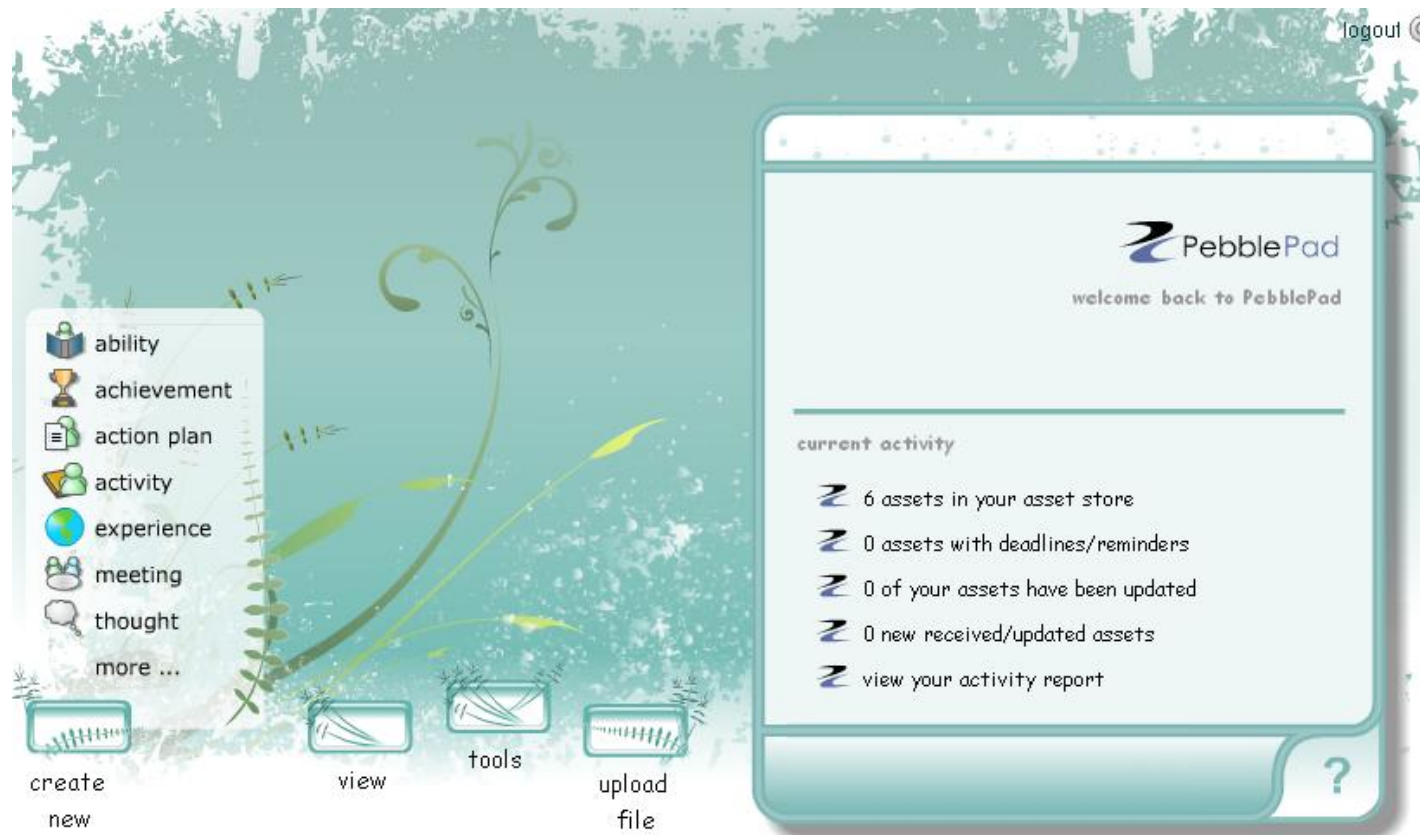




PebblePad: a good practice guide

What is PebblePad?

