Welcome…

Editorial

Rob Ward, Director, the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA)

Welcome to our final issue of the current academic year, and another rich and eclectic mix which reflects the range of exciting practice that is part and parcel of the PDP 'scene' nowadays.

We offer understanding as to what makes a difference to student engagement, with some 'heartening' –yet still challenging- conclusions from Jonathan Weyers.

We revisit enduring challenges; in respect of tutoring, for example, and Janet Strivens suggestions for supporting tutor development which are nicely balanced by Emma Purnell and Paul Towers' views of mentoring development from the inside.

We catch up on the research and evaluation agenda which in turn feeds forward to new work on the national - and international - stages.

We have insights into the ELLI in HE initiative, which offers a basis both for curriculum and individual student development. And, finally, Michael Schmidt suggests that solutions to the e-portfolio and e-pdp challenge might not cost the earth, or indeed very much at all, and in doing so takes us toward the idea of tools to deliver a range of e-portfolio services as opposed to single e-portfolio systems.

PDP represents a world first, a unique sector led initiative, and how far we have collectively travelled in the ten years since Dearing should of itself be a source of pride and promote a worthwhile sense of achievement. With that thought, have a most enjoyable summer!

An Analysis of Policy and Strategy Factors in Relation to PDP

Jonathan Weyers, Director of Quality Assurance, University of Dundee

Which policy and strategy inputs have the greatest effect on student engagement with PDP? This was the question asked of delegates at a workshop held during a joint QAA Scotland/CRA/HEA conference in Glasgow on 16th April 2007. Although the workshop structure was somewhat experimental, the delegates' collective input and comments provide a useful snapshot of opinion, and the responses reveal some interesting points about the current status of PDP in HE institutions and how CRA, HEA and QAA might focus their efforts to support engagement in PDP schemes, both north and south of the border.

Nineteen of the 23 workshop participants came from a wide range of Scottish HEIs, FEIs and PSBs, and the remaining four from the University of Olso, Norway. In Part 1 of the workshop, these representatives were asked to provide an individual quantitative evaluation of the impact of seven pre-selected policy and strategy factors on effective student engagement with PDP. The leftmost column in Table 1 shows the different factors that were taken into consideration.

Table 1 : Weightings provided by workshop participants to different strategy and policy factors impacting on student engagement with PDP

Possible factors	Group				Mean value [1]	Rank
	A	B	C	D		
External policy decisions and review procedures	5	5	5	5	5.0	6=
University Learning and Teaching Strategy	15	5	5	15	9.8	5
University Quality Assurance procedures (e.g. degree programme review)	5	5	5	5	5.0	6=
University PDP implementation policy, including mechanism of delivery	20	10	25	20	18.7	3
College/faculty/school /departmental PDP or L&T strategy and policy	15	25	25	20	21.7	2
Policy for embedding PDP within a programme	25	25	25	15	22.0	1
Other policy factors impinging on student decisions to engage with PDP	15	25	10	20	17.8	4

[1] for the technically minded, weighted for group size, which varied

The task was essentially a sensitivity analysis, where participants provided an 'importance weighting' for each factor, derived from a total of 100 notional points. It was agreed that these assessments should reflect the current situation for those with an active PDP scheme and an ideal situation for those without (who were few), and that responses should take account of the institutional role and perspective of each participant.

In Part 2 of the workshop, the participants joined one of four groups, listed as A–D in Table 1. They were asked to introduce themselves to the other group members and then explain their individual ratings. After this, each group was asked to arrive at a consensus on the weightings they would give to the different policy inputs. Quite intense discussion ensued and the results reported by the groups are shown in columns two to five of the table. Individual weightings in the first phase had been variable, but groups seemed to be able to reach a consensus without substantive argument.

The four groups arrived at broadly similar views on the weightings, as shown by the high degree of agreement across rows two to five of Table

1. A mean value is given in column six and the overall rank in terms of perceived importance is provided in column seven.

