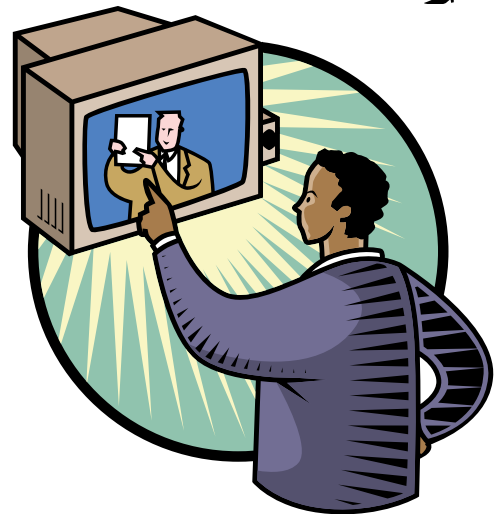
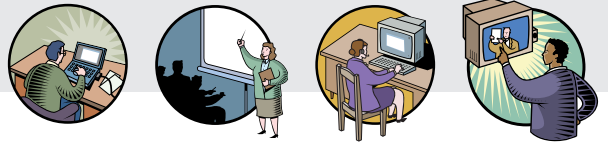


## Working with VLEs





## Working with VLEs

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is a set of integrated Web-based tools that enable tutors to create and administer courses and allow learners access to those courses. One of the big advantages of a VLE is that it allows tutors to provide their learners with online materials without requiring a deep technical knowledge. It provides the learner with one unified interface through which they can get access to all their courses and which will have a consistent look and feel.

The majority of UK Universities and Colleges have at least one VLE and are always keen to encourage their staff to add learning materials to it. In fact, in some cases, the Institution insists that all courses have a place on their VLE so you may have no choice on where to deliver your learning package. To help increase the use of their VLE your Institution may have set up a VLE support team. This team should be able to give you training on how to use the VLE and they should really be your first port of call if you are going to use a VLE. These guidelines are an introduction to what a VLE can typically do for you and what things you should look out for if designing your learning package for a VLE.

A VLE will typically include most or all of the following features:

### **Content creation or upload tools.**

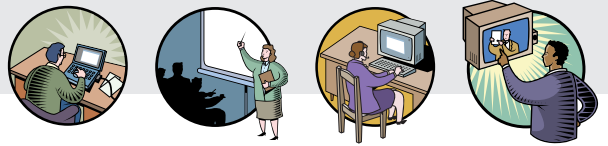
There will be some mechanism to get materials into the VLE. Most will provide an upload facility so you can add files to the course that you have created elsewhere. In some cases the VLE will also provide an authoring tool allowing you to create content; this authoring tool is likely to be more restrictive than a dedicated Web page authoring tool. When uploading materials, check that they appear in the VLE as you expect; sometimes things can get badly formatted or can be missing altogether.

### **Course structure.**

Having got your materials into the VLE you can give them some structure within that module or course; the VLE will then provide a navigation toolbar to the learners so that they can view your learning materials in the intended order. Most VLEs allow only a linear navigation structure, but others can be much more flexible allowing for more complex structures.

### **Communication tools.**

These are tools such as email, discussion boards and chat rooms and can be used for exchanges between tutor and learner and between learner and learner. These communication tools can really add to the richness of your learners' learning experience if used sensibly. However, don't use the tools just because they are there; make sure



### Hints and Tips

Don't work in isolation – talk to your VLE team and discuss what you want to do. They will advise you on how best to use the features of your Institution's VLE.

The VLE team can also advise you on any design and style requirements for VLE based learning packages in your Institution.

Check on some existing materials in the VLE to see what does or doesn't work. It will give you a good idea how you might structure materials (how much text on each page etc.).

Make sure you check how the materials will appear to the learner (the staff interface to a VLE often looks different).

If you are linking to external websites, check how the VLE navigation works when the web pages open on screen.

there is a clear purpose behind them. For example, if you are using a discussion group the learners should have a specific topic to discuss.

### Assessment tools.

VLEs can provide tools for assessment, both formative (self testing) and summative (assessed). Built in tools can be useful for keeping track of the learners' progress and the VLE will record scores from these assessment activities. However, these tools can be very limited, particularly for formative assessment. Sometimes you are not able to provide good feedback (if any) when the learners answer the questions. Integrating assessments within materials (rather than at the end of the package) can also sometimes prove difficult so again it is worth getting help if you want to include these features.

### Management tools.

These tools allow you to set up user accounts and access levels. In some cases you can track your learners' progress through your course.. Course marks can also be recorded here (even if the assessment did not occur online).

### Other tools.

There is a range of other tools your VLE may include. For example, a few VLEs include a tool that allows learners to add their own notes within the learning package. Some VLEs have a special area where learners can submit work where learners can view it and add comments about it.

While these tools sometimes prove restrictive, it is always worth investigating what your VLE is capable of as it may well save you work in the long run. Finding out about its particular features may even inspire you to change the way you teach a certain topic.

These guidelines were produced as part of the JISC-funded project X4L Healthier Nation. You can find out about JISC at <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>, the X4L Programme at [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme\\_x4l](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_x4l) and X4L Healthier Nation at <http://extranet.lauder.ac.uk/x4l/>.