Edge Hill University

USING EXTERNAL ONLINE TOOLS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

ASSESSING AND MINIMISING RISKS

Introduction

Many teaching staff see benefits in using external services and tools that are not officially supported by Edge Hill University. Examples of these tools are Twitter, Google Drive and Skype, and if you are using services like these for teaching and learning you can increase the chances of students having a positive experience by being aware of potential issues that you might need to respond to.

The aim of this document is to prepare you to assess the risks involved with a certain use of the tools, so that you can decide if the use is worth the risks and look at ways of reducing them.

In Part 1 of this guide we look at questions that are worth asking before using any external web based tool, and in Part 2 we expand on that by applying the questions to actual uses of the tools. In Part 3 we look at risks and benefits that are related to specific uses of a wide range of external web based tools.

Contents

Part 1: General Questions to Ask Yourself

There are some issues that relate to any external tools that you use, for example backing up of data and accessibility.

A - Do I need a 'Plan B'?

When you are using any online service, technical problems are always a possibility. Their servers can go down temporarily. Even the campus internet connection is occasionally temporarily lost. If you are running an activity that is planned for a certain time, consider how you could undertake it if the service was available.

It may not be possible to replicate the activity completely, but always have a plan to ensure that the students get something from the activity.

B - Can I backup my data?

Being able to backup your data allows you to easily export your data from a service that is closing, or move it to an alternative service that better meets your needs. It is always important, but consider the possibilities for exporting data before you start using a tool.

C - Is this service accessible to all my students?

One or more of your students might have specific needs which might prevent them accessing the materials. They might be Deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, or have a specific learning disability such as dyslexia.

Sometimes these external tools can benefit these students, for example YouTube makes it easy to add captions to your videos, but consider if using a certain tool might impact these students in a negative way and aim to remove the impact on their learning.

D - Does this service provide suitable controls over and protection of privacy and data?

Certain activities may work best if students work is kept private, and other times you want a wider audience. You might not mind your resources being publically available, but sometimes they contain more sensitive materials. Check that any tool that you use gives you enough control over who can access content or activities.

Note that to ensure privacy on some of these tools, student might require their own accounts. This requires effort for them to set up accounts and remember their passwords.

Other questions to think about might be:
- If the students need to hand personal data over to the service when setting up accounts, does the company have suitable privacy policies?
- When using the service are you asking students to store personal or sensitive information on it? If so can you be sure that the data is going to be stored in a country with adequate data protection laws? (see page 6 of JISClegal's August 2011 'Report on Cloud Computing and the Law for UK FE and HE').

- Are students asked to hand over credit card details or anything that could have especially negative effects if the service's databases were to be hacked?

- Can you delete all your data from the service if required?

Part 2: Applying the General Questions to Actual Uses of the Services

Here these questions are applied to some common uses of some external services to demonstrate what risks might exist with their use.

A - Using Twitter to update students with notifications and links to resources.

Do I need a 'Plan B'?
In this case student access to the tweets is not likely to be particularly time dependant, as they would tend to be informal. If it is important that students receive a certain notification then send it out by more than one channel, perhaps using Blackboard and email too.

Can I backup my data?
There is not an official Twitter backup option, but you could open all your tweets in one page and save the page as a PDF, or use an external service such as backupify to do the backup for you. However people don't tend to export their tweets into other microblogging services.

Is this service accessible to all my students?
There are a range of ways to access tweets which means students will be able to choose one that suits them.

Does this service provide suitable controls over and protection of privacy?
At the time of writing, if you wanted to control who can see your tweets you can set the'Tweet privacy' option so that you have to approve each account that can see your tweets. This would require the students to have Twitter accounts to see

your posts.

By default tweets are public, and in this example use this is unlikely to be a problem. This means that students don't even need a Twitter account to follow your posts.

B - Using YouTube to share videos that you have you have created, with students.

Do I need a 'Plan B'?

YouTube is generally reliable, but could students wait for a few minutes to access resources if YouTube was temporarily unavailable? If they couldn't wait (for example if the videos were part of an online exam) you could perhaps upload resources elsewhere too.

There could be issues if you have students located abroad in a territory where the site is blocked, or studying at work where the site is blocked. It would be worth keeping the original copies of the video backed up on a disk so that you could upload a high quality version to a different video hosting/sharing site. eShare might be an appropriate place to allow student to download the videos from.

