

Case Study 1

Using an e-portfolio to support learner progression into Higher Education

Context 1- Access to HE: transition from School to Higher Education

Summary

Students found the use of an e-portfolio helpful in thinking about going and applying to University. They particularly liked recording and evidencing the experiences and skills that they had which would be useful to include on a University application Personal Statement. Generally, they found the e-portfolio easy to use. For the schools involved the e-portfolio encouraged independent learning and provided a structured programme to get students to think about university. The e-portfolio module got students thinking about University at an earlier stage and this was seen as beneficial.

Institutions

University of Bradford and Sixth Forms from three Bradford Schools.

Institutional context

The University of Bradford is committed to widening participation in Higher Education, particularly targeting pupils from local schools through the Bradford University Academy Compact Scheme (<http://www.brad.ac.uk/compact/>). The Compact Scheme has been running for a number of years and provides a [programme of activities](#)¹ aimed at raising the aspirations and achievements of young people and encouraging their progression into higher education. It is open to all sixth form students in the Bradford district.

Until this pilot, compact activities required students to come into the University; using an e-portfolio allows the University to locate some compact activities in schools and combine and blend these with activities at the University. The e-

¹ <http://www.brad.ac.uk/compact/activities.php>

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portfolio offers the University a way to expand the provision of the Compact scheme through flexible delivery and to embed access activities in schools.

This case study reports on 65 students from sixth forms in three Bradford schools who took part in this pilot, and used an electronic portfolio as part of their Compact scheme activities between October 2005 and July 2006. The sixth form tutors in the participating schools opted into the pilot and the module formed a compulsory part of the career planning activities of the 65 pupils participating. Each school tutor supported a group of between 17 and 25 students who were also supported by a tutor from the University.

Challenges

Careers provision in sixth form is often delivered by form tutors who are subject specialists and do not have any formal careers guidance training.

Learners often do not record valuable experiences that could be relevant to a University application, developing their sense of achievement and building their confidence. Personal statements for UCAS applications² are often written close to the deadline and consequently learners do not always have time to reflect on their experiences and achievements to enable them to select those that best demonstrate and highlight the skills they have gained.

Established practice

The Bradford University Compact scheme offers a range of whole or half day workshops in a range of subject areas which are available to all sixth form students. Places are reserved on a first come first served basis to students registered on the Compact scheme. In addition, for those students who have an offer of a place at the University, it runs a summer school in the vacation just before student entry to University which offers students the opportunity to develop study and IT skills. This workshop occurs before students know their exam results and gives them the opportunity to gain 15 points towards their UCAS application. The University does not currently offer Compact students specific help with compiling their personal statements.

² Universities and Colleges Applications System <http://wwwucas.ac.uk/apply/>

Learner activity

Learners were enrolled on a 5 credit foundation level module at the University. Learners are asked to complete an electronic portfolio to encourage them to think about entering higher education and to make informed and / or realistic choices about their future education, and to help them put together a personal statement for University admission. This is a new module, developed as part of this pilot, designed to exploit the features offered by the e-Portfolio system. It is designed to help the students develop their awareness of and record their achievements, build their confidence and raise their aspirations to enter HE and help them plan what they need to do to achieve this.

The module consists of eight tasks that students are required to complete. The tasks were designed to be generic and applicable to any subject or University application.

Students are asked to include the following in their e-portfolio:

- research to find out about the Universities they are interested in, the courses they offer and the potential career paths available (not restricted to Bradford),
- evidence and reflection on any experiences they have had that might be relevant to their application, for example: work experience, extra-curricular activities, personal achievements, volunteering, hobbies and interests,
- a skills audit to identify gaps in their current abilities,
- an action plan on how they would go about improving their knowledge and skills to achieve those identified for their chosen university and course.

The tasks in the e-portfolio are assessed as part of the module. On successful completion of the module, learners gain 15 UCAS points towards an offer at the University of Bradford.

Pedagogical / technical approach

The participants were studying a range of different courses, from vocational AGCE³ courses in IT to courses such as Science A-level. They were given initial

³ Advanced General Certificate in Education

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training in using the e-portfolio and given an overview of the tasks which they were to complete.

After completing these tasks, learners then had to complete a webfolio (a web based presentation) containing the experiences and skills they had recorded, through completing the tasks, over the course of year 12 along with a final reflections on what they thought they had learned and achieved. An example is given in Appendix 1.

The e-portfolio tool used was the web based flash application PebblePAD (<http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk>) developed at the University of Wolverhampton.

The majority of learners accessed their e-portfolios over networked computers at school. Regular sessions were held in each school with a teacher to support the e-portfolio building process, as summarised in figure 1 below. The amount of time pupils had to develop their e-portfolios ranged from an hour per week to an hour per month.

Some students also accessed their e-portfolios from home as well.