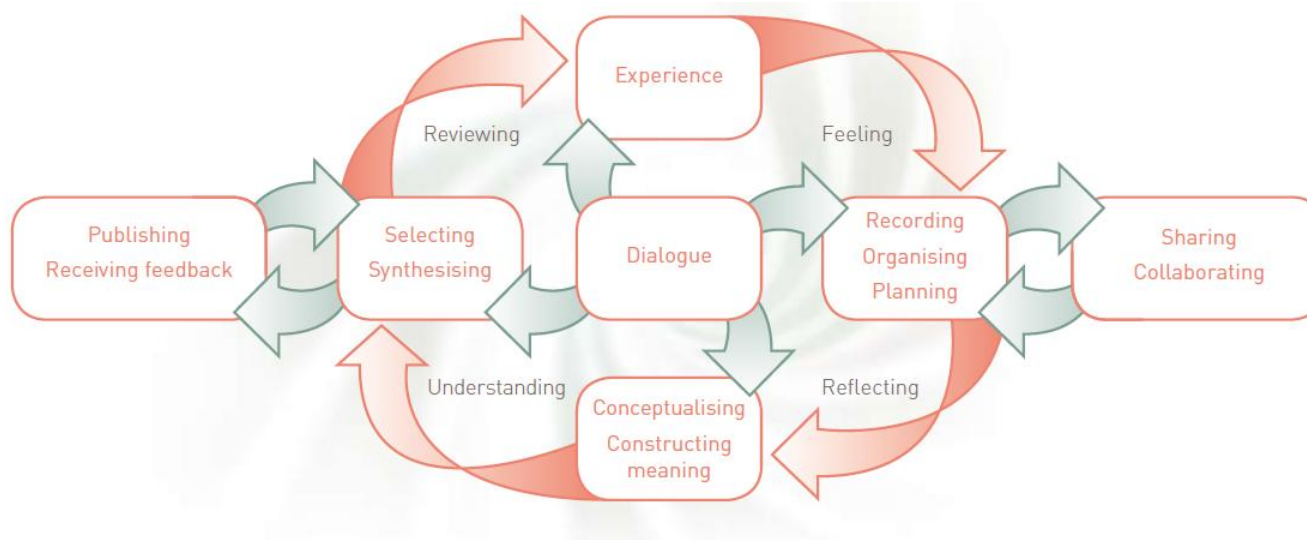
Essentially, PebblePad is an e-portfolio tool that uses Macromedia Flash to enable users to record and edit details of their learning experiences, whilst also customising their personal account. There is still a great deal of debate about what an e-portfolio actually is, however, they can best be described as a type of learning record that provides actual evidence of achievement. Typically, they comprise a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web, such as inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. The main purpose of an e-portfolio is to facilitate an individual's reflection on their own learning, thereby leading to greater awareness of their own particular learning strategies and needs.

PebblePad is unusual because it is a generic system; it has been developed to support and celebrate all forms of learning, to facilitate transition between stages of learning and transition to employment. It places control of the ePortfolio in the hands of the learner, whilst allowing for authentic and reliable assessment by the instructor. It provides scaffolding to help users create records of learning, achievement and aspirations and has a reflective structure underpinning its entire core element.

PebblePad users are able to develop their learning profile over time and without constraint, thereby offering the opportunity to document lifelong learning. The tool allows users to selectively record any abilities, events, institutional/personal data, plans or thoughts that are personally significant; and allows these records to be linked, augmented or evidenced by other data sources.

The process of learning using e-portfolios

Below is a model of e-portfolio-based learning that was adapted from Kolb, (1984; cited in JISC, 2008):



This model suggests that there are four stages in learning through use of e-portfolios which follow from each other: Experience is followed by Reflection on that experience on a personal basis. Using an e-portfolio, learners can document evidence of their experiences, along with their ideas, feedback, data and future plans. Reflection is then followed by the derivation of general rules describing the experience, or the application of known theories to it (Conceptualisation), and hence to the construction of ways of modifying the next occurrence of the experience; i.e. Synthesising. This, in turn, leads to the next Experience. In addition, by sharing a selected audience with information about learning processes, e-portfolios can facilitate learners' self-awareness and enhance understanding and self-improvement through commentary and feedback from the recipients of shared assets.

