

Virtual world activity in UK universities and colleges

“What now?”

Snapshot #9: Summer 2010 (Revised December 2010)

“Elluminate doesn’t require a 3 hour induction session, and neither should a virtual world.”
Dr. Daniel Livingstone, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

“We’ve had up to 40 avatars simultaneously on Education UK and it’s like herding cats.”
Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

“Second Life is not blocked, but it is still not on the managed desktop, therefore as far as most students/lecturers are concerned it IS effectively blocked.”
Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

“The fact that people from around the globe can meet up without travelling, saving time, money and shoe leather, seems to be a glaringly obvious reason why Second Life should be used as a meeting place.”
Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

“The importance of smell in the facilitation of social cohesion is vastly underrated.”
Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

John Kirriemuir
Virtual World Watch
www.virtualworldwatch.net



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Summary

This snapshot is the ninth in a series which stretches back to what seems the almost impossibly distant past of 2007. Many previous contributors to snapshots have contributed to this one, though a series of problems (see the next section) has resulted in there being less content than hoped for. Despite that, at north of 26,000 words, there's still a lot of content to read through.

And it's interesting noting that the snapshots have been produced for over three years, as it's a reminder that the use of virtual worlds in education has longevity - more than some technologies. As one respondent comments:

*"Second Life is being introduced to undergraduate students for the fourth consecutive year by Michael Callaghan."*¹

Virtual worlds are not a new technology, but a slowly evolving component of the toolset available to academics. One positive aspect of virtual worlds having been around for a few years in the education sector is that research results are (finally) becoming available in significant amounts, helping people to independently determine how this particular technology is best used in teaching and learning.

Some of the trends of previous snapshots continue. The large majority of reported and identifiable virtual world activity appears to be happening at the university, as opposed to the college, level. Activity involving virtual worlds is a mixture of teaching, learning and research. Though this issue lessens with every snapshot, some academics still have problems with freely using virtual worlds (and especially Second Life) in their institution.

Another continuing trend from previous surveys concerns using virtual worlds (especially Second Life) in universities and colleges. Access issues, such as installation and upgrades of the viewer, tend to be more in the older, than the newer, universities, and in colleges. It is odd that, even after several years of virtual world use across UK academia - enough time to assess their dangers (has there actually been any major security issue with SL in a university?) - some institutions still ban or heavily restrict their use by lecturers and academics.

Attitudes to the new service conditions for Second Life were generally relaxed or non-caring, while attitudes to the new interface for Second Life range from mixed to positive. Media on a prim is welcomed by most as a (possibly overdue) development. Despite this, the drift away from Second Life towards OpenSim, and similar environments, continues. Many of those respondents staying (for now) with Second Life are aware of the dangers of having "all their eggs" in the "basket" of a commercial company. The relative technical demands of OpenSim, and the lack of a national OpenSim grid initiative (though much discussed), probably prevent this drift from accelerating. However, foreseen funding constraints may finally be the tipping point for some academic projects and services wishing to use virtual worlds.

And it's funding that is the key worry, issue, concern, for most respondents. It's sometimes more interesting what people say, but don't want made public, when they get in touch with responses. With this particular snapshot, many correspondents expressed private concern over the future funding landscape. Some are worried that the incoming government may reduce funding for research, or be more 'traditional' teaching and anti-technology in attitude. Others are less pessimistic but more uncertain, seeing possibilities for virtual worlds to be 'pushed' as a cost-effective technology in education. No-one appears to have great certainty for the future, hence the title of "What next?" for this snapshot.

¹ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

1. Background

Le sigh.

1.1 How not to compile a snapshot

Rock bands are often said to have a “difficult second album” in terms of production. This snapshot seems to have become the “difficult ninth snapshot”. Things that have gone wrong include, but are not limited to:

- A reduced number of responses to a call for information. This is partially through asking at the wrong time of the year (into the summer), when academics are away, marking exams, or conferencing. VWW should have learnt from previous experience that the best time to ask for responses is in the autumn (start of the new academic year) and the late spring (before the end of the academic year rush).
- The funding cycle for several research projects completing, with staff either being made redundant, leaving for other projects, or moving elsewhere in academia.
- The continuing “centralisation of dissemination” in academia. Three previous survey respondents replied that they would have to “run” their response, in different ways, either through or past some central admin, PR or media unit within their university or college. This is a somewhat annoying state of affairs, as it results in a lengthy delay and a loss of the “fresh” feel of some of the responses. In the end, no content came from two of those three previous correspondents. The third resulted in something so corporate - most of it was how great their university ranking was, rather than the Second Life project developments - after their local PR/media unit had, well, butchered it for want of a better phrase, that we agreed with the project not to use it.
- Authorisation (within the project) issues. This is possibly the most annoying problem, and has happened in two previous snapshots. One survey response was politely withdrawn, as the person who submitted it didn’t have authorisation from their line manager. However, a similar thing happened with a second submission, but instead of a simple withdrawal, the director of the project sent a ridiculously over the top legal threat i.e. if the snapshot response sent by the team member ever became public, we shall take punitive legal action. VWW contacted the HR unit in that university, pointing out that we were providing a free publicity service for the project, had received the content in good faith and a simple withdrawal request would have been more appropriate. HR apologised and said that the issue was being dealt with “internally”. VWW passed on all the details and emails to the project funders, who “gave the director a good bollocking” [their words]. However, the resulting unpleasantness was off-putting in terms of requesting or accepting content from that project again.
- One person who submitted content withdrew it due to significant (negative) developments within their project. Another submission was withdrawn as the associated project felt it may compromise a funding proposal they were about to submit.
- One submission, from someone who had not previously submitted, was rejected as on checking it was found to be exaggerated. The [and we quote] “Substantially developed in-word educational environment” turned out to be a plot of land in Second Life with four walls, no roof and no other content within.
- Three people sent, in response to the snapshot request, their extended CV and/or a list of publications they had written. This doesn’t work in the context of snapshots and weren’t included.

- Technical issues. The website was hacked, in a serious and curiously specific manner, resulting in specific content being deleted and components of the hosting platform being crippled. The website hoster was, to put it mildly, unhelpful here, despite many hours being spent on the phone to a distant call centre. Live and learn.
- Proofreader. The content that VWW receives from snapshot respondents is of variable quality in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation. We do like to leave things as much as possible in the words of the person submitting a snapshot response, but tidying up is sometimes required. The early snapshots were partially or wholly proofread by a proofreader personally associated with VWW, which was great. However, the recent move over to a paid and remote proofreader hasn't worked out with no action (despite a fee being paid) in two months. In the end, VWW has edited the content himself.
- No funding. This has meant that VWW had to become a "when there's time" activity, as funded works are ringenced in terms of time (one has to eat). This doesn't really work out, as it means either promises are made for when things appear online that are broken, or absolute dates cannot be given.

The upshot of all this is a snapshot that is several months past due date, contains some good content but from a smaller number of contributors than for previous snapshots, and is mounted on a website that is partially functioning and partially broken. It's of little surprise that VWW is writing this while consuming a bottle of Bombay Sapphire gin and cursing at the moon outside.

1.2 Future plans

At the time of writing this revised background (December 2010), it seems wise to put VWW and future snapshots on hold for a while.

Hence the title of this snapshot, "What next?", which refers not just to the uncertainty of funding and virtual world developments in UK academia, but also to Virtual World Watch.

At the moment, the personal feeling is that it is better not to continue, or attempt to continue, data collection and dissemination, rather than have a chaotic process and provide an unsatisfactory snapshot report. VWW is concerned that the snapshot reports have become to be seen as "representative" of virtual world activity in UK academia, whereas they are not - they reflect what responses and content have been submitted, which is something different.

There's two main issues that need to be addressed before another snapshot is undertaken:

- Finding (realistic) funding, so that a firm commitment can be made to content production. Compiling a snapshot on a wing-and-a-prayer, in terms of funding, doesn't work out.
- Looking at all aspects of compiling and producing a snapshot, so that most or all of the problems in the previous sections do not reoccur.

1.3 Acknowledgements

Virtual World Watch thanks those people who did provide content that appears in this snapshot, was submitted for it, or appeared on the website. We especially thank you for your patience in waiting for it to appear.

We also thank people who have supported Virtual World Watch, in whatever fashion (funding, content, dissemination, just all-round-support) over the last few years.

2. Survey responses

Virtual World Watch asked nine questions, with some variations. This section contains the responses. Where people didn't answer the nine questions but sent in something else, we did try and match the content as close as we could to the question.

1. What are you doing in virtual worlds? Teaching, learning, research, publicity, and/or anything else?

Rather pleasantly, there is still a heady mixture of teaching, learning and research going on in UK academia. However, as in all other snapshots, nearly all of the activity mentioned in responses happens in universities, not colleges.

"Developing a Second Life teaching tool for undergraduate literature and history students, to introduce them to early printing technology. Long-term plan is to develop the tool for research purposes and host it outside Second Life."²

"We still have 2 islands; 1 main grid, the other in Teen Second Life. Main grid island is home to the Virtual Path Lab being developed with Dr. Anne Cunningham. We are still working on the scenario part of the project and hope to be using Daden's PIVOTE 1.2 (as early as next week) to help speed the process up a bit."³

"We have developed a Second Life environment, called deepthink⁴ as part of the infrastructure for the Virtual MPhil⁵, a novel research degree programme for remote part-time students launched by the Open University last October. deepthink supports a variety of research activities, from supervision sessions to skills development workshops, to informal peer group work."⁶

"The JISC Regional Support Centres have continued their programme of virtual worlds CPD for RSC staff in Second Life, with advisors from different regions taking it in turns to organise events in-world. There have been some simple skills development / familiarisation events such as a 'field trip' and shopping outing as well as more formal presentations, tours and discussions which aim to use the environment to support the more 'mainstream' RSC work. We have set aside areas in world for use by individual RSC staff.

RSCs are working together at UK level to make better use of the combined RSC spaces in-world. We also look forward to supporting the JISC conference in November 2010 where we've been asked to showcase a selection of the innovative work going on in this area."⁷

"We are employing OpenSim to pilot a quarter of a million pound research project on citizenship education that will involve up to 900 young people in the UK. The research will be conducted using a virtual environment as it will enable young participants to openly explore and freely discuss difficult and sensitive topics about citizenship and will allow them to experiment with their own personal space, identity and individual expression.

² Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

³ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

⁴ deepthink. <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Deep%20Think%20East/228/29/34/>

⁵ Open University Virtual MPhil. <http://www.virtualmphil.open.ac.uk/>

⁶ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

⁷ Shri Footring, e-Learning Adviser, JISC Regional Support Centre (Eastern)

This will be achieved by presenting them with experimental interactive scenarios that cover issues of relevance to today's multi-ethnic United Kingdom. The research is being funded by the UK's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and being backed by the former education secretary, Estelle Morris."⁸

"Our virtual worlds project, Communication Skills Learning in Immersive Virtual Environments (COMSLIVE⁹) is funded by a JISC Learning and Teaching Innovation Grant¹⁰. The project seeks to explore the feasibility of using the Open Wonderland¹¹ (OWL) virtual world platform to provide a creative and innovative solution to more effective communication and team working skills development amongst health care learners. Deficits in communication are known to be a major contributor to much of the unintended death and illness that occurs within the UK and US health care sectors each year. This provides educators with a strong social imperative to explore more effective solutions towards developing team working and communication skills.

Some readers will know that Open Wonderland (OWL) is a 100% Java, open source virtual worlds toolkit, that is free to download and incurs no license fees. The Wonderland platform was originally developed by Sun Microsystems. During our project Sun was acquired by Oracle and Oracle withdrew direct support from the Wonderland initiative. This obviously was a concern to us as for a while the future of Wonderland seemed unclear. However, Project Wonderland became Open Wonderland, the source code forked and completely transitioned to the open source community and is now steered by the Open Wonderland Foundation.

Interestingly, since this transition the forums and community have become more active, and the release of updates and enhancements has never been more frequent. OWL, therefore, is going from strength to strength.

Prior to starting our JISC project we scoped a range of virtual world platforms (this scoping report can be found on the project website¹²) and concluded that in terms of having the greatest transformative potential to meet our needs to enhance communication skills development, Wonderland was the most promising technology that we had assessed. Some of the reasons behind our decision included:

- Open art pathway.
- Sophisticated communications tools including spatialised sound and telephony integration.
- Highly extensible architecture.
- LDAP integration and ability to deploy and host behind firewall.
- Community support.
- Drag and drop PNG, JPEG, and 3D model functions.
- Potential to scale to support large cohort learning.

COMSLIVE aims and outcomes were informed by some of the questions we felt teachers, managers and ICT staff would ask when considering the strategic rather than ad hoc deployment of virtual world learning across curricula. These included:

- How easy is it to create or use existing artwork for Wonderland?

⁸ Nayyera Aslam, Research Associate, University of Teesside

⁹ COMSLIVE (Communication Skills Learning Within Immersive Virtual Environments). <http://comslive.health.bcu.ac.uk/>

¹⁰ JISC Learning and Teaching Innovation Grants. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/ltig.aspx>

¹¹ Open Wonderland. <http://openwonderland.org/>

¹² COMSLIVE reports. http://comslive.health.bcu.ac.uk/resources_JISC_reports.asp

- What levels of interactivity can be supported in a Wonderland world?
- What considerations, both logistical and pedagogic, need to be made when integrating Wonderland learning in module programmes?
- To what extent will Wonderland scale to support potentially high numbers of concurrent learners?
- What impact would our COMSLIVE scenario have on learner experience?
- What impact would COMSLIVE learning have on learner real world behaviour?
- What are the server, network and client side resource implications of running our COMSLIVE scenarios?
- How feasible would it be to deploy Wonderland within the NHS to support work based learning?

That's a pretty good summary."¹³

"Still managing Cornwall College Island in Second Life – and have just been given some land for Cornwall College to develop on the Education Grid. At the moment everything just seems to have ground to a halt and I am, quite honestly, at a loss as to what to do about it. Pockets of activity are evident: the Foundation Degree in Arts and Media group are displaying their work on the island and their tutor wants to write a new module for the course that involves mandatory use of Second life, and the RaPAL group meet there regularly.

I have just delivered an introductory teacher training course using Moodle, Second Life and web 2.0 elements such as wikis and blogs and hope to deliver a second course soon – but cannot see when I will find time. The college has suffered crippling funding cuts, and has had to make a percentage of staff redundant, so with so many people bearing the burden of others' job losses (by taking on departed colleagues jobs on top of their own), there is no time to indulge in what are seen as 'luxury' items such as Second Life."¹⁴

"Continuing to use virtual worlds for teaching, learning and research."¹⁵

"We haven't used Education UK island for teaching purposes at all since the last snapshot although other activities have been going forward. For some time we have been developing a music venue in the shape of an intimate dance hall; this was given a thorough shakedown in June when it was utilised for a week-long charity fund-raising event. The resident DJ, guest DJs and two superb live performances helped raise in excess of £70 for the charity Avon Walk for Breast Cancer 2010.