School	Subjects being studied by learners	E-portfolio sessions	Supported by
A	Vocational IT course	Up to 1 hour a week as part of timetabled IT lessons.	IT / sixth form tutor
B	Academic A-level courses	20 minutes a week during one morning tutor group period	Sixth form tutor
C	Academic A-level courses	50 minute sessions after school. These were not on a regular basis.	Sixth form tutor

Figure 1: Summary of e-Portfolio support sessions

Intended outcome(s)

The intended outcome of this module is to facilitate wider participation in HE by raising aspirations and attainment through the use of an integrated e-support environment that helps learners piece together and manage their learning in a range of school, university, work-based and informal settings.

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Identify and describe the personal skills and qualities needed to study in higher education.
- Identify and describe any areas for personal improvement.
- Compile an effective portfolio that demonstrates appropriate levels of skills development, personal reflection and personal development planning and action.
- Use e-portfolio packages effectively.

Evaluation – Data Collection

Sixty-five learners are involved in using the e-portfolio along with three tutors, one from each of the three schools. The evaluation covered the full cycle of the module. We evaluated the pilot cohort using a variety of methods:

- Online questionnaire, at the beginning and end of the year, to all students using the e-portfolio (38 students completed the initial survey and 29 completed the final survey out of 65). The initial survey in the first few weeks of their use of the e-portfolio and the final survey after completion of their portfolios.
- Midpoint focus group of students using the e-portfolio (Focus group for each of the three schools with a total of 14 students involved).
- End focus group with students and staff (7 students and 5 school tutors).
- Informal interviews with the supporting tutor at each school.
- Critical incident log.
- Email records.
- Reflective journal kept by ELP project officer.

E-portfolio users were asked a series of questions, for the initial online questionnaire (appendix 2 & 4), designed to measure

- Their initial impressions of the e-portfolio tool and its ease of use.
- How useful they thought the e-portfolio module would be.
- Their initial thoughts and plans in relation to going to University.
- A self assessment of learning and study skills.

The final online survey was designed to measure broadly similar impressions as the initial survey (see appendix 2 & 4):

- Their impressions of the e-portfolio tool and its ease of use.
- The frequency and location of use of the e-portfolio.
- How useful they found the e-portfolio module.
- Their revised thoughts and plans in relation to going to University.
- A self assessment of learning and study skills.

The focus groups (see appendix 3 and 5) were used to elaborate on this information and additionally measure:

- Specific aspects of the e-portfolio that were good or that needed improving.
- The user's thoughts and feelings on using the e-portfolio to record achievements and experiences and reflect on what they had learnt from their experiences and achievements.

The e-learning advantage

Learner's perspective

- Learners feel they are able to access material that will help with their future career decisions from school or from home at any time. (62 % of respondents accessed the e-portfolio at home and 15% accessed it at other locations outside of school)
- Learners are able to share work with their tutors electronically and get feedback electronically. There are no excuses for losing work as bits of paper and learners seem to like getting electronic feedback from their tutors. The sharing work feature was used more frequently than the feedback feature. In practice, often feedback was delivered face-to-face during a taught session to aid the teacher's workload and give immediate feedback and the sharing of work with tutors was mainly as a way of keeping check on learner progress
- The e-portfolio is allowing users to organise their work more effectively and access it from different locations without the need to carry paper around.

"The fact that it is online, it reduces paper work" Student.

"I like the fact that large amounts of information can be saved/stored on it and then access at a later date", Student.

- Learners are encouraged to think about Higher Education and prepare for it at an earlier time than normal. This has given them the opportunity to seek out new experiences and skills which may be of benefit to them in applying to University.

"I have been able to identify my strengths and weaknesses and have been able to do things in my spare time like voluntary work" Student.

- Learners have found it valuable recording their experiences and learning more about themselves. They feel an increase in confidence and self-esteem. Recording skills, achievements and experiences was seen as the most useful aspect of the e-portfolio work they were doing. (86% of respondents felt this aspect was useful).

"It is very useful to me because it enabled me to record my experiences, something I usually would not do" Student.

Teacher's perspective

- Most sixth forms use form tutors as a key means of delivering careers guidance and helping learners with University applications. This module has made the delivery of that guidance easier because learners can see that the University, through the module and e-portfolio, is reinforcing the messages that learners are getting in school.

"Someone from outside telling them (the students) is more credible than it just coming from us (school teachers)" Teacher.

- Teachers are keen to emphasise the fact that it enhances and encourages independent study because it allows for easy access at home and the work in the module is designed to for independent study.

Institution's perspective

Partner schools

Schools recognise that e-portfolios are going to be an important part of student work and assessment in the future. This project gives the school an opportunity to see what e-portfolios are all about, for staff to gain experience and skills in using e-portfolios and to see what issues they raise.

