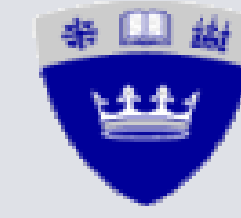


# Exploring the learner experience of ePortfolios for formative and summative feedback in the health sciences

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## Introduction

Researchers at Queen Margaret University (QMU) have been investigating whether, and in what ways, learners engage with formative and summative feedback delivered through ePortfolios as a mini project supported by the Health Sciences and Practice Subject Centre (HSaP).

Timely, detailed and appropriate feedback is extremely important for all learners [1]. In addition to improving achievement in knowledge acquisition and skills development, feedback can also promote deep learning, improve motivation, increase reflective skills, and help learners prepare for future learning events [2][3]. Feedback on progress is particularly important for students in the health sciences; these learners regularly undertake activities in the clinical environment which are less structured and predictable than those in the academic setting, requiring a highly flexible response.

ePortfolios have the potential to help learners capture, collate and reflect on feedback, assisting them to develop, over time, a more informed sense of their skills and achievements – linking to personal and professional development. Barriers to learner engagement with ePortfolios and feedback include computer anxiety, lack of access and usability issues, or inappropriate use by tutors.

## Generic findings

Learners' views, attitudes and preferences regarding feedback in general:

### Understanding of feedback

Learners perceived feedback to be:

- A response or communication;
- Provided usually by someone with subject specific experience;
- Linked to grades;
- Expected;
- Deserved in return for student effort.

### Purpose of feedback

Feedback is viewed as a communication mechanism between tutor and students to:

- Confirm level of attainment;
- Offer clarification especially of grade;
- Assist learning and understanding;
- Improve motivation;
- Build confidence;
- Provide signposting for future development.