Education UK island is home to the Edge of Life, an artificial life ecosystem comprising several species of digital organism which co-exist and interact with each other and with visiting avatars. The organisms are spawned, survive for a period of time defined by the availability of food and the magnitude of lag in the region (used to control the population by rendering some organisms sterile), and die. Each species has characteristics that demonstrate aspects of evolution: for example, one species changes colour with each new generation; whilst others are able to pass on acquired abilities to their offspring. Current work involves the modelling of swarming behaviour. Visitors are welcome and are encouraged to interact with the creatures and thus play an active role in their evolution.

Preparatory work is being undertaken to support future projects in the areas of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and pre-sessional English support for overseas students with the development of a 'Welcome' area.

¹³ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

¹⁴ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

¹⁵ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

We continue to host an exhibition of contemporary art entitled 'The Windhorse Project' by Vanessa Cuthbert, and a new exhibition inspired by the Haunch of Venison's much talked about show, 'Shoebox Art', is to be launched in August. Participants at a workshop run by the artist Hayley Goodsell at Leeds University's Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery will be invited to create within a shoe box a bedroom from their past, a dream or one from a photograph. The works will be photographed and re-created in Second Life enabling visitors to enter into the rooms."¹⁶

"Teaching: For the 3rd year running I used Second Life with a 1st year undergraduate class and a Masters level option. This year I was able to schedule attendance at the Virtual world Best Practices in Education conference into the Masters class, which worked well (apart from me not checking out that the headphones worked in our lab, so some people had voice issues) and I will look for more ways of doing that. The main problem is finding events that are on during the scheduled class time.

The School of Education also used it again with a Masters level distance learning class.

Someone in our English Language Teaching centre has used Second Life and may be working with students in Second Life – colleagues in other departments have also shown interest.

Events and CPD: Use of Infolit iSchool as a venue increased, in particular I bid for an ESRC Festival of Social Science (March 2010) event, and put on one of the few online events 'Searching, shopping, sightseeing: literacies in virtual lives' in Second Life, and in June 2010 the island was venue for the final dissemination seminar in an ESRC Research Seminar series that was organised by Sheffield University, Sheffield Hallam University and Lancaster University ('Children's and young people's digital literacies in virtual online spaces').

There has also been the continued Infolit iSchool series of one hour discussions or presentations. There has been an international mix of presenters and participants (e.g. in an Information Literacy "mini festival" in May a colleague in Puerto Rico did a talk and tour of her information literacy installation in Spanish and then later in English, and at the ESRC Research seminar we had three well-known researchers from North America presenting to an international audience).

Personally I have also benefitted from attending a lot of events, from small get-togethers like the UK Educators meetings, to the big conferences in Second Life. As in life outside Second Life, I find that offering to do things and getting involved means that you get more out of things.

Awareness raising of Information Literacy (and, probably, me and my Department): In terms of what happens in Second Life, I know that people visit the island to look round: not hordes, but I bump into people reasonably often, and they are usually there because they are interested in information literacy and learning. There are increasing numbers of things to look at and explore on Infolit iSchool, and I think that (as with a website) it is valuable to keep it fresh with new content and to have things going on there (the events) to bring people in periodically and make it a live place for them. Since I have a commitment to information literacy, and international dialogue on Information Literacy, I think this is a good thing.

I got asked to talk about Second Life and libraries/information literacy almost as soon as I got involved in Second Life, so it has an impact on my profile. Interestingly, invites tailed off rather last year, but last week I did one presentation in Bath and have been asked to deliver a session in Prague in September, so perhaps there is a second wave of interest.

Research: I have one Masters student using Second Life as the focus of her dissertation this summer and there will be at least one PhD student starting fairly soon looking at virtual worlds. I have co-authored a paper with a colleague in the US (met only in Second Life) and she has also

¹⁶ Dr Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

agreed to be co-editor on a substantial research book, I put in one small research proposal with another colleague in the USA (failed, but made some use of the text of the bid for something else!), have one refereed paper published, have presented at several research conferences about my work, and am currently putting together a substantial research bid concerned with use of Second Life. Essentially it has become one of my research fields, but it has also provided me with new research contacts (particularly in the USA): people I had heard of and who might have heard of me, but we had never physically met up.”¹⁷

“The main focus of activity since the last report has been finalising the virtual patient¹⁸ application for a physiotherapy respiratory module. A pilot group of about 20 students used it during May and June and an evaluation is currently underway to analyse their experience and assess its potential for inclusion as an integral part of module delivery. Results to date are quite favourable but I won’t pre-judge the outcome. There is considerable interest externally in this development and we would hope to form partnerships that would enable us to extend this facility to greater numbers of students and to other disciplines.

Although the virtual lab is not in active use at the moment there continues to be interest in the paper¹⁹ published some time ago via the HEA Biosciences subject centre. A couple of us attended a meeting of VWER²⁰ to discuss its findings and a week or so later hosted a visit to this and other facilities on UEL HABitat.

UEL School of Psychology: students from a second year module ‘Psychology of Physical illnesses’ presented posters on their chosen topic in Second Life to a range of academics from UEL and one external. A paper will be published shortly but the overall experience was positive as far as the students were concerned giving them exposure to a larger audience and removing inhibitions they might have had in a face to face situation.

As part of current activities to promote Sports in UEL, we are prototyping our proposed state of the art Sports building on UEL Island. Development in real life is planned to start in September 2010. Having a prototype of the building in Second Life will allow interested staff, students and visitors to ‘walk through’ and interact with parts of the facilities through an avatar. Prim limits continue to be a challenge for us so we are currently investigating the use of holodecks and have in fact already implemented this for the experiments in the virtual lab. Textures can also be useful in reducing the number of prims used in creating realistic objects and this was particularly useful in the UEL Sports building.”²¹

“Official university work is on hold for now. We ran a teaching a research pilot in Second Life for 18 months that was well received both by students and researchers and have established a university steering group. Under present budget constraints, neither the up-front costs for land in Second Life nor the staffing costs could be justified.

¹⁷ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

¹⁸ UEL Virtual Patient. <http://blog.uelconnect.org.uk/hab/2010/06/>

¹⁹ The Learning Gains and Student Perceptions of a Second Life Virtual Lab. <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol13/beej-13-5.aspx>

²⁰ Transcript of Virtual Worlds Education Roundtable, May 18th 2010. <http://www.virtualworldsedu.info/vwer/100518.html>

²¹ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

However, I have just taken on my first PhD student working on religion in virtual worlds, and I suspect we will explore both Second Life and clustered, locally-hosted, open source VWs like OpenSim and Cobalt over the next few years.”²²

“This past year I've used Second Life to teach microbial bioinformatics for the second time though the subject matter was significantly changed (from cell wall defenses in Gram-negatives to an analysis of homologous genes in mycobacterial species). I also supervised an undergraduate project that involved the student constructing a build themed on the cell wall of Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Finally, I gave a Masters group a brief introduction that was intended to give them some idea of what it would be like to attend a conference in a virtual world.”²³

“At the present time Cam Swift (senior e-learning advisor, JISC RSC Northern) is beginning a review of the JISC RSC Northern²⁴ presence in Second Life.

All of the regional learning providers who had their own allocation of space on the RSC Northern Island or attended any RSC Northern events in Second Life will be consulted. The review will look at what these learning providers planned to do in Second Life, what they achieved, any difficulties / obstacles encountered and what future plans they have for using Second Life. The review will cover the period from July 2008 until the present time.

Once the research is completed an overview of the findings will be shared. However the identity of individual learning providers would not be revealed.”²⁵

“We have been attempting to show students how to apply human-computer interface design techniques to 3D environments, using OpenSim, by giving them assessed practicals to complete. Student response has been very split; some loved it, some hated it. Most of them missed the point, and built fantastic but overly-complex solutions, which was deeply unfortunate. Stability was a significant issue, but overall I think it went better than previous attempts in Second Life (where network stability, difficulties backing up and extracting content, etc. were major hindrances).

We're also making a reproduction of St Andrews cathedral in OpenSim, looking at creating OpenSim avatars from a web interface (in a similar manner to signup for Second Life's RegAPI, as I understand it), as well as continuing work on the Sparta Basilica archeological dig site in OpenSim.

In terms of research, I believe there's a few postgrad (MSc or PhD) students involved in a variety of projects, but I'm not directly involved in those and can't comment further.”²⁶

“As always a mix of teaching, mentoring, meetings and development work.”²⁷

“We are using virtual worlds as part of our Media and Communication undergraduate programme at Newman University College.

Specifically, the MC502 Media Futures module aims to give students a critical understanding of developments in new media, interactivity as well as virtual experience. Students will also look at

²² Dr. Will Tuladhar-Douglas, Anthropology of Environment and Religions, University of Aberdeen

²³ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

²⁴ JISC RSC Northern. <http://www.rsc-north.ac.uk/>

²⁵ Cam Swift (Senior e-learning advisor, JISC RSC Northern

²⁶ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

²⁷ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

the effects of this on society now and in the future. The module encourages students to partake in original primary research to help inform their own understanding of developments within this area.

This module ran for the first time using Second Life in academic year 08/09, and primarily focused on giving students an experience of a series of lectures within a virtual world. In academic year 09/10, we have introduced some practical production based activities around creating 3D objects in Second Life and game environments within Unity. These primarily helped students consider issues around product usage / convergence from first hand experience.”²⁸

“I am using Second Life to enhance students simulation time. I have adapted problem based learning scenarios into Second Life. The student takes a diagnostic history from an avatar patient-bot/simulated patient or a volunteer (with a real life health problem). They then move on to listen to heart or lung sounds which are embedded in an avatar chest and discuss the differential diagnosis, investigations and next step in the management of the patient. This is part of an action research project.”²⁹

“We still use Second Life for teaching, following on from our work during the 'Learning from Online Worlds, Teaching in Second Life'³⁰ project (funded by Eduserv, 2007-2008)”³¹

“We still have a couple of HE projects going, and just finished one at FE. We are seeing more and more interest from private sector training now, and some interesting possibilities around supporting real-world/non-education research.”³²

“Up until now, Wivenhoe Island has been used for the holding of classes, for seminars and projects for students of Computer Sciences. We have also placed important revision material on it that students can access when they go home for the summer holidays. For 2010 and 2011, we are looking at using it for projects for students of Marketing and Economics. I don't want to go into the details at this point, but we're developing some ground-breaking, creative ideas.

Most of the students in our department are from foreign countries who have come to the University of Essex for a UK education. We are, however, now looking at more distance courses. By December we will have firm strategies in place with regard to e-learning tools. I am looking at Sloodle for some of these courses. The department is also looking at DimDim, Adobe Connect, Elluminate and the Big Blue Button.”³³

“I'm still working as a developer in virtual worlds (as well as other multimedia such as serious games) and have found there to still be a lot of interest in the area. There are still lots of people showing an interest in using virtual worlds for the first time for learning and education in particular, in the UK and as further afield as Australia!

Last time I mentioned I was developing a Second Life orientation HUD for new users but the new Second Life viewer release meant I was forced to shelve that. The reason being it was very specific to the interface and the new viewer obviously has a completely different interface to the previous version.

²⁸ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

²⁹ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

³⁰ Learning from Online Worlds, Teaching in Second Life. <http://learningfromsocialworlds.wordpress.com/>

³¹ Diane Carr, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education

³² David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

³³ Iffaf Khan, International Academy Gateway delivery coordinator, University of Essex

Also though, I felt the new shared media functionality meant a more powerful, simple and interactive orientation object could be created so I am instead developing an orientation pod. This will feature a shared media screen displaying a Flash application, and also various interactive activities that rez and de-rez accordingly all within the individual pod space. The hope being it will form an all-in-one orientation solution. This will be made available completely free and will be accompanied by a PDF introduction to Second Life, that combined with the pod, should be able to help a completely new user become active within Second Life.”³⁴

“Nothing at the moment - there are about 6 lecturers and our Student Union interested in doing things but nothing solid at the moment.”³⁵

“We have several projects at the college:

- FdEng Database Project. OpenSim used with final year FdEng students as part of an assessed activity on a Database Development course. The task involved testing and customising an in-world avatar scanner communicating with an external LAMP server. Student end of assignment was overwhelmingly positive and the simulator was reasonably stable.
- ND Software Project 1. Design, code and construct a solar panel, calculate watts for panel size, conversion efficiency, sun angle and cloud cover, display result as in-world text. A virtual world environment allows students to evaluate the following, the real-time environmental impact, implications for planning permission. Simulator reasonably stable.
- ND Software Project 2. Designing in a 3D world: build a real world model for the Maze game project. Students planned a maze in real world metric scale and replicated this in the Open Sim. Gamers register in a blue or red team, enter the maze and collect points from different orbs, beware of trap doors and spikes, score is maintained in-world on two towers. The game ran very well. The avatars had free movement, with orbs awarding scores on contact. The towers kept a record of points. The simulator did not crash during the demonstration.
- Project 2b. Designing in a 3D world: build a real world model for the Island game project. Students were able to get scale perspective for the future design of the vehicles. Gamers are in two teams, aliens that emerge from a mother ship, ground forces are sea based, bullet hit scoring, recorded in-world, the objective, to enter the volcano base. The game did not run very well. The simulator required several restarts during the demonstration.”³⁶

“Second Life is used for both teaching/learning and research. To date, teaching and learning has been the main focus, with some research into how it can be used for teaching and learning (Intro to Arabic) as well student based research projects within the Medical School. We are also supporting research into the various routes people take exiting a replica model of one of our buildings on campus during a fire drill - possibly the ugliest building on our island :(.

In terms of teaching and learning, we have a number of activities including:

- Virtual wind farm sim
- Virtual maternity ward sim
- Interactive performance space
- Pharamatopia: Virtual mass spectrometry lab
- Business school: Operations management sim
- Library garden: Information skills training

³⁴ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

³⁵ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

³⁶ Clive Gould, HE PAL ICT, Bromley College

We have also made materials available as Open Educational Resources, these include freebies within our sandbox (scripts, training materials and various objects) as well as the interactive performance space (allowing users to create a variety of differing performance spaces to explore the impact of the physical space on the theatrical performance). There is also a 'guest user' mass spectrometry lab.

We don't see Second Life as a marketing tool specifically. The number of visitors are too few to be truly worthwhile--compared to alternative means of promotion - and search in Second Life is still very poor. We do have some promotional information on the island for the odd virtual tourist, but we mainly promote use for small group numbers with specific objectives suited to a 3D environment.”³⁷

“A little bit of teaching, but many computing students now see it as too limited compared to games engines.”³⁸

“The CURLIEW (Coventry University Research into Learning in Immersive Educational Worlds) project³⁹ has been running for 18 months and is progressing in various ways. The project is co-ordinated by Dr Lesley Gourlay and three PhD students are investigating different aspects of how virtual worlds are being used in UK Higher Education, with a focus on social practices and qualitative forms of understanding. The students have collected most of their data, but will continue data collection as required until the end of the calendar year.