University

This approach enables the University to maintain contact with local schools throughout the year. It also enables Bradford Compact modules to be delivered in school during the year instead of just during the summer school, thereby increasing capacity and embedding the scheme in schools and strengthening partnerships. This should reduce the resource implications of extending the Compact scheme and allowing more students to benefit from completing modules.

Points for effective practice

Usability and support

E-portfolios, especially in the early stages will probably be new to both students and teachers, (42 % of students had compiled a portfolio before but only 6% of students had previous used an electronic portfolio). Training and support for schools in using the e-portfolio is important for success. How the e-portfolio module is introduced to users is also an important factor. It is not just about training users in how to use an e-portfolio but also about educating them in the purposes of developing and maintaining an e-portfolio and the potential benefits it affords. An e-portfolio tool has no value without a purpose for using it. The more useful the purpose and the greater the benefits from engagement in the process, actual and perceived, the more likely that the e-portfolio will be used.

The use of electronic feedback is an important issue to consider. Tutors felt that it was often easier to give feedback face-to-face with students rather than electronically via the e-portfolio system, particularly for formative feedback. Giving formative feedback electronically through the e-portfolio to large numbers of students was considered too laborious and time-consuming. This raises issues about how you evaluate feedback when using electronic systems like e-portfolios. Students did receive feedback on their work but the majority of this feedback was not recorded in the e-portfolio system.

Technical issues

Technical issues will arise. The problems in school relate mostly to the school network, computer permissions and software updates. Initially, one school did not have the Flash plug-in to allow the e-portfolio to work and this had to be installed by IT support because no one else had permissions to install the plug-in. At another school the html code would appear instead of the actual webpage. Occasionally students would not be able to login. Being able to resolve them

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quickly will minimise user frustration. It cannot be assumed that once a technical issue has been resolved that it will stay resolved due to changes in either the e-tool or the network over which the tool is accessed. In one school students were able to access their e-portfolio at the beginning and for most of the project but towards the end of the project the school network had been changed and students were no longer able to use the e-portfolio.

The use of internet based tools in schools can be problematic. Recent research across Europe suggests that students think that the Internet is 'over-regulated' in schools with the emphasis on using the Internet for gathering information and not collaboration and communication.

(<http://www.mediapro.org/publications/finalreport.pdf>)

In all three schools, students encountered difficulties accessing their e-portfolio whilst at school. This compares to the fact that those students who used it at home experienced no technical difficulties once the required free software plug-in⁴ had been downloaded.

Dedicated time

Students need to be given dedicated sessions in school time to undertake some of their portfolio work. As can be seen from Figure 1, School A gave students the most time in school to work on their e-portfolio activities. They made the most consistent progress with the e-portfolio from the beginning. In schools where less time was given, students did not tend to work on the portfolios in their own time as an ongoing process. They tended to leave the work until close to the final deadlines for completion. As a result, more dedicated time in schools was given in the later stages of the e-portfolio module.

Conclusions and recommendations

Teachers are in the best position to support their students in applying to University. This programme is giving support to teachers and provided a more structured way of building a personal statement. Students are able to record and collate relevant information all in one place. They have been recording their experiences and skills on a regular basis. They have been able to identify gaps in skills and experience and to plan for improvement in the future. This should mean

⁴ Adobe Flash Plug-in <http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/about/>

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that applications are of high quality and students feel less pressure. It also means that students should have a more considered idea of Higher Education and what they want to do.

Author(s) and date

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Glossary

Compact Scheme	<p>The Compact Scheme forms part of the Bradford University Academy. It will provide Post 16 students with a programme of activities, including support for their current programmes of study, the opportunity to sample future degree options and help with their university application. The scheme will also help those sixth form students who would like to progress onto The University of Bradford by giving them the opportunity to complete additional work to obtain 30 points towards their Bradford UCAS tariff points offer.</p> <p>The Bradford University Academy is a programme of activities aimed at raising the aspirations and achievement of young people and encouraging progression to higher education.</p>
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Appendix 1: Composite student webfolio

This webfolio can be seen in its proper format on the internet at

www.epistle.wlv.ac.uk/elp/webfolio.aspx?webfolioid=16869

Welcome

This is a composite webfolio consisting of various assets that have been created by students in Bradford as part of their work using e-portfolios for entry to Higher Education. It gives a flavour of what the students have done.

All assets are in the name of Neil Currant (the project officer) in order to anonymise the students.

In many cases, a number of students actual portfolios will contain multiple evidence for skills, hobbies and interests. This webfolio takes just a sample and is smaller than the portfolio produced by many of the students.

All spelling mistakes and grammatical errors are the students and the contents of this webfolio are verbatim what the students have written without any changes.

About Me

I am doing my A-Levels in Business and ICT.

My hobbies are to watch television, listen to music and go shopping.

I have had work experience in a Bank for two weeks, by helping the workers out, with their paper work, and i had a good time because all the people were very nice to me.

Other achievements that i have are, by passing most of my GCSE'S.

