



**National
Teaching
Fellowship
Scheme**



**National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal
Development Planning and e-Portfolio Practice**

Year 2 Research Progress

<p>Your contact details: ljf@kent.ac.uk</p> <p>Name: Louise Frith</p> <p>Organisation: University of Kent</p>
<p>1. What is your research question?</p> <p>Does an e-portfolio help students to recognise and articulate their employability skills?: a case study using Pebblepad at the University of Kent</p>
<p>2. Progress with research:-</p> <p>a) Please provide a short update of your current research activity related to the project</p> <p>This project uses the HEA Student Employability Profiles http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/employability/disciplines It details generic skills and how they might be achieved in each subject. The skills identified break down into 6 main areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cognitive Skills The ability to identify, and solve problems, work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions 2. Generic Competencies High level and transferable key skills such as the ability to work with others in a team, communicate, persuade and have interpersonal sensitivity. 3. Personal Capabilities The ability and desire to learn for oneself and improve ones self-awareness, emotional intelligence and performance. To be a self-starter (creativity, decisiveness, initiative) and to finish the job (flexibility, adaptability, tolerance to stress). 4. Technical Ability For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern technology. 5. Business and / or Organisation Awareness An appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience. Appreciation of organisational culture, policies and processes 6. Practical and Professional Elements Critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice, reflect and review own practice participate in and review quality control processes and risk management <p>Subject Benchmark Indicators © The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education</p>



This research focuses on 3 subjects (one from each of the University's 3 faculties) in which the e-portfolio is being piloted. These are the School of Social Work (Social Science), the School of Architecture (Humanities) and Dental Care Practice (Science, Maths and Technology). I am working closely with each of these departments to introduce the e-portfolio.

Background

In the summer of 2006 the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UFLT) carried out a campus-wide review of PDP (see appendix 1). The outcome of the review was a report detailing a rich variety of PDP practice, but it was often hidden from the students so they didn't necessarily realise that they were developing employability skills as part of their University experience.

The report was sent to the University LTB with the recommendation that UFLT pilot e-portfolio software to attempt to capture students' academic development and make existing PDP activity more visible and valued.

In Dec 2006 PebblePAD software was introduced at the University on a small scale (200 licences) and piloted in one department Kent Institute of Medicine and Health Sciences (KIMHS). Interest in the software was increased by working closely with a few students to produce example web-folios and show these to academic colleagues at departmental L&T committees. Since Sep 2007 Kent has increased its PebblePAD licence to 2000 and is working with roughly 10 departments developing ideas about the use of e-portfolios or actually using PebblePAD with students.

Methodology

Before the introduction of e-portfolio students were asked what skills they felt they are developing and how they are keeping a record of this (see appendix 2). This was done by surveys, there will also be a focus group at the end of the pilot year to ask again about the skills they are developing and how they articulate them. Students' portfolios will be put forward for inclusion on the University PDP web pages.

I am also interviewing lectures after the introduction of Pebblepad to see how they think students' skills are being captured and whether the e-portfolio helps students to record and articulate their skills (see appendix 3)

3: Future Activities:

How do you see your research developing?

So far the research has shown that PDP activity at the University is varied throughout departments and this is recognised as a strength. However questions to students have



revealed that they are not clear about the skills they are developing or able to articulate them.

Therefore future activity will focus on getting this message through to academics via the University's Learning and Teaching Committee. Students are not motivated to get involved with Pebblepad if it doesn't carry credit so I plan to support staff using the software to review their assessment methods so that they can give students credit for PDP engagement.

Both staff and students report that the employability skills need to be 'translated' for their subject I plan to work with departments to develop subject-specific PDP teaching and learning resources for class sessions and for the PDP web-site.

4: Reflection:

How has the National Action Research Network supported you and what lessons have you have learnt to date, in undertaking the research?

It has been very useful to meet with my colleagues regionally to share and support ideas. The national project has provided useful deadlines and training input.

5. Any other comments

Empty text box for additional comments.



**National
Teaching
Fellowship
Scheme**



Appendix 1

PDP Review

Questions

1. Have you got a link from your departmental home page to the PDP web pages?
2. Have you made any customisations to the PDP web pages for use in the department?
3. Do you make reference to PDP in your course handbooks?
4. How much teaching time is devoted to PDP?
5. Do you have a senior tutor or personal tutor system?
6. How does the personal tutor or senior tutor support PDP?
7. Do you use any form of student mentoring to support PDP activities?
8. Do you run a skills module which addresses PDP within it?
9. Do students get credits for any of their PDP activity?
10. What PDP activities does the department run for students?
11. What links does the department have with the University's Careers Service?
12. In what ways are students encouraged to use PDP to record and reflect on their: placement year, volunteering activities or paid work experience?
13. How do you know if students are engaging with PDP? E.g. module/programme evaluations
14. What particular employability skills do your graduates have?
15. In what ways is PDP being used by post graduate students?



Appendix 2

PDP/PebblePAD pilot project evaluation questions

The curriculum development team will be piloting new e-portfolio software called PebblePAD. We are particularly interested to find out if the software helps students to recognise and articulate their employability skills development.

Could you please spend ten minutes completing the following anonymous questionnaire? The results will be fed back to the staff student liaison committee.

Thank-you in advance for your help.

Pre-pilot questions (baseline)

1. What employability skills do you think you have developed through your study so far?
2. How have the assignments that you have completed so far supported your skills development?
3. In what ways do you currently record and monitor the skills that you are developing?
4. What support do you get to recognise and record your skills development?
5. Please use this space for any further comments that might be relevant.



**National
Teaching
Fellowship
Scheme**



Appendix 3

Questions for

staff

1. How did students record and reflect on their employability skills before they were introduced to PebblePAD?
2. What do you/your students use PebblePAD for?
3. How user-friendly have you and your students found PebblePAD?
Please specify if there is any further support technical or pedagogic that you think you need?
4. What guidance have you given students on keeping an e-portfolio?
How much of a student's e-portfolio do you require them to share with you/an employer?
5. Will you continue to use PebblePAD in the future? Please say what for.
6. Do you have any further comments?