

## Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching

University of South Wales

# SOCIAL SOFTWARE IN THE CURRICULUM A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

### Executive Summary

This document sets out the University's Guidelines for the use of Social Software in the curriculum. It highlights the university's commitment to using social software as a key means to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. In line with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategies, these guidelines will develop the use of social networking software to support students in learning, teaching and assessment. They are also designed to strengthen the online student experience for students at the University of South Wales.

In developing these guidelines, the University aims to:

- (1) improve students' learning experiences by raising the academics' awareness of social software;
- (2) encourage and support the embedding of social software across all aspects of the curriculum in the University; and
- (3) highlight the key issues and considerations for using social software in learning, teaching and assessment.

## 1. Introduction

The guidelines are intended to offer guidance to USW academics on good practice and issues of social software which they need to consider. Social software, in the context of the University of South Wales, is perceived as a potential tool for supportive online learning and facilitating an engaging social environment for students. Embedding social software in learning, teaching and assessment can lead to many new learning opportunities. As such, the University, through CELT, is committed to support academics as follows:

- Promote social software for student motivation and engagement in the learning process, both academically and socially.
- Provide information and guidance for staff and students in the effective and appropriate use of social software
- Provide good case studies and qualitative evidence from different disciplines.
- Provide good practice examples of the use of social software.
- Provide support for academics at all stage of social software usage for learning, teaching and assessment.

## 2. Aims of the guidelines

To support the effective use of social software in learning, teaching and assessment the University is promoting these good practice guidelines with the following aims:

- To improve students' learning experiences by raising the academics' awareness of social software;
- To encourage and to support the embedding of social software across all aspects of the curriculum in the University; and
- To highlight the key issues and considerations for using social software in learning, teaching and assessment.

This document is NOT suggesting a blanket approach which insists that “all academics have to embrace social software” but to promote the use of social software to enhance learning and teaching experiences at the University.

## 3. Social Software for Learning, Teaching and Assessment at the University of South Wales

The University is not committed to any particular social software or approach to using social software. It provides social software tools as part of its learning environment. However, the University also encourages the use of externally provided social software when that is deemed to be more appropriate for the student group.

### 3.1 Benefits to using social software

There are many benefits for the institution and its staff and students in using social software for learning, teaching and assessment. These are outlined below:

Students	Academics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Widely spread, easy and free usage without significant support from the University.</li> <li>▪ Enhance communication skills, widening participation, social engagement and collaboration.</li> <li>▪ Encourage peer-support and review.</li> <li>▪ Create learning interest through a community of learning.</li> <li>▪ Create educational engagement and a sense of ownership when the learning process is published on the web.</li> <li>▪ The ability for students to retain access to their work, communication and learning history after they leave the University.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All students' benefits listed in the students' column;</li> <li>▪ More flexible than a VLE;</li> <li>▪ Stimulate more interesting ideas in learning, teaching and assessment;</li> <li>▪ Meet individual's needs which go beyond the services provided internally by the University; and</li> <li>▪ Simple tools to get peers or other researchers involved in a research group for information and media sharing, and opportunities for instant feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional Benefits</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhancing learning, teaching and assessment experiences with the above benefits; and</li> <li>▪ Improving student induction, participation and retention.</li> </ul>	

*Table 1. Opportunities of Social Software at USW*

### 3.2 Support for the use of social software

The Enhancing Learning through Technology team in CELT have experience and expertise in the use of a wide variety of social software tools both those within Blackboard, Moodle and external tools. CELT's research addresses the use of social software tools in a pedagogic context. Academics who have little or no experience of using such tools are recommended to contact the team in CELT via IT Support, to explore the possible uses of social software in Learning, Teaching and Assessment.

Additional reading on how social software can be used to enhance learning and teaching can be found on the JISC website:

[Study of the effective use of social software to support student learning and engagement](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/projects/socialsoftware08) [Accessed 02/12/14 from <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/projects/socialsoftware08> ]

### 3.3 Good Practice Guidance and Considerations

Social software can be used freely, anytime and anywhere. However, there are some limitations when using external social software services in the University's courses. The University's existing policies and regulations as regards IT use and general conduct still apply to staff and students when using social software, as the technology is essentially unchanged. However, the *nature* of the content and how it is used can change, as more and more data is shared and recorded, and this has its

own implications. Academics and students should be aware of the following key issues and good practice guidance:

### 3.3.1 Accessibility and Reliability

Generally, an account to sign up to social software is required. Issues such as multiple passwords in addition to the University login may cause problems. The learning materials and communication may not be securely backed up if the social software provider changes some functions, or the nature of its service, or in the worst case, the service is discontinued.

**Good Practice Guidance 1:** Academics using external social software in their learning, teaching and assessment are expected to make students aware of the need for multiple logins and the fact that the University's SSAA (Self Service Account Administration) system does not extend to external sites.

**Good Practice Guidance 2:** Students are expected to be informed of the possible risk (although the risk is considered low) to the security during any submission or contribution to the social software.

**Good Practice Guidance 3:** Academics using external social software need to ensure it is effectively backed-up

**NB:** In addressing Good Practice Guidance 3 staff are recommended to use the zip functions available in many external wikis or use [ScrapBook \(Firefox extension\)](#) which allows easy capture of websites and files.

### 3.3.2 Support for Social Software Performance, Development and Interoperability

The University cannot provide support for performance or technical problems with externally hosted social software.

**Good Practice Guidance 4:** Academics should be aware of the potential performance and technical support issues for external social software and consider how they will deal with these if an issue occurs during the course delivery.

### 3.3.3 Privacy and Data Protection Act

To prevent the University or academics becoming legally responsible for any breaches of the Data Protection legislation by external social software service provider(s), the following good practice guidance is recommended:

**Good Practice Guidance 5:** Academics should inform students that any use of social software means a direct link between the student and the service provider and not with the University. It should be made clear in the learning material or assignment that the social software used is an external site provided by external service providers.

For example,

A brief statement on Blackboard or Moodle: “This is an activity which involves an external social software provider, pbwiki – you will leave the University’s VLE after clicking the link below...”

**Good Practice Guidance 6:** Before making use of social software, academics are strongly advised to explore the site’s Terms and Conditions of Use (usually found at the bottom of the website’s homepage) to determine who will own the content and what use will be made of it.

Further advice is available from the University’s Information Compliance Officer – Rhys Davies ([rhys.davies@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:rhys.davies@southwales.ac.uk))

### 3.3.4 Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights

Uploading and storing material for learning, teaching and assessment purposes to external social software sites is now common practice within and outside the University. However student use for these purposes is governed by the Student Regulations and the University’s IT Regulations, and staff use is governed by their Contract of Employment and the University’s IT Regulations. Those uploading content to such sites need to ensure they do not contain material which infringes someone’s copyright. It should also not contain material that is defamatory about another person.

**Good Practice Guidance 7:** Academics are advised to consider the copyright issues before posting University materials to an external site.

Further advice is available from the University’s Rights Officer - Beth Pearce ([beth.pearce1@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:beth.pearce1@southwales.ac.uk))

## 4.0 Conclusion

This document sets out the University’s Guidelines for the use of Social Software in the curriculum. It highlights the university’s commitment to using social software as a key means to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. Using social software services should pose no problem for learning, teaching and assessment purposes if the good practice guidance and considerations are taken into account. In line with the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategies and its ‘Assessment for Learning’ policy, these guidelines encourage staff to develop the use of social networking software to support students in learning, teaching and assessment.