Coventry University's new Engineering and Computing building is currently being constructed on the Gulson Road Hospital site and is due to be finished in 2012 to enable the delivery of activity-led learning in a flexible environment. We are currently replicating the building in Second Life to give students, visitors and staff the opportunity to visualise and explore the building before it has been built. The virtual building will incorporate all the important features that will be present in the new building and give staff the opportunity to see how they can use the learning spaces. Additionally, it will give visitors the chance to see what the plans are for the campus redevelopment over the next 10 years by providing information throughout the virtual building.

We have recently received funding to develop project management and employability scenarios using artificially intelligent bots and interactive objects within Second Life, using PREVIEW's health and social care management scenarios as a basis.”⁴⁰

“It is a combination of activities: learning, teaching, research and publicity.

We have conducted a study to investigate how a 3D virtual world (Second Life) can facilitate socialisation and team working amongst students working on a team project at a distance. This models the situation in many commercial sectors where work is increasingly being conducted across time zones and between multiple teams. Collaboration in these geographically distributed teams is virtual rather than through face-to-face interactions.

We have investigated how Second Life compares to other collaboration tools such as instant messaging or Skype; and the challenges that students experience in becoming acquainted with and working in Second Life. The research outcomes could enhance uptake of 3D virtual worlds by

³⁷ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

³⁸ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

³⁹ CURLIEW (Coventry University Research into Learning in Immersive Educational Worlds).
<http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/leverhulme/>

⁴⁰ Lesley Gourlay, Research Fellow, Learning Innovation Applied Research Group, Coventry University

organisations facing the challenges of facilitating socialisation and knowledge sharing in a distributed workforce.

We are investigating how Second Life can be useful as a platform for developing research skills such as communications skills, for a variety of audiences (e.g., academics, public, employers) and networking and team-working skills. It is particularly challenging to develop training strategies for imparting communication, networking, and public engagement skills to research students who may not be based on the campus. It has been widely recognised that researchers participating in communication and public engagement activities may find that they increase the relevance, impact and legitimacy of their research.

In a JISC-funded research project called DELVE (DEsign of Learning Spaces in 3D Virtual Environments)⁴¹, we conducted an empirical study involving Second Life educators, designers, and students to investigate their experiences with and perceptions of learning space designs in Second Life, and which key characteristics of learning space designs were important to them. Based on this empirical research, we have derived some design considerations which, we hope, will provide useful guidance and triggers for ideas for educators and designers who are involved in designing learning activities and spaces in Second Life.

I attend demonstrations, meetings, conferences and tours in Second Life so as to meet with colleagues from other universities, learn from their experiences, and to share my own experiences. Therefore, there is a continuous and conscious effort to learn from others. Through attendance at these meetings and networking events, I am also able to (implicitly) publicise our Second Life activities and other technology-enabled learning initiatives.

Research is an integral part of our Second Life activities. We collect students' perceptions and experiences of their Second Life experiences and evaluate if the Second Life activities are meeting the learning outcomes of the course. It is important for us to elicit students' requirements, to determine the benefits of Second Life initiatives to students and educators, and to investigate the scalability and sustainability issues within our institution."⁴²

"Undergraduate laboratory classes are constrained by time, resources and space, with limitations on the opportunities to acquire essential skills, such as linking practical approaches with theoretical knowledge, team working, communication and development of experimental strategies.

The SWIFT project⁴³ (Second World Immersive Future Teaching) has created a virtual genetics lab in Second Life to help undergraduates in their acquisition of these laboratory skills and procedures. The aim is to supplement real laboratory teaching, not to replace it.

The first study developed an activity in Second Life to support real life laboratory induction. Thirteen Biological Sciences undergraduates volunteered, attending a Second Life training session and a taught class in the virtual lab with the aim of learning Health and Safety and the use of specific lab equipment."⁴⁴

"We've never really done publicity, although that's not my role, so I've never needed to. Had an interesting exchange with marketing over the fact they had no idea we were doing cool stuff, but I don't think there's any plan to move into publicity. I think a lot of what we are developing could be

⁴¹ DELVE (DEsign of Learning Spaces in 3D Virtual Environments).
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/tig/delve.aspx>

⁴² Dr. Shailey Minocha, Department of Computing, The Open University

⁴³ SWIFT laboratory. <http://www.tinyurl.com/SWIFT-lab>

⁴⁴ Dr. Paul D. Rudman, SWIFT project, University of Leicester

construed as research as we are constantly aware of developing in order to enhance the student experience and improve learning and teaching, so the scholarship in learning and teaching underpins most of what we do.

A few new things from previous snapshots. More development for Health, based around establishing shared scenarios for inter-professional learning. Will be tricky to pull off, but great vision to try. We seem to be good at developing for rated screenshots, so presumably Virtual World Watch will be monitoring our upcoming temporary mortuaries closely. Business scenarios that have been floating free will hopefully turn into concrete (virtual concrete, well, you know what I mean) plans very soon and we also have some pressure-immersion projects for disaster management in design as well. There's also been some funding secured for research on the factory environment which we're looking forward to learning from.

We really need another island. Have finally begun looking at how to capture then archive some projects which were one-offs in order to reclaim the prims for reuse, whilst retaining the potential to re-rez if required. However, it has meant that we are also now beginning to implement some of our original ideas to create multi-agency and multi-occupancy spaces, in order to make each build work hard."⁴⁵

"We are:

- developing teaching and learning materials / scenarios
- many of these are used for research as well
- teaching about virtual worlds; OpenSim server hosting, building & scripting, animation, sculpties, first module finished recently
- creating the new London campus for both publicity & distant learning
- collaborating with local FE (colleges) in developing their VW activities

... and then some."⁴⁶

"Nothing new for me just now. Finishing off projects started a couple of years ago, collecting data, writing up, looking at how lecturers can move onto second and third stages of their exploratory projects. Other stuff is going on around the university, but lecturers are to a great extent now "doing it for themselves" (with the developers). Still exploring integrating Second Life with Blackboard. Still looking at if we wish to use any virtual world element on the LTHE PGCert."⁴⁷

"The University of Portsmouth UoP Island⁴⁸ is being used for a mixture of teaching, research and student support. There is an iconic entrance area based on the University Library, an area for the HEA-ICS Toolkits project, an area for the Portsmouth Business School Placements Office and a multitude of areas/platforms where students are/have developed work in Second Life.

Jonathan Crellin is using Second Life to look at interface design with his final year computing students in their Human Computer Interaction Design unit. The students have an area of land on which to experiment with interfaces for educational applications.

Jane Chandler, Emma Duke-Williams and Jonathan Crellin regularly supervise final year computing students undertaking projects in Second Life. This year's projects have included:

⁴⁵ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

⁴⁶ Ferdinand Francino, Project Manager, CU There, Glasgow Caledonian University

⁴⁷ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

⁴⁸ University of Portsmouth Second Life island. <http://slurl.com/secondlife/UoP%20Island/42/38/41>

- A virtual classroom teaching about TCP/IP
- Work on tools for simulating forensics seizure of data
- A virtual classroom teaching about UML

This year the Portsmouth Business School has developed a virtual student placement centre to provide support to placement students and to provide information and a meeting place for prospective employers.

Also, we still host the HEA ICS Depot and a range of Second Life teaching resources and educational links.”⁴⁹

“I am...

- Teaching Project Management to Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.
- Teaching LSL to 3rd year Computer Science and Software Engineering students (3 week course)
- Providing PhD supervision on the topic 'Customer satisfaction in Second Life'
- Preparing a book chapter on teaching Project Management in Second Life”⁵⁰

“I work within the Lifelong Learning Academy at UWS, which provides support, guidance and information to part-time students. After completing this module I hope to build a virtual Lifelong Learning Academy in our VirtuALBA site and use it as a location for students to meet with me in Second Life for guidance / information. I also hope to run an information session in Second Life later in the year where new and existing students could attend.”⁵¹

“Our current activities include:

- JISC funded Sloodle pilot: In partnership with Imperial and Ulster, and with the University of the West of Scotland leading, we have just been granted JISC funding to pilot Sloodle with some T175 tutor groups in the October cohort with a long term view towards using Sloodle on the upcoming T175/M150 replacement course TU100.
- Linden prize nomination: Our Second Life project was shortlisted for the Linden Prize.
- T161 using Second Life: Students on the ten week course T161 (Return to Science, Engineering and Technology) were given synchronous meeting opportunities in Second Life, along with the opportunity to talk live in Second Life with ‘visiting experts’. Roughly 50% of students participated in these activities, with very positive feedback. Students plan to hold a reunion inworld.
- Inworld activities: A series of new activities is planned, based upon the results of a survey which found that the majority of active OU community members who responded placed “Lectures on a variety of topics” at the top of their wish list. Further down the list came Course related discussion groups, Field trips and science competitions.
- Additional core OU island in Second Life: We now own another Open University island in Second Life (imaginatively titled Open University 2). It is specifically for large-scale events (e.g. Virtual Worlds Conference supported at the OU by COLMSCT and the STEM Network) where a lack of frills will keep lag to a minimum.
- Activity in production: We are currently working on virtual world content and activity with groups in Languages, Science and Maths Computing & Technology.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

⁵⁰ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

⁵¹ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

⁵² Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

“We're still in the process of rolling out our OpenSim project. We've made some progress on the central authentication issues, and hope to have a testable system ready for the start of the coming academic year.”⁵³

“Teaching: Second Life is being introduced to undergraduate students for the fourth consecutive year by Michael Callaghan. Students are divided into teams and are allocated buildings on campus, which are to be recreated in Second Life; this allows the students to gain skills in 3D content creation tools, as well as scripting with Linden Scripting Language.

Research: Our team is currently researching a number of virtual worlds, but our predominant focus is on Second Life and OpenSim. Much of the research on going is in relation virtual learning environments and hardware integration. Such research builds upon Engineering Education Island and projects undertaken last year⁵⁴.

Projects: ‘Immersion in the Landscape of Victims and Commemoration in Northern Ireland’. (CAIN / AHRC-Awarded Project). A one-year project⁵⁵ based on Conflict Resolution is three months into development, which focuses on leveraging Second Life’s latest viewer to allow users to interact with information contained in a database and to engage in dialogue with other users through the media integration tools.

Conferences/Workshops: Our team has experienced an increase in the application of virtual worlds of teaching and learning in that past year. There is a lot of interest in this area locally; as a result we are organising the second Immers[ed] workshop on teaching and learning this year. In addition, the team were approached by Monterrey Institute of Technology Mexico to visit the campus and present a three day workshop on the use of virtual worlds in a teaching and learning setting.”⁵⁶

Going well? Not? Want to say why?

With a few exceptions, the general mood seems to be upbeat, with many respondents reporting developments of some kind or another.

“Excellent Second Life model pilot, designed by Graham Hibbert (Leeds Met). Just putting finishing touches to it.”⁵⁷

“Development taking longer than expected as there's only myself here with building skills plus have other Web Development duties to.”⁵⁸

“It's going quite well, although it's still very early in the life of the programme and it will take some time to build an active community. From the evaluation we have conducted so far, users' overall impression of deepthink is very positive: they find that it is enjoyable, offers a lot of functionality, has potential for a wide range of research-related activities, and adds a new dimension to their learning.

⁵³ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

⁵⁴ Projects integrating hardware with Second Life. http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Hardware_Integration

⁵⁵ Conflict resolution project. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/about/project2.html>

⁵⁶ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

⁵⁷ Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

⁵⁸ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

However, we have noticed a split between users who express a preference for the immersive environment as a platform for meeting and sharing over more traditional synchronous conferencing systems, and those who think that the latter provides all the functions they need, in a more efficient manner and with much less initial learning and effort required. Some also stated that they had no inclination to be part of a virtual world, indicating that this paradigm is still seen as unusual by some and not to everybody's taste.

The relative immaturity of the technology is also cause of concern: its requirements for high computer specifications and bandwidth have a negative effect on its accessibility, and variable performance and reliability of the software can detract from the quality of the overall experience.

The number of deeplthink registered users has grown steadily going from 33 in October 2009 to 126 at the beginning of July 2010, and currently deeplthink is visited by 80 to 100 distinct avatars every month.”⁵⁹

“At RSC Eastern we continue to work with and support new developments in the region as appropriate. It was particularly good to hear at a recent conference that attending an RSC virtual worlds event gave him the confidence to start his own research project in Second Life.

I have personally found it difficult to try to align our work in Second Life with the core RSC remit of supporting learning providers to make effective use of technology for everyday learning, teaching and organisational effectiveness. The links are still not clear enough for most of us, so I feel our Second Life work is still thought of as a 'research' rather than a 'production' level technology solution. There have been some successes in using Second Life as a team meeting space and there are plans to continue to do this in the future. Our work in Second Life is led by a growing number of enthusiasts, but is still not embedded.”⁶⁰

“The project is currently in the pilot stage and going well at the moment. Many schools and religious organisations are keen to get involved and willing to participate, so obtaining the minimum requirement of 300 students will not be a problem. We are currently in the process of developing and refining the virtual environment through conducting focus group discussions on young people from different religious and cultural backgrounds to ensure students have all the inventory objects they need. The virtual interactive environment will be complete with houses for each avatar and a central meeting place to discuss scenarios.

Upon learning the project will use virtual worlds to conduct research on citizenship, many of my peers become very excited and enthusiastic but there a few who look perplexed as they have never heard of 'virtual worlds'!”⁶¹

“Yes – in short the project is going very well. (A video walkthrough of an early iteration of our world is online). We're approaching the tail end of the project now which officially runs from Nov 1st 2009 to Oct 31st 2010. At a strategic level it has informed the procurement of new on-campus student learning, training and research PC's so that we now have a suite of approximately 120 computers that are virtual worlds capable.

We've been impressed with the ease of art creation, and the drag and drop functions have made aspects of scenario design almost effortless. We have run our first iteration of an RCT trial that explores impact on real world behaviour. Learner experience was very positive, and intervention group behaviour seems on initial analysis to have been positively affected by the COMSLIVE

⁵⁹ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

⁶⁰ Shri Footring, e-Learning Adviser, JISC Regional Support Centre (Eastern)

⁶¹ Nayyera Aslam, Research Associate, University of Teesside

experience. We are conducting further analysis and 1-2 more iterations of the RCT between now and December. Evaluation reports will be published on the website over the coming weeks.

Some interesting and unanticipated findings have emerged from our COMSLIVE work. The first is the impact on the student – teacher relationship when learning in-world. Students and teachers both felt like they were operating on a much more level playing field when in-world, with students being much more questioning and responsible for their learning.

