LEARNING AND TEACHING

E-LEARNING

OFF THE GROUND
Cleveland College get Blackboard working

BUT IS I.T. ART?
UWIC focus on staff development needs and the uptake of e-learning

CONTENT IS KING
Time to stop worrying about looks and focus on the substance

LEGAL ACCESS
Being accessible isn’t just about building ramps

COMING ONLINE
Details of a new JISC-funded project on e-learning
Getting a VLE adopted by an institution is one thing, but getting staff and students on board is another. For Cleveland College, the successful adoption of Blackboard on FE courses gave HE a head start.

CELEVELAND College of Art and Design is a ‘mixed economy’ FE college, meaning its HE programmes are a relatively small (but important) part of its work. FE, being the focus of the government’s expansion of higher education, has benefited from a great deal of capital investment in recent years, most of which has been targeted at specific areas. The National Learning Network ([www.nln.ac.uk](http://www.nln.ac.uk)), set up in 1999 and representing organisations such as Becta, NIACE, the Learning and Skills Councils and the Department for Education, made funds available to Cleveland to purchase a VLE, as well as helping to raise awareness of what a VLE could do in the college.

Although there was a lot of interest, and an enviable amount of financial assistance to purchase a VLE, when it came time to involve HE staff it was clear from the start that many lacked the skills to use the system effectively.

“We needed a long-term staff development strategy,” says Christine Goult, Cleveland’s HE Enhancement Coordinator, “but with staff under a lot of pressure to take up a range of development activities it was clear that not everyone could, or would want to, focus on the VLE”.

Like many institutions, Cleveland decided to focus on a few staff at first and set up a VLE Working Group. This consisted of a member of staff from each HE programme, all three historical and contextual studies staff, the IT projects administrator, and Christine Goult who had responsibility for overseeing development of the VLE. Only Christine and the contextual studies staff had any previous experience of using a VLE in a real-life situation, so after getting some training in the use of Blackboard, the group began a series of one-to-one sessions with the others.

UWIC’s report into the problems associated with staff development and VLEs (see But is I.T. art?) highlights some of the problems involved in getting people on board. Cleveland’s solution was simple: “We decided to pay staff overtime for attending evening meetings,” says Christine. “We wanted to run the project around a series of evening sessions that would allow us time to discuss and make decisions, develop our collective skills, or simply work on the VLE content itself.”

All seven HE programmes were given a presence on the VLE as was the Learning Resource Centre.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Even with the incentive of pay it was never possible to arrange a meeting at which everyone could be present. But anyone who missed one was kept up to date by Christine so nobody felt out of the loop. Each meeting lasted around three hours and was focused around specific points. The first meeting discussed what each course area should have as a minimum and, after much debate, a list of minimum standards was established:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE INFORMATION</th>
<th>Programme Handbook</th>
<th>Timetable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAFF INFORMATION</td>
<td>A picture of each team member</td>
<td>Email addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE DOCUMENTS</td>
<td>Module guides</td>
<td>Health and safety documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSIGNMENT FOLDERS FOR EACH YEAR CONTAINING</td>
<td>Module descriptors</td>
<td>Schemes of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL LINKS</td>
<td>Appropriate web sites subdivided to avoid unwieldy lists</td>
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“Some teams were a little more free-spirited about where documents were placed,” says Christine, “but as the idea was to get people using the VLE rather than conforming to rules, this didn’t matter too much. Because students only see one course area it doesn’t matter if there are slight variations so long as there’s no disadvantage involved.”

Looking around different institutions it is clear to see that many VLEs fail to take off either
because of a too-rigid approach (which Cleveland clearly avoided) or by failing to have any sort of structure to discussions. At Cleveland, meetings covered subjects such as accessibility and DDA requirements (see Legal Access), file sizes, and visiting other institutions to see what lessons could be learnt. An odd mix of topics, perhaps, but important nevertheless.

**IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK. OR IS IT?**

“Once an initial introduction to the Blackboard interface had been received, staff found it remarkably intuitive,” says Christine. “They had no problem posting Word files and Powerpoint presentations. But the problems really only started when they began thinking how the VLE could be used to supplement studio-based teaching.”

