UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE

LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE

Guidelines for the use of external software/services for Blended Learning

Summary

Over the last few years there has been a significant increase in the number of external services available which have potential to support or enhance learning and teaching. The appeal of these services is also raised by the fact that many offer their services for free. However, use of such services is not without potential issues particularly in relation to data uploaded to or stored on external sites. This paper sets out a set of guidelines beyond immediate pedagogic requirements that are intended to help those evaluating such services to make an informed judgement as to the suitability of the services being considered.

Decision

Members are asked to consider the guidelines proposed

Introduction

The rapid technical developments in both web and mobile arenas seen in recent years have led to numerous external services coming into being that offer potential for learning and teaching. As many of these services are based around social media principles of ease of collaboration and sharing, often reflect the cutting edge of technology, are regularly used by students outside their study and are frequently available without charge, their appeal for use in learning & teaching is, and will continue to be, increasingly significant. In some circumstances the use of external software is desirable to undertake some authentic learning activities. However, the university, both at an institutional and individual level, needs to exercise judgment across a number of perspectives when determining the appropriate choice of such external services.

These guidelines are intended to serve two purposes:

1. To help the Blended Learning Sub Committee determine appropriate recommendations for LTC on the adoption of external services for blended learning and, conversely, what services or functions would be more appropriate to maintain internally.
2. To help individual academics or course teams who may wish to adopt subject-specific external software or services beyond the services provided centrally within the university

The Guidelines

The guidelines take the form of a set a questions that should be considered when evaluating an external service for use in learning & teaching and support for staff considering these questions will be provided both by LTAs, colleagues within the CLT and the university's legal adviser. These questions are intended to act as prompts for the key issues to consider beyond pedagogic requirements for the use of the service

and should be considered alongside specific learning & teaching issues that are being addressed.

a. When considering the use of an external service, have you checked whether your requirements could already be met by an existing service offered within the university? A full A-Z list of software and services provided to support blended learning is maintained here http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearning/

b. Have you sought advice from your School Learning Technologies Adviser? You School LTA can help both in advising on the choice of software and collating need across the university to inform future adoption of central services and software.

c. Are other universities using the service being considered?

d. Would your intended use of the service fulfil legislative requirements such as the Data Protection Act? The university Legal Adviser can advise on these issues.

e. Can data be exported or archived and is there any policy/contract in place to allow this to happen should the service shut down?

f. Who will have access to the data?

g. Who owns data uploaded to the service?

h. Have the risks of publishing personal data on the Internet been explained to students where they are obliged to do so in order to use a service?

i. How long will 'idle' data be kept on the service's systems if it is left un-used or un-accessed?

j. Is there any possible impact upon the university's reputation? The Marketing & Communications department can offer advice on issues to consider here.

k. Summative assessment can only be used with approved services and follow the Summative eAssessment Guidelines for Electronic Examinations

l. Can the identity of participants be guaranteed?

m. Can all intended participants gain access?

n. What should happen if a student objects to being asked to use the service?

o. To what extent can the service be integrated with current university systems? – e.g. using existing usernames/passwords rather than separate ones, content being able to be presented within studentcentral etc

p. What level of support and maintenance is provided by the company for the software or service should you encounter problems with reliability or performance?

q. Does the service comply with accessibility standards?

As this is a rapidly developing area these guidelines are not intended to be comprehensive or cover all eventualities but should highlight the key considerations in making a choice on adopting external services.