An experience that i have is, by doing a course in [basic food hygiene](#).

I have really good skills in ICT, which i find very interesting.

I am doing ICT, AND Business, because in the future i might want my own business such as a Hair and Beauty Salon.

Reflection on e-portfolio module

Journal Entry

What I have learnt during the eportfolio course

Reflection

Eportfolio has been very helpful to me it has helped me think about the current situation I am in and has allowed me to see what options are available to me in the future it has allowed me to think about my strengths and weaknesses and what I need to do for improvements. At the beginning I could not be bothered with the course I hated to use pebble pad it isn't something I like to in my spare time but it is very helpful. Knowing that Eportfolio has helped me I still don't like it very much I don't hate it as much I used to but still it isn't my favourite its ok.

I have done all the activities that had been set successfully when I did the activities it allowed me to think about what my weaknesses were and I realised that I had a lot of weaknesses and very less strengths and that I had to do something about this. The

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activities allowed me to think about improvements that I need to make. If I didn't do this Eportfolio course then it would have been difficult for me to get a place at university.

I did a skills activity and when I completed that activity I was shocked with the outcome I didn't realise that I was good at certain things the activity allowed me to see my own strengths and weaknesses I had some areas that I needed to improve on.

I did the time management skill and I realised that I could do with planning work and not leave things to the last minute I am still working on this skill and hope to reach this skill before next year.

I did a activity which showed my achievement I wrote about my GCSEs and found out that my grades were good and that I need to re-sit my maths. I was proud of my grades but I think I could have done better if I worked a little bit harder.

My speaking and listening skills are pretty good I am better talking and I am getting good at listen due to the voluntary work I do since I work with younger children I have learned to listen to them.

I reached a activity which wanted me to write about some work that I did for the community and I was shocked to see that I do nothing for my community and that it was time that I started so I decided to do some voluntary work so I started to do this in the at school I went to my ex textile teacher explaining to her that I would like to give her a hand in her lesson and she agreed so now I attend every Wednesday afternoon in my free periods to help students in lower school and when I have a lesson cancelled I attend the textile lessons and help the students.

I really enjoy working in the textile department due to it being one of my hobbies in my spare time I now attend sewing classes where I learn about how to sew different outfits I have joined these classes recently at Thornbury community building I attend theses classes every Saturday afternoon for 2hours.

Eportfolio has allowed me to change my lifestyle and has made me a better person it has allowed me to become more of a patient person since I have worked with younger year groups during my voluntary work it has made me more calmer I am able to understand people and their needs.

I have attended a law master class recently at Bradford University and have come to a decision that I would like to do law as a degree. As a child I have wanted to become a lawyer and before I attended this class I wasn't to sure about whether to go head with this degree but know I am adamant about doing this degree.

By attending the law master class I got to find about the cost involved in doing the degree and found out a bit about the course content and how much ucas points are needed I knew most of the information that the teacher was on about because I had done research on the course.

Eportfolio is a good activity to do it's not something you enjoy doing but it's really helpful because it allows a person to identify strong points and weak points. This course has made me realise that research is the key thing to everything and that without researching things may not always go the way you plan them to go.

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Eportfolio has helped me plan my steps to university it has allowed me to identify what grades I need to get into the course I want to. Planning is success I have realised now that I have learnt this and I have used this technique I am confident with myself and I see my future bright.

At first I found this program hard to use and annoying but now I am confident but I think this program could be still made more exciting and better. Overall the truth is that I have hated making time for this work but I am glad I did because if I didn't I would be an incomplete person and I would find it hard to get a place at university if I didn't do this work.

I am going to be at ease when filling in my UCAS form because I will be able to take the best parts of my work out and put it into the UCAS form when I come to write my personal statement.

Eportfolio has allowed me to become a person who is hard working because when I found out that I need 300 UCAS points to do the LLB LAW Degree I have started to work extra hard and I only found out this information because of Pebble Pad and the activities which were set.

Action Plan

Current Situation

I am currently studying my A-levels in Year 12 so I intend to pass them first and send off my UCAS form.

Ideal Situation

I need to:

Pass my A-Levels

Send off my UCAS form

Think/research of the courses I'm going to do at University

Research the course that I want to do and

see how many UCAS points I will need etc.

Steps to success

- Pass my A-Levels
- Apply to university
- Research the course I want to do
- See how many points I will need
- See what university I'm going to

SWOT Analysis

Strengths: My strengths are I am a very hard working person and very helpful to others.

Weaknesses: My weaknesses are that I can be less confident and I should meet deadlines.

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Opportunities: If i look further into the future about business then one day i might have my own Hair and Beauty Salon.

Threats: The threats are if i don't be confident then i won't be able to get in to uni.

Supporting Resources

Books like prospectuses, uni books etc.

I could use the internet to search for anything, like uni's, courses etc, to help me.

People

I could get support from teachers and career advisors to help me.