One of the most frequently heard complaints from practice-based staff everywhere is that their subject simply cannot be taught any way other than face to face. However, this does not stop us referring students to books, or setting briefs in which they try something for themselves before being critiqued and corrected. We probably use face-to-face teaching far less than we like to think. And when we do, it is probably to teach some of the more basic skills several times over. At Cleveland some staff were quick off the mark to suggest that the VLE might be a good way of cutting down on this repetitive aspect of the job.

To get across the idea of how to approach putting multimedia demonstrations online, a session was held in which a technician who had put a lot of thought into this problem gave a simple, but intriguing, demonstration. Staff were given a list of instructions and a piece of paper and asked to follow the steps to make a complex paper plane. Only one or two people managed the task. Next the instructions were supplemented by photographs and the success rate improved. Finally, the technician played a video which, in best Blue Peter tradition, had been prepared earlier. “This was a real eye opener”, says Christine. “Staff now saw the benefit of the VLE and commissioned two videos from the technician there and then to act as a pilot: inking a plate for printing and threading a sewing machine.”

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**MAKING THE PUDDING**

Once the minimum standards had been met, programme teams were free to develop their Blackboard areas to suit their particular needs. One of the most successful areas belongs to the Historical and Critical Studies team who had used Blackboard before and, says Christine Goulth, “were enthusiastic about its possibilities. Handouts, PowerPoint presentations of lectures and dissertation handbooks all quickly became available. With an area that tends to generate lots of documentation it quickly became clear that students appreciated having it all available in one area.” Of course, HCS is a ‘text heavy’ discipline and seems to suit the text-based and document-centric concept of a VLE – Blackboard especially – more than some other art, design and media disciplines. Indeed, this has often been the reason given for the slow take-up of VLEs in our area (see Content is King). Yet at Cleveland this has been far from true.

“BA Photography wanted to get their students talking about their work”, says Christine. Discussion of students’ work has long been a mainstay of studio-course teaching, a tradition that tends to go unchallenged as, since it obviously worked for us, must work for today’s students no matter how many of them or how diverse the group. But the traditional studio crit
has been the subject of serious analysis recently (see Critical Distance at www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/report-CriticalDistance.htm for example).

Online forums are a method of discussion that have been around since before the worldwide web, and are a medium that many students are comfortable using. To test this out, a member of the photography team posted a piece of his own work and asked students to post comments and questions. The posts came in thick and fast and before long students started uploading their own images. Though uploading files is not as intuitive as it could be, all persevered until they were successful. All comments were constructive and helpful, with no negative responses at all.

But this success was not repeated across the board. “It’s difficult to know why some students respond and others don’t,” says Christine, “especially as there was no shortage of ideas – fashion tried to hold a debate on the use of fur and fine art tried to start a discussion on whether fantasy art was a valid form.” This difference is apparent among graphic design and illustration students at Brighton where third years failed to use online forums but did form small tutor-less discussion groups that met face to face, while first years are currently engaging in quite in-depth discussion about the place of theory on their course.

Aside from discussions, other uses were found for Blackboard. The foundation degree in TV and Film makes use of a paper-based production log system that had been proving unreliable. The programme leader put three folders on his Blackboard area for pre-production, production and post-production, with industry-standard forms placed in each one that could be completed online. The quality of log-keeping improved dramatically and was remarked upon by the course’s external examiner.

Textiles too found Blackboard a time-saver by uploading examples of each stage of the design process so that instead of pulling work out of cupboards every time a student asked to be reminded what a ‘concept visualisation’ was, for example, they could be directed to the VLE where several diverse examples were available to see at any time. The team also used a gallery feature on the VLE running offline on a laptop when giving recruitment talks in FE colleges.

In some institutions the idea of students submitting work electronically has not been met with enthusiasm, but at a group meeting at Cleveland it was agreed that all honours-level programmes would use the ‘digital dropbox’ feature to allow students to post work which would then be assessed online and returned to students the same way. The advantages to this were numerous:

| It got students used to using the VLE |
| Work submissions were logged accurately |
| No work was lost (or claimed to be lost) |
| No paperwork (signed receipts etc) were required |
| There was no need to cordon off areas for work to be piled up |
| Students did not have to spend a lot of money printing out their work or worrying about the quality of the print-out |
| This form of submission is common across most industries |

Other tools found to be useful were message boards for posting tutorial times, news about exhibitions, and external links tailored to each programme.

