

Getting what you want: Implementing Personal Development Planning through e-portfolio

The term portfolio as used in the context of UK Higher Education has a range of meanings. Here we are using it to describe a collection (or archive) of reflective writing and associated evidence, which documents learning and which a learner may draw upon to represent her/his learning and achievements, and on the basis of which may plan and set targets. A portfolio in this sense therefore encompasses the concept of records associated with personal development planning (PDP), including personal development records (PDRs) that may contribute to the HE Progress Fileⁱ (Dearing, 1997)ⁱⁱ, and extends beyond that, to incorporate artefacts which may evidence claims made in PDRs. Many institutions are choosing to implement PDP (and to encourage learners to manage their PDRs) through electronic means, often linking this to the term e-portfolio.

This introductory paper has been developed to help Higher Education institutions to make informed choices about e-portfolio systems, which they may wish to consider implementing, to support learners in personal development planning processes. It provides a generic summary of things to think about, questions to ask, and people to talk to. This summary is supplemented by web-based guidance materials for specific audiences, derived from specific stakeholder perspectives, including institutional and technical managers (e.g. academic registrars, MIS managers), practitioners who support learners (e.g. personal and academic tutors), and students. The guidance for specific audiences is available from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_0103_support.html

This paper draws on an investigative survey of current e-portfolio and related systems¹ in the UK, which was funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). The full report, *Developing and Implementing a Methodology for reviewing e-portfolio products*² can be found at the MLEs programme Support Project web site http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_0103_support.html and at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/epfr.doc.

In addition, an earlier complementary paperⁱⁱⁱ was concerned to help IT managers and PDP developers make informed choices that give the best opportunity of:

- ensuring that systems are fit for purpose and avoiding the provision of services that prove of little use or value to the student community;
- avoiding the pitfalls that sometimes accompany the implementation of IT where this is explicitly concerned to support student learning and development.

The Context

The use of portfolios for the collection and management of assessment evidence has been a feature of vocational and professional programmes for a number of years². More recent portfolio uses have included processes to support personal development planning. The production of this report is, therefore, particularly timely given:

1. the Higher Education sector-agreed implementation date for Personal Development Planning (by 2005/6 academic year). There appears an increasing though by no means universal move towards 'e' implementation in respect of PDP, a development reflecting the increasing use of IT-based learning environments, study off-campus, the remorseless pressure on staff resources, and the increasing readiness of many students and an increasing number of staff to engage with the technology;
2. the Report of the Scoping Group on Measuring, and Recording Student Achievement in HE ('the Burgess Report' 2004)^{iv}, which envisaged the possibility of a personal electronic

¹ The word 'systems' as used here encompasses not only e-portfolio software applications (products) but also processes to support learners, regardless of whether these are by electronic or human intervention.

² For an earlier example of the development of Portfolios for assessment in respect of vocational competence see http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/qualifications/index_nvqs.htm (accessed 23/12/05) formerly at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/nvq/what.shtml>.

- portfolio for all HE students in the medium term. Selected evidence from such an e-portfolio could be presented for a range of purposes and in a range of different formats;
3. the recently published HEFCE e-learning strategy^v emphasises the encouragement of 'e-based systems of describing learning achievement and personal development planning (PDP)' within its Joint Implementation Plan.
 4. beyond HE, the DfES e-Strategy^{vi} emphasises that:
'We will encourage every institution to offer a personal online learning space to store coursework, course resources, results and achievements. We will work towards developing a personal identifier for each learner, so that organizations can support an individual's progression more effectively. Together, these facilities will become an electronic portfolio, making it simpler for learners to build their record of achievement throughout their lifelong learning.' (para10, page 5)³

Earlier UK thinking^{vii} used the term e-portfolio to describe the presentational aspect and 'Learner Profile' to describe the archive on which the presentational portfolio was built. Here a developed, more inclusive position is taken, with the recommendation that attention can profitably be given to four contexts of e-portfolio usage^{viii}. These are concerned respectively with:

- a. supporting formal (e.g. curricular) learning;
- b. supporting overall development, (encompassing personal and career areas as well as educational ones, and learning/experience derived from less formal contexts)^{4 5};
- c. presentation/showcasing for progression;
- d. formal summative assessment.⁶

These are most appropriately thought about as types of usage or types of scenario of use, with a fully-fledged e-portfolio system ideally covering many or all of the different uses. This categorisation offers greater definition in respect of the audience(s) for the presentational aspects and also emphasises the learner themselves as one such audience.

