

Enhancing Learner Progression (ELP) – Understanding the learners' perspectives

Overview

The use of e-Portfolios in support of learning and teaching is rapidly extending across an increasing proportion of education practice largely driven by national policy including the Tomlinson Report (2004), the DfES e-Learning Strategy (2005), HEFCE e-Learning Strategy (2005), and Universities UK (2003). These strategies cover learners in the "14-19, HE, Adult, Community and Lifelong Learning sectors in the UK" (Beetham, 2005). The current premise of these strategies is that

"Progress Files help make the outcomes, or results, of learning ... more explicit, identify the achievements of learning, and support the concept that learning is a lifetime activity" (Universities UK, 2003, Progress Files for Higher Education)

The Enhancing Learner Progression project aims to evaluate the application and potential of e-portfolios in supporting learners through their lifelong learning journey, with particular emphasis on the ways that e-portfolios can provide support at the key points of transfer in this journey. The focus of this symposium is the extent to which the learner experience matches this ideal at particular stages in the learning journey.

The project's starting point is the Student Lifecycle Model approach to planning widening participation activities, recently adopted by HEFCE, shown in Figure 1 below.

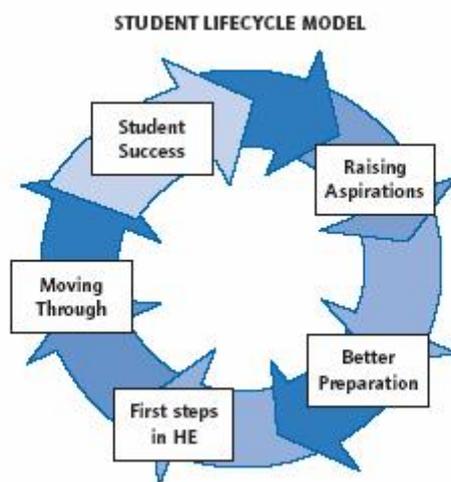


Figure 1: The Student Lifecycle Model

The Student Lifecycle model sets targets in five key areas which are essential to the success of widening participation. It can also be summarised in tabular form as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Student Lifecycle Model stages	
1.	Raising aspirations (from primary school age upwards, including adults)
2.	Better preparation/pre-entry support (raising attainment to aid transition from school to higher education)
3.	First steps in higher education (including induction programmes and assessment of key skills)
4.	Moving through the system (supporting students)
5.	Student success/employability (achievement and preparation for work)

The focus of the ELP project is to evaluate the application and potential of e-portfolios to enhance the learner experience at three key points in the lifelong learning process:

1. moving between school/FE and University (stages 1 and 2)
2. moving from University into the workplace (relating to both placement experience and moving into first career positions, stages 4 and 5).
3. transferring between HE institutions and courses (stage 4).

The papers in this symposium address two key questions

- The extent to which the actual experiences of the learners match the rhetoric and expectations of the other stakeholders (institutions, staff and employers).
- Whether the learners at different stages of the student lifecycle have common needs and concerns or whether these change throughout the lifelong learning journey.

Papers

Into HE: Learners' Experiences of e-Portfolios in Raising Aspirations and Pre-entry Support

Neil Currant¹, Christopher Murray², Carol Higgison¹, Jill Taylor³, Sally Raby¹, James Hairsine², Rebecca Sykes³

The role of e-Portfolios in Student Success in Employability

Christopher Murray², Andy Pellow² and Scott Henderson²

Evidencing and transferring achievement across institutional boundaries

Neil Currant¹ and Carol Higgison¹

Stakeholder Perspectives on the effectiveness of e-Portfolios in enhancing learner progression

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Into HE: Learners' Experiences of e-Portfolios in Raising Aspirations and Pre-entry Support

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ABSTRACT

The Universities of Bradford, Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan, are firmly committed to widening participation in Higher Education and promoting lifelong learning. Through the Enhancing Learner Progression Project (ELP), a year-long JISC funded distributed e-learning project, the institutions are using e-Portfolios to support learners within three distinct transitional areas of lifelong learning.

This paper reports on an evaluation of learners' experiences of using e-Portfolios in raising their aspirations to enter Higher Education and their effectiveness in helping these students prepare for entry into Higher Education.