We also found that virtual world learning seems to have a powerful impact on “friendship forming”. i.e. all of the students forming our intervention group were randomly allocated to their small group teams and didn’t know their fellow team mates. All stated that they had formed friendships and valued the opportunity to work intensively with each other and thereby get to know each other better. We now think that virtual world learning may have an important role to play in first semester teaching if only from a social networking perspective. We are considering deploying Wonderland to further enhance our strategies for minimised attrition during what is a challenging time for many students.”⁶²

“Honestly? Not going well at all. The island is seldom used – we were featured in the Second Life Destination Guide and were getting 50 visitors or more a day – and many keep returning to this very day – but not for the educational aspects of the island. They return because they want to hang out in virtual Cornwall, listen to the seagulls, drink Scrumpy, eat virtual pasties and hang out on the beach – which is still a marvellous thing! Cornwall College has had frighteningly big funding cuts to make in the next academic year(s), so many members of staff have been made redundant. Those who remain are working harder and have even less time than before to learn about new technologies.

The whole ‘18 and over’ thing still weighs heavy too; as an FE college, every classroom will have cohorts of students under the age of 18 (even on occasion, specialty designated HE classrooms), which means that IT Services will not allow Second Life to be installed ‘freely’ in any classroom. If it’s not available in any classroom, only available to staff if they request firewalls to be changed on their office machines, but staff have less time than before to dabble in anything new – let alone something STILL seen as a virtual ‘knocking shop’...then what hope do we have?!!!”⁶³

“Quite well. The biggest challenge personally is balancing teaching and research – something that is likely to be increasingly challenging for many folk as the cuts come in.

The best recent development is that our university island is now being used by people in other parts of the university (especially Lifelong Learning) – this has taken far too long, but it’s happening now.”⁶⁴

“Use of Second Life at Leeds University remains a very low key exercise – essentially the preserve of a handful of individuals working in their own time to explore the possibilities. The situation is unlikely to change in the near future since the University’s new Blended Learning Strategy is – quite rightly – primarily concerned with making more effective use of the institutional VLE, Blackboard, in learning and teaching activity.”⁶⁵

“Basically, the teaching side could be improved by having better kit and broadband connections, and more access for the students throughout the campus. This might also then lead to more use

⁶² Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

⁶³ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

⁶⁴ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

⁶⁵ Dr Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

by colleagues elsewhere and then some critical mass which would mean it would be taken seriously centrally by our e-learning people.

I think the other aspects are not so dependent than this though (for example) if there was better on campus access then I would use it more with specific cohorts to promote its use as a venue for Continuing Professional Development.”⁶⁶

“It’s going well but it’s still very much a niche activity if we assess it in terms of the numbers using Second Life relative to the size of the institution. However, our Second Life activities are generating a lot more evaluation and research potential than most other learning technologies and have wider implications than just the use of Second Life per se e.g. applications such as the virtual patient enable us to evaluate simulations in general and to generate patient case data that could be used in other contexts, not just Second Life or virtual worlds.”⁶⁷

“My general impression of the bioinformatics sessions is that there is a minority of students that really likes this kind of thing but that I still need to make the experience less bumpy for the majority. Fortunately there seem to be very few that absolutely hate it. Given that this year was radically different in content and approach from the previous one (e.g. different topic, greater emphasis on teamwork), I thought the end-result was sufficiently good to justify running a streamlined version of the same sessions next year.

The (much longer) project seemed to go reasonably well. I personally liked the way the student became largely independent and we had some good conversations, both online and offline, about subject content and design issues as well as the mechanics of building.

Sadly, the Masters group session suffered from some scheduling issues (the class ended up being run multiple times) and coincided with the introduction of the new viewer which also caused some problems. Most of the students were, however, reasonably proficient in basic navigation by the end of the single session. That said, I don’t think the implementation, however well-intentioned, hit the intended target. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been much better just to have facilitated some kind of actual conference inworld. Obvious really.”⁶⁸

“Moving from Second Life to OpenSim for the majority of our virtual world projects has reduced costs, increased flexibility, and all but completely erased networking issues. In counterpoint, stability has been an issue; my feeling is that stability is improving, but we won’t know until we have a really big group of students to test with, again.

We’re looking at resurrecting a project we tried a few years back, of building an educational hypergrid (although at the time, this would have been based on the OGP standard, which is now VWRAP), but I’m not aware of any progress made on that yet (e.g. to arrange funding).”⁶⁹

“The teaching and mentoring work I do is all in my comfort zone. There are ups and downs with individual students and mentees and their health for example, or other issues, but fundamentally it’s all going well. Meetings generally go well - although it is my impression there are often new-to-Second Life people attending and that can cause some disruption as they get used to the UI.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

⁶⁷ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

⁶⁸ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

⁶⁹ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

⁷⁰ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

“With the academic year just gone, we were severely hampered by access issues within our University. This resulted in us having to use offsite ICT facilities for inducting students in its use. In academic year 08/09, we noticed an increase in attendance, but this did not happen in the most recent academic year.

We are putting this down to the fact that most of the module was delivered remotely in Second Life (in 08/09 only a few sessions were delivered in the virtual) and this gave chance for the novelty factor to wear off (However, student feedback has still been extremely positive and certain assessment results have been better than expected).”⁷¹

“This is part of an action research project. The first stage is complete and initial results are very positive. Students enjoyed the learning environment, found it immersive and authentic and knowledge and skills were transferable to the real life clinical area. They reported improvements in real life clinical care both during and at the end of the module. There were a few technical and IT skill issues at the start but these were quickly sorted by the second session.”⁷²

“Yes, it's going well. The student feedback is generally very positive - they don't all love Second Life but most find the inworld discussion sessions useful and thought provoking.”⁷³

“Yep. And clients still quite amazed by what the platform can deliver in comparison to other technologies.”⁷⁴

“Initially, uptake was quite hard and it was only with the help of teachers in Computer Sciences that we got students to use our campus. There were also other Virtual Worlds that were being employed and there were too many choices for students. We now have a clearer policy in place with regard to virtual worlds and, with the backing of our Social and Welfare team, we are getting greater student interest.

Another interesting factor is that old University of Essex students are contacting me to find out about courses they can apply for. We feel a greater need to have a marketing person on board to speak to these students about their options, even although we do provide contact details when they land at our campus.”⁷⁵

“Yes there still seems to be lots of interest in educational projects and particularly with using solutions other than Second Life.”⁷⁶

“Not going well - partly because I'm the only person supporting people wanting to work in Second Life (and I've been off with a broken ankle). More than that I don't really want to say.”⁷⁷

“Development has reached a plateau, but we are generally satisfied with where we are. Interest continues and we have a number of self-supporting projects exploring Second Life for teaching and research. We currently have two islands, which is proving sufficient to meet our needs.”⁷⁸

⁷¹ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

⁷² Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

⁷³ Diane Carr, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education

⁷⁴ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

⁷⁵ Iffaf Khan, International Academy Gateway delivery coordinator, University of Essex

⁷⁶ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

⁷⁷ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

⁷⁸ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

“In Computing Maths and Science (CMS) interest has waned. Computing students see it as too limited, other CMS students and staff see it a too much of an overhead for little payback. The emptiness of Second Life is also off-putting. Some education staff are using the environment to explore other concepts around identity and diversity. Some health staff are involved in the collaborative trialling Second Life environments for training.”⁷⁹

“Our Second Life initiatives have been progressing well. It has been a slow and steady approach with techniques for collecting student feedback and evaluation integrated in every initiative. The constant cycle of evaluations has enabled us to learn from our experiences and students’ inputs, to change and improve the Second Life activities, and to disseminate our empirical findings through reports and research papers.”⁸⁰

“The virtual lab classes ran successfully. The Second Life environment supported all activities well, except for detailed demonstrations of picking up and manipulating objects, with the only difficulties participants encountered being putting on and removing (virtual) lab coats.

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the virtual laboratory, finding it more realistic than expected. Realism seemed important, with dislike of 'fantasy' elements – e.g. a fire exit in the roof. Participants reported a meaningful experience, but commented on the need for greater interaction with the virtual equipment. While learning gains were not directly measured, participants felt that they had either learnt new information or successfully revised existing knowledge. Overall, the first study indicates that the virtual lab can provide both good preparation for the real lab and good revision afterwards.

We are currently designing a second virtual lab that will allow students to observe simulated experiments, helping them to understand better the procedures before attempting them in the real lab. The final phase of the project will see students use a virtual lab to work together in small groups, carrying out Problem-Based Learning Scenarios. They will design and carry out sequences of experiments. This would take too long to do in a physical lab, and is currently achieved using paper and web pages.”⁸¹

“It could be going better, but to go better we’d need more input. At the moment, I have some frustration that people buy into the ideas, and want to develop, but are on tight timescales and can’t always continue to put time in. I think we’re beginning to see – if not a tipping point – the potential for a tipping point in some places, and that it would, in theory, be almost reachable. I have two hesitations about this. One is that even though there are an increasing number of machines on campus that can manage Second Life, I have decided that they’re possibly not really up to the kind of spec that encourages Second Life activity – that staff and students can see things rezzed around them and can move with confidence.

I don’t envisage all machines being routinely of a standard that really facilitate fast and complex scenarios. Secondly, although there is a [comparative] rush of people now there is a little time for development over the summer, I’m not sure whether there will be enough development in place to keep up the pace when the main member of staff currently supporting projects leaves the institution.

There are technical staff who are beginning to engage and a new post about to be advertised, but the need for a champion until established is pretty clear. ‘Established’ isn’t very far away, and I

⁷⁹ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

⁸⁰ Dr. Shailey Minocha, Department of Computing, The Open University

⁸¹ Dr. Paul D. Rudman, SWIFT project, University of Leicester

hope that it's enough to keep going. We are, obviously, about to have to engage with how/what we hand over responsibility for the university island and the developed content.”⁸²

“It's going well (but can always go better), people are picking up on it, the first examples are bearing fruit, more interest shows. But I so wish there was some HE/FE wide initiative into using Open Simulator more, share, exchange and pool knowledge, (perhaps even as platform of choice) but being from the real world, don't know who would be able to fire up such a thing and I'm too busy to go and try to figure that out.”⁸³

“Going fine. It's gained its own momentum and is rolling along nicely, and whilst not at the speed we initially envisaged, it IS rolling along. The concept of Second Life / virtual worlds has become commonly accepted in the university, and is now seen as a serious learning technology / learning environment, which is a huge change from two years ago! We are no longer looked at strangely... ;) So, successful in many ways.”⁸⁴

“Things are ok - we are running out of space and have to regularly clear out older student work and at busy times keep close tabs on prim counts.”⁸⁵

“It is going well so far and it is expected that the projects are ongoing.”⁸⁶

“Still in the very early stages, but I have high hopes!”⁸⁷

“Going as well as it has done for the last couple of years, a continuing very slow but steady increase in interest.”⁸⁸

“Finding the time and resources is always an issue, but the interest and enthusiasm of staff goes a long way to plugging the gaps.”⁸⁹

“Teaching, research and projects are all currently going well. Most of the issues previously occurring in teaching (such as firewall and required client updates) don't pose as a problem. The projects are currently posing no issues.”⁹⁰

Money is tight. The 'golden age' of education money may be ending. How are you getting funded? How do you think your virtual world activities will be funded in the future?

Funding issues are the dark cloud on the horizon - but then again, that's probably the same for most or all technical and research-based projects and initiatives in academia. Respondents

⁸² Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

⁸³ Ferdinand Francino, Project Manager, CU There, Glasgow Caledonian University

⁸⁴ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

⁸⁵ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

⁸⁶ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

⁸⁷ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

⁸⁸ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

⁸⁹ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

⁹⁰ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

reported funding from a number of sources, including some new initiatives and projects. The JISC were mentioned (either on or off the record) more than other funding sources.

“Good question. In the first instance, we're looking to build partnerships with an interested institution who could pay for the basic modelling. And then see how the land lies.”⁹¹

“Initially our funding came from marketing; they are now looking to shift the financial commitment to Second Life to a service department or faculty that is getting the most direct payback from Second Life involvement i.e. the Sciences here at the moment.”⁹²

“My faculty provides funds for virtual land maintenance fees, IT support and academic time. This is likely to continue for a few years, despite current financial uncertainty.”⁹³

“We were awarded 75K from JISC and made a significant match contribution from Faculty and central university pots. We already have in place a learning technology team based within the Online Simulation and Immersive Education Research Group, within the Faculty, and so have native capacity to deploy and develop further. With no licensing fees to worry about we can concentrate on design, integration and research into impact.

However in order to promote interactivity within Wonderland we are keen to secure JAVA skills and are therefore looking to develop collaborations with other organisations. We will also be funding a PhD studentship that will involve programming developments within Wonderland, so if anyone out there is interested please let me know.”⁹⁴

“Our tenancy runs out in February 2011. We will have no choice but to abandon the island to Linden Labs. That’s going to be a very sad day indeed. And it’s not because of funding really – though we have had massive budget cuts, if the island was ‘earning its keep’ then money would and could be found to keep it going. The honest truth is that the island remains a glorious representation of the geography, geology, history and folklore of Cornwall – but as an educational establishment remains virtually unused.”⁹⁵

“I was fortunate to receive funding from JISC – it was very competitive, and only possible I think because we had a collaboration where all partners had significant prior experience with virtual worlds. The bar has been raised somewhat I think!

Our project has been funded by the JISC LTIG programme: Supporting Education in Virtual Worlds with Virtual Learning Environments (VW/VLE)⁹⁶.

The consortium consists of the University of the West of Scotland (Daniel Livingstone), The Open University (Anna Peachey), University of Ulster (Michael Callaghan) and Imperial College London (Maria Toro-Troconis). The project will run from 1st July 2010 to 30th June 2011.

This project will analyse and catalogue emerging pedagogical opportunities offered by integrating virtual worlds and web-based virtual learning environments. It aims to show how the relative

⁹¹ Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

⁹² Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

⁹³ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

⁹⁴ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

⁹⁵ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

⁹⁶ Supporting Education in Virtual Worlds with Virtual Learning Environments. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/ltig/vwvle.aspx>

strengths of each platform, i.e. administrative capabilities of virtual learning environments and the presentation layer of virtual worlds, can be exploited and subsequently enhanced through such integration.

The project will develop, evaluate and disseminate effective models of good practice, where little guidance or structure currently exists and based on experiences from pilot groups use this integrated approach for teaching and learning at multiple institutions.

We will be looking into areas such as using VLEs to support greater personalisation of learning in shared 3D spaces, supporting accessibility, and improving reuse.

With a squeeze on UK funding, charity and EU funding initiatives will be more attractive, as will work with companies and industries looking to save on their travel budgets relating to training programmes – and where online training will be increasingly desirable.”⁹⁷

“Current activity at Leeds is funded solely through my one-year Developmental University Teaching Fellowship supplemented by a small grant from the University’s Blended Learning Futures Group. Together this has provided sufficient funding to purchase and sustain the Education UK region for about four years (we’re now in year 2).

