Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

Pre-Raphaelite Resource Project: Audience Research Report

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Executive summary

This report for Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's Pre-Raphaelite Resource has been designed to inform the development of an effective, user-centred online resource for Arts and Heritage and Education communities. The research report explores audience use and perceptions of online archives in both further and higher education and the broader public space. It looks at social software use in general by learners, teachers, image librarians and academic professionals.

Based on the aims and objectives outlined in commission documents and in further consultation with the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery we ran six focus group sessions with Further Education and Higher Education students, postgraduates and lecturers in English Literature, History of Art and related Arts subjects. We also hosted a broader survey and conducted interviews with image librarians and interested amateurs.

Profiling included reference to age, gender, location, background and education (e.g. mature student, young undergraduate, lifelong learner), participants' broader interests (reading, British art movements), motivations for using the service (academic research, general interest, teaching materials) and barriers that might get in the way (time poor, limited IT skills, limited experience of technology in teaching). By focusing on key subject areas, we aimed to ensure a mix including regular users of online databases, online resources, and other relevant websites to support their academic work.

Findings and recommendations

Our research indicated that there is some readiness among the education community for Web 2.0 technologies but only in the context of academia as a status-conscious, competitive environment. Whilst there are clear benefits to be achieved from providing teachers and students with the opportunity to share ideas in the context of stimulus artefacts, many hold reservations about 'giving away' their intellectual property. Providing different levels of publishing privileges will help cater for the varying acceptance within the audience base for sharing their ideas publicly.

Social networking features are perceived by both HE students and lecturers as primarily for pleasure rather than for work so must be used sparingly in a resource of this nature. For younger students, however, the boundaries between work and life are increasingly blurred and the ability to contact experts and to personalise or control the space would be welcomed.

Care must be taken with positioning for the resource to be truly useful as a research tool; students and lecturers need to know that it has been created for

them and has scholarly merit. Their main concern is to access reliable, relevant content and information, but the ability to form connections between these resources is one way of adding value to the collection.

Time-poor students and lecturers need quick and easy ways to engage with the content. Providing multiple access routes, printer-friendly views and making the artefacts feel as 'physical' as possible are likely to increase use of the resource. The initial teaching stimulus drafted by the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery project team would be most useful if integrated alongside the artefacts. Small, adaptable stimulus pieces are more useful to both students and lecturers than lengthy directive materials.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations for the resource. These should not be taken as a final blueprint for development but would usefully form the foundation for a formal design and development cycle, involving user testing at appropriate points.

Methodology

Context and considerations

Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery's large and important holding of Pre-Raphaelite drawings has never before been comprehensively documented and accessed as a collection. It has received funding from JISC to digitise its Pre-Raphaelite collection and create an online resource and four teaching exemplars that can be used by Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) institutions in teaching, research and learning. The Pre-Raphaelite online resource will be fully accessible to the education community and to the general public. With the digitisation of these works, this project will create a unique research source for the study of the Pre-Raphaelites and British 19th-century art. The project is supported by the advice of an Academic Advisory Group made up of members with considerable knowledge of Pre-Raphaelitism and teaching in this field.[1]

The project plan for the online resource has the stated intention to create a website that will encourage user tagging and user generated content. Such features are characteristic of a Web 2.0 approach – the banner given to online features that allow people to collaborate and share information online. Initial research by the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery project team highlighted potential risks to adopting a Web 2.0 approach, notably that integrating social networking features can add complexity and that most college students say they are not interested in social networking facilities provided by their libraries such as the ability to self-publish creative work.[2] The project team recognised the need to consult with potential users about the inclusion of Web 2.0 features to determine whether they would be useful or important to the education community on a resource of this type.

The project team commissioned Illumina Digital to conduct a short audience research project to provide evidence of the websites and online resources currently used by students and lecturers to support their academic work, and to establish the appropriateness of adopting a Web 2.0 approach. Illumina Digital has ten years' experience producing resources for and working across the museum, education and learning sectors. The Illumina Digital Audience Research and User Testing team are specialists in the use and integration of audience testing for the development of websites and multi-platform projects, combining in-depth knowledge of research methodologies with practical experience in the field.

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[1] For further context see The Pre-Raphaelite Resource Project – Audience Research Initiation Document – Appendix 4

[2] http://www.useit.com/alertbox/web-2.html, http://www.bl.uk/news/pdf/googlegen.pdf

Principles, approaches and research structure

The Audience Research team were influenced by the Learner Experience of e-Learning study's[3] six guiding principles for an ideal user-centred methodology:

- To use open-ended methods (allowing unexpected issues to emerge)
- To use mixed modes of engagement (eg card sorts; interviews; focus groups)
- To triangulate evidence (by using more than one source of evidence)
- To access beliefs, explanations and intentions
- To talk about learning with learners
- To base discussion in authentic contexts

To this end, the following approaches were chosen for qualitative research:
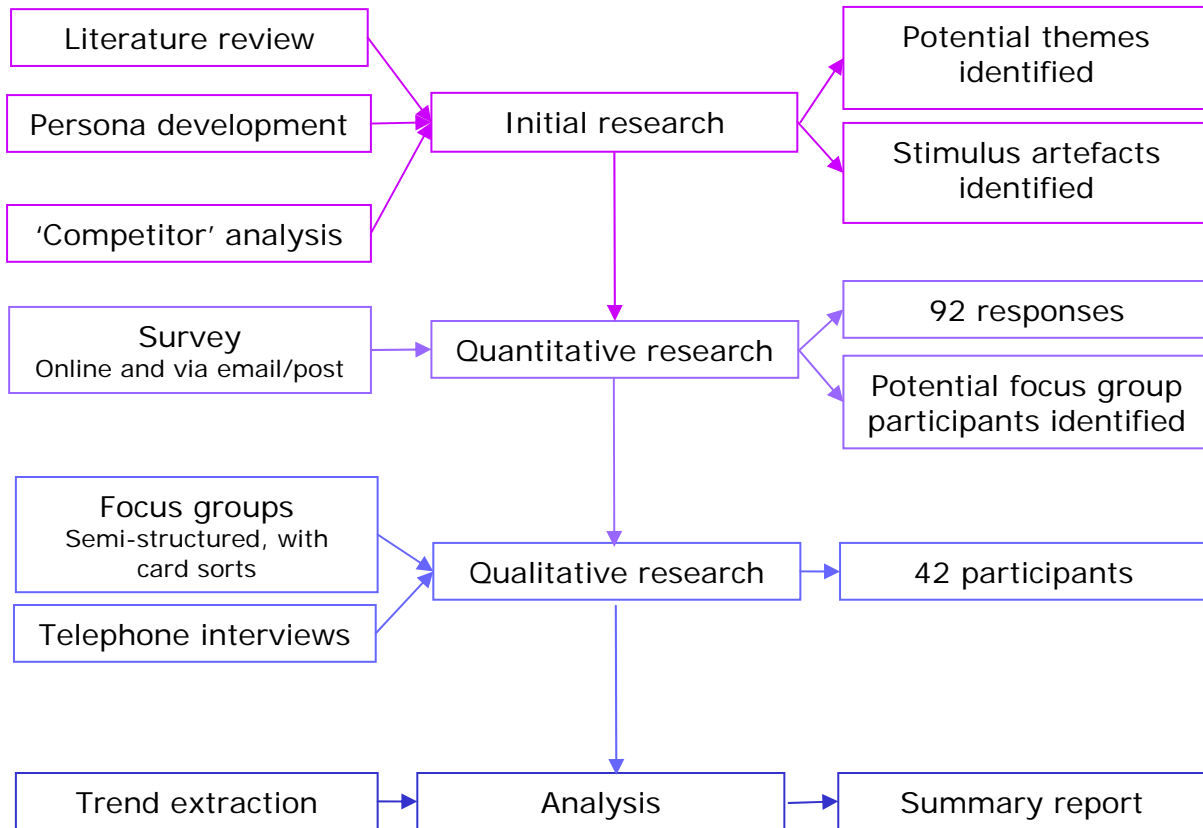
- *purposeful sampling*
  choosing audience members characterised by their behaviours or qualities of particular relevance
- *using semi-structured interview schedules*
  particularly focusing on exploration of attitudes and behaviours, and on feature prioritisation
- *adapting 'interview plus'*
  where the 'plus' represents some artefact or activity chosen to guide recall or aid thinking aloud – in particular, visual stimulus and card-sorting techniques
- *empowering the user*
  conducting focus groups in familiar and topic-relevant settings for users, whether a staffroom, seminar room or a pub; using the language of the participants in discussion; and acknowledging the participants internally and explicitly as experts in their own experiences.

To broaden the evidence base beyond the participants able to attend focus groups in a limited time period and to support the ability to draw conclusions from the qualitative findings, two additional approaches were also adopted:

- telephone interviews to access audience members who for practical reasons could not participate in focus groups
- an online survey to establish trends to be explored in the focus groups and to be used as a basis for purposeful sampling and for additional data.

The overall research structure is summarised in the following diagram:

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[3] The Learner Experience of e-Learning Methodology Report, September 2006 (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearningpedagogy/lex_method_final.pdf)

Literature review → **Initial research** → **Potential themes identified**

Persona development → **Initial research**

'Competitor' analysis → **Initial research** → **Stimulus artefacts identified**

Survey Online and via email/post → **Quantitative research** → **92 responses**

Quantitative research → **Potential focus group participants identified**

Focus groups Semi-structured, with card sorts → **Qualitative research** → **42 participants**

Telephone interviews → **Qualitative research**

Trend extraction → **Analysis** → **Summary report**

This structure allowed for revisions to the research plan as one set of findings informed another. For example, personas[4] developed with the project team at initiation were replaced by a deeper understanding of the audience through encounters with real individuals in focus groups, whilst trends identified in the survey findings influenced the questions posed in the focus groups.

