

Surveying e-pdp and e-portfolio practice in UK Higher Education

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The Centre for Recording Achievement

Mission: to promote awareness and understanding of the processes associated with Personal Development Planning (review, reflection, planning) as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment.

- A cross-sectoral network organisation with institutional and individual members.
- A registered education charity.

From 1 September 2005 designated as an Associate Centre of the Higher Education Academy with a brief to support Personal Development Planning and e-portfolio developments across the HE sector

The survey brief:

to identify provision for e-PDP or e-portfolios in UK Higher Education Institutions by:

- mapping and identifying existing practice;
- documenting the approaches taken;
- establishing a directory of practice and key contacts.

Some problems:

- Who should respond?
- What definition of ePortfolio would the respondent be using?
- Would any respondent be able to give a complete picture of their institution?

Method: A non-anonymous online questionnaire; multiple responses welcomed; alternative telephone interview offered; personal definition invited; followup for crosschecking to be

Findings

- Responses from 70 separate institutions; 61 UK universities
- Multiple responses from 11 of these
- All HEIs claimed to be implementing PDP
- 34 support PDP electronically but NOT through an ePortfolio
- 34 claim to have an ePortfolio

Systems

- Big commercial systems most frequently cited
- Closest rival also a commercial system but developed with UK policy/practice in mind
- Individual in-house solutions more popular than OS
- Few systematic trials comparing systems
- Some instances of different systems in different departments/disciplines
- Some instances of using a range of tools/functionality

Target users

- Available to all students - 18 institutions
- Also available to all staff - 11 of these
- Only specific modules/levels - 14 institutions (but often because still piloting)
- Issues: flexibility/customisability of system; external drivers eg Roberts requirements for PGRs/perceptions of different requirements for different disciplines

Purposes

To implement PDP	31
To support formal learning/learning to learn	25
To support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts)	31
To support formative assessment	22
To provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment	17
To create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression	24
To support transition between different learning environments (into and from the institution)	19
To support CPD for staff	15

Accessibility

- "Users can change their settings, which cover how the font, colour, background etc is displayed - this can be applied throughout the portfolio. Users can also apply style sheets to the system if preferred. The system works with assistive technology software such as JAWS";
- "Extensive testing and consultancy by TechDis has influenced design";
- "Compatible with W3C and Bobby accessibility standards";
- "Our VLE has a profile and the ePortfolio system will work with this. Useability testing including students with additional needs will go on. [University X] has a rep on the IMS group looking into accessibility for ePortfolios. Alternatives may need to be considered. Main problem is accessibility of material uploaded by students and shared to other students";
- "We rely solely on the accessibility features built into the Blackboard framework by the manufacturer";
- "Whatever comes with the software. Probably some of above";
- "It doesn't deal with accessibility".

Interoperability and integration of systems

- Considerable misunderstanding of the question
- Transfer between institutions not yet a high priority
- Considerable interest in intra-institutional integration, especially with VLEs and Student Record Systems
- However Transcripts typically not available to ePortfolio/e-PDP systems

Space/retention issues

- 2 MB to 200 MB but most in the 10-50MB range.
"Currently limits are not set, but individual files are around 4mb"
"Situation monitored. Most use in the area of 10Mb, some exceptions 70Mb +"
- Too new a problem for clearly defined policies on retention: 14 respondents - undecided, still under discussion or policy being developed; 15 respondents thought it likely that hosting service would be offered to alumni.

Institutional policy-making in relation to ePortfolio (1)

"Came bundled with Blackboard Academic Suite - which we purchased for Portal functionality. Might as well try it out now we have it";

"Simplest way to go. Didn't want to buy another product";

"Automatically came as part of the updating of Blackboard."

"The institution's usual policy is not to develop in-house or use opensource software but to rely on big commercial vendors";

"University has a policy of developing as little inhouse software as possible. Looks for software from reliable supplier with support available";

"As a matter of policy we would buy in a commercial system if such a system existed";

Institutional policy-making in relation to ePortfolio (2)

"A tradition that software is usually developed internally to be compatible with other in-house systems";

"developed internally as is the institution's policy"

"[University X] has a IT team with significant experience of building and customising software for the student body";

"We had a number of demonstrations from external companies (there was no intention to develop something internally)";

"We spent quite some time evaluating a range of electronic tools including those at [institutions X,Y,Z] together with a number of commercial products from the US... The tool also needed to be able to be implemented at a institution level, which ruled out products with a discipline base...it was important that any tool supported processes as well as being a repository".

Institutional policy-making in relation to ePortfolio (3)

"Result of jointly developing this system to our requirements as part of a research project";

"ePET developed in-house using OS platforms ... as part of successive collaborative FDTL and JISC projects, building on two prior projects funded by DfES.

"I have largely driven the OSP initiative. The ePDP initiative has been driven by the Head of Student Services..."

"Decision was made by ISS (Information Systems Services) to pilot Concorde as it is interoperable with Blackboard and it appeared capable of delivering all the main outcomes that would be required of an eportfolio (so decision was not academically driven). I am key client for pilot so encourage pilot team to consider education issues.

Next steps

- Identify important gaps, make direct contact
- Identify practice representing a range of systems, purposes and policies
- Complete report, add case studies
- To be published on HEA and CRA websites:

<http://www.recordingachievement.org>

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>