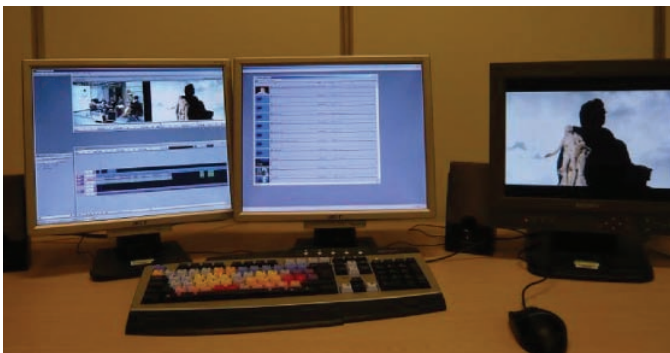


# Demystifying visual technologies

An update on the work of the Visual Learning Lab (VLL) student interns.

**T**he Visual Learning Lab (VLL) has been working with a group of five student interns since September 2008. Student intern work is diverse; they can design, facilitate and deliver workshops, or provide training and support for both staff and students, for example. Each brings their unique specialism and dynamic abilities to the team.

Part of their work to-date has been focused on finding out how the VLL team could work more directly with students, and get student innovators involved in using visual technologies. This article looks at some of their work and talks to two of the interns about their experiences.



## Practical solutions

Although an increasing number of teaching rooms now have interactive whiteboards, there is still a reluctance to use them. The interns have been helping to demystify these classroom-based visual technologies across the campuses through the production of simple guides for staff and students. Similarly, the Thunder™ Wall in the Hallward Library can seem intimidating if you have never had a go. The interns have started delivering lunchtime slots at the wall to showcase the system and encourage students to try it out.

This 'demystification' process also takes the form of offering specific and targeted support to individual groups of lecturers and students using visual learning technologies. For example, VLL interns Sparsh Chandan and Lola Ogunbadejo delivered a talk to a group of academics in Civil Engineering on visual technologies.

## Mobile learning!

The University is a dispersed campus, and students and staff who are not based at University Park can feel isolated. The VLL interns have been trying to ensure that access to their support is available right across the campuses. Claire Mann, for example, is a VLL intern who is currently being sponsored by the School of Veterinary and Medical Sciences to do a PhD in the use of visual technologies in Veterinary education. She is training up other VLL interns in the making and editing of videos, and these interns will now be supporting students at Sutton Bonington campus in their video-editing work. Claire has also organized a Pizza session for UGs at the Vet School looking at Visual Learning Awareness.



## Learning close to home

Even when the technology and support is right on your doorstep, sometimes it still seems far away. Sparsh Chandan will be facilitating a lunchtime session in the School of Education (home to the VLL's Jubilee base), targeted at postgraduate students. Current visual learning research projects being carried out by the core team will be introduced by Dr Brett Bligh and Dr Rolf Wiesemes, after which Sparsh will give an overview of the range of technologies available for use in the VLL's base at Jubilee.

## Confidence-building using 'Learner-users'

Sometimes the learning process is best facilitated by someone who has recently learned about the subject themselves – they can seem to be closer to the learner, and to understand the steps the learner will need to take in order to understand. A technology 'expert', for example, is sometimes so far removed from the starting-point of the learner that they can forget to convey the basics! Using the interns as 'learner-users' has been really effective. Staff and students have been able to relate to them, and have felt comfortable asking questions and taking guidance.



### A reflection on my time as an intern with the VLL Adele Cushing



I started working with the VLL in June 2008 as a student intern. My employer, South Nottingham College, released me for a few hours a week to support the deployment and integration of visual learning at Nottingham University through the media of interactive whiteboards, mobile devices and digital cameras, document cameras and the Thunder™ Wall. This shift from FE to HE has contributed to my Continuing Professional Development as I was able to support the use of visual technology at a higher pedagogical level.

Being a student intern has also improved my confidence and given me the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills I acquired through my MA in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education, in a practical way. I have particularly enjoyed working with academic staff to help them identify visual practices that would support their teaching. I also got the opportunity to have some interesting discussions with academic staff in Maths, Counselling, Midwifery, and English teaching, as well as representing the VLL at Freshers Fayre and CETL national best practice forums.