Two areas yet to be used are the on-line classroom programme. while some VLEs remain unused by students Cleveland’s offers a valuable lesson: ‘if staff are willing to spend time developing the VLE students will use it,’ says Christine Goult. ‘And the more enthusiastic the staff, the more the VLE will be used.’ And as the VLE began to take shape, students have been among the most vocal proponents, setting the bar for what was expected and providing the next list of essential features.

Two years yet to be used are the on-line classroom which seemed unnecessary given that the students were on-site most of the time, and the online tests feature which seemed unsuited to the learning outcomes of the courses. However, there are plans to use this as a diagnostic tool for areas such as health and safety.

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

So did students actually use the VLE? There’s nothing worse than throwing a party and nobody coming. Fortunately Blackboard has several tools built in that allow you to see how many people are using it (you can identify who, and when, as well as specific areas that are being used). Additionally Blackboard has a survey tool which can be an effective way of getting student feedback without having to collate hundreds of sheets of paper. Over 90% of students used the VLE on at least a weekly basis with only 5% using it rarely. There was some variation with all photography students using the VLE on at least a weekly basis but fewer than 13% of fashion textiles students doing so, and over one third using it rarely.

Qualitative feedback was supportive with what little negative feedback there was being constructive: ‘It would be good to be able to look at our marks on the VLE,’ said one student. ‘I know the service is there, but the information is never loaded’.

LESSONS FOR ALL

Cleveland’s experience is evidence that VLEs are not a quick fix. Staff development is essential, as is inspiring staff as to what is possible. Although time is always an issue it became clear that any investment made up-front would be repaid several times over later down the line.

While some VLEs remain unused by students Cleveland’s offers a valuable lesson: ‘if staff are willing to spend time developing the VLE students will use it,’ says Christine Goult. ‘And the more enthusiastic the staff, the more the VLE will be used.’ And as the VLE began to take shape, students have been among the most vocal proponents, setting the bar for what was expected and providing the next list of essential features.
Content is King

When it comes to producing a successful VLE, think beyond what it looks like and focus first on content.

Even though the successful take-up of virtually every new medium has required the talents and vision of artists and designers over the centuries, for some reason the challenges and potential of online learning and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are ones many teachers in our subject areas seem reluctant to confront. The studio-based teaching environment of many subjects has a lot to do with this, it seems: “Staff see the software underpinning many VLEs as very text-heavy, and say that what they do is very hands-on,” says Gail Braybon, the computer officer with responsibility for art and design’s presences on the University of Brighton’s VLE, StudentCentral. “Blackboard, (the system used in many VLEs) is good at supporting courses that explain things through text, or through diagrams, but art and design staff place great emphasis on face-to-face communication and can’t see how Blackboard would allow that to happen.”

Christine Goult, the HE Enhancement Co-ordinator at Cleveland College of Art and Design, has experienced a similar divide between the theoretical and practical sides of the discipline: “Historical and Contextual Studies staff love it and see the benefit of it to their particular modules. One member of staff believes that 1st year marks have improved simply because everything they need to help produce an essay is made easily available, along with lecture notes and handouts – it certainly helps students be more organised”. But while studio staff at Cleveland were slower to adopt Blackboard than their more “text-based” colleagues, interest is increasing rapidly. “Film and Television use Blackboard to house their Production Logs (see Off The Ground) – all the documentation is available and can be completed within the VLE, and the necessary but extensive paperwork to produce a shoot can be accessed very simply.” Cleveland are piloting the use of ‘digital drop boxes’ allowing students to post their work electronically, and receive marked work back by the same method, much the same way as happens in industry. Photography lecturers are using discussion boards to promote critiques of work, with students posting their images and receiving feedback from their peers.