Several interesting points can be derived from the data:

- Policy for embedding PDP within a (degree) programme was the highest ranked factor for influencing student engagement with PDP. This indicates that PDP is no longer an abstract strategic notion and that staff are coming to terms with concrete issues to do with its role in learning, teaching and career planning. The participants acknowledged that the principles of constructive alignment imply that assessment of PDP activities should occur if it is properly embedded in the curriculum, but this raised many further issues in the minds of conference delegates, such as: ethical concerns regarding ownership and privacy of PDP content; the reliability of methods that might be used for assessing reflection; and whether the act of assessment might inhibit the production of introspective and frank PDP content.

- External factors and 'higher level' institutional learning and teaching strategy were judged to have relatively little effect on current engagement with PDP schemes. It was agreed in discussion that this was probably a sign of the maturing status of PDP schemes within HEIs. It was conceded that the results might have been different, had the same question been asked a few years ago, when institutions were still grappling with the Dearing/Garrick reports; the CVCP, SCoP & QAA Joint Consultation Paper about Progress Files; and the implications of QAA review. At that time, larger weighting values might have been allocated higher up the table.

- Internal QA procedures were deemed to be relatively unimportant at present. This may reflect the fact that PDP has not yet been integrated within such procedures, or that participants lacked experience of modified procedures due to their intermittent nature. This assessment might be anticipated to change in future, as HEIs go through further cycles of review and staff respond to internal and external questions about implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PDP.

- It was agreed in discussion that the relative influence that participants attributed to university level or to sub-unit level policy depended upon whether the institution had delegated responsibility for policy-making to the sub-units or not. This obvious point lay behind much of the variability observed in individuals' responses. Alongside other conference contributions, the

impression was given that institutions were grasping the PDP policy nettle in one way or another at either of these levels, and that this was critical for staff and hence student engagement. Intriguingly, at least two examples were cited of HEIs which had moved from a delegated college/faculty level policy to one that now applied across the institution.

In part three of the workshop, participants identified some additional strategy, policy and practical factors that are influential in PDP engagement. These included:

- policies that promoted student involvement in the initial design and review of the PDP scheme (mentioned many times, independently);
- the level of study at which PDP was first introduced and how well students engaged at that stage;
- whether a personal tutor scheme existed and could support PDP;
- the quality of the PDP delivery mechanism (often an eportfolio tool);
- degrees of security and privacy for students;
- employability and/or career planning strategies 'joined up' to PDP;
- whether staff valued PDP and whether staff were expected to carry out PDP themselves;
- workload issues for students and staff;
- relevance to the degree pathway and requirements of accrediting bodies (successful PDP schemes often being present in vocational degree programmes because of links to later CPD schemes within professions).

What, then, are the main messages to emerge from the workshop for policy-makers and bodies charged with supporting implementation of PDP?

1. QAA and other educational PSBs can be heartened by the maturing status of PDP within HEIs and the evident way in which policy factors 'nearer the curriculum' are coming into play. PDP schemes are now firmly rooted within institutional cultures and 'deeper level' decision-making is seen as extremely influential.

2. The importance placed by delegates on policy for embedding PDP within degree programmes indicates that the support of coherent and meaningful assessment of

PDP should be a priority for the CRA and others.

3. There may be a need for the CRA to continue to emphasise sectoral and institutional evaluation of and reflection about PDP schemes, as this necessary activity does not seem to have a high profile at present.

4. At institutional level, experienced students need to be fully involved in the development of effective systems and in persuading their fellow students about the value of PDP.

5. The focus of senior HEI managers should move from monitoring the overarching 'macro level' strategy and policy towards supporting the integration and application of policy at 'micro level', that is, within degree programmes and courses or modules.

Note: the conference delegates who took part are thanked for their constructive contributions to the workshop discussions and for giving permission for their views to be summarised.

Personal development planning and personal tutoring: training staff for the role

Janet Strivens, The Centre for Recording Achievement

Among the strategies adopted by institutions for implementing PDP is a re-casting of the personal tutor role. Usually this means that the student and personal (development) tutor expect to have a number of formal meetings throughout the programme to review progress and set targets. It is quite likely that such meetings will not be specifically linked to modules or credits (though much of what is written below applies equally to reviews carried out within modules). One challenge therefore is the expectation that such meetings have a synoptic function, reviewing progress across the programme and even in terms of extra-curricular experiences and skills development.

