an e-portfolio and a VLE for e-learning. Both are accessible from anywhere using an internet-connected device. The provider decided against linking the packages as it does not treat any of the output from VLE activities, such as quizzes, as assessment evidence. The VLE activities are formative self-checks. The relevant evidence comes from assignments which learners can download from the VLE, complete and then upload to their e-portfolio for marking and assessment.

- The e-portfolio, is a system for filing and cross-referencing evidence of learners' competence and knowledge (for example, observations, discussions and written assignments) maintained in a secure web-based portfolio. It allows good control of the workflow by routing assessment plans and work to the right person, such as the learner, assessor, or internal verifier, at the right time, once they have been signed off by the previous owner under their own secure login. Through detailed and comprehensive monitoring reports, managers have full control of planning, tracking and chasing reviews and signs-off. Illustrations of the types of report are shown in images 17 and 18 below.

Images 17 & 18: examples of monitoring reports available from the e-portfolio system

- Time is saved in the assessment process as all participants have immediate access to the portfolios when required. E-portfolios enable instant feedback to the learners, providing effective tracking of their progress through each unit of their course as well as through the courses themselves. An example of a learner's progress is shown in image 19.

- E-portfolios promote good learner–assessor interaction and are very secure. Learners and staff use the package well as an interactive tool with private communications between staff and learners and also for more general communications through open forum. They allow the provider to be more inclusive as they do not depend so much on learners writing everything down.

- The second package, for e-learning, is based on Moodle, a common open-source software package, and underpins the VLE (eQual Learning) which was developed in-house. An external subject specialist was used to develop the content. The materials are reviewed for relevance and improvements at regular staff meetings. Use is optional for learners and effectively replaces a textbook. It complements other forms of knowledge acquisition, such as, one-to-one assessor coaching and support and classroom teaching. However, since using technology is stressed from the beginning of the learners' programme through the use of the e-portfolio, all learners use the package. They draw on the resource for completing their written assignments and appreciate the multi-media nature of the VLE and the way it caters for different learning styles. Staff are enthusiastic champions of technology and support the learners well.

- PBD launched eQual Learning in 2010 to complement its use of technology with e-portfolios and to cater for geographically distributed learners for whom classroom teaching is not feasible. Through the development of the package, the provider has subsequently extended both the range of courses and the range of learners. The provider currently offers five courses which together provide full coverage of the advanced level diplomas for the Children and Young People's Workforce, and Playwork. Materials are being developed for the equivalent qualification in supporting teaching and learning in schools. Courses are also made available on licence to other providers and colleges who can add their own branding and content; for example to Cambridgeshire County Council and Blackpool and the Fylde College.

- The package provides an interactive themed collection of resources set out by type of activity, for example: lecture, transcript, podcast, video, PowerPoint, quiz, animations – the extract in image 20, shows the page for their sample course.

Image 19: The VLE allows instant feedback to learners and tracks progress through the course

Overall Progress: 52%		☐ Include pending assessments ☐ Show detailed view
Learner Evaluation	**Unit Progress**	**Actual**
LE1		50%
Level 3 NVQ in Children's Care, Learning and Development (Sep 2005)	**Unit Progress**	**Actual**
CCLD301		51%
CCLD302		72%
CCLD303		51%
CCLD304		75%
CCLD305		66%
CCLD306		37%
CCLD308		26%
CCLD309		51%
CCLD310		60%

Image 20: an interactive collection of resources set out by activity type

READING
Material to read and think about

Some of the social, economic and cultural factors that can affect outcomes
Case study - Alethea's story
Case study - Chen-Chi's story

TALK
Short talks from a range of early years practitioners and assessors

Talk 1 - the importance of background
Click here for a transcript of Talk 1

ENGAGE
Take part in our fun, interactive exercises

Discrimination
Living happily ever after

VIDEO
Watch the videos and reflect on how they compare with your own setting's practice

Click here for a Teachers TV video on child poverty and how to reduce its impact

- At appropriate stages of the learners' programmes, assessors direct learners to particular sections and support them in their use of the package. Learners respond positively to the wide variety of materials and activities available, particularly the multi-media approach and the fact that they do not have to study by reading textbooks. The animated material and videos are particularly appreciated.

