

# The Connected U

## About the project

### What

The concept of *The Connected U* is about all staff and students having and maintaining an online professional profile. For students this is about their employability; for staff, it is their professional standing. The project has focused on developing use of LinkedIn as a familiar social media platform already used by many staff, alumni, employers and students.

This project is delivering a toolkit of resources to support the effective use of LinkedIn by staff and students made up of artefacts in multiple media, including:

- Video 'talking heads' of employers describing how they scrutinise LinkedIn profiles, and other social media, as part of their recruitment strategies;
- Short video case studies featuring alumni and how they understand the importance of social media in relation to getting a job;
- Case studies from students and staff describing their use of LinkedIn and how this has helped them, especially in becoming confident, networked professionals;
- Leading academics talking about the importance of maintaining a professional network.

The 3 month long project was completed at the end of June 2015 and has been supported with funding from the Higher Education Academy.

### Why

This project's informing principle is,

Engagement in managing one's professional profile will drive engagement in developing one's professional capability.

### 'Presentation layer' for a common challenge

The focus on LinkedIn as a widely used social media 'presentation layer' is strategic: it is a straightforward tool for managing one's professional profile online. The expectation to have and manage one's professional profile helps to make both PPDP and Professional Recognition real. It

turns a good idea into something more tangible and meaningful, whether that is student employability or professional standing for staff.

To some extent staff and students share the common challenge of developing an effective online presence. The toolkit developed in this project will help both groups to support each other in addressing this.

Most staff and students are aware of LinkedIn and many are already using it. Employers and alumni in the Connected U project have reported how important a tool it is for them too.

We need to know how to use it well, both technically and as an effective professional networking tool.

## What we did

Connect U was produced at Sheffield Hallam University. Like other universities, we had already produced presentations for use in workshops targeting staff and students about getting started with social media and LinkedIn in particular, and has a series of leaflets in this area too. The project began by evaluating our existing resources and identified gaps in information and guidance to ensure we have materials targeting:

- Incoming students to Sheffield Hallam University
- Existing students
- Researchers
- Teaching and support staff.

The main development activity, guided by the project steering group, involved an Employability Adviser working with three student interns to develop a toolkit for staff and students to inspire them, and provide guidance and instructions for producing a professional profile by establishing and maintaining a professional LinkedIn presence.

## Who

The project was led by Andrew Middleton (Head of Academic Practice & Learning Innovation) with the support of a Steering Group involving university representatives (2 faculty academics), Kieran Pearson (Education Officer of the Hallam Union), and Sue Beckingham (ACES) who is known nationally for her expertise in using social networking tools like LinkedIn.

The materials were mostly developed by the employability adviser and the three student interns.

### Then what?

The Connected U project team created a toolkit.

Concurrently the University has another externally supported project (Re-imagining PPDP) looking at how students can be more meaningfully engaged in PPDP in and out the classroom. PPDP is too often presented as a problem - by taking a learning ecologies view, engagement in PPDP becomes more purposeful and meaningful. Connecting the outcomes of this project to the Connected U project will help us to clarify how students can do something useful to develop their sense of 'becoming professional' throughout their time at University that will have a long-lasting beneficial impact on their lives.

Secondly, academic staff who are fellows of the Higher Educational Academy are required to evidence their good professional standing. LinkedIn provides a useful presentation tool that will support this need. Working with the University's professional recognition scheme, TALENT, staff will be supported as a follow on project to develop and maintain their professional profile on various scholarly sites including LinkedIn.

### Further information

The Connected U toolkit is available here: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/profiles>

Please contact Andrew Middleton in LEAD for further information tel: +44(0) 22547544724.