What can PebblePad be used for?

There are many ways you could choose to use PebblePad. For example, the tool can be used to support work-based learning students and their workplace mentors, research students or their supervisors, in any instances where learners are required to record and reflect on their learning; perhaps their tutors want to see some of these records and to provide feedback and support as part of a PDP process. The primary aim of an e-portfolio may be to collect evidence for summative assessment, to demonstrate achievement, record progress and set targets – as in records of achievement and individual learning plans (ILPs).

Perhaps users on placement want to blog their experiences and to document critical incidents which defined their learning. Placement mentors or others can have access to the blog to provide support and encouragement. Some learners use PebblePad to collect evidence of competencies in order to fulfil qualification or professional requirements.

This guidebook will focus more specifically on the software as a tool to support work-based learning and workforce development.

An overview of PebblePad Features

PebblePad has a variety of features, such as blogs, action plans, reflection tools, webfolios, etc. The software uses moving 'pads' which guide the user through the procedure of creating record types using a similar process to that shown in Kolb's model. These include records like action plans, abilities, achievements, experiences and thoughts. Records may be presented in webfolio (which are a type of webpage) and journal entries as part of a blog. Videos and Photos can be imported from social networking sites such as You Tube and Flickr. Assets can be tagged, which allow them to be re-used in different parts of the software, e.g. the same asset can be part of a Webfolio and a Journal.

Users can share the records and assign differential permissions to view, comment, copy and collaborate permissions. These can be granted to both PebblePad and external users. Experiences, such as field trip type activities, can be recorded via camera phones and the collection of evidence can be uploaded into PebblePad using Windows Mobile devices, an iPhone application and a lightweight web version for use on Internet enabled mobile phones.

Assets

There are 12 types of assets in PebblePad. Each of these asset types can be used to record elements of learners' education and professional development. Rather than creating a formal list, these assets have been designed to act as individual parts that make up a whole picture of a student and their progress. PebblePad encourages users to reflect on their learning processes and to consider how their experiences affect their learning and development. An individual's assets and reflections can be shared with peers, tutors or potential employers.



Tags allow learners to group assets together, quickly locate specific entries, cross reference related assets and to aggregate items. A number of default tags are available which learners can add, or they may choose to create their own tags as they develop or edit assets.

A help movie related to creating new assets is available [here](#). You may also find the movie [introduction to PebblePad](#) helpful.

The table below shows each of the PebblePad assets, how they can be used and the ways in which they may benefit learners.

Element	Description	Benefit
Ability	The ability asset enables users to record new skills.	- Documenting new skills improves learners' confidence as they develop, reflect on and continually improve their capabilities. - They can support and evidence claims learners make about their skills developments.
Achievement	The achievement asset allows users to record anything at which they have been successful or are proud of. Learners should record any achievement which they think may be useful in the future as part of a webfolio or CV.	Motivates students to progress and continually improve their abilities.
Action plan	An action plan can be used to create plans designed to help learners achieve a particular outcome or goal, e.g. a plan to help complete a project or develop areas that an individual currently perceives as weaknesses. A help movie is available to demonstrate the options available within the action planning tool	- Helps students to focus on their individual learning needs. - Develop appropriate skills. - Identify own strengths and weaknesses and continually improve.
Activity	The activity asset means that students can record any event or experience - normally directly related to their personal or professional development - for example a workshop or training course they have attended; a conference they presented at or a project they have been involved in; for project work, appraisal or review as well as providing a record that learners can return to and review or reflect upon their progress.	- Activity assets provide useful evidence towards an overall development record. - Recording activities encourages students to recognise the value of a wide range of learning activities, including those which are work- or programme- related or even personal. - Learners begin to understand the impacts that various activities have upon their learning and development.
Experience	The experience asset allows students to record any event or experience which is significant to them.	- This asset type allows students to store evidence which may be useful in the future, such as when applying for a new job. - Users have the opportunity to refer back to earlier experiences when learning about new topics, thereby supporting students' assimilation and understanding of complex/unfamiliar subject matter.
Meeting	Meetings enable learners to record significant meetings they have had with other people and what they have learnt from them. Users might want to record meetings with mentors, advisors or with colleagues working on collaborative projects.	Users can create a meeting record in advance of a meeting and edit it afterwards to reflect, revise outcomes and actions, thus encouraging students to develop planning and time management skills.

