The Pathfinder Journey - Embedding ePortfolio at level 1
University of Wolverhampton - June 2008

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1. The way we were

This project came out of two areas of best practice highlighted in our Benchmarking exercise, 1. Innovative use of retreats (two day and one night off campus staff development events) 2. Successful implementation of an ePortfolio tool – PebblePad© to support the process of Personal Development Planning.

Our situation at the start of the project with regard to use of PDP needs to be described in the context of the following national initiatives. These were the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) *et al* (2001) Policy Statement (2000) and Guidelines (2001) on the development of a Progress File for Higher Education. This policy statement came from recommendations within the *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* more commonly referred to as the Dearing Report (1998). The Guidelines gave an implementation date for Progress Files as the start of the academic year 2005/6, from this date the QAA could include PDP in their institutional audit.

Within the University of Wolverhampton, PDP was strategically placed within the Institutions' Learning and Teaching Strategies (2002 – 2010). An outcome of the strategies was the development of an institutional framework (Fig. 1) for the process of PDP which set out that the main outcome should be a formative student-centred process that provided a product that documented a student's achievement and experience at the university.
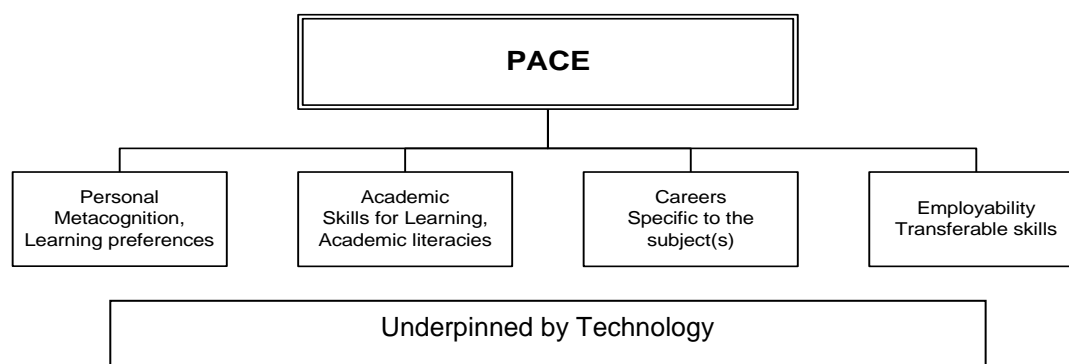

Figure 1. University of Wolverhampton institutional framework for PDP processes - PACE

The PDP processes were to be integrated throughout the whole of the student experience, they were conceived of as being developmental and used with tutor guidance. A consequence of this framework was the development of an electronic tool (PebblePad©).

In the academic year 2003/4 the University undertook a review of PDP practices across all undergraduate provision. That review showed that there were lots of activities that could be classed as PDP. Best practice was gathered and suggestions were made to find some form of electronic student portal that would, as a minimum function, allow students to access Microsoft Word™-based PDP templates from their own and other academic disciplines.

In 2004/5 the University of Wolverhampton worked with an external company, Pebble Learning, to develop and pilot the software PebblePad©. At the start of the academic year 2005/6 this tool was rolled out across the whole of the University. Over 2005/6 and 2006/7 new communities of users emerged that were early adopters and 'champions' of the new software and an ePortfolio users' group was established.

ePortfolio and PebblePad© at the University are often used interchangeably. For example the URL to access the PebblePad© software is http://www.wlv.ac.uk/eportfolio. One conceptualisation of PebblePAD can be seen here.

In the early days of the tool being available, it was used by small pockets of staff enthusiasts in the university for ad hoc personal development planning tasks and was also used for formative and summative assessment. These were the early adopters of the system, but such staff and practice did not exist in all schools. Examples of early practice included lecturers using scaffolded webfolio templates that students can download, copy, personalise and undertake various assessment tasks. The template is then shared with the tutor for comment and formative feedback throughout the module of study. When all tasks are completed the web folio is summatively assessed. Examples of Wolverhampton student eportfolios prior to the Pathfinder project can be seen here.

2. What was the problem the project set out to address?

There were opportunities within the level 1 curriculum and tools available, that could support learners to evidence and reflect on their learning journey. However, it was evident through the benchmarking exercise that this opportunity was not fully embraced across the institution and that a change to this aspect of the curriculum could benefit students greatly. It was felt that this opportunity to develop the level 1 curriculum by integrating ePDP would not only benefit students but would also provide staff with an opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge in areas that perhaps they were not already familiar with and thus the project could potentially affect improvement in the quality of student learning and develop an additional model for the professional development of staff.