I could do training to help me more.

I could use the television to get support from.

Other

Like newspapers, magazines etc.

Reflection

I think if i work to these standards then i will be able to get into Universty with the qualifications i want and eventually become successfull.

Hobbies and Interests***Description***

Activites i participate in in my spare time

I love to sew in my free time i like to try and make different types of out fits.

It is a hobbie and a interest of mine to learn how to sew and to develop this skill i do some voluntary wk as well as attend sewing classes

Evidence

I attend a sewing class every Saturday afternoon at 2.00pm. I attend theses classes because i have a interest in learing how to sew clothes so far I have made a suit for my self.

I also like to do some voluntary work at School A in the textiles department I act like a support assistant in the class room by helping the students with the sewing and paper work.

Reflection

I think I have achieved a lot in a very small period of time I have learned to be patient and helpful.

I have learned to sew without getting impatient at first when something used to go wrong I used to lose my patients but now I have learnt to be patient and control my temper.

Thoughts On Uni***Journal Entry***

This section will highlight my thoughts on going to University, and what the advantages and disadvantages I feel are.

According to my opinion, I believe that the advantages of going to university are that it would firstly, allow me to seek extra knowledge and therefore; the long term advantage is that I will have the skills, abilities and academic qualifications required for a job. This would also make me more employable in organisations in the future. Being more employable means that in the future I should hopefully have a good future and career.

The disadvantages of going to university, I personally think are that it takes a long time to be qualified as what you want to be in order to progress further. However, at the end of the qualifications you could be an important asset of an organisation. This all comes from the idea of making money.

Reflection

In the future I would like to go to university, because of the advantages I have explained previously. In order for me to proceed further I will need to complete my A-levels and receive excellent results. In order to study Business & Management at Bradford University. I consider that succeeding means going to university and gaining qualifications and therefore this is why I tend to make this choice - going to University (as one of the main reasons).

**Exploring the Options*****About The subject - Business***

The subject that I would like to study in the future are:

I am interested in this subject and therefore would like to study it in more depth.

I am currently studying this subject and already have some knowledge about this subject.

This will help me to work in the field I want to in future.

Skills and Knowledge I will acquire

I believe that by studying this course I will acquire a range of different skills by completing assignments and projects. This will include learning about how a business starts up and how to manage and operate a business. It will learn about business at a higher level.

Job Opportunities

After completion of this course I would have the opportunity to enter employment, and to have a more senior role in a organisation if I have the required skills for the job. However, in future hopefully I would like to work in a higher school as a business studies teacher. The job opportunities for this subject are good as the business sector industry is growing in this country and therefore this subject would be valued by employers and will lead to career opportunities in business specialisms, such as: finance, human resources, marketing and teaching in business studies. In future I want to become higher school teacher in business studies subject

Bibliography***Description***

The sources of information used in completing the tasks for the e-portfolio are listed below:-

Internet:

www.ucas.com

www.bradford.ac.uk/compact

<http://courses.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/6thform/>

Appendix 2 – Online survey questions

Questions on students early use, student post use and staff post use surveys
(NB: for the staff survey, 'you' was replaced with the words 'your students')

Question	Student early use survey	Student post use survey	Staff post use survey
Have you made a portfolio before?	Q1		
If yes, what was the portfolio for?	Q2		
How useful did you find making the portfolio?	Q3		
Have you used an electronic portfolio before?	Q4		
If yes, what did you use and what did you use it for?	Q5		
How useful did you find making the electronic portfolio?	Q6		
How many times have you used PebblePAD so far?	Q7		
How frequently have you been using PebblePAD?		Q1	Q1
How easy has PebblePAD been to use?	Q8	Q2	Q2
Tick all the places where you accessed PebblePAD from?		Q3	
Which parts of the e-portfolio have you found useful?		Q4	Q3
In what ways is using PebblePAD useful to you?		Q5	Q4
In what ways do you think PebblePAD might be useful to you?	Q12		
How useful do you think PebblePAD will be in helping you apply to University?	Q13	Q6	Q5
What do you dislike about PebblePAD?	Q9	Q7	Q6
What do you like about PebblePAD?	Q10	Q8	Q7
How much discussion have you had with your teacher about why PebblePAD is being used?	Q11		
Would you have preferred to hand in your work as a paper portfolio rather than an electronic		Q9	

