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# E-PIP – Final Project Report

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Higher Education Academy  
Physical Sciences Centre

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## Summary

### Practical support for the project was provided by:

- Attending course tutor meetings to introduce the project and answer initial questions
- Setting up training sessions from an expert user
- Attendance at drop-in sessions for course participants
- One-to-one help using PebblePad for tutors
- Providing ongoing technical support in using PebblePad and problem solving

### Data on experiences and attitudes was collected using the following methods:

#### *Pre course*

- online questionnaires of course tutors and course participants/students
- interviews with course leaders and tutors
- focus group with course participants

#### *Post course*

- online questionnaires of course tutors and course participants/students
- interviews with course leaders and tutors

### Pre course focus group, interviews and questionnaires revealed the following:

- students can identify many ways in which the e-portfolio could be of use to them
- they could also identify potential pitfalls

### Post course interviews and questionnaires revealed the following:

- students work can still be largely paper based and scanning work to put into an e-portfolio can seem like an extra and unwanted task
- Course participant use of the e-portfolio was strongly linked to whether use was compulsory
- Tutor enthusiasm was affected by matters of whether use was to continue in the future (after the project's completion)
- How tutors used the e-portfolio with students was affected by their personal views of what an e-portfolio should/could be and hence their personal experience
- Experience of using an e-portfolio cannot be completely separated from the specific tool that is being used
- Meeting an expert user was a very valuable experience to the attendees as were active training sessions with them

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## Background

The Flourish ecpd project successfully demonstrated the embedding of an e-portfolio system (PebblePad in this case) in various aspects of CPD provision at the University of Cumbria. The overall aim of the E-PIP project was to work with the Flourish project and to use its outcomes and experiences to embed e-portfolio practice at Hull.

A key aspect of the Flourish project is the use of an e-portfolio within their Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PgCinLTHE). The focus of this collaboration therefore looked at the embedding of the Flourish outcomes in Hull's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE). A key module on Hull's PGCHE involves the development of an e-portfolio so this was thought to be a good opportunity to disseminate good practice developed at Cumbria and evaluate the outcomes.

A PGCHE course tutor at Hull is the course leader of a wholly online master in education (MEd) course. Because of this, the trail was extended to the MEd students in order to compare and contrast their experiences.

An unconnected project at the Scarborough Campus of the University of Hull was funded to trial the use of e-portfolios with Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students. Given the similarities of projects, it was decided to compare the experiences of this Hull project with those of E-PIP, given that both will be using PebblePad.

## Project Support

Practical support was provided by the Physical Sciences Centre for the project in the following ways:

- Attending course tutor meetings (PGCHE) to introduce the project to all course tutors and answer initial questions
- Setting up training sessions for all course tutors (PGCHE, ITT and MEd) with an expert user from the Flourish project
- Attendance at drop-in sessions for course participants (PGCHE)
- One-to-one help using PebblePad for tutors
- Providing ongoing technical support in using PebblePad and problem solving

## Data Collection

### Pre-project

Prior to beginning work with the e-portfolio, data was collected using the following methods:

Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course	students	online questionnaire
Online MEd course	students	online questionnaire
Online MEd course	course leader	individual interview
PGCHE course (module 2)	'participants'	online questionnaire
PGCHE course (module 2)	'participants'	focus group
PGCHE course (module 3)	'participants'	online questionnaire
PGCHE course	course leader	individual interview
PGCHE course	tutors	individual interviews

### Post-project

At the end of the project, data was collected using the following methods:

Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course	students	online questionnaire
Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course	course leader	individual interview
Online MEd course	students	online questionnaire
Online MEd course	course leader	individual interviews
PGCHE course (module 3)	'participants'	online questionnaire
PGCHE course	course leader	individual interview

## Findings – Students/Participants'

### Benefits and issues anticipated when using an e-portfolio

The follow are examples of the anticipated benefits and issues associated with use of an e-portfolio taken from pre-project questionnaires from those on the three courses. Those questioned managed to identify many ways in which the e-portfolio may offer a direct benefit to themselves, both whilst on their course and beyond. They could also see potential issues with the process of maintaining an e-portfolio and the technology. It should be noted that there is no significant differences between the kinds of responses of those on the three courses.

#### *Benefits anticipated*

##### Access

- e.g. access at all times from anywhere (as long as there is internet access) [ITT]
- e.g. having a single access point [MEd]

##### Communication

- e.g. possible online submission of work to tutor [ITT]
- e.g. sharing work with tutors or others (at remote sites) [MEd]

##### Personal development

- e.g. able to monitor progress and highlight areas to improve upon [ITT]
- e.g. experience of using different software for teaching and learning [MEd]
- e.g. Increased confidence in working online [PGCE]

##### Organisation

- e.g. being able to organise materials [MEd]
- e.g. giving structure [PGCE]

##### Flexibility

- e.g. able to add to and edit work [PGCE]

#### *Issues anticipated*

##### Access

- e.g. problems if there is no internet connection [ITT]

##### Technology

- e.g. not knowing how to use the software [ITT]
- e.g. could have a non-friendly interface [PGCHE]

##### Time

- e.g. time consuming, especially when unfamiliar [MEd]
- e.g. having to upload a lot of information to start with

##### Effort

- e.g. the 'learning curve' [PGCHE]

## **Benefits and issues experienced when using an e-portfolio**

The follow are examples of the benefits and issues experienced when using an e-portfolio, taken from post-project questionnaires from those on the three courses. Those questioned realised several key ways in which the e-portfolio offered them a direct benefit despite the limited experience they had, and there is a notable similarity here with the benefits that they expected to gain before the project began. They did have some issues, which is to be expected since by the end of the project period they were still quite new to the software. Nevertheless, the issue sited were relatively minor and tended to be linked to the technology not the concept of the e-portfolio itself. It should be noted that there is no significant differences between the kinds of responses of those on the three courses.