The training provided for the personal tutor role has always been variable, to say the least, across the HE sector (from excellent to non-existent). With the advent of PDP and therefore, in some institutions, a

fresh look at the nature and purpose of the role, it is timely to look again at the training needs of staff undertaking this role.

There are skills, information and a level of understanding involved in facilitating this process which are different from those of the good subject teacher. Firstly, the tutor needs to be quite clear about his/her role and its boundaries. S/he needs to be able to explain this role to the learner/tutee without sounding defensive or dismissive. The tutors understanding of the role can be helped by both a clear institutional policy statement, and training which considers different roles and their implications.[1] Clarifying that the tutee understands the relationship and its purpose is going to be a priority at the first meeting (whatever it says in the Student Handbook).

Where there is an assumption that the tutor role is limited and supported by other institutional services (welfare, counselling and so on) an important part of a tutor's training is to gain an understanding of the role of these support services. Specifically, the tutor needs good quality information about how these services are accessed and any constraints on them. However, it is a matter of judgement to decide when students need more specialist help and a matter of skill to encourage them to take advantage and seek help. Both judgement and skills are best developed through discussion and roleplay and neither is susceptible to a 'quick fix'.

Secondly, if the meeting is part of a formal institutional or departmental PDP process, it is likely that the student will have been expected to prepare for it. It goes without saying that the tutor needs to understand the process, its purpose, and what the student is supposed to have done. Key to a successful process are the skills of clarifying and reflecting back to the student: questioning which invites further reflection and prompting designed to uncover the student's real feelings, intentions and frustrations. Tutors who are also teachers may be too quickly inclined to jump in and offer advice and solutions in their eagerness to help the student. Holding back and listening are not the most natural responses for many academics!

In some processes, the tutor will expect to offer direct feedback at some point. Again, there is a skill to offering critical comments in such a way

as to be accepted by the student (perhaps in the context of other strengths demonstrated) and in making sure that the student has fully understood the comments and has a clear plan for tackling weaknesses (or if you prefer, areas for development). The process may have a clear requirement for targets to be set and reviewed, but whether or not this is so, the tutor should be able to help a student in identifying and setting realistic goals.

Finally, the tutor-student relationship is almost invariably constrained by time. Giving one's full attention to a tutee to encourage deeper reflection is not easily compatible to keeping an eye on the clock for the next arrival.

While much of the judgement and skill described above needs experience to develop fully, it is not enough to rely on this. New staff, young staff, and staff from other cultural backgrounds all need specific support both in understanding the policies and the role, in learning about institutional provision (to support them and their students) and in identifying their own skills training needs. Experienced staff will benefit from revisiting the role in the light of PDP implementation (as well as changes in the student body in terms of mental health, financial problems, time pressures on study etc.)

The Centre for Recording Achievement is developing a web site of resources to support the training of staff in the role of personal tutor in the context of PDP. This will contain both paper-based and video resources, with suggestions for use. Some material is being commissioned but it is hoped that much will come from practitioners willing to share the resources they have successfully used. For more information (and to offer to contribute any material) please contact: janet@recordingachievement.org

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[1] Staff could be invited to think about where the emphasis is laid in the roles of: critical friend, networker/gatekeeper, mirror, coach, guide.

Pass it on…experiences of cascade mentoring

Emma Purnell, E-Learning Co-ordinator, School of Art and Design

Paul Towers, Research Assistant, School of Art and Design and School of Education

Effective mentoring can be like travelling down an unknown road, knowing your destination but not necessarily having a specific road map to get there. Sometimes the road changes: it can feel uphill at times or an exhilarating race downhill at 100 mph at others, but it is always a two-way street; A protected, non-judgmental relationship which facilitates a wide range of learning, experimentation and development. (Industrial Society 1995).

I believe from my experience of being both a mentor and a mentee, that both should be a way of being, rather than a role you undertake. Both experiences have been fundamental in my development both professionally and also personally. Mullen and Lick's (1999) definition of mentoring as a two way learning synergy has been particularly influential in the way in which I view mentoring. I have been lucky enough to be part of a cascade mentoring model which has taken place both on and offline, both equally valuable methods. I have been mentored, supported and encouraged in my new role as a teacher by a respected colleague and friend.

