

Bloomsbury Survey: Overview Report

Overview

1,263 staff and students from across all six Bloomsbury colleges participated the **Bloomsbury Survey of Web Use** over a two month period in the summer of 2008. We would like to thank everyone who took part in this survey.

The survey aims to discover the extent to which web-based technologies for communication, content editing and sharing are known and used among Bloomsbury Colleges stakeholders, which includes students and staff in their various roles.

Response demographics

The majority of responses came from the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) and Institute of Education (IOE): 36% from RVC and 27% from IOE. Birkbeck and the School of Pharmacy (SOP) contributed 11% of responses each and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) contributed 8% of the responses each.

More than half of respondents (58%) were students, divided into undergraduates (32%), and postgraduates (26%). Staff (37% of all respondents) were divided into administrative, academic, research and support staff (13%, 11%, 7% and 6% respectively) with the remaining 5% selecting their role as 'other' and classing themselves as teachers, librarians, vets or a combination of the above roles.

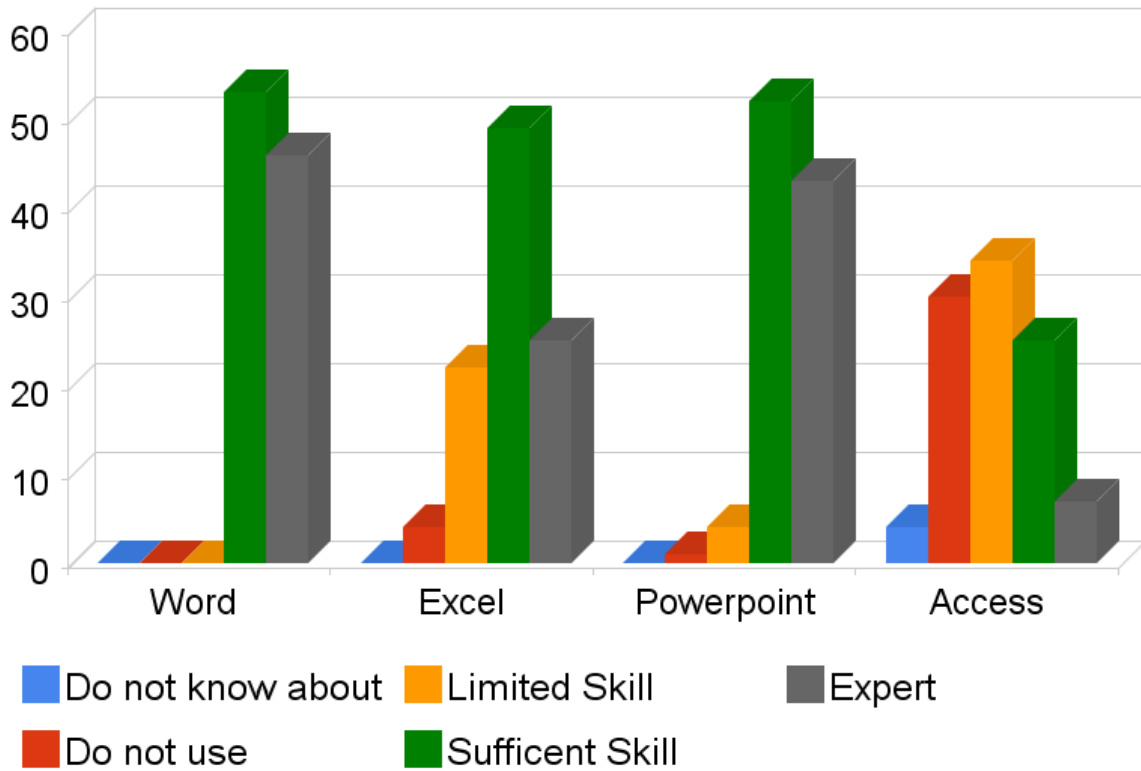
All age groups responded to the survey. Each of our six age groups (18-21, 22-25, 26-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51+) was represented by at least about 10%, with 22-25 year olds slightly dominating our population with 22%. Two thirds of our respondents were female.