Lack of technical skills among staff is not the insurmountable difficulty many claim, with most institutions employing VLE “champions” like Christine and Gail and their teams to work with teachers. Instead, it seems the biggest problem may be one of image, with a lot of time being wasted debating what a VLE should look like, rather than what it should achieve. Ironically, web design as a subject is often found in art and design departments, so one might think the situation would be far advanced. But as any web professional will tell you, there is a difference between web design, which is all about usability and the effective presentation of content, and web styling, which is about making things look nice, even if it means compromising usability and accessibility. VLEs are seen as unacceptably constraining because they are, to put it bluntly, dull to look at. But overcoming problems like that is what designers do: “There’s a common misperception that design concerns the decoration of a surface in an attempt to achieve aesthetic distinction or beauty,” says Adam Greenfield, an American design critic and writer. “Design necessarily involves solving problems. These problems present constraints; whether these originate in the client’s budget, the target audience’s availability, or in the technical limitations of the medium is immaterial.” In other words, design is far from simply ‘visual’. But because art and design staff understandably want their VLEs to look good, and feel more comfortable discussing the look and feel than the technical aspects, discussion about content and pedagogy is often low on the agenda.

The key is to stop thinking of a VLE as a showcase of design skills or technical knowledge, but as a simple tool for supporting students. “Success in design strongly implies satisfying the requirements of a user. This is what distinguishes it from art or self-expression”, says Greenfield. So put the students first and find out what they want. Communication is often top of the list. Cleveland has found the “announcement boards” particularly useful and thinks the VLE could be a help in supporting part-time Foundation Degree students. In Brighton, StudentCentral discussion forums have been successful in building online communities, credited by some with being the place where students organised the anti-war sit down protest that brought Brighton to a standstill in 2003.

Advocates of VLEs believe that student demand will drive the expansion of online course materials, and that we are already playing catch-up with student expectations. Sarah Latham and Emily Smith graduated with degrees in Illustration and Graphic Design at Brighton in 2004 and had a long list of things they would have liked to see online. “We were shown bookbinding ages ago,” Sarah says, “but now I could really do with a recap. Putting something online wouldn’t mean students could stop going to the actual demonstration, but it would help us learn later.” Emily thinks being able to contact tutors by email would have been useful. “It’s been really handy being able to contact my tutor over the summer about my final year research project, and I can see the potential for more email support.” Far from adding to the burden of overstretched staff, there is a great deal of evidence to show this sort of support reduces time spent dealing with repetitive, low level enquiries in person.

The demand from students like Sarah and Emily seems not to be for online teaching, but online support for learning, and the simpler the better. Gail Braybon agrees that simplicity is essential: “I’ve seen some students use online materials and their eyes have simply glazed over. If a site has clear aims, a path that draws students in, and is well designed and laid out clearly, then students will use it. There is a danger in having too much, with links everywhere and information overload – a vast resource will not be used unless there is a clear path through it.”

With more students possessing wireless-enabled laptops, and the web moving into the world of PDAs, mobile phones, blogs and podcasting, efforts to focus on whiz-bang screen-based visual sites risk becoming outdated before they even get going, as well as being simply inaccessible. Observing students using the internet and other information sources shows that there is little, if any, concern for styling. The most popular sites tend to be the easy-to-use and, crucially, interesting to use ones. Content, it seems, is king.
But is I.T.

Teaching online is not a case of just putting handouts onto a website: it is still about the teaching. And that requires proper staff development in more than just computer skills.

THE BIG PICTURE

Virtual learning environments are now a feature in most, if not all, higher and further education institutions. Yet according to research carried out by The University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), many staff claim not to know of one in theirs, and only half of those who are aware of one use it. In specialist art and design institutions, less than a quarter of staff use VLEs.

This seems to suggest a few issues: are institutions communicating their facilities well enough? Are staff reluctant to use VLEs? Do staff have the skills required? And is there something about art, design and media that makes them less willing – or able – to use technology to teach their subjects?