In total, 42 audience members were involved in qualitative research and 92 in quantitative. Six focus groups were carried out with:

1. FE students from Filton College, Bristol
2. FE tutors from Filton College, Bristol
3. BA Art History students from University College London (UCL)
4. BA English and Combined Honours students from University of Leicester
5. PhD and MPhil Art History and English students from University of Birmingham and Birmingham City University
6. Art History and English Literature lecturers from University of Birmingham

The focus groups themselves had two parts: the first focused on open discussion about general experiences and preferences and a review of the teaching stimulus;

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[4] imaginary characters with attributes perceived to be representative of a sample group, created in order to develop a shared understanding of the group

the second used two card sort activities to explore the types of features and content that might be useful in a resource of this nature.

A brief description of focus group participants, and those involved in the telephone interviews, is provided in Appendix 1.

While a study of this limited scope and breadth can never be conclusive, combining methodologies in this way has given us confidence that the descriptive qualitative results are supported by evidence collected through quantitative methods.

Constraints

- *Time:*
  As is common on this type of project, tight timescales imposed the main constraints on the research, with the Easter holidays and exam revision falling within the project timescales. However, the Audience Research team were able to work within these constraints by carefully matching the scope of the research project to the ambitions of the Pre-Raphaelite project as a whole.
- *Access to the audience:*
  The May examination period for FE and HE students severely reduced students' willingness to participate. Offering a £10 cash incentive to HE students, capitalising on informal networks and being flexible regarding time and location mitigated this to some degree. Time-poor lecturers were also difficult to access, so telephone interviews were used to supplement focus groups.
- *Diversity of the audience:*
  The Pre-Raphaelite project is designed to be useful to a broad sector of the academic community – including FE and HE students, postgraduates and lecturers from disciplines including History of Art, English Literature and History – as well as interested amateurs and professionals in the field of archiving. The danger of aiming to please everyone – particularly those with such diverse experiences and requirements – is that you satisfy no one. To avoid this, the Audience Research team worked closely with the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery project team to define the primary and secondary audience base and research participants[5] were selected to achieve sufficient coverage and focus. The project team acknowledged that in a small research project of this nature, criteria such as academic level and subject focus had more relevance to the findings than sociological factors such as age, gender and ethnicity. Consequently, these latter aspects were not decisive factors in sampling, however the Audience Research team maximised opportunities to involve a diverse audience by carrying out focus groups in Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and London.

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[5] See Appendix 1: Qualitative research participants

Findings: Main themes

The themes outlined below were extracted from the qualitative data (ie focus groups and telephone interviews) using coding techniques. Some themes, such as *Work/life split*, were anticipated (but not fixed) in advance on the basis of previous experience, whilst others, such as *Sharing and competition*, were identified during the data analysis stage. Where appropriate, statistical evidence gathered from the survey has been provided to indicate the extent or degree of the issue described.

Experiences of teaching and learning

Across the sectors, passion and a sense of independence are tempered by time and resource constraints. The online resource should celebrate and foster the audience's enthusiasm for the topic but be aware that it will compete with many other demands on their time. 'Resource-hungry' students need quick ways to engage with the content that Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery has to offer. Currently, students and lecturers do not spend much time discussing their work informally so attempts to foster community discussion should be 'light touch'.
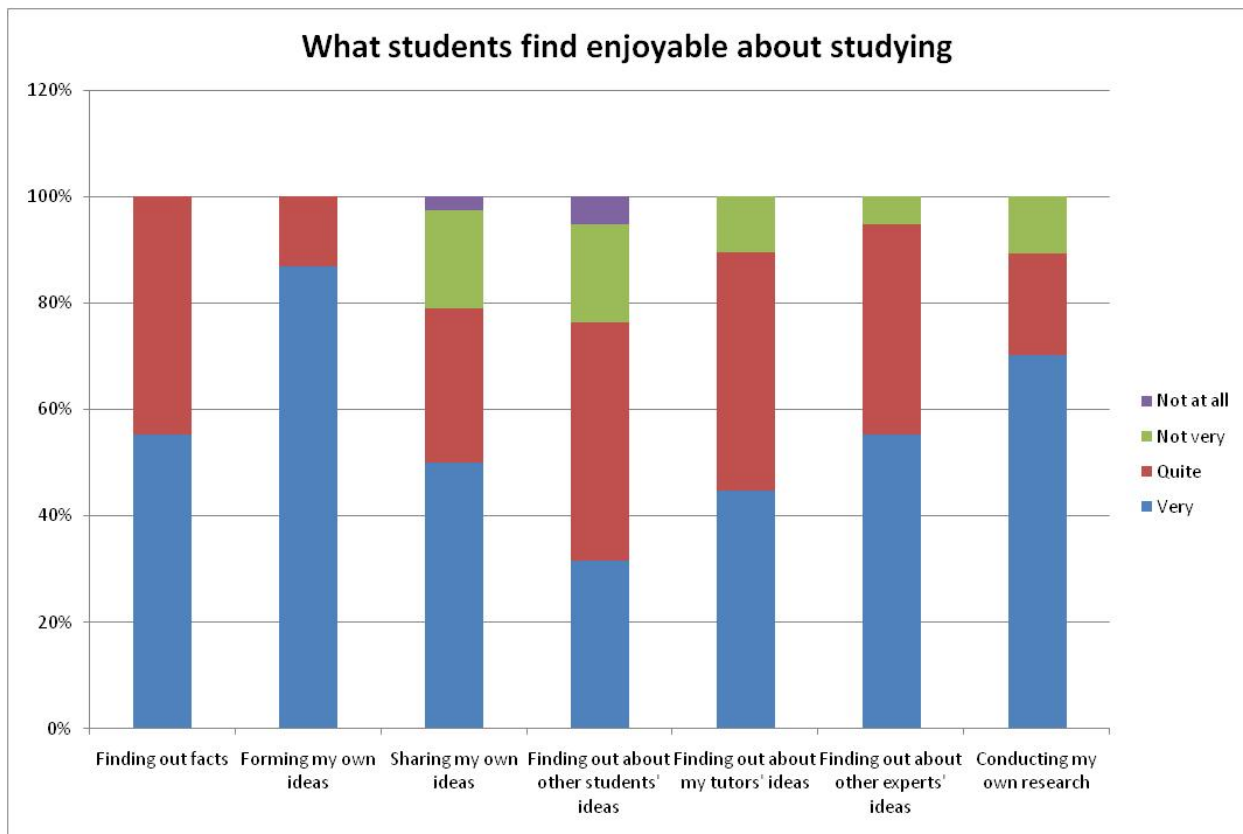
Overall the experience of studying is one of freedom and the ability to pursue one's own interests. In the Further Education system (FE), students relish the opportunity

to take ownership of their studies, and see their tutors as facilitators rather than instructors:

> "We have to be the starting point and then [the tutors] might help you along the way and push you a bit further."
> *Rosie, FE student, Filton College*

FE tutors support this perception:

> "I suppose it's initially project led, with… the introduction of more self direction as one goes on. So in other words it's like you're kind of equipping…an animal or a child to go out into the outside world and increasingly to be able to… direct themselves in the kind of exploration that they are required to do in a creative subject. If they don't have the… desire to create or to be creative we only foster that to a certain degree… It would be… ethically wrong to direct it all… We do start taking more of a backseat… So you'd make a suggestion about the changing of something and then you'd leave it to the student to see whether they'd want to… implement that change. And then you watch, you keep an eye on it and then you might intervene."
> *Ollie, FE tutor, Filton College*

The majority of university students interviewed chose courses based on personal interest rather than to follow a particular career path. This sense of personal choice deepens at postgraduate level:

> "You're freer than undergraduates, you choose what you want to do. You're more passionate about it because it's what you want to do."
> *Serena, Postgraduate student, Birmingham University*

Occasionally this sense of freedom is undermined by having to 'learn the essentials' – whether via 'pathways' in FE (tutor-led workshops) or compulsory modules in HE, but this is mostly seen as a necessary limitation rather than wholly negative:

> "I think [the] first year is about establishing: there is a lot of art historic discourse that you need to get your head around. It is quite important to get that basic understanding to know where everyone is coming from. You can't really develop your own ideas on art historic discourse in your first year because that's crazy."
> *Daniel, Undergraduate student, University College London (UCL)*

The sense of passion is deep-rooted amongst lecturers. One spoke of "falling in love" with Rossetti, with teaching and studies used as a way of developing that relationship. For the lecturers at Birmingham University, their passion lies in browsing through libraries, bookshelves and journals where they can "stumble upon

golden nuggets of information" but time constraints and too much admin mean they are unable to dedicate as much time to research and teaching as they would like. For FE tutors, too, the desire to keep up to date with their subject area often gets subsumed by "preparation, marking and then a ton of other duties".

