

Client: University of Warwick
Source: i (The paper for today) (Main)
Date: 27 May 2013
Page: 26
Reach: 302373
Size: 893cm2
Value: 13082.45



Young, gifted and bright sign up with Iggy

A new social-networking site is described as 'the thinking teenager's Facebook', says **Richard Garner**

Forget Facebook. Bright teenagers with £120 to spend are being encouraged to sign up to an exclusive social-networking site to give them an academic leg-up.

The new site, described as a "thinking teenager's Facebook", aims to prepare bright pupils for top universities and has attracted more than 2,500 members.

Called Iggy (the International Gateway for Gifted Youth), it has been devised by academics at Warwick University. It challenges the nation's brightest 13 to 18-year-olds with a series of questions and puzzles aimed at stretching their intelligence, as well as offering them the chance to network with each other.

Membership is open to any pupil recommended by their teacher on the grounds of impressing them with their ability or potential.

Dr Adam Boddison, academic director of the project, said: "The real test is whether the pupil has the potential to perform in the top 5 per cent of their peers. You have to be recommended by a teacher or an academic expert who says you can make it.

"It includes those who are already highly performing and a

second group who don't always perform in school, and who may not be challenged sufficiently in school."

Once accepted, they can take part in a number of games and quizzes, such as following an expedition by Arctic explorer Mark Wood and predicting how his body will be affected by his travels, including his sleep patterns, fat biopsy, blood tests and weight activity.

He even called the website from Mount Everest on one of his trips to answer members' questions.

In another quiz, students are asked to discuss the connection between cats and maths, including the scientific theory behind how a cat flap works.

In the politics section, there are interviews with the UKIP party leader Nigel Farage, Labour's spokesman on the environment, Mary Creagh, and with the BBC's chief economics correspondent Hugh Pym. Members can post comments about the interviews and exchange views.

Other subjects covered by the website include history, creative writing and science. In maths, there are also Sudoku puzzles to tax the pupils.

In addition, Iggy has enlisted the help of 12 postgraduate students to liaise with the teenagers and act as

mentors for them.

"It is modelled along the lines of Facebook - but for gifted students," Dr Boddison said.

The site has just launched its own young writers' prize and is asking its members to contribute a short story of no more than 2,500 words for a cash prize of £2,000 and the chance to see themselves in print

CASE STUDY JAMES REED

'A lot to look at - like maths and history'

For James, it has been the chance to debate topics he would never have dreamt of discussing during his school life that has most impressed him about the site.

The 14-year-old from Beam-inster school in Dorset was one of a number of "gifted and talented" students selected by his teacher to sign up.

He visits the site almost every day to see if any mes-



Client: University of Warwick
Source: i (The paper for today) (Main)
Date: 27 May 2013
Page: 26
Reach: 302373
Size: 893cm2
Value: 13082.45



sages have been left for him or look at the puzzles, games and debates that have been posted.

One of the benefits of using the site, he said, is getting in touch with new friends – especially international students who have signed on.

“I started off by mainly looking at English and science,” he said, “but there’s a lot more to look at – like maths and history.”

in *Litro* magazine. Additionally, the site poses debate questions, such as: “Is it a problem that the average age of members of the House of Lords is 69?”

Membership is open to pupils in the UK and abroad, although 75 per cent of those who have already signed up are from the British Isles. It costs £120 to join but there are subsidies available for disadvantaged pupils. So far the site has been used by students in South Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia, as well as the UK.

“One of the delights is that students can go on to it without their teacher knowing what they are doing,” said Dr Boddison. “They can learn by themselves and for themselves.”

The site is a tacit acceptance of the new ways pupils want to learn. Earlier this month, Wikipedia found Jimmy Wales predicted the boring university lecture will be the first casualty in a major move toward on-line learning in higher education.

The aim of Iggy is to bolster teenagers’ confidence and encourage them to apply to top-ranking universities in the UK.

“It’s a bit like building the Olympics of education,” Dr Boddison said. “It’s acceptable to strive for excellence in sports but it doesn’t seem acceptable in education.

“Watch this space. We want to change that,” he added.

CASE STUDY IMOGEN DOWNING

‘I really like the

debates and challenges’

Imogen has been a regular visitor to the Iggy site since she was introduced to it by her teacher at the end of last year.

The 15-year-old pupil at Rugby High School for Girls in Warwickshire was one of a number at the school selected to become a member.

Since then, she has visited the site almost every other day. “I really like the debates they have and the challenges.”

One she recalls vividly is writing an essay debating the use of nuclear power and alternative energies; the topic mirrored that of an essay she was asked to produce in school soon afterwards. She also remembers how much she enjoyed designing a video of water condensation together with Severn Trent Water. “I really like it”, she says of the site. “It’s sort of different from schoolwork and very constructive and enjoyable.”

Since joining Iggy she has chatted online with other members, including one pupil from India. They had never met before but became the digital equivalent of pen-pals. Imogen will be taking four GCSEs this summer before moving to Scotland and transferring to its education system, sitting her standard exams next year.

