futurelab

Greater Expectations

Supporting young people's aspirations and entitlements in their lives and learning, and the enabling role of digital technology

Year Two Research Report
12th March 2010

Contents

Overview

Objectives

The Greater Expectations project aims to enable young people to use technology effectively, safely and purposefully to support their learning, feel confident and empowered to secure their entitlements, and make positive changes in their lives.

A core aim of the project is to deliver a free-to-use, learner-centred resource that supports young people to have a voice and take action around the principles and issues important to them. This resource aims to connect young people with resources, tools and gateways that illustrate how they can be confident, engaged and supported agents of change, and how technology can enable and facilitate that to happen.

The primary audience for this resource is young people aged 14-19. The resource also recognises an important secondary audience of supportive adults in young people's lives whose primary role would be supporting young people to use the resource and take action around the areas they choose to pursue.

Background

The objectives of the project support a number of initiatives within education and children's services, including Harnessing Technology strand two's focus on developing 'demand-led' reform and confident use of technology that closes the gap for disadvantaged learners, as well as Every Child Matters, the Children's Plan, the 14-19 agenda, Digital Britain, and increasing learner voice and personalised learning. The recent Pupil and Parent Guarantee's draft legislation highlights that young people's awareness of their rights and entitlements continues to be a priority.

Progress Overview

Work undertaken in year one of the project identified the common core principles and entitlements that run across a range of important policy and rights legislation and initiatives. These core principles and entitlements were further developed to incorporate the views of participants from year one's field work. This resulted in a taxonomy of themes and subthemes to structure the collection of content in year two. Field work and desk research also explored and established the overall requirements of the resource. A core advisory group was established to guide the project's development.

Year two focussed on the development of the resource in line with the core principles and organisational structure established in year one. Ongoing user involvement developed a resource that aimed to reflect the needs of the target audience and was subject to wider testing during a pilot in early 2010. Following user involvement sessions and internal consultation the resource was named 'Infocow'; 'info' representing the content of the site, and 'cow' aiming to both illustrate the social functions of the site and give it a appealing and distinctive brand. Content included in the Infocow resource was drawn from literature and resources harvested during years one and two together with suggestions from practitioners and young people. Year two also saw the development of the Greater Expectations network, including expanding the Core Advisory Group, and establishing a Young People's Advisory Group.

Year three will focus on promoting and disseminating the built resource both through the established core groups and through engagement with wider audiences. This will include online campaigns, such as adverts on social media platforms, as well as a competition and a launch event. The Young People's Advisory Group will be developed into a group of Infocow partners who will inform the development of the site, as well taking on some practical roles with the support of Futurelab staff. Minor revisions to the site will be ongoing in line with feedback from users. Resources will be developed to support practitioners working with young people to use the site.

Research Process and Methodology

The Research Methods for the project have incorporated ongoing desk research, field work with young people, and stakeholder engagement.

Desk research

_ During year one a series of existing policy documents were analysed to create a framework of 'principles' encompassing a range of entitlements and rights afforded to children and young people. Further desk research was conducted to populate the principle framework with indicative tools, resources and case studies.

_ During year two a literature review was undertaken to ensure that the development of the resource continued to be in line with policy initiatives.

Field work in schools (year two)

_ As detailed in the year one research report, a total of 21 field work sessions were conducted with 29 children and young people in three schools. The sessions were intervention-based, participatory workshops that built successively on material and activities from previous workshops. Therefore, participants were involved in session design and evaluation to ensure activities met learners' requirements and were involved where possible. Issues of consent and confidentiality and voluntary participation were discussed with all learners.

User research and testing (year one and two)

_ During year one a set of four workshops with young people and interviews with 12 stakeholders (e.g. teachers, industry professionals) were held to determine initial resource requirements.

_ During year two, twelve workshops were held with young people to ensure the development of the resource was in line with the requirements of the user group.

_ A workshop session was held with 8 teachers to discuss the possibilities and potential challenges of the resource being used within schools.

_ A pilot was held during February and March 2010. Schools engaged in different activities including analysing existing content on the site and the usability of the resource. This was still ongoing at the time of writing.

Stakeholder engagement

_ Other stakeholders were involved through interactive workshops and interviews, to elicit feedback on the project's aims, support networks and resource development. The events were as follows:

_ 5 meetings with the project's Core Advisory Group over Year one and two. The Core Advisory Group has grown to include 40 different individuals from the education, academic, media and youth work sectors.