The costs

- The initial cost was limited to training in the use of Moodle and the rental of a hosted server. This has since been recovered by external sales revenue. There were also several months of uncosted development time spent redesigning the package to PBD's own format. Continuing costs consist of the server rental and a royalty to Ufi Learndirect, from whom PBD obtained some of the materials for the early years programmes. Costs are now about £4,000 annually. PBD is expanding its range of programmes and ensuring that the materials on the VLE are kept fresh and up-to-date. The use of new content creation tools such as XERTE is being considered.

The Premier League

The learning provider

■ The Premier League is a limited company, with the 20 premier league football clubs as its shareholders and is based in central London. The youth development department manages the work-based learning contract for advanced apprenticeships in sporting excellence (AASE).

■ The Premier League coordinates the apprenticeship programme for 19 of the 20 Premier League clubs and also the three clubs that have been relegated. It quality assures the programme for the other club which is not as formally involved as the other 22 clubs. Because the Premier League is the hub, its VLE is a central point of communication and contact; it is also the means to monitor and check on the progress of apprentices.

Why is this virtual learning environment effective in supporting apprentices?

■ The VLE is well used and essential in helping the apprentices complete their courses. The reasons why it is successful are:

  – it seamlessly integrates the learning with the practical nature of the apprenticeship programme, the aim of which is to enable the apprentices to become professional footballers

  – there is a good range of professional and interactive resources and good links to external websites

  – it is accessible and easy to use

  – it enables staff both centrally and in the clubs to track and monitor apprentices' progress from before they become apprentices to beyond 18 and to 21 years of age – their 'learner journey'

  – staff are enthusiastic and use the system intelligently.

The virtual learning environment

■ The VLE is run and maintained by a commercial company and administered centrally by the education team in the youth department. All the clubs have access to it and to their own data and the shared resources.

- An Ofsted survey report, *Apprenticeships for young people,* referred to the Premier League's VLE as a VLE that introduced flexibility into training.[4]

- The benefit of the VLE to the clubs is that it provides a helpful tool when clubs undergo independent auditing that assesses the quality of support at each club. The Premier League supports the clubs to create opportunities for academy players to develop to their full potential in football and education. Their overall aim is to develop well-rounded individuals as well as high-quality professional football players. The vision of the Premier League is to produce more 'home grown' players – these are players that have come through the academy system and will progress into professional football. The ultimate aim is to produce world-class players that can compete favourably on an international stage. This will be implemented through the 'Elite Player Performance Plan'. The VLE is an important element in ensuring that all the aspects of their performance are appropriately captured and documented. For example, the initial performance check on their physical health and fitness is fully recorded, enabling progress to be measured.

- The VLE supports the delivery of the qualification without detracting from the main aim of the apprentices – to become professional footballers. To avoid the apprentices spending a disproportionate amount of time collecting evidence for their reviews and portfolios, the 'Skills Track' section enables the tutors to readily cross- reference the relevant evidence to the range of assessment criteria and use it to update individual learning plans. Video evidence is uploaded too, for example live video evidence from games showing the performance of individual players and how this relates to their improvement targets.

- The 'Skills Builder' section includes detailed cross-referencing in the relevant sections, such as for the National Vocational Qualification, the BTEC qualification, and the mapping of personal, learning and thinking skills. Internal verifiers have found that since the VLE has been used in this way it has saved them time and made the process more efficient because it brings everything together in one place. It shows: units done, evidence used, verification and sign-off details. The matrix overview in image 27 shows these details at a glance.

- The VLE enables staff to record, monitor and support apprentices, in a timely way, so that apprentices can complete their qualification and be well prepared for the next phase of their career, whether as a professional footballer or a different career path. This approach guides the apprentices to regard the programme in a holistic way, ensuring a suitable balance between the practical and theoretical. The education team has an overview of the performance profiles of each club and each apprentice that it monitors to ensure that they are on track. A measure of success is that over 90% of apprentices complete their training within the planned timescales.