Thought	The thought asset can be used to record journal entries, structured reflections, significant incidents, ideas or notes. PebblePad provides a range of options for recording thoughts from a simple single stage process to more detailed structures to guide users through the recording process. Thought assets are also automatically created when a new entry to a blog is added. Users may choose between four different options when creating a thought record: ○ journal entry ○ reflective journal ○ what, so what? now what? ○ reflective cycle	• Students' critical thinking skills develop. • Self-awareness improves.
Blog	Blogs are single page websites that list entries made to them in date order. Entries can be posted straight to blogs, though users may also choose to post existing assets to blogs using the "send to blog" option on the overview and end pads.	• Blogs are effective as knowledge-centred instructional tools. • Shared blogs promote Interactivity, student-centred learning and peer input. • Blogging can complement community building in distance courses. • Given that many online students miss the face-to-face contact realised in a traditional classroom, blogging offers particularly useful opportunities for learner-centred feedback and dialogue.
Activity log	The activity log is an optional record type which enables learners to bring together items that demonstrate their activity during a given period. They display as a single page that lists entries made to them in date order. Using PebblePad, users can send any normal record from their PebblePad record store to their activity record, except files, webfolios, blogs and CVs. Multiple activity logs can be created for different purposes such as appraisal and any standards you are working towards.	• The activity log enables individuals to decide how many hours are required to complete an activity and as items are added to an activity log it will display the number of hours that are required to complete the task in hand. As items are added to the log, it is possible to see how many hours it had taken to complete the activity so that learners can easily gauge their own progress.
CV builder	The CV building tool allows users to create a CV by drawing upon information they have already entered into the 'about me' section, as well as other PebblePad assets. CV content is customizable - users can choose to include information about personal details, qualifications, employment, and any other area included in the 'about me' section of PebblePad, such as a personal statement and details of referees. CVs are treated just like any other record in PebblePad, which means that users can create as many as they require and then share them with relevant	• Allows students to develop high quality, well-structured CVs, which detail an individual's experiences, strengths and academic achievements. • Learners are more likely to keep the document up to date, adding details about each of their achievements and experiences. • Good CVs remain essential for candidates in the modern jobs market. Empirical evidence suggests that candidates with good

	people. CV assets can be shared with an individual's contacts, other PebblePad users, potential employers, published to gateways or printed. PebblePad CVs can also be sent to a word processing package, which allows learners to make layout and design changes to their CV. For students who have already created a CV as a Word document, it is possible to upload the CV as a file to the PebblePad 'record store', rather than using the CV building tool. A help movie about the CV builder tool is available here.	quality CVs are three to five times likely to be hired than those with a poor/ average CV. Thus, the CV builder could enhance students' employability. • Creating a CV is a good way for students to recognise their own skills and strengths, as well as areas for self-development and improvement.
Profile	Profiles are self-evaluation questionnaires that allow learners to audit their current knowledge, skills and abilities. Profiles can be created based on their understanding of a subject, expertise or they may be based on professional standards from external organisations. When completing a Profile, users are required to respond to questions and ability statements with scales ranging from 1-2 through 1-9 and with short text and long-text answers. Here is a help movie available to explain how you can work with Profiles. This is a general overview which introduces the broad features of the profile tool	• Profiles can be linked to other evidence and assets which highlight learners' abilities and can also be used to form action plans which help users to develop new skills profiles. • Effective way of summarising individuals' capabilities and knowledge.
Gateways	Gateways operate alongside PebblePad and fulfil an institutional function. They provide an 'affinity' area where completed assets, or assets in progress can be published by users. Gateways are controlled by teachers and permissions can be set to allow work to be 'handed-in' by assessment deadlines; feedback can be added to multiple items and released on demand and work can be archived for quality assurance purposes. Moderators and external examiners can be given access to gateways: Gateway tools allow, amongst other functions, secure conversations to be conducted to support the assessment process.	• Gateways ensure that assets can be published for viewing by other users such as tutors or peers • Access is controlled by permissions so some Gateway users may be able to publish items but not view other peoples work whilst other users may be able view each others' work. This means that Gateways can have a wide range of uses including assessment submission, mentoring, sharing items with a group or personal tutoring.