There had been positive feedback from students who had experienced PDP through eportfolio in a number of the early adopter schools previously mentioned. Staff in these early adopter schools had achieved success with their students in a number of ways by using eportfolio, including, as discussed ePDP tasks which had led to improved motivation, confidence and an improved sense of belonging in their students. Therefore the overarching aim of the project was to harness expertise across the institution in the areas of eportfolio and PDP to improve the quality and the capacity of our students' learning in all schools, through the design and implementation of integrated ePDP tasks in core Level 1 modules. The starting point therefore was that student improvement would come from staff engagement, as the QAA Guidelines for HE Progress files states "Students are more likely to value PDP if they see that academic staff themselves are involved in PDP processes" QAA et al (2001) Through consultation with employers it also seemed that students may not be leaving the institution with sufficient evidence of their learning journey that could be clearly linked or aligned to their attainment, and therefore, perhaps were not easily able to demonstrate their employability in an holistic way.

3. What were the intended outcomes?

The project was important to the institution to move past 'champions' and early adopters of the ePortfolio tool to build personal capability in staff and institutional capacity to increase the quality and amount of PDP activities in the level 1 curriculum. The reason for this being that students value the opportunities for personal and professional growth that our institution offers them as indicated in both internal (The Student Satisfaction Survey) and external surveys such as the National Student Survey.

The project focused on Level 1 learners to provide those at the start of their University career with a range of appropriate opportunities to think about their learning, to develop their own learner identity and provide strategies for reflection on learning which will remain in their following years of study.

The outcomes of this project, (models for strategic change to embed the blended use of e-PDP tasks within the learning curriculum), directly support one of HEFCE's strategic aims (2005) for e-learning - **Strand 3** *Student support, progression and collaboration, Objective 3.4 Encourage e-based systems of describing learning achievement and personal development planning (PDP).*

In addition, the outcomes of this project hoped to make a contribution to our understanding of the issues in the following aims in HEFCE's eLearning strategy;
1.1   Reward excellence and promote and encourage innovation in e-learning
2.3   Promote the sharing of learning technology and resources across the HE sector and between sectors
4.4   Address skills, knowledge and competencies for e-learning in training and continuing professional development for learning and teaching staff, including learning technologists
4.5   Review the human capacity in the HE sector to deliver future e-learning growth

In addition the project hoped to provide the sector with the following useful ePDP resources to enable others to benefit and learn from the experience of this Pathfinder project:
1.   A best practice guide on approaches to the design of blended electronic PDP activities and on staff development for the design of blended electronic PDP activities
2.   Cases studies on the design of blended electronic PDP activities across the 10 Schools
3.   Pedagogic templates to guide design of integrated electronic PDP activities in different subject areas
4.   National conference papers and publications, as and when, on strategic change in the Level 1 curriculum
5.   To contribute to private and public blogs as well as HELGA, as required by the Pathfinders project

One other possible outcome of our project was that it would provide information to inform the Higher Education Academy Professional standards level 3 descriptor: *Supports and promotes student learning in all areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values through mentoring and leading individuals and/or teams; incorporates research, scholarship and/or professional practice into those activities*

4. What has the project achieved at this stage?

This project has provided the sector with a proven and transferable model for the implementation and integration of ePDP as a key aspect of the level 1 curriculum across all disciplines. In particular, the sector can learn from what the project has achieved in the up skilling of staff, the creation of repositories of worked through ePDP activities and templates, the development of additional strategies for staff development, the

creation of best practice guides and a number of case studies that can be used for disseminate and inform future practice.