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portfolio?			
Are you likely to go to University?	Q14		
Are you more likely to go to University after doing the e-portfolio module?		Q10	Q8
Do you have an idea of which University you want to go to?	Q15		
Do you have a better idea of which University you want to go to now than you did at the start?		Q11	
List the Universities you want to go to	Q16	Q12	
Do you have an idea of what course you want to study?	Q17		
Do you have a better idea of what course you want to study now than you did at the start?		Q13	
List the courses you might study	Q18	Q14	
Do you think the e-portfolio module has helped students make better choices about their future?			Q9
Are you more prepared for going to University?		Q16	
Do you think the students are better prepared to apply to University as a result of the e-portfolio module in comparison to students who have not undertaken a similar programme or students from previous years?			Q10
Since using the e-portfolio do you know more about: The skills needed for a good University application The non-academic experiences you need The different course available Your own strengths and weaknesses What to put on your University application		Q15	Q11
When would be the best time to start using the e-portfolio?		Q17	Q12
How good do you feel you are at: Using computers Using the Internet to find out information Making decisions about your future study or work Using paper based resources and the library to	Q19	Q18	

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find out information Planning you own time and sticking to your plan Finding useful material without help from others Going over things you have learnt Studying more than you have been asked to by others Writing about your learning, e.g. in a learning diary etc. Knowing how you learn best			
Has the e-portfolio module helped you to: Organise your time Record your achievements Identify your strengths and weaknesses Improve you ability to reflect on your experiences and skills		Q19	Q13
Name	Q20	Q20	Q14
School	Q21	Q21	Q15
Gender	Q22	Q22	
Ethnicity	Q23	Q23	
Age	Q24	Q24	
Disability	Q25	Q25	
Nature of any disability	Q26	Q26	
If you have a disability, please suggest any adjustments that could be made to allow you to participate more fully in using PebblePAD for the module	Q27	Q27	

Appendix 3 – Student focus group questions (early and post use)

1. What do you like about doing the e-portfolio module?
2. How easy did you find it to record your achievements / experiences / skills at the start?
3. Is it getting easier or harder to record these over time?
4. Do you record these things straight onto the computer or use paper first?
5. Have you liked recording your achievements / experiences / skills?
6. Has recording these things helped you in any way?
7. Do you think you will be able to do a better UCAS application?
8. Has doing this helped you come to any decisions about University? Do you feel better informed?
9. Have you done any reflection on your records?
10. Do you think you have improved your ability to reflect?
11. What do you like about PebblePad?
12. Which parts of PebblePad are the most useful?
13. What could / should we do differently to make this e-portfolio module better?
14. When is the best time to start the module?
15. What improvements does PebblePad need?
16. What, if anything, should we leave out?

Appendix 4: Quantitative data from student and staff surveys

Question		Student early use survey	Student post use survey (n=29)	Staff post use survey (n=1)
Have you made a portfolio before?		Yes	15	
		No	21	
If yes, what was the portfolio for?				
How useful did you find making the portfolio?	Very useful	9		
	Useful	11		
	Undecided	4		
	A little bit useful	0		
	Not useful	0		
Have you used an electronic portfolio before?		Yes	2	
		No	34	
If yes, what did you use and what did you use it for?				
How useful did you find making the electronic portfolio?	Very useful	0		
	Useful	1		
	Undecided	1		
	A little bit useful	0		
	Not useful	0		
How many times have you used PebblePAD so far?		Mean = 3.8		
How frequently have you been using PebblePAD?	Every Day		0	0
	More than once a week		2	0
	Once a week		10	0
	Less than once a week		12	1
	Less than once a month		5	0

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How easy has PebblePAD been to use?	Very Easy	3	2	0
	Easy	14	14	1
	Neither Easy or Hard	16	11	0
	Hard	2	2	0
	Very Hard	1	0	0
Tick all the places where you accessed PebblePAD from?	School		28	
	Home		18	
	Public Library		3	
	Other		4	
Which parts of the e-portfolio have you found useful?	Uploading files		18	1
	Recording skills, achievements and experiences		25	1
	Doing an action plan		23	1
	Recording meetings		19	1
	Doing a webfolio		20	1
	Sharing assets		20	1
	Getting feedback from others		18	1
	Being able to customise the look of your e-portfolio		21	1
In what ways is using PebblePAD useful to you?				
In what ways do you think PebblePAD might be useful to you?				
How useful do you think PebblePAD will be in helping you apply to University?	Very useful	11	8	0
	Useful	13	11	1
	Undecided	11	5	0
	A little bit useful	1	1	0
	Not useful	0	4	0
	Not going to University	0	0	0
What do you dislike about PebblePAD?				
What do you like about PebblePAD?				
How much discussion have	My tutor has not mentioned it	16		

Case Study 1: School to University

you had with your teacher about why PebblePAD is being used?	My tutor has mentioned it briefly	11		
	My tutor told me a lot about it	14		
	My tutor explained it and I asked questions	3		
	My tutor and I discussed it in detail	2		
Would you have preferred to hand in your work as a paper portfolio rather than an electronic portfolio?	Would have preferred paper		4	
	Preferred electronic		20	
	Not sure		5	
Are you likely to go to University?	Very likely	20		
	Likely	13		
	Maybe	3		
	Unlikely	0		
	Not going to University	0		
Are you more likely to go to University after doing the e-portfolio module?	More likely		7	0
	About the same		21	1
	Less likely		0	0
Do you have an idea of which University you want to go to?	Yes	21		
	No	15		
Do you have a better idea of which University you want to go to now than you did at the start?	Yes		16	
	No		12	
List the Universities you want to go to				
Do you have an idea of what course you want to study?	Yes	23		
	No	12		
Do you have a better idea of what course you want to study now than you did at the start?	Yes		19	
	No		9	
List the courses you might study				
Do you think the e-portfolio module has helped students make better choices about their future?				Yes
Are you more prepared for going to	Yes		21	

