Guidelines on improving provision for disabled students through use of a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) are now available from the ALERT (Accessibility in Learning Environments and Related Technologies) project website – http://www.dur.ac.uk/alert.

The guidelines have been developed over the past two years as part of the HEFCE funded Strand 2 ALERT project and are based on a series of case studies with staff and disabled students. Themed guidelines include the following:

- Introduction to ALERT guidelines
- Holistic use of a VLE
- Delivery of learning support materials through a VLE
- Asynchronous discussion through a VLE
- Synchronous discussion through a VLE
- Assessment through a VLE
- Group work in a VLE
- Technical aspects of VLE use
- Practical aspects of VLE use
- VLE recommendations

The guidelines are aimed at use by academic and student support staff, such as learning technologists and disability support staff. It is hoped that issues raised will encourage reflection and discussion on existing practice.

The guidelines and case study summaries are available at  http://www.dur.ac.uk/alert

One of the case studies features a Mathematics and Computing student with dyslexia (http://www.dur.ac.uk/alert/casestudies/word/casestudy4a.doc):

**Student 4: a student with dyslexia**

Disability: Dyslexia  
Subject: Mathematics and Computing  
E-tivity: General use

**Summary**

**Student 4** is a full-time Mathematics and Computing student who is a very confident computer user, yet rates his competence in using the VLE as basic. He is not, however, a frequent user of the VLE, accessing it only once every few weeks, and does not believe that it has any effect on face-to-face delivery of his classes. **Student 4** does not feel his use of the VLE has affected the amount of notes he takes in lectures.

**On learning**

I think it’s common with most of the maths students, because of the nature of the material and the nature of the way most maths students work - you take all your notes and you write them down on paper, which is quite beneficial to your learning because you are writing out stuff you need to remember, you have your notes in a folder and you usually have that with you, and you have all the problems you need to do and you know what they are on a piece of paper that’s been handed out in a lecture... it’s portable...

**On the VLE**

VLE pages should be set out well so they’re nice and coherent and there’s a general theme throughout all your modules, cos you don’t always do modules in the one department...you use one and then all the other ones should be consistent...

**On e-tivities**

It’s good to reinforce learning to have everything there ...there’s always a discussion whether it’s good to put (lecture notes) on (the VLE) in advance of lectures or after lectures, but I think that should be down to the lecturer’s preference. But definitely to have it eventually all there is very useful to refer to, or if you’ve missed something or you’ve lost your problem sheet, it’s great to have it all there.

**On disability**

I remember menu orders on web pages rather than the actual text...it’s like when I type I actually remember patterns of keystrokes rather than how to spell a word. I have a really high typing speed until I come to a word I can’t spell, then it comes to an abrupt end...

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