A few bids for academic development funding within the University have been made, so far without success. We desperately need a successful project to demonstrate the potential; but with staff time limited and technical support rarer than elephant feathers it remains an uphill struggle.”⁹⁸

“Our island is still being funded jointly by the Information Studies Department and the School of Education: i.e. it is still a special item (rather than part of regular e-learning, funded centrally). Central funding is still concentrated elsewhere, with no investment in virtual worlds (to my knowledge).”⁹⁹

“We are planning on the basis that there will be less money and much greater pressure to justify Second Life developments particularly resource intensive ones such as our virtual patient. Collaboration within and without institutions will be important to pool resources and add clout to bids.”¹⁰⁰

“As of the end of May, I am no longer supported by the University Library but I have managed to locate some residual teaching monies and this, together with the financial support normally afforded project students, should suffice for one more year. Sadly, I don’t do enough teaching inworld to warrant funding as ‘infrastructure’.

I am, however, hoping to share the island with a US educator who will be contributing funds that will enable continuation for a further year, i.e. two in total. Her subject interest meshes well with my current teaching so there is potential for synergistic interaction, including running a meeting involving both student groups. I hope this comes off as I see this type of subject-level collaboration as the future in the absence of any direct support locally, at least in the short term.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

⁹⁸ Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

⁹⁹ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

¹⁰⁰ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

¹⁰¹ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

“We're primarily funded from the Higher Education Academy¹⁰² and from internal funding.”¹⁰³

“My funding mostly comes privately, although I am doing some teaching directly with a university rather than with students or staff of a university. That funding is relatively trivial and is well supported from a number of sources. In the wider sense, I make my living mostly from development work. That went through a very sticky patch, and my current work is largely from outside the UK, but the US education system seems to be recovering reasonably and approaches for new projects are close to their highest numbers over the last quarter.”¹⁰⁴

“We are delivering this on a shoestring budget, so no funding issues for us at present. However, if funding is something that needs to be addressed in the future, we are fairly confident that needs will be met, as senior management see this as a tool for aiding international delivery of qualifications.”¹⁰⁵

“I have a scholarship from Glasgow Caledonian Academy. The university is still funding the island at the moment.”¹⁰⁶

“We have recently received funding from the Higher Education Academy to establish a 'Games, Virtual Worlds and Higher Education Special Interest Group¹⁰⁷'. The SIG committee includes Diane Carr and Martin Oliver at the IOE, John Kirriemuir, Hamish Macleod and Fiona Littleton at the University of Edinburgh and Natasha Whiteman at the University of Leicester.

The aims of SIG include supporting research into the use of games and virtual worlds in HE teaching and learning, and facilitating the exchange of ideas across disciplines. The SIG will be hosting two Real Life events and two Second Life events over the next 12 months. Contact the SIG chair (d.carr at ioe.ac.uk) for more information.”¹⁰⁸

“I think we'll be doing far more in private sector training, and also starting to see how we can productise the content side for HE/FE so that people can buy/rent complete modules rather than having everything bespoke.”¹⁰⁹

“It is because of the development of important external relations that we will continue to receive funding for this campus.”¹¹⁰

“Obviously I tend to be funded via clients, who in turn are funded by various funding organisations. I'm hoping there won't be much affect on my business as my prices are incredibly competitive and if anything, I am hoping to get more work as Gemixin Ltd tend to appeal to people on lower budgets anyway. I rarely apply for funding directly so hopefully it won't be an issue.”¹¹¹

¹⁰² Higher Education Academy <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>

¹⁰³ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

¹⁰⁴ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

¹⁰⁵ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

¹⁰⁶ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹⁰⁷ GAME-SIG. <http://www.game-sig.info/>

¹⁰⁸ Diane Carr, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education

¹⁰⁹ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

¹¹⁰ Iffaf Khan, International Academy Gateway delivery coordinator, University of Essex

¹¹¹ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

“No idea - the managers are thinking of closing the island.”¹¹²

“Funding is supporting centrally through Information Services. We have two islands, which do not cost a great deal of money. The Learning Team initially provided all technical and development support. A mixture of maternity leave and non-Second Life projects means that currently ongoing support is provided mainly through consultancy and technical advice to academics and students. We have provided training materials, freebies and sandbox to help people get started, and these have proven useful.”¹¹³

“The university has an island (purchased and managed by the school of CMS) but we are finding it hard to justify due to lack of interest. Also hardware is starting to take budget priority compared to software.”¹¹⁴

“We have been fortunate to receive generous funding from JISC and our Faculty at The Open University, UK. A Teaching Fellowship from the Centre for Open Learning in Mathematics, Science, Computing and Technology, one of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at The Open University, also helped towards our initiatives. For the next stage of our research, we are planning to target research councils (ESRC, EPSRC) with research programmes that are beyond the use of 3D virtual worlds in education and for a wider role in the community.”¹¹⁵

“We have done everything we’ve done on a skinny shoestring. The only funding we have used has been to buy and maintain the island – this was funded first under TQEF by our Centre for Learning & Quality Enhancement, and so far has successfully been kept in the budget. I don’t know how safe it will be next year. Realistically speaking, as the development of projects spreads around campus, it’s a pretty small amount of money compared to other softwares or activities on campus.

Over the last eighteen months, a growing number of projects have successfully bid for central Learning & Teaching Innovation Fund monies with which to develop or study their intended activities. If this were to continue, island rent could be covered from these bids, but I don’t anticipate there being always money given to a Second Life project.

The School of Health has also found some money to fund buying kit for a set of pilot scenarios and now looks to employ someone for a few months to develop some more cross-school activities, so there is definitely a move towards engagement financially as well as intellectually. Whether it will be enough? I hope so. I’m quite proud of what we’ve managed with very little budget.

I wouldn’t actually like to look at my own personal transaction history to see how much I’ve spent during the last two years on work things, but I haven’t really noticed it. Whether it’s an acceptable amount when someone else has to pay it remains to be seen!”¹¹⁶

“If it becomes an integrated learning environment to use, then hopefully the technology will still be funded at central level, as are our other accepted learning technologies (VLE, etc). Lack of funding will impact more on opportunities for substantive research than for development. Lack of extra

¹¹² Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

¹¹³ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

¹¹⁴ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

¹¹⁵ Dr. Shailey Minocha, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹¹⁶ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

funding will slow down learning and teaching innovation as people will not be able to buy out time for design of learning activities or courses.”¹¹⁷

“Our land purchase / maintenance has been on an ad-hoc basis until now, but we hope this summer to formalise arrangements so that it becomes a regular part of the university's licensing cycle.”¹¹⁸

“The island is currently funded from the departmental budget - necessity needs to be justified (as with any other 'software' used for teaching, e.g. licences for Oracle etc are also costly).”¹¹⁹

“I haven't had to apply for funding for this as I'm essentially going to be using space that UWS has already established in Second Life.”¹²⁰

“Teaching and learning activity will be funded by individual course budgets.”¹²¹

“I tried to shoe-horn our OpenSim ambitions into a recent JISC call, but it was (unsurprisingly) rejected. I'm now looking to fund it internally, which mainly involves begging for an old server from computing services, making use of my 'research and scholarly activities' allocation, and creating some space for an enthusiastic member of technical support staff to do the fiddly bits.”¹²²

“The three islands are funded by the School and the AHRC funding is used towards the INCORE island housing the conflict resolution project. The islands are all funded for one year.”¹²³

Long distance travel is increasingly precarious. Ash, strikes and airlines going under ground flights. Travel is expensive (even in the UK with extortionate train fares) and takes up a lot of time. Virtual Worlds could, possibly, be used instead of many workshops, conferences, meetings et al. Your thoughts on this? And how do virtual worlds such as Second Life stack up against other event-replacing media such as Elluminate and Skype?

A perhaps long-winded question, with some interesting responses. Though the feeling is broadly in favour of using virtual worlds, it isn't an overall consensus, with some people wishing for a combined or blended approach with other technologies.

“We were motivated by the fact that organising student visits to see real printing equipment can be difficult, costly and indeed might not allow the kind of access that would be most pedagogically useful.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹¹⁸ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

¹¹⁹ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

¹²⁰ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

¹²¹ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

¹²² Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

¹²³ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

¹²⁴ Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

“I think this is a very valid point, especially in light of events this past 9 months or so. I attend many meetings in Second Life; the productivity and travel savings are there to be had for all.”¹²⁵

“I agree that travelling is becoming less and less attractive and affordable. I'm convinced we'll see more and more online communication technology becoming mainstream to replace events traditionally run face-to-face. This is particularly true for me as I work in a distance learning institution. I must say that my working patterns have changed considerably in the last couple of years and I now interact online with remote students and collaborators 90% my time(!).

This year I've even run an international workshop in mixed mode (i.e., residential plus remote users via Elluminate Live!) connecting people from 3 continents. I use Second Life whenever possible, but many non-virtual world users seem rather resistant to the idea and prefer more conventional means like Skype or Elluminate Live! rather than worlds, and particularly Second Life, need to become a lot more reliable and better integrated with other online tools (e.g., application sharing) to become serious contenders.”¹²⁶

“I guess it's the purpose of the travel that informs judgments about whether certain technologies may afford cost effective alternatives. If your aim is to communicate, collaborate, develop and share with colleagues virtual worlds are now offering powerful solutions that can make this work more cost effective. If you are largely looking at content transmission albeit with voice or video supported dialogue then Skype, Elluminate, Wimba etc. may be the way to go.

For my mind virtual worlds are a very useful simulation tool. Our interest in Wonderland was its potential to become one of a number of simulation modalities that we are integrating across our curricula; maybe 2D virtual patients, 3D virtual worlds or games platforms etc. actor focussed or computerised mannequin focussed simulations. The point for us is that each of these modalities has its own affordances and limitations. Where some provide higher fidelity, they may be geographically fixed, resource intensive and difficult to scale. Where others have lower fidelity, we may get cheaper running costs, yet more distribution capacity.

The challenge for us is to engage less in head to head evaluations but look more closely at combining and aligning modalities so that we optimise their respective affordances and accommodate for their respective limitations. We call this approach Constructively Aligned Multiple Modality Simulation. There are some presentations available (under Dissemination) that describe this approach and a paper will be published shortly.”¹²⁷

“I see huge potential in using Second Life as a meeting place, and Cornwall College Island's most successful usage has been based around just that. I am more than happy for educational groups from all over the world to use the island as a meeting place, and the RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) group recently held two pre-conference meetings there to talk about digital literacy.

Skype seems to be the medium of choice for one to one meetings and tutorials, but for larger meet-ups or discussions (the RaPAL group now use the island on the first Monday of every month to hold informal discussion groups) Second Life seems to be a better option. The fact that people from around the globe can meet up without travelling, saving time, money and shoe leather seems to be a glaringly obvious reason why Second Life should be used as a meeting place – I just wish I could convince others to see it the same way!”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

¹²⁶ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹²⁷ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

¹²⁸ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

“Virtual worlds ‘must do better’ in this regard. Elluminate doesn’t require a 3 hour induction session – and neither should a virtual world.”¹²⁹

“As noted previously, this is already a major (possibly the major) use of the island. In terms of Second Life vs. Physical face to face, I think that face to face still has value for initiating and cementing connections. There is still more “hanging around and networking” time at a good physical world conference. For example, the COLIS conference (information science) I just went to, wandering round at lunch and coffee breaks to follow up with questions and discussion, and I ended up going to (and enjoying) some sessions because I was physically there, there I might have skipped out on in a Second Life conference. Voice is more reliable too.

In terms of Second Life vs. Elluminate or Skype – really no contest as far as I’m concerned, Second Life is the winner. I haven’t used Elluminate or Skype that much as conference tools – the one time I was presenting with Elluminate, the voice didn’t work (so it’s not just Second Life!) and obviously you can’t do things that you can in Second Life (e.g. the demonstrations, tours, displays), plus you REALLY don’t get any “networking”, the best you can hope for is the sound of the “real” conference delegates going off for their refreshments and some amusing uncensored remarks when speakers forget to take off their mics.

You do get the backchannel and audience interaction, plus people hanging around just chatting after an event (I have the evidence in chatlogs!) Plus, the conference delegate goodie bags are so much more exciting – I’ve had helicopters, whiteboards, musical instruments, bluebells etc. And even with my limited building skills I managed to give delegates at the last event I organised a complete set of logo-ed virtual clothes. Skype has much more reliable voice (and for discussions between a few people it can have advantages), obviously, but I’m someone that does not find a small squinty view of someone’s nose that engaging (from a visual perspective).¹³⁰

“I think we are some way off from mainstream acceptance of virtual conferencing let alone using Second Life as a platform of choice. The barriers to conferencing in Second Life are still considerable.”¹³¹

“I attend a lot of remote meetings and conferences via Second Life and find it very convenient and much less fraught than it used to be. A number of the Masters students, however, were less than enthused about the lack of facial feedback from avatars and, I suspect, also begrudged the loss of the opportunity to network in person as well as visit new and exciting real-life places.

I have relatively little experience of Elluminate -- my recollection is that it didn't seem to engender as good a backchannel and, of course, there was negligible sense of shared presence. If I'm speaking, I do like to rez things as well as show slides and that seemed to go down reasonably well at the Virtual Worlds Best Practice in Education talk I gave.”¹³²

“I personally am a big fan of events I can attend online in any shape or form. While it will never be the same as attending in person, with time and money in short supply it allows me to at least follow proceedings of far more events than I might otherwise. In terms of technology comparison, I think there is no one true answer. Virtual worlds suit presentations with slides, as well as providing a

¹²⁹ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

¹³⁰ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

¹³¹ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

¹³² Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

concept of how people are arranged (so people can see who is presenting, because they are at the front), while simpler tools such as Skype are probably easier to use.”¹³³

“Being hard of hearing, Skype is not really useful to me - enough people in Second Life are used to text chat that they are usually happy to change even if their preference is voice chat. In Skype the tools, naturally, promote voice and the tools for text chat are not as useful.