The project is piloting the use of e-portfolios across the three partner institutions with 6th form and college students who are considering a range of career options such as Medicine, Healthcare, Health Sciences and IT. The project is running at Bradford, Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan Universities through existing institutional compact schemes and widening-participation programmes. The aim is to improve learners' understanding of the educational choices available to them, the skills and qualifications they have to achieve to meet the entry requirements and to improve the quality of the learners' personal statements in the UCAS applications.

Through the provision of an e-portfolio system, the students have access to online exercises, information and some have contact with under-graduate mentors to consider Higher Education as an option and completed UCAS personal statements. The portfolio acts as an online Careers Education resource for teachers in schools, tutors in FE as well as a reflective tool for the students. Lecturers and teachers in the participating institutions will have the opportunity to incorporate the e-portfolio in their teaching practice or to allow students to use the tool independently.

The project will aim to evaluate the effectiveness of e-portfolios in supporting the needs of learners and to develop case studies in pedagogy in the application of e-portfolios. The evaluation reported here will focus on the 'student experience' of using e-portfolios and the extent to which the use of e-portfolio tools:

- a. Enhances their capacity building as individuals and groups through the effective use of technology to assist them to access, piece together and manage their learning in a range of institutional, informal and work-based settings.
- b. Facilitates their wider participation in HE through raising aspirations and attainment by providing them with:
 - a. a more seamless learning experience,
 - b. better learning tools,
 - c. easier access to personal learning planning and portfolios.
- c. Provides appropriate and relevant guidance and mentoring support.
- d. Engenders a sense of belonging to a wider community of learners and promotes greater interaction amongst learners at different partner institutions.

- e. Supports greater communication, collaboration and information interchange amongst learners and across the consortium.

Specific questions to be addressed include:

- How easy is the portfolio to use?
- Has the use of the portfolio facilitated reflective learning?
- Has the portfolio enabled students to make sound career choices and create suitable applications to HE?
- Has the portfolio provided the student with easier access to personal learning tools?

The project will also be able to evaluate initial attitudes to portfolio use and look at ways in which the portfolio is marketed and how these different methods of presentation affect the take-up.

CONTEXTS

The project is using two different systems to manage the e-Portfolios. The University of Leeds currently uses an e-Portfolio tool as part of its Boddington VLE. The existing system will be extended to meet the aims of the project. The University of Bradford and Leeds Metropolitan University are using the Pebblepad e-Portfolio system. Both portfolios systems are being tested in a range of educational contexts.

The role of e-Portfolios in Student Success in Employability

Christopher Murray, Andy Pellow and Scott Henderson, University of Leeds

ABSTRACT

As part of the Enhancing Learner Progression Project (ELP), a year-long JISC funded distributed e-learning project, the University of Leeds are using an e-Portfolio to support learners moving from higher education into professional practice.

This paper reports on an evaluation of learners' experiences of using e-Portfolios in stages 4 and 5 of the HEFCE student lifecycle model. The use of the e-portfolio in this context is designed to provide support for placement activities and then moving into work, focussing initially on health professional education at the University of Leeds with a view to extending this support across the region through an existing partnership which has now become a CETL (ALPS).

Lifelong learners, School, FE, HE and Employers need a situation where all the learning partners have a common PDP skills framework so that levels of attainment in the different skill areas are reasonably unambiguous and agreed. This is particularly important where fitness to practise is a requirement of professional registration/certification. Whilst different institutions and employers are likely to have their own processes for measuring this, it is important that the information is compatible. However, it is widely reported that newly qualified health and social care professionals often feel under prepared for the roles they are required to undertake. Taking up a first post is often highly stressful and work based learning can provide the key to equipping learners with skills they need for their professional roles. This project aims to provide tools that can assist in measuring competency, providing effective feedback, collecting teacher, peer and self-assessment and developing a comprehensive portfolio of competencies in work-based settings.

This project is implementing e-portfolio tools designed to support students as they move from higher education into professional practice. E-portfolio tools will be piloted for students whilst on work based placements and for those undertaking postgraduate professional qualifications. The tools will support interoperability and common practice amongst the NHSU health and social care partnership in West Yorkshire and facilitate the movement of students between professional education and professional practice.

