Putting Another 'E' Into Guidance!

Presenters

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1 About our organisations

The University of Leeds is the largest University in the West Yorkshire area with over 30,300 enrolled on a mixture of undergraduate and post graduate courses. The School of Medicine admits 238 per year to the undergraduate 5 year medicine degree course. (MBChB) and the School of Healthcare offers various courses including nursing, cardiology and social work.

Huddersfield New College is a large sixth form college offering general and vocational courses to 1960 16-19 year olds in the Huddersfield area. Courses on offer range from advanced to beginner levels.

2 Overview

The presentation will outline the use of an e-portfolio approach to widen participation to medicine and healthcare courses. We will discuss the types of activities and materials which have been developed, how students engaged with the tool, what impact the introduction of the e-portfolio had within the FE institutions and on the students involved.

3 The detail

3.1 Approach

In launching the e-portfolio the university identified colleges and 6th form colleges whose students would benefit from extra support in making applications to medicine. The e-portfolio materials were developed by the university. A member of staff linked with the identified providers launched the tool through face-to-face group meetings. The competitive nature of entry into the profession was highlighted and students were supported in their use of the technology. In the first year four colleges were involved and eight in the second year.

The main aim of the e-portfolio was to provide support to students in making decisions about and applications to medicine and other healthcare courses. The e-portfolio system offered opportunities to introduce students to some of the tools used in undergraduate education and illustrated to them the importance of reflection within the undergraduate setting. Medical and healthcare courses require a high level of reflective learning and students on courses in these two areas are expected to regularly participate in reflective activities and be able to record the outcomes of these activities in a meaningful way through the use of technology. At Leeds University students are expected to reflect in the online progress file and through the use of a blogging tool. It was useful for students to have a choice who they showed their work to highlighting the advantage of collecting and then choosing appropriate evidence.

The e-portfolio approach fitted these subject areas in other ways: Medical and Healthcare students are now required to maintain a progress file to record their achievements which they have to present at annual appraisals and review meetings; through their foundation years training as trainee doctors staff have to use an e-portfolio to collect evidence, monitor their progress and reflect on experiences. Trainee doctors cannot become fully qualified until they present an e-portfolio of evidence to prove their competencies; speciality training is now moving increasingly to the e-portfolio approach as is continuous professional development; and future job applications in the profession depend heavily on the presentation of evidence from a collection of achievements and competences.

The e-portfolio approach also encourages students to engage in self-directed learning. It emphasises the need to students to take control of their own learning and it is hoped encourages a self-analytical approach to personal development.

3.2   Scale

The initial project ran from July 2005-Decemeber 2006. The e-portfolio was made available to 151 students from 6 FE institutions.

3.3   Impact ….

3.3.1   …. on learners, teachers, partners, staff, etc

The students who took part in the project have been successful in securing places on courses in medicine and in healthcare. 75% of those who participated have been offered places on medical and healthcare courses, set against a national success rate average of 11%.

The use of the e-portfolio also impacted on the students' decision making process. FE students felt that they had an advantage in gaining a medical place. They were more mature and better at reflection. After completing a few of the e-portfolio exercises some students decided that medicine was not the correct choice for them and changed direction. There was also the power of the external voice to confirm what careers tutors had said.

Over 80% of the students who took part believed that using the system had introduced them to a new way of thinking and learning and saw the e-portfolio as a useful space in which to audit their skills and competencies and identify ways forward. The students also valued receiving feedback from members of staff within the university and from professionals and medical students already in jobs and in courses.

The staff within the institutions believed that the use of the e-portfolio bridged the gap between FE and HE and made the relevance of their current studies more apparent and real.

Students liked having access to the HE system though Boddington and being able to 'talk' on line to medical students and tutors.

3.3.2   …. on the organisations involved

The University of Leeds is constantly researching and exploring ways of attracting more students from diverse backgrounds into higher education and, more specifically, the School of Medicine is attempting to attract a broader base of society into the medical profession which is still heavily dominated by students from traditional professional and middle class backgrounds.