My impression of Elluminate is that it fails to generate a sense of presence in the way that Second Life does. I have to say I don't use it often - but I'm also under the impression that use is declining, at least for the groups I work with: a meeting in Second Life is far more likely at all steps, backed up in most cases with an exchange of emails particularly during busy times and across time zones when organising meetings between more than two people becomes fraught but the asynchronous nature of email gets the replies and clarifications necessary in a reasonably short time frame.”¹³⁴

“I agree that virtual worlds offer a place to meet up as an alternative to face-to-face. How appropriate virtual worlds are for meeting as opposed to facilities such as Elluminate and Skype will depend on what you are trying to achieve. If we keep on progressing towards developing a fully integrated 3D web, then I would suspect that the virtual will be used in conjunction with these types of tools (if they are appropriate for what you are doing).”¹³⁵

“I use virtual worlds to attend meetings on a weekly basis and am involved with the Virtual Worlds Education Roundtable (VWER). I also have attend conferences inworld which I have found to be fun, immersive, informative and professionally run. I have met many educators and technology experts who I otherwise would never would have met. However, there are times when face to face meetings are appropriate and virtual worlds should not be seen as a replacement. Don't use Elluminate. Skype is okay; a bit boring.”¹³⁶

“We do use Second Life for thesis supervision however we leave the choice of media to the student. If the student prefers Skype we use that instead.”¹³⁷

“We still find Second Life more immersive than Skype - even when we use Skype instead of Second Life voice. And with Viewer 2 the ability to replicate WebEx type functionality is even greater. Second Life voice still needs to be more forgiving / intuitive though, to make it really easy for newbies.”¹³⁸

“In my opinion there is definitely an advantage of using virtual worlds over more static online meeting tools, as having an avatar makes the experience more immersive. I think Second Life isn't really ideal for casual use though - i.e. a one off meeting, as the learning curve is fairly steep. I would personally prefer a web browser based solution that's sole purpose is for online meetings and is incredibly simple to use.”¹³⁹

“Whilst I'm sure some of us would prefer to meet in somewhere like Second Life and can see the advantages of doing so, I'm quite positive that managers feel safer with Elluminate and Skype.

¹³³ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

¹³⁴ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

¹³⁵ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

¹³⁶ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹³⁷ Diane Carr, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education

¹³⁸ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

¹³⁹ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

Most of them still haven't entered the digital age and are extremely anxious about getting a bad reputation (for what I'm not sure). Their anxiety means that they are unable to let go of the control. Despite everything they will not recognise that they are alienating a lot of their staff, most of their students and a lot of the general public."¹⁴⁰

"Depends. Easy answer I guess. Skype/Elluminate type meetings meet a particular need, which Second Life isn't good at. Not sure about Second Life conferences, only attended one and it wasn't a great experience for me--that said I haven't been overly impressed with Elluminate meetings either. At least virtually, if I get bored, I can walk away and get a coffee without offending the presenter :). Virtual workshops could prove more useful, especially if placed in activities that take full advantage of Second Life. Would be keen to 'attend' something like this."¹⁴¹

"Skype is very useful here, primarily because of facial emotions recognition. We are investing in new VOIP systems that will enhance this. Carbon reduction will play an increasingly important role in decision making. We don't yet have Elluminate or Wimba remote teaching tools but this is under consideration."¹⁴²

"In my own personal experiences: the sense of presence and sense of place in a 3D virtual world is more similar to face-to-face (offline) situations in the real life rather than interactions in a 2D environment such as Facebook, or in video- or audio-conferencing via Elluminate or otherwise. I will attempt to answer your question through a case study example from our recent research."¹⁴³

"I finally realised the power of Second Life when attending a streamed conference event on the Eduserv island. The stream (sorry Andy) was pretty flaky back then, but the sense of presence was phenomenal. I've now attended and indeed presented at conferences around the world from my desk at home (at least once, I confess, in my pyjamas) and I think there's a huge potential for sharing, bonding and networking. I wouldn't say it completely replaces f2f meetings, but it is a real potential today, that should be just as much an option as doing a webex or video conference. I'm not a fan of video conferences, never have been, and although I do webexes regularly with Blackboard designers I kind of see that as a different type of event.

Sharing content online in a webex / Elluminate session is a very tailored event, and almost always has a particular focus to be presented/discussed, usually in voice above a presentation. As often pointed out there is a turn up, do then leave straight away thing with these. Arriving at a virtual conference, hanging out with coffee in the back row gossiping on the back channel, incorporating a social aspect to nurture existing and new relationships is a very different thing. Complementary. Worth trying, even if you're sceptical. Although clearly the electricity/power requirements are not carbon-free, I think very many more project meetings etc as well as conferences could be held inworld. There is a major professional development agenda that we are missing here. If you don't believe me, believe one of my team!"¹⁴⁴

"It has potential. But I'd like to see some more integration of tools such as Elluminate / Skype offer mixed into Second Life / virtual worlds, and also the asynchronous nature of some online conferences should not be lost. I don't think its necessarily a one-or-other situation. They all have

¹⁴⁰ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

¹⁴¹ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

¹⁴² Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

¹⁴³ Dr. Shailey Minocha, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹⁴⁴ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

good and bad points. But I do think it will happen that we remotely conference more in the future, and a 3D environment has much to offer that experience.”¹⁴⁵

“Personally I prefer Second Life for meetings to Elluminate and Skype, but it is easier for someone with no experience to be added into a Skype call than into a Second Life meeting.”¹⁴⁶

“Second Life is overrated on this and may be superseded by some sort of advanced video conferences.”¹⁴⁷

“I would be delighted to attend workshops, conferences, meetings etc in virtual worlds. I found that during classes in Second Life the experience was actually quite similar to a face-to-face class and as such think the platform would be useful in other similar contexts.”¹⁴⁸

“Despite the benefits of spatial/visual feedback, Second Life continues to be Second Choice for some. In one meeting, staff said that they and their students rated a recent Second Life experience very highly; but this meeting was being held – by their request – in Elluminate. This is doubtless due to several factors, including unfamiliarity with the Second Life interface, and problems such as lag or software/hardware issues.

However, putting our money where our virtual mouth is, the OU is hosting The Virtual World Conference across two of our islands on September the 15th. The event will follow the sun, with invited speakers in each time zone contributing to a full 24 hours of activity. With so many global challenges ahead, we are using the conference to ask that participants and speakers begin to consider the opportunities for virtual worlds to address how virtual worlds can change how we socialize, work and learn.

The event will be chaired in the eastern time zone by Andreas Schmeil, PARC, San Francisco and University of Lugano (USI), Switzerland, in Europe by Sara de Freitas, Serious Games Institute, and Anna Peachey, Eygus Ltd/The Open University and in the by Claus Nehmzow, Alcus International Ltd, Hong Kong. More details will be available shortly.”¹⁴⁹

“I’m not sure. The importance of smell in the facilitation of social cohesion is vastly underrated.”¹⁵⁰

“Virtual worlds may provide the ideal setting for virtual events. With most having customisable avatars and services such as media integration, text and voice chat – the opportunity to conduct meetings and workshops, they can provide a realistic and productive environment. Having attended many virtual events, the benefits of virtual world events are obvious against video conferencing / audio software applications.

The problem is that many virtual worlds require client downloads and may have associated firewall requirements. Unexpected downtime, accounts being logged out (even if only for a few minutes) are problems, which are experienced. Until these issues are appropriately addressed with a

¹⁴⁵ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹⁴⁶ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

¹⁴⁷ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

¹⁴⁸ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

¹⁴⁹ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

¹⁵⁰ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

resulting shift in opinion – applications such as Skype will continue to be chosen of virtual worlds for the majority of users.”¹⁵¹

Second Life. Using just that, or considering other virtual worlds? If so, why?

Second Life is still the most “popular” virtual world in terms of use, but OpenSim and similar environments continue to attract more attention, despite the new Second Life UI.

“We're thinking about OpenSim. We've had quite a bit of feedback from scholars interested in our work who balked at having to create a Second Life account. Long-term plan would be to build a bespoke open platform.”¹⁵²

“I'm now seriously looking to shift OpenSim or similar. I'm getting increasingly frustrated with not being able to move assets between Main Second Life and Teen Second Life. Rebuilding the same virtual asset is just plain stupid in this environment; plus, mesh still hasn't been delivered to help matters.”¹⁵³

“Only Second Life at the moment as I also use many other conventional technologies (Skype, Elluminate, Ning, Moodle...) and there is only so much time in a day...”¹⁵⁴

“Using Second Life was ruled out as it would have caused problems due to limitations such as age restrictions, firewall servers and high costs. OpenSim offers no age restrictions, can be run on the university servers and allows backups to be taken, so environments that have been used by a particular group of young people can be preserved by using an OAR export feature to allow researchers to examine at a later date. Furthermore, there are no long-term financial commitments using open source software.”¹⁵⁵

“For the foreseeable future we are sticking with Open Wonderland. Its extensibility makes it a very exciting platform to work with. For example, the VNC viewer module is a recent development that means we can display and control a desktop and any apps displayed within it, in-world. We're looking forward to having some fun with this in the near future.”¹⁵⁶

“Currently just using Second Life – but have been given some free land on the education grid (set up by the Immersive Education Group). It seems clear that because of increasingly tight budgets and, more importantly, the lack of use that Cornwall College has had, the only way to move forward in to have free land and start again, on a smaller scale. I really don't want to give up – I see real benefits to using virtual worlds in education – but in the economic climate I can see no other option.”¹⁵⁷

“We have a little work with OpenSim, primarily still Second Life.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

¹⁵² Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer., School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

¹⁵³ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

¹⁵⁴ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹⁵⁵ Nayyera Aslam, Research Associate, University of Teesside

¹⁵⁶ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

¹⁵⁷ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

¹⁵⁸ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

“Just using Second Life. No time or money to do otherwise.”¹⁵⁹

“Basically I concentrate on Second Life, but I keep my ears open about other worlds. In particular, I’m putting together a research bid using Second Life and will have to say what I will do if Second Life disappears partway into the project. Opensim seems the most obvious, in that it is something you can have control over. I feel I can make a case for using Second Life as the venue for a multiyear research project, but I think it would be difficult to do that (in terms of stability) with any of the others. (I’m talking about VWs other than gaming VWs like WoW) in terms of research, I’ve had 2 or 3 students focus on World of Warcraft for their UG or Masters dissertations, but I’ve felt I could supervise them without actually using it myself. It’s sounds horribly gendered, but for leisure interest I prefer virtual clothes shopping to virtual orc-bashing.”¹⁶⁰

“I’m only anticipating using Second Life for the coming year though, if time permits, I will have a look at some of the alternatives.”¹⁶¹

“I think it would be fair to say the bulk of our work is in OpenSim at this point.”¹⁶²

“I always peek at others - inWorldz most recently, which is a Second Life clone - but so far just Second Life. That's mostly where the work is for me - universities moving into OpenSim etc. (and there are some although I'm not sure how many are UK-based) tend to have a strong relationship with a designer already in place and move with them. One of my main clients has explored a couple of other worlds, but each time has remained in Second Life.”¹⁶³

“Next year, we will briefly look at other virtual worlds such as Blue Mars along with students looking at virtual gaming worlds, but we will continue to primarily use Second Life. This is probably the easiest virtual world to get students to use and has a wealth of resources that students can access that are relevant to the module they are taking.”¹⁶⁴

“I am aware of other virtual worlds and our own OpenSim but only using Second Life at the moment.”¹⁶⁵

“We're still looking at OpenSim, but still get the sense that that is not ready for robust turnkey commercial use - great if you've got an army of friendly techs to look after it, but not otherwise. We're particularly excited about VastPark at the moment, it has a nice architecture, has an open-source core, lets you run in standalone and network mode, and saves out the world (less assets) to an XML file. We're porting both our Discourse chatbot software and the PIVOTE training software to it.”¹⁶⁶

“I'm most definitely using other virtual worlds - in particular Open Wonderland, Open Sim and custom made virtual worlds/spaces created using Unity. I think there are various pros and cons for them all, and Second Life has many advantages such as the large user base and the massive amount of built in features (which of course can be a disadvantage too as it's more complicated to

¹⁵⁹ Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

¹⁶⁰ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

¹⁶¹ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

¹⁶² J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

¹⁶³ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

¹⁶⁴ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

¹⁶⁵ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹⁶⁶ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

use!). I think there will be more interest in non Second Life virtual worlds over the next couple of years as people try and expand their projects and try and become less committed to one single solution.”¹⁶⁷

“I don't think the university would like any virtual world unless it was one they had control over.”¹⁶⁸

“So far just Second Life. Mainly practical, unfortunately. We're exploring Second Life to get a better understanding of 3D worlds and what 3D environments can offer teaching and research. Second Life meets this. Like most engaged in this field, I have genuine concerns over sustainability of Second Life and vendor 'lock-in.' Time permitting, we would explore alternatives. However, Second Life does meet our immediate requirements and interests.”¹⁶⁹

“CMS has been using games engines (UDK, Unity, Valve Hammer) more this year. They give better quality rendering, AI, lip synching and more structure.”¹⁷⁰

“I try my best to keep myself up-to-date with various initiatives in other virtual worlds and, particularly, OpenSim, Reaction Grid and through groups on LinkedIn or by following the discussions on the SLED List (Second Life Educator's mailing list). However, I have not ventured in other virtual worlds as yet, because my current research efforts are focussed in Second Life. In our research, we have made a conscious effort to derive generalisations from our empirical findings – so that what ever we are learning through our initiatives in Second Life would also be applicable to other 3D virtual worlds.”¹⁷¹

“Just Second Life. No central IT support to install OpenSim – that hasn't changed in all the snapshots I've written for and is unlikely to change in the near future. I have installed OpenSim at home (with mixed results, depending on whether I want to be in glorious isolation on my continents or open them to others but be myself locked out by my router) so I could have a look, and the extra prim limit could really spoil a girl with a building fetish.

However, until movement of 'stuff' between grids or the capacity to buy stuff in OpenSim (or that I have triple the time to build everything I wanted) becomes commonplace, I can't see that it's in anyway a real alternative for us.”¹⁷²

“No, OpenSim as well, I try to bring everything I do into some sort of open sim existence. Am annoyed with the RealXtend hype, since it's not cross platform and a prime example of what the open source community does very well: get divided, fork, fork again. Machiavelli rolls in his grave. With laughter.”¹⁷³

“Too much buy in to a commercial system that has so much control is not good for education, IMHO. It's holds us hostage to their whims, downtime, pricing... As long as we can export to other virtual worlds then Second Life will continue for a while, but I eventually would prefer to see this as

¹⁶⁷ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

¹⁶⁸ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

¹⁶⁹ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

¹⁷⁰ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

¹⁷¹ Dr. Shailey Minocha, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹⁷² Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

¹⁷³ Ferdinand Francino, Project Manager, CU There, Glasgow Caledonian University

a technology that we host and control (us as individual institutions, or collaboratively, across the UK), and can steer its development more for our needs.”¹⁷⁴

“We want to look at other virtual worlds (and Jonathan Crellin has been looking at Open Wonderland) so we have a better idea of what is out there and their relative affordances, but are struggling to find the time.”¹⁷⁵

“For the moment just Second Life because it is fit for the purpose. Open Grid could be an alternative so that the island could be hosted locally, but that depends on availability for the future.”¹⁷⁶

“At the moment due to my inexperience with virtual worlds I’m sticking to Second Life. I’d be very interested in other platforms though, as the minimum system requirements and steep learning curve of Second Life could, I feel, be difficult for some of our students to get to grips with (our students range from those with extremely basic IT skills to those with extremely advanced IT skills) so if a more accessible platform was available I would definitely consider it.”¹⁷⁷

“We completed our comparison of available platforms and are in the process of getting that onto a wiki so that we can share with the community before publishing – we hope others will find this useful, and perhaps be able to fill in some of the gaps in the lesser known areas.