_ 3 meetings with the Young People's Advisory Group during year two. This group has now been developed into the Infocow partner group.

_ Open Discussion Day and Learner Voice Conference input from industry, education, policy, and voluntary and community sectors

_ Workshop and expert interviews with academics

_ Workshop with people from the technology industry

_ Workshop with third sector professionals

_ Telephone interviews with parents and carers

_ Workshop with FE college teachers

Infocow partner network

_ An Infocow partner network has begun to be developed to support the development of the resource over 2010 and 2011. This consists of 10 individual groups that will feed into development and promotion of the resource over the coming year.

Findings from the desk research, field work and user testing sessions

Overview
Greater Expectations' core vision was "to create an online resource that supports young people to explore their aspirations and entitlements and engage with the information, networks and tools that can help put these into practice". After testing and development of the resource over year two, this core vision continues to embody the aims and direction of the site.

However, the online marketplace for 14-19 olds is a highly crowded area, with many commercial companies clamouring to get the attention of the age group. As such, for the Infocow site to gain popularity it has to offer something both highly relevant and useful for its audience. It is exactly for this reason that the resource continues to be valuable by providing an access point for young people to engage with supportive resources that otherwise may be missed in this overcrowded area.

It is evident that young people's engagement with many types of online material is facilitated through recommendations by friends and online sharing. The Infocow resource reflects this trend for social use of the web through linking to social software like Facebook and offers opportunities to share information 'horizontally' rather than relying on top down support. This aspect has strongly informed the marketing and development of the site over year two and the strategy for year three. It engages with Facebook to support the sharing of the site across 'friendship' groups, and will also use Facebook as an area to place online adverts for the site in year three. Equally, this sharing of media across groups has informed the more 'viral' aspects of year three's marketing strategy.

While the secondary audience of professionals has been highly supportive of the rights aspect of the site, young people have been seen to frequently approach the area of rights in a context-based way. As such, useful rights information has to be embedded in the questions and concerns that young people face on a day to day basis. This has led to the generation of a database of rights statements around themes and subthemes. Whereas other existing online resources frequently theme their rights information around the subject area of the organisation, the Infocow site aims to offer a cross

section of rights information focused for young people. This ambition of presenting a holistic resource for young people has been seen to be a relevant and valuable undertaking.

Teachers
The following findings are drawn from a workshop held with 8 teachers which aimed to explore the potential for the resource to be used within schools. The findings are presented alongside responses to the development of the resource and project where appropriate.

Access
It was identified that not all students have access to ICT, and even where access to equipment is provided in school, e.g. during breaks, not all students use it. As such, teachers reflected on a possible need for non-technology based resources that could accompany the online resource. This has fed into the requirement for supporting resources to be developed over year three, which will be created following a workshop with practitioners.

Teachers also raised the possibility of students accessing the resource through mobile phones. This corresponded to findings from workshops with young people that it would be beneficial if the resource could be accessed on mobile devices. While this has been added to the list of potential resource features, developing the core functionality of the site has taken precedent.

Use of resource in schools
Teachers were supportive of the aims of the site to bring resources together in one place and signposting young people to them, rather than creating a new resource.

The group of teachers identified a wider problem of students feeling 'disconnected' from schools, and the difficulties teachers face in finding space within the curriculum to offer advice and guidance to pupils. As such, it was felt that the resource could offer possibilities for teachers to offer support to pupils as part of specific subjects, e.g. in PSHE or Citizenships lessons, through one-to-one support and mentoring, or as part of tutorials.

The group also recognised the possibility for the site to have a more holistic 'offer' to young people than other sites by incorporating a range of different areas of interest.

While the group felt that there was a role for schools in promoting the resource they felt that it should be independently used by young people. In this way students could use it privately and no value judgments would be placed on their use. The group also reflected that if parents and teachers could access the site it could be off-putting to young people. This has been incorporated in the development of the resource by maintaining it as a 14-19 focussed site, through its branding and design. Equally, specific areas on the site have not been created for education professionals, such as a teachers' section. Instead, supporting resources for practitioners will be hosted on the Futurelab main site.

Technical Challenges

The teachers highlighted the problem of trying to 'keep up' with young people's use of technology and asserted that schools need to embrace the technology that young people are using. This has informed the development of the Infocow partner group and commitment to ongoing involvement of the young people in the design process.