Why should I use Pebblepad on my programme?

To improve Work-based learning and work placement provisions

The shift in emphasis within higher education towards work based learning will raise the need for tools to facilitate collaborative working. Programmes such as these require the skills and learning developed in the workplace to be documented and validated. According to the Introduction to the report 'About e-Portfolios: an overview of JISC

Key points for effective practice

- Use scaffolded tasks to develop learners' ability to articulate and present their learning
- Promote learners' ownership of the purpose as well as the processes behind e-portfolios
- Establish a shared understanding of the value of e-portfolios between all involved: learners, tutors and workplace mentors

activities', an important aspect of lifelong learning is the learners' ability to assemble, demonstrate and reflect on the skills, knowledge and achievement they have built up during their unique learning journeys. One of the functions of PebblePad is to support such activity. As part of their assessment work-based learners following HE programmes are required to provide evidence and reflections of their experiences and the skills and learning they have developed in the workplace.

Key points for effective practice

- **Encourage the personalisation of e-portfolios to motivate and engage learners**
- **Promote innovative ways of demonstrating learners' achievements through video files, podcasts and other multimedia content**
- **Embed all PDP-related activities into the e-portfolio system to avoid duplicating data collection**

PebblePad enables work based learners to create an online collection of various learning experiences, document learning processes and experiences and record their personal development as a lifelong learner. When adding assets, users are taken through procedures which have been designed to maximise learning and development. For example, when creating an Ability or Achievement record, users are required to name and tag the asset (e.g. work, placement, personal) then provide a brief description of the activity. They are then asked to provide evidence of their learning in relation to the activity and reflect on their experience. Users can also log the total hours spent on the learning task, award themselves points and set themselves deadlines for reflection or follow-up, thus enabling learners to continue at a time and place that is most convenient to them. This personalisation of learning will improve the quality of the student experience whilst also maximising the skills development and progression.

The image displays four sequential screenshots of the PebblePad e-portfolio interface, illustrating the process of creating an achievement record. Each screenshot shows a progress bar at the bottom with four steps: 1 (Title), 2 (Evidence), 3 (Reflection), and 4 (Completion).

- Screenshot 1: Title** - The user is prompted to enter a title and description. The title field contains "Wiring a plug". A sidebar shows popular tags and a list of categories: Development, Work, Volunteering, Placement, Education, Personal, and all tags. The progress bar shows step 1 is active.
- Screenshot 2: Evidence** - The user is prompted to provide evidence. The evidence field contains text about wiring a plug. The progress bar shows step 2 is active.
- Screenshot 3: Reflection** - The user is prompted to reflect on the activity. The reflection field contains text about the device and the plug. The progress bar shows step 3 is active.
- Screenshot 4: Completion** - The user has completed the form. The interface shows options to view the asset, send it, add a review, add/edit link, and tag the asset. The progress bar shows step 4 is active.