Students share this sense of time poverty – concentrating on the course essentials at the expense of museum visits or wider reading. One group raised the issue of 'resource poverty':

> "For something called the 'core course' – which is maybe a third of our course – [we are in] a group of maybe 30 people [sharing] six binders and then you have to go away and photocopy that in groups or whatever, and it can be a bit of a bother because… one always goes missing… So, you can end up… without access to what you really need to read… And sometimes it will still be confusing - you get one hour a week where you can pop into your lecturer's office if you've got a problem so it can be tricky sometimes… to get hold of people you want to chat to."
> *Daniel, Undergraduate student, UCL*

Isolation and lack of communication also appear to be a widespread problem. For the postgraduate students, this can be counteracted by attending seminars and conferences – although the respondents themselves have come to the point where they just need to sit by themselves and "get stuff done" whilst the university lecturers rarely have time to talk to their colleagues, particularly about their individual research.

Indeed, of all the interviewees, only the FE students actively engaged with each others' work:

> "…all your work kind of feeds into each other because people might have discovered a new technique that you don't know about or you know a way of doing a bit of text or you know certain type of paper or whatever. And it's really useful for you to sort of consider that in relation to your own work… With fine art we've got that studio there and everyone's got their work up on their boards… Or they might show you their sketchbook…"
> *Rosie, FE student, Filton College*

In contrast, the undergraduates spoke of a lack of communication about the course contents:

> Helena: "I think [exams are] the only time that we really communicate about the same course that we are on. Other than that it is just 'what are you doing for lunch?'"

Indeed, communication patterns are one of the key indicators of the next theme: the work/life split.

Work/life split: The technological divider

Within the HE sector, respondents felt that 'Facebook-style' features were purely for personal use and unsuitable for academic pursuits. In FE, however, the boundaries between work and life were blurred and the ability to contact experts and to personalise or control the space was welcomed.

During the course of the research, Facebook became a clear symbol of the division placed between work (study) and life: all but one of the HE students interviewed had a Facebook account. Only one postgraduate student used Facebook consciously and explicitly for study, as a way of networking with other postgraduates mostly via a Pre-Raphaelite group that she set up. For the remainder, Facebook was seen as a personal space for play, with one student stating, "It is like anti work." Indeed, the gut reaction of many participants to social networking features was to see them as Facebook add-ons and thus as frivolous and not suitable to work.

> "[A blog is] not something that's associated with work at all. It's like Facebook, for me it's entirely separate. It is useful for some things. I mean I made a similar sort of blog when I was travelling…"
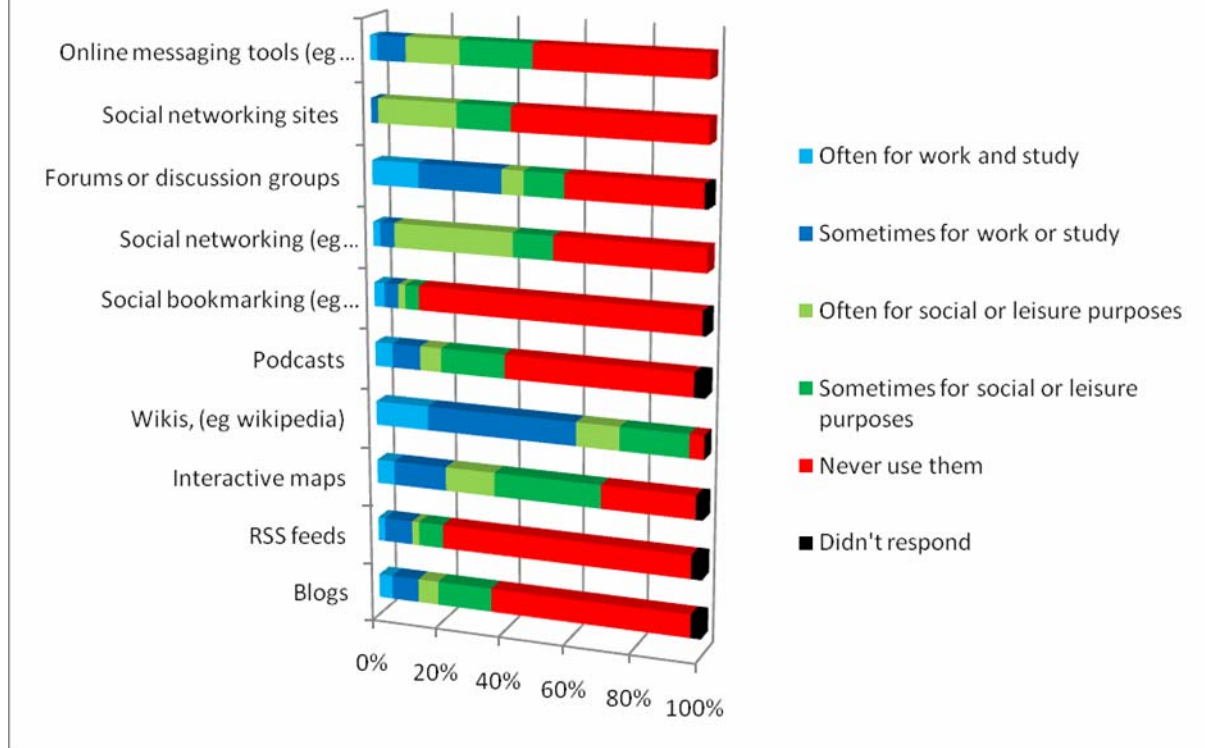
> "When I think of video I think of fun things, but I don't see how you could use a video for an English [degree]."

> "Upload means anyone can put on whatever they want… Upload just seems to me uploading pictures on Facebook."
> *Undergraduates, Leicester University*

> "I would not want to be Facebook friends with my tutors because then they would be able to see what I was up to socially. And you want to keep that kind of separation between you as a student… to you as a friend or whatever."

> "You are not allowed to be Facebook friends with tutors or anything like that."
> *Undergraduates, UCL*

How participants use web 2.0 features

Legend:
- Often for work and study
- Sometimes for work or study
- Often for social or leisure purposes
- Sometimes for social or leisure purposes
- Never use them
- Didn't respond

Categories (top to bottom): Online messaging tools (eg…), Social networking sites, Forums or discussion groups, Social networking (eg…), Social bookmarking (eg…), Podcasts, Wikis, (eg wikipedia), Interactive maps, RSS feeds, Blogs

For the tutors, too, Facebook represents informality, with one going so far as to note that straying into that domain for work-related issues would make her relationships with student too relaxed – a concept she found alarming.

For the FE tutors, however, this informality was positive as it gives the students a sense of control:

> "What our resource network does is that it just delivers and it's rather like a stale old teacher who is just telling you what happens here and what happens there. Whereas I think things need to be more flexible, a bit more lively, a bit more like you know in Facebook how you can customise what happens, how you can change the way it looks, how you can do all of those kinds of things. I think that's quite an important thing for this, because then [the students] become part of the authorship of the information in effect."
> *Ollie, tutor, Filton College*

The inclusive approach to technology within this particular FE college was shared by the students, who used Facebook groups as a way of gathering research and for peer review. One particular student described how he combined social networking technologies to great effect:

"I ran a blog for my project… because we've got to record like a diary of what we do. So every day I go onto my blog and I… write up what I [do] every day. And then I put up work – again on there. And I needed some people to comment on my story. So I went onto Facebook, made a group and invited everybody. And then [I asked the group] 'can you go onto my blog and make a comment?' And I think I got like 15 comments in the end which was quite useful because it would have taken me ages to go round everybody and ask everybody."
Tom, student, Filton College

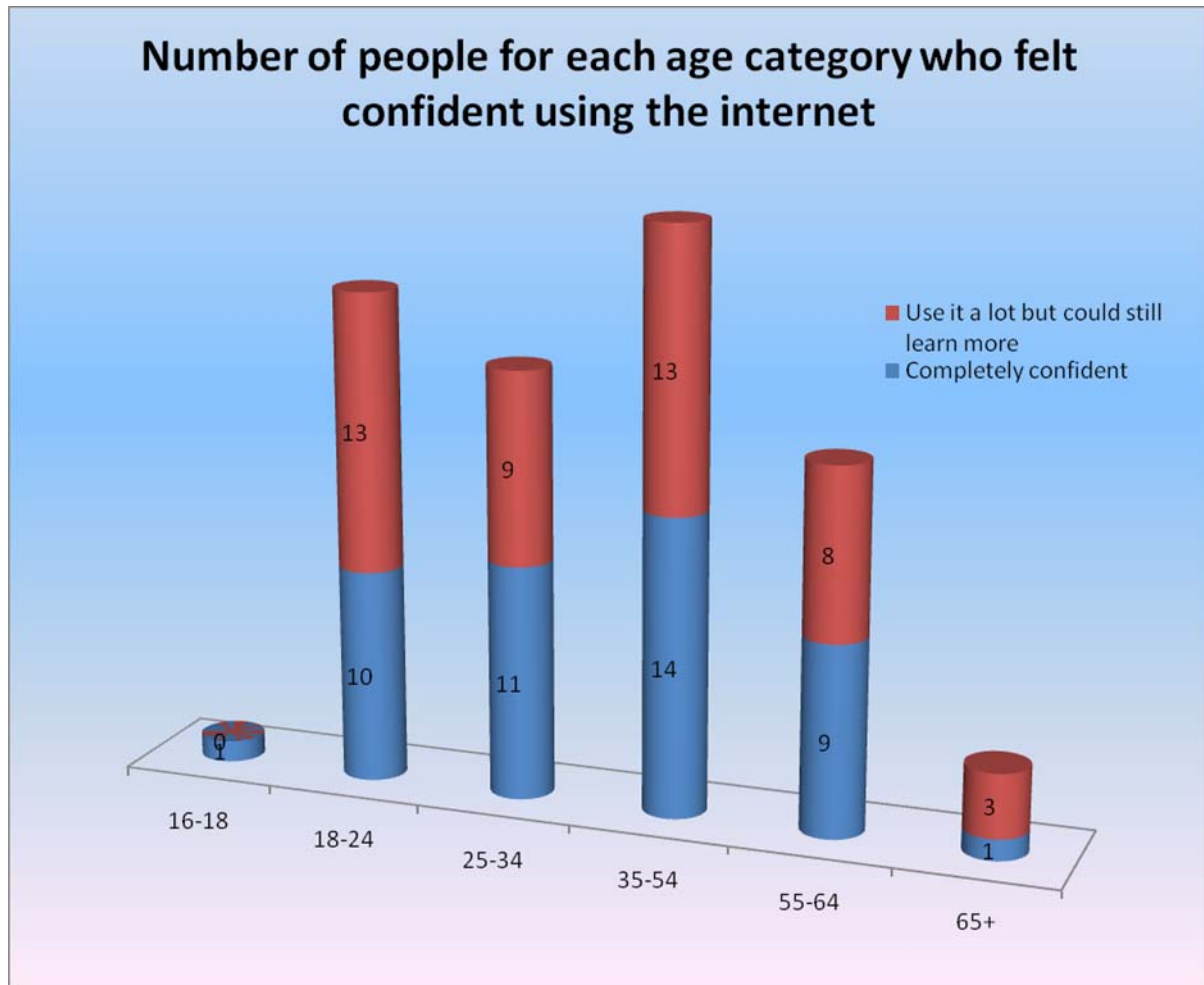Others used MySpace and YouTube as a way of making contact with experts:

"If someone's made a cool video or something like that, that's kind of using some technique or something and I'm like 'oh I wonder how they did that', I can email them on YouTube and they've got back [to me]… There's a Pixar animator who's got a blog… and I've emailed him via that and he's got straight back to me, telling me a bit about how to do something… which is really good because he's obviously in the industry."
Simeon, student, Filton College

For this group, with its blurred boundaries between 'work-related' and 'personal' use of the web, social networking tools fit comfortably in this shared space.

Comfort levels and default practices

There is a willingness within the sector to use the internet and to explore new technologies, but only those with real benefits to studies or teaching. Too many 'cutting edge' features in websites can alienate the core audience so subtly integrating a limited number will add value for those who are embracing technological developments. Many respondents have had negative experiences of forums and would need reassurance before posting that they will get a timely and appropriate response. The majority of respondents would 'lurk' but not post to a forum so if this feature is chosen it must be carefully managed to avoid dwindling contributions making the site feel unused.

Number of people for each age category who felt confident using the internet

Legend:
- Use it a lot but could still learn more
- Completely confident

Data by age category:
- 16-18: 0, 0
- 18-24: 13, 10
- 25-34: 9, 11
- 35-54: 13, 14
- 55-64: 8, 9
- 65+: 3, 1

Not one of the 92 survey respondents had low confidence in their ability to use the internet. Moreover, some lecturers we spoke to actively challenge their own comfort zones. Jim, for example, teaches 19th Century literature and was educated by taking notes on paper so finds this method more natural than using technology, yet is also a webmaster for a university site and embraces technology as a means of delivering his lectures.

Another lecturer has integrated multimedia resources into her teaching, but her fear of certain aspects of technology has led to complicated work-arounds; for example, the use of multiple desktop folders to store and play-out slideshows and DVD clips through fear of PowerPoint.

The postgraduate students we spoke to used 'offline' practices by default.

> "I'm old school. I'd rather just go see people [than use technology]"
> *Connie, postgraduate student, Birmingham University*

However they take care not to let themselves get too far behind. Serena, for example described how she missed out on a job because she didn't know how to use a computer so when she did find work she learned how to use it and now has a blog, a Facebook account and uses Flickr.

At the other end of the spectrum, the youngest students (in FE) considered the internet to be their comfort zone:

> "I never used books before [this course]. Possibly like two during A level but up until then nothing. It [was] always internet, always the teacher."
> *Sam, FE student, Filton College*

HE students as a group were very aware of the pace at which technology is changing:

> "Everybody I know has got Facebook. Everyone in the whole entire world – that I know – has got it. And when you think about it, a year ago, maybe two years ago, when you first got it none of us knew what it was or how to work it but when we got it within a couple of days we knew every single thing there was to know about the whole of Facebook."
> *Lucy, undergraduate student, Leicester University*

This rapid development can sometimes feel like a struggle:

> "[To learn new technology] I fight it myself. It's like when you get a new phone, you don't want to say to your friend 'oh how do I do that'… you just jab it."
> *Caroline, undergraduate student, Leicester University*

Whilst students do actively opt out of some areas of technology, such as RSS feeds and blogs, seeing them as "a geek thing", they are keen to point out that they're streets ahead of their lecturers:

> "Some of [our lecturers] are very poor [at using technology]."

> "Having X teaching us about [PowerPoint] was like the blind leading the blind."

> "The blind leading the seeing."

> "Of course we know how to make a PowerPoint presentation. Some of them are… fine but [sometimes] half the lecture is taken up finding someone to sort out the projector or something."
> *Undergraduates, UCL*

Lecturers and postgraduates spoke of holding back from posting comments online (through blogs or forums) because they weren't sure if what they had to say was relevant to the site or particular audience. One tutor was happy for his comments to be published online, but only if someone invited him to do so personally, whilst another was put off from posting to the 'Have your say' section of the BBC News site by the thought of receiving aggressive comments back in return.

In contrast, one postgraduate student started blogging because she had things she wanted to say about conferences she'd been to, books she'd read, etc. The FE students seemed happy to share comments and ideas online, and noted that communicating virtually can be less intimidating than doing it face to face. The undergraduates echoed this opinion, recounting with horror how one tutor had given them his home phone number instead of an email address, and praising another for setting up an MSN account for contacting her during the exam period.

Whilst all participants used email as a means of communication, only 58% used forums. For the postgraduate students – who all had access to departmental forums – this was because off difficulties using the site or unreasonable delays between posting and responses. For undergraduates usage varied widely by department:

> "My friend's in second year psychology and she uses [the department forum]. She got stuck on something so she posted a question and she got answers straight away. From students and tutors and that."
> *Fiona, undergraduate student, Leicester University*

For some lecturers, time constraints and the perceived frivolous nature of chatrooms reduced the appeal of a forum whilst comments were seen as representative of the kinds of surface, unscholarly responses to artefacts that they try to discourage. All participants seemed happy to 'mine' forums for information or ideas, however:

> "At the moment I just read. I've never posted anything. I will just search and often there is something already up there. But it doesn't mean I wouldn't post in the future: quite often when I look I've only got a day to go so I'm thinking of replying time. But, no, I would use it in the future, I do find it useful."
> *Jules, FE tutor, Filton College*

One 'interested professional' – a schools interpretation officer who has been working on a project about Ford Madox Brown – noted that she uses e-lists to communicate with academics as they're not as participatory as forums – the academics are able to engage to a degree they feel comfortable with. Indeed many of the participants spoke of using e-lists and email newsletters as a handy way of keeping abreast of developments.

Email however is not without its drawbacks: the FE tutors spoke of being bombarded with irrelevant information whilst one HE lecturer deliberately ignores

her university email account for similar reasons, preferring to give out her personal account.

Technology usage and barriers

Whilst all participants used the internet and wider technologies to some degree, many preferred the reliability and 'solidness' of traditional reference materials. Providing printer-friendly views and making artefacts feel as 'physical' as possible – for example, by providing a user-friendly zoom feature that allows you to 'get close' to the image will help to overcome these barriers. Some users will be put off by registration requirements, so this should not be obligatory. Providing multiple routes through content and opportunities to actively engage with materials in a way that suits the user will maximise value to this broad audience base.

Barriers to technology varied across the groups, although technological breakdown was an issue for everyone:

> "You can't rely on [the internet]. When I go home sometimes it
> will just kind of cut out in the evening and then I'm kind of left –
> want[ing] to scream."
> *Simon, FE student, Filton College*

University lecturers were wary of using video in their teaching because the systems frequently freeze.

For some participants, the very fact that websites aren't books is a barrier in itself. All of the postgraduates and many of the lecturers we spoke to found it difficult to read text on screen, and preferred to print large passages to read later. One said, "It's nice to not always be in front of a computer," whilst an undergraduate commented:

> "Websites are much quicker but I find it much easier to be able
> to reference and understand text when it's in books. Just
> physically having it there is reassuring."
> *Fiona, undergraduate student, Leicester University*

University lecturers in particular spoke of the casual (although intellectual) enjoyment of browsing through books in contrast to the more sterile experience of using the internet.