COMPUTER USE BY ART AND DESIGN STAFF

‘Art and design’ is a broad, catch-all term and even that term covers a multitude of ‘sine’: a PowerPoint whiz may not know how to use a spreadsheet, a Photoshop expert may be Flash-blind, a database wunderkind may think HTML is a communicable disease, and someone who knows Word’s every hidden feature may not know how to surf the web. And there are lots of people out there who are quite happy not knowing the first thing about computers and comfortable in the knowledge that they were employed because they were experts in something else, and able to teach them as well.

But there is a sense, perceived or real, that some institutions expect computer literacy to be an essential component of every staff resumed; second only to breathing.

Is this fair or appropriate? You wouldn’t teach typography with a needle and thread, or pattern cutting with a hammer and chisel so why assume that it is always going to be right to teach anything using computers?

However, it’s equally silly to assume that these subjects can’t be taught using computers (they can be taught using books and handouts, after all) but it has to be acknowledged that not everyone is going to be able to do it as well as others, or necessarily should – yet there certainly seems to be an element of entrenchment on both sides of the fence that leads to a sense of suspicion: it is not unknown for people to insist the intention of managers everywhere is just to get course notes online then just do away with teachers.

TRAINING – A LACK OF FOCUS?

According to UWIC’s research all institutions that wish to develop the use of C&IT run training sessions for staff. And while most staff are aware of these a minority said they were not aware of any training on offer. 5% of academic and support staff in specialist institutions fall into this category, which might be viewed as a reasonable figure; but in non-specialist institutions the figure rises to 27%.

However, when the question was focused not on institutional training but school- or faculty-based support the figures get interesting: in all institutions only 72% of staff were aware of specific faculty-based training while 43% of staff development units were unaware of what was going on at that level. In other words, it is clear that individual schools and faculties are taking on responsibility for training staff but that in many cases there is a lack of communication between the faculty and the centre.

Specialist institutions seem to be better at providing training at faculty level. This may seem obvious – specialist institutions are smaller and it can be easier to provide customised training than in a large, sprawling and multi-disciplinary organisation. But when you think about it, the need for specialist faculty-focused training is greater when art, design, and media are small fish in big ponds.

UWIC found that nearly all teaching staff are aware of ‘generic’ training organised at institutional level. These provide training in Microsoft-based programs such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. The problem being, as one respondent put it: “they don’t do Flash, they do practically all the administrative software”.

Some people prefer to learn generic software in their own time but are keen to be trained in titles like Photoshop, Dreamweaver and Final Cut Pro. 80% of staff in specialist organisations appear to be offered such training compared with 30% in non-specialist ones.

Of course, a particular distinction is clear here: in our subject area we tend to use very specialist software and when we talk about using C&IT in our teaching we mean “teaching the software” rather than “teaching using software”.

Consequently the focus is different – staff are concerned about knowing how to use the latest version of Fireworks and less about how to use it as a teaching tool.

Although the Mac is a strong platform with an enormous user base in industry and education, it is still seen as a minority and troublesome platform in many institutions. In the USA this is changing with several universities investing heavily in Apple Store and finding themselves ranking in the supercomputer top ten alongside set-ups that cost many times more to buy. The school system is still dominated by Macs, with children in many school districts receiving free iBooks. Over here, our adherence to Macs is still seen as a little odd and behind the times and – it could be said – ‘threatening’. Mac users are more likely to be able to fix problems themselves and perhaps IT departments don’t like people who don’t need them!

“They are trying to push the school until it’s a PC based” said one UWIC interviewee. “Which of course is outrageous, because they think we’re being funny, we’re a pain in the neck. We use Macs to be different or something, but in fact a lot of my graduates will go and work somewhere like the BBC which is Mac-based. That’s what designers use.”

The choice of computer platform and software seems to be a site of real conflict and drags discussions of teaching and learning away from the point and often leads to the lack of specialist training – it almost seems as though IT departments refuse to offer it thinking that will force misbehaving departments to recant their deviant faith. Sounds harsh? Swift would have had a field day with this particular dispute.

Whatever, there is a feeling that our subjects are not valued within non-specialist organisations.

Specific software aside, what about VLEs? 66% of staff from non-specialist institutions say training is available in the use of VLEs compared with only 48% in specialist institutions. However much or little training is offered, and no matter how specialist or generic, one particularly interesting statistic stands out from the UWIC research: 75% of staff said they learn through trial and error rather than through formal training.

