

Project Name: Accessible Social Networking CPD

Amendment History:

Version No.	Date	Reason for Amendment
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Name of Project Manager & Contact Details

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Document Distribution

<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Action/Information</i>
Debbie Lambert	LLN	Manager of the LLN	For information
Geoffrey Elliott	UW	Members of the Steering Group	To approve the proposal
Chris Morecroft	WCT		
Ian Peake	HCT		
Mike Rookes	OU		
Gail Rothnie	UoB		
Donna Obrey	LLN	Project Officer for the LLN	To track and monitor project

Background

Social networks have established themselves in the business world being used as an advertising medium, for gauging public opinion, for recruitment and for providing real time customer support.

Social networking is now being used as a teaching resource and is being integrated into education and e-learning. For example Facebook is being used for on-line tutorials in some university settings, Wikis and Blogs used for peer support.

Social Networking was previously seen as inaccessible, Abilitynet in their State of the eNation Reports state that "these sites are inadvertently imposing a 'technological lock-out' on those who have most to gain from social networking - arguably the most socially excluded members of the community."

The RNC has previously investigated the inaccessibility of Social Networking and found that blind and visually impaired students are desperately finding ways to use what was previously seen as inaccessible so as not to be excluded from the world of Web 2.0 technologies.

However, there are still blind and visually impaired students who have not had the support necessary to learn to use this resource. In addition, due to lack of real life experiences visually impaired users are less likely to understand the dangers involved with giving out too much personal information and education on e-safety is essential. As BECTA has previously stated, the internet and new technologies offer great benefits and learning opportunities but it is important that skill in the use of new technologies is not confused with an ability to perceive and avoid risk; therefore education on e-safety issues is essential.

By teaching social networking blind and visually impaired further education students can be better prepared for entering into higher education, mainstream further education and employment.

Teachers of the visually impaired are constantly looking at ways to level the playing field and the most effective way to reinforce taught skills is to use them in everyday contexts. Following discussions with teaching staff and students many areas of possible usage have been identified for social networks in education.

Although the staff are interested in the concept of using social networking as a teaching resource and have suggested many areas of possible usage, barriers were identified that prevented them from moving forward. The barriers included a lack of staff knowledge and experience with the use of social networking sites and the time and support perceived as necessary to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to create an effective resource.

Objectives of the Project

To create an effective programme of CPD for teachers of visually impaired students to include:

- what social networking tools are accessible and how they can be relevant to their students
- the suitability of content to students from certain religious and cultural backgrounds where open forums/discussions and photographs may not be seen as appropriate
- how to create an account using assistive technology keystroke commands
- how to create a group
- how to invite others into a group
- navigational instructions using assistive technology keystroke commands
- what are the privacy settings and how to access them using assistive technology keystroke commands
- the use of rules governing chat i.e. chatiquette
- adapt Innovative ICT based material using appropriate enabling technology to encourage and enable staff to create teaching resources appropriate to their subject area and level.

Project Approach

Through recent research carried out at RNC and referred to in the Project Initiation Document (PID) staff have volunteered to take part in the project. They recognise that they require further professional development in order to support students specifically though not exclusively those who go on to Higher and Further education.

An initial skills audit of participating staff will be carried out to enable a targeted CPD application. The programme contents and delivery style(s) will be devised in collaboration with staff and learners. The programme will be rolled out in December initially to the controlled group .Mentoring support will be available to the group and is seen as integral to the programme sustainability.

All resources will be uploaded on to Moodle to facilitate staff development and encourage cross college exposure to the opportunities of using social networking as a teaching resource with blind and visually impaired students..

Scope:

The scope of the project will include a variety of subject areas across the college.

The programme could also be useful to teacher and lectures in mainstream education who are delivering to visually impaired and blind students.

A Key Products from the project

- An effective programme of CPD that could be scaled up and replicated to use in mainstream education and other specialist colleges
- Learner support material across subject areas

B Out of Scope

A comparison between social networking sites showing which may be more appropriate for use with students who are likely to move on to mainstream and/or higher education and which may be acceptable for lower ability students

Constraints

The project outline has in principle been accepted by the learning directorate however staff availability is subject to change and could pose a challenge to project timelines.

Technological issues could arise however RNC do have a technical team onsite to support both staff and learners

Initial Project Case

The difficulties encountered by visually impaired and blind students engaging in e-learning have been well documented (Evans and Douglas 2008, National Learning Network (NLN) 2007, Seale 2006). However the potential impact on learning for through a targeted supported e-learning CPD programme has not been widely researched. With the increasing use of e-learning as a teaching methodology and resource in Higher and Further education it is important that staff are offered the opportunity to develop their skills whilst supporting the learning process of their students.

Benefits of the Project

Teachers of the visually impaired could receive sufficient support to learn to use social networking as a teaching resource. By teaching social networking blind and visually impaired further education students can be better prepared for entering into higher education, mainstream further education and employment.

As securing funding for a student to attend a specialist FE establishment is becoming increasingly difficult it is likely that the learning and support needs of an increasing number of learners with disabilities will be attempted to be met within general post-16 provision in their local providers. The teachers of general post-16 provision could benefit from the CPD programme to understand the additional cognitive load imposed on students attempting to use Social Networks and on the possible approaches that can be adapted.

Key Assumptions

Staff are perceived as lacking the knowledge and experience with the use of social networking sites and the time and support viewed as necessary to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to create an effective resource

Timescale

Oct 2009	ICT Skill Audit
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November –December 2009	Construct CPD programme in conjunction with staff and learners
December –February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial programme rollout • Ongoing monitoring and evaluation, • Mentoring support for staff
February 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project evaluation • Report submission

Costs

Project Officer 150hrsx £20 Carrying out skills audit /data analysis Writing programme Delivering programme Mentoring support Final report Dissemination	3,000
Project Manager 20hrsx £40	800
Staff Development Time 50hrsx £20	1,000
Total costs	4,800

How will the project be evaluated?

The project will be subject to formative and summative evaluation. The college has a standard evaluation plan based on the JISC Project Management Guidelines which includes: timing, factors to evaluate, questions to address methods, measures of success.

The project will be evaluate against how successful it has been on reaching is outcomes. These will include:

- achievements against objectives
- Outcomes and impacts
- Benefits
- Learning

Evaluation methods could include:

- Questionnaire
- usage logs
- Focus Groups
- Observation

How will the project be sustained?

- The project will be sustained through a nominated manger in the Learning Directorate who is responsible for developing and supporting out e-maturity objectives. The project officer will maintain ongoing links with the nominated manger beyond the life time of the project.
- Mentoring and peer support will be available to all staff
- The programme will form part of the colleges CPD offer

Implications for Equality & Diversity

Blind and visually impaired students move on to university already familiar with how to use social networking both formally and informally.

Initial Risk Log

The following table summarises the risks that have been identified that may prevent the project being completed to the required quality, budget and timescale. The probability and impact of each risk has been graded as low, medium or high to indicate the relative importance attached to each element of risk.

Risks	Probability	Impact	Containment Plan
Staff availability	low	High	Staff and senior management have sanctioned the project
Technological issues	low	High	RNC have a technical team on site who are able to deal with the majority of problems

Project Team

Sandie Foster: Project Manager
Ailsa Macleod: Project Officer
Nicola Smith: e-learning champion
Cathy Shovlin: Head of Human Resources