

## Getting what you want from e-portfolio systems: a starting point for PDP practitioners supporting learners in HE

This guidance template is one of six documents aimed at different audiences that have been developed to help Higher Education (HE) institutions make informed choices about e-portfolio systems, from a range of different perspectives. The others in this series include:

- Generic guidance: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/Guidance\\_final.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_final.doc)
- A starting point for institutional managers in HE: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/Guidance\\_man.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_man.doc)
- A starting point for MIS managers in HE: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/Guidance\\_MIS.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_MIS.doc)
- A starting point for technical developers in HE: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/Guidance\\_tech.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_tech.doc)
- A starting point for students in HE: [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/Guidance\\_student.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_student.doc)

This template has been completed from the perspective of practitioners supporting learners who are engaging in Personal Development Planning within an electronic environment. We've included, in italics, quotes from staff and students to exemplify some points at least. It provides a perspective on the key issues in developing and implementing e-portfolios from their point of view.

As every institution and every department is different, you might not agree with all they say.

However, it might help you to clarify your own ideas about your contribution to your institutional discussion about developing and implementing e-portfolio. The third column gives space for you to record your own ideas.

A blank template for recording results of collective discussions with other stakeholders can be found in the generic guidance document.

<b>Aspects/functionalities/features/ for consideration<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Key issues for practitioners supporting learners</b>	<b>Key Issues for you</b>
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<sup>1</sup> We suggest that the questions may appropriately be used as an aid to conversation with colleagues, including institutional managers, PDP practitioners who support learners, IT developers, and with learners. 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'.

	Remember that this is not a categorical list, but some first thoughts from other PDP practitioners and students to help you decide what the key points are for you, and for learners in your context.	
1) Target learners and e-portfolio purpose(s)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are our target learners?</li> <li>What is their stage/episode of education or employment?</li> <li>How does this build on previous stages of their learning?</li> <li>How might this prepare for their next stages of learning?</li> </ul>	<p>Who might want to engage/who might we need to engage and why/how might such learners find the approach useful?</p> <p>What do our learners understand by the term PDP? UK learners are likely to have some previous experience which will inevitably colour their engagement. <i>'I have experience of PDP at college and at work before coming to university.'</i> So was their experience positive or not and what do you need to do to engage with this? Are there ways of valuing previous engagement through transfer, AP[e]L, interview or other means?</p> <p>Learners are likely to be more open to engagement and more welcoming of support at points of transition. Establishing links with past and future stages could add to learner motivation</p>	
<p>What do we see as the main purpose(s) of e-portfolio for our learners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to support formal (e.g. curricular) learning/ learning to learn</li> <li>to support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts)</li> <li>to support formative assessment,</li> <li>to provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment</li> <li>to create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression</li> <li>to support transition between different learning environments</li> <li>to support personalisation, effective choices</li> </ul>	<p>There is value in a multi –format approach to e-portfolio purposes and formats for recording,</p> <p>It's important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>avoid just 'prescriptive' forms ;</li> <li>complete forms on academic reflection;</li> <li>include free-flow forms,</li> <li>and for learners to record what is of interest to them and in a way that engages them, within and outside the curriculum.</li> </ul> <p>- <i>"Make the questionnaire more relevant to student life rather than just the academic side"</i>.</p> <p>Others need to see the direct academic relevance or will they not engage: <i>'I thought the use of these</i></p>	