Case Study 1: School to University

University?	No		7	
Do you think the students are better prepared to apply to University as a result of the e-portfolio module in comparison to students who have not undertaken a similar programme or students from previous years?				Yes
Since using the e-portfolio do you know more about (yes responses):				
The skills needed for a good University application			22	1
The non-academic experiences you need			15	1
The different course available			20	1
Your own strengths and weaknesses			25	1
What to put on your University application			20	1
When would be the best time to start using the e-portfolio?	Sept in year 12		17	0
	Feb in year 12		7	1
	April in year 12		2	0
	Sept in year 13		1	0
How good do you feel you are at (mean score for each skill)				
Using computers		7.5	8.11	
Using the Internet to find out information		7.5	8.11	
Making decisions about your future study or work		6.11	6.78	
Using paper based resources and the library to find out information		6.39	6.37	
Planning you own time and sticking to your plan		5.81	5.93	
Finding useful material without help from others		6.44	6.48	
Finding useful material without help from others		6.25	6.15	
Going over things you have learnt		5.56	6.63	
Studying more than you have been asked to by others		4.36	5.37	
Writing about your learning, e.g. in a learning diary etc.		6.44	6.41	
Knowing how you learn best				
Has the e-portfolio module helped you to (yes responses):			14	0

Case Study 1: School to University

Organise your time			24	1
Record your achievements			26	1
Identify your strengths and weaknesses			23	1
Improve you ability to reflect on your experiences and skills				
Name				
School	College A	22	13	1
	College B	5	5	0
	College C	8	8	0
Gender	Male	15	8	
	Female	21	18	
Ethnicity	White – British	3	1	
	White - Other	0	1	
	Asian – Pakistani	28	20	
	Asian – Bangladeshi	1	2	
	Asian – Other	3	1	
	Black - other	1	0	
	All other categories	0	0	
Age	16	26	4	
	17	6	17	
	18	2	5	
Disability		2	1	
Nature of any disability		Dyslexia Mobility	Mobility	
If you have a disability, please suggest any adjustments that could be made to allow you to participate more fully in using PebblePAD for the module		None	Blank	

Appendix 5: Transcript of BRADFORD SCHOOL DISSEMINATION EVENT

12 JULY 2006

Student opinions:

Was Pebblepad easy to use?

- Once you got used it, it's easy to use. At the beginning I didn't know what I was doing but that is because I am not good at computers.
- I think it was quite easy to use once you got started and was useful.
- Hard at the beginning but it got easier.
- Lot of problems at the start – didn't know whether it was our network or the system.
- I didn't like it, but will put in my personal statement. It was helpful but not something I liked. At the beginning you weren't able to customise it.
- It was really slow. Took ages to load up. I still don't like it but it was helpful.

When you come to write your Personal Statement next year, do you think the evidence you have collected in Pebblepad will come in useful?

- Definitely.
- You will know better how to set it out.
- You can use the information for next year.
- When we first started, I thought we were starting early and that the students weren't even thinking about University but I think now that it was a good time to start.
- Want to start our Year 12 on e.portfolios in October. It is time for them to do something about it. We will have some Year 13 coming back in September who won't have anything to say.
- Christine piloted with ICT Group and those that haven't done it are more unsure than those who have done it. Those who have are more focused.
- In terms of timing, it should run from October to Easter. Year 12 from September to around May time.

How did you feel about it at the beginning?

- We didn't have a lot of choice.
- We didn't like it either because we were doing so many subjects and this was just another thing to do. It felt quite pressurised.
- We decided to do it ourselves and I think it was a good thing. If you think about it long term, the experience that you have written, you can use again

Case Study 1: School to University

and it made you think a lot more about yourself and you have got the ability to do that. I like it.

Why did you apply in the first place?

- For the UCAS points.

Having been through the process, what do you think about it now?

- It's helpful.
- It's been worthwhile.

The students that are coming on behind you, what would you tell them, would you recommend it?

- Yes.
- When I look back I am glad that I did it, it's helpful.
- At the time you have many things to do, but once you have done it, it is good.
- It's trying to get people into it. I think when you get new people in, you should remind them that they do have coursework etc but at the end of the day you will achieve something, you get a lot out of it.

How much time did it take?

