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Using e-portfolios for learning and assessment within the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) at the University of Salford

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Case Study: Illustrating and evidencing practice.

My Case Study is relevant to the following section (please highlight):

- 14-19
- Higher Education
- Employers/CPD
- e-portfolios

1. What title would best characterise what is being described here? (a short sentence-two at most)

Using e-portfolios for learning and assessment within the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) at the University of Salford

Please note that the PGCAP students are academics and other professionals who support learning at the university. They complete the PGCAP Programme to gain teaching qualifications in Higher Education and we address them in this case study as learners. Total number of learners was 25.

2. Describe the practice (what do staff do, what do students do, are others involved – and how)?

The e-portfolio system PebblePad is being trialled since September 2010 by the Academic Development Unit (ADU) during the Engaging and Enhancing Student Learning (EESL) 30 credits module of the blended PGCAP programme. It is used as a personal learning space, to capture reflections, the process of learning and for assessment purposes.

A webfolio template was provided to organise content according to the assessment components. Learners were encouraged to personalise the template and look so that it works for them. The webfolio formed the basis of the e-portfolio which was shared with tutors and peers throughout the module.

The aim was to encourage formative feedback between peers and between tutor and learner and for learners to create an ongoing reflective account of their development during the module.

This case study refers to cohort 1 learners who started the PGCAP Programme and the EESL module in Oct 2010.

3. What did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it?

Some learners used the e-portfolio system effectively throughout the EESL module. A small number found it useful to capture reflections beyond assessment requirements. The e-portfolio based learning and assessment

approach enabled module tutors to provide formative feedback on drafts and work completed during the module and engage in a conversation with learners around their learning and assessment. Evidence of work completed and feedback received from these learners show this approach was effective and deeper engagement with the module themes was achieved.

It was noted, that the majority of e-portfolio assets submitted were text-based and about 50% of learners preferred to upload Word documents instead of adding content directly to their e-portfolios. Only a few personalised their portfolios and organised their materials in different ways. However, some learners took the opportunity to experiment with audio and provided part of their work in audio format and generally used their e-portfolio more effectively by exploring some of its features and functionality. Learners who experimented with audio found it beneficial for their learning and some noted that they have started using audio with their own students.

Formative audio feedback was provided by tutors in combination with written feedback and all learners who received feedback in their e-portfolios felt that it was beneficial for their learning.

A number of learners found the e-portfolio tool itself challenging and frustrating and therefore provided the majority of their work on or shortly before the submission deadline and a very small number of learners submitted their work as separate assets without using the template or webfolio.

Through this trial, the module team learnt the following:

- e-portfolio-based learning and assessment creates additional, extended and media-rich opportunities for learning, feedback and dialogue between tutors and learners and between peers and leads to deeper engagement.
- an introduction to e-portfolio-based learning and assessment at the beginning of the programme would allow learners to familiarise themselves with this approach. Learners from a number of disciplines were unfamiliar with portfolio based learning.
- the short introductory session (30min) during the PGCAP induction was not sufficient and despite ongoing support during the module, face-to-face and online, online self-study materials, multimedia guides, further assistance was needed especially at the start to help learners new to this specific e-portfolio system to familiarise themselves with the tool and develop the skills needed to navigate, add, link and organise assets more effectively during the module.

4. How might/are you planning to develop/improve practice?

- A portfolio training session before induction has been introduced during which the specific e-portfolio tool is introduced together with the principles of portfolio-based learning.
- Learners now have access to a sample portfolio from previous cohort.
- The use of the portfolio system is monitored more closely and the module team aims to resolve any portfolio issues in collaboration with the learner as soon as they appear, to encourage and enable e-portfolio-based learning and steer learners away from using the e-portfolio as a last-minute document repository.
- Because of the difficulties experienced with the previous cohort mentioned above with PebblePad and the current flexibility within the Academic Development Unit to pilot alternative tools for portfolio building, Wordpress, a social media tool, is being trialled with the current cohort in combination with PebblePad. A comparative study is being conducted to capture the experience of learners using different digital tools and identify common themes, differences and identify which tool would enable more natural and effective portfolio-based learning.
- We are also in discussions with the developer of the in-house developed application 'the Hive' which could be developed further and become an attractive and sustainable e-portfolio solution for the whole university for staff and students. We hope to be able to trial it in the academic year 2011/12.

5. Can the resources/approach be viewed by others? If so where/how?

All PGCAP PebblePad portfolios are kept within the institutional PebblePad space and e-portfolios are currently only shared with the Programme Team, peers and mentors.

A sample portfolio has been made available by one of our cohort 1 learners for research purposes. Please get in touch if you would like to view it.

Our work on the above, with a focus on providing feedback during the EESL module using an e-portfolio was disseminated on the 25 January 2010 during the Students' journey with Technology Enhanced Learning, Good Practice Event, Academic Development Unit, University of Salford through a joined presentation with Currant, N; Nerantzi, C, Avramenko, A, Harvey, V: Formative Feedback in the blended classroom – how an e-portfolio can create a student-tutor dialogue to improve learning.

A reflective research paper on the use of e-portfolios for feedback and learning by Nerantzi, C, Currant N, Avramenko, A and Harvey V has been submitted for

the Creativity and Engagement in Higher Education Conference, University of Salford 6-8 July 2011 with the title Feedback conversations in a blended classroom.

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