Following and adapting the mentoring I received, I then mentored a recent Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) graduate who has been working with me on ePortfolio projects in the School of Art and Design during his time on the PGCE. He then continued the cascade by mentoring level 1 students in their work with e-portfolio, an exciting mix of peer and teacher mentoring as he had recently been an undergraduate in the same school. The focus of all of these mentoring relationships within our cascade model has been to develop personal and professional skills that strengthen our learner-centred focus on teaching. It is not a method of cloning, but of encouraging and developing strengths and providing support for each individual's diverse range of skills and attributes and most importantly, recognising that we can learn from each other "The mentee is as much an agent in bringing about effective mentoring as the mentor." Fletcher (2000, pp. 1-2)

It was important to write this article jointly with my mentee, but not for us to necessarily to try to have to fit our words together, as the mentor/mentee relationship is most effective when both voices are heard. There is therefore (below) a direct quote from my mentee on his experience of cascade mentoring.

'The Oxford dictionary states that a mentor is 'a wise and trusted counsellor or teacher.' On reflection, I feel that I have always had a mentor figure in my education. However, it has never been more apparent than while I have been studying on the PGCE course. Having the opportunity and experience of a mentor to help me with my work and progress assisted me in ways I never thought it could. I feel that just having a student/teacher relationship is not enough. Mentors need to be friends and to have the ability to provide creative inspiration: someone that I can bounce ideas and developments off. Mentoring is so different from standard teaching, I feel that in many ways, the mentor can also learn from the student, while at the same time, not being hindered by this approach. My mentor has been there for the development of my work, but they have also listened and encouraged my own ideas, that we can then **both** build on and use. The ideas that have developed through our student/mentor relationship have left me wanting, and being able to do the same for other students. It has been fantastic to share experiences and ideas with someone who has all ready travelled the same road. If I were to re-write the oxford dictionary definition of the word 'mentor', it would be: 'a trusted friend, counselor or teacher who I can share experiences and ideas with.'

References

Fletcher, S. (2000) *Mentoring in Schools: A Handbook of Good Practice*, London, Taylor and Francis

Industrial Society (1995) cited in http://www.ucreative.ac.uk/index.cfm?articleid=7922

Accessed 10th May 2007

Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-portfolio: steps towards supporting practitioner researchers.

Rob Ward, Centre for Recording Achievement

During 2006 the CRA ran a series of regional workshops through which the 'Researching and Evaluating' toolkit now available on the CRA site was developed. This focus reflected the importance in the minds of practitioners of an enhanced evidence base to inform the effective implementation of PDP

practice (Ward, Strivens and Jackson, 2005[2]). Further survey evidence (Strivens 2007, at http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/KD-HEAe-portfoliosurvey.pdf) confirms that the majority of UK HEIs are using some form of technology to support their PDP processes, and that over half are currently exploring e-portfolio systems.[i] The development of such electronic portfolios, whilst a global and rapidly developing phenomena for which broad claims are made, is also limited in terms of a research-informed evidential base.

Interest at practitioner level is mirrored amongst policy makers where the PDP initiative has been accompanied by calls for the development of evidence to support effective implementation. The original Progress Files Guidelines (QAA et al 2001) noted that: 'It will be important to evidence (claimed) benefits in order to justify the substantial investment that will need to be made to support this initiative.' More recently, the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Scoping Group confirmed that:

'There should continue to be evaluation of the impact of (sic) learning and the representation of learning and achievement of different forms of Personal Development Planning.' (Burgess 2004[3]). And the synthesis of existing research undertaken by the EPPI team at the Institute of Education, University of London, whilst confirming the central tenet of policy, that 'PDP has a positive effect on students' learning, attainment and learning styles' also indicated 'the need for an increase in well-designed experimental research to add to the descriptive research of PDP in the UK.[4]

Conversely, others have highlighted the challenge in extrapolating from the methodologically rigorous and controlled quantitatively-oriented approaches that are emphasised in the EPPI approach to the real-world and multiple contexts of PDP implementation in UKHE. Here the rich nature of the concept of PDP, and the preference for research based on researcher-manipulated studies, might mean that practitioner questions are sidelined (Clegg 2004). On this analysis, while major methodologically rigorous studies

may be important, there is at least a similar need to promote more effective local and situated evaluation practice, thereby bridging the gap between practice and research, meeting the agendas of institutional audiences, and enabling those implementing PDP to learn in more systematic ways from the experience of implementation, thereby improving practice.