- It took ages.
- It didn't take ages, you could access whenever you liked. We didn't have certain dates. As long as you have done it and shared it with the teachers.
- Going on Pebblepad has improved my IT skills.
- I did IT in Year 10 and 11 so I used to help others as well.
- The links were like reading French, I didn't understand it.
- I didn't do any IT courses and I didn't like IT either, but I didn't find it hard to use once I had been shown.
- It doesn't take 50 hours.

Is it the IT that takes the time or having to think about what you write?

- Having to think about what you write. You don't write about yourself so you have to think about it.
- The booklet that Neil produced was helpful, it kept it structured.
- Once the booklet was up in a shared space, a bit of momentum started.
- Some of the tasks were confusing, we couldn't understand what was written
- The instructions were awful.
- They have improved!

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Were there any other benefits?

- I liked the IT Unit.
- We were hoping that some students would feel more confident.

Do you feel better prepared to apply to University?

- Yes. I have done all my research as to where I want to go, what points are needed, what kind of routes are available to me.

Do you get a sense that you are better off than your Peers who haven't done it?

- Kind of.
- It depends what kind of person you are. I stress a lot and others don't stress about anything.
- I think it is quite useful.

Do you feel less stressed about the whole University thing?

- Yes.
- It has kind of prepared us now. This is what we have got, these are our strengths and these are what we have to work at now.

Do you all know what you want to do?

- Business and Law
- Business and Law or Business and Management
- English Literature
- English Literature or Law
- IT
- Law
- Pharmacy

Did any of you completely change your mind about what you were going to do?

- No.

In terms of writing about yourself and recognising what you have done, is that something that you have found was beneficial to you? Did it make you realise things?

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- Yes, because you never have the opportunity to write about yourself, or your strengths and weaknesses, it gives you the chance to get to know yourself better. When you write it down you believe it more.
- It gives you confidence.
- It just helps you. You look at your weaknesses and think about how you can improve them. I have got a friend who doesn't do a lot of work a now she knows how many points she needs and it lets you identify strengths and weaknesses and do something about it. It is never too late.
- Doing this process, you realise you need to do other things outside school.

Are there any things you have done you would not have done otherwise?

How did you go on around exam time?

- We did this at the end of our exams. Once we had the exams out of the way and coursework, we had time to focus on our portfolio.
- Finished it by staying back after school.
- We did a 6 week block on a Friday morning.

Do you think you could use it as part of an induction process, do you think that would be helpful?

- Yes.
- We did have a time tabled session to start it.
- Once we had done the first exercise together, I set a particular thing to do by such and such a date. We didn't use any more class time.
- It was time consuming. Every time they had an exercise I asked them to share it with me.
- Would have liked to have been able to add notes even when they didn't give me the option.
- Sometimes you weren't able to read the comments.

Motivation is the key word. After all the teething problems, it was good that we could get the cohort into the University and be shown around. About December/January time we used the Friday morning period. Exam time comes in January and revising takes over from Pebblepad. If we didn't have that 6 week block, we would have been struggling.

Did anyone have any fun doing it? (laughter!)

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On a Friday we have enrichment time so we had the flexibility to take people out during this time to catch up. It is all these bits about completing and I think the success rate in the school reflects that.

There is nothing new in the content, this is what good PHSE students should be doing. I think the key benefits about this are that it emphasises the independent learning which at post 16 should be being done. I think these students will have had a lot more out of it because it is independent. The actual structure is nothing that isn't in progress files, it is the way of doing it and what it demands of the students that makes it overall a much better thing for them. How it would work with the masses, I don't know.

The selling point of this is 'what's in it for me?' Even if they don't come to Bradford they can use it in their personal statement. It will help you to develop as a person.

Gender point – boys are in the minority. It is a motivational thing. Girls are more motivated and reflect easier.

School C – organise a few things after school .

Did anyone experience problems at home?

Nothing at all. All the problems we had were with school networks.

Would you take into account, in the process of identifying a group of students, those who have intentions of going to Bradford and are IT literate?

No, I wouldn't – one of our girls has decided she wants to go to London and she said this has helped her decision.

Non IT students are just as important.

How will you be doing things next year?

I have had a few ideas here and I will be taking them back.

How many students?

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School C 80/90.

We will have to have a more formal structure with so many.

School B – yes, we will be running it next year. Another member of staff coming on board and we will identify a cohort that we will use. I would like next year to have more emphasis on independent study, more monitoring than facilitating from our point of view.

We are going to do it with our level III, time tabled between October and Christmas and then pick up again from Easter. I think it is valuable. We have never delivered so early in preparation for UCAS personal statements.

Students, if you have access to Pebblepad next year, would you use it?

If we got something out of it, then yes.

Tutors, if your students wanted to go on and use it, would they be able to get support?

If we had students who hadn't completed, it would be an opportunity for them to complete if they could still access.

They have got access and will have access next year.

It would be useful to have one page where all the students are listed and showing what stage they are at.