Supervisors and employers play an active part in learners' skills development and work-based learning. Using PebblePad, mentors can comment on students' assets and provide feedback, engage in dialogue and monitor the progress of their employees/learners. The tool also takes account of the complexities associated with SME employment and learning, such as: shortage of time, prior informal learning, the need to match individual learning with requirements of the organisation, the need for flexible delivery, quality assurance, opportunities to record and build achievement, confidentiality and for ease of access to e-learning and feedback.

Below is an example of the effectiveness of e-portfolios from a learner's point of view. Delia Cook, a second year foundation degree and work-based learning student describes her experience (from JISC, 2008).

‘As a residential care officer for adults with learning difficulties, it has always been my dream to study for a degree. I come from a working-class background and never had the chance to go to university. Now I am studying part time at my local college, while continuing to work full time.

We had the choice of using an online or a paper-based portfolio to record our personal development planning (PDP). That was quite alarming to me at first. As I chose the e-portfolio route, it seemed even harder still – I had never even used a computer before, but I had to prove to myself that I could do it.

Now I look back and realise just how far I have come. The e-portfolio has been an integral part of that journey. There were times when I thought I would never get there, but with the extraordinary support I received from my tutor and the IT helpdesk, I have developed an e-portfolio which charts my progress. And the sense of achievement is huge!

Using the e-portfolio has even changed the way I think. Organisation has never been my strong point, but adding to my e-portfolio keeps me in touch with my learning. In my first year, I would put off doing work until the last moment, and then it would seem so much more difficult. Now I can blog my tutor if I need information. Looking out for the reply keeps my work at the forefront of my mind and is a good way of making progress in itself. I am also more confident in the workplace and now take a more active role in discussions about clients. I have learnt the value of asking questions and of sharing difficulties with others.

What has been the most important thing for me? It has been being able to ask for help when you need it – the kind of support that makes you feel that no question is too silly. 🍌

Examples of learners' PebblePad e-portfolios can be found here: <http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/examples.asp>

To enhance students' learning experience through reflection

Reflection is important because looking back and thinking about what we have just done helps us to make changes in our learning, behaviours and interactions with people - and this helps us to continually improve and develop our skills and attributes. Students sometimes view reflective writing as an annoying interruption to the serious business of developing content knowledge in their subject area. However, there are sound reasons why reflective writing is included in student assessment.

"Reflection is indicative of deep learning, and where teaching and learning activities such as reflection are missing... only surface learning can result."

Biggs, 1999

"Reflection leads to growth of the individual – morally, personally, psychologically, and emotionally, as well as cognitively".

Branch and Paranjape, 2002

Reflection can lead to greater self-awareness, which in turn is a first step towards positive change – it is a necessary stage in identifying areas for improvement and growth in both personal and professional contexts. Taking time to reflect can help learners to identify approaches that have worked well, and therefore reinforce good practice. Most research evidence indicates that learners become empowered through the reflective cycle that is associated with e-portfolio-based learning, but it should not be assumed that this will occur without guidance or carefully considered design.

As well as facilitating and monitoring learning, education providers should aim to produce graduates who have acquired the habit of reflection as a means of continuing to learn and grow in their professions. Reflection can help learners to:

- better understand their individual strengths and weaknesses
- identify and question their underlying values and beliefs
- acknowledge and challenge possible assumptions on which they base their ideas, feelings and actions
- recognise areas of potential bias or discrimination
- acknowledge their fears
- identify possible inadequacies or areas for improvement

Key points for effective practice

- Use dialogue tools within e-portfolio systems to guide learners in developing effective applications
- Develop learners' skills in the appropriate selection and reuse of content in e-portfolio repositories

Here is an example of how PebblePad has been used at the University of Wolverhampton to develop learners' reflection.