Key Messages from the Survey

The study developed a mapping template⁷ and explored a sample of twelve e-portfolio products which exemplify the range of existing UK systems, in terms of target learner communities, purposes and functionalities and commercial or non-commercial basis. It reported that:

- most e-portfolio products have been developed for a particular age or stage of learning rather than to support lifelong learning;
- the main purpose of most was to support personal development planning type practice, usually alongside a tutorial programme⁸, or with facility for mentor feedback;
- two products were more appropriately described as assessment management tools, and three provided a means for creating presentational portfolios;⁹
- all products allowed learners to create and edit text;

³ While the focus here is upon developments in England, parallel work is under way elsewhere.

⁴ Helpfully, similar categorisations are presented in a report to Becta by Strivens 'Current e-portfolio developments in the 14-19, Adult and Lifelong Learning Sectors' (2005), and in a paper reviewing emerging practice in Europe developed to facilitate discussion at the 2004 e-portfolio conference held in La Rochelle (Rees Jones P, (ed) 2004) – in press

⁵ A fifth purpose, to support individual inclusion within more differentiated learner environments, might also be added.

⁶ There has been an emerging emphasis upon the use of ICT in the assessment process in formal learning/training contexts, including the use of use of electronic portfolios with a greater use of evidence in digital format, such as in video, images or sound, which may also increase the opportunity for more flexible assessment processes (see e.g. <http://www.pgce.soton.ac.uk/ict/eps/>). We do not define this as 'showcasing' as the learner may have little or no say in the elements that are required for such assessment.

⁷ Our starting point for the template, based on Grant *et al.* (2004) viii and developed through stakeholder discussion, was to consider the portfolio domain in terms of purposes of use, information management and functionality offered, all of which might be considered to be central to e-portfolio systems and support.

⁸ Tutorial support was usually 'face to face', hence, a 'system' encompassed electronic and human delivery.

⁹ However, these purposes overlap and some systems support more than one purpose.

- most supported file upload and/or linked files;
- about half the products stated their privacy policy on site;
- similarly, about half allowed the learner to select person(s) to share either selected parts (or all) of their e-portfolio;
- very few products supported learner controlled screen display preference settings. Some were planning development in this area;
- most product developers reported that 'conformance with e-learning standards was under development', although none yet supported transfer of learner information to another e-portfolio product.

Transferable Benefits: an agenda for discussion and decision making.

A significant transferable outcome of the study was the analytical tool itself, with wider potential uses, including to:

- enable informed conversations between practitioners, IT experts and managers about which functionalities may be important to effectively support learners in their own context,
- inform developers and vendors of functionality which user communities are likely to require;
- catalyse developers to develop systems accordingly.

Here we have suggested some questions, based on the mapping template¹⁰, which readers may wish to ask about systems to more effectively support learners in their own context. **We suggest that the questions may appropriately be used as an aid to conversation with colleagues**, including institutional and technical managers, practitioners who support learners, and with learners¹¹. Remember that this is not a categorical list, but some first thoughts to help you decide what the key points are for you.

Aspects of e-portfolio systems, including purposes, information managed, and functionalities	Key points for us: e.g. what are the potential benefits and importance of this aspect to effectively support our learners?
1) Target learners and e-portfolio purpose(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are our target learners? • What is their stage of education, training or employment? • How does this build on their previous learning, training etc? • How might this prepare for their next stages of learning or career management? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we see as the main purpose(s) of e-portfolio for our learners? • to support formal (e.g. curricular) learning/learning to learn • to support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts) • to support formative assessment, • to provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment • to create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression • to support transition between different learning environments • to support personalisation of learning, through facilitating selection of effective choices and pathways • Other purposes? 	
2) What guidance to support learner is important in our context to include online or alongside? (Would you include this 'online' or	

¹⁰ The template is itself evolving in response to use and feedback. It is planned to develop this web resource, with additional guidance about how terms within it are used, as we recognise that vocabularies and meanings will vary among different users.

¹¹ With this in mind, we have addressed the questions to 'we/our', as though readers are asking colleagues and themselves together. The question tool may also be used by an individual as a personal prompt, in which situation, a reader may prefer to read it as though addressed to 'I/my'.

