

Evaluating 3rd Party Applications for Use in Teaching

During the past year, the number of tools and applications available online has increased dramatically. Education and software providers have worked together to make free and readily available resources to deliver learning. At meetings and conferences, education blogs and social media, different tools are being highlighted as essential for delivering online teaching. At the same time, the potential for misuse of such systems has also increased. If you are considering using a free or paid service or platform for your teaching, please take some time to consider the points below.

Reminder: when contacting students please follow [Acceptable use policy - Addendum 3rd Person Application Usage](#)

Purpose and Impact

Carefully consider the outcomes you want from a learning activity and then choose a tool to fit. Your fellow teachers are the best source for proven classroom tools, so take a look at our CPD activities to see what tools others are using.

If you are looking at a new technology, consider the reputation of the provider, or look at community sites such as [Top Tools for Learning](#) for an overview of applications in use and comments from users. Look at pages such as [EdTechImpact](#) for an overview of available tools, their purpose and impact, with reviews from real users.

Issues

- **Privacy and GDPR** - as the saying goes, "you don't get something for nothing" and many free sites will use the data they collect to attract advertisers or license the data to other companies. Some 3rd Party tools may require sharing of personal data (name and age, typically) or access to college systems (such as your OneDrive). The GDPR compliance of such systems must be evaluated and a college-approved tool used if available. At all times the highest possible privacy settings should be used, and students made aware of these. It is also good practice to tell students at the start of the course what tools they will be using. Systems that allow anonymous users have fewer GDPR concerns, however...
- **Safeguarding** - if tools will be used for direct communication between students then monitoring (either in the form of moderation or logging) must be in place and the students must be able to be identified. If such communication is part of the course, it must be linked to college email addresses and staff should never contact students using personal accounts through any application.
- **AADCOP** - [The Age Accessible Design Code of Practice](#) comes into effect on 2nd September 2021 and applies to "information society services which are likely to be accessed by children" (under 18's). Although this doesn't directly affect our college platforms, it does apply to any external digital services we may use, and we should assess such services for their alignment to the COP. If the application doesn't provide clear and accessible information about collecting and sharing data, it probably isn't conforming to AADCOP.
- **Accessibility and Inclusivity** - avoid using applications that only work on specific devices or platforms, i.e. mobile only or desktop only. Check that services work with common accessibility tools. If it is not accessible to all then an alternative format should be provided. Visit the [Accessibility SharePoint](#) for more information about making learning accessible to all.

Support

If you do decide to use a new tool in your teaching check and make sure it has clear and accessible support for you and your learners. Check providers' websites for help materials, and/or a contact email for support. Test it with your fellow teachers or the eLearning team to check how it works on our systems. If the application is not college licensed, we may not be able to provide additional support for you if things go wrong, but we would still like to know what systems we are using for teaching in the college.