<p>and pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other purposes?</li> </ul>	<p><i>forms was unnecessary and confusing in understanding the subject.'</i></p> <p>Students who are less likely to engage define systems as being about narrow skills audit and time management, those who do engage are more likely to see it as being about their own personal development.</p> <p>Different purposes may be appropriate for individual learners at different points in their engagement.</p> <p>Systems need to help learners' link aspects of their experience together. Thus to follow on from a skills audit – “what might you use these skills for?” – “if an employer wants skills x, y, z, how will you tailor (evidence of) your skills to those required? This approach could be linked to a section on pathways to support and making informed choices.</p>	
<p>2) What guidance to support learner is important in our context to include online or alongside? (Would you include this 'online' or 'alongside' the e-portfolio system?).</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance to learner on the purpose(s) of the system</li> <li>• Guidance to learner on how to use the system</li> <li>• A tutorial programme alongside to support the PDP/e-portfolio process</li> <li>• On-line tutor/mentor support for feedback to learner</li> <li>• Diagnostic tools to assist with self-assessment, or educational or career planning</li> </ul> <p>Other guidance?</p>	<p>When a system claims to include PDP support, what does that mean and how appropriate is it to our target learners?</p> <p>Tutor support and expectations are crucial. <i>'Get tutors to promote the use of the PDP more, - if tutors say students should do it, they will.'</i></p> <p>However, we need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish clear and realistic expectations of how immediately tutors will respond (probably not 24/7 e-immediacy) ;</li> <li>• manage student expectation that there will be immediate and clear support available when they are first using the system</li> </ul>	

	<p>Learner expectations may depend on how the support is framed and how it is linked to PDP – e.g. if the framework for PDP support is via tutorial processes, and if the e-portfolio is a tool (e.g. for recording reflections and learning) which is supported by the tutor, there is no reason for an expectation of increased sense of need for ‘immediacy’.</p> <p>Embedded guidance and support are key in conveying to learners the extent to which PDP is valued in their learning <i>‘I was encouraged to reflect, evaluate, record achievement, set targets and plan in the assignment criteria of my module.’</i> <i>‘The support system on our course is positive. PDP is valued to great extent.’</i></p> <p>Consider flexible support systems which allow learners the level of access they find most individually useful. Also the more sources of support there are, both alongside and online, the more likely learners will find support appropriate to their own particular needs.</p> <p>Publicity is vital, through as many different avenues as possible. Ensure a clear and shared understanding of what is meant by PDP, and the purposes of the inclusion of PDP in relation to their learning.</p> <p>Re Diagnostic tools: see note about ‘skills audit’ and ‘pathways’ in ‘main purposes’ section.</p>	
<p>3) Information management: a) What types of information will be managed by a learner, and will <b>not</b> be processed for the purposes of the institution?<sup>2</sup></p>		

<sup>2</sup> Legal framework terminology for what is often described in lay terms as ‘owned by the learner’.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development records (PDRs) e.g. statements of interests and achievements; claims of progress, skills, and competency; aspirations, goals, plans</li> <li>• Evidence, e.g. qualifications, certificates, licences, other digital files (audio, video, picture)</li> <li>• Reflections</li> <li>• CV</li> <li>• Other information?</li> </ul>	<p>Learner records might include any of the PDR types listed at:  <a href="http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/pdpcontent">http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/pdpcontent</a>  although institutions are likely to want to title PDR forms to suit their context; e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>'Abilities'</b> for learners to record (in their own words or copied from an official description) abilities, skills, competencies and other attributes which they feel are significant or which are required by an external agency for the purposes of assessment, accreditation or validation.</li> <li>• <b>'Achievements'</b> for learners to record any successful curricular or extra-curricular endeavour.</li> <li>• <b>'Action Plans'</b> for learners to create to help them achieve a particular outcome or goal. The action plan tool could usefully include a 'steps to success' function where larger goals can be broken down into smaller steps, a SWOT analysis section and a facility for recording outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to providing forms to complete, there could be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (for every record type) a section called Reflecting on Learning, to encourage learners to think about how, why and where they are learning;</li> <li>2. <b>'Folders'</b> for organising, saving and publishing any selected records created by the learner, and allowing learners to publish any folder as a WebFolio page.</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is very important for students to know something of the use to which information may/will be put, not least by themselves.</li> <li>• If the record is owned by the learner will it be portable and possible for learners to take it with</li> </ul>	
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	<p>them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might any system be linked explicitly into CV development and what might the value in this be?</li> </ul>	
b) What types of information will be managed by a learner and will <u>also</u> be processed for the purposes of the institution?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is our institution acting as a data controller of e-portfolio learner information? (Yes/No)<sup>3</sup></li> </ul> <p>If 'yes', does our institutional notification to the Information Commissioner cover our proposed processing/ use of e-portfolio learner data?</p>		
c) Information owned and managed by Institution/ Organisation		
Developing transcript - will a learner be able to view progress/assessed achievements (marks, grades) to evidence formal progress during a period of study?	An 'in progress' transcript can serve as a basis for formative feedback and discussion, a confidence builder for students and allow for increased flexibility of learner use of this document as they progress through their studies.	
Transcript – will a learner be able to view and link to transcript as authenticated evidence of achievement after period of study?	Learners may well value the ability to link to an authenticated transcript whether or not this is central to the e-portfolio system	
How will security and authentication of transcript information be assured and maintained?	An issue for the MIS folk!	
How will the e-portfolio interoperate with our existing VLE? MLE? MIS?	<p>A system which pulls together authenticated and established data with student personal material would only require key data to be entered once.</p> <p>A system integrated within an MLE might encourage greater learner 'ownership' and engagement with all systems</p>	
Other considerations?		
d) What information might be managed or		