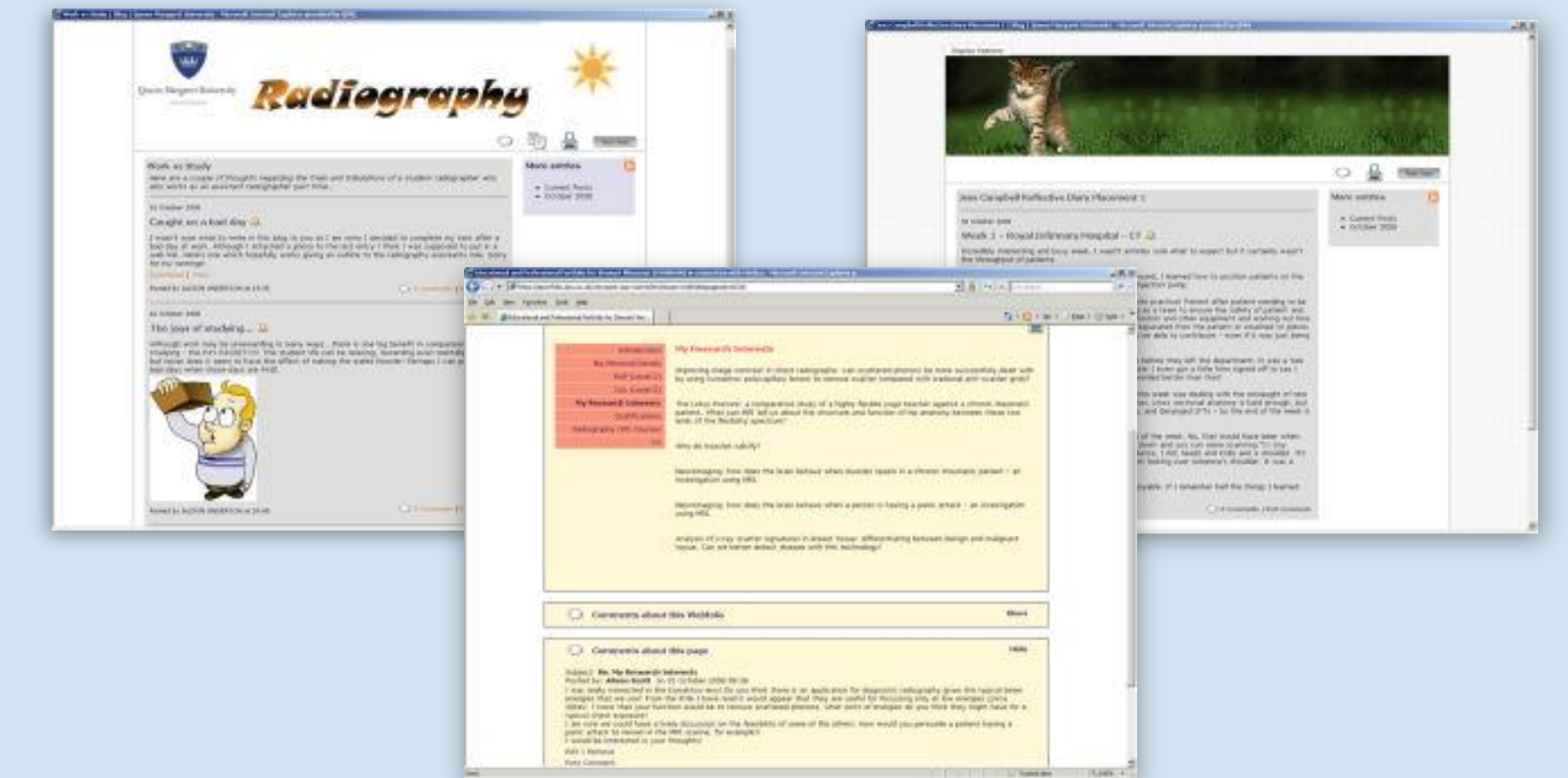
### Types of feedback

- Written and/or face-to-face;
- Generic and/or subject specific;
- Theoretical and/or practical;
- Formative and/or summative.

### Qualities of feedback

Learners expressed a preference for feedback which is:

- Task related;
- Personalised;
- Transferrable;
- Understandable.



## Recommendations

The development of an assessment dialogue [4] between tutors and students will aid learner understanding and engagement with feedback. This includes:

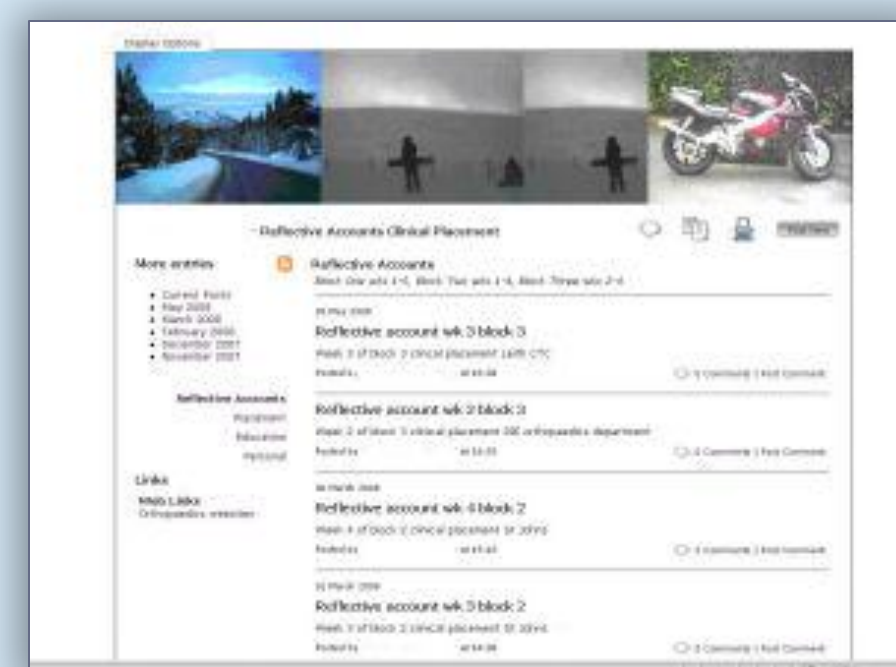
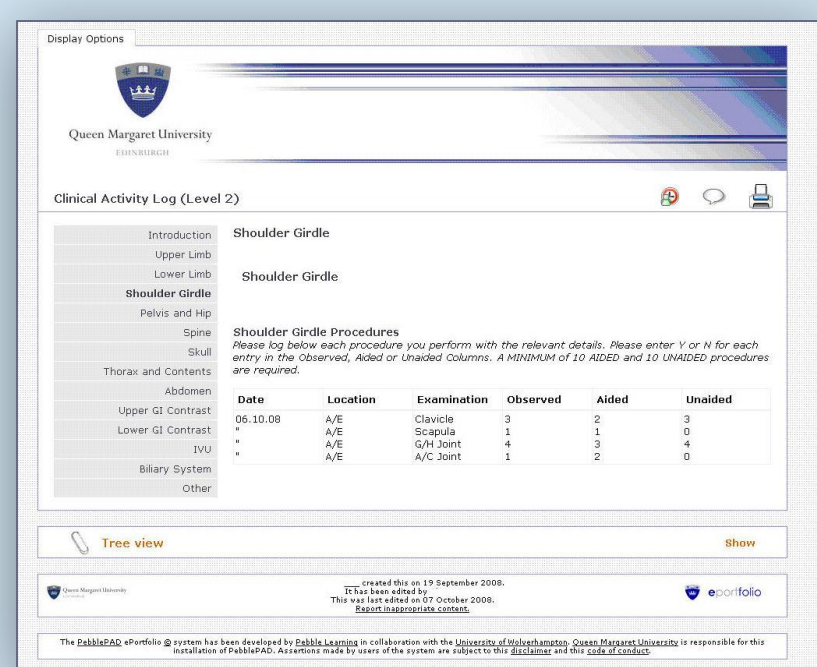
- Clarification of purpose and role of feedback;
- Tutors' expectations of learners' engagement with feedback;
- Clarification of assessment, assignment criteria and learning outcomes, and how these relate to feedback.