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[4] *Apprenticeships for young people* (110177), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110177.

- The interactive nature of the VLE enables effective target-setting and use of data to motivate the apprentices; it makes the educational element of the programmes important when the main aim is football excellence. The data manager has developed a programme on the VLE for club support managers and tutors to assess likelihood of outcomes based on performance in individual modules. This is used in one-to-one reviews with the apprentices to motivate them and set or adjust their targets.

- All the information that the apprentices need is in one place. It is in presentable, clear format and language with links to social network sites. Apprentices access the VLE at their clubs or at home or even when on tour. There is a discussion forum for them – being developed further as a 'closed' blog – to keep them in touch with developments related to the Premier League and football, such as their recent tour to South Africa. The apprentices like this feature.

- For staff, another advantage is the range of training resources and programmes readily available to them. There are quick links to relevant sites, e-books and a well-planned and thorough equality and diversity programme for apprentices to work through as part of their induction and continuing programme. The intention is to develop a keen sense of social awareness and responsibility to the community both individually and in their roles as professional footballers. The attitudes of the apprentices suggests that this approach is successful.

- The VLE supports the learning of all the different groups of apprentices comprehensively and variously. For example:

  – the section on foreign scholar support for the apprentices from abroad is an effective resource for tutors and the apprentices and is well used

  – the importance of maintaining and promoting e-safety is brought home effectively by the online training programme

  – the interactive drugs awareness programme is informative and engaging.

- The VLE plays a significant part in the vision of the Premier League to 'develop educationally rounded people through a holistic approach'.

Image 27: The Premier League's VLE – matrix overview

Southampton City College: a well-established virtual learning environment

The learning provider

- Southampton City College is a medium-sized general further education college based on a main site in central Southampton with courses also provided at a range of other local venues. The college's curriculum is almost wholly vocational, along with significant provision in basic skills, providing courses in 12 sector subject areas and at pre-entry to advanced level.

The virtual learning environment

- City College has had a VLE – called 'CityBit' – for many years. Originally based on 'Blackboard' it has used Moodle since 2007 when the current VLE manager (the Learning Technology Manager) took up his post. The college is planning to upgrade to Moodle 2.3. The VLE is more advanced than most in the range of its use, as well as in categorising courses and in developing specialist aspects like NanoGong for setting audio assignments and gaining audio feedback.

- Support for CityBit comes from the VLE manager and support team; they are located in the Learning Resource Centre but have college-wide responsibilities. The manager is a member of the college management team and enjoys strong support from the principal who sees interactive learning technology (ILT) and the VLE as essential to learners' experience and skills development. The VLE manager updates governors on the college's ILT strategy for which he is also responsible. The team provides individual support for tutors and teachers, and delivers continuing professional development, though team members also work with 'champions' in departments. Staff can upload their own materials; they do not have to go through the central team.

- An introduction to the VLE is included as part of induction for staff and learners. New staff have an individual session with the Learning Technology Manager or one of his staff. For all staff there are comments in their appraisals about their use of the VLE and ILT.

How is the virtual learning environment used?

- All learners' work, for example assignments, templates and videos, is kept on the VLE. In addition, the VLE incorporates messaging and email and is linked to attendance monitoring and individual learning plans, with sections for e-portfolios. Learners have little or no choice other than to use the VLE. Adult learners particularly like the VLE because they are able to keep in touch if they are unable to attend classes. Interactive whiteboards are available in the majority of classrooms allowing in-class use of the VLE.

- As with most VLEs, CityBit is accessible to all learners both on- and off-site by direct link. Many access it using mobile phones – some learners use this as they have no internet home access. The VLE is used by different departments for: retrieving materials from lessons; accessing extension materials; enhanced graphics; classroom activities; links to other sources; 'wiki' collaborative working; chat room; messaging; videos (of learners/activities); assessment submissions and feedback; and tutorial information. Quick response (QR) codes are used for several purposes, including one that enables learners to alert the college if they are being bullied.