Can I backup my data?

You can download an MP4 version of each of the videos that you have uploaded to YouTube. However you need to do this one at a time.

Is this service accessible to all my students?

YouTube allows easy creation of captions and an interactive transcript. This might be of value to Deaf and hard of hearing students.

Does this service provide suitable controls over and protection of privacy?
YouTube allows you to make videos completely public, viewable only by people with the link (which gives a certain level of privacy) and viewable only by those with Google accounts who have specifically been given access to it.

Videos can easily and quickly be deleted from YouTube if you decide that is necessary, but remember that anything that you upload could be accessed and copied by someone else. Don't put anything that has to be kept completely private on here.

Part 3: Risks Associated with Specific Tools and Uses

Below are listed web based tools commonly used in education (taken from C4LPT's 2012 list). They are categorised for convenience and common uses of the tools listed, along with reference to the Learning Edge tools which have similar uses.

Within each category we look at benefits and risks associated with using the non-Learning Edge tools.

A - Social Network / Microblogging Tools

Examples of these tools are Twitter, Facebook, Edmodo and Ning.
Uses of these tools might be:

- Using **Twitter** to update students with notifications and links to resources
  - Learning Edge alternative
    - Web links on Content Pages, Announcements
  - Benefits of using Twitter for this
    - Easy to keep students updated with relevant resources, especially if using Twitter is part of your daily routine and you are using software such as Tweetdeck that makes it easy to manage several accounts.
  - Risks related to using Twitter for this
    - The Announcements tool in Blackboard gives students updates on the Blackboard home page, inside Blackboard sections, via email, and if they use push notifications and the Mobile app they are

notified immediately on their mobile device. If students are used to looking at Blackboard or their student email account for important notifications, asking them to check yet another service for announcements might reduce the likelihood of them checking each service.

- Encouraging student discussion activities in a **Facebook** Group
  - Learning Edge alternative
    - Discussion
  - Benefits of using Facebook for this
    - If you want the students to interact informally to, for example, build cohort identity, then students may access Facebook more often than Blackboard. Students may also find the Facebook environment friendlier and be more comfortable interacting with people within it.
  - Risks related to using Facebook for this
    - The way conversations are shown in Blackboard allows for more complexity than in Facebook groups.
    - Students may not want the courses to intrude into Facebook, or they might not want to have to set up a Facebook account (e.g. due to concerns about privacy). It might be best to check with them all first. If you do use a Groups set it up as 'Secret' so that their Friends won't even know the existence of the group, let alone what is being talked about in the group.

B - Blogging Tools

Examples of these tools are [Blogger](#) and [Edublogs](#).

Uses of these tools might be:

- Using **Blogger** blogs to encourage student writing, with the aim of developing and demonstrating understanding.
    - Learning Edge alternative
        - Blackboard Blogs, Campus Pack Blogs
    - Benefits of using Blogger for this
        - Public writing could motivate students to produce better writing.
        - A public blog could be used as a portfolio to demonstrate understanding.
    - Risks related to using Blogger for this
        - Some students may not respond as well to having their writing published, and may write better in private.
        - Students may create posts that are not appropriate for a public forum. For example they might be critical of someone at Edge Hill or where they on placement. They might need briefing on what is acceptable to talk about, and what might be unwise or even illegal to say.

Examples of these tools are [YouTube](), [Jing](), [Audacity](), [VoiceThread](), [Animoto](), [iTunes](), [Vimeo]() and [Voki]().

Uses of these tools might be:

- Using **YouTube** to host videos that you have created
    - Learning Edge alternative
        - eShare
    - Benefits of using YouTube for this
        - Unlimited storage space, extensive functionality that is regularly updated.
        - Accessibility tools such as captions are available.
        - Comments can be used for conversations around the video.
    - Risks related to using YouTube for this
        - There are marketing issues; if your resources are low quality will that impact on Edge Hill's reputation. Learning Services Media Development team may be able to help you, but you also need to consider what sort of videos you can create with the time, skills and equipment you have available.
        - Unless you are using official Faculty, Departmental or Programme accounts, then anyone taking over your module would not have access to the account where the videos are uploaded to manage them.

Examples of these tools are Google Drive, Dropbox, Google Apps, Scribd, SlideShare and Prezi.