This project has provided the sector with a proven and transferable model for the implementation and integration of ePDP as a key aspect of the level 1 curriculum across all disciplines which are discussed in more detail below

- o Integrated ePDP activities which are transferable across disciplines and contexts
- o Eportfolio as an approach for staff development
- o Mentoring models to support ePDP
- o Residential staff development retreats as a focused immersion model of staff development

Integrated ePDP activities

Tutors were asked to design and implement module-based ePortfolio mediated PDP tasks. These tasks are aimed to facilitate reflection on a variety of learning related issues to enable learners to better meet the challenges of HE. To help staff conceptualise and define their tasks and the learning outcomes to be achieved reference was made to published work from the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) and the JISC Centre for Educational Technology & Interoperability Standards (CETIS). There were a range of ePDP activities carried out and the majority of activities could be catergorsied into 'recording activities and concerning skills' Ward and Richardson (2007) (Appendix 1) These activities included Reviewing critical incidents, reviewing / profiling / auditing skills, Reviewing / reflecting on personal, attitudes / values, assembling evidence for skills, assessing own learning style, setting goals for skills development (a full list of ePDP activities used in the project can be found highlighted in Appendix 1)

The tasks and ePortfolio system tools that were used varied and in some cases tested the software and required new approaches. For example in the case of ePDP tasks in the module 'Interpreting (BSL/English)' students were asked to reflection on their own production of British Sign Language using web cams to record their signing which was linked to their web folios. This created difficulties for file uploads which were eventually overcome (A paper on this is to be presented at the DIVERSE conference 2008 Haarlem, Holland University, The Netherlands, July 1 - 3 2008). Another example is the use of YouTube links in Drama and Dance for students to critically reflect on such issues as the staging of a particular clip from the ballet Sleeping Beauty. (Links to this conference and other dissemination activities can be found in the project blog)

Eportfolio as an approach for staff development

The Project team from ILE decided to build capability in staff by using the PebblePad© software for the management of the retreats and where appropriate for evaluation. The rationale for this was that the student experience could be mirrored for staff and cover key software skills in a context that facilitated learning for those who had a range of experience using the software. An example of the use of a Gateway for the project (fig. 3) is that all the retreat resources were uploaded, including a scaffolded webfolio template for staff to download and personalise. This web folio template was then required to be published to the Gateway and updated during and between the retreats. This activity is one of the most common uses of the software that is seen within the curriculum but for some staff this was the first time that they had actually experienced the activity as a 'student'. The use of PebblePad© mirrored the student experience in other ways such as difficulties using an on-line system off-campus via wireless networks and working collaboratively on-line.

Mentoring model

This project implemented a transferable mentoring model to support implementation of ePDP across the curriculum. It was based on an existing developmental mentoring model. There any many different mentoring models and definitions (The Coach Mentoring Group, 2003) For this project we used a developmental mentoring model. The Megginson *et al* model (2006) differentiates between Sponsorship mentoring and Developmental mentoring. (Appendix 2) This model was a key element to the project as our 'champions' of ePortfolio were asked to become developmental mentors and to work within this role descriptor. This was important for the building of capability as staff less confident in using the software were in some cases in awe of the 'champions' and could not see themselves working in a similar way.

Another important element of developmental mentoring was that the mentoring relationship went through five distinct phases 1. Building rapport, 2. Setting direction, 3. Progression, 4. Winding up and 5. Moving on. The project team used these five phases for the three retreats (see Appendix 3) leading and facilitating the different retreats accordingly so moving the participants through a process that would have a start middle and end.

Retreat model
The project has been successful in shaping a residential retreat model of staff development that supports the stages of the mentoring model we used. This residential retreat supported mentoring model has already influenced an institution in the South West in how they may approach some future staff development needs.

The value of the use of sequenced retreats on staff development to achieve specific learning and teaching curriculum change. The retreat model had already been used successfully for other e-Learning skills but feedback six months after the events from participants showed that although they were inspired during the events themselves, few were fully able to carry out what they had planned to do as other things took priority when they returned to their workplaces.. Each retreat had different aims, activities and was facilitated differently to mark the change through the project (see Appendix 3). At the end of the retreats follow-on work was highlighted so that the momentum at the event was not lost when back in the work situation. For this the project team became almost 'super-mentors' smoothing out issues such as software problems to resource management challenges. As mentioned, the project has highlighted the motivating and beneficial nature of the retreat 'immersion' model of staff development and that as an institution we need to be even more aware of how valuable staff time is and that careful planning of external staff development sessions can be a rewarding initiative that has practical benefits.