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<p>processed collaboratively, e.g. by more than one learner, or by more than one organisation? What are the implications of shared information?<sup>4</sup></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative work involving other people's personal data</li> <li>• Work undertaken with another organisation, e.g. work experience placement</li> <li>• A record of a discussion at key review points</li> <li>• Learner information shared with the institutional MIS, and re-used for the purposes of managing the e-portfolio</li> <li>• "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?"</li> </ul> <p>Other considerations?</p>		
<p>4) Managing information: How will a learner manage information? What editing rights and facilities will a learner need?</p>		
<p>e.g. should a learner have rights/facilities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enter, edit and save text ? (e.g. personal development records)</li> <li>• upload files as evidence of learning/competency etc? (these might be text, images, audio, video)</li> <li>• hyperlink to files as evidence? (text, audio etc)</li> <li>• export files?</li> <li>• create his/her own web page templates?</li> <li>• see all his/her data and a list of uploaded and linked files?</li> <li>• view/link to his/ her developing transcript/awarding body record?</li> <li>• Other considerations?</li> </ul>	<p>The greater the flexibility the better the chances of learners putting together a format that works for them and their learning. The more personalisation that is allowed the more learner ownership is established and the more it becomes a <i>personal</i> development portfolio. However, as with many software systems, the capability for endless permutations and customisation by the committed might serve to confuse or overwhelm the novice learner who wants a simple, approachable system.</p> <p>Do we have, or need to develop, a policy on learner <b>language for writing</b> – will 'text message'</p>	

<sup>4</sup> 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>language be acceptable, or will learners be expected to create different versions for different audiences?</p> <p>Navigation and printing out are other important considerations for learners and for practitioners supporting them – how easy is it to find your way around the site, and carry out the activities? How easy is it to print out the information in a format which suits your current purpose (some e-portfolios have a 'standardised' way of presenting a learner's information) – can it be extracted and used in a different presentational way?</p>	
5) Privacy <sup>5</sup> and ownership/stewardship <sup>5</sup> of information		

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<sup>5</sup> Where 'stewardship' is defined as 'the assumption of responsibility for the proper management of learner data'. See 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.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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?</li> <li>• What is our institutional data protection policy (DPP)?</li> <li>• How does our e-portfolio implementation relate to this policy?</li> <li>• Will a learner be able to view the institutional DPP from within the e-portfolio system? (Yes/No)<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Who will have permission to view all or part of a learner's e-portfolio?</li> <li>• Who will set permissions for sharing learner information? (learner/Department/ School/ Faculty/Institution/ awarding body/company?)</li> <li>• How long may/must data be stored after learner leaves Institution /Organisation? What are the institutional obligations of stewardship?</li> <li>• Other considerations?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Permissions</b></p> <p>In respect of sharing and permissions structures, a learner is likely to want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are portfolios public or private?</li> <li>• Can I let certain people see my portfolio?</li> </ul> <p>A fundamental design principle is that the ePortfolio system is 'owned' by the learner. All data in the ePortfolio store should be recorded, uploaded or 'invited' (to be added) by the individual learner, and should be secure.</p> <p>But the learner should also be able to share any part(s) with other people, either inside or outside an institution, and may be required to share parts for purposes of CPD, validation, or assessment. A learner should be able to give permissions to view, comment, copy or create records collaboratively.</p> <p>Therefore a pragmatic approach is to set default as 'no sharing' and set up zones for different permissions.</p>	
<p>6) Accessibility/usability</p>		