This report focuses on a general overview of the survey results including some initial comparisons of the data by role. Age, gender and institutional affiliation were not yet taken into account.

Editing documents locally and online: skill level

The majority of respondents rated their skill level in using Word, Excel and Powerpoint as "sufficient" or "expert" whereas skill level with an Access database was much lower. The graphs below are for academic staff; generally academic, research and support staff rated their skills significantly better than students, except for databases, for which postgraduate students and support staff indicated better skills than other stakeholders.

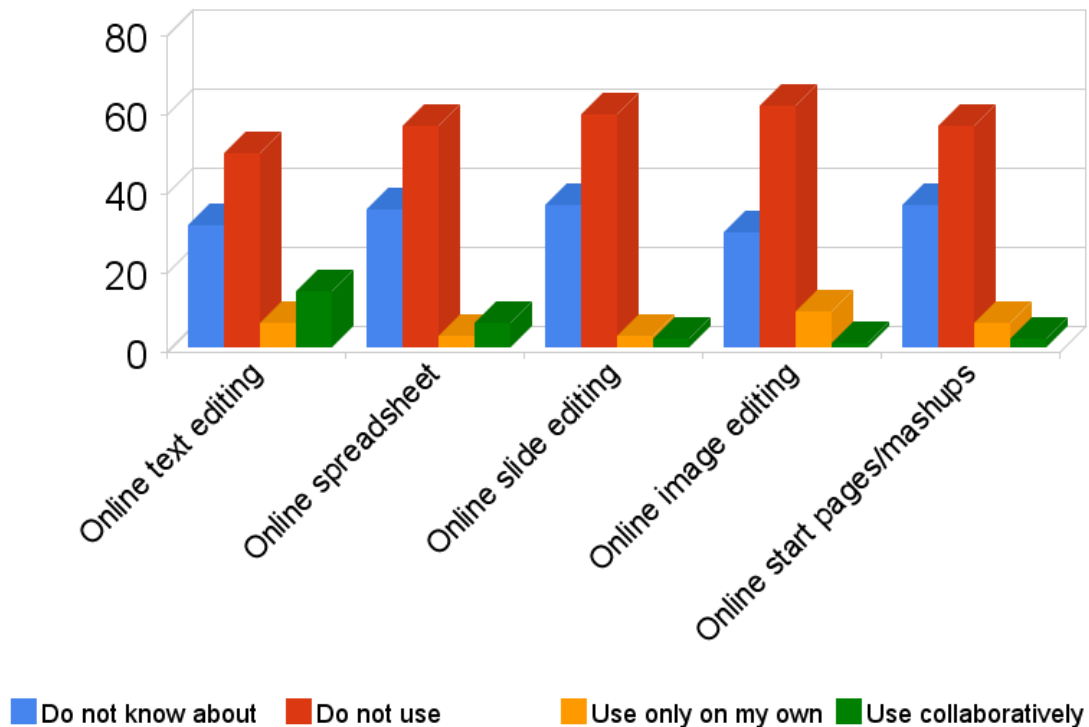
How would you rate your skills in using the following software on your PC?



For online editing tools, the general picture was very different; very few respondents report using these tools either on their own or collaboratively as shown below (for example 6.5% of all respondents use online text editing on their own and just under 7% use it collaboratively). Collaborative use is slightly higher for academic staff and researchers with around 14% using online text editing tools in this way.

The graph below shows the percentages for academic staff.

Do you use any of these technologies to edit online?



About 40% of undergraduate students report not knowing about most online tools; this number drops to roughly 30% for postgraduates, academic (shown above) and research staff, and to 20% for support staff.

Online communication

Perhaps not surprisingly, email was reported as being used regularly by the majority of respondents with all but 4 using email (one respondent reported that they did not know about email). Email was also mentioned by the largest group of people later in the survey, when asked which of the technologies had the most potential to help them in their institution.

