Changes & New Features in VLE 2015/16

VLE 2015/16 is based on Moodle 2.8. This version is more recent compared to the one used for VLE 2014/15 (Moodle 2.6). The general user experience is similar to that of past VLEs, with the addition of supplementary features. This guide is intended to inform tutors about the changes and new features in VLE 2015/16.

In Brief

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Department Name

All the study-units / classes that a tutor has access to are listed in their **My Study-units / My Classes** page. To improve structuring, the **faculty/department/subject name** of each respective area is now displayed adjacent to the area.
Text Editor

The text editor has been updated to enhance usability and accessibility. Two additional functions have been added for assisted screen aid, namely the Accessibility checker and Screenreader helper. Further enhancements include the Autosave feature and the highly improved Equation editor.

Autosave

A new feature within the text editor is the Autosave function, which helps to reduce the risk of data loss in case of unforeseen events. The autosave feature is set to automatically store a draft version of text at 30 second intervals. A message 'Draft saved' is displayed at the bottom-right corner of the text editor.

In case one accidentally closes the tab or otherwise leaves the text editor without submitting, the text will be restored the next time the editor is accessed. The message 'A draft version of this text was automatically restored' is displayed.
**Accessibility Checker**

The Accessibility checker ensures that any text entered in the editor is accessible, that is, text is easily read through the choice of simple font and suitable use of font colours. Upon clicking the Accessibility checker icon, a warning message will be displayed if the text is unclear and difficult to read, such as the example below.

The warning message highlights the text that is not considered accessible. The text can be made accessible by clicking on the highlighted area, and then clicking the **Clear formatting** button within the text editor toolbar.

Consequently, upon clicking the **Accessibility checker** button again, the following message indicating that there are no further problems with respect to the text will be displayed.
Screenreader Helper
The Screenreader helper checks that the text is suitable for screen readers, which are used by persons with visual impairments. The Screenreader helper checks that descriptions have been added to any images or hyperlinks that have been included in the text editor. Providing a clear image and link description is essential for visually-impaired students making use of screen readers.

Note that when inserting an image through the Image button, tutors will be asked to insert a description.

If an image is copied and pasted in the text editor, it is recommended to double click on the image so that a brief description can be added. Otherwise, the screen reader will not be able to clearly identify the image and its aim in the context, as shown in the screenshot below.

Alternatively, if the image will improve the appearance of the document but doesn't add any important information, tag it as an artefact so that it is ignored by screen reader users.

Moreover, web links should be added to descriptive text using the Link button, so that the screen reader will be able to recognise what the hyperlink is pointing to.
By clicking on the **Screenreader helper** button, one can check and confirm that any image descriptions or links are displayed as required.
Equation Editor
The Equation editor has been greatly improved, and now fully renders TeX expressions that it finds appearing within specific tokens. To use the Equation editor:

1. Within the text editor, click on the **Equation editor** button. The **Equation editor** dialog box is displayed.

![Equation editor dialog box]

2. Write the equation in the text field. The provided operators and symbols can be used. A preview of the equation is displayed in the **Equation preview**, beneath the text field.

3. Click the **Save equation** button.

Alternatively, advanced TeX users can avoid using the Equation editor by simply writing down the equation directly in the text editor, within either one of the following tokens:

- $$ equation $$
- \( equation \)
Google Drive Repository

Google Drive is one of the applications available through the Google Apps for Education suite of web-based messaging and collaboration applications. It is a good way to back up material online, as well as share content between different users.

The Google Drive Repository allows staff and students to easily upload material from their University Google Drive into the VLE.

Upon accessing the File picker dialog box to upload a file, the Google Drive repository will be listed as an option in the left side menu.
Forum Activity

The Forum activity has been enhanced with a new feature, namely subscription to individual forum discussions.

Subscribing to Individual Forum Discussions

In a forum set with Optional or Auto subscription, one can choose which individual discussions one would like to subscribe to. It is no longer necessary to receive emails for all distinct threads within a particular forum. To subscribe to a particular discussion, click the 'dot' icon to the right of the discussion. An 'envelope' icon indicates that one is already subscribed to this discussion. To unsubscribe from a particular discussion, click the 'envelope' icon.

For more information about the Forum activity, please refer to a separate user guide 'Using Forums in the VLE'.
Assignment Activity

The Assignment activity allows tutors to collect work from students, review it and provide the necessary feedback. This activity has also been improved with two new features: support of additional files and controlling when feedback is sent to students.

Additional Files

When creating an Assignment activity, tutors can now include attachments of additional files to provide students with further details, or to include sample assignments or an answer template. The Additional files option is available within the General section.

Control when Feedback is sent to Students

When grading individual submissions, a Notify student option is available for every student, which by default is set to Yes.

Upon giving feedback, the tutor must change the setting to No if they do not wish to notify the student.

A new setting, namely, Default setting for "Notify students" is now available in the Notifications section within the assignment activity settings page.
By changing this setting to No, the **Notify students** option within the *Feedback* section will be marked as No by default for every student.
Conditional Activities

The **Conditional Activities** feature enables the tutor to restrict the availability to students of any activity or resource. Access can be based on one or more criteria being met, such as a date, grade received in another activity, the completion of another activity, etc.

Conditional activities are now simpler to set up, and allow the use of OR conditions as well as AND conditions to restrict access. A set of nested restrictions can also be used for more complex access criteria. Conditional activities are set within the *Restrict access* section of an activity's or resource's settings page.

Prior to this update, the *Restrict access* section had the following setup:

![Restrict access section from previous version](image)

In the UM VLE 2015/16, the *Restrict access* section has the following simple setup:

![Restrict access section from new version](image)

By clicking on the **Add restriction...** button, the **Add restriction...** dialog box is displayed, where the required condition(s) can be chosen.

![Add restriction dialog box](image)

Note that the **Group** and **Grouping** restriction buttons are only available if groups and groupings have been enabled in the study-unit area, respectively.

For further information about **Conditional Activities**, please refer to a separate user guide, 'Using Conditional Activities in the VLE'.