### To achieve this tutors should be cognisant of:

- The emotional investment that learners' put in to their assessments;
- The importance of maintaining communication channels.

### When providing feedback through ePortfolio, tutors should consider:

- Timeliness of orientation with the tool is essential;
- Consistency and clarity of feedback location;
- Reminding learners about using feedback and its role in their development.



## Study aims

Conduct an in-depth, comparative study of learner experiences in health sciences of using an ePortfolio to receive feedback, in order to:

- ✓ Develop an understanding of the impact of using an ePortfolio for feedback on the learning experience;
- ✓ Build a rich picture of actual learner experiences of engagement with feedback through an ePortfolio;
- ✓ Develop guidelines and case studies for educators to improve learner engagement with feedback.

## Methods

A collective case study approach has been taken in order to study cases where ePortfolios have been integrated into the curriculum. Data were collected from:

- ✓ Radiography, Physiotherapy and Nursing tutors, who completed online forms to provide in-depth information regarding the use of ePortfolio for feedback and assessment by the student cohort participating in this study;
- ✓ Learners from these health science areas, who participated in a series of focus groups. This facilitated access to learners' views and perceptions.

Case study	Focus groups
<b>1. BSc (Hons) Diagnostic Radiography</b> Year 2, 3, 4 PDP, forms, blogs, webfolio Formative and summative feedback	3 groups Aged: 22-44 7 female 5 male
<b>2. MSc Physiotherapy (pre-registration)</b> Year 2 Webfolio Summative feedback	1 group Aged: 26-37 4 female 3 male
<b>3. BSc Nursing</b> Year 4 Webfolio Summative feedback	2 groups Aged: 21-29 12 female

### Case study cohorts

## ePortfolio related findings

Learners' views, attitudes and preferences regarding feedback in ePortfolio:

### Engagement with feedback through ePortfolios

Levels and means of engagement included:

- Reading in-depth, or just skimming;
- Retaining feedback within ePortfolio and/or elsewhere;
- Printing;
- Questioning – cognitively and/or with provider;
- Returning to, and reusing feedback.

### Benefits of engaging through ePortfolios

Learners identified the following benefits of engaging with feedback through ePortfolio:

- Immediate and permanent;
- Accessible from any location;
- Digital notification;
- Storage of feedback in a single location;
- Targeted and focused;
- Transferability – technical and as part of CPD.

### Potential barriers to engagement

Learners highlighted barriers when engaging with feedback through ePortfolio:

- Preference for face-to-face contact;
- Technical issues;
- Inappropriate timing of introduction of tool (i.e. not final year of study).

### Comparison of experiences of using ePortfolios for feedback with previous experiences

- Positive experiences – e.g. context specific if feedback is linked to a specific section;
- Negative experiences – e.g. inconsistency amongst tutors regarding alignment of marking criteria.

The ePortfolio can be used to facilitate an ongoing assessment dialogue by tutors, encouraging students to:

- Store, collect and collate feedback from across their programme of studies;
- Reflect on this feedback and use it to inform their development, support self-regulation and sustain continuous learning.

For health science students, feedback through ePortfolio can assist learners to reflect on the 'messy' experiences of clinical placement and to link these to the emerging theoretical knowledge.



## References

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For further information please see our website:  
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