Online Protocol

A Student's Guide for the VLE

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Top 5 tips

1. **Participate online regularly in the VLE activities**
2. **Remember it is better to make frequent short posts (be it via text, video or audio) for others to respond to rather than one long one.**
3. **Avoid flaming – be polite and courteous online**
4. **Do not look to the tutor to answer all your queries; work together with your fellow students in your group areas.**
5. **Remember to start new 'topic' of conversation as the discussions change.**

1. Introduction

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is the platform you will use to communicate and learn online at UCEM. It is a collaborative platform and is essentially your equivalent of the lecture, seminar and tutorial system that a face-to-face university would offer. It is also your opportunity to engage with your fellow students, and to learn together. We have a vast range of students on all our programmes who offer their own expertise and experiences.

It is through this process of exchanging information that you expand and develop your knowledge of the key concepts and practices associated with the modules/units and learn from each other.

The Student Handbook details how to use the VLE, and the areas within the site. Further information about how to use the VLE can be found within the Student Self-Help (FAQ) tool on the VLE, which also includes videos of key features. A "welcome to the VLE" video is also available in the Induction Module.

When working online it is important to remember that there are certain expectations that you should take responsibility for as a student of the University. They have been summarised here.

2. Your Role

All our programmes are designed to encourage you to get involved in activity-based learning. To help you progress through your modules/units and to get the most out of your studies you are expected to participate in the activities and discussions that are provided to support your learning. This engagement is useful to you because you will hear from your peers who will be able to offer different perspectives and will have a range of experiences that you can learn from. You are not expected to provide answers to every question. The important thing is that you share your ideas and participate in the discussions and activities in a supportive and collaborative way. This will develop your understanding and knowledge and your sense of being part of a student community.

When engaging in the discussion forums, or other discussion tools keep your responses short: they should not be longer than a screen in length, otherwise they can become difficult to read on screen. The same applies to audio and video, keep your responses short and no longer than 3 minutes. Others can also feel intimidated by long messages and may be put off replying to them, so it is best to post several, shorter comments. One of the skills you will learn is to get your message across in a succinct and relevant way.

You are not permitted to post messages anonymously as everyone will want to know who is talking to them.

Always give credit where credit is due. You are part of a community of learners and if someone has made a comment that you think is interesting or that has made you think, give them credit for that. If you are quoting something someone has said in another message, make sure you acknowledge the source. Linking to and sharing third party resources (such as a web page or a journal article) to support your study is encouraged, however do not directly post or upload text, images or other multimedia from a third party (such as a Web page or a journal) without permission from the copyright holder and a citation. Please refer to *The UCEM Guide to Referencing and Citation*, available within Section 6 of the e-Library (opens new window) on the VLE.

3. Your Tutors

Your tutors will visit the site regularly across the week during the designated monitoring periods. However, the tutor role is not to answer every message that you post, but to guide your studies by responding more generally to themes and ideas in order to facilitate your learning and help you to develop and apply your knowledge and understanding. The discussion forums are equivalent to a tutorial meeting, where students discuss topics together, and the tutor interjects as appropriate. An important part of the learning process is the exchange of ideas with your fellow students and tutors. Your tutors will provide a summary of the contributions to the weekly learning activities and provide additional support and guidance in a weekly wrap-up.

You should post any queries you have regarding the programme material and assessment on the VLE, rather than email to your tutor. You can be pretty sure you will not be the only person to have had that question and this allows everyone to benefit from your question and the answer received. Remember to submit questions relating directly to upcoming assessments at least a week before the deadline – it is a busy time and we cannot guarantee an answer if time is short.

If you have a specific personal problem relating to your study that you do not wish to post up on the VLE, you should contact Student Central (opens new window) via the VLE.

4. Everyone is Human

When you meet face-to-face, facial expressions such as smiles, frowns and other gestures can add extra meaning to what you are communicating. Remember that online there are no facial expressions, so the written word can easily be misunderstood. This is particularly true with humour and irony. Remember there are students on the programme from all over the world, and what may be appropriate to one culture may not be to another. You should therefore be careful as to the expressions you use. Putting emoticons at the end of your message can help clarify meaning.

5. Be professional

You must abide by the VLE Terms of Use at all times when using the VLE. A copy of the VLE Terms of Use can be found at the bottom left hand side of the screen on each VLE page.

You should not use any language that could be considered to be racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or derogatory or inappropriate in any way. Any messages that are considered to contain unsuitable content will be removed immediately from the VLE and will be dealt with in line with UCEM's Student Disciplinary Procedure (opens new window).

6. Disagreements

At some point in the programme you may find that you disagree with someone else's view. It is fine to have a healthy debate but remember to be careful in your tone. Just as you would not shout or be rude to someone in person, you should not be rude or aggressive online. Do not use entirely capital letters in your messages as this can be interpreted as shouting.

When a disagreement becomes aggressive it is called 'flaming'. If someone has upset you online, do not respond immediately to his or her message with a further insult. Take a step back and remember that words on a page can easily be taken the wrong way.

If flaming does occur the online tutor may well step in and ask you to stop your debate in the VLE and remind you of the online protocols.

7. Asynchronous Working

The VLE is an asynchronous environment. This means that you can visit the site at any time of the day or night to post messages. The advantage of this is that you can work on your programme whenever you like. The disadvantage is that long 'threads' of discussion can grow within a discussion forum area. Remember that people will be posting messages from different time zones – so if someone takes a while to reply this could be the reason.

Direct messages can be sent to participants, including Tutors, on your module through the 'messaging' area. This provides you with privacy if you do not wish to share content with another member of your module cohort, or if you wish to correspond on an issue that would not be something that you would normally share on a public forum. As this is a direct form of messaging to a tutor it is only viewable by the recipient. This means that maybe a delay in response. If you query is relevant to the rest of the cohort to support the learning process, you will be encouraged to post in the discussion forums so others can benefit from the tutor support.

8. What we expect from you

- Participation! Visit the VLE regularly – this is your learning space. Remember it may initially take longer than you think for others to read and respond to the messages.
- To actively participate in the weekly learning activities as directed as you work towards each assignment. This provides you with a deeper learning experience, ensuring that you develop the skills and knowledge to be successful in your assignments. It also promotes engagement with your fellow students and the module team that enhance your learning experience. If you are away from the VLE for long periods of time, we may contact you to check on your status as an active student with us.
- To be polite and considerate to others online as you would in your day to day dealings with others.

- Respect the privacy of others on the forums and please do not share personal information without consent. This includes phone numbers and email addresses, especially with regard to setting up social spaces online.

9. What you can expect from UCEM

- An online presence from your programme tutors, who will guide your studies and monitor your messages, though they may not respond to every message.

- Support from your Module/Unit Tutors and UCEM's student support teams as appropriate. If you have a specific personal problem relating to your study that you do not wish to post up on the VLE, you should contact Student Central via the VLE.

- You can find support services and resources via the Student Hub on the VLE.

- Interactive and engaging, up to date and relevant online learning.

10. And finally

Enjoy being able to chat to others online and learn from others' views. As you grow in confidence in using the VLE, the sense of community which will develop will benefit you in your study and make the programme a rich learning experience.