At the other end of the spectrum, over-familiarity with technology sometimes creates a barrier in itself. For example, one visual resources librarian we spoke to found having to use passwords a put-off, as she has so many she can't remember which is which; an issue shared by those in the FE sector:

> "I think there are some fundamental reasons why students don't
> use [new technologies] enough. They've already got... two or

three passwords for their own email thing. They've got maybe Facebook… [and] a login for the Mac Suite… they don't want another PC login which they may only use once in a blue moon."
Sam, FE tutor, Filton College

Technology is by no means viewed purely negatively within the FE and HE sectors, and the access to information and opinions afforded by websites was widely praised:

"When you're working in a tight niche you can't actually have a book… I got in contact with an American guy who does concept illustrations for like PlayStation and Xbox but you can't expect to have a whole big book full of… concept artists."
Tom, FE student, Filton

"JSTOR for American History isn't much use to us because you're just accessing the same facts over and over again. But for English or anything that you can have an opinion about, going on the internet or on JSTOR is really good."
Lucy, undergraduate, Leicester University

"Easier," "It's quicker," "It's at home as well."
FE students, Filton College

"The internet gives students easy access to texts."
Barrie Bullen, Lecturer, University of Reading

"The internet has completely changed History of Art – because beforehand when you were studying it you wouldn't obviously have access to as much… the idea started in the 50s when somebody put together a photo library which they kind of spread across the floor. So, History of Art and the internet have a really strong relationship now - it gives you access to any gallery in the world."
Daniel, undergraduate, UCL

Opinions varied as to the role of the internet in accessing information, with the postgraduate students seeing it as part of a cycle 'internet --> books ---> internet etc', and FE students using it as a funnel.

"I use [Google as] a starting point and then find websites and then…"

"… specific websites."

"Yeah and then websites from other websites."

"And then books from there... I think it's easier narrowing it down because there's so many books that you can look at. You can just sort of waste your time just flicking through all these books until you find something useful. Whereas if you type something in on the internet and it comes up with a picture you can then research that picture and then go and find it in a book for example."
FE students, Filton College

University students and lecturers view it as a quick reference tool.

"Quite a lot of the time when I am writing an essay I only use books for solid facts. The internet only comes into it if I need to remember what a picture looks like or if I need a date or something like that just quickly."
Chris, undergraduate student, UCL.

Value judgements

Academia is laden with value judgements around quality, reliability, scholarliness and status. The resource should be explicit about the credentials of its contributors and not try to foster a 'wiki' approach of quick access, community-owned knowledge. However, giving opportunities for students and teachers to share ideas on a level playing field is viewed as a positive step – as long as these ideas do not become misused by others.

"When you first arrive, the tutors say to you, 'if you use Wikipedia... sod off'. If you're going to use Wikipedia you might as well not be here. It's a load of rubbish... Wikipedia is sin."
Lucy, undergraduate, Leicester University

For the most part in the HE sector, websites are seen as a 'quick cheat' or a last resort, with the notable exceptions of JSTOR (almost universally recommended by students and lecturers) and the Rossetti archive (noted by two lecturers as full of reliable information). Wikipedia was singled out by both FE and HE interviewees as being particularly unreliable, and yet highly popular; it's used by all participants as a quick reference tool. The main criticism waged against Wikipedia was its un-scholarliness, both in terms of the authors and the ways in which it is used uncritically by students.

"Wikipedia is a lazy person's route to knowledge."
Paul, lecturer, Birmingham University

"Often what happens is that you tell some student to go and find something out and they go to Wikipedia and they find out... [and think] 'oh I've gone to the website and printed the page out

therefore I have done the research'. I think that is sort of endemic with students and I don't think that that's very, very healthy at all."
Ollie, tutor, Filton College

In fact, students themselves seem highly aware of the need to proceed with caution.

"I always – well I don't always – but I sometimes check it against actual books and other websites because well people can alter it so it's not always going to be 100% true."
Sam, FE student, Filton College

"Obviously the fact that it's kind of written not necessarily by authorities on the subject [means]you have to be wary of it because anyone can change it… so I might cross reference that with a book."
Helena, undergraduate student, UCL

They do sometimes admit to using it for shortcuts when deadlines are pressing.

"If you are brutally short of time – if you have got a good article… they've got footnotes of where they got all their pieces of information from and if someone good has written the article… you can look to where the footnote is, take that information and put it in your essay and just quote the quotes so it looks like you read the book."
Ed, undergraduate student, UCL

Not one of the interviewees had ever – or thought they would ever – amend an entry on Wikipedia, even if they found an error relating to their specialist area of expertise. Indeed, one of the lecturers noted that he would simply show this error to his students as further evidence of why the site cannot be trusted.

Concerns are not limited to Wikipedia, however. The postgraduate students commented that their tutors are suspicious of the net as a whole. For a website to be acceptable it has to be scholarly – The Victorian Web was 'approved' by reputation (in other words, sites written by published authors or affiliated to an institution would be acceptable).

"In our first module (approaches to literature) [the lecturers] tried to get us to use the internet but put a really heavy focus on using academic websites… One of the exercises we had to do was find a website that we would recommend to someone else (an academic), because it was referenced and it was regularly updated and recognised by a board of… whatever. Like a university-approved one. An academic one. Like JSTOR rather

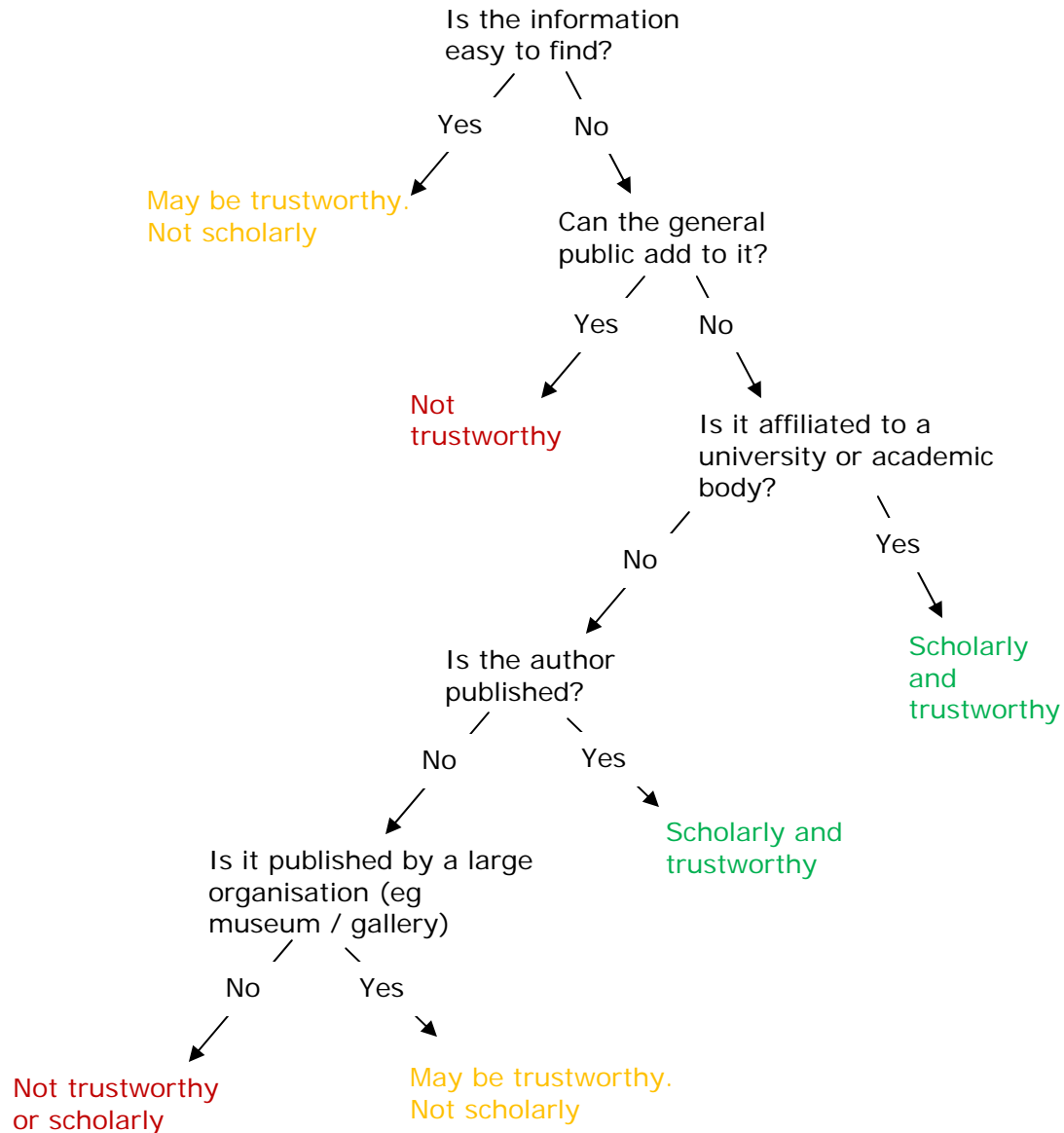than Wikipedia. They do try to make sure you differentiate
between the two."
Jacqueline, undergraduate student, Leicester University

Concerns about reliability and scholarliness are paramount. For one lecturer, the inability to be sure whether or not a website is reputable makes the process of internet research counter-productive. For postgraduates even sites from reputable organisations such as the National Gallery are used with caution.

"If it's meant for the general public it's probably not academic
enough for us."
Serena, postgraduate student, Birmingham University

Throughout the interviews a series of semi-formal rules emerged for establishing whether it was acceptable to acknowledge use of a website in a scholarly context:

Is the information
easy to find?

Yes   No

May be trustworthy.
Not scholarly

Can the general
public add to it?

Yes   No

Not
trustworthy

Is it affiliated to a
university or academic
body?

No   Yes

Is the author
published?