In summary, these initiatives resulted in the following outputs and activities; apart from the project team of three pedagogy/technology/ staff developers from the Institute for Learning Enhancement 9 members of staff, each from different academic schools, acted as mentors to 22 tutors/mentees, the teams worked with 22 different modules in subjects such as Creative Writing, Dance, Drama, Education, Engineering and the Built Environment, Health, Human Resource Management, Interpreting (British Sign Language/English), Legal Studies, Mathematics, Pharmacy, Psychology, Social Work, Visual Communication. 1810 students were participants on the modules which ranged from groups of 15 to the largest module that had 350 registered students.

5. Where now?
The Pathfinder project has shaped the following future university initiatives:

- o   A new University wide Blended Learning Strategy which includes ePDP
- o   Incorporation of the mentoring and retreat model in school business plans
- o   Invigorated ePDP research community, internally and externally
- o   Continuation strategy

These are now explained in more detail
During the life of the Pathfinder project the institution has developed a Blended Learning Strategy as a discrete and significant appendix to the institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The overarching aims of the Blended Learning strategy are to enhance student learning and to improve each student's learning experience. This Pathfinder project was the catalyst for one of the target strands for this strategy. The strategy is framed in terms of six student entitlements. The benefits to student learning evidenced through our Pathfinder project led to a target devoted to the development of PDP electronically. This student entitlement says that all students should be entitled to have the opportunity to participate in electronic Personal Development Planning. The full list of student entitlements is below, and Pathfinder project also informed entitlements 2, 3 and 5

1.   *have access to a digital copy of all lecturer-produced course documents. e.g. module guides, assessment briefs, presentations, handouts, and reading lists;*
2.   ***formative assessment/s opportunities on line with meaningful electronic assessment feedback;***
3.   ***have opportunities to collaborate on line with others in their learning cohort;***
4.   ***have the opportunity to participate in electronic Personal Development Planning (ePDP);***
5.   ***submit all (appropriate) assessments online;***
6.   *opportunities to engage in interactive learning during all face to face sessions*.

The model is the subject of a detailed briefing paper. In the institution the model has been included in school and department business plans, for example, one academic school will be using mentoring and retreats to develop its work on an updated VLE.

For staff the project has created a new Pathfinder community for peer support that has helped re-launch the internal ePortfolio Users Group and stimulated new members to join the user group. Externally the evaluation data is feeding into the work of Cohorts III and IV of the International Coalition for ePortfolio Research (Cohort IV is sponsored by the HEA and CRA), Cohort III is addressing the following: *What can be learnt from the experiences of ePortfolio early adopter schools as a way to build capacity and build frameworks for scalability across the institution and its partners?* And Cohort IV *What are the facilitating and inhibiting factors in building capability and capacity of staff in supporting the use of ePortfolio?"* .This work is also informing the NTFS folio Research Special Interest Group and the Research in Mentoring and Coaching Network. project to establish a National Action Research Network (NARN) for PDP and ePortfolio.
It is important to note that the evaluation data we collected as part of the project is playing an important role in informing a strategic continuation strategy to ensure all the hard work during the project year can continue to be

integrated and supported in the curriculum post-project and encourage engagement from the wider non-project community. We carried out extensive data collection and have drawn information from 606 student questionnaires, 42 staff questionnaires (both interim and end of project) 35 residential staff development retreat specific questionnaires, 3 hours of staff feedback presentation video, 2 hours audio of staff final interviews and an external evaluation of telephone interviews with Associate Deans within the project schools.

In a year's time the project envisages that those who were mentees/tutors would become mentors to others and that the model of staff development is recognized and used for other areas of enhancing staff e-Learning skills. The seven factors identified in the projects initial risk analysis were: recognition and allocation of hours for the mentoring relationship, expectations of the role from those taking part and from resource managers, lack of student engagement, Module colleague engagement, Student difficulties in using the software, Technical infrastructure, teaching facilities

These provide a landscape for issues which will be addressed in the continuation strategy. It is hoped that one issue, lack of student engagement, will be the subject of a mini pilot project to evaluate if using student peer to peer mentoring based could be adapted to offer institution wide support for student ePDP engagement.

Finally, the Dean of Learning and Teaching has included a post pathfinder continuation strategy in the Institute for Learning Enhancement business plan for 2008/9 which has been accepted by university executive and the Business Learning Information Systems Group. This will provide a continuation of the ePDP impetus created through this Pathfinders project and ensure wider embedding and student engagement with ePDP.

