

## Learning Bytes: Session 3: Thurs 19 May, 12:15-13:15

### What is an e-portfolio? How can I use them in teaching and learning?

The session comprised accounts of e-portfolio related work by the following:

- Andy Raistrick, Senior Computing Officer: Computing and Library Services
- Helen Ryall, Senior Lecturer: School of Art, Design and Architecture
- Niall Dew, Head of Division: School of Human and Health Sciences
- Alastair McKinna, Research Fellow: the Business School

Kathrine Jensen introduced herself and Ola Aiyegbayo, and gave a brief introduction to the work and remit of the recently formed Teaching and Learning Institute, where they are employed as Research Assistants.

#### Andy Raistrick

Andy explained that the terms 'Personal Development Portfolio' (PDP) and 'e-portfolio' have often been used interchangeably. However he felt that an e-portfolio was a wider-ranging tool than a PDP as it provided students with a personal space where they can select, develop, organise and showcase their work. In this way students can present a reflective account and self-assessment of their learning and evidence transferable skills, academic progress and employability skills.

The University's VLE, Blackboard, includes a wiki tool which is separate to course modules. This is currently used by some courses as a means for students to develop e-portfolios. Staff have to contact Computing and Library Services to be assigned the tool for use by their students.

In addition the following are currently being trialled:

- [PebblePad](#)
- [mahara](#)

Andy showed an exemplar portfolio in PebblePad and demonstrated how the content could be downloaded and the portfolio recreated using the Blackboard portfolio tool. He explained that the functionality available with the different systems is consistent with the differences being in how easy and intuitive they are to engage and work with. All the systems allow the sharing of content. Consideration needs to be given to the portability of the e-portfolio once students leave university. Currently students are able to download the content in either web format or via a JISC standard tool, LEAP2 which allows the transfer of content to another tool.

PebblePad has a yearly subscription fee so if students wish to continue using it once they leave the University they will have to pay a fee.

## **Helen Ryall**

Students on the BA Surface Design course have been developing e-portfolios as part of an assignment that also includes the production of trend packs.

Students' predominantly use the Blackboard portfolio tool but are given the option to use alternatives. They are encouraged to be as creative as possible with the design tools available. The majority of the portfolio content is focussed on the design work, being predominantly image-based with short statements about their work as designers.

There are a number of benefits to presenting the student work in this format:

- There is not always enough physical space for students to display their work in the studio and this offers an alternative.
- Students have to be selective with the content and highlight their best examples in a professional way.
- Students learn technology-based skills, such as using appropriate and meaningful naming conventions for files and folders, digital image formatting and organisational skills involved in producing a web-based resource.
- Digital portfolios are an easy way of showing work to potential employers at a first point of contact.

In terms of assessment the students invite Helen to view their portfolio on a certain date. Positive feedback has been received from external examiners on this mode of exhibition.

Those students with more advanced IT skills have found limitations with the available tools; via the Blackboard tool there is the option to access and edit the HTML, but PebblePad and mahara are less flexible. However the templates available in Blackboard are minimal and more variety would offer greater design options.

## **Niall Dew**

Niall Dew is leading a cross-discipline University funded Teaching and Learning project to investigate how technology can be used to improve PDP and reflective practice. There is currently at least one project representative from each School but other academic colleagues are welcome to join the focus group and feedback on their experiences of working with e-portfolio tools.

The project has some funding to pilot both PebblePad and mahara and evaluate these tools from both a staff and student perspective. PebblePad is licensed so the use of this is currently limited to some extent. mahara is an open-source system but does incur costs in terms of servers and technical support. In terms of evaluation the project team are investigating how e-portfolios are used and what for; for example, reflective work, assessed as part of a module or for professional development. In addition how intuitive and user friendly the different systems are is being considered. A further requirement is the flexibility in terms of continued use and support of an e-portfolio once students have left University. The ultimate project

outcome will be to put forward recommendations for a centrally supported university wide standard e-portfolio system.

### **Alistair Mckinna**

Alistair and Ruth Brooks from the Business School are piloting a School-funded Teaching and Learning project on the feasibility of developing PDP and e-portfolio tools over the three years of the Business Management course. Alistair has taught PDP for the last seven years and has found that those students looking for a job straight after University do tend to engage more fully with the process. Motivating students is however proving challenging, it is felt that the process should be started in year one and potentially assessed in some form.

Alistair explained that they began the process by developing a hard copy workbook linked to the course and module specifications. This was then further developed to include a linked e-portfolio, which included a number of content areas such as:

- Reflection
- Career development
- CV
- Achievements
- Transferable skills
- Core competencies
- Skills portfolio
- Work experience

Further development is being undertaken in terms of looking at a set of work-based skills, to encourage students to appreciate and reflect on the experience they have gained in for example voluntary or part-time work. The PDP/e-portfolio isn't assessed at the moment due to the modular nature of course design. It may be possible to link it to a career-planning module and link to resources (pod casts and video clips) /references and useful examples e.g. reflective diaries.

### **General discussion**

Difficulties in engaging students with PDP and reflective practice were discussed; the fact that students don't always recognise the value of this learning with assessment proving to be the main motivational factor for undertaking it. Often it is linked to placements and career development activities. In order to effectively assess e-portfolios specific guidelines need to be in place, with clear objectives from the start. There needs to be a balance in terms of quality and quantity, with clear relevant examples of learning and achievements. When done well there is a great deal of flexibility in terms of exploring and evidencing a 'learning journey'. Greater flexibility may be achieved via an integrated learning portfolio that includes a reflective blog, work portfolio and examples of written work. A blended portfolio comprising digital and physical portfolio may be more appropriate to some disciplines.