<p>Accessibility/usability issues which should be taken into consideration include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does our e-portfolio system comply with our obligations under the DDA and SENDA <sup>iii</sup>?</li> <li>• can each learner select preference settings for screen display – font style, size, colours of font and background, which are stored and</li> </ul>	<p>Important considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should a learner (or guest) be able to change the look and feel of the pages?</li> </ul> <p>It's important to ensure that learners can interact with an e-learning system regardless of visual impairment, other disability, preference for screen</p>	
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<sup>6</sup> 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>automatically applied at log-in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is accessibility via a keyboard (instead of a pointing device) available to a learner?</li> <li>• Other considerations?</li> </ul>	<p>display (so that e.g. the pages are usable by persons irrespective of preference for background colour, font size, type etc.), hardware, or environment.</p> <p>Although this is a mainly an issue for technical developers, it's important that practitioners also are aware of this (including compliance with SENDA).</p>	
<b>7) Storage capacity and storage duration</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much space will be allocated to each learner's PD records and digital files?</li> <li>• How long will a learner's records be retained, so that learner may reflect back on progress between 'then' and 'now'?</li> <li>• Other considerations?</li> </ul>	<p><i>This is a question for technical developers, and MIS managers, but practitioners need to be aware that some students develop very large files in their normal course activities.</i></p>	
<b>8) What does the system need to conform to e-learning standards?</b>		
<p>How will the system interoperate with other systems, so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a learner can transfer his/her PD information from previous stage, and to next stage of learning/ organisation without re-keying information?</li> <li>• an organisation can transfer a learner's information from previous, and to next, stage of learning/ organisation without re-keying information?</li> <li>• Other considerations?</li> </ul>	<p>A question for developers – but it might be helpful for practitioners to be aware of some of the issues.</p> <p>An important consideration is that if the record is owned by the learner, will it be portable, and how will learners take it with them, or use it in multiple situations/environments if studying/working in multiple locations contemporaneously?</p>	
<b>9) What other resources do we require to run alongside to assure effective learner support?</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e.g. human resources, such as tutor support, IT support for learner and system, IT developer support for further development.</li> <li>• Other?</li> </ul>	<p>Tutor support for learners covered in section 2.</p> <p>Guidance/ training/development to support practitioners to support learners is important too!</p>	
<b>10) Evaluation</b>		
<p>How might we evaluate efficacy, e.g.</p>	<p>How would or could these be measured? Is use</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• level of use by learners</li> <li>• impact on learners</li> <li>• impact on staff</li> <li>• Other ?</li> </ul>	<p>the same as effective use?</p> <p>Is student or staff satisfaction with the system evidence of impact? How might any possible evaluation of a system be related back to its stated purposes?</p> <p>How might the long term benefits of PDP be captured in any evaluation? <i>Many people do not realise the benefits of PDP as they 'got on fine' without it in the past. Tangible results and long term results are too far away to be seen. It takes time, commitment and perseverance. Today's society often focuses on the 'quick fix' which PDP is not.</i></p>	
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This perspective developed by Rob Ward and Helen Richardson with contributions from Shane Sutherland (University of Wolverhampton), John Peters (University of Worcester), PDP practitioners at various events during May to September 2005, and the JISC Legal Study team.

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**Acronyms:**

- DDA – Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- 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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- ii 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](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](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](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](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_learner_records_legal_study.html) ) (accessed 23/12/05)
- iii Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm> (accessed 23/12/05).