The teaching group also highlighted the need to develop young people's skills in digital literacy to support them to think critically about the online material they access.

The group also asserted that there could be significant challenges in interoperability and use of the resource within schools in terms of school's acceptance of pupil's use of technology, and limits on what students can access in schools. The possibility of integrating the resource into school VLEs or websites to support and encourage its use was raised. Currently this has not been followed up. Initially, integrating into school systems does not reflect the core objectives of the project and secondly, existing school filters are likely to block a number of resources on the site and so limit its functionality. As such, VLE integration is not felt to be a strategic use of resources.

Challenges

The group highlighted a number of challenges for the web:

_ To account for teacher's confidence in their use of technology the site would need to be easy to use. This has informed the development of an effective and accessible search interface throughout year two, in order to make it accessible to all users.

_ The group identified there a number of similar sites already operating. While there are many sites to support young people, a core aim of Infocow is to bring these together. This has underlined the importance of the resource linking to useful sites, rather than generating new content. Equally, Infocow explicitly focuses on rights and entitlements, which is not a focus of other sites.

_ The group highlighted that the resource is trying to be very broad so faces challenges as to how it will it be able to focus and meet everyone's needs. This has informed the aims of the resource to be personalised for individuals, including recommending content to users based on their use, and the creation of profiles.

_ Teachers reflected on the value of the resource for young people and what would encourage the students to return to the site. This continues to be a challenge for the resource. Qualitative evidence from young people's workshops indicates that they generally only look for information on their rights when they feel these have been contravened. As such, for the resource to be continuously used it must provide useful information beyond basic rights information. This has linked to the core aims of the resource to link young people to tools and networks to support them in making positive changes, as well as providing factual information about rights.

_ The group felt that the site needed to utilise young people's skills in order to stay relevant. This has been fed into the development of the resource, both in terms of it drawing on social media as far as possible while supporting safe use, but also through the increasing involvement of young people to direct the development of the site e.g. as Infocow partners.

_ The group felt that the site would face competition with games web sites. As identified below, that resource is operating in a 'crowded marketplace' where many online resources are vying for the attention of the 14-19 audience. However, the resource is capable of linking to any relevant resources if they support the core site objectives of encouraging young people to engage with their rights and entitlements. Part of the year three marketing plan is to explore the possibility of creating a mini game to advertise the site.

_ The group also reflected whether young people need a motivation to engage with the site in the first instance, e.g. it being suggested by teachers / friends? This related to discussions in the workshops that teachers advocating the site may in fact work against the 'kudos' of the site. This concern around promotion of the resource has led to the development of the site using social media like Facebook, in order that young people can recommend or share the site among their own network. Also, the site is being optimised to appear in search engine searches around relevant terms.

Young People
The following findings are drawn from ongoing user involvement sessions held with young people and the ongoing input of the Young People's Advisory Group. The findings are presented alongside responses about the development of the resource and project where appropriate.

Overall Comments on resource and project aims
Young people generally felt positive about the web site. Things they liked about the site included: the ability to search for things relevant to their specific questions; a possible way to make knowing about your rights 'fun'; a way to think about or get new ideas; somewhere to learn how to do what you want to do; a space to see what other young people have done and what your friends are looking for; a place where your friends and other young people can help each other find information or share advice.

The themes, while being a useful structure by which to locate and organise material, were not felt to be useful for young people in searching the site. Although they were understood in principle, young people were often unsure as to where their own enquiries would fit under these themes when using them to search. As a result of this the themes have been hidden on the site, and are only used to organise and structure content.

It was felt that the resource needs to give users a clear idea of what it is about, including a clear description of its purpose and should indicate that it is for young people. This is especially important considering the depth of material and possibly intangible nature of rights and entitlements. It was felt the resource could benefit from guidance to support people to search and structure interactions in the site. This has informed the development of the homepage.

Rights
Young people, on the whole, understood the purpose of the site, though the concept of rights, and what they mean in day-to-day life, was less clear for most. Equally a significant part of the user development in year two was focussed on developing an effective search interface. Without the other functions of the site (social media links and rights information) being present, young people questioned how it was different to Google. Given the dominance of such search engines this highlights the importance of the other elements of the site.

While information around rights is implicit in the site through the links it contains, it was identified that the information around rights and entitlements was not explicit in the resource. As such, the purpose of the site was not immediately evident in testing. Following consultation with the Young People's Advisory Group, a means of making rights information explicit on the site was developed, through individual statements related to search terms.

