



2 Oswald Street | Victoria Park | WA | 6100 | 08 9473 3888
www.moncrieff.com.au | info@moncrieff.com.au

Exchange website's days are numbered

A virtual community supposed to spread the gospel of better teaching and learning is to be wound down and warehoused, reports australianit.com.au.

In November, the 3162 members of the exchange website hosted by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council were told by email that the idea had not lived up to its promise.

Over the past six months, only 660 members had accessed the site, which was set up in 2006 to help with the task of "disseminating and embedding change and development in learning and teaching".

Council chief executive Carol Nicoll said: "It's just not worth our while continuing to invest in maintaining the exchange when there is not a large number of people using it."

The exchange was to serve as a kind of bulletin board, blog site and meeting space for those with an interest in teaching and learning projects.

Some 95 projects funded by the council had used the exchange, but only 12 had worked up extensive sites.

"Part of it is the way that academics operate. They enjoy and prefer face-to-face opportunities and they don't have a lot of

time," Dr Nicoll said.

For those academics inclined to mix it online, there are plenty of newer, universally available social web tools, such as Google Docs.

Sydney University's Simon Barrie, director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, said: "There are now well-established networks of discipline and topic experts in teaching in higher education in Australia, thanks in part to the work of the ALTC, and these experts are now frequently contacted directly for the sort of advice and discussion the exchange might originally have been intended to support."

Dr Nicoll said the exchange would stay open for current projects but be wound down and its material transferred to a resource library.

"We've commissioned a lot of work and we're concerned that reports sit on shelves or on our website."

Apart from a new search engine for the home website, the council will commission a series of "synthesis" reports, offering a summary, evaluation and links to useful material.

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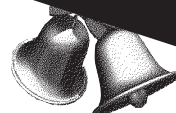
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Microsoft education resources

Microsoft has recently published an overview of education resources and programs under their 'partners in learning' program.

Resources listed include websites such as Microsoft Mathematics, where you can plot graphs in 2D and 3D, calculate numerical results, solve equations or inequalities and simplify algebraic expressions.

Over 40 other useful websites are included in this overview and can be downloaded at www.moncrieff.com.au/brochures.

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My School site 'an utter mess'

FROM AUSTRALIANIT.COM.AU

ACARA has hired 11 new staff members to address concerns before the updated My School website goes live in December.

Education experts have called for the board of the government body responsible for My School to step aside if issues raised over the publishing of incorrect data are not resolved before the revamped website goes live.

Schools Minister Peter Garrett avoided questions about whether he would consider delaying the website's launch until all the problems were ironed out. But an ACARA spokesman confirmed it had hired 11 extra staff to deal with school alarm.

"We're confident that with our resources, we'll be able to roll out the site with proper and correct financial data," the spokesman said.

The Australian reported that financial data on the My School preview portal were riddled with errors, with independent schools finding major discrepancies between information they had provided and that which appeared on the site.

Independent schools fear that if the updated website goes live as planned, incorrect data could smash their reputations and lead parents to false conclusions about the value they are getting for their school fees.

Executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, Geoff Newcombe, said there needed to be "some accountability" for the botched information. "This essentially is a company running a major project and someone has to accept responsibility," Mr Newcombe said.

"I feel for the board of ACARA but they've got to consider whether they say we can fix it or if they step aside and let someone come in who can. I think that's an option and I just feel very strongly about it."

Chief executive of Catholic Schools Australia, Stephen O'Doherty, said he believed the responsibility lay with Mr Garrett.

"Ultimately, it has got to be the minister that accounts for the performance of ACARA," Mr Doherty said.

Mr Garrett said yesterday he did not believe his department was letting him down on the My School rollout, unlike during the home insulation scheme when he was environment minister.

"It's not a question of whether or not anyone has been let down, it's a question of making sure that ACARA continue to work through any issues that have been raised in a comprehensive and thorough matter

and that is what I am expecting they will do," he said.

Opposition education spokesman Christopher Pyne said the updated My School website was an "utter mess" and Mr Garrett needed to personally oversee the consultation process to ensure it was handled correctly.

"I am very concerned that if the website goes ahead in its current form, the government will use it as an excuse to reduce funding to non-government schools," he said.



5 great 'e-time wasters'

There are so many great digital diversions out there in cyberspace that are perfect for wasting time. These easy-to-learn games don't require a lengthy commitment, so they're ideal for when you need a quick pick-me-up, or when you want to give the kids ten minutes of play time after a responsive learning session. Each game is suitable for players of all ages.

Insaniquarium Deluxe

This game challenges you to feed a growing number of fish, collect all the coins that they drop, and unlock unique pets as you advance through more than 20 play levels. The problem is, each fish requires special food that you must purchase with coins, or else you'll find them belly up in the tank. You must also buy upgradeable weapons to protect your school from nasty aliens. Strange and strangely addictive!

Moraff's MoreJongg

This classic puzzle asks players to correctly match and remove two similar tiles from a pile - but only the ones on the top and sides are accessible. The goal is to clear the entire screen, but you must use strategic tactics since there's more than one match per tile design and you can't render the tiles underneath inaccessible. Gamers can choose from various tile layouts, background art, tile sets, and cursors.

SolSuite

If you're still playing the Solitaire games that are bundled with Windows, you don't know what you're missing. SolSuite is a free download that contains a whopping 455 solitaire card games, such as Klondike, FreeCell, Pyramid, Monte Carlo, Spider, Golf, Canfield, and Forty Thieves. This collection also contains a few original Solitaire variations that you won't find elsewhere. Along with its pick-up-and-play accessibility, this set of games enjoys a number of features such as a "show a legal move" command, game demos, extensive rules, and customisable backgrounds.

Aqua Bubble 2

This addictive game challenges players to launch colored bubbles at other colored bubbles as they move toward the bottom of the screen. When three or more bubbles of the same color touch one another, they pop and disappear. If the bubbles touch the bottom, the game's over. The cannon that shoots the bubbles can be rotated side to side, so part of the strategy is to use the walls to bounce the bubbles into hard-to-reach areas. Along with cute graphics, music, and sound effects, Aqua Bubble 2 adds special powers, such as the ability to temporarily freeze bubbles to prevent them from descending.

Superball Arcade

This program is a new combination of old games like Breakout, Arkanoid, Asteroids, and Pinball. The goal of the first level is to prevent a ball from touching the floor by catching it with a paddle that you control with your mouse. The twist is that you're periodically besieged by falling cows and flying wolves. Each level promises something different and quite unexpected.



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