Learning through reflection - School of Health, University of Wolverhampton

Background

Students at the University of Wolverhampton have been using the PebblePad e-portfolio system to support their learning on professional and vocational courses. All students and staff at the institution have a PebblePad account – the system was initially developed at the university and now plays a primary role in the delivery of PDP in some courses. The School of Health, for example, replaced paper-based PDP with e-portfolios for all students on a pre-registration diploma course in nursing in 2008. The midwifery team in the School of Health also views PebblePad as key to developing students' reflective skills while on clinical practice placements. Student midwives are required to provide four pieces of reflective writing for assessment, together with evidence of their attainment of Nursing and Midwifery Council professional competences. The system then enables students to submit their assignments through a learning gateway.



Establishing effective practice

The pilot studies revealed that students are more likely to reflect and gain understanding as a result of using an e-portfolio tool. Linsey Duncan-Pitt, the Technology Supported Learning Coordinator in the School of Health, argues that students who exploit opportunities for personal reflection in their e-portfolios are more likely to develop the self-appraisal skills required of healthcare professionals. Both midwifery and nursing students undertake a rolling programme of placements in a variety of contexts, mainly within the NHS. During the placements, they have much to reflect on and often require support and guidance from tutors and each other, as well as from their mentors in the workplace. Reflection on what they have learnt can be recorded as *learning assets* stored privately within an e-portfolio repository or shared with others – learners

can choose who sees the outcomes of their reflections. Even when the assets are kept private, the skills acquired in the process of reflection contribute to students' writing about their clinical practice, on which they are assessed. Tutors use the e-portfolio system to provide helpful formative feedback, but e-portfolios can also expose other emerging issues. At intervals on the midwifery course, e-portfolio evidence is the focal point of a three-way progress review involving the student, course tutor and workplace mentor. This joint discussion is facilitated by reflections in e-portfolios which can help to identify difficulties that could have an impact on student retention and achievement. An established habit of reflection also provides a record of skills development over time – many students find it a boost to morale to look back and see how far they have come. For others, using the e-portfolio tool as the central point for their learning activities instils a sense of order and provides a way of managing the demands of their formal programme of learning. Course leaders warn, however, against simplistic assumptions of 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' – students of any age group can lack experience and competence in ICT. IT support is provided via the university, but a culture of peer-to-peer support is strongly encouraged within the school.

For more PebblePad case studies and insight into the tool from a student perspective, please click [here](#)

To reduce the administration burden

Traditionally, student portfolios involved the production of paper-based portfolios containing a series of documents including assessors' comments and feedback. Nevertheless, paper-based mechanisms for capturing, validating and integrating the WBL elements of the HE provision are inflexible and unreliable in terms of meeting the requirements of those involved in the learning process because students, mentors, employers and tutors are unable to view, comment on or contribute towards the portfolios at their own convenience. Students often find paper format restrictive both in terms of access and in the nature of material that could be included.

PebblePad can be accessed online, from anywhere in the world, thereby removing geographic barriers and offering financial, environmental savings, as well as being more time efficient. Other benefits include: less paperwork, thereby removing the need to carry around large folders. The risk of losing paper-based documentation is omitted as the information is solely web-based.

In addition, PebblePad's Form Builder tool allows institutions to create bespoke forms which can be accessed directly through PebblePad, through links in the VLE or on staff development and corporate websites. PebbleForms can be designed to replicate existing paper forms and, once completed, can be saved directly to PebblePad for using like all other assets.

To enhance learning and teaching

Every lecturer has at least an implicit set of beliefs about what is good practice. However, in 1987 Chickering and Gamson developed an explicit set of principles which are now widely accepted as being good practice within higher education. PebblePad helps teaching staff to meet a number of these principles, as outlined in the table below:

Principle	PebblePad
1. Encourage contact between students and staff	✓
2. Encourage co-operation among students.	✓
3. Encourage active learning.	✓
4. Give prompt feedback.	✓
5. Use time in class or online effectively to support student learning.	✓
6. Communicate high expectations: make the students aware of what you expect from them.	
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.	✓

In addition, PebblePad can enhance the learning experience by allowing users to document and reflect on their learning in their own time and at their own pace, thereby offering flexibility and affording students the opportunity to manage and regulate their own performance and progression.

