

# Enhancing employability skills through electronic portfolios

*Using PebblePad to develop personalised records of practice and reflection and preparing students for employment*

## The aim

As part of the process of securing graduate employment, nursing and midwifery students are required to produce personal statements outlining the skills and experience that make them suitable for a particular position. The tutor found that the quality of these statements varied considerably, and the use of paper-based portfolios, with their limited opportunities for tutor feedback, may have been a contributing factor. The tutor wanted to introduce a more structured approach to portfolio development to help guide students in their reflection and gathering of evidence of the skills and experience they have gained. The students development from their first year into their second and third years needed to capture their personal and professional journey and the flexibility of e-portfolios allows the students to capture this evidence in a creative way.

## Benefits

- Improves quality of portfolios through increased reflection and enhanced evidence of achievements
- Assists students in articulating their skills and experience throughout their academic and clinical journey
- Encourages development of employability skills and evidence during the first year until they graduate and also throughout their professional careers

## The approach

An electronic portfolio was desirable as it would make the process of capturing evidence easier for the students while on placement and the review of that evidence more flexible for tutors and practice mentors. In addition, using an e-portfolio would better reflect employers' emerging Personal Development Planning (PDP) practice.

The tutor was already familiar with electronic portfolios and, as PebblePad was being used elsewhere in the faculty, she decided to introduce it to her first year students. A set of templates were created to help students when writing reflections on their skills development for later use in their personal statements. The templates placed particular emphasis on the relevant employability skills and graduate attributes being developed by making explicit links between them and the work in their portfolio. The students used the templates throughout the academic year to record, reflect on, and provide evidence of, their learning both on campus and during placements.

PebblePad provides a method of sharing portfolios that allows changes to be seen as they happen, meaning a reader will always see the latest information and resources. Students were encouraged to use this, as it would allow tutors and mentors to provide feedback regularly, rather than only at specific points during the year. More people were able to read and comment on the e-portfolios' contents and offer new perspectives than with previous paper portfolios.

A mentoring scheme was created at first where first year students were allocated a third year student as a mentor. This didn't work as well as expected and the allocation of PebblePad Champions was organised. These Champions were students who engaged well with PebblePad and produced outstanding portfolios. The Champions became part of the tutor's Student Nurse Employability Group and assisted teaching the new students who started in cohorts behind them. The engagement of the PebblePad Champions was a huge success with students and the engagement of students increased greatly. The students were able to view the Champions' portfolios to gain insight into expectations and the Champions, under supervision by the module leader, provided drop-in sessions, advice and comments based on their own experience of PebblePad and the course.

There was a designated Champion for every cohort of students to ensure succession and an allocated Champion for all students.

## The outcome

By sharing their portfolios with tutors, practice mentors, and others, students were able to receive feedback more frequently and in a more digestible format than was previously the case with infrequently reviewed paper portfolios. This meant that the students were better able to make use of the feedback by changing their work, and ultimately spreading the tutor and mentor workloads more evenly across the year.

The tutor has seen a general improvement in the personal statements and portfolios produced by the students. In particular, the students' ability to articulate their skills effectively appears to have increased across the cohort as a result of the increased emphasis placed on this through the templates and from the additional directed feedback received from tutors and mentors. This improvement has continued as the students have progressed into their second year.

There was some reluctance to using the electronic portfolios from both students and staff. Some of this was due to a lack of skills or confidence in IT. Using the templates helped reduce this reluctance, and it quickly faded as people became comfortable with the system.

The PebblePad Champions scheme has been highly successful, with students feeling comfortable sharing experiences with their peers and students from both the first and second year remarking that the discussions and additional perspectives helped them develop a richer view of their learning and, in particular, how it relates to their employability. The engagement of students to support the teaching has been an added bonus as the Champions have been able to develop their teaching skills and have received many testimonies to embed into their PebblePad portfolio as part of their own individual personal and professional development.

## Future development

The tutor plans to:

- Encourage students to develop annual action plans, and develop their portfolios based on issues identified during placements and within the academic settings
- Encourage practice mentors to use PebblePad to record their student reviews
- Obtain feedback on the design and implementation of the portfolio materials from key employers in the sector and use it to further refine the templates
- Look at the future of e-portfolios in relation to the recruitment and employment process
- Develop preceptorship and qualified staff templates to allow a smoother transition into employment and PDP

## Profile

**Tutor name:**

Pamela Holland

**Faculty:**

Health & Wellbeing

**Size of cohort:**

Very large (150+ students)

**Technologies used:**

Blackboard, PebblePad

If you would like your assessment practice captured and shared in a similar case study, please email !

Assessment Journey Programme

Updated: June 2015

## Recommendations

The tutor advises anyone interested in this approach to:

- Source worked examples of reflective portfolios relevant to their subject area
- Add support materials on the use of e-portfolios and PebblePad to Blackboard
- Provide regular feedback through PebblePad to students on their progress
- Network with other professionals involved in the same activities and share best practice