- Videos of lessons and learner activities are very popular as are the blogs/learner forums for sharing views and giving feedback on ideas and suggestions. CityTube is also very popular – this is a college version of YouTube but only accessible to college learners. Demonstrations and explanations (particularly in construction, hair and beauty, and engineering) on CityTube help learners to understand the theory behind a skill because they relate to the material in textbooks, have relevant links and learners can work through them at their own pace. This is an example of a short demonstration from hair and beauty shot on a flip camera.[5]

- A specific example of engaging learning on the VLE is the work a tutor did on the 'Towards independence' course in enabling his learners with learning disabilities to reinforce their learning and gain confidence. It won a JISC 'Hi5 e-learning' award. He produced topic-based video, and animated clips of the learners to help them in everyday situations, such a making an appointment with the doctor, keeping money safe or explaining the college code of conduct.[6] It is used to show learners how they 'fit', which they identify with more readily than someone telling them. Learners have also prepared short clips to reinforce their IT skills and to boost their confidence when they appear – even as an Avatar – on the internet. This is an example from Daniel, a City College learner.[7]

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[5] http://mybit.southampton-city.ac.uk/view/view.php?t=PwIgqGeb4H2JjuKfCM1x.
[6] http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/12421017/code-of-conduct.
[7] http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/13705251/celebz-movie.

- Learners like:
  - the easy access
  - the 'immediate' feedback on assignments
  - reduction in printing
  - the comprehensive source of college information
  - ready communication with their tutors/teachers
  - the blogs and discussion forums
  - the control over learning and independence
  - the 'look and learn' section (for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities).

- The usage of the VLE is monitored centrally. The pattern of usage is as might be expected; for example, there is low usage on Monday mornings and on Friday afternoons, but high usage in mid-week and early evening, with a drop in usage in the early evening until adult learners log-in later. Weekend usage varies over the year, with more use among adult learners.

VLE developments

- In 2009 the college introduced a gold/silver/bronze model for assessing courses based on criteria of:
  - in development: working towards bronze level
  - bronze: just a repository for material with no interactivity and low usage
  - silver: material for learners with interactivity but not a full range of functions (forums, online assignments and assessment)
  - gold: a full range of functions, genuinely collaborative, high usage (by hits).

- As well as assessment for the 'medals', feedback is gathered from learners through the VLE itself and learner questionnaires. An element of audit and 'spring-cleaning' takes place but this is not yet systematic.

- While it is difficult to link VLE usage directly with improvements in achievement, data show higher retention where courses have increased their use of the VLE and when assignments and course work are submitted and marked online.

- E-portfolios, and the ability to produce online CVs (for learners) are being developed using the Mahara platform. MyBit has an e-portfolio for all staff which

they can use to update employability skills. There is a link to the attendance management system.

- The college is developing further its use of SAM – Learner Apps and Messaging – as a new way to communicate with learners and use the learner voice more effectively. The aim is to find out what learners think in order to inform and guide their work more effectively. Using a modern interface that looks like a Smartphone, learners can use SAM to navigate to 'one question' surveys, give views on specific topics, read short community news items and access CityBit and areas that support their learning. In conjunction with SAM, the college is also extending its 'City VOX' to gather the views and opinions of all learners.

Teeslearn: partnership working to provide VLE resources for short-courses
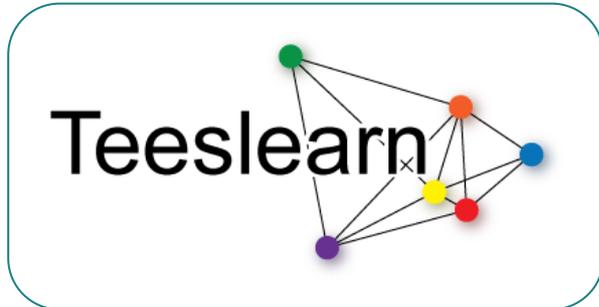
The learning provider

■ The Teeslearn virtual learning environment (VLE) is a partnership project that has been in place since 2005, with the Moodle element being launched in 2006 using some initial funding from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. It initially involved five local authorities (Hartlepool, Darlington, Redcar, Middlesbrough, and Stockton) with Durham County Council joining later. The software and server are maintained by Middlesbrough Community Learning Service, with overall management exercised through a steering group of partners and a representative from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) regional support centre. The aim is to support learners in the area, specifically those attending adult and community classes.