Approximately half of respondents used discussion boards, text chat and social networks occasionally or regularly to communicate online. Students and research staff report more frequent use of text chat and social networks than discussion boards.

Asynchronous discussion boards are primarily used by postgraduate students, academic and support staff (two thirds), while just over a half of undergraduates and researchers use them occasionally.

Video conferencing is only used occasionally, and then mostly by academic staff: about half of them report using it, whereas two thirds of the other groups indicated that they do not use video conferencing at all.

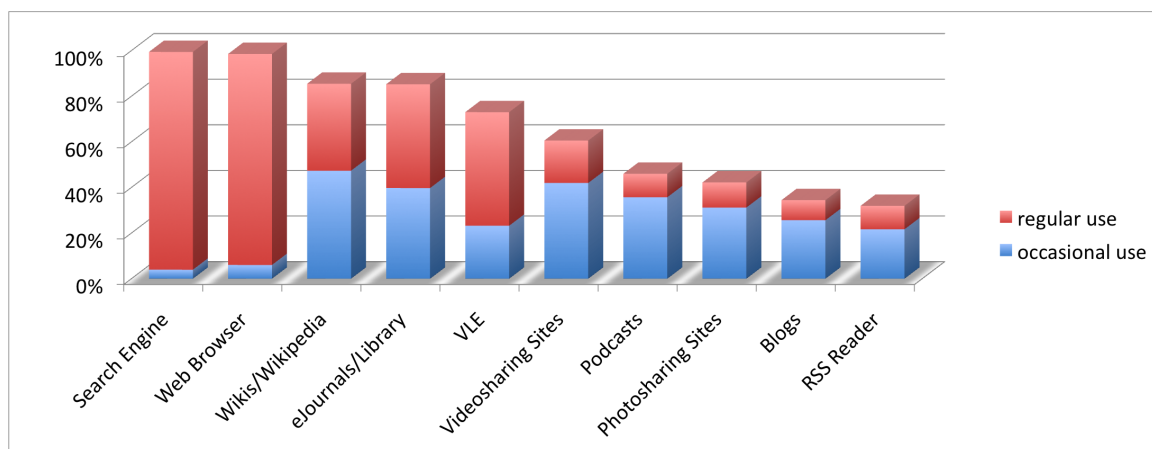
Virtual worlds, such as SecondLife, do not play any significant role for Bloomsbury Colleges with only 2.4% of respondents using them occasionally and 1.8% using them

regularly. However, the majority of people had at least heard of virtual worlds, whereas only 13.4% indicated that they had not heard of them at all.

Accessing online content

In terms of using the Internet to access online content, the survey confirmed that web browsers are used on a regular basis by the majority of users (92.5%) and occasionally by most of the remainder (0.8% reported not using a web browser, and 1% reported not knowing what a web browser is). The highest percentage of people report using search engines to access online content (95.5%), with wikis, online library catalogues/journal databases and virtual learning environments (VLEs) following closely behind. Not surprisingly, VLEs are essential for half of the academic staff and students, with four in five undergraduates logging on regularly.

How often do you use the following technologies to access content online?



Less than 8% of all students do not use a VLE; percentages for other groups are higher - with 15% of academic staff, 35% of support staff and nearly 50% researchers. While wikis are accessed at least occasionally by more than 80% of our users, this appears to be mostly for sites such as Wikipedia. The survey does not indicate how many users are editing wiki content.

More than half of our users never use blogs, and interestingly the highest number of non-bloggers were undergraduate students. RSS readers were used as much as blogs: around 30% of respondents used them occasionally or regularly. However, when comparing the familiarity with these tools, 19% indicated that they did not know the concept of RSS, compared with just under 5% unfamiliar with blogs.

Photo sharing services are used by about 11% of all respondents, which is only slightly higher than the 9% of regular blog readers. But interestingly, photo sharing services has a significant lead over blogs regarding occasional users with 32% versus 25%. Support staff are the most active photo sharing group.