Overall, user involvement identified specific rights information could be valuable provided it was clearly worded and relevant, while offering opportunities for individuals to find out more through further links. While existing internal desk research from year one and two highlighted a strong content and policy overview on young people's rights, it was not felt that Futurelab had the specific expertise to construct rights statements that were succinct and technically accurate. As a result, the Core Advisory Group member 'Children Rights Alliance of England' were contracted to deliver rights statements relating to specific themes and subthemes. The text was tested with 2 user groups and generally regarded as useful and informative.

Social media & Greater Expectations

The use of social media within the resource was embraced positively by most young people. There seemed to be a sense that the resource would offer something unique by creating an information/resource bank specifically for young people that they could also participate in (rather than simply being a limited Google).

There were a range of affordances of social media that young people were interested in having on the site. Across the different groups these related to connecting to other people, both friends through existing 'messaging' systems, and accessing and communicating with people who could help you, e.g. by offering advice, sharing information, etc.

A significant number of the features that young people tended to favour were those that were currently used in social networking sites (e.g. chat, personal profile, etc). It was not always clear however whether these were preferred because they were familiar and understood, rather than because they brought an inherent benefit to the site. During earlier design workshops it was sometimes challenging for the participants to see what benefits new, more unfamiliar features might offer. As such, development priorities were adhered to, to develop core site functionality, and it was felt that wherever possible desired site functionality would be harnessed from sites that already offered the service, rather than re-creating them on the resource. However, further restrictions were put in place in order to support safe use

of the site. For example, direct messaging was not felt to be appropriate functionality of the site due to safety concerns. However 'helpline, advice' was included as a filter for young people to use to search the site.

Young people were interested in the possibilities of passing and receiving information from 'friends'. Initial workshops identified a range of possibilities for sharing information among 'friendship' networks, as seen in the table below, which indicates the most popular features young people identified to use in the site (in order of preference)*:

Hanham High School (age 14; 9 male, 5 female)
Search engine
Connect to friends
Personal profile
Store info/videos/photos
See new and inspiring stuff
Use on mobile phone
See what friends searched
Rate and comment
Recommend and share sites
Use in school

KWMC: (age 14-18; 3 male, 3 female)
Personal profile
Chat to others
keep some stuff private
Post questions and get answers
See friends activity
See new stuff
Add stuff
Rate stuff
Make friends

*lists were compiled from ideas in each workshop so the two lists were different and should not necessarily be compared side by side.

However, during later user involvement sessions young people identified that, while they had an interest in specific recommendations from trusted friends, e.g. through votes attributed to resources, they were also interested in general opinion from the wider Infocow community on resources e.g. through collected votes. In addition, it was highlighted that frequently young people may be using the site and have none of their 'friends' network present on the site, either because they, or their 'friends' may have not created profiles on the resource. As such, a recommendation engine has been developed that offers an additional layer of information to the resources that result from a search. This highlights resources to the user that have been voted or commented on by 'friends', as well as wider ratings of resources from the Infocow community, and lastly those resources from within the search results that have been browsed most frequently by the community.

Preferred Media
The vast majority of the Young People's Advisory Group used social networking sites. Facebook and Bebo were highlighted as particularly popular.

Bebo was preferred by younger individuals; typically the top age of Bebo users was 15. Some advantages associated with Bebo were that it allows you to create your own 'brand' and more extensively personalise your page than Facebook. Negatives of Bebo were that it required more time to complete the sign up process, it did not have as many features as Facebook, and that it was associated with younger people.

Facebook was significantly more popular than Bebo, particularly among older users (15-19) with the vast majority of participants having a Facebook profile. No specific research was conducted on the frequency of user interaction with Facebook, but in discussion young people asserted that they checked their profile frequently, many checking it at least once a day. Specific advantages of Facebook were the amount of functionality it offered, e.g. direct messaging each other.

MySpace was used less frequently by all young people, and seen more as a site for promoting themselves or their band. The use of Twitter was marginal and almost non-existent among the groups. MSN was used by younger users, but its function appeared to have been superseded by 'Facebook chat' functionality for older users.

Linking with Facebook
Due to the vast majority of users having a Facebook profile the development of the site has been focussed on offering young people the opportunity to link their profile on the site to Facebook. However, users can still share resources through a range of social media including Bebo.