In the wake of the recent shake-ups at Linden Lab, we have been asked to produce a report into contingency options that might be put into effect if Second Life were to disappear. This is no simple task, as Second Life’s closest living relative – Open Sim – is worlds apart in terms of hosting, etc.”¹⁷⁸

“OpenSim, as mentioned before. If Apple did a virtual world, I’d probably use that.”¹⁷⁹

“Second Life and OpenSim are the two virtual worlds that are being actively used on a daily basis though we are exploring other virtual worlds. The reasoning behind investigation into other virtual worlds is that we feel that a browser-based solution would enhance the learning experience by improving ease of access and usability.”¹⁸⁰

Problems with universities blocking access to Second Life. Is anyone still having that, or are we over it now?

Though this issue lessens with every snapshot, some academics still have problems with freely using virtual worlds (and especially Second Life) in their institution. As with previous surveys, access issues tend to be more in the older, than the newer, universities, and in colleges.

¹⁷⁴ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

¹⁷⁵ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

¹⁷⁶ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

¹⁷⁷ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

¹⁷⁸ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

¹⁷⁹ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

¹⁸⁰ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

“No, no problems at our end.”¹⁸¹

“We've never had an issue with this; the Networks Team at the University of Sunderland are excellent.”¹⁸²

“Not at my institution”¹⁸³

“Firewall issues were a consideration for us when we chose Wonderland. We wanted to be able to deploy the technology behind our firewalls and ensure that students could log in as themselves. It was also important for us in terms of communication skills training that students were not anonymous, but that they could also rehearse these skills in secure environments. With OWL we have LDAP integration which helps with these issues.”¹⁸⁴

“Anyone who wants Second Life installed on their machine has to ask my permission; then, I have to ring IT services to have the user's firewall settings changed remotely, enabling them to install and use the Second Life client. This is not going to change. This has to be a big reason why Second Life has not taken off at Cornwall College: the expectation that the only way to access it is at home along with the fact that staff can use Second Life on their office and staff room machines but not in the classrooms.”¹⁸⁵

“Generally over it, but staff still need to fill in forms to open the required ports for connecting to services like Second Life.”¹⁸⁶

“At Leeds access to Second Life is still blocked for most users of desktop machines hard-wired into the campus network, although a port through the firewall will be opened if the need can be demonstrated and authorised. Access to Second Life via the campus wifi network is not constrained; but the penalty is reduced performance.”¹⁸⁷

“It's not blocked, but it is still not on the managed desktop, therefore as far as most students/lecturers are concerned it IS effectively blocked. Bit depressing, frankly, as there is periodic interest from colleague sin other parts of the university, but when the students can't access it on campus except in those departments which have labs under their control.”¹⁸⁸

“It's not blocked but many PCs in the institution still don't run it well.”¹⁸⁹

“Never had that problem.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸¹ Dr Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

¹⁸² Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

¹⁸³ Dr Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

¹⁸⁴ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

¹⁸⁵ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

¹⁸⁶ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

¹⁸⁷ Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

¹⁸⁸ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

¹⁸⁹ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

¹⁹⁰ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

“There's definitely still resistance here against opening up as many holes (I mean, ports) in the firewall as Second Life/OpenSim require. We've managed to find a working compromise for locally hosted OpenSim servers, though.”¹⁹¹

“Not seen it. Some fun describing to students how to install Second Life, but not with access being blocked.”¹⁹²

“Not over!”¹⁹³

“Still an issue. We have a few clients looking at the SOCKS5 implementation in the Snowglobe viewer as one way of simplifying this.”¹⁹⁴

“Still can't use voice!”¹⁹⁵

“Not blocking Second Life, but we still have concerns about forced updates to viewers. Not happened for a while, but memories are long. Replacing and testing all computer images when there is a forced update is a pain, especially without notice (as in the past). Linden labs have provided a work around for viewer 1 (hopefully also works for viewer 2), but untested at this point.”¹⁹⁶

“It's the updates which can cause problems.”¹⁹⁷

“No, that's never been a problem for us. Although we have had a moment or two where the virtualised updating of software hasn't worked and has been fine when tested and then not fine when members of staff went back in to hold a class... Mainly it's access to decent PCs. There's usable and usable, I've decided.

However, I have been to other institutions this academic year and found that although I can access the wireless on a campus, there is no access to Second Life, so I don't think it's completely gone yet!”¹⁹⁸

“Not blocked, and it's now on the standard desktop image (yay!), but we still have issues of 'training' as part of general IT skills. It's still seen as something not yet standard.”¹⁹⁹

“No problems here at University of Portsmouth.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹¹ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

¹⁹² Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

¹⁹³ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

¹⁹⁴ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

¹⁹⁵ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

¹⁹⁶ Andy Beggan, Learning Team Manager, University of Nottingham

¹⁹⁷ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

¹⁹⁸ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

¹⁹⁹ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

²⁰⁰ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

“Not here (University of Bedfordshire), the use of Second Life is championed by the relevant tech people.”²⁰¹

“Still a problem at this university unfortunately! Any work I do in Second Life has to be carried out from home at the moment.”²⁰²

“Problems with the campus firewall crop up every now and then. Usually an email to the right person sorts the issue out, but the process is sometimes slow.”²⁰³

“Not an issue now.”²⁰⁴

“IT support are aware of the rooms which are used to teach Second Life and all PCs in allocated rooms pose no issues.”²⁰⁵

Handling large numbers of students in virtual worlds simultaneously i.e. more than 30. Do you have experience of this? How did it go?

This question produced mixed responses, which in some ways is an improvement (as several years ago, large numbers of avatars in one virtual world space were a technically difficult accomplishment).

“Not yet tried this.”²⁰⁶

“Not as yet, but we are looking to get 50 through the Pathlab simultaneously in future. In other developments I've worked on we've had 70 on a sim without any problem.”²⁰⁷

“Not really. I usually deal with small groups, despite having developed a large virtual world that could support around 200 simultaneous users. There isn't enough interest as yet for such large events and I have some doubt the technology I use (Second Life) is sufficiently reliable to support them.”²⁰⁸

“We have a server architecture that includes an application server, and four blade servers (nodes). Three of these nodes each support a world, and within each world we can create multiple world instances. The fourth server supports Asterix, a soft phone server that provides telephony support. In a recent test we launched 60 avatars in-world and then distributed these to each of the sub world instances.

Performance in each sub world was excellent. We aim to continue with these tests by doubling the numbers of clients and trying different deployment configurations. i.e. more sub worlds in one server node, using more than one node, each with sub worlds. There is real potential to now create

²⁰¹ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

²⁰² Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

²⁰³ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

²⁰⁴ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

²⁰⁵ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

²⁰⁶ Dr. Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

²⁰⁷ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

²⁰⁸ Dr. Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

a range of concurrent inter-professional virtual world scenarios and simulations that interconnect and support high numbers of concurrent users. Imagine, therefore, a virtual community populated by learners representing a range of agencies.”²⁰⁹

“We’ve had up to 40 avatars simultaneously present on Education UK and it’s like herding cats.”²¹⁰

“There were 35 in my 1st year class this year. I had to manage it in 2 or 3 groups, since our own lab does not have 35 computers in it. Actually I would probably have broken them down into smaller group anyway for induction, but it would have been nice to have them all inworld for some activities later on. I was able to have other people tutor with me – I do think that is helpful – and in my case some of them were librarians at other universities who were enjoying getting the experience as well as me and my students benefitting.

In particular, in my first class with students I am in the lab with students (so I can see what they are seeing and troubleshoot, though obviously they help each other too, which is part of the process) and have a colleague (in their office) inworld. I don’t do lectures inworld, it will be different kinds of activities, usually involving pair or group world, so it is helpful there too to have a couple of you taking special responsibility for specific groups.

The largest number I’ve had inworld simultaneously have been for meetings/seminars, about 40 people, but that’s easier to manage (although it is still a good idea to have a couple of people organising e.g. one to chair and one to sort out any problems, guide latecomers in, IM people who seem troubled etc.)”²¹¹

“Many of our activities are designed for independent use and any group activities have tended to be small, certainly no more than 30.”²¹²

“The Masters class was more than 30 but I was forced to schedule that into smaller groups anyway so the inworld supervision was not a major issue.”²¹³

“OpenSim seemed stable enough as long as no-one built anything too strange, last time we tried. Not expected to be a significant issue any more, but no opportunity to test. I suppose the other thing we’d say about large groups is trying to herd them together is predictably tricky.”²¹⁴

“Last year, I had a student group of 15, may be experiencing over 30 next academic year, so I can tell you how this went in a years time.”²¹⁵

“We have never had more than 15 people at Wivenhoe at the same time, although we do get constant drop-ins. I recently finished teaching a study skills course that primarily used Second Life and e-mail. It was quite hard work to manage quite a large number of students with poor levels of IT and problem-solving skills at the same time.”²¹⁶

²⁰⁹ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

²¹⁰ Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

²¹¹ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

²¹² Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

²¹³ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

²¹⁴ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

²¹⁵ Richard Sanders, Lecturer in eMedia and Media Production, Newman University College

²¹⁶ Iffaf Khan, International Academy Gateway delivery coordinator, University of Essex

"Haven't done this. Mainly 'cos it's a bad idea in Real Life as well as virtual worlds - sometimes I guess it's unavoidable but one of the advantages of Second Life is that it makes it easier to create more personalised learning opportunities for smaller groups."²¹⁷

"No personal experience; just heard that it's hard to manage (as in enrolling and knowing who is who) and that can slow down the environment if there are too many people at once."²¹⁸

"No, but having more than 10 staff at a time gets interesting. Talk about herding cats ;-) I've had 20 or so a few times without too many problems."²¹⁹

"Little experience - the nature of what we are doing with the students means we tend to see them 1-to-1 or in small groups."²²⁰

"See my paper exactly on that issue: "Teaching Large Student Cohorts in Second Life"²²¹
It's tedious but after two years or so you get used to it...."²²²

"We had experience of this back in January (so outside scope of this snapshot?) with a Student Services induction event for new students. We were not prepared for the popularity of the event; many hundreds of students logged into Second Life but were unable to come as the region was at full capacity. (By the way, don't let anybody tell you that a sim can't handle the theoretical 100 agent limit. We know better!)"²²³

"Not well. Lag is a big problem in a learning situation. One of my big worries is the ability to scale use of virtual worlds up to normal levels (e.g. 120 in a year group.) However, we experience similar problems in real life, as big lecture theatres are fought over by many courses."²²⁴

"Having recently conducted a workshop on Second Life with 30+ users we experienced no problems. Users were active in carrying out many activities including building and scripting which had no impact on the island and no impact to the avatars."²²⁵

What do you think of the new Second Life viewer, both the UI / usability changes and the new functionality it enables (e.g. media on a prim)?

Generally, a thumbs up from people who have tried it, with some exceptions and mixed reviews.

²¹⁷ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

²¹⁸ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

²¹⁹ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

²²⁰ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

²²¹ Teaching Large Student Cohorts in Second Life. <http://sl.sanfoh.com/csedu2009/>

²²² Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

²²³ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

²²⁴ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

²²⁵ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

“Not had enough experience.”²²⁶

“The UI is just something you get used to after the initial use. Not being able to easily drag an LM or other Group message asset across into a Group Message is a pain. Overall, I like it and I think its better for new users. Media on a prim is very very useful and I use it a lot.”²²⁷

“I'm still getting use to it; in fact, I still run the old viewer most of the time. I find the new viewer a little slow and some of my favourite features from the old viewer don't work as well. I haven't tried the 'media on prim' feature yet - next on my to-do list.”²²⁸

“We took a look at this when testing out new PC specs. I though the new UI was very impressive!”²²⁹

“The same people who raved about how brilliant the new viewer was were exactly the same people who, within a week, had gone back to using ‘Emerald’, complaining that the new viewer was awful. I love the media on a prim element – this opens the door for a much more interactive and immersive experience for users / students. The new viewer isn't as user-friendly as the previous version – or Emerald, which I do admit to having installed on one of my machines – but with every upgrade the experience gets a little better.”²³⁰

“New media capabilities are a great improvement. I generally like the new UI – but it does need some streamlining, and some things can be a bit hard to find. Some aspects are not obvious. It is certainly much more welcoming than the old UI. Sadly the new client does not work well with OpenSim.”²³¹

“Only looked at it briefly and I wasn't impressed, so I continue to use either Version 1.23 or Emerald. I guess it's a familiarity thing.”²³²

“Must confess I have not yet swapped over.”²³³

“We are all quite used to it now and recent orientation sessions for students would suggest new users find it more intuitive than the original version. Media potential is interesting but we have not exploited this yet.”²³⁴

“I do agree with the Linden Lab notion of simplifying the initial experience and I think the web browser-like features are an improvement, albeit somewhat reminiscent of the earlier OnRez viewer. The sidebar and communications aspects are less well implemented but hopefully they will be improved in the next release.

²²⁶ Dr. Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

²²⁷ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

²²⁸ Dr. Lucia Rapanotti, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing, The Open University

²²⁹ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

²³⁰ Bex Ferriday, Lead Teacher, School of Education and Training, Cornwall College

²³¹ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

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²³³ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

²³⁴ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

I am very enthusiastic about shared media and will be talking on that topic at our local Learning & Teaching conference. I am hoping that it will go some way to simplifying aspects of what I currently teach although I do see some issues, not least legibility as well as lack of synchrony between different users seeing the same media prim unless you are using special apps.”²³⁵

“I think the new user interface is going in the right direction, but took a wrong turn somewhere in ‘Pretty but hard to use’ territory. From what I've seen, 2.1 should help resolve a lot of that. We haven't managed to test with a large group, but trials with small numbers of new users suggested the new viewer is less ‘scary’ initially.”²³⁶

“Don't you read my blog?! But seriously - Speaking personally I loathe the UI, and whilst I like the new functionality, not so much that I use the viewer 2.0 regularly. I'm hoping for a 1.23-ish UI with the MOAP functionality sometime soon. The new viewer causes confusion at meetings where you now have a real mix of viewers and so saying 'click that button' or ‘it's in the X menu’ when that menu no longer exists/doesn't exist in your older viewer is adding to the fun.

