

OU Facebook

Position Statement | June 2008

This document describes a range of OU-related activity within Facebook, and some thoughts about future direction. It is an information note for all interested parties inside the OU.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. [Facebook](#) is a social networking site which allows users to maintain and create friendships and affiliations online.
- 1.2. In 2007 Facebook opened up its platform to application developers leading to an increase in both its user-base and the development of applications that users could add to their personal profiles activity. Facebook applications have been created by tens of thousands of individuals and brands with the most popular being used by millions of members.
- 1.3. The OU has a number of presences in Facebook, both official and user-generated. ("Official" presences are taken to be presences established by employees of the Open University that relate directly to OU activities; they *may or may not* be official in the sense of being a part of a budgeted OU project. "User-generated" presences are presences established informally by students that relate directly to the OU). These include:
 - 1.3.1. The [official OU profile page](#). This page has had over 7,500 declare themselves as fans of the OU. It contains over 80 discussion threads and has nearly 1,000 postings to its wall (the area for users to post messages they want the profile owner to see). It is [the most successful university profile page on Facebook](#).
 - 1.3.2. The [user-generated OU group](#) which was created by a student and existed before any official OU activity in the space. It has over 2,000 members but has declined in popularity since the arrival of the "official" profile page.
 - 1.3.3. An OU application [Course Profiles](#) built by members of The Institute of Educational Technology (IET), Academic and Administrative Computing Service (AACS), Faculty of Maths, Computing and Technology (MCT) and Online Services. This application allows OU students to badge themselves with the OU courses they are studying, have studied or hope to study, links these courses to C&Q pages and relevant OpenLearn material, recommends future courses (based on data mining other users' Course Profiles data) and enables users to find study buddies on a particular course. Educationalist Stephen Downes called this application '[Best educational use of a social networking service](#)'. It is estimated that around 90% of OU students in Facebook have Course Profiles installed. The Course Profiles application was also praised in [a report by Childnet International and funded by Becta](#), the UK Government body for learning technology.
 - 1.3.4. Another OU application [My OU Story](#) which allows students to keep an online diary of their experiences of OU study. Emotional status is ascribed to each story and students are able to provide peer support through the application. Over time the emotional status of each user is formed into a personal mood graph so that they can see their high and low points during their OU study.
 - 1.3.5. Other "official" OU presences include [The Library](#), [Sesame](#) (student magazine), the group which was used to [oppose the HEFCE ELQ cuts](#) and various communities of practice set up by Course Teams / ALs such as [Social Networking for Practice Learning](#).
 - 1.3.6. There are numerous examples of user (student)-generated groups relating to OU study. Two examples are [OU Student Study Group: DD100](#) and [October 2007 Starters](#) which have 347 and 191 members respectively.

1.4. Facebook has recently added new ways to interact with its services including Facebook Connect (which allows users to connect their Facebook friends and identity to other sites), and [Facebook Open Platform](#) (which makes parts of the Facebook application platform available to developers for free under an open source license).

2. Reasons for Engaging with Facebook

2.1. Activity in Facebook is undertaken with the aims of:

- 2.1.1. Extending the reach of the OU (through its students and staff) into online social networks, thereby both building community and raising awareness of OU brand.
- 2.1.2. Building The Open University's reputation as a leader in understanding the opportunities and threats afforded by social networking and other web 2.0 environments.
- 2.1.3. Building an understanding of the structure of OU-related social networks/social network activity and the ways in which they may be leveraged for viral distribution, social marketing, social recommendation and peer support.
- 2.1.4. Establishing a framework for exploring the future use of web 2.0 and social software for a wide range of University activity, both internal and external.
- 2.1.5. Investigating issues of identity and privacy in the web 2.0 world.
- 2.1.6. Maximise the publicity gained by being in these spaces.

3. Facebook issues

3.1. There are a number of issues to consider both in terms of the OU's official engagement with Facebook and user-generated but OU-related activity

3.1.1. How does the OU 'police' usage of its brand logo if it is used on user-generated study groups? Should OU-approved image assets be created for this and other related purposes?

3.1.2. How does the OU deal with inappropriate activity undertaken by OU students within environments that the OU does not control? This is discussed further in section 4.

3.1.3. To what extent are OU Facebook applications (or Google gadgets / other widgets) tied to official OU systems such as CIRCE or VOICE?

3.2. Within the next 2 – 3 years Facebook may no longer be the most rapidly-growing social network. Online Services will keep up-to-date with new offerings and considering their appropriateness for official OU engagement.

3.3. The development of existing OU applications has been undertaken by a loosely-managed team from four separate OU departments. Experience of such cross-departmental working can help the OU understand the processes required to make such virtual teamwork easier.

3.4. Facebook is currently the most rapidly-growing social networking site in terms of new users per month and will provide many of its users with their first experience of online social networking. As the OU moves further towards online course delivery social sites such as Facebook can serve as a useful introduction and familiarisation to such activity.

3.5. Facebook is a closed (almost proprietary) world – whilst applications reside on our servers they are not immediately transferable to other social networking sites. This will be resolved in the medium term with developments such as [Google's OpenSocial](#) and ubiquitous profiles (user profiles which users can transfer from one environment to another).