It was felt by the majority of Young People's Advisory Group that connecting users to Facebook was a good way to drive traffic through the site and share its use among other young people. However, they also identified that there would have to be some evident benefits for them to link their Facebook profile to the Infocow resource. A small number of younger participants (14-15) expressed that they would be reluctant to link their use of the Infocow resource to their Facebook profile on the basis that they preferred to keep their work and personal lives separate.

Overall, this indicates that the benefits have to be immediately evident to support young people in linking their profile to Facebook, and that this process has to be as easy as possible. This has informed the technical development of the site, including the employment of software to facilitate signing in with a Facebook id.

Young people identified two core benefits of linking their Facebook profile to the Infocow resource: the ability to gain social recommendations (e.g. see resources their friends had commented on), and that they would be able to suggest or communicate links to friends. While there was value in sharing links to Facebook profiles through traditional means, suggested as writing on Facebook 'walls', it was also identified that it would be beneficial to have private means to share resources in case they related to personal or sensitive issues (e.g. health).

No extended primary research was conducted into general internet use, but young people were specifically asked in the user testing workshops about their preferred search engine and email. Google was almost exclusively used as a search tool and was frequently the means for accessing all sites, e.g. going to YouTube via Google. This indicates that, unsurprisingly, for the Infocow resource to be found outside of direct links it needs to appear high on Google rankings.

From the field work, Hotmail and Yahoo (in this order) were cited as the most popular emails providers.

Use of mobile phones

It was identified that there are a number of young people who access the internet on their phone. For those who had the means to do this it was felt that it would be positive if they could access the resource on the phone. However, as the majority of young people would be accessing the site on laptops or PCs, development priorities have focussed on the core functionality of the site.

Choice

Having options to customise features of a site was frequently seen as being important to young people when using online materials, this typically included having the choice to share information, post a photo or log in.

This has resulted in the development of individual profiles on the Infocow resource, which includes the option to share a resource among a network, and the option to upload a profile image. While young people asserted that getting recommendations on the site was useful as a result of answering questions on sign up, some also identified that the process of creating detailed profiles when signing up to a site was off-putting. As such, the profile currently asks for minimum information on sign up, pending research on the possibilities for automated filling of profile information using software.

Privacy

The ability to keep things private, search for things confidentially, and choose how you interact with people on the site were seen as very important throughout the user involvement sessions and workshops. Ensuring personal data was safe and private, or having the option to not offer personal data, was important for some young people, notably females. The resource has incorporated these concerns through safety features such as removing the possibility for private messaging on the site, and eliminating discussion boards.

The issue of privacy has further informed specific functionality and engagement with the resource

_ Users are offered different levels of engagement with the resource. I.e. they can use it without logging in, they can create a standalone profile and choose whether to engage with the community, they can log-in with existing email addresses and choose whether to engage with the community, or can log-in with Facebook and link with their network and the community.

_ There is the specific option for users to 'go private' and hide their browsing while using the resource (anonymous browse data is collected to identify which sites are the 'most browsed' on the resource, to support recommendations)

_ It was identified that it would be useful to have a private sharing option in case users want to suggest resources to friends on Facebook around sensitive or personal issues, e.g. health. Currently resources can only be shared publically. This is being explored with the developers.

Reliability through ratings

It has been repeatedly highlighted throughout user involvement sessions that the site needs a robust ratings and commentary system. This has led to wider discussions concerning how young people know what information is reliable or trustworthy. Several methods have been explored and tested over year two to satisfy this, including showing the nature of the publisher of the resource (e.g. government, NGO, user-generated); creating a scale with how relevant a resource is to a specific content area; traditional voting and commenting; and seeing apparent usefulness based on the popularity of the resource on the site through votes or browsing history.

A rating system, including a simple vote 'score' and area for comments was continuously felt to be the most useful mechanism for users, as it was clear, accessible (i.e. immediately apparent to new visitors to the site), and replicated existing popular systems such as YouTube. This has been implemented on the Infocow resource.

Use in school

Opinions about using the site in school were mixed. Some young people felt it would be very important and could possibly be a way to help with coursework, think about future careers, or communicate with teachers (e.g. used in a history lesson or used in the library to answer a friend's question). Many identified the challenges of using it in schools as most schools will not allow sites that require log-ins. Equally, young people identified a psychological division between work and school based resources. As such, excessive promotion of the resource through schools and formal education risks it being presented in a particular, and possibly alienating, way.