Uses of these tools might be:

- Using **Prezi** to create and host presentation slides.
  - Learning Edge alternative
    - Most types of presentation slides can be hosted on eShare or Blackboard. We recommend using eShare as resources held here can be linked to from a range of places.
  - Benefits to using Prezi for this
    - Would be a time consuming job requiring specialist skills to create similar slides using software such as Flash.
    - Could be easily linked to from Blackboard.
  - Risks related to using Prezi for this
    - Can only be accessed on devices with Flash or a native App installed.
    - Ensure anyone taking over your module has access to the account where these presentation slides are stored, or access to a folder where they are saved.

Examples of these tools are [Skype](), [Adobe Connect]() and [WebEx]().

Uses of these tools might be:

- Running online sessions using **Google+ Hangouts**
  - Learning Edge alternative
    - Wimba/Collaborate
  - Benefits to using Google+ Hangouts for this
    - May have a capability which you want to use, that is not available in the systems that Edge Hill supports.
    - Can record and publish to YouTube easily.
  - Risks related to using Google+ Hangouts
    - Less support available if there are technical issues.
    - Students need to set up and remember details of a Google account.
    - Need to check students can install any software required on the computer they will be using.
- Running online sessions using **Skype**'s free version
  - Learning Edge alternative
    - Wimba/Collaborate
  - Benefits to using Skype for this
    - May have a capability which you want to use, that is not available in the systems that Edge Hill supports.
  - Risks related to using Skype

- Less support available if there are technical issues.
- Students need to set up and remember details of a Skype account.
- Need to check students can install any software required on the computer they will be using.
- Limited to two cameras at a time.

Examples of these tools are [Tumblr](#), [Scoopit](#), [Pinterest](#), [LiveBinders](#), [Flipboard](#), [Instapaper](#), [Paper.li](#), [MentorMob](#), [Mahara](#), [Popplet](#) and [Diigo](#).

- Example uses
  - Develop a collection of resources on a topic and display them using Learnist
    - Learning Edge alternative
      - Web Links on a Content Page
    - Benefits to using Learnist for this
      - Can display resources in an attractive way
      - Can receive comments from outside the class which might inform understanding and discussions
    - Risks related to using Learnist for this
      - Can receive comments from outside the class, so you are not completely in control of the experience

Examples of these tools are [Wikispaces](), [Google Sites](), [PBWorks]() and [Wikipedia]().

- Example uses
  - Collaborative group writing assignments using PBWorks
    - Learning Edge alternative
      - Blackboard Wiki tool, Campus Pack Wiki tool
    - Benefits to using PBWorks for this
      - Creations can potentially outlive the students' access to Edge Hill Systems
    - Risks related to using PBWorks for this
      - Students need to create accounts and remember account details for PBWorks

Examples of these tools are [Articulate](), [Adobe Captivate](), and [eXe]()

- Example uses
    - Creating a sequential online lesson using Adobe Captivate
        - Learning Edge alternative
            - Learning Module tool
        - Benefits to using Adobe Captivate for this
            - Easy to export the content to use in different environments
            - More flexible in terms of what you can include in the lesson
        - Risks related to using Adobe Captivate for this
            - Takes longer to learn to use fully
            - The software is not officially supported by Edge Hill. Any issues with using the software, and any help ensuring it works within Learning Edge and on student's devices overtime, will depend on the time that Learning Technology Development have available at that time

I - Image Creation and Storage Tools

Examples of these tools are Flickr and Snagit.

- Example uses
    - Create a collection of annotated images using Flickr
        - Learning Edge alternative
            - Images hosted on eShare and brought together in an eShare collection
        - Benefits to using Flickr for this
            - Can easily upload and annotate photos
            - Photos stored in a range of sizes
        - Risks related to using Flickr for this
            - Only a limited amount of photos can be displayed when you use a free account, so a cost may be incurred for some uses

Examples of these tools are [Survey Monkey](), [Quizlet]() and [Doodle]().

- Example uses
  - Create an end of module evaluation survey using Survey Monkey
    - Learning Edge alternative
      - Blackboard Survey tool, Bristol Online Surveys
    - Benefits
      - Has some advanced features such as question branching, which are not currently found in the Learning Edge Tools
    - Risks
      - Costs incurred if you want to receive over a certain number of responses in a month, to use the advanced logic features like question randomisation, or use the SPSS integration.