



Queen Margaret University
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Tutor guide to supporting students when moving a portfolio online

This guide includes:

1. An introduction to the ePortfolio system
2. Consideration of the issues when implementing QMU's ePortfolio system
3. An overview of online portfolios
4. A review of the different roles of an online portfolio in the learning environment
5. A discussion of the potential benefits of an online portfolio
6. Guidance for preparing students to develop an online portfolio

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1. The ePortfolio system at QMU: PebblePad

The QMU ePortfolio is an online space that provides the learner with a number of tools to record, store and structure a collection of evidence that will demonstrate learning achievements and abilities. For students this may be a reflective account of a practice placement, or may be a concept map or a presentation that they have produced. It may simply be a reflective account of their learning experience when working in a group, or an account of their thoughts while developing an aspect of their learning.

The software we are using for our ePortfolio at QMU is called PebblePad. The PebblePad ePortfolio is, simply, an evidence-based web-publishing system. The system allows individuals to share elements of their ePortfolio with others if they wish and users need to decide whether those they share with can interact with the materials by commenting on, or even editing the materials. The ePortfolio is the learner's own private area, and no one can access the content unless the learner chooses to share it with them. The tools within our ePortfolio system allow learners to:

- Create action plans;
- Keep an online journal;
- Reflect on achievements and abilities;
- Complete forms;
- Assess their own learning;
- Create and develop an online portfolio.

You may wish to visit the 'list of tools' document for a complete overview of tools that are available to students and tutors in PebblePad. This and other guides are available on the 'ePortfolios at QMU' website:

<http://www.qmu.ac.uk/eportfolio/>

Students should be encouraged to think of their QMU ePortfolio as a springboard to recording their lifelong learning which will support their career development and improve their employability. When students leave QMU they can take the content of their ePortfolio with them, saving it either to a memory stick, or to a CD-ROM. This could be transferred to another ePortfolio system (for example provided by a professional society) or to the commercially available PebblePad website at: <http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/>

2. Issues for consideration when implementing the ePortfolio system

As with implementing any new practice or tool, there are challenges that need to be considered. In particular tutors are encouraged to think carefully about:

- **How does an ePortfolio fit in with existing institutional e-learning tools, for example, our VLE: WebCT?** It is worthwhile spending a little time thinking about which tools you are using and why. It is important

that you explain to the students your rationale otherwise they may not understand why you are using the ePortfolio and/or WebCT.

- **How can students be assisted in understanding the purpose of an ePortfolio?** Spend some time with students in the induction explaining about what you want to achieve with the ePortfolio system and how it links to employability, PDP and reflection. You might want to show your students the examples of portfolios on the QMU eportfolio website to help them visualise what a blog or a folio looks like.
- **How can students be motivated to maintain an ePortfolio?** Students will not use the ePortfolio system on a regular basis if the tutor does not repeatedly refer to the system and its role in their learning. In some cases, tutors at QMU have used assessment (formative and/or summative) to encourage student engagement.
- **Will development of an ePortfolio be optional, or a compulsory activity as part of a module or programme?** It may be appropriate to work as a programme team to decide how you will implement the ePortfolio. Many learners may not immediately understand the role of the ePortfolio in their learning and it is important that you are clear about this and convey this to them.

(Stefani, Mason, & Pegler 2007)

3. What is an online portfolio?

Using a paper-based portfolio to keep a record of achievements is not a new practice, for example artists and musicians develop portfolios to keep a collection of their work to demonstrate their range of artistic abilities. Health professionals, accountants and financiers keep portfolios to show evidence of their work and their commitment to Continuing Professional Development. This may be required by their professional society.

An online portfolio consists of several online sections which will differ according to the particular purpose of the online portfolio. For example, a portfolio for employability would include sections on:

- **Welcome** (a brief welcoming statement to people viewing your ePortfolio)
- **About Me** (a biography)
- **Classes and Projects** (selected coursework and reflections)
- **Educational Goals** (a reflection on your educational and career goals)
- **Resume** (an electronic version of your resume which can be interactive with hyperlinks)
- **Links** (annotated web sites you suggest to your visitors)

- **Contact** (your email information so that people can get in touch with you)

(LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning 2007)

At LaGuardia Community College, there are several examples of online portfolios developed by students:

<http://eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/default.htm>

These show how an online portfolio can be 'chunked' into different areas and linked to showcase examples of student work, for example, assignments and presentations.

Alternatively, an online portfolio which is supporting an application for recognition of prior learning may have different sections to show how a learner has met the different learning outcomes of a module. Crucially the learner will be able to upload evidence in a variety of formats (e.g. audio, video, word documents, and PowerPoint presentations), to provide evidence of prior learning.

4. The roles of an online portfolio in the learning environment

An online portfolio could be used for learning, assessment and professional/employment purposes:

4.1 Learning

In this case, learners keep an online portfolio so that they can:

- Keep documents together including blogs, actions plans and competency checkers;
- Document evidence;
- Organise and structure work (link with mindmaps).

This would not be shared with anyone else but would help to organise and structure learning and crucially to reflect on the process of learning.

4.2 Assessment

In this case, the online portfolio is shared with tutors as part of an assessment. The focus here is on the product of learning, for example:

- An online portfolio (paper to online) which will meet specific assignment criteria;
- Recognition of prior learning (meeting module outcomes);
- Meeting programme outcomes (facilitates joined up thinking about learning across a programme of study).