Adults' role in the site

Early workshops indicated mixed reactions to adult's involvement in the resource. Some young people felt adult contributions would be valuable while others seemed to think it should be only for young people. It was felt that if adults were also able to create profiles, young people would want to have a choice of how to interact with them, and a way to reliably know who was who and what age they are. Few said they would use the site with an adult and few wanted adults like teachers or parents to be able to see what they were searching for.

As it is very difficult to restrict the age of individuals who create a profile on the site, features that offered interaction with other unknown users have been removed from the site to reflect these concerns. Equally, the site has been kept young person facing in terms of branding and design.

Importance of linking to local opportunities

Throughout the workshops young people asked about the extent to which the site connects to local as well as national opportunities. While the resource contains location specific links, and explored means to display these, the project team are also exploring possible links to dedicated local providers of information, such as the Plings project.

Design and Branding

It was identified throughout the user involvement sessions that the design must appeal to young people. Equally the branding of the site had to be engaging to young people.

Drawing on desk and field research with young people it was felt that a suitable name for the resource would incorporate a factual term to identify its use, and a more 'catchy' term to lift it from other site names. Four naming workshops were conducted as part of user research, together with an internal brainstorm. 'Infocow' was the result of this.

Content

Content for the site has been generated from existing and on ongoing research from year one and two and suggestions from stakeholders, including the Core Advisory group and the Young People's Advisory Group. In order to guarantee the material on the site is appropriate for this target audience, selection criteria were generated and validated with the Young People's Advisory Group.

In testing with young people much of the content was identified to be a good source of information. However, when comparing the material with their own media consumption it was apparent that there were differences not just in the nature but also the form of content. This was also identified as part of the stakeholder review in September 2009.

Participating young people, for example, frequently identified media based sites like YouTube, games sites, as well as social networking sites, as sites most commonly visited.

This has informed the sourcing of a wider range of video material related to rights and entitlements over the second part of year two. In addition, content selection has been added to a core role for the Infocow partner group who will support the development of the site over 2010 and 11.

Research implications on the online resource and project

More specific implications of the ongoing user involvement and input from the Young People's and Core Advisory Group have been outlined in context above.

However, some wider research implications for the resource and project have been identified below.

_ The resource provides a mechanism to search existing resources, mediated with opinions from a user's network and the wider community. However, it does not currently directly support young people to build or facilitate their engagement with the resources. This extra step can be seen as a possible barrier for young people to build their capacity to act on their rights. Such facilitation may be beyond the scope of the resource. However, there is a possible question of whether the resource can be developed to support young people to do this. On a simple level this could be through guided questions on the home page, while more sophisticated methods could support young people mapping and structuring their development.

_ The site will continue to need to respond and evolve morph over the coming year in order to reflect users' needs. This will mean that content will have to be added and unvalued resources will have to be removed. These will come from Infocow partners and the wider Infocow community. It is expected that the Infocow partner group will make decisions on what it included in the resource. This new influx of resources has implications for the scope of the resource, specifically the number of resources Infocow links to, and their perceived association with rights and entitlements. This will have to be carefully monitored over the coming year to ensure the resource remains associated with its core aim.

_ The possibilities for user interaction on the site have been heavily reduced as a result of supporting the safe use of the site, as well as prioritising alternative features. This has meant that the voting and commenting mechanism have become the core means by which resources are valued. Core Advisory Group members and young people have identified that the voting experience will be significantly more engaging if votes are published straight to the resource. However, this means that comments will need to be moderated on top of existing filter and flagging mechanisms that are currently in place. The Infocow partner group will need to take a key role in this, supported by Futurelab staff.

Recommendations for project dissemination and Year three activity

Promotion is evidentially crucial to the success of the site. The primary audience for this resource is young people aged 14-19. In exploring the existing sites that young people use it is apparent that a number of online activities, aimed at young people themselves, will be a valuable way to raise awareness of the Infocow resource and its potential value to young people. These could include:

_ Promotion on social networking sites, e.g. through the establishment of an Infocow identity and presence

_ The production and distribution of a 'viral' video clip via You Tube or related 'viral media'.

_ Placement of online advertisements promoting the Infocow resource on sites young people visit, such as social networking sites, gaming sites

_ Creation of a mini game to feature on games sites such as 'miniclip'.