Colleges have a greater percentage of students making realistic and appropriate choices.

3.4   Costs and benefits

University- Project Officer to initially set up and create resources and systems.

Colleges/Sixth Forms-Time for identified member of staff to act as contact.

Benefits:

Students are better prepared for UCAS application and personal and professional development and are more aware of what is expected of them at university.

Medical student body starts to represent the society it will serve

College destinations

Increased number of successful case studies to share with future students thinking of applying to these areas.

4 Lessons, caveats, and implications….

4.1 …. for the organisation(s) involved

- Potential students need to be identified early in Yr 12 to be introduced to the e-portfolio and provided with help to organise their work experiences as well as record the outcomes of their activities in a meaningful way.

- Need to ensure that any project is not duplicating work carried out elsewhere

- Technical issues need to be overcome otherwise staff and students can lose confidence

  Identify ICT staff to install (if necessary) or provide access to, if hosted on a 3rd party server, the e-portfolio tool? Initial access is vital to the levels of engagement and 'reputation' of the tool. This may also involve creating usernames and passwords depending on the type of tool utilised.

  Ensure there is access to a named member of technical staff familiar with the tool to deal with any problems that arise.

- Teaching Staff/Support Staff

  The involvement of those providing feedback is vital. The receipt of feedback was the most important factor in maintaining engagement. Identify staff members who will be involved in the provision of feedback and, as mentioned above, involve them in the design or adaptation of the materials but also get them involved before this stage discuss with them how will it impact on their work? The use of the tool should compliment existing learning activities not create more work.

- Protocols for using e-portflios need to be agreed

- It is useful to engage tutors by getting them involved in developing the e-portfolio

- Gender issues became noticeable with twice as many males accessing the e-portfolio but females were twice as likely to engage with the e-portfolio on a continuous, deeper level.

- Usage

  Ask yourself what would they use it for? Will it be assessed/compulsory or voluntary? A higher percentage of students will engage with an assessed/compulsory e-portfolio but their relationship with the activities and with the tool will be more than likely 'strategic' i.e. they will only complete the parts that they need to for assessment purposes. Voluntary usage will yield lower numbers of users but those who do engage are more likely to continue to do so at a deeper level.

- Materials: Adapt or Create? Pre-existing paper-based materials will need adapting to the online environment.

  Long pages of text do not work well in e-portfolios. Can the materials be enhanced with the use of pictures, video or podcasts? Is it clear when the students need to make entries and what they are responding to? Relevance is a major factor in engagement, particularly with voluntary usage e-portfolios. Ask yourself what will the students gain or learn that will be of use to them in the e-portfolio. What is the added value? Students cited the activities as the most useful aspect of using the e-portfolio.

If appropriate involve those who will be providing feedback or using the e-portfolio with the students in the design of the materials. It is important that they are familiar with the layout and design of the materials and have 'ownership' over the content

- What activities do I need to organise to launch the e-portfolio?

Familiarise students and feedback providers on the use of the tool. It's advantageous to go through the first entry with them to ensure they understand how to get started. Just show them what they need to do for the purposes of the learning/recording activities. They will familiarise themselves with the other functions of the tool. Ensure that materials, help documentation is located in and outside of the tool on paper or available on the intranet. Make it clear who the contact is for technical support.

Do not just focus on solely technical matters highlight the increasing use of e-portfolios and other online tools in higher education and in professional training. Discuss the importance of being able to reflect on personal strengths and weaknesses, of keeping records of achievements and how these activities are important for Personal Development Planning in HE and for appraisals in the work place.

Also discuss with students how this fits in with their course and or other activities. Students should not view e-portfolio activities as 'extra' work. This will lead to low level or non-engagement.

It should also be made clear to students what is expected of them and what they can expect in return. If they are to receive feedback through the tool how long can they expect to wait. Some students stopped using the e-portfolio and only restarted when they received feedback on their previous entries.

5 Contact details
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