Introducing an e-portfolio tool to your programme.

In 2009, at Gateshead College, Andrew Robson completed a study, funded by JISC, which evaluated and cross-compared a number of e-portfolio/PDP systems (including PebblePad) in a range of H.E work-based learning programmes. The aim was to examine how e-portfolio tools can support and enhance learning on programmes such as these and on how the HE in FE learner can be supported most effectively in achieving their learning goals. The project team produced case studies that others can adopt or adapt at their own institutions and also created short rule-of-thumb definitions of good practice in establishing WBL support. The project highlighted a number of important issues to be considered before introducing e-portfolio tools:

- Students often experience difficulties with reflection, rather than with technology. Opportunities to practice reflection and development may be necessary. Initially, it may be useful to encourage students to use a blog to record learning activities as this gets them used to posting frequent entries and builds their confidence.
- Timing of the introduction of the e-portfolio must be carefully considered. Midway through the first term is considered too late as learners require time to familiarise themselves with the technology before they are assessed – to explore and make mistakes, get into the habit of recording and reflecting on their learning activities, build confidence and overcome any potential technical problems. There is undoubtedly a learning curve which takes time to negotiate before the potential, e.g. for collaborative reflection, begins to be realised. How learners are supported through this stage is a key factor in successful implementation and user motivation.
- Learners who express concerns or criticisms about their employer in their e-portfolios may be reluctant to allow their work place mentor access to their online work. Therefore, students should be discouraged about including negative comments relating to their work/workplace.
- Students were found to be wary of functions and tools which they did not need and any over-complication was seen, by some, as a barrier to engagement – ‘keep it simple’ could be the maxim here.
- Identify strategies to engage and support learners online: support and feedback is a vital catalyst for learner engagement and commitment to using the e-portfolio. Thought needs to be given to the pattern and availability of both technical and practical support throughout the programme. This may require front-loading support costs, which can be substantial. The aim should be to develop peer support, if possible, which can be highly effective with first line problems and also encourage students to take ownership of the system which is a crucial factor in engaging their long-term interest.
- Staff buy-in is key to successful implementation of e-portfolio tools. Staff must be given sufficient opportunity to familiarise themselves with the technology and recognise the potential for individual and collaborative learning so that they can support and encourage learners effectively.

- Staff must understand that critical reflection is a skill which needs to be developed. Learners often have inhibitions about recording their reflections and sharing their thoughts. However, the impact of these inhibitions can be reduced with support and positive feedback from tutors. Encouraging dialogue and collaboration can improve the quality of reflection.
- Engaging learners and supporting them in the workplace is crucial. Offering sensitive, individual feedback and technical support were identified as crucial to student performance and progression.

Adult learners may have no previous experience of e-portfolios or even of working with IT. Their need for support in the early stages is particularly acute and, at first, progress may be slow. Learners' initial difficulties with technology – and with reflective writing – may lead them to make more demands on tutors and IT support staff in the early stages. Flexible support options are critical to learners' progress.

It may be useful to introduce PebblePad through carefully scaffolded tasks. Evidence suggests that e-portfolio-based tasks may have more credibility for learners if they are assessed or carry credits, and that learners respond better to e-portfolio development and to blogging if introduced to these activities during induction. However, most learners gain confidence through developing e-portfolios, and many acquire a greater sense of self-worth.

Privacy and confidentiality of content

The information users store in their PebblePad e-portfolio cannot be viewed by anyone else as access is protected by the learner's username and password. However, users may choose to share items with other people or submit them to a gateway which will allow others to access their assets (note: if users share or submit an asset that is linked to other assets the viewer will also be able to view all the linked items).

Where can I get PebblePad?

Contact ISD (extension: 7000) who will be able to install the software onto your machine. In most cases, this can be done remotely.

What support is available?

The Learning Development Team in LTDU can visit departments and individuals to provide tailored support. A 'How To' user guide is also available in conjunction with this resource.

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