As part of the core project aims to recognise the role of supportive adults in engaging young people in their rights, and understanding the possibilities these individual have in mediating the use of the resource, there is a secondary adult audience for the resource including:

_ Practitioners such as teachers, parents or carers, youth workers, whose primary role would be in raising the profile of and supporting young people to use the resource

_ To a lesser extent, leaders and influencers involved in directing and developing policies related to young people

In order to engage with practitioners who would be interested in sharing the resource with young people there are a number of online or print activities to promote Infocow. This could include:

_ Producing online CPD materials to support practitioners to bring the resource into their own work.

_ Promotion of the benefits of Infocow via relevant social networking sites used by practitioners such as Facebook and blogs.

_ Regular updates via social media that practitioners engage in, e.g. Facebook and Twitter

_ Promotion of the Infocow resource on portals and websites used by practitioners

_ Advertisement via email or print to practitioners

_ Inclusion in the Futurelab e-newsletter and on the Futurelab blog, Flux, to support the use of the resource among existing Futurelab networks

Relationships are important to the promotion of the resource. Where groups have been involved with the resource over year one or two, they have felt ownership, and invested in the resource. As such, developing relationships with the target audiences identified will be important, including analysing the relationships that are already in place, identifying gaps, and building contacts to fill those gaps.

Content will continue to need to be developed over year three in order to continue to ensure the resource is relevant for the target audience. Encouraging individuals to offer content for inclusion in the resource, e.g. through competitions, could both promote the resource and offer users the chance to feel more ownership of it.

Upcoming legislation continues to highlight the importance of young people's rights and entitlements, e.g. Every Child Matters, the Children's Plan, the 14-19 agenda, Digital Britain and Pupil Guarantees. As such, it would be useful to relate the work of the resource to ongoing policy initiatives when sharing among the practitioner and policy audience.

Broader analysis on the process of the project's iterative development

Overall, the process of iterative development has been highly valuable for the resource. The issues the resource attempts to grapple with are wide reaching. As such, it would be highly challenging to conceive of a resource which could engage with all these areas without ongoing research and feedback. This iterative process allows for such feedback to be directly incorporated into the resource development.

The development of a 'product' that is engaging to young people is challenging. From branding through to the specific functionality requirements, it is difficult to create a resource that can satisfy the diverse needs of users. As such, iterative development has meant that site functionality has been allowed to be created and tested with users on a small scale. Functionality that has been successful has been developed while unpopular features have been dropped without impacting too heavily on development costs.

The iterative development cycles have also allowed for smaller changes in the site to be tested rapidly though interspacing user involvement sessions between development sprints. This had the added advantage that user's feedback was able to be incorporated into the site rapidly and increased their sense of ownership of the site.

It has been apparent that in order to 'keep up with' the target audience's use of social media any tool has to be flexible and develop in response to demand. The iterative development cycle has facilitated this and allowed this ethos to be embedded in the project.

While the iterative project development has allowed flexibility for the resource, it does hold challenges relating to maintaining the core mission of the site. Balancing the guidance of users and stakeholders requires a continued reassessment of the project brief to ensure that changes remain within the original core remit of the project.

Wider recommendations

Qualitative evidence has highlighted factors that impact on young people's motivation to engage in finding out more about their rights. A key area of this is the perception that regardless of whether something is a right for a young person it is unlikely to be recognised by the wider adult world.

It has been identified that there is an apparent 'catch 22' in that frequently young people were only motivated to find out more when they felt their rights have been contravened. However, without the existing knowledge of their rights and entitlements, they were unsure when this contravention had occurred.

Ways of structuring support for young people to assist them in engaging and actuating their rights would benefit from further research.

Young people's use of social media is widespread and diverse and offers a range of possibilities for education and third sector professionals to engage with young people. This area would benefit from further primary research.

It is still challenging for teachers to find space in the curriculum to explore young people's rights. Subjects such as PSHE and citizenship can be seen as a catch all for non subject-specific areas.

Advisory Group Meetings

Core Advisory Group meetings

Two meetings were held with the Core Advisory Group over year two. Details of the meetings have been reported to Becta throughout the year, and a Becta representative has been present at both meetings. However, for completeness, an overview of the group meetings is included here.

Core Advisory Group meeting (CAG) 21st May 09

Aims of the meeting were firstly to provide an update on progress and clarify further the role of the Core Advisory Group for year two; secondly to begin a discussion around the priorities for the resource in terms of content and format; and thirdly to assess the idea of the (chat) 'bot'.

_ Overall the CAG were unsure about the value of the 'bot', feeling that although it had received an initial positive response from young people, this could be down to the novelty factor of the resource.