That said, if I was working in a situation where I would be inducting a number of students into Second Life come the next academic year, my impression of the new UI is that it is more accessible in general. There are bugs and issues - people using the 2.0 viewer are far more likely to miss new IMs than those in 1.x viewers for example and I don't know if there are changes to that in the pipeline - but it has made the learning curve easier for new users (mostly by making the things that builders and scripters want to get to harder to find which increases my dislike of it) and that has to be good for educators and I suspect for Second Life and churn in the long run.”²³⁷

“Takes a bit of getting used to. However, it should be easier for new people. Some of the functions a little hidden but reading the instructions helps.”²³⁸

“Accessibility is still an issue in the 'Second Life and education community' and it's not always about the technology. For instance, I wish that educators publicising their Second Life seminars and conferences would include a statement about whether they planned to use voice and/or text.”²³⁹

“Whilst there are some real issues with Viewer 2 (grey on black colour scheme, lots of menu nesting, buggy script editor to name a few). they are pretty much balanced out by Second Life Shared Media - being able to put a web page on any prim face is wonderful. However we find that in practice a user can only see 3 - 4 media faces at a time, and the fact that the face only updates when the URL changes means that doing things like PPT in Second Life are still tricky.”²⁴⁰

“With regard to Viewer 2 - I got the hang of the interface and then found that I had to keep looking at the capabilities in each new version. For example, after the most recent update, I couldn't invite people to my group until I realised that that had been disabled in the menu and was now only in the pie menu for each avatar. I switched to the Emerald Viewer for a while but now find myself going back to Viewer 2. I encourage students to only use Viewer 2.”²⁴¹

²³⁵ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

²³⁶ J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

²³⁷ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

²³⁸ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

²³⁹ Diane Carr, Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education

²⁴⁰ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

²⁴¹ Iffaf Khan, International Academy Gateway delivery coordinator, University of Essex

"I think it takes a bit of getting used to but overall I see it as a positive upgrade. I think the new interface will be more appealing to new users, for example the web browser style, as it should be more familiar to users of web applications. The shared media functionality is by far the best aspect in my view, as it opens up so many new possibilities. The ability to have rich media integrated within objects is brilliant, and it makes things like collaborating on documents and sharing slides and content much easier."²⁴²

"Took ages to get used to and I like the improvements they've made - on the whole, much better than the old one."²⁴³

"It's neater, but seems slower. Haven't used the new functionality."²⁴⁴

"Still getting my head round it. I know I should use it more and then it would be more intuitive still, but although I use it regularly with alts and although I know that they say stuff won't be lost when upgrading, I'm somehow still illogically nervous of logging into viewer 2 with my main account and her ginormous inventory. Just in case... I never use the camera or movement controls, so I'd personally prefer option setting to select what I wanted in the navigation panel at the bottom – didn't realise just how often I used the map – a bit like you don't realise how often you look at your watch until you forget to put it on one morning.

And I find it a little disconcerting that the inventory etc menu shifts the focus of the screen rather than just overlays the view, but that's just being picky. Media on a prim is a game changer. Not just because you can do that, although flash-based tools like Edistorm being able to be shared by students inworld has real potential to extend learning scenarios without breaking the immersion, but because it removes the cost implication from lots of things.

Being able to take snapshots and send them to Flickr, for example, means students can share these without having to pay. Or to use presentations in role play scenarios without uploading them (this doesn't of course, include those activities based around building things, for which textures may still be required, but to be honest, that has very little to do with our main developments)."²⁴⁵

"It's hard to get used to, for an old dog like me & I didn't give it much time yet (also fearing the rumoured inventory bug, I can NOT permit to loose inventory) but it looks promising, especially media on a prim, which was a pain in land settings. Looks like it's going to indeed enhance the experience and make more interaction possible.

But I recently ventured into main land and the lag horror is the same as three years ago. Linden Labs might consider improving the user experience not by patching the viewer - or depressingly boring new first experience area's - but investing in some hardware and connection."²⁴⁶

"The UI confuses me ;-), but media on a prim is fantastic news."²⁴⁷

"Media on a prim is great. I think for novices the UI/usability changes are a great step forward but for me as 'an old hand' I still revert back to the old viewer because I know where everything is.

²⁴² Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

²⁴³ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

²⁴⁴ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

²⁴⁵ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

²⁴⁶ Ferdinand Francino, Project Manager, CU There, Glasgow Caledonian University

²⁴⁷ Kathryn Trinder, Research Fellow, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University

Also, the new viewer tends to trash the appearance of my avatar and I've not yet had time to spare on sorting out new skins etc. which look okay in both viewers.”²⁴⁸

“Media on a prim is cool stuff and I will try to use that feature when we do the Project Management unit again in the next academic year.”²⁴⁹

“I only really have experience of this as a student (as it was used in class). It was great when it worked, but there were times when, as a class, we were standing around staring at a blank prim – fortunately we were able to stream through VLC as well, and used this as a backup.”²⁵⁰

“Aside from the generally lower usability due to things being hidden away unlabeled, we have noticed several practical problems, but we were very pleased to see Esbee Linden’s blog post, in which he acknowledged the widespread frustrations and promised to fix such things as the missing 'Create' item in the context menu when trying to build on a prim floor, as well as announcing a complete U-turn on the newly entogged camera controls.

However, other problems persist. For example, the majority of our residents are not touch typists and so find the floating chat window is of little benefit because the text input bar stays firmly glued to the bottom of the screen.

In short, Linden Lab got a bit carried away when giving the viewer a makeover, and ended up putting sleek beauty far ahead of intuitive usability. Even the 'help' function requires the user to just click on everything in sight to see what it does, rather than being an index of tasks and how-to’s. Many web pages on the subject are similarly flawed.

What this means for us a conflict in choice of viewer: Adopting Viewer 2 would mean we were in a better position to coach newbies, but would seriously affect workflow – not just because of a 'learning curve' but because the Viewer 2 interface simply requires more mouse movement and clicks per task.

The media on a prim does, of course, represent a revolution. Within minutes of the viewer’s release we were excitedly discussing the possibilities, which go far beyond such mundane items as TV screens and web pages. However, we need to bear in mind that – for the time being – the majority of Second Life users do not use Viewer 2, so it would be folly to create content which depended solely upon this functionality. Concerns have been expressed about the potential lag problems of many avatars walking about with media-primms on their heads. Time will tell on that one.”²⁵¹

“The media on a prim is very exciting, and opens up lots of new possibilities. This is the one thing that OpenSim can't do, which makes Second Life better in this respect. Don't mind the new look/feel, but my colleague hates it.”²⁵²

“Mixed views. The media integration obviously is a major development and already has opened many new opportunities for projects in Second Life, this includes the project “Visualising the Conflict: Immersion in the Landscape of Victims and Commemoration in Northern Ireland” with

²⁴⁸ Jane Chandler, Technology Supported Learning Research Group, School of Computing, University of Portsmouth

²⁴⁹ Marc Conrad, Academic Director of the Field of Undergraduate Computing, University of Bedfordshire

²⁵⁰ Colin Malkin, Education Guidance Adviser, Lifelong Learning Academy, University of the West of Scotland

²⁵¹ Anna Peachey and Greg Withnail, Eygus Ltd for The Open University

²⁵² Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

leverages the media integration feature as well as virtual learning environment and hardware integration.

Some issues with the new viewer include:

- Dialog boxes and notifications on the bottom left on the client instead of the top right are a pressing issue. Some simulations we have created use dialog boxes, which users can now miss due to most of the commutation with groups and friends being presented in the same area.
- Simple tasks such as uploading textures are now longer on the file menu and would seem to be hidden.
- Changing land settings is tedious with the world menu having two menu items and three options for similar land settings.
- Trying to pass an inventory item to a friend requires a new window to be opened for the inventory in order to be able to transfer objects.
- Cannot use new viewer for uploading textures on a Mac.

That said, viewer 2.0 is used on a daily basis. The media integration alone makes it a viable choice over previous viewers, I am confident that further releases will address issues which users are facing.”²⁵³

Do you have a view on the new Second Life Terms of Service conditions and ownership rights which are creating a bit of a hoo-hah in some quarters? Do you think it will affect you? Does it matter in the grand scheme of things?

Generally, the response to this can be summarised as: “Meh.”

“Erm. Better get reading then...”²⁵⁴

“Just typical Linden Labs, doesn't really matter.”²⁵⁵

“Not really had a chance to get my head round this. We were concerned that spending time developing resources for Second Life may be a wasted effort if it went belly up. I understand that we can re-use 3D resources created in Second Life in Open Sim, but at the time Open Sim had no native VoIP support; the platform wasn't going to be a solution for the type of skills training we were focussing on.

With the open art pathway in Wonderland we can now create 3D assets using standard 3D authoring software packages such as blender, sketchup, Max and Maya. As we have three work streams, VCC, Unity, and COMSLIVE, all of which do or will use 3D media, we can support a fairly efficient workflow in which we can develop almost simultaneously for all work streams.”²⁵⁶

“On the plus side, from my reading of the terms, I can take a screenshot of Second Life and not have to ask Linden Lab for permission to use that image in a paper or publication. That is different from the legal situation for just about every other software package you can think of!

²⁵³ Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster

²⁵⁴ Dr. Ian Gadd, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

²⁵⁵ Shaun Allan, Second Life Developer, University of Sunderland

²⁵⁶ Nigel Wynne, Senior Academic in Learning and Teaching, Birmingham City University

What I would like is better support (legally and technically) for taking in-world content out of Second Life.”²⁵⁷

“I do have some concerns over the lack of a facility to back up inventory offline – one can’t keep on asking for a region to be rolled back when things go wrong. It is the nature of educational use of Second Life that the majority of objects created or builds tend to be one-offs: for example, student work, which is essentially irreplaceable. Long-term ownership of artifacts and archiving of installations will become an issue in the future if off-line storage is prohibited.”²⁵⁸

“Um, despite being in an iSchool, I’m not sure I have read them properly ;-(At the moment I’m not contemplating using another VW and I haven’t built a huge amount, so I haven’t seen it as a major worry.”²⁵⁹

“We haven’t had time to investigate yet but hope it will not hinder our intention to be as open and sharing as possible with our facilities.”²⁶⁰

“I don't think it has changed my views and intentions significantly, given that I was never anticipating migrating my builds (or, more to the point, anyone else's) to other worlds. I do create quite a lot of content from scratch so the option is there for some of it; anything computationally intensive is handled by an external server anyway. Ultimately I suspect I would be able to migrate to an OpenSim world reasonably easily provided it had decent scripting performance -- that can't be far off now.

That said, I have no idea whether I will ultimately end up in OpenSim or somewhere completely different. If the University was suddenly to endorse a.n.other non-OpenSim virtual world, I would do my best to support that, possibly for new developments in the first instance. That means that I most likely wouldn't abandon Second Life; I see it as the metaverse hub for some years to come.”²⁶¹

“I think mostly not applicable, due to focus on OpenSim.”²⁶²

“It confuses me. Linden Lab has reiterated and clarified a situation that they have always maintained. The ability to export your content was never part of the main viewer functionality, it was only offered by third parties. Linden Lab have clarified that they are not prepared to allow this to continue since they have to be seen to maintaining the IP rights of the creators of content. It seems a lot of people, in academic circles and elsewhere, want to throw the baby out with the bath water because they're being told they can't do what Linden Lab never offered them anyway.

I'm not sure if and how we will see a way forward in this, although it is my understanding that Linden Lab are looking at ways of doing it. The whole situation surrounding IP rights and legislation is quite a mess. There are, naturally, a number of vested interests and differing opinions - from tightening everything up even more, imposing DRM measures that are frankly both draconic and idiotic as they are unenforceable, to an equally unfeasible totally laissez-faire situation that would, for example, destroy the writing, photography and similar industries. The speed of legislation, even

²⁵⁷ Dr. Daniel Livingstone, Lecturer, School of Computing, University of the West of Scotland

²⁵⁸ Dr. Geoff Barker-Read, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, University of Leeds

²⁵⁹ Dr. Sheila Webber, Senior Lecturer, Information School, University of Sheffield

²⁶⁰ Rose Heaney, Learning Technology Advisor, Schools of Psychology and Health & Bioscience, University of East London

²⁶¹ Dr. Peter Miller, School of Biological Sciences, University of Liverpool

²⁶² J Ross Nicoll, Research Fellow, School of Computer Science, University of St Andrews

emergency legislation, lags dramatically behind the ability to technology to circumvent the protections that some insist are required.

Linden Lab are in the unenviable position of having to visibly and punctiliously following the laws of California, the USA and international copyright treaties even as most of their user base are screaming that the law is an ass - although with some on both sides of the fence of course.”²⁶³

“I don’t have a lot of problem with it. However, it is a difficult to get your head around and I may be breaking rules I did not know existed. Although all reasonable effort has been made to ensure I don’t!”²⁶⁴

“Don't think it matters too much - but another reason why we like to keep as much as we can on the cloud (e.g. PIVOTE).”²⁶⁵

“I'm just waiting to see how it develops for now.”²⁶⁶

“I really don't think this will affect us much at all. I'm far more concerned about people's reactions to the staff changes in Second Life.”²⁶⁷

“Always had a problem with (a lack of) ownership rights. Need to be able to export and import objects.”²⁶⁸

“It might matter re ownership of content at institutions for backup purposes, if you have to be the creator of something. Where we’ve had an external builder, we’ve carefully made them use our prims, but it will apply soon to all the stuff created by someone leaving the institution. Mostly, I imagine it won’t affect us too much – we’re not doing much grid switching, we never planned to cheatingly copy other people’s work/builds etc etc.

Although I sort of appreciate the idea of having a covenant statement about allowing photography (the snapshot and machinima tos), I’m not likely to check when I go somewhere new either. But I would be a bit shocked if I went to log in one day and found my own builds staring me in the face from the login screen!”²⁶⁹

“I don't think it will affect me. But the fact that they can, and do, change the TOS should be considered a warning shot. We are putting our HE/FE development in the clutches of a commercial enterprise who's first and actually only target is to make a profit. We might be held hostage in the future, with god knows what TOS change, having invested too much to walk away from it. Yet another reason to start thinking in another direction, where we are the owners, and not the renters, of the virtual real estates and goods on there.”²⁷⁰

²⁶³ Eloise Pasteur, independent developer

²⁶⁴ Evelyn McElhinney, Lecturer in Advanced Practice, School of Health, Glasgow Caledonian University

²⁶⁵ David Burden, Manager, Daden Limited

²⁶⁶ Gemma McLean, MD and Lead Developer, Gemixin Ltd

²⁶⁷ Tim Johnson, Adviser in Digital Literacy, ILS, University of Worcester

²⁶⁸ Simon Walker, National Teaching Fellow, Head of Educational Development, University of Greenwich

²⁶⁹ Kate Boardman, Head of e-Learning, University of Teesside

²⁷⁰ Ferdinand Francino, Project Manager, CU There, Glasgow Caledonian University

“No strong feelings.”²⁷¹

“Having skimmed over articles relating to this, it would seem that we would not be majorly affected by the terms of service conditions and ownership rights.”²⁷²

²⁷¹ Ian Truelove, School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design, Faculty of Arts & Society, Leeds Metropolitan University

²⁷² Kerri McCusker, Research Associate, Serious Games and Virtual Worlds, University of Ulster