	AHRC Whitefriars, Lewins Mead Bristol United Kingdom BS1 2AE **Telephone +44 (0) 117 987 6500** **Web http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/**	*Phillipa S.*	**AHRC and BBC** **Knowledge** **Exchange** **Programme;** **Knowledge** **Infusion**

Knowledge Infusion
FINAL REPORT

Reference:

University Partner

Organisation	City University
Department	Sociology

Title of Project [up to 150 chars]

'Alone Together?'

Start Date and Duration

Start date	**January 2009**	**Duration**	**3 months (further extension of 2 months)**

Academic details

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(Please add further boxes, if necessary, to capture details for all project partners.)

BBC Partner details

Name of contact	Title	Mr
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Post-doctoral Research Assistant details

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(Please add further boxes, if necessary, to capture details for all Research Assistants.)

Please outline the activities undertaken. In particular please highlight any changes to the activities as proposed in your application or the personel involved.

This extension project developed the original 'Alone Together?' project in a number of key areas. It aimed to

1. **Further our knowledge of online learning environments beyond the original single focus on the Blast website**

This included an indepth analysis of 24 further websites where online leanrng and exchange could be said to occur. These websites spanned learning and social webistes, a rnage of child, teenage and adult sites and multiple language websites. The analysis focuses on the key question of the relationship between content and context as well as the longevity of the webiste, user numbers and the facilities available. This research was undertaken by John Millner at the BBC, and collated by Brooke van Damme at City University in order to appear as a research package on the Blast webiste at a future date. This answered one of our dissemination aims which was to produce our own 'UGC' for the users of Blast so they could identify the work of the project. Initially, it was intended that BBC staff would be used to collate this material into an audio-visual package. However, due to the current re-structuring of FM&T, and the lack of availability of BBC staff, this task was completed by a CITY University PhD student with the required skills.

2. **Gather more data on young people's behaviour in online social spaces**

The initial intention was to dather this information via an online questionnaire posted on the Blast website in conjunction with edigital. This questionnaire would work alondside the analysis above to offer depth and breadth of data regarding young people's behaviour in online social spaces. However, due to a number of reasons, most notable the extended oduration the Blast website was offline because of re-design and re-launch issues, this method became unfeasible. Similarly the questionnaire, although designed, did not gather any responses for technical reasons. The unfeasibility of this method became evident in the 2month of the project. Consequently, an extension was requested and granted, and money was redeployed so this information could be gathered through face to face interviews with Blast participants during the workshops. Delegates were interviewed about online habits and interests with particular reference to learning and creative outputs.

3. **Deepen our understanding of teen perceptions of online creativity and the significance and learning potential of user-generated content.**

This information was due to be gathered through the online questionnaire, but due to the rasons oulined above, was instead gathered through the face to face interviews with the Blast delegates. This method was made possible through the extension which allowed for the tour element of the Blast project to be incorporated into the project (the tour runs from April- October, and the initial project would not have co-incided with this). This produced much richer qualitative data, most particularly around motivations and understandings of online and offline creative habits.

Although the methods and funding deployment was conseqeuntly altered mid-way through the project (some money was redeployed for technical equpiment in order to conduct the interviews and record the data), this did not adversely affect the aims of the project. In fact, the face to face interviews provided a much richer set of data from a wider geographical spread, and offered new insights which have benefitted the project as a whole, and fed into the re-design and relaunch process of the Blast website.

Please summarise the ways in which the above activities have embedded the research findings of the KEP project through targeted or niche research (this may also produce pilots or prototypes). Please refer to specifically to the target audiences as identified in your KI application.

The initial aim of furthering our knowledge of online learning environments beyond the original single focus on the Blast website draws on the qualitative analysis techniques utilized and developed in the 'Alone Together?' project to analyze and investigate comparable websites where successful learning can be said to occur. This aim directly speaks to one of the outcomes of the original project which found that learning within Blast was sporadic and mostly unsupported, and seeks to better understand how sites which have more consistent learning outcomes achieve this. Consequenelty, the research of the Knowledge Infusion project has specific implications for the design and managament of the Blast website and tour, but also situates Blast within a contemporary and comparable learning and creative context. By looking at other competitors, the project has produced a critical analysis of the ways and means through which Blast can fulfil its aims and objectives whilst maintaining a competitive edge. The 'Alone Together?' project raised some pertinent questions around what a learning environment *should* look like, and how design and management modifications can facilitate this. This project went much further, ultimately producing both specific and contextual data which has fed into the future design of Blast as well as critically positioning it within a wider creative and learning envronment. Alongside the online reasearch, the face to face interviews provided a deeper understanding of the potenital and actual audinces Blast is trying to attract. A better understanding of motivations and creative activities has contributed to the provision of bespoke resources which demonstrate a deeper understanding of the requirements of teenage audiences.

The particular teenage audience of Blast has therefore been addressed through this project in terms of understandings of motivations to post considered work, and the pleasures and activities on the Blast site itself. A broader understanding of facilities available to such an audience has deepened understaing around expectations, control and engagements elsewhere.