'alongside' the e-portfolio system?).	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance to learner on the purpose(s) of the system • Guidance to learner on how to use the system • A tutorial programme alongside to support the PDP/e-portfolio process • On-line tutor/mentor support for feedback to learner • Diagnostic tools to assist with self-assessment, or educational or career planning • Other guidance? 	
3) Information management:	
a) What types of information will be managed by a learner and will not be processed for the purposes of the institution? ¹²	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development records (PDRs) e.g. statements of interests and achievements; claims of progress, skills, and competency; aspirations, goals, plans • Evidence, e.g. qualifications, certificates, licences, other digital files (audio, video, picture) • Reflections • CV • Other information? 	
b) What types of information are/will be managed by a learner and will also be processed for the purposes of the institution?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is our institution acting as a data controller of e-portfolio learner information? (Yes/No) ¹³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If 'yes', does our institutional notification to the Information Commissioner cover our proposed processing/ use of e-portfolio learner data? 	
c) Information owned and managed by Institution/ Organisation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing transcript - will a learner be able to view his/her progress/assessed achievements (marks, grades) to evidence formal progress during a period of study? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript – will a learner be able to view and link to transcript as authenticated evidence of achievement after period of study? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will security and authentication of transcript information be assured and maintained? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the e-portfolio interoperate with our existing VLE? MLE? MIS? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other considerations? 	
d) What information might be managed or processed collaboratively, e.g. by more than one learner, or by more than one organisation? What are the implications of shared information? ¹⁴	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative work involving other people's personal data • Work undertaken with another organisation, e.g. work 	

¹² Legal framework terminology for what is often described in lay terms as 'owned by the learner'.

¹³ For the purposes of the Data Protection Act (1998), the institution is a 'data controller' of learner data that are processed for the institution's purposes. For a discussion of obligations of a 'data controller' with respect to a 'data subject', and related DP issues, see endnote reference to the JISC Legal Aspects of ePortfolios. If the institution is not a data controller, then the DPA 1998 does not apply to the information, but e-portfolio system users may need advice on DP implications of their own activities – see section 3d.

¹⁴ For all potentially shared data, considerations include: "Who has an interest, an obligation, a right with respect to these data? What is the interest, obligation, right?" e.g. Is the learner's sponsor aware of, and agreeable to, use of their placement data, (which may include commercially sensitive data) in the learner's portfolio?

"Does our portfolio system have suitable prompts about the use of other people's data, or other people's copyrighted material, at the point of incorporation?"

<p>experience placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A record of a discussion at key review points • Learner information shared with the institutional MIS, and re-used for the purposes of managing the e-portfolio • “Does our portfolio system have suitable prompts about the use of other people’s data, or other people’s copyrighted material, at the point of incorporation?” • Other considerations? 	
<p>4) Managing information: How will learners manage information? What editing rights and facilities do/will learners need?</p>	
<p>; e.g. should a learner have rights/facilities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enter, edit and save text ? (e.g. personal development records) • upload files as evidence of learning/competency etc? (these might be text, images, audio, video) • hyperlink to files as evidence? (text, audio etc) • export files? • create his/her own web page templates? • see all their data and a list of uploaded and linked files? • view/link to his/ her developing transcript/awarding body record? • Other considerations? 	
<p>5) Privacy¹⁵ and ownership/stewardship¹⁵ of information</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is our institutional Data Protection Officer (DPO) aware of our (planned) e-portfolio implementation? Do we have an ongoing dialogue with our DPO to tackle data protection issues as they arise? • What is our institutional data protection policy (DPP)?¹⁶ • How does our e-portfolio implementation relate to this policy? • Will a learner be able to view the institutional DPP from within the e-portfolio system? (Yes/No)¹⁷ • Who will have permission to view all or part of a learner’s e-portfolio? • Who will set permissions for sharing learner information? (learner/Department/ School/ Faculty/Institution/ awarding body/company?) • How long may/must data be stored after learner leaves Institution /Organisation? What are the institutional obligations of stewardship? • Other? 	
<p>6) Accessibility/usability</p>	
<p>Accessibility/usability issues which should be taken into consideration include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does our e-portfolio system comply with our obligations under 	

¹⁵ Where ‘stewardship’ is defined as ‘the assumption of responsibility for the proper management of learner data’. Copied from Q 4 of (1.) of a series of papers in the form of FAQs, produced by the JISC Study to Explore the Legal and Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

¹⁶ It might usefully be noted that the DPA makes no distinction between ages. Children enjoy the same protection as adults, unless there is an exemption under the Act to allow for that. If there are special issues for children, they will arise from legislation other than the DPA. In line with the general assumption that age 12+ can understand, a 14 years old person would have the right to say whom he wanted to see his/her portfolio, or not.