In order to respond to this need, four workshops were held during the period May–June 2006. These brought together 142 people from 66 different HEIs (and other organisations including the THES!). In delivering the workshop programme, it was clear that the primary focus for the majority was upon what we might call 'real world catch-up' evaluation rather than Project-based evaluation, the latter having goals and objectives pre-specified and evaluation strategies built in from the outset[5]. While this might have been anticipated, it may bring additional challenges to the evaluation effort, such as the lack of any planned baseline data.

In addition, we noted that:

1. The emphasis on 'real world catch up', allied to the lack of prescription associated with PDP implementation, made the establishment of evaluation approaches particularly challenging. Notwithstanding the conclusion from the earlier 'Achieving our Goals' seminars that practitioners shared a broadly similar view of the elements that comprise PDP, there needed to be full consideration, in respect of the 'does it work' kind of question, of both the nature of the 'it' that should be focussed upon and the relevant criteria for 'work'.

2. There is further challenge in seeking to isolate the impact of PDP interventions in naturalistic implementation contexts where:
   - many factors will be at play;
   - the concept of PDP itself is often seen in holistic terms, with the perceived risk that evaluation might trivialise the implementation process;
   - PDP practice may be regarded as embedded within approaches to learning and teaching.
   We sought to address both aspects in the published evaluation toolkit.

[2] At http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/PFWorkingPaper.pdf (accessed 06/02/07)
[3] At http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/measuringachievement.pdf (accessed 06/02/07). Such demands are mirrored at institutional level, where senior managers may seek evidence that the investment made in suchapproaches can bejustified.
[4] At http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=503 (accessed 05/02/07)

5   We sought to address both aspects in the published evaluation toolkit.

3. The process of defining evaluation strategies and goals is itself highly useful in sharpening ideas about the nature of practice and what we might be seeking to achieve through it. It reinforces the importance of considering PDP in terms of its educational value rather than as an external requirement.

4. There are a range of paradigms that might be employed in PDP evaluation. Within these, a general preference amongst those attending the workshops was for qualitative approaches with a view to the improvement of practice. Alongside this, participants also recognised that there might be a range of audiences for evaluation outcomes, some of whom (senior managers perhaps) may have different views as to 'what counts as evidence' and – perhaps - a stronger interest in evaluation outcomes expressed in numerical data and for the purposes of accountability. Overall, we noted four rationales for evaluation activities, each of which might appeal to particular audiences:

- evaluation for justification – aimed at fund holders, within and beyond institutions;
- evaluation for improving practice – for practitioners (individually and collectively);
- evaluation for knowledge – for a wider academic audience, and
- evaluation for persuasion – aimed at a far wider group.

All of the above suggests the value of conceiving the collective outcomes from the evaluation efforts we are seeking to identify and stimulate in terms of a 'patchwork quilt' set of results. Here each element will – one hopes – have local utility and meaning, but can also be linked to other work to create an overall set of results that are at least suggestive of the emerging picture, and which in turn inform future evaluation efforts and generate hypothesis for further investigation.

The outcomes from this work are now available in the form of an 'Evaluation Toolkit' which can be downloaded from the CRA website at www.recordingachievement.org. This comprises:

1. two evaluation guides (one focussing upon the evaluation of PDP projects, including defining project goals, gathering baseline data and monitoring and evaluating effectively against a project plan; the second recognising that many PDP practitioners are carrying-out 'real world catch-up' evaluation, and looking particularly at the purposes of evaluation and audiences for evaluation before working through to techniques of evaluation and reporting.

2. a small collection of examples of evaluation tools that have been used by Personal Development Planning practitioners;

3. a simple template for practitioners to record their own evaluation activities, methodologies and outcomes, and which – when submitted – can be added to the CRA website. By this means – amongst others – we hope to develop the 'patchwork quilt' of evaluation activities and findings and to support a sustainable community of practitioner-evaluators.

