

# Implementation of an ePortfolio Early Adopter Phase: Processes and outcomes

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## Chosen theme(s)

*Program curriculum*

*Institution agendas*

*Professional learning and accreditation*

## The context

The ePortfolio Early Adopter Phase built on previous research from the ePortfolio Feasibility Study in late 2012<sup>1</sup>. This earlier study found that professional degree program leaders, and teaching staff in particular, within the University of the Sunshine Coast value eportfolios for storing and using assets for career purposes, such as continuing professional development, accreditation and employment opportunities. Further, eportfolios were seen by teaching staff as useful in providing evidence of student competencies and graduate attributes. Based on these findings and other internal (and external) support for the value of eportfolios, the Centre for the Advancement and Support of Learning and Teaching (C~SALT) recommended the University adopt eportfolios for student learning purposes using the PebblePad software platform. This recommendation was accepted by the institutional decision-makers with the view to apply for funding to begin a staged implementation across the university in 2014. However, some professional degree programs were keen to start using eportfolios in 2013 as an outcome of this consultative process. This was a year earlier than anticipated. Therefore, the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program was joined by the Master of Midwifery program as Early Adopters, including eportfolios in their curriculum for the first time.

<sup>1</sup> see 'The Approach' section for links to a fuller explanation of the Feasibility Study



## How it was ...

The Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program leaders introduced eportfolios to the first year student cohort (140 students) with the view of progressively building up the students' skills and knowledge throughout the four year degree. This allowed the program to take a 'slow start', gently introducing students to the concept of an eportfolio and basic functions and culminating at the end of the second semester with the submission of a reflective assessment task into the students' PebblePad eportfolios.

The Master of Midwifery (15 students both full and part-time) took a more active implementation approach particularly due to the shorter timeframe of a postgraduate program. The students' extensive practicum was used as the basis for eportfolio use. Emphasis was placed on students' philosophy and reflections of care, clinic experience records, and feedback from patients. Under new accreditation requirements Master of Midwifery students need to complete 20 'follow through' case studies during their degree.

The rapid introduction of the ePortfolio Early Adopter Phase did not align with the slower institutional curriculum revision and amendment processes. Therefore, embedding of changes to assessment tasks to include eportfolios into the course outlines for the two programs was not possible until the second semester of 2013. Consequently, the introduction of eportfolios and PebblePad in Semester One was not linked directly to immediate assessment tasks. Evidence from pre and post-usage student surveys and program analytics show that a majority of students were slow to engage with the eportfolio software until it was an integral part of an assessment task. Therefore, academic teaching staff needed flexible pedagogical approaches to address this challenge in terms of preparing students over both semesters to use eportfolios for later assessment tasks.

## The approach

C~SALT staff facilitated the eportfolio implementation process with teaching staff and students. Oversight of the Early Adopter ePortfolio implementation was undertaken by the C~SALT eportfolio project manager. Activities involved liaison with the academic teaching staff to facilitate their understanding and curriculum planning for eportfolio use in their programs as well as initiate and lead a research partnership with them during the course of the implementation. The project manager developed the research design, gained human ethics permission, collected and analysed data collected on behalf of the programs and at the end of the program shared this information with the teaching staff for their use in wider dissemination opportunities. The research also provided evaluation and reflective practice opportunities for all concerned.

The C~SALT IT Functional Analyst worked with academic teaching staff to build their eportfolio skills so in turn they could work with their own students in a similar digital literacy development role. Initial sessions included an introduction to eportfolios and PebblePad for academics;



a planning session to develop understanding about building eportfolios into course curricula; a training session with academic staff; and one-to-one support to create templates for student use. Further, a couple of non-compulsory computer workshops for students were trialled but were not well attended.

In Semester 2, 2013 attention turned to developing six basic 'how to videos' in the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program that guided students in how to complete their first assessment task to be submitted in PebblePad. This method was particularly successful in engaging students who did not respond to other methods. In the Masters of Midwifery program adjustments were made to the workload associated with the development of the case studies assessment task.