This experience recently assisted me being accepted to cover a Maternity Post at the University of Plymouth Colleges as Blended Learning Co-ordinator for HE in FE, which I have just started. I will be working with the CETL at Plymouth and other colleges in Devon and Cornwall. I hope this experience will contribute to my gaining a more permanent post in this field in the future.

As well as hard work it has been really good fun working with the VLL Core Team and the other Interns. I would recommend any other students interested in the way technology supports learning to give it a go!



### Reflections on my experiences as a learner and a user Li ShanShan



I started as a VLL intern in September 2008. Initially, whilst excited about being a VLL intern I also felt somewhat unsure about my expertise in visual learning. However, through the support of VLL staff and my fellow interns, as well as through my involvement in practical VLL work from the start, I soon became more confident.

I now feel that my understanding of visual learning and my ability to communicate this is developing quickly. In the last few months, my work has mainly focused on video-editing and production for promoting and explaining VLL activities and use of related visual learning technologies. This has not only allowed me to learn about and develop my own uses of video editing and production via Avid, but also to apply my increasing knowledge about visual learning to the content of the videos in order to spread new ideas.

Being both a learner and user of visual learning technologies, I have experienced the process of learning about video production myself, and this has allowed me to understand the potential challenges and problems new users of video editing software and visual learning technologies in general might experience.

In addition to learning how to use video editing I also have participated in research of current visual learning activities in the Classics department in sessions run by Katharina Lorenz and supported by Brett Blich, the VLL Learning Research Systems Developer.

Filming presentations given by students has given me a greater understanding of the role visual technologies play in enhancing student engagement with learning right across the University.



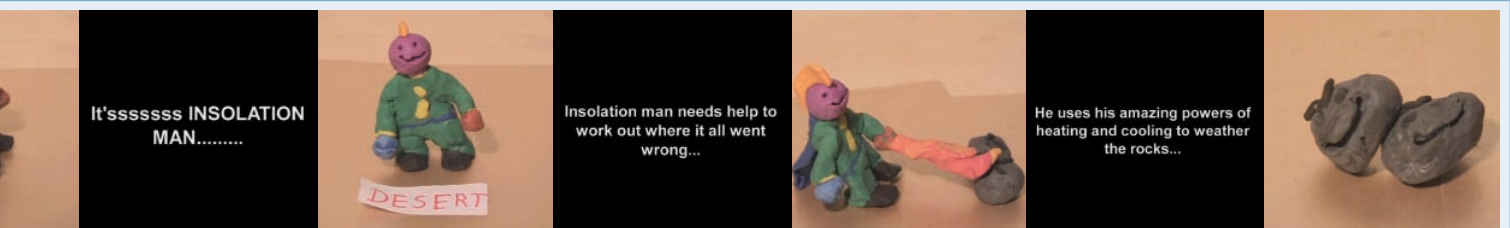
**For more information about getting in touch with the VLL student interns please contact the VLL administrator Marian Anderton (email: [marian.anderton@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:marian.anderton@nottingham.ac.uk)).**

### Video Diary

Is it possible to simulate insolation weathering in a laboratory environment?



## Interview



## Engaging learners through video making

Professor Michèle Clarke from the School of Geography discusses the teaching and learning benefits from the use of video-making as a form of assessment with Sarah Kerr from the Visual Learning Lab.

### Sarah Kerr: “What was the teaching and learning challenge that the investment sought to address?”

Michèle Clarke: “I don’t think the way we organise assessments is as engaging as it could be. If students are enjoying themselves, there are going to be all sorts of added benefits: they put more effort in than they would normally, and the output is great. My project was really a capital equipment request aimed at enhancing the potential of video-technology for helping students learn. We had some equipment on campus which allowed students to film their own videos, but you couldn’t edit them. Students would use them, they’d have great fun using them, but the output would often be poor in comparison to the effort they had put into it”.

“Before we invested in this equipment, there was one student-access edit suite at the University, available through Information Services (IS). I found about it through some students, who had contacted IS and travelled over to Kings Meadow campus. News of the facility travelled, and in the end the demand was such that IS contacted me and said ‘we clearly have a need here, what can we do to help?’ They were really supportive, but clearly with only one facility for a growing number of students it soon became clear that we reached capacity very easily.

The students loved it”.

“The grant that I had from the Visual Learning Lab was for increasing the capital infrastructure to allow more facilities for students to do their own video-production. It’s been very successful. Too successful in a way! Other schools have come and board and now we are almost at capacity again: Nursing, Film & Media Studies and Chemistry have all engaged with video in slightly different contexts”.