ONLINE TEACHING IS STILL TEACHING

Teaching and learning are not things that happen by happy chance, and over the past few years a great deal of time and effort has gone into developing institutional and individual understandings of pedagogy. But this has, for obvious reasons, focused on the more traditional...
teaching methods such as studio teaching, lecturing, tutorials and so on – little, if any, consideration has been given to the question of how teaching and learning need to be adapted for the virtual learning environment. Although there is a great deal of literature available on the subject, and much expertise (for example at the Open University) there is little awareness of what constitutes good, and bad, practice within programme teams or institutions. Consequently, many VLEs are simply repositories for course documents and handouts, as well as ‘useful links’ and reading lists – hardly inspiring stuff, but not surprising given the lack of investment in training and research into effective and innovative teaching that uses the online environment to its full potential. In institutions where progress has been made, a concerted, well-led and well-funded programme has resulted in some outstanding examples of what can be achieved. But in many institutions, online teaching is not funded as ‘proper’ teaching and so relies on staff developing materials in their own time, or resorting to simply uploading Word documents and the occasional PDF or Powerpoint presentation.

Until this contradiction between what institutions and students (and many teachers) want, and what we are allowed the time to develop is tackled, the gap between aspiration and reality seems likely to remain for some time to come.

The DDA didn’t just affect buildings. Are your websites and web design courses meeting the requirements?

The requirements of legislation regarding accessibility have been covered in great detail and you must have been living on another planet if you haven’t received a full briefing on what it means to you from your institution. But all the legal consequences affect you personally.

But requirements for accessibility also affect online learning and aspects of the curriculum that cover online elements.

**Accessibility and Usability**

Firstly, it’s important to set a clear distinction between usability and accessibility.

**Usability** is a measurement of how easy it is for everyone who visits your site to use it. Can they work out what everything does? Is it clear when they arrive what they can expect to find on the site? Does the site use familiar metaphors or must the visitor learn a new way of working with the site?

**Accessibility** refers to the measure of how specific groups can use your site. The issues involved change depending on the group under consideration: for the blind or partially sighted, sites that display information purely in graphical formats will be unusable, as will sites that use links such as ‘click here’ or ‘download’ instead of ‘click here to visit our contact details’. For visitors with dyslexia, large bodies of text or unusual colour schemes will pose serious problems. Those with motor difficulties will find sites difficult to use if they have to work hard to click buttons that require precision.

Usability is a desirable goal of any site. Accessibility, on the other hand, has been a legal requirement for web sites for quite some time—since before the DDA in fact. If you offer part of your course online it must be as accessible as if you offered it in a building.

In recent years the web has moved towards an idea of commonality in terms of visual metaphors - more and more sites reflect the conventions of web browsers and operating systems, for example, and don’t expect visitors to have to adjust to a new way of thinking. Good web design is about using understood metaphors rather than trying to be different, and content is more important, particularly for news and education sites.

The level to which a site is accessible is rated according to a set of standards often known as ‘section 508’ after the relevant US law, and all sites should aim for at least what is known as ‘double-A’ compliance, with ‘double-A’ being the ideal. These terms are explained in more detail in the table above (if the terms there mean nothing to you don’t worry, so long as whoever teaches web design or looks after your site does!) Things to avoid are the use of colour to convey information (e.g. ‘click the red button’), and the use of frames and tables as layout tools. Instead, designers should make use of cascading stylesheets (CSS) to separate content from design.

**ARE YOU GUILTY OF CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT AN OFFENCE?**

But there is another implication of which you may not be aware: If you run a web design course your curriculum should cover these issues - that means, for example, not teaching students how to use tables to make pages look ‘right’ and focussing on CSS instead. If you don’t then at the very least your students will find their skills out of step with what industry needs. At the most, you could be guilty of teaching ‘illegal’ skills!

For more details on this issue, and to check if your site is ‘legal’, see the ADM-HEA website.
A major JISC-funded project aims to bring together experiences in art, design and architecture to produce a definitive resource for teachers wishing to include C&IT in their teaching - and for those still to be convinced...

