

Online presence for learning and employability: students' use of profiles in social networking environments

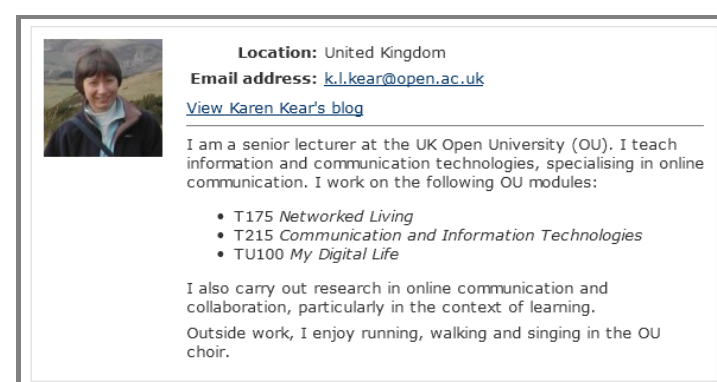
Karen Kear (k.l.kear@open.ac.uk)
Frances Chetwynd and Helen Jefferies

Background

This project concerns users' profiles in online social networks. The user's profile is an area where a member can share information about themselves and add photographs or graphics. The profile forms a central role in many social networking environments, such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

Profiles enable participants to reveal their interests and personality, and learn about each other. In the world of work, profiles enable people to communicate their skills and experience to employers worldwide.

But how effective are profiles in representing individuals to other users and building a sense of community? These questions motivate this research.

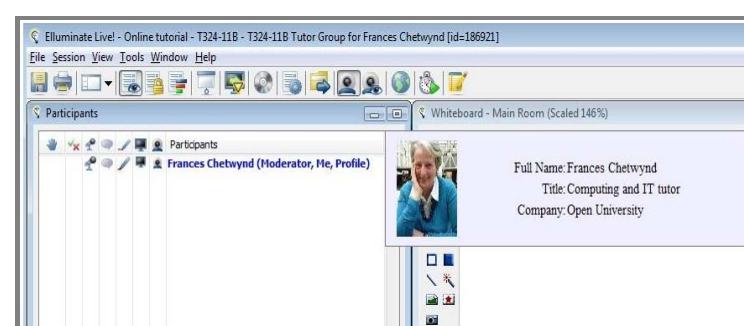


Karen's profile in Moodle

Aims

The aims of the project are:

- to investigate how user profiles contribute to online identity and community - in relation to the world of learning and the world of work
- to investigate how students use the profile facility in educational online environments
- to support students in developing their public online presence via their user profiles.

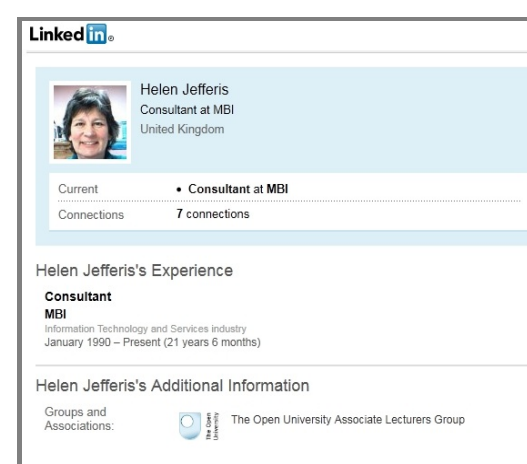


Frances' profile in Elluminate

Activities

The project will take place within the new Open University module *My Digital Life*. Using two of the tutor groups, the project will investigate students' use of profiles in Moodle forums and other social networking environments.

Data will be gathered at the start and end of the module, via observations, qualitative online surveys and online focus groups. This data will reveal whether students' use of profiles, or their perceptions of their value, have changed during their studies.



Helen's profile in LinkedIn