References:

Clegg, S. (2004) 'Critical readings: progress files and the production of the autonomous learner' *Teaching in Higher Education* 9(3) 287–298.

[1] Responses to the HEA e-PDP/e-portfolio survey showed that institutions were in very different places in relation to evaluation of PDP. In a few cases where the institution was developing or implementing a new tool with funding from an external source such as JISC, there was a clear evaluation framework involving external evaluators. However, evaluation of an e-portfolio tool was seen by most respondents as a separate issue from the evaluation of their PDP implementation, and they were making separate plans for this.

Some institutions were evaluating their PDP implementation internally but were assigning a clear role to identified staff members, e.g. Faculty TQEF co-ordinators, to carry out this work, sometimes as a secondment. Where the institution had a CETL with an interest in this area, evaluation plans were being channelled through the CETL. A further tranche of institutions were relying on their existing monitoring and audit procedures. This left a significant number who declared themselves to be still in the planning stage, sometimes for the expressed reason that they were *"only just thinking about implementation at this point"*.

Measuring Development? The ELLI in HE project.

Jamie Thompson, Northumbria University

What's going on?

A collaboration of fourteen diverse universities are engaged in a research and development project that involves staff and students exploring the notion of 'Learning Power'. Learning Power is the name given to a cluster of learner characteristics identified and tested at Bristol University and that can be individually profiled with the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI). See http://www.bristol.ac.uk/education/enterprise/elli (accessed 17th May 2007).

Key research questions include: How valid are these characteristics in an HE context? How do these profiles change over time and in response to different HE experiences and interventions? How do profiles differ across different disciplines, level of study, institutions and modes of delivery? How do students and staff respond to engagement with ELLI in terms of awareness raising and relevance? Beyond core questions, institutions focus on particular issues such as impact of placement/work experience, progression, application to Personal Development Planning (PDP), relevance to e-portfolio, attrition, international students, post-graduate students.

Staff briefing is taking place between now and the end of September and with two pilot studies this summer the main project will take place in 2007/08. Dissemination will follow and we anticipate a second phase of funded, focused enquiries.

How did we get to this point?

The CRA has played an important part in facilitating a history of conversation and discussions. Key debates over recent years have included researching and evaluating PDP (and how difficult it is!), the contested nature of PDP and what we mean by personal development. Alongside these debates the discourse about PDP has focused on relevance to contemporary issues: employability, e-portfolio, progression, lifelong learning etc. The ELLI in HE project has emerged from these discussions motivated by interest and enthusiasm for the relevance and potential uses of ELLI profiling, and by an intrinsic recognition of and desire to work within a community of practice, from foundations well established through the CRA.

By the end of 2006 it was clear that a substantial group of universities wanted to work together to explore the ideas presented by ELLI. A well attended meeting at Northumbria began to shape the project and draft plans were shared, debated and honed. Each institution makes a commitment to share costs (£2,600 each, largely for briefing events, registration with ELLI and data analysis costs), engage at least one cohort of students and a member of staff in two profiling exercises, participate in the evaluation process, and share data.

Although there is a small voluntary management group, the project Steering Group consists of all participating institutions and success depends on continuing high levels of cooperation. The Steering Group will continue to meet but an electronic hub has been established to facilitate communication and project management.

Reflection

Ron Barnett suggests that for a world of supercomplexity we need a pedagogy in HE that puts students rather than knowledge at the centre (1999, p170). This implies a relationship between learner and teacher that resonates with much of our thinking about PDP. It is also radical talk, alienates many colleagues, and can be interpreted as undermining a central part of their legitimacy. PDP is a radical enterprise and the ELLI in HE project will promote fresh thinking about learning in HE. It also contributes to an active community of practice in PDP, a community content to live with ambiguity and motivated to learn together across different and supercomplex worlds.

Want to know more or to be part of the ELLI in HE project? Please make contact.

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References

Barnett, R. (1999) *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity* (Buckingham, SRHE and OU)

'Cost free' solutions to the e-portfolio challenge?