### Why do you think video is a particularly good form of assessment? Other than being fun, what else do the students get out of it?

“Well, they have to think more carefully about how to present information. When you are presenting something visually, you are using different tools to get to your audience. The structure and design of how to share information and the visual processes around that are something that they haven’t necessarily engaged with before, but are implicit in using this kind of assessment: It develops their visual and technical literacy”.

“They like it because they feel they are being rewarded for the effort they have put in. I find that even when they get into the third year, they come back to me and say ‘Can I have a copy of my video, cos I want to show it my mates’. They are so proud of it! When they graduate, it is one of the

things they remember doing from the entire course. It is different. If I could think of new and other ways to engage with that kind of creativity and enthusiasm, it would be great!”

“The good thing about video as a form of assessment is that you can see how much effort goes in. This means that if you are lazy, it really shows! And the process of getting into groups and collaborating together develops a sense of peer competition. Once all the videos have been submitted, I book out a room and we all sit down together and watch them as a group. The students are very critical. ‘That wasn’t really very good because...’. And the ones they think are great they go ‘Wow! Wasn’t that great! I wish we had done that!’ So they share their experiences in a way you would never get with an essay: It’s real added value in all sorts of different ways. This is why I’ve been doing it for a number of years and, even with the timetabling problems and difficulties with accessing the facilities, I still pursue it.”

### Do the students appreciate the opportunity to develop these transferrable skills?

“Absolutely. After you have left University, how often do you write an essay? Critical thinking and writing >>

skills are important, but the ability to be able to use video and think about presentation skills in a wider context is something that is transferrable across all sorts of avenues and employment sectors. Receiving training on something that is professionally accredited gives them an extra point on their CV that they would not otherwise have. And I know they value it. The feedback shows that”.

“It is all about teamwork too and this helps them learn other employability and life skills: delegating responsibilities, diplomacy skills, negotiating. They have to sort all these issues out as a group in order to succeed.”

### **Apart from the fact that the facilities are once again at capacity, what other ways can you gauge the impact and success of this investment?**

“The quality of assessments I get improves every year, as students put more and more effort into it. I am getting submissions that are astoundingly professional in the way they have been produced. And this means that they do very well in the module. The implicit assumption is that I am being too generous with the marks, whereas actually what is happening is that the students are putting much more effort into it, and doing better as a result. I consider that to be a great indicator of success”.

### **It sounds like a huge investment of time and effort for you. Do you enjoy it?**

“I’m lucky as I’m in a School where teaching innovation is very well

supported.

Word goes round. I have my colleagues come down and say to me ‘I’ve just had students raving about your course so I thought I would pass that on’. There is a huge benefit from doing this kind of thing on a personal level as it makes the teaching process so much fun, and so rewarding. And what is a University if it is not about teaching?

“I do it because I love it! I enjoy the creativity. This is why I am currently going down this lecture-capture route. I have been awarded funding from CIF to take video a bit further. And I did that because I thought ‘Wouldn’t that be great?’ So yes, on a personal level I get a lot out of it”.

### **What have you learned and what future plans do you have?**

“What is really interesting about this is that it is really student-based, but no staff have yet engaged with it: there are no facilities for staff to do the training. I’d like to see staff involved. There are things we could do as academics with video-editing that could be really great. Staff-training would also allow us to understand the processes that our students are employing in a more comprehensive way”.

“We have also been talking about developing some e-learning training packages for students so that they don’t have to go over to KMC. They could learn online and then use the equipment here on University Park. I think there are some really exciting future developments that could grow out of this investment. So I would see where the project has got to so far as a first step on a path of increased use of different media in learning and assessment. Watch this space!”

“I have my colleagues come down and say to me ‘I’ve just had students raving about your course so I thought I would pass that on’. There is a benefit from doing this kind of thing on a personal level. It is rewarding to have your teaching appreciated and valued in this way. And what is a University if it is not about teaching?”



“When the students get into the third year, they come back to me and say ‘Can I have a copy of my video, cos I want to show it my mates’. They are so proud of it, that when they graduate, it is one of the things from the entire course that they remember doing. It is different. If I could think of new and other ways to engage with that kind of creativity and enthusiasm, it would be great!”