The experience of Cleveland College of Art and Design, and the research undertaken by the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff demonstrate that while there is a great deal of interest among many teachers in our sector in the use of technology for teaching and learning, there is also a great deal of reluctance. In part this is due to the lack of technical skill and, importantly, technical awareness - there are so many possibilities that it is hard to keep up, and even if you are up to speed on what’s available, it can be difficult focusing on just one area or making a choice at all.

A JISC-funded report undertaken in 2003 showed precisely the issues covered in this edition of Learning and Teaching:

“Art (UWIC) there was an historical reluctance in the School of Art and Design to engage with the VLE because of the importance of studio-based, student teacher interactions”

“Some respondents (at Norwich School of Art and Design) made the point that (their) work presents some different requirements from other institutions”

“There is uncertainty about the ‘fit’ of commercial VLE platforms with the specific and to some extent atypical needs of the Art and Design curriculum in The London Institute and Gray School of Art”

“There has been widespread take-up of Blackboard-based Student Central at the University of Brighton). All faculties except Arts & Architecture have participated.”

While it’s unfair to pick on those institutions (particularly as, between them, they have also demonstrated the other extreme of good practice and involvement) it’s probably true to say that these comments can apply sector-wide - with outstanding exceptions that only prove the rule. Yet it is those exceptions, like Cleveland, that call into serious question the myth that art, design and media practice can only be taught in the studio. Furthermore, other research such as that undertaken at Surrey Institute of Art and Design showed that online crits presented a friendlier and therefore more useful environment than the traditional variety.

**GAP**

Given this apparent gap between perceptions and real experiences, JISC are funding an ambitious project to bring together existing research and case studies into e-learning in practice- project- and studio-based learning in art, design and the closely related area of architecture. The end result will be a discipline-specific resource identifying the range of work that has been undertaken in the development of VLEs in our discipline and to identify models of good practice.

Ultimately, it is hoped this resource will offer guidance and encouragement to teachers looking to implement technology-based teaching and learning in their courses. Detailed case studies will look at work in four institutions (University of Bournemouth, University of Manchester, University of Brighton, and UWIC).

**LEFT BEHIND OUR STUDENTS**

However, the project (due to conclude in June 2006) will be critical where need be - it is too easy to become evangelistic about e-learning and ignore the issues (just as we are perhaps overly evangelistic about the traditional methods we believe to be essential to our subject). The project will shift the focus away from learning about C&IT to learning through C&IT, something all the features in this issue have stressed as being vital. At the moment, the debate about e-learning is too focused on technology, and traditional versus modern (and future) methods; not enough about features in this issue have stressed as being vital. At the moment, the debate about e-learning is too focused on technology, and traditional versus modern (and future) methods; not enough about

Whether you are driven by the pedagogical opportunities of e-learning, or the business opportunities, this project should make interesting and timely reading.

For further information on The distributed e-learning project in practice-based learning in art, design and architecture, see the ADM-HEA website (www.adm-hea.ac.uk/distributed)

**LINKS**

**Legal Access**

Is your site legal?

Test your site’s compliance with Bobby for free at bobby.watchfire.com

The following books and sites are highly recommended if you want to know more about implementing, and teaching, accessible and usable web design.


Moss, Trenton Web Accessibility and UK Law: Telling It Like It Is. www alistapart com/articles/ access uk/


Shea, David et al. CSS Zen Garden www csszengarden com


Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) Website, Accessibility Guidelines v 1.0 (1999) www w3 org/TR/WCAG10/full-checklist Html


**But is IT art?**

The full UWIC report can be found at www.brighton.ac.uk/adm-hea/html/projects/report-UWIC.html

**Off the ground**

Cleveland College of Art and Design undertook their research project using funds from the ADM-HEA’s HE in FE project funds.

Their full report can be read at www.brighton.ac.uk/adm-hea/html/projects/report-impVLE.html

**Content is king**

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**Credits**

Teaching and Learning was written and produced by Jonathan Baldwin.

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**For Further Information on The distributed e-learning project in practice-based learning in art, design and architecture, see the ADM-HEA website** (www.adm-hea.ac.uk/distributed)