

# A fusion of mobile technology and Second Life in a learning environment to support the transition from school to university

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents results from the pilot phase of the Economic and Social Research Council / Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council funded project, InterLife. InterLife represents a unique collaboration between education and computing science research to establish a robust, generic tool to facilitate transitional changes for young people. Importantly, this research is exploiting novel techniques in computing science to link real and virtual worlds seamlessly using mobile technology. In this paper we focus on the school to university transition. Students starting at university reveal a range of emotions experienced when approaching this major life transition. InterLife will provide a structured, safe, anonymous yet realistic introduction to this new world.

Educational research aspects explore how an avatar (virtual representation of self) can support an individual in a new situation and how a virtual environment can facilitate a real life transition. Initial findings reveal important aspects of the affect of an individual's digital identity, e.g. when engaging with activities in-world which could be considered risky or challenging in the real world. The vehicle is a private island in Second Life designed to mimic facets of student life and provide tools to support student progress. A feature of InterLife is the ability to continuously communicate in a seamless way between real and virtual worlds using a mobile device. Peer to peer mobile technology will allow students to communicate with in-world, record diaries, and observe activities.

Students' avatars will participate in induction and development activities monitored by a sophisticated, automatic logging system which records movements and interactions of individuals in world and between participants (in and out of world). This will allow us to visualise emerging patterns of movement and communication. Every participant has a virtual private room for personal reflection and development of a personal portfolio. Personal reflections will be recorded in diary room episodes, facilitated or prompted by the course team. Students are involved throughout the process and developments will respond to their needs. We anticipate that this "light touch" methodology will lead to an effective and engaging tool of genuine benefit to new students which will in time emerge as an important support structure for the whole degree programme.

## REFERENCES

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