What makes Teeslearn special as a virtual learning environment?

■ Teeslearn has the following special features:

– resources closely linked to class activities that aid learning and build on the relatively short duration adult learning classes

– a joint venture, making it an efficient project

– an international dimension.

The virtual learning environment

■ Teeslearn relies on the efforts of individual tutors to populate the areas of the VLE. In the main it is used for communication between learners and tutors and to allow learners access to resources linked with their class, repeating exercises or, more usually, attempting additional activities.

Languages

- Among the more active sites are those for languages where there is a very good range of additional activities and exercises. Forums and weblogs were tried some years ago but video conferencing is now preferred and used on a regular basis with partners in Europe (including France, Greece and Russia). However, this initiative does mean that certain classes are restricted to main centres with good connectivity. Resources are mainly links to external sites to allow learners to reinforce class activities. Some material on the French language site was recorded by a tutor in Bourges following joint work initiated by Teeslearn. The constant references to this city give learners a sense of identity with a particular area. An example of a language site linked with a class is seen in image 21.

- In addition to the sections relating to specific courses, the VLE also hosts an 'Emporium'. Here tutors have placed resources or links for a particular language that can be used by any course or tutor for extension or reinforcement activities. These useful sites are well used by learners. An example of the French 'Emporium' is shown in image 22. The links to Guadeloupe relate back to the days when an assistant from Guadeloupe was working with the service, and generated and then maintained an interest in the area. These facilities are mainly aimed at encouraging the 'expert learner' who can direct their own learning relatively easily.

Yachtmaster course

- Away from languages the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Yachtmaster course is interesting as it shows how a tutor can work with specialists to produce resources. Here the tutor wanted to show the type of signal displayed by vessels. Rather than spend hours on it himself, he provided the central team with sketches which they translated into pictures as seen in image 23.

- The RYA site also has sound signals with short MP3 files demonstrating siren blasts. There are also aide memoires in Word documents, quizzes, helpful links and some video clips; the one of a ferry in a rough sea available on YouTube should rightly dissuade sailors from putting out to sea in rough conditions, but could also do wonders for the channel tunnel![8]

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[8] www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=_QKVSYz3Md8.

Welcome to French level 2

Use Moodle to back up your classroom learning.
If you miss a week, all resources used in the meeting are available online.
Contact your tutor if you want any further information

You will find webquests in the Holiday periods, they are optional assignments, for your practice.

French Language Resource Emporium
Café Pierre Home Page

- News forum
- Bourges Weblog file
- INITIAL ASSESSMENT file

Test Your French find what suits you best

- Link to French 1 Resources
- QUIA RESOURCES
- Word Reference
- BBC French
- 10 Questions Interviews

WEEK 1: Welcome to French 2.
In the first term we will be revising pronunciation, introductions, numbers, the alphabet and food and drink.

- BBC Learning Zone
- Home page for the city of Bourges
- Introductions revision Quiz
- Introductions revision
- Introductions revision
- Food and Drink Revision

WEEK 2: Numbers 1-30 and the alphabet.

- Numbers 1
- Homework week 2

Image 21: an example of a language site linked with a class

Image 22 (below): example of a French 'Emporium'

La Francophonie
[The French Speaking World]

The news from Luxembourg

LES DOM TOMS

guadeloupe

LINK TO OUR GUADELOUPE PROJECT HERE

- Peter France 2009 Lightbox Gallery
- ST BENOIT Resource
- La Patrouille file
- LES DOM TOMS. Resource
- Les nouvelles de Guadeloupe file

Web Sites

B|B|C

Probably the best language site in the World!