See links below for publications from this eportfolio work that further explain the processes and outcomes:

1. Slade, C & Readman, K. (2013). New Pedagogical e-spaces: Keeping pace with staff readiness. In S. Frielick, N. Buissink-Smith, P. Wyse, J. Billot, J. Hallas, & Whitehead, E. (Eds.) *Research and Development in Higher Education: The Place of Learning and Teaching*, 36, pp.433-443, Auckland, New Zealand, 1-4 July 2013. Available: [http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2013/HERDSA\\_2013\\_SLADE.pdf](http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2013/HERDSA_2013_SLADE.pdf)
2. Slade, C, Murfin, K & Readman, K 2013, 'Evaluating Processes and Platforms for Potential ePortfolio Use: The Role of the Middle Agent', *International Journal of ePortfolios*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 177-188. Available: <http://www.theijep.com/pdf/IJEP114.pdf>
3. USC *ePortfolio Journey: Past, Present and Future*, Presentation at Learning & Teaching Week 26-30 August 2013, University of the Sunshine Coast. Link to Video: <https://mediasite.usc.edu.au/Mediasite/Play/f466250c4bac4c07add84db7391562b11d>

## How it is now ....

The Early Adopter phase contributed valuable insights into the planning of a university-wide staged eportfolio implementation process funded for 2014-2015. The aim of this new process is to foster a culture of eportfolio use across the University that creates a positive outcome for all stakeholder groups involved. The first year Bachelor of Primary Education students are now joining the first and second year Bachelor of Occupational Therapy students and two cohorts of Master of Midwifery students in using eportfolios as an embedded part of their curriculum in 2014. It is anticipated that another one or two programs will start using PebblePad in semester 2, 2014 with further programs added in 2015. C~SALT staff are also currently trialling the use of PebblePad for their professional practice review (PPR) to explore the enablers and challenges involved in potentially wider use within the University.



## The Benefits

Benefits of this Early Adopter Phase include:

- Opportunity to begin a staged eportfolio implementation process which, according to scholarly literature and current best practice, increases the likelihood of successful outcomes.
- Showcasing eportfolio use in the Early Adopter Phase has generated further interest and improved understanding of eportfolio value across other programs. Implementation at both an undergraduate and postgraduate level provides deeper understanding of potential enablers and barriers through highlighting the individual nature and needs of different programs.
- Collaboration between faculty and C~SALT provides pedagogical and curriculum support for staff.
- Development of a research project between C-SALT and the early adopter programs involved to produce scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) outcomes for academic and C-SALT staff involved.

## Lessons learnt

Challenges of this Early Adopter Phase include:

- Taking a measured and timely approach to look past participant excitement with a new technology to bring about pedagogical adaption and digital literacy support.
- Ensuring adequate training for different groups involved e.g. management team, L&T staff and academics, including sessional staff, as well as meeting the needs of students.
- Finding the capacity to respond appropriately to the differing needs of both a long undergraduate program and a short postgraduate one.
- Managing a range of stakeholder expectations

Recommendations for future improvement include:

- Allow a longer preparation time so eportfolios are embedded into curriculum and particularly in assessment tasks.
- Take a 'program level' approach to eportfolio implementation
- Don't assume that all younger age students have digital literacy
- Maintain a consistent relationship with teaching staff during the semester whilst they are in early stages of eportfolio implementation.
- Always be looking for ways to cross-link learnings and resources across programs.
- Develop a community of practice for peer support.



## In brief – personalising the curriculum

- The PebblePad platform provides flexibility for use in different contexts and timeframes.
- Teaching staff can design their own templates to meet individual course needs.
- PebblePad allows students (and teachers) to have a Personal Learning Space (PLS) for the development of reflective practice as well as evidence collection for later use, which is vital to career and accreditation purposes.