Scholarly
and
trustworthy

No   Yes

Is it published by a large
organisation (eg
museum / gallery)

Scholarly and
trustworthy

No   Yes

Not trustworthy
or scholarly

May be trustworthy.
Not scholarly

Status was also a huge issue for the participants when considering the reliability of research sources. Whilst both students and lecturers asserted that their ideas have equal validity, there was a general consensus that lecturers have a greater authority and experience whilst students often lack critical abilities.

"Students' and lecturers' ideas count equally I think. They're different planes, aren't they? One group are actually there doing it with you, and one is the people who did it a long time ago but ultimately have the academic opinion, the academic authority."
Caroline, undergraduate, Leicester University

"Although I talk to them about the fact that the internet is… a huge library of information… it's actually quite one dimensional in a way when it comes to research unless you know how to use it to research properly. And that's something that maybe we don't teach properly, because I know how I use it in quite a different way to the way that students use it."
Ollie, tutor, Filton College

Information and stimulus: collecting and connecting

For this audience, content is king but support in finding new connections and interpretations is always welcome. Ideally, the ability to form connections using the resource should not be limited to the Pre-Raphaelite collection.

"Sometimes with an essay I always feel a bit like when I first sit down to do it I'm like doing this [gathering motion], I'm pulling everything I can in. I'll read about 12 books and then try and condense it in to what's relevant."
Caroline, undergraduate, Leicester University

The experience of 'collecting' at the start of a project or research piece was shared by all participants. Lecturers described forming connections between artefacts and ideas as an integral part of scholarly research, but one that should be done independently and critically, rather than passively by following other people's connections. The National Gallery website was mentioned for the way in which it automatically generates links to other paintings you might like, depending on what you looked up – and whilst this was seen as a good idea for the general public, the lecturer who discovered the feature "tried to resist it" because of a desire "not to be like other people". Her colleague agreed saying, "It's important to create your own pathway."

Some lecturers were interested in forming links between artefacts for themselves, but not sharing these collections publicly, but others noted that "it's also good to watch what other people and students will put together." Alex, a schools interpretation officer, explained how her work involves considering how collections can be understood in new ways, encouraging different audiences to look at them in different ways through discussion. Some lecturers talked positively of thematic groupings on websites such as The Victorian Web but were frustrated by the limiting of these themes to particular collections.

Currently, participants' methods of identifying themes and links are rather ad hoc. The undergraduates, for example, sometimes had difficulties in structuring their thoughts.

"I find it very difficult to argue my third point before my first and to build it up."
Vita, undergraduate student, UCL

The postgraduate students described it as a "chaotic" process involving a mix of post-it notes, spider diagrams and mental mapping. One postgraduate was advised by a tutor to use *Literary Machine*, a concept mapping tool, but she found it too difficult to use so mostly just works things out in her head.

For the majority of participants, the collection of information and ideas is a combined process of copying files to the desktop, and printing or photocopying articles. Only one of the 42 people we spoke to volunteered the fact that they used social bookmarking software such as del.icio.us, and 86% of survey respondents had never used it. Many stored links in their browser (although one student had recently abandoned this as the university has switched over to Vista and she can no longer find 'Favourites') whilst others pasted links into Word. One tutor spoke of her "laptop gallery" – a collection of digital artefacts used as a basis for presentations. This same tutor was the only person to volunteer the word 'lightbox' when describing the referencing or storing of artefacts, although a couple of others (who work in galleries or publications) were familiar with the underlying concept from their work. One Art History lecturer uses traditional lightboxes as a way of ordering slides for his lectures and a colleague described how he sometimes makes a detour to look at the slides to "see what Paul's thinking about".

Sharing and competition

The level of concern around 'giving away ideas' varies, so users should be encouraged to share their thoughts and able to control the degree to which they do so.

For those in the HE sector, a sense of competition forms a key barrier to the uptake of Web 2.0 technologies. Undergraduate students keen to get a good grade are reluctant to share ideas or useful references in case they lose their competitive edge over fellow coursemates, and this sense of rivalry continues for postgraduates who aim for original thought but recognise this is hard to achieve so will settle for "being the first to get your ideas out there". The internet can be both damaging and beneficial to one's competitive advantage.

> "You can't put something up on the internet and expect people not to use it."
> *Connie, postgraduate student, Birmingham University*

Serena, however, uses e-lists and Facebook groups to keep an eye on areas to avoid because they're already being covered, and to monitor career opportunities. Both she and Connie use the queries generated on relevant e-lists to identify what work still needs to be done in the research field.

Intellectual property is a concern for all participants. For students this revolves mostly around accidental plagiarism (and they're aware that their tutors are using technology to check up on this) whilst for lecturers concerns are around giving

away their knowledge in what they see as a marketplace. Three of the lecturers we spoke to, for example, would not want their lectures posted online in case it was used by students from outside their own university.

The only group who wholly embraced the idea of sharing ideas as a means of improving one's own and others' work were the FE students:

> "We get taught at like GCSE level to kind of keep your work to yourself and kind of carry it on. But here … everybody just talks about each other's work."

> "You all do the same work during GCSE so you don't want someone to copy you. But here everybody is doing something completely different… even if you get the same brief like we did in graphics during our pathway, we all came up with completely different outcomes. I think it's the way it's structured really."

> "And all your work kind of feeds into each other because people might have discovered a new technique that you don't know about or you know a way of doing a bit of text or you know certain type of paper or whatever. And it's really useful for you to sort of consider that in relation to your own work."
> *FE students, Filton College*

The widespread membership of e-lists and interest-based societies within the wider audience group suggests that sharing ideas within a known community is positively viewed, whilst allowing a 'free-for-all' online carries more concerns.

Findings: Opinions about the teaching stimulus

Teaching stimulus materials drafted by the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery project team featuring sample questions and related extracts of text (Appendix 5) were circulated for discussion during the focus groups. Comments are summarised below: users saw potential in the materials but would prefer a less text heavy and directive approach.

HE tutors were hesitant to give a full critique because of a lack of time to review the materials thoroughly.

Audience	Positive responses	Negative responses
FE students	Reading lists and stimulus handouts are useful	Materials that are too wordy, boring and intimidating can be off-putting
FE students	Images and bullet points would make the stimulus easier to use	The amount of information involved would take longer to cover than normally allowed on a project.
FE students	The stimulus is appropriate for degree level and the information would be useful on an English Literature course: "I'd love something like this in a way, it's kind of directing you much more than we're used to… this is like what I was more used to at maybe like degree level… all these references and then I'd go and get out these books and have a look at them" *FE student who also has an English degree*	The materials were felt to be directive, which might result in everyone producing similar work
FE tutors	Interesting information for the students will 'get their juices flowing' and further reading will support further exploration.	
FE tutors	Workshop-style stimulus materials from other galleries have been used in the past. It's helpful when there's a broad project outline that can	

	then be adapted, and would be useful alongside a visit to the museum.	
HE undergraduates		Intimidating for English literature undergraduates.

"I can't really look at it, I'd rather see it in a book."

"There's too much - too blocky all at once."

"This isn't what I'd want – if someone gave me this to try and learn from I couldn't do it." |
| HE undergraduates | Analytical material that could be used for writing good essays quickly were valued by the Art History undergraduates. They first professed to using reading lists and reading around in their spare time, but later decided that they didn't do this as much as they should do.

"Our reading list for example over the summer before we came here included Ovid's Metamorphoses and Homer and things like that... if you read it, it is fascinating – it is a great thing to read - but you think well I will probably get one or two points I expect for a few days reading." | Did not want to be given too many opinions as they felt they should be working these out for themselves. |
| Postgraduates | It seemed like the kind of thing you would do when putting a proposal together; it would be useful for a literature review. | Would rather ask own questions than be given them. |
| Postgraduates | | When writing about a niche topic (as at postgraduate level) questions like these would be less helpful as much of the preliminary research is |

		yet to be written
Postgraduates		Information is key when doing a thesis, rather than the questions.
HE tutors	Similar stimulus material is created by lecturers for students containing reading lists, exhibition lists and websites.	Materials would need to adaptable to the needs of different classes – currently the numbered points look like they're angled to a particular type of class.
HE tutors		Students will only look at lists like these right before writing an essay and they would not be perused for general pleasure.
HE tutors		Tutors already know their own subject and would prefer to create their own questions. "I sometimes look at what other teachers are doing [in order] to assess my own work – I may find an interesting question or opening which I then include in my teaching material but I prefer to do things my own way. And I want to set an example for my students: I'd hate them to find that I'm using other people's work when I insist heavily on their own individual application!"
HE tutors	Keen on integrating resources like these with Blackboard, which has links to reputable websites and books.	
HE tutors	A helpful bank of teaching resources containing course plans and lecture notes would be useful to dip into.	

Findings: features and functionality

To give rigour and context to the discussion of Web 2.0 features that could be used, the second part of the focus groups incorporated card sort activities. On the front of each card was a feature name (eg Search), with a visual example on the reverse.

In the first card-sort activity, participants were asked to take it in turns to identify a feature they were familiar with, and describe what the feature meant to them. In this way we were able to check understanding of the features and establish a common language for describing them without intimidating the group.

Throughout the focus groups, the same three features caused confusion:

- *RSS feeds:* whilst some participants recognised this feature from sites such as BBC News, only a few understood what it was, and none had used it.
- *Personal area / Repository / Lightbox:* whilst almost all participants understood the concept of a personal area, many struggled with the term 'lightbox' and preferred to understand this feature as a 'shopping basket', 'wishlist' or space to save content.
- *Tags:* A common immediate response to the term tag was to dismiss it as irrelevant to academic work. Upon discussion of the feature, however, many decided that it could be a helpful way of quickly assigning meaning to an artefact. There was widespread concern that the value of labels would be degraded by people 'tagging any old rubbish' and some asserted that the feature would only have value if it was solely editorially controlled.