_ There was some disappointment from certain members of the CAG about the decision to narrow down to a 14-19 target audience.

_ There was discussion that, in general, young people are not interested in official, 'dry' information coming from charities, institutional sources or directly from the government. It was suggested that there might be more potential in trying to involve them in setting agendas and priorities. This will also affect the type of information a resource links to.

_ There was debate around the quantity and quality of information sources, i.e. the resource is trying to provide a large range of information and there are challenges to how this can be effectively managed.

_ Overall, there was support in the group for the idea of the resource supporting the 'transition' from casual interest in an area (e.g. volunteering, music, arts, careers, etc.) to a deeper engagement. Some CAG members reiterated that there is a distinction between reliability of the information provided and its 'range', that is, the depth and the personal meanings which can be drawn upon.

Core Advisory Group meeting – 13th November 09

The aims of the meeting were to update members on the progress of the project, including the decision not to pursue the 'bot', to present the resource, and to present and explore possible sustainability models.

Overall, the resource was well received and it was felt that it linked to useful sources of information. Within the context of sustainability, some concerns were raised around the possibility that fragmented funding could impact on the ability of the resource to continue its core mission, and single sources of funding were generally advocated.

Young People's Advisory Group

Specific direction from the Young People's Advisory Group has been included in the findings from research with young people's section above. However, for the sake of completeness, details of specific meetings have briefly been outlined below.

Young People's Advisory Group 13th May 09

This was spent introducing the group to each other and the project. Specific discussions concerned the aims of the project and explored the feasibility of the 'bot'.

Young People's Advisory Group 18th August 09

Young people were generally pleased with the project's progress; the move to include social media was well received, in particular through the link with currently used social networking sites such as Facebook. The social aspect was seen as an element that would make the site unique. Specific Activities Included:
_ Exploring the rating and commenting system.

_ Design feedback – the design was well received, the group emphasised that it would be valuable to customise the look of the site.

_ Security and privacy was highlighted as being important to the group

_ It was felt to be a good idea to have discussion forums which could link to social networking profiles.

_ Advice was offered on search refinement.

_ Profile – it felt to be a good idea to create profiles perhaps related to existing information drawn from social networking profiles.

_ Rights and entitlements – there was general agreement that it would be good to know their rights but it is rarely something they would purposefully go to search for.

October 30th meeting
It was felt that the progress on the site had been good. Specific areas of discussion included:

_ Metadata - the young people attending the meeting had had experience of entering metadata so some time was spent advising on development of the metadata form and possibilities for users to suggest sites

_ The specific chosen functionality of the Facebook connection was well received, though the need for occasional privacy was reiterated

_ The nature of the rights material on the site was discussed in detail and draft criteria for rights statements were established

_ The 'bar' being visible when viewing resources was reviewed by the group

_ Recommendation engines were explored

_ The design of the site was reviewed

Summary

At the end of year one it was identified that Greater Expectations is a project with ambitious aims. It endeavours to create a resource that is useful, informative and catalytic for young people, particularly those who face barriers in pursuing their ambitions, understanding and actualising their rights and having an effective voice in matters they care about. This continues to be the case.

At the end of year one it was suggested that paramount to the success of the resource was the inclusion of young people in the design and development of the site, the development of a strong and invested network, and an open and flexible feedback process. Year two of the project has attempted to develop these aims through the expansion of the Core Advisory Group to a wider community of individuals from different disciplines, the creation of a Young People's Advisory Group, ongoing user testing, and an iterative resource development cycle.

The overriding focus of year three is on the dissemination of the resource and creating an ongoing user base, and this remains the major challenge. The 14-19 audience is swamped with online products vying for their attention. As such, while dissemination is key, there will continue to be demand for refinement of content and site functionality in order that it continues to be a valuable resource for young people and supportive adults. Furthermore, there are challenges around ensuring that the community develop the site to be a useful and engaging resource, while remaining true to its overall project aims.

About Futurelab

Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

_ incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom

_ offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools

_ communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT

_ provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.

Futurelab
1 Canons Road
Harbourside
Bristol BS1 5UH
United Kingdom

tel: +44 (0)117 915 8200
fax: +44 (0)117 915 8201
e-mail: info@futurelab.org.uk
blog: flux.futurelab.org.uk
www.futurelab.org.uk

Registered charity 1113051

Supported by

Becta leading next generation learning