Michael Schmidt, University of Central England

E-Portfolios offer several advantages over conventional paper based solutions (Evan, 2005). However, software costs for institutions and students may be one of many issues slowing down their uptake (see Figure 1). This article considers some of the cost free[6] solutions currently available and highlights the issues to be considered when embracing such options.

Fig. 1 (Barriers Affecting E-Portfolio Uptake)
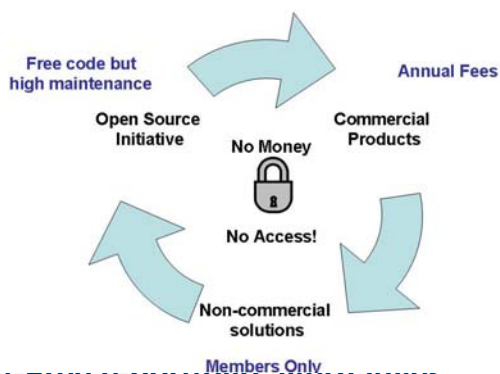
Cost-Free e-portfolio alternatives

An e-portfolio allows users to store digitized evidence to aid personal development or to showcase their success to teachers or employers (Banks, 2004; Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005). Technically an e-portfolio is a website, usually database driven, which allows user input and offers communication tools to connect users with other users or support systems.

Free e-portfolio systems such as the generic e-portfolio from Newcastle University (http://www.eportfolios.ac.uk/; (Cotterill et al, 2005) offer a wide variety of services and functions. However the system is only available to a number of member Universities and therefore not 'free' to the general public yet. The e-portfolio of the open source initiative (www.theospi.org) or future e-portfolio add-on's in Moodle (http://moodle.com/)) offer a free product however its implementation, adaptation, management, hosting and maintenance in the institution requires expert knowledge and hardware which does not come free of charge.

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[6] 'Cost-free' is defined here as 'no additional licence fees or maintenance costs' are required from the e-portfolio user or institution.

Technically it is possible to offer e-portfolio functions (data storage, editing, assessment and communication) without incurring extra costs for institutions or users by combining existing software or other free systems on the market (Fig. 2). (Cohn and Hibbitts, 2005)

Fig. 2: Cost- free e-Portfolio alternatives.

Table 1 outlines options of how the systems outlined in figure 2 could be combined to offer a cost-free e-portfolio solution that could be used for pedagogic purposes.

Content Development & Management	Development of html documents created by free web editing software or Microsoft office suite
Storage	⌃ Free Web space (e.g., myspace.com or geocities) ⌃ Use of Personal Computer as web server
Communication	⌃ Free email/voicemail (e.g., yahoo, hotmail or gmail) ⌃ Chat lines ⌃ Synchronous chat (e.g., msn, yahoo messenger) ⌃ Asynchronous chat (e.g., Blogs) ⌃ Email distribution lists ⌃ Blogs offer creation tools, file management, space & communication all in one
Assessment	Formative assessment (feedback) ⌃ Use email/chat lines, existing VLE's; Summative assessment ⌃ Web/VLE's; Excel (& email)

Table 1: E-Portfolio alternatives: potential applications

Issues influencing the choice of an effective e-portfolio solution

In order to be judged 'fit for purpose' e-portfolio solutions have to face a number of issues (see Figure 3)

Fig. 3: E-Portfolio functions: issues to be considered.

Depending on who controls or owns the e-portfolio system (the institution or the student), different issues have to be taken into consideration. Common issues of interest to both groups are the costs and resources needed, user friendliness, copyright, longevity of product and educational effectiveness. If an institution is the provider and caretaker of an e-portfolio it has to face legal responsibilities.

However if an institution gives students the choice over their e-portfolio provider (e.g. a private website or blog) it releases the institution from the often costly responsibility of dealing with issues such as; an enhanced need for hosting, technical support, data protection and storage; adherence to standards to satisfy accrediting bodies; as well as interoperability of software systems to aid the exchange of the e-portfolio data between educational institutions (to name just a few).