Sections of the learning portfolio may be used for the assessment portfolio.

4.3 Professional/employment portfolio

In this case, a learner develops an online portfolio to provide an overview of their learning, their development and their CV. It is hoped that this will provide a competitive advantage over other job seekers.

Examples of online portfolios can be found at:

- Warwick University:
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/csde/gsp/eportfolio/> and
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/csde/gsp/eportfolio/awards/winners>
- Minnesota: <http://www.efoliominnesota.com/>
- New York city College of Technology:
http://eportfolio.citytech.cuny.edu/ePortfolio_examples.shtml
- St Olaf College: http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/cis/web_portfolios.htm

JISCinfoNet provides many more case studies of ePortfolios at
<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/e-portfolios>

5. Benefits for learners and tutors

Early research indicates there are a number of advantages for learners, tutors and institutions when moving a paper-based portfolio online, such as:

- Enabling a large amount of material to be stored and shared;
- Facilitating inclusion of various data types in addition to text e.g. audio files, slide presentations, video;
- Flexibility and adaptability – materials can be added, deleted or rearranged easily and quickly;
- Ability to share materials – peers, tutors and potential employers can all be granted access to view students' assets. This leads to student engagement and greater pride in the finished product (Aschermann 1999);
- Encouraging individuals to develop and showcase key skills.

(Madden 2007)

Critically an ePortfolio is a “connected document” - students can hyperlink between documents to show evidence and link to external sources such as 'MySpace' (Stefani et al. 2007). This will facilitate students linking their learning from many different areas, both formal and informal.

5.1 The student perspective

An ePortfolio can assist students with:

- Keeping documents together to evidence learning at QMU;
- Reflecting on learning;
- Demonstrating their technical skills (Amber and Czech 2002);

- Remembering to think about personal development planning – what do they need to do next to help them progress in their chosen career?
- Preparing for an interview;
- Developing a CV.

An ePortfolio can assist learners in preparing for employability. For example, first year students at Penn State University liked being introduced to résumé [CV] writing since it helped prepare them for work (DiBiase 2002).

5.2 The benefits for tutors

The advantages of moving a portfolio online for tutors include:

- Eliminating the need for paper-based storage space;
- Easier to access and carry;
- Students being able to include evidence of a wider range of artefacts including multimedia;
- Sharing of portfolio content that can be viewed by more than one individual at any one time including external examiners.

(Siemens 2004; Love, McKean, and Gathercoal 2004; Gathercoal et al. 2002; Cotterill et al. 2004; Amber and Czech 2002)

However, online portfolios are not suitable for all assessments: web-based folios cannot include physical objects, such as art and craft (Cooper and Love 2001). Also, some tutors will like the physicality of paper-based portfolios and dislike marking online.

5.3 Institutional benefits

From an institutional perspective, an online portfolio could have a number of benefits including:

- Facilitating insight into student progression;
- Providing an opportunity for course specific feedback from students (we currently use WebCT for this kind of feedback, not PebblePad);
- Providing a support mechanism for placement experiences;
- Demonstration of institutional success through showcasing of student achievement;
- Meeting PDP requirements.

(Madden 2007)

6. Preparing students to develop an online portfolio

Here are some suggestions for supporting students when you come to use ePortfolios with assessments:

6.1 Preparing students

When introducing an online portfolio, it is essential to show students good examples to help them visualise the concept of a paper-based portfolio. This can be quite prescriptive so have a variety of examples to show good practice.

Materials

Discussion of appropriate materials will be helpful for learners. For example:

- Provide learners with advice on selecting materials. For example, will video and audio be acceptable?
- Encourage learners to use multimedia if appropriate;
- Encourage use of photos (for non-anonymous assessment);
- Explain about copyright and if necessary ask the Librarians to give a short introduction to copyright;
- Explain about scanned articles (for example, the quality of a document may make it unsuitable for scanning).

Explain about sharing

Make sure students know:

- How to use the gateway. It might be appropriate to set up a test gateway;
- Who has access. For example, will you be providing access to their materials for an external examiner?
- How to access resources, such as forms, through the gateway;
- To be aware of confidentiality issues when uploading materials. (For example, if a learner wished to provide evidence of letter writing skills, by linking to a letter written while on a work placement, they should be aware that an employer has the legal rights to any documents created for them. Therefore, it may cause infringement of property rights if a learner were to include said letter as evidence of experience in their portfolio).

6.2 Linking to the module

If you decide to link ePortfolio to your module you should:

- Make it clear to students if and how the ePortfolio will be assessed and how this links to the module outcomes;
- Specify a word count if appropriate (there is currently no function for this in PebblePad);
- Decide how much feedback you wish to provide, for example, with formative blogs.

6.3 Using the ePortfolio system

Explain to learners:

- That evidence should be clearly labelled, for example, a title such as evidence 1 is not very helpful. The title of the evidence should make it very clear what the evidence is referring to;
- Evidence should be collated as early as possible. Learners could create a folder early on and use this to store evidence (again, it should be clearly labelled);
- The importance of 'saving' and 'backing-up' assets;
- That it is much easier to compose and edit content for the portfolio in WORD and then to move the materials into the PebblePad system using copy and paste.

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