Ma France   24 Interactive French Videos

Enseigner.tv

- General Useful French sites Resource
- French TV and Radio Sites Resource
- Teaching Resource sites
- Ma France sample, Eating out. Mini Lessons. Resource

Image 23: images used on the RYA VLE site
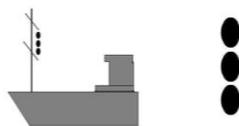
A vessel **aground** shall exhibit 3 vertical balls:
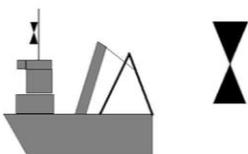
Fishing vessel engaged in fishing displays double cone shape.

Photography

- Photography master classes, as presented in image 24, have an inventive range of resources, with the facility for learners to upload their work to share with others and get comments. This is an unusual example in that a tutor has developed extensive resources on the VLE ahead of the class, ready to launch with the first session, rather than build up resources as the year goes on.

- Other photography classes, such as the NCFE level 1 (seen in image 25 below), are well laid out with clear instructions for learners, again helping them to become 'expert' or independent learners; for example, allowing them to create a portfolio.

Image 24: Extract from photography master class page

Image 25: Use of VLE to help students create a portfolio

Your Portfolio

Your portfolio must consist of 12 images presented as a considered approach to the chosen theme.

The themes are:
a) Spirit of the place
b) Faces
c) A day in the life
d) Celebration
e) Action!

Please Note: Candidates should only complete ONE of the above topics and images must be at least 6x8ins in size.

Use the Exabis E-portfolio to store your images, remember to share them with your tutor.

My Personal Journal, plan and reflect on your progress. Your tutor will give continual assessment.

- 📝Journal

Unit 01 Use of cameras

This unit looks at how a camera operates and learners can examine the functions of their camera, ie aperture, shutter, ISO settings, zoom lenses. They can experiment with their camera and provide annotated examples of a series of images that show the effects that can be achieved when using these controls.

Camera equipment should allow the learner the opportunity to experiment with aperture/shutter settings. The learner should also provide evidence that they, in the case of digital, understand the various file types and sizes and media storage devices.

Health and Safety can be covered by carrying out a simple risk assessment when taking shots.

Download criteria

- 📁Photography Tasks file
- 📄Unit 01 Criteria Resource
- 📄Photo Tracking Sheet PDF document

Professional development courses

- Professional development courses, particularly those for teacher training (PTLS, DTLLS) tend to be more interactive, with learners using the system for the submission of assignments and tutors updating news, as shown in image 26.

Image 26: tutors update news


```
Latest News
        2 May, 14:30
Welcome to level 4 May to July cohort more...
        9 Feb, 12:39
Assignment deadline sheet amended more...
        27 Jan, 12:01
Handbook and candidate numbers! more...
        18 Jan, 14:50
Welcome to 2012 PTLLS more...
        10 May, 10:16
Suggested Reading more...
```

Other aspects of this VLE

- With geographically widespread staff, many of whom are part-time, the Teeslearn team has to work hard on continuing professional development for tutors to enable them to utilise the VLE. All staff are introduced to the VLE as part of their induction, with annual events available for update work. The 'staff room' areas on Moodle offer tutors tips and training. Tutors are encouraged not to overload their learners and use the hide facility so that only a couple of week's worth of material is shown at any one stage. Where several classes are using the same material simultaneously (for instance three parallel photography classes), the group will only see submissions and correspondence with their own group, increasing the sense of class identity. Some tutors use the text message system on Moodle to update their class on subjects such as venue changes, or materials required for the next session.

- Those learners not used to this form of learning are offered short sessions on information and communication technology on the VLE to help them make effective use of Teeslearn. Workshops for the 'expert learner' have been arranged for other learners to improve their use of the VLE. Simple measures such as issuing learners with log-in cards, reminding them of their names, password and VLE internet address have been successful in reducing the number of calls to support staff.