The features most associated with a Web 2.0 approach (rate, comment, upload, blog and send to friend) were commonly described with reference to social networking or e-commerce sites and were largely considered non-academic and therefore inappropriate for the Pre-Raphaelite online resource.

In the second card-sort activity, participants were set the challenge of selecting the features and content they would like to include in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery's Pre-Raphaelite website. To stimulate discussion they were asked to complete the challenge in small groups. By limiting the number of items available to 15 out of a possible 30, we were able to deduce the features and content of most value to the audience. The table below shows the number of times – out of the total 14 – each feature or content type was chosen.

Two features were suggested in telephone interviews but not included in the card sort activity: 'Ask an expert', and 'About the curator'.

The findings illustrate how information is seen as the primary value of this resource, followed by the ability to identify meanings and connections between artefacts.

Feature	Score	Comments
High resolution images (view and download)	12	Include handwriting as well as images *HE lecturer*
Detailed information about the artefact	11	"I think for something like this you just want the information there and you want the pictures there. You don't really need anything else because you wouldn't be going on it really for your own amusement." *FE student* "Maybe where it's been held before, before it came to there… what's used on it ie paints, acrylics, oil, stuff like that… Obviously the artist, obviously…. when, where… what kind of canvas was used… Yeah possibly like what it sometimes means or [is] symbolising. Or what it's referencing." *FE student* "The main point is to look and get information." *Visual resources librarian*
Search	10	"I usually use a search first before I use an advanced search because quite often it's from the general search that I can home in on the advanced search, so I know which things to cut out that aren't relevant. I use search to find out what things a website has got at first." *HE undergraduate*
Tags	10	"Some people may be interested in other people's tags. There is a danger with this feature that students would just copy someone else's, if using it for work." *HE lecturer* "Would be a positive move in terms of future proofing the site." *HE lecturer* "Curated collections would be good for

		the younger generation." *HE lecturer*
Information about the period or theme	9	
Browse	9	
Zoom	9	"For detailed things which are symbolic it is very useful." *HE undergraduate* "Especially with art because it's on a computer it's obviously not as big as it would be in a gallery. For instance I was looking at a picture and I couldn't work out if they were little horses with carriages, or market stalls. And I found that when I zoomed in I could tell what it was which was really useful because if I had written that they were market stalls it would have been like 'oh'. I can't see why zooming in would ever not be a good thing." *HE undergraduate*
Related links / If you liked this, you might like…	9	"Links are good. When you are at the bottom of a website and they have got loads of other websites with roughly the same material that is good - because I mean - quite a lot of the time with art history you are looking for specific information but that specific information is more than likely not going to be on any website. It is going to be formatted with the paintings and such and their history. But if you are answering on a specific theme in the painting you can't expect to be everywhere but if you've got related links you may find it, you know what I mean, following it through." *HE undergraduate* "Too guided, spoon fed." *HE lecturer*
Museum information	9	"Because you need to visit as part of

(visiting hours, location, contact details)		… primary research you need to go to places." *FE student* Participants also wanted 'What's on' info (special exhibitions and lectures etc) The museum info could also include a risk assessment "so that we could just print that out rather than having to do it ourselves" *FE tutor*
Basic information about the artefact	8	Basic information is more likely to be suited to the general public, whilst academics will need detailed information. "Dual level access to information is good. One for academics, one for the general public." *HE lecturer*
References (publications)	8	
Personal area / Repository / Lightbox	7	"I like that… having images you can compare." *HE undergraduate* "Like a wishlist – aah, that's quite useful. But maybe you'd just use Word." *HE undergraduate* "I would like to be able to compile my own electronic 'book' by gathering information from the site where it particularly interested me, so that all relevant work was in the same place. This should not only be linked to the artists' visual work but to their written works as well, especially where, as in Rossetti's case, for example, poems were written to stand side-by-side with paintings. It should be possible for the user to type his/her own commentary in the book as well so

		that one could build up a series of detailed study notes comprising only those items of relevance." *Interested amateur*
Thumbnail view	7	
Links to other collections	6	
Printer friendly version	6	"If you are reading something quite long, reading on the internet … kind of hurts your eyes a bit. …If I have written an essay I always print it out and read it on the page and highlighting and stuff is really useful." *HE undergraduate*
Copyright information	6	"But for education it doesn't really count so I've never really bothered with it." "The old watermark. Bit of Photoshopping will get rid of it." *FE students*
Full size image	5	
Low resolution images (view and download)	5	
Advanced search	4	"Most websites have this and it's quite useful because, in theory, it's going to return more specific information." *HE undergraduate* "It's too restrictive. When you use the BMAGiC advanced search it doesn't give any results, even though you know the thing's there." *Postgraduate student*
MP3 / Sound file / Podcast	4	"If it is interviews with artists I think it is really important - or like reports or commentaries." "I think you need a transcript if you want to quote." *HE undergraduates* "I've downloaded poetry but never

		used it in a lecture. It could be embedded in a PowerPoint [presentation]." *HE lecturer*
Discussion forum	3	"You need … somebody from the museum or whatever to be like regularly visiting the forum." *FE student* "I have got an active hate of discussion forums. Because you can't rely on it - because it is from someone who is on exactly the same level as you." *HE undergraduate* "If you are using it for academic purposes… you are not going to use discussion forums - you are going to use it for research - facts that are signed by a name, that are published, that are critics or something." *HE undergraduate*
Ask an expert / contact the curator	3	"An 'Ask a curator' option would be really helpful. I'd only be interested in instant messaging the curator. Not the general public." *Postgraduate student* "[This would be] someone who knew about different specialisms for different months." *Interested amateur*
Video	2	
Stimulus questions	2	
Comment	1	"It would be useful to have comments on … extra features that were on the website … so if there were any new things that you hadn't tried out it would be useful to know what people's response to that is." *FE student*

		"I'm not going to kind of hang around and do comments." *FE student* "You get so many people with rubbish points of view so you might - you don't get expert points of view." *FE tutor* "It's visually distracting and reduces it to Facebook level." *Postgraduate student*
Rate	1	"Rating is a personal thing and it is not necessarily going to help you academically." *HE undergraduate* "1-10 criteria is not suitable for academics!" *HE lecturer*
Blog	1	"Wiki… blog…discussion … that's for nerds." *FE tutor* "I don't like blogs - really self absorbed. I always think about really annoying people telling you what they had for lunch or whatever." "I love people with opinions so blogs are things that I love." *HE undergraduates* NB. This group did decide that a blog from a curator in the midst of a re-hang would be interesting.
Information about the writer / curator	1	"It should be clear who the author of each commentary on a particular work is, and the site should include a brief CV of each contributor. I would expect this in a good encyclopaedia." *Interested amateur*
Share / Recommend / Send to a friend	0	"I hate this, it's rubbish. The only things I'd share with a friend is something stupid, from YouTube, to make them laugh. I wouldn't share an

		article. I'd possibly say, 'oh this is quite useful', but if you're looking for information why would you recommend it or share it. It just seems patronising. And quite often you're doing different things so I don't necessarily know people who are doing the same thing on your course, and even if I did I wouldn't necessarily share the same things because you might end up with a similar essay." *HE undergraduate*
RSS feed	0	"You're not going to get that much news on a museum." *FE student* "'I know it's a geek thing" *HE undergraduate*
Wiki	0	
Upload facility	0	The schools project officer we spoke to found that in her experience even when there was an initial demand for this feature it wasn't sustained over time.

Recommendations

For a site of this nature, content is key. The core attraction of the site to its intended audience is the Pre-Raphaelite collection itself, and the best way to give value to this audience is to maximise access to all of the artefacts. For this reason, we suggest providing three different access routes (described in further detail below):

1. Search
2. Browse
3. Curated collections

Content

The range of specialisms within the broad sector of English, Art History and History means that every single artefact within the Pre-Raphaelite collection is of potential value. Providing access to both thumbnails and high resolution images of the artefacts (including hand-written text as well as pictures and photographs) will be of great benefit to the academic community, but information about each artefact is also essential. The information required varies according to subject focus and artefact type but should include where appropriate:

- Information about the techniques used in the making of the artefact
- History of the artefact: when it was created and for whom, who donated it, and where it has been previously displayed
- Purpose and meaning of the artefact: symbolism and influences
- Details of the artist/writer: biography and body of work
- Context to the artefact: the period in which it was created and contemporaries of the artist, related artefacts

It would be most useful to provide all of this information in layers that can be switched on or off, thus allowing academics to access the detail they need without overwhelming the general public and FE students.

Examples of information layers or filters

For the site to be trustworthy and of value to scholars, care must be taken to provide references and also cite the academic credentials of the author of this information.

Stimulus questions have little value to the audience when provided as separate pieces of content, but could add value when linked to the artefacts. The section on curated collections, below, covers this in more detail.

Navigation routes

1. Search (Simple and Advanced)

Adding meaningful and detailed metadata associated with the information types described above will benefit scholars seeking particular artefacts. The ability for users to add metadata by tagging content should also be considered, but only alongside the ability to restrict search results to non user-generated tags (in order to avoid alienating the HE community).

