
CAKE FOR THE MASSES; THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING E-PORTFOLIO AND COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT TOOL BUILT ON THE NOW.NET PLATFORM - ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The RCN Learning Zone is recognised as one of the pioneering e-Portfolio learning projects. Since the site was launched in 2002 it has provided bite-size learning modules on topical nursing issues; an e-Portfolio and a comprehensive CMS of learning resources to the RCN's 390,000 members.

The RCN has recognised that it is no longer sufficient to capture time spent on continuing professional development (CPD), what matters is the impact that this has on a nurses' practice. There is a growing requirement from professional associations and employers alike, that nurses should be able to demonstrate how that learning has affected their competence as practitioners.

The RCN is about to enhance the functionality of its e-Portfolio to enable nurses to capture evidence of their practice using multi-media and to be able to extract this data to demonstrate how they meet competency standards that are set by the RCN and nationally.

The success of this development is dependant on a positive response from nurses. We therefore want to explore with delegates strategies to enhance the user experience of e-portfolios. We also want to discuss the challenges of developing an e-portfolio, which supports personal competency development, alongside the requirement to be able to easily generate evidence of that competence for a professional association or awarding body. This proposal will address two of the challenges/issues outlined for the conference:

- Methods, technologies and standards for ePortfolios and new forms of assessment,
- Methods, technologies and standards related to (personal) competence development/lifelong learning.

Background The debate about e-Portfolios

There is now a frenzied debate about the purpose of e-Portfolios and the right technology required for them. Serge Ravet in his recent thoughtful contribution to these discussions calls at the end of his paper for the e-Portfolio standardisation community to *'move beyond the discussion on whether 43things is an e-Portfolio or not, and beyond a fixation with semantics.'* In the quest for finding the right box to shoehorn e-portfolios into, their actual purpose and the benefits they bring could be lost. In this context Roger McGough's short poem which was originally about marital tensions is illuminating. *'You wanted one thing, I wanted another We could not have our cake So we ate each other.'*

There is a real danger that as learning institutions and technology companies compete to assert the primary learning pedagogy or create the definitive technology platform the whole point of e-portfolios will have been missed. Our contention is that is not a case of either/or but both, and the real challenge is to create an e-portfolio that is flexible enough to meet the multiple requirements of learners and their learning and employer organisations.

When the original RCN e-portfolio was created in 2002 its main purpose was to help nurses keep up to date with current key issues in nursing practice through the use of bite size learning modules. It also enabled them to create a record of their own CPD to help them with their re-registration as nurses. Although the site continues to provide high quality content, quality assured and checked by experts in the RCN, the Now.net platform through which the site is delivered, offers nurses other tools to support them with their professional development.

The Now.net platform is the product of work with a number of other professional organisations as well as the RCN, from archaeologists to radiographers; foresters to neuro-linguistic programmers. All these organisations have wanted to mandate their members to engage in Continuous Professional Development but they have not had the capacity or means to monitor their members' development activity and its impact on their practice. The Now.net e-portfolio enables their members to cross reference evidence of their practice against professional standards and the professional organisations are able to have access to the relevant parts of portfolio to quality assure the evidence. All these relationships between individuals and with the data can be defined according to groups and roles to ensure security and authenticity.

This e-portfolio can be used with highly complex competency assessment systems like the National Vocational Qualifications in the UK to simple sets of competency standards. Critically genuine judgements are able to be made on the evidence submitted. No decision is 'forced' by a particular rule base.

As a result of these developments the RCN will be able to offer nurses the ability to demonstrate their competence in different areas of nursing practice. They are able to capture 'just-in-time' reflections on their practice or a learning experience within their portfolios using multi-media resources and then represent this evidence for different purposes e.g. meeting the requirements of their professional body, the Nursing and Midwifery Council; demonstrating to their employer their competence so that they are able to progress through career grades and for developing their own skills and knowledge for its own sake.

The e-portfolio that the RCN now uses will also allow the nurse to receive feedback, either directly from their supervisor or manager who is granted access to that specific part of their e-portfolio. Alternatively the nurse can invite by e-mail an expert in their specialist area to comment on a part of their portfolio. The expert only has access to the relevant section in the portfolio and their comments are captured as an attachment.

In this way the e-portfolio can serve multiple purposes. It can still be a discrete and secure depository of information that the nurse captures for his or her own development and interest. However there can also be folders in the e-portfolio where evidence can be cross referenced against standards defined by their profession and their employers and selected others can review and provide feedback.

These developments are the product of many years work and investment between the RCN and their technology partner Axia Interactive Media along with other professional organisations and training bodies. As a result of this work the Royal College of Nursing and other users of the Now.net platform are at the forefront of influencing and informing the ways that technology can transform CPD.

Through our presentation and the discussion that follows we hope to hear of other experiences so that we can continue to scope a model of an e-portfolio with the capacity to respond to a range of needs and requirements in a way allows everyone to both have 'their cake and eat it.'

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