6. What are the key messages for the sector?
The key messages arising from the project for the sector are:

- Ways in which HEFCE e-Learning Strategy aspirations can be realised.
- Change takes time…be patient, it is worth the wait
- Listen to the learner voice
- Listen to the staff too

These are outlined in more detail below and would be relevant to a number of stakeholders, including Senior Managers, staff developers, academics and support staff (including dedicated student support units). In addition, the outcomes will inform the implementation of the HEFCE e-Learning strategy, the work of the CRA, the HEA and JISC.

Ways in which HEFCE e-Learning Strategy aspirations can be realised.
This project should be able to inform and has provided evidence in support of the HEFCE e-Learning Strategy (2005/12) relating particularly to Strand 3: *Student support, progression and collaboration* the Measures of success for this being where: *Students are able to access information, tutor support, expertise and guidance, and communicate with each other effectively wherever they are. They are able to check and record their achievement in a form designed for multiple uses to enable personal and professional development.* Students have commented on the flexibility and benefit of being able to use an eportfolio for PDP as it provides 'anytime anyplace' learning. The rapid nature of feedback has been encouraging to students feeling a sense of belonging much earlier than they originally expected. Many staff chose to use blogs as a way of supporting dialogue and facilitating communication with their students as well as encouraging peer online interaction. The project has demonstrated how HEFCE's objective 3.4 *Encourage e-based systems of describing learning achievement and personal development planning (PDP)* may be realised In particular the project has addressed this through supporting staff to take risks and use the eportfolio system for PDP and providing ongoing support and encouragement through the mentoring relationships.

Change takes time…be patient, it is worth the wait
Implementation and the path to embedding eportfolio and ePDP into the curriculum does not happen overnight. Be patient and be prepared to do small pilot studies, dip your toe in the water and see how it feels initially, We have been fortunate as the Pathfinder project has enabled us to do a large scale implementation and embedding initiative, with 30 staff and over 1800 students. However, this was only possible as we had an established core of 'eportfolio experts/enthusiasts/champions' who were able to join the project as mentors and thus enthuse and develop less eportfolio experienced staff. Being part of a community of eportfolio practice is really helpful in the path to embedding eportfolio and ePDP. Our pathfinder project community has shared blood, sweat, laughter and tears together. Look within your institution to those who may already have experience and get advice from them. If you are the ePortfolio ePDP pioneer within your institution then approach other institutions or product user groups that may exist. There is a community of practice in this area that either already exists in your institution or is just waiting for the brave enthusiast to get it started. Successfully implementation and embedded must be built upon effective practice that already exists, either within your own institution or in the wider academic community.

Listen to the learner voice

The evaluation of this project has shown that students like using electronic methods for their learning and teaching but that they must see a value and benefit by undertaking those activities. Within the sector there has been a visible increase in research into learner experience in eLearning and more recently specifically eportfolio learner experience. However, there is a lot that can be learnt from learners within your own institutions. Taking on board learner comments and ideas can provide a valuable source of information that can be used to inform curriculum design and shape potential learner support needs. We should look at implementing eportfolio ePDP strategies into teaching as something we do '*with*' our students, rather than something we do '*to*' them. The student data we have gathered is being used to inform our post Pathfinder project exit strategy. We have found the majority of students have enjoyed participating in eportfolio and ePDP and those who haven't have given us some valuable ideas on plans to develop wider engagement. Evaluation findings are being discussed with tutors and those responsible for curriculum design in order to further develop ePortfolio ePDP practice within the project modules, but also in wider contexts across the schools.

Learner quotes

'Using PebblePAD for PDP has helped me understand what I have learned in this module and in relation to other modules'

'The tasks were really helpful in helping me identify my strengths and weaknesses and where I need to focus on to improve these'

'I really enjoyed the ePDP tasks and intend to use the eportfolio to help me structure my learning in the rest of my degree'

'I really enjoyed the PDP tasks. As I can write my feelings etc down better than I can verbalise them!

Listen to staff too!

The project has given us the opportunity to work closely with a number of staff from across an entire discipline spectrum. Through this we have taken on board the factors that enable and inhibit eportfolio ePDP within their curriculum We are fortunate that we have been able to gather data from both staff and students that will enable us to look at ePDP from multiple perspectives, including that of the project team who are situated in the institutions central learning and teaching department. Members of staff need to be supported and mentored when risking the use of new pedagogies involving a blended learning approach and that Institutional cultures and infrastructures need to make space and time for colleagues to work together.

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