2. Browse

Editorialised categories, either using navigation bars or tabbed sections, will provide value to the general public, FE sector and some undergraduates. Categories might include:
- Symbolism
    - Ideal female beauty
    - Art versus nature
    - Classical mythology
    - etc
- Medium
    - Letters
    - Painting on canvas
    - Sculpture
    - Works on paper
    - etc
- Artists
    - Edward Burne Jones
    - John Everett Millais
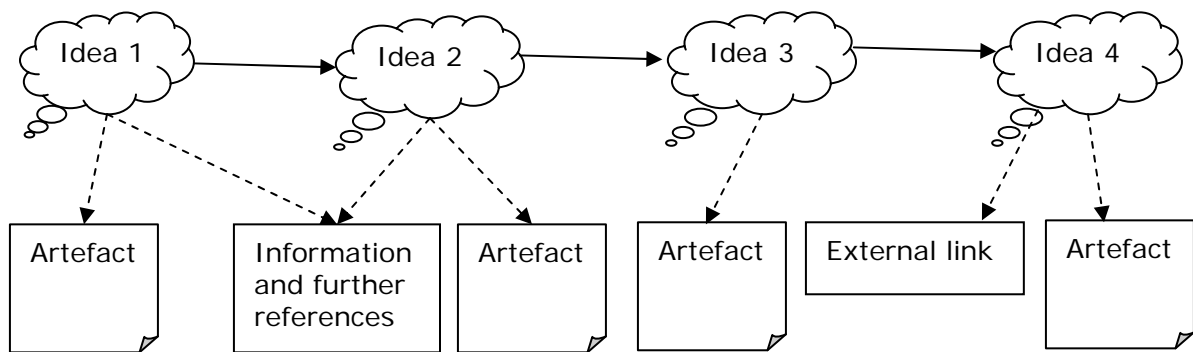   - Dante Gabriel Rossetti
    - etc

3. Curated collections

The ability to combine artefacts, information and ideas would provide opportunities to showcase the collection in innovative – and potentially rejuvenating – ways. If scoped and built correctly, this functionality could work effectively in two 'directions';
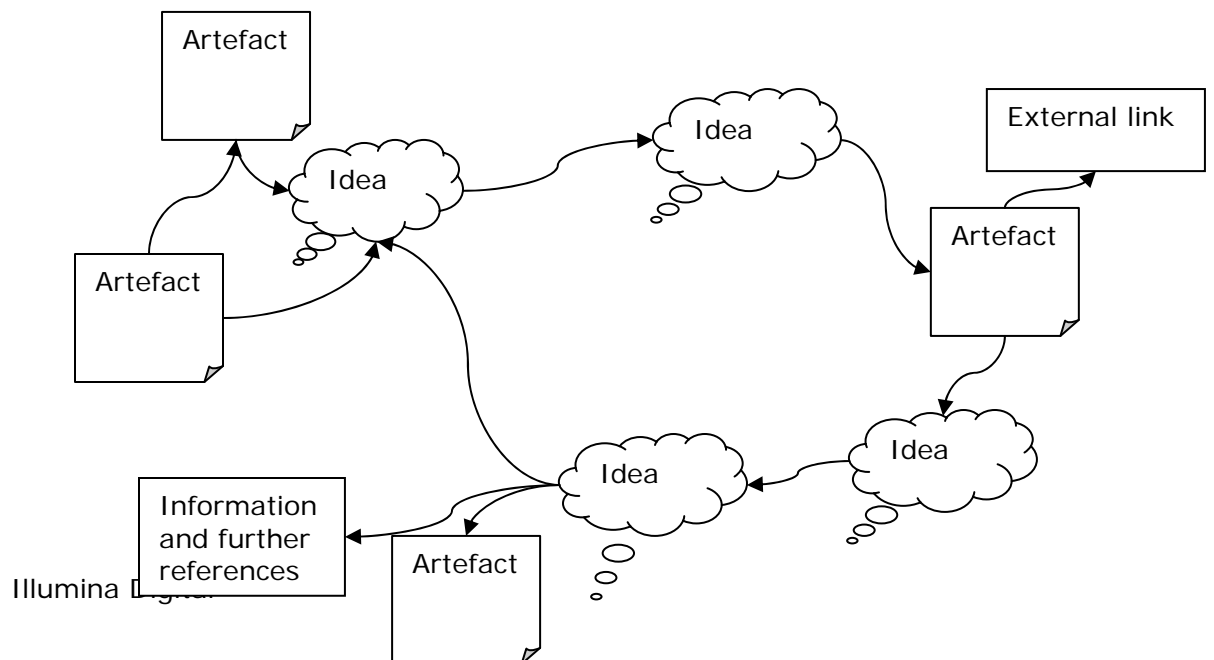
a) Starting with artefacts and information using these to stimulate new ideas

Artefact → Information → Artefact → Artefact / Artefact → Artefact

Idea 1   Idea 2   Idea 3   Idea 4
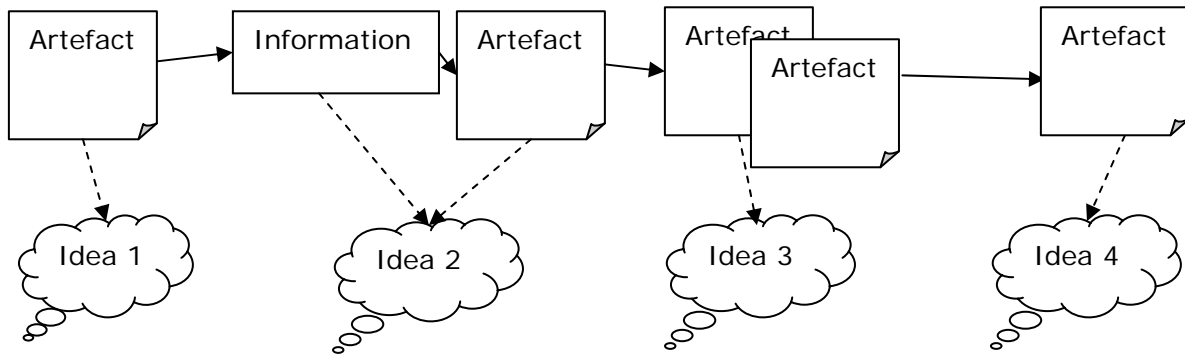
b) Starting with ideas and then collecting artefacts, information and even external links to support those ideas

Idea 1 → Idea 2 → Idea 3 → Idea 4

Artefact   Information and further references   Artefact   Artefact   External link   Artefact

Ultimately, the relationships between the items can be as fluid and non-linear as desired:

Artefact

Idea   Idea   External link   Artefact

Artefact

Information and further references   Artefact   Idea   Idea

We would suggest that the 'curated collections' area is seeded by the project team (and perhaps the academic steering group). Collections could be added over time, for example to promote new acquisitions or to generate interest in a lesser-known artefact. These seeded collections would also take the place of traditional teaching stimulus material with questions and stimulus points used in the place of ideas.

Additionally users would be invited to create their own collections. Potential uses (which would need to be clearly signposted to the audience) might include:

- HE tutors who can collect together artefacts as reference material before or after a lecture or seminar
- FE tutors who can gather together artefacts and information as a starting point for student essays
- Students who can gather together artefacts and information to research and structure essays
- Teachers who can create virtual tours of artefacts for students who would otherwise be unable to see the collection
- Teachers who can challenge students to create a collection around a given focus, explaining what artefacts they'd display and why
- Interested amateurs who can gather their favourite artefacts and share them with society members or the general public.

The two important aspects to note here are that:

1. Users can choose the degree to which they 'give away their intellectual copyright' by putting as much or as little into the 'idea blobs' as they like.
2. Users can control who sees their collections by keeping them private, sharing them with a group or with everyone using the site.

Since users from the HE sector are very concerned with reliability and scholarliness, it may be appropriate to explicitly label user-generated collections, perhaps even indicating whether they were created by teacher, student or interested amateur.

In addition, to cater for the sector of the academic community that is currently wary of setting up accounts and saving online, an export feature could be provided enabling the user to export their curated. Over time this feature is likely to be used less and less as the core audience become more comfortable working 'virtually'. Meanwhile, a printer-friendly version of the curated collections is likely to be widely used.

Additional features and content

Ask an expert / Contact a curator
This idea was not suggested by users until the last part of the qualitative study but other comments around discussion forums and blogs (ie that they could be useful if

well managed and hosted by recognised experts) suggest that it would be well-received.

The basic principle is that of a forum, but one that is explicitly managed by a Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery team member and/or a 'guest expert'. As is normal for a forum, users would be invited to post their queries and comments about the collection, but what is distinctive is that at defined periods, new topics would be introduced, with the expert/curator seeding content around that theme. Topics might include:
- Restoring and maintaining the artefacts
- Focus on… Rossetti / Burne Jones etc
- Donation and collections (this topic would particularly appeal to the interested amateurs).

As a way of limiting maintenance overheads and also involving the academic and wider community, users could have the opportunity to volunteer as an expert. At first this would need careful promotion over e-lists and specialist groups and perhaps some additional support from the Academic Steering Group but over time could become a self-sustaining feature.

About the site
Although not a major overhead or headline feature, attention should be given to explaining the purpose of the site and offering advice on how to use the content and features. Both the FE and HE sectors would benefit from clear information about copyright, whilst HE in particular will be more likely to adopt the site as a firm favourite if it is clear about its academic credentials.

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