¹⁷ If ‘yes’, can a learner view information about the policy and institutional use/processing of their data, by means of collection notices at a point when personal data are collected?
 If ‘no’, how are learners advised about DP implications of their own e-portfolio activities?

<p>the DDA and SENDA ^{x?}</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can each learner select preference settings for screen display – font style, size, colours of font and background, which are stored and automatically applied at log-in? • is accessibility via a keyboard (instead of a pointing device) available to a learner? • Other considerations? 	
7) Storage capacity and storage duration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much space will be allocated to each learner's PD records and digital files? • How long will a learner's records be retained, so that learner may reflect back on progress between 'then' and 'now'? • Other considerations? 	
8) What does the system need to conform to e-learning standards?	
<p>How will the system interoperate with other systems, so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a learner can transfer his/her PD information from previous stage, and to next stage of learning/ organisation without re-keying information? • an organisation can transfer a learner's information from previous, and to next, stage of learning/ organisation without re-keying information? • Other considerations? 	
9) What other resources do we require to run alongside to assure effective learner support?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. human resources, such as tutor support, IT support for learner and system, IT developer support for further development. • Other? 	
10) Evaluation	
<p>How might we evaluate efficacy, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of use by learners • impact on learners • impact on staff • Other ? 	

As ever in educational contexts, there is more than one approach to a particular question. An alternative, but complementary approach, is provided by Beetham (2005)^{xi}. Appendix 2 in her recent paper helpfully starts from the perspective of potential benefits of e-portfolio use to learners, and considers the functional requirements to support each of these benefits.

Additionally, it is essential that the system adopted is sufficiently flexible for functionalities to evolve as learners' support needs, and organisational requirements change. This might be appropriately addressed through development and use of web services, in support of, for example, the re-use of e-portfolio information in new contexts, and the personalisation of learning, including for individuals to review and assess the relative suitability of alternative learning pathways to achieve their goals.

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Acronyms:

DDA – Disability Discrimination Act
DfES – Department for Education and Skills
DPA – Data Protection Act 1998
JISC – Joint Information Systems Committee
MIS – Management Information Systems
MLE – Managed Learning Environment
PDP – Personal Development Planning
PDR – Personal Development Record(s)
SENDA – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
VLE – Virtual Learning Environment

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- i Developing a progress file for HE: Guidelines on HE progress files
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressfiles/guidelines/default.asp> (accessed 23/12/05).
- ii Dearing, R (1997) Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (The Dearing Report) <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/> (accessed 23/12/05).
- iii Implementing PDP with IT: A Guide for Busy Academics :<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/2258.htm> (accessed 23/12/05).
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- v HEFCE Strategy for e-learning (2005) at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_12/05_12.doc (accessed 23/12/05)
- vi Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services
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- vii Grant S, Rees Jones P and Ward R (2003): Mapping Personal Developments to IMS LIP: Consultation Document, JISC, CRA and CETIS
http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/UK_LP1_1B_Final.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
- viii Grant S, Rees Jones P and Ward R (2004). E-portfolio and its relationship to personal development planning: A view from the UK for Europe and beyond.
<http://www.inst.co.uk/clients/jisc/e-portfolio/def.html> (accessed 23/12/05).
- ix A series of papers in the form of FAQs, produced by the JISC Study to Explore the Legal and Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record:
1. Legal Aspects of ePortfolios: A Short FAQ -
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Legal_Aspects_FAQ.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
2. Data Protection, Lifelong Learner Record Systems and ePortfolios: A short FAQ -
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Data_Protection_FAQ.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
3. Consortium Agreements: A Short FAQ -
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Consortium_Agreements.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
(Further outputs and information on the legal study can be found at:
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_learner_records_legal_study.html) (accessed 23/12/05)
- x Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
<http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm>
- xi Beetham, H (2005) e-portfolios in post-16 learning in the UK: developments, issues and opportunities. Report to the JISC e-learning and pedagogy programme. Located at:
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/eportfolio_ped.doc (accessed 23/12/05).