This paper reports on the use of the e-portfolio with Trainee Doctors undertaking the 1st year of the Foundation Programme and Student Nurses on first degree and postgraduate courses. The e-portfolio gives the participants access to assessments, information, feedback and contact with clinical supervisors whilst on placements. The focus of the evaluation is the extent to which the work with students/trainees and their supervisors enhances the learning experience and speeds up the feedback given to the student/trainee, and forges a link between professional education and practice.

The evaluation reported here will focus on the 'student experience' of using e-portfolios and the extent to which the use of e-portfolio tools are perceived to:

1. Aid personal development planning, recording of achievement, tutor, peer and self-assessment tools to support progression from higher education into work.
2. Provide electronic evidence of achievement that can raise aspirations
3. Facilitate student progression into work by enhancing the student experience in work based placements
4. Support and develop work based teaching staff by providing guidance and training on e-portfolio systems.

5. Establish good practice guidelines in e-support of students prior to entry and after graduation – in particular access to content and services.

Context

The context proposed here will implement the enhanced Bodington logbook tool, teacher resource creation tools and search discovery service. This application presents particular technical and environmental issues in relation to the use of e-Portfolios in the workplace.

Evidencing and transferring achievement across institutional boundaries

Neil Carrant and Carol Higgison, University of Bradford.

Abstract

The University of Bradford is using an e-Portfolio to support learners moving from one higher education institution to another, as part of the Enhancing Learner Progression Project (ELP), a year-long JISC funded distributed e-learning project.

The BSc Clinical Sciences at the University of Bradford has been designed to open up opportunities into medicine and healthcare education to groups currently under-represented in higher education. The majority of students it attracts are from the West Yorkshire locality where the University has strong links with schools and colleges and a well-established outreach programme with dedicated outreach workers. This paper reports on the use of e-portfolios to support students entering, progressing through, graduating or transferring to Leeds University MBChB. This is a limited study and will report on the student experiences in a case study format. This case study is located in stage 4 of the HEFCE student lifecycle model and examines the potential benefits to the learners of being able to record, evidence and transfer their progress and achievements to their new course and new institution, which uses a different e-portfolio system.

Contexts

The project is using two different systems to manage the e-Portfolios. The University of Leeds currently uses an e-Portfolio tool as part of its Boddington VLE. The University of Bradford is using the Pebblepad ePortfolio system.

The Effect of Stakeholder Attitudes on the Effectiveness of e-Portfolios in Enhancing Learner Progression

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The Enhancing Learner Progression Project (ELP) is a year-long JISC funded project exploring the use of e-portfolios to support students to successfully manage their transition between stages of the lifelong learning journey. The project uses the HEFCE Student Lifecycle Model to define these stages, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Student Lifecycle Model stages	
6.	Raising aspirations (from primary school age upwards, including adults)
7.	Better preparation/pre-entry support (raising attainment to aid transition from school to higher education)
8.	First steps in higher education (including induction programmes and assessment of key skills)
9.	Moving through the system (supporting students)
10.	Student success/employability (achievement and preparation for work)

The ELP project is focussing on the three key transition points:

1. Further education to higher education,
2. Higher education to professional practice,
3. One higher education institution/course to another.

Previous studies of UK 14-19, further, higher, adult and community education have highlighted the growing importance of portfolios and personal development planning. However, little research has been carried out into the impact of key stakeholders on the learners' experiences of using e-Portfolios.

This paper looks at the relationship between the formal strategies put in place to enable the implementation and sustainability of e-Portfolios and the attitudes of key stakeholders on the student experience. The attitudes of key stakeholders, particularly those directly involved in implementing e-portfolios and supporting students, can have a major impact on the effectiveness of e-portfolios in supporting student learning. This paper identifies different organisational design issues and the impact they have had on practice. The organisational foci which inform this study include: the importance of how strategy is developed staff development and support; commitment at the institutional level; and personal issues such as motivation.

Since research has suggested that differences between institutions leads to characteristically different strategies this study uses a multiple case study approach, each case a specific context representing a key transition point in the learning journey. Each case study uses data from three main sources: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and student feedback. This data is used to illustrate and discuss relationships between stakeholder attitudes and the types of organisational climate and support structures within institutions and the potential impact on the learners. The findings are used to identify important issues and draw out key themes to support sustainable innovation in e-Portfolios. An in-depth qualitative investigation has been used to develop a full understanding of complex underlying issues involved in the responses of people to institutional change towards the use of e-portfolios to support student learning.