- Courses are assessed by administration staff and are awarded 'Teeslearn Stars' to reward good practice and follow-up correspondence highlights how courses can be improved. This is linked to the system for observing teaching and learning and online learning is taken into account when reviewing lessons. The quality group meets every second month to discuss a range of developments, from the routine weeding out of old courses to ways to assist staff to develop their resources.

- Learners have created a number of resources on the VLE, notably in crafts and languages. Active participation in sharing cultures is a strong element of Teeslearn activities. As well as the links with French colleagues, learners have been participating in pilots such as 'Amigos' in which learners across Europe are using Teeslearn as a portal for independent study alongside the use of Skype video conferencing.

Safe Learning

Learner safety at home and in the classroom

- Safeguarding has a strong emphasis in the VLE. All pages have a single click button as pictured left. This takes the learner to advice, procedures, links and the opportunity to contact Teeslearn staff directly (the learner having some choice in which of the partners they go to).

- Teeslearn has started to make the VLE 'mobile friendly'. When viewed on a mobile browser, the VLE dynamically alters its layout to a format more suitable for a small-screen display. However, this has its limitations, notably with the suitability of resources for a mobile platform; some mobile telephone handsets do not support Microsoft Office documents, which is a frequently used resource in online classes.

- The international dimension is growing. The initial links with Bourges, a Spanish institution and other British institutions laid the foundations for further work. A new project is extending the links to a new Spanish group, as well as contacts in Germany and possibly Italy. Among other things the project hopes to make language more authentic and interesting for learners, for example by looking at everyday life along a pilgrimage route (The Camino de Santiago) that links some of the partners. A spin-off from this type of venture is that learners also extend their understanding of technology, for instance with many learners being introduced to Skype for the first time.

- At home, Teeslearn is embarking on a JISC-supported project to establish a database of resources that will be freely available to all providers, with the proviso that anyone who wishes to use the facility should upload a resource themselves as they take one. This is aimed particularly at the provision of

material for the adult learning sector, where freely available resources are limited at present.

- Teeslearn has been innovative in respect of bringing together several 'providers', but this also has its challenges in trying to meet the needs and interests of all partners. A significant change in the future will be the division of the single, large VLE that serves all partners into smaller units that operate under the Teeslearn umbrella. This is intended to make the management of the VLE easier, allow for greater customisation by each partner, and will allow partners the opportunity to link with their own management information systems.

- The system is also due to be migrated to Moodle2 in the near future. Teeslearn hopes to make this an opportunity to engage more staff: at the moment it is the full-time tutors who are the more active. All staff will be trained again with the intention of encouraging the development of work that can be shared.

Links and other information

Published as part of this VLE e-portfolio are four documents providing links to further information. They can all be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120361.

Links to good practice: a range of further good practice examples that make reference to the use of virtual learning environments.

What the reports say: extracts from Ofsted reports in 2010–11 with references to virtual learning environments.

What the reports say: extracts from Ofsted reports in 2011–12 with references to virtual learning environments.

VLE e-portfolio – links. Providing links to various sites and resources which might be of interest to readers who are looking to add to the content or management of their VLE.

Learner voice: Ofsted commissioned report. Ofsted asked YouthSight to run a survey with learners and provide the data and a summary report about virtual learning environments.

Have your say – and help out the VLE community

Thank you for accessing our portfolio of resources. We hope it will give people who are interested in virtual learning environments some ideas or inspiration as to how they might improve their facilities.

However, we appreciate that this is only a very limited review of what is going on or is available. Having this in mind, we would be delighted to receive ideas and input from you, which could take the form of:

- links to new resources, applications, software, or hardware you have been using – we will use them to update our links document

- comments on what has worked well for you or your institution; or feedback from learners

- pictures/screenshots of some useful approach.

We looked at the various ways of doing this – bulletin board, social networking site, forum, wiki – but decided that we would start small and sensible with something we could easily and cheaply manage. Therefore, if you have any input that you would like to share with us please email it to vle@Ofsted.gov.uk.