Finally, while the Knowlegde Infusion project has significantly improved understanding of the relational position of Blast,iit has also deepened understaing between industry and academia. The specific aim of the KEP project, to collaborate knowledge exchange between inustry and academia with equal beneift to both partners, has therefore been achieved and as indicated below, has strengtheed resolve for future collaboration.

What specific challenges were raised by the project? How were these challenges overcome?

What 'good practice' advice can you provide to others working on collaborative projects of this nature?

The nature of this project led to significant challenges. Most particularly the three month time allocation corresponded directly with the re-launch process of the Blast website, producing technical and administrative difficulties. While some of these were accounted for in the planning and budget of the project (outsourcing the questionnaire, budgeting for monies to collate dissemination products) some challenges were unavoidable. The website was offline for a month longer than expected – 2 of the allotted 3 months, meaning that gathering data through the website became unfeasible. Instead, an extension was requested and granted, which allowed for this data to be gathered through the tour populations. As suggested above, this offered equally significant, if different outcomes, which have nevertheless contributed to a greater understanding of Blast audiences and their creativity and learning levels.

Edigital, to whom we outsourced the questionnaire to, did not allow for under 16 year olds to complete the questionnaire, in keeping with the BBC child protection policy. This meant, that a crucial demographic would not have contributed to this research (the KEP project found that the average age of user of the Blast website was 15 years old). Face to face interviews, however, also sidestepped this issue, so that such data could be gathered. However, it does raise serious questions around how to research under-age children in a safe environment, but careful planning for future projects will address this specific issue.

The third major challenge was related to the first as team members of Blast were reduced in number following the relaunch. Many had scheduled holiday time after the completion of the relaunch. This meant that some tasks were redeployed to the academic partners, but the good relationships and communication meant this was not overly difficult.

The final challenge was the short duration of the project per se, which meant that there was insufficient time to gather long-term data from the face-to-face sources. The information gathered evidences the good relations and strong management team, who worked together on the project. Without their direction, this research would not have been possible. As it stands, we have a great understanding of the breadth of other websites, but would still like to complement these findings with an in-depth analysis of each site.

Did the extension to the collaborative/IP agreement to reflect these new activities have any new impact on the partnership? Please highlight any challenges that this posed.

The only impact the extension to the collaborative/IP agreement was to positively allow for critical reflection from both partners. This has resulted in exciting and positive exchanges, and has allowed for in depth discussion where both partners have been able to

Do the partners have plans for further collaboration? Yes
(If yes, please specify below)

The next stage of our research is to analyze where teenagers are posting creative materials and if there is a correlation between onlne and offline environments. Consequently we have applied for further funding with the AHRC, and hopefully will be able to continue our good collaboration.

BBC Partner comments (Please provide additional comments on any of the above.)

This research project had to overcome some unforseen obstacles. A serious delay in relaunching the Blast website, and the subsequent de-scoping of many of the site's most important features, made it much more difficult both to collect data on user behaviour and motivations and to assess website functionality. Operational problems of this kind will inevitably occur in the course of an 'embedded' industry/research community partnership like this one; and the fact that the project was able to flex its methodology, reconfiguring to accomplish the same research objectives by different means, testifies to the agility of the researchers and strength of the collaboration with BBC Learning.

The project's findings - on theoretical frameworks for types of online community engagement, on the relationship between design and ease of engagement with online social environments, on young people's motivations for contributing content to online spaces and associated attitudes to education, creativity and authorship - these findings should not only be of great theoretical interest to other researchers and practitioners in the field, but of great practical use in the further development of Blast and other online social learning environments.

Declaration

I declare that the information contained in this report is to the best of my knowledge correct and accurately reflects the conduct and outcomes of the project.

Academic Partner

Signature	Date
Print name	

BBC Partner

Signature _John Minnos_	Date 14/09/09

Print name	JOHN MILLNER , BRC 5-19 LEARNING

If you would like to provide confidential comments on any aspect of your involvement with this project, please do so by email to: j.pollock@ahrc.ac.uk

Budget Statement

(Please explain any variations between actual and forecast expenditure. You should attach a copy of any correspondence authorising significant virements.)

As suggested above, the technical difficulties of gathering data through the Blast website led a significant alteration in methodology. Consequently, some funding was reallocated for recording equipment for face-to-face interviews and the tracking of movements online. This re-allocation of funding was approved by the AHRC as the attached email correspondence confirms.

	Paid to Date	Actual Expenditure
DI - Staff	6523.00	6523.00
DI - Travel and Subsistence	1750.00	1182.86
DI - Other Costs	3950.00	2273.20
DI - Equipment	0.00	2525.70
DA - Investigators	500.00	
DA - Estates Costs		
DA - Other Directly Allocated		
IC - Indirect Costs		
Total	**12723.00**	**12504.76**

I confirm that the grant has been spent in accordance with the terms and conditions of awards.

Award-holder's signature

Head of Department signature

Print name (including title)

Date:

Date:

Institutional authorisation (for example Head of the Research or Finance Office)

		Institutional stamp:
Signature		
Print Name (including title)		
Position		
Date:		

Please enclose any relevant publicity material that has arisen as part of the Fellowship or its outputs (if not previously supplied).