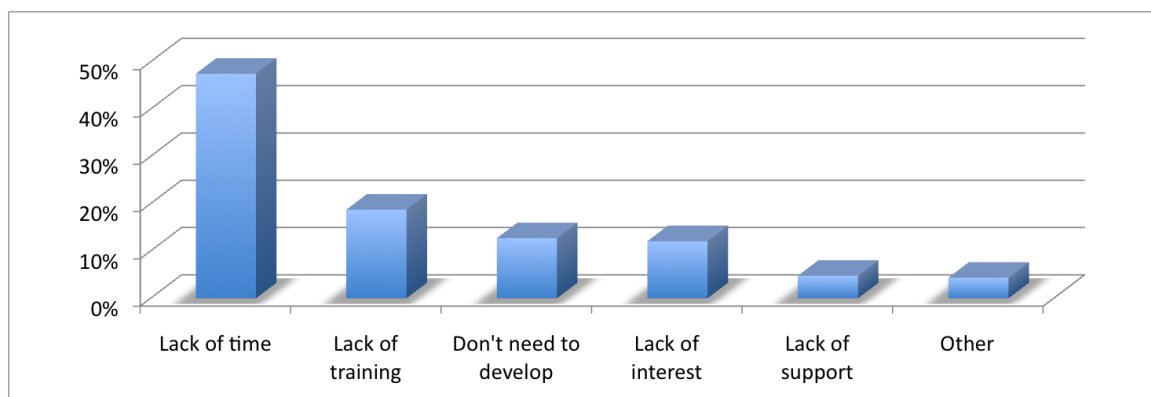
Perceptions

When asked how comfortable users felt with using the computer and the Internet, almost 90% of the respondents reported that they found using the computer easy and that they enjoyed communicating/networking online. Academic and administrative staff were slightly less likely to network with other people online than the other groups. Three in five people like to engage with new or innovative technologies, with research staff

being the most pro-active users of innovations.

While half of the respondents felt their institution provided everything they needed for effective online collaboration, academic and research staff were clearly more critical than postgraduate and especially undergraduate students; the two staff groups were twice as likely to criticise the institutional offerings compared to students. These views should be seen in the light of a general overwhelming satisfaction with current online technologies and their appropriateness for university work, though interestingly administrators and researchers appear to wish for future improvements more than other groups.

What most prevents you from developing your expertise with these technologies further?



Learning new technologies, however, requires effort and motivation. The most detrimental factor to developing this expertise was reported as lack of time which was true for almost half of the respondents. However, fewer undergraduate students (40%) found time to be a problem. Institutions should note that almost 20% of respondents indicated that lack of training prevented them developing their expertise further. Just over 10% of people felt that they did not need to develop, and a similar percentage said that lack of interest prevented them developing their expertise further.

Open questions

The replies to open questions exemplify the breadth of technology use and pockets of interest. For example, a number of respondents mentioned e-journals, conferencing tools and VLE-integrated instant messaging as technologies they would like to explore further. Other frequent recommendations were reference managers and mindmapping tools. While several respondents were not adverse to trying out new technologies if they served a purpose, there were also critical - as well as positive - comments about the use of the VLE. Indeed a few respondents were concerned that technologies were favoured over face to face communication.

Conclusion

This overview report presents a summary of the initial findings from the Bloomsbury Survey of Web Use. The results provide us with a better understanding of our overall user group. An analysis by roles helps us profile our stakeholder groups in order to identify preferences for technology use and, with additional detail, to design more appropriate development and training strategies. Such profiles help to articulate any gaps between stakeholders; for example between academics and undergraduates, administrators and researchers, postgraduates and support staff.

Overall this data enables us to identify in much greater detail the technologies that are appropriate and practical for our stakeholders with their individual skill and confidence levels; the main goal that the APT STAIRS project set to achieve using the User and Innovation Development Model (UIDM).