Barret (2006) emphasizes that student learning should come first, not institutional control. To satisfy institutional as well as user needs Barret and Wilkerson (2004) argued for a separation of assessment and learning in e-portfolios and suggested the use of three different systems that are digitally linked instead (see Fig.4)
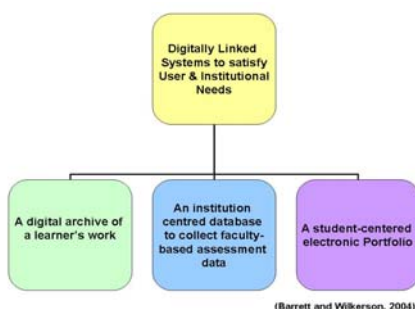

Fig. 4: Digitally linked systems to satisfy user and institutional needs

Conclusion

On the positive side

- Combining free solutions can technically serve both institutional and learner centred needs in relation to e-portfolios.
- Free solutions seem to be particularly suited to foster higher student autonomy and ownership by offering a higher degree of flexibility, control and platform independence.
- Some free solutions (ELGG, Facebook and other social web systems) offer tailored access.
- Free solutions could be more economical, not only in terms of costs and maintenance for both student and institution, but also in

terms of training. They often utilise already established platforms with which students are familiar.

However:

- Many free solutions can't easily deliver tailored access (i.e. provision for restricting access to only selected people, or barring access altogether.) You Tube, for example, only 'does public, not private'.
- If there is neither tailored access nor automatic delivery, presentations cannot be put on the web at all, but only e-mailed.
- Before going down the free solutions route, consideration should be given to how to extract information from such free systems after putting it there.

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News and Events:

University of Bolton

Project Title: National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio

The introduction of student Personal Development Planning (PDP) is the first attempt in UK Higher Education to implement a particular framework for enhancing and capturing student learning by sector wide agreement. In order to maintain and enhance practice in ways which ensure maximum efficacy, it is now essential to deepen our understanding of its impact on the student learning experience.

This project will directly engage practitioners from 16 HEIs in participant action research on the research and evaluation process to build substantial capacity for robust research and evaluation amongst the group responsible for implementing PDP in HE.

If you would like more information regarding this project, please contact:

Sue Burkinshaw, University of Bolton email: S.F.Burkinshaw@bolton.ac.uk

Or Dr. John Peters, University of Worcester, e mail: j.peters@worc.ac.uk

'PDP in the First Year', University of Dundee

The outcomes of this project, one of nine commissioned by QAA (Scotland) as part of The First Year Enhancement Theme 2006/07, will be available in autumn 2007 and disseminated through the enhancement themes website, through a series of seminars and meetings and in a future article for this Newsletter. For more details of the Project, please visit the website: http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/ProjectSix.asp

Dates for Your Diary:

Progressing with Personal Development Planning: a Seminar for Senior Managers Universities UK, Woburn House, London: 30th October 2007

This half-day seminar, aimed at Senior Managers, Deans, Heads of Faculties/Schools/ Departments and others, will:

- Enable consideration of how PDP aligns with institutional and departmental strategies.
- Hear from colleagues who have built PDP into departmental practice.
- Bring you up-to-date with current developments, including revision to the Guidelines for Personal Development Planning.
- Formally launch the PDP Update for Senior Managers that the Centre for Recording Achievement has produced for the Higher Education Academy.

We propose to showcase practice that demonstrates that for some HoD's PDP is an important element within departmental policy and practice, and is associated with good outcomes.

Further details to follow shortly, however in the meantime please make a note in your diary now and feel free to pass these details on to those who may find it to be of interest.

3rd European Conference on the First Year Experience (EFYE) Wednesday 7th to Friday 9th May 2008 The University of Wolverhampton, Telford Campus, Telford, UK. TF2 9NT

The aim of the European First Year Experience (EYFE) Conference is to explore the first year student experience (FYE) at universities across Europe.

The intention of these conferences is to create an environment where educators, researchers support staff and students from all areas in universities across Europe can meet and share new research, innovative practices and experiences on the first year experience.

You will be able to get new ideas on how to develop and increase the quality of the student experience at your respective universities.

*New to this year's conference will be a theme called **"Hearing student voices"** which is aimed at encouraging and offering students or mixed student and staff groups an opportunity to present their work. This is a friendly, supportive conference that would welcome new participants.

For more details please go to www.wlv.ac.uk/celt/efye or email EFYE@wlv.ac.uk