### ***Experienced benefits***

#### **Communication**

- e.g. able to share work with colleagues [PGCHE]
- e.g. online collaboration [MEd]
- e.g. able to publish work [MEd]

#### **Organisation**

- e.g. learnt to be more organised [PGCHE]
- e.g. can use it to organise thoughts [PGCHE]
- e.g. everything in one place [MEd]

#### **Access**

- e.g. able to access all documents from any location [MEd]

#### **Personal development**

- e.g. experience of using new software [MEd]
- e.g. experience of using an e-portfolio [MEd]

#### **Other**

- e.g. stronger sense of community (on the course) [PGCHE]
- e.g. thought more deeply about use of resources and their suitability [PGCHE]

### ***Experienced issues***

#### **Effort**

- e.g. work on paper has to be scanned to add it to the e-portfolio [ITT]

#### **Technology**

- e.g. restrictive format [PGCHE]
- e.g. text editing not as sophisticated as that used elsewhere [PGCHE]
- e.g. not always intuitive to learn [MEd]
- e.g. slow interface [MEd]

## Findings – Course leaders/Tutors

### *Benefits and issues experienced when using an e-portfolio*

Data was collected via personal interview with the course leaders and tutors both pre- and post-project. They had little or no prior experience of using an e-portfolio and were offered practical support from members of the Physical Sciences Centre then and throughout the project.

### Pre-project interviews

These were conducted at a very early stage so that they had a limited opportunity to introduce themselves to the e-portfolio and consider how they were going to use it within their course. There was a high degree of motivation in the early stages which prompted most staff to investigate the e-portfolio for themselves. Of those that did engage, all continued to try using the e-portfolio despite any difficulties in learning the system, technical problems or dislike of the layout. They recognised the potential benefits of using an e-portfolio and also that some of the activities they would be engaged in (e.g. reflection) were challenging in themselves. Being almost as new to the e-portfolio as the students meant there was a feeling of low confidence for some. There was an attempt at integrating the e-portfolio into the (new) institutional VLE (though this was later regretted with the benefit of experience).

### Post-project interviews

These were conducted at the end of the project but it should be pointed out that this was a very short project so everyone involved still felt themselves to be on the learning curve. There was still a high degree of motivation but staff could now see how better they might employ the e-portfolio in their courses, playing to its strengths. Technical problems and idiosyncrasies of the system were dealt with or worked around. Confidence levels were understandably higher and plans were in place for increased future use and expanded support mechanisms.

They recognised that any students' reluctance to use the e-portfolio was connected to their reluctance to engage with a course or type of activity. They also saw that assessment was a motivator for engagement as was tying e-portfolio use to specific parts of a course. Tutors saw no change in levels of engagement of students with activities than when other methods of recording (e.g. paper based portfolios) had been used previously. The link between tutor engagement with e-portfolios and take up by students was recognised.

Some tutors found that the experience had challenged their whole concept of what an e-portfolio was and could be. Some also reported that they had felt that the software had guided them to engage with the e-portfolio in a way that would not have occurred to them naturally.

### Advice from experience

Interviews with the course leaders and tutors on their experience of using the e-portfolio with students yielded advice for others in their position. This includes:

Training and building confidence

- build time into your schedule to use the e-portfolio yourself hence giving you the experience to support others (your colleagues and students)

- arrange sessions for yourself and fellow users to attend to share practice in a setting that promotes honest and open dialogue
- consider organising a mentoring scheme for both staff and students, matching less experienced with more experienced users
- offer drop-in sessions or visits by an experienced user
- find out what motivates you to use an e-portfolio and use this to get and keep yourself involved
- identify the root cause of difficulties (is it the e-portfolio or the activity/course you are using it for that's the problem?) and solve that
- use your experience with the e-portfolio to make training resources for others

#### Use in a course

- integrate the use of the e-portfolio into the course
- indicate explicitly what activities in a course tie in with use of the e-portfolio
- recognise that assessment is a motivating factor for engagement

#### Becoming an expert

- appreciate that your early experiences of using an e-portfolio with students will not be perfect and will teach you lessons that you can apply in the future
- your experience of e-portfolio use will be different to another's; make opportunities to share experiences of what works and why

## Conclusions

This was a very short project and given the type of activity (e-portfolio use is usually thought to offer most benefits over a substantial period of time) it was gratifying to see that tutors and students had gained so much from the process.

The tutors were experiencing largely their first use of an e-portfolio and obviously, from their comments, had learnt a lot from it. Even when they had experienced issues they learnt from them and were ready to use this to plan for the future.

Students were also beginning to realise some of the benefits they had expected from the use of an e-portfolio, even in this short period of time

Fortunately, although the project is over, e-portfolio use has been embedded and will continue to be used by the students for the remainder in their courses.