3.6. Development of student-facing applications using Facebook allows us to use a 'real' environment for testing potential internal services with an early adopter user base in conditions where user expectations about (lack of) application support can be managed. Rapid prototyping and testing of applications in contained social networks allows us to test the viability of applications that may be rolled back into official OU services.

4. Guidelines of use for OU Staff and Students

- 4.1. The number and variety of web 2.0 services is rapidly changing and it is likely that guidelines developed for today will (in some cases) be inappropriate tomorrow. The below should be considered a guideline only, and those wishing to discuss particular needs or issues in more detail should contact comms-online-services@open.ac.uk.
- 4.2. Although the OU cannot control the actions of its students in other online environments, nor the actions of its staff in their own time, it does expect that as members and representatives of the OU community they adhere to certain standards of behaviour. These are set out in the OU Web 2.0 behaviour guidelines:

Recent years have seen the rise of a number of social networking sites allowing users from all over the world to come together and connect online. The tools, technologies and philosophy which underpin many of these sites reflect aspects of what has become known as [Web 2.0](#). Some of the sites that fall into this category are Facebook, MySpace, Delicious and YouTube. Blogging software such as Blogger and Wordpress are also a part of these developments.

The Open University has a presence [in many of these sites](#) and is aware that many of its staff and students are also active in these environments. Use of these tools and services can be a great benefit for many students, particularly those studying at a distance. While we encourage their use, there are some issues to consider. As members of an OU community that functions on the basis of mutual respect and responsibilities you are expected to observe the code of conduct of hosting services while acting in these spaces.

While the OU cannot, and does not wish to, monitor behaviour outside of its own network, actions that directly impinge on students are still subject to possible disciplinary action. For more information about the responsibilities of a student using the OU network please read the [Student Charter](#) or the [Computing Guide](#). For information about staff responsibilities when using the OU network please see the [OU Computing Code of Conduct](#). General information about online netiquette is available from <http://www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/codes/netiquette.html>.

Alongside responsibilities around standards of behaviour students and staff should also be aware of their personal privacy and recognise that information contributed to social networking sites is not private. You should think carefully before posting anything to the internet that might be seen by your current or future employer, students, tutors or peers. Further information on this is available from [DirectGov](#) or [Thinkuknow](#).

- 4.3. It should be noted that the above guidelines deal almost exclusively with behaviour of OU staff and students within external online environments. They do not deal with the legal issues around ownership of data submitted to external sites nor the appropriateness of external providers' Terms of Service for OU projects or activities. These issues will be discussed in a forthcoming Guidelines for Using External Web 2.0 Services document, but briefly the following issues should be considered:
 - 4.3.1. Does the service require that you sign away intellectual copyright to the content that you submit? ("Intellectual property rights/Copyright")
 - 4.3.2. Once you have submitted content or held discussions within the environment how easy is it to retrieve in a usable format? ("Data portability")
 - 4.3.3. Can you delete (as opposed to disable) your user account, group or community should you wish to do so?
 - 4.3.4. Are the Terms of Service suitable for your participants? Is it likely that they will receive spam email or that their details will be passed to other services?
 - 4.3.5. Are you planning to make your area of the external site look and feel like an extension of an existing OU service? If so you should make it very clear to participants at what point they are changing environments.

4.3.6. Do you wish to use the OU brand logo on the external service? If so you need to speak with Communications (communications@open.ac.uk).

5. Rights and terms and conditions of use.

- 5.1. Under Facebook's [Terms of Use](#) "All content on the Site and available through the Service, including designs, text, graphics, pictures, video, information, applications, software, music, sound and other files, and their selection and arrangement (the "Site Content"), are the proprietary property of the Company, its users or its licensors with all rights reserved."
 - 5.1.1. However, each individual user is "solely responsible for the photos, profiles (including your name, image, and likeness), messages, notes, text, information, music, video, advertisements, listings, and other content that you upload, publish or display (hereinafter, "post") on or through the Service or the Site, or transmit to or share with other users (collectively the "User Content")."
- 5.2. The [terms relating to Facebook profile pages](#) state that brands "are solely responsible for the creation, use and content of your Facebook Page and the URL you choose to be associated with your Facebook Page (your "Facebook URL")."
- 5.3. [The platform developer guidelines](#) which relate to Facebook applications state that "You own your application, and you're responsible for developing, operating, maintaining, and supporting it. You're also responsible for any content you show as a part of your application." And further that "you retain all right, title and interest in and to, and Facebook obtains no rights of any kind (other than the rights and licenses expressly granted in this Agreement) in, Facebook Platform Applications you create and in the Facebook Platform Application Content, and all associated Intellectual Property Rights (subject to Facebook's underlying rights in Facebook Platform and Facebook Site)".

6. Contacts

- 6.1. Stuart Brown (Online Communities and Conversations Manager).
- 6.2. Laura Dewis (Communications Manager - Open Content and Web Projects).
- 6.3. Matt Rawlinson (Communications Officer - New Media).
- 6.4. Ian Roddis (Head of Online Services). Overview from an OU online perspective.