

Getting what you want from e-portfolio systems: a starting point for students in HE.

This guidance template is one of six documents aimed at different audiences that have been developed to help Higher Education (HE) institutions make informed choices about e-portfolio systems, from a range of different perspectives. The others in this series include:

- Generic guidance: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_final.doc
- A starting point for institutional managers in HE: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_man.doc
- A starting point for MIS managers in HE: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_MIS.doc
- A starting point for technical developers in HE: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_tech.doc
- A starting point for Personal Development Planning (PDP) practitioners in HE: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Guidance_PDP.doc

This template has been completed from the perspective of students. It provides a perspective on the key issues in developing and implementing e-portfolios from their point of view.

As every institution and every student is different, you might not agree with all they say.

However, it might help you to clarify your own ideas about your contribution to your institutional discussion about developing and implementing e-portfolio. In an attempt to add authenticity, we have – for the most part - written the middle column in the first person. The third column gives space for you to record your own ideas.

A blank template for recording results of collective discussions with other stakeholders can be found in the generic guidance document.

Aspects/functionalities/features/ for consideration	Key issues for learners	Key points for you
1) Target learners and e-portfolio purpose(s)	Remember that this is not a categorical list, but some first thoughts from other students to help you decide what the key points are for you.	
• Who are the target learners?	(The HE sector-agreed policy on Personal	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is their stage/episode of education or employment? • How does this build on previous stages of their learning? • How might this prepare for their next stages of learning? 	<p>Development Planning, which e-portfolios might help to deliver, indicates that policy will apply to all students on all awards.)</p> <p>Some of us are likely to have previous experience which will inevitably colour our engagement. <i>'I have experience of PDP at college and at work before coming to university.'</i></p> <p>Establishing links with past and future stages – if positive - could add to our motivation, so was our experience positive or not and what should the institution do to engage with this?</p> <p>Are there ways of valuing previous engagement through transfer, AP[e]L, interview or other means?</p> <p>We are likely to be more open to engagement and more welcoming of support at points of transition.</p>	
<p>What do we see as the main purpose(s) of e-portfolio for our learners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to support formal (e.g. curricular) learning/learning to learn • to support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts) • to support formative assessment, • to provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment • to create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression • to support transition between different learning environments 	<p>Many need to see the direct academic relevance or will they not engage: <i>'I thought the use of these forms was unnecessary and confusing in understanding the subject.'</i></p> <p>Generally, there needs to be a clear balance between the benefits for a students' future career and the benefits of using it in the curriculum. (Specifically, it is important to establish whether we – or the learners we are considering - are primarily interested in improving our own learning, employability, or professional qualification, etc, or...)</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to support personalisation, effective choices and pathways • Other purposes? 	<p>It may be that different purposes will be appropriate for us at different points in our progress.</p> <p>We also value systems which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support non-formal learning e.g. student development activities such as sabbatical officer roles, community based and union based volunteering, clubs and societies participation; • provide opportunities for reflecting on extra-curricular activities and interests = personal development – <i>“Make the questionnaire more relevant to student life rather than just the academic side”</i>. <p>We tend to respond best to the use of reflection and development when linked to practical examples</p> <p>Those who are less likely to engage define systems as being about narrow skills audit and time management, those who do engage are more likely to see e-portfolio as being about our own personal development.</p> <p>We value a multi-format approach: not just ‘prescriptive’ forms but also free-flow forms <i>‘The choice of being able to edit the forms to suit the individual is of strong importance. If a student is limited in the way they wish to work, engagement with the system will reduce.’</i></p>	
<p>2) What guidance to support learner is important in our context to include online or alongside(Would you include this ‘online’ or ‘alongside’ the e-portfolio system?).</p>		

- Guidance to learner on the purpose(s) of the system
- Guidance to learner on how to use the system
- A tutorial programme alongside to support the PDP/e-portfolio process
- On-line tutor/mentor support for feedback to learner
- Diagnostic tools to assist with self-assessment, or educational or career planning

Other guidance?

'PDP tool – never heard of it!' Publicity is vital, through as many different avenues as possible.

The institution needs to:

- ensure a clear and shared understanding of what is meant by PDP, and the purposes of the inclusion of PDP in relation to our learning.
- consider flexible support systems which allow us the level of access we find most individually useful. Also the more sources of support there are, both alongside and online, the more likely we will find support appropriate to our own particular needs. With, for example, the University providing academic and online support and the Students' Union providing training sessions

Embedded guidance and support are key in conveying to us the extent to which PDP is valued in our learning. Regular reference needs to be made to the system so that students can start to understand where and how this fits in with their curriculum. Staff scepticism will prove fatal; if academics are not 'on side' then students will not want to use the system. *'Get tutors to promote the use of the PDP more, - if tutors say students should do it, we will.'*

We recognise the need to have clear and realistic expectations of support available when we are using the on-line system. This is not only important for staff - so as not to get

	overwhelmed with contact from students - but also for students to have guidance of how much support they can realistically expect from their tutors.	
3) Information management: a) What types of information are/will be managed by a learner, and will not be processed for the purposes of the institution? ¹		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development records (PDRs) e.g. statements of interests and achievements; claims of progress, skills, and competency; aspirations, goals, plans • Evidence, e.g. qualifications, certificates, licences, other digital files (audio, video, picture) • Reflections • CV • Other information? 	<p>Inclusion of both formal and non-formal elements are important. As students we wanted to see a structured system for academic development with the opportunity to add extra-curricular activities and skills that improve our CV's. The presence of extra-curricular forms actually helped 'advertise' the importance of building skills outside our courses.</p> <p>It is very important for us to know something of the use to which information will be put:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will it be public or private? • will it be assessed? <p>We value linking the PDP system explicitly into CV development.</p>	
b) What types of information will be managed by a learner and will <u>also</u> be processed for the purposes of the institution?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is our institution acting as a data controller of e-portfolio learner information? (Yes/No)² 		

¹ Legal framework terminology for what is often described in lay terms as 'owned by the learner'.

² For the purposes of the Data Protection Act (1998), the institution is a 'data controller' of learner data that are processed for the institution's purposes. For a discussion of obligations of a 'data controller' with respect to a 'data subject', and related DP issues, see endnote reference to the JISC Legal Aspects of ePortfolios. If the institution is not a data controller, then the DPA 1998 does not apply to the information, but e-portfolio system users may need advice on DP

If 'yes', does our institutional notification to the Information Commissioner cover our proposed processing/ use of e-portfolio learner data?		
c) Information owned and managed by Institution/ Organisation		
Developing transcript - will a learner be able to view progress/assessed achievements (marks, grades) to evidence formal progress during a period of study?	An 'in progress' transcript might serve as a confidence builder for students and allow for increased flexibility of use of this document as we progress through our studies. It also gives increased credibility and interest. Maintaining long term accessibility to this either in hard copy or another form, will aid long term goal planning and personal development	
Transcript –will a learner be able to view and link to transcript as authenticated evidence of achievement after period of study?		
How will security and authentication of transcript information be assured and maintained?	Security and authentication is key. If at any time, this is compromised, then the credibility will fall and we will become sceptical.	
How will the e-portfolio interoperate with our existing VLE? MLE? MIS?	A system which pulls together authenticated and established data with student personal material would only require key data to be entered once - <i>It just makes life easier!</i> . So a system integrated within an MLE might encourage greater learner 'ownership' and engagement with <u>all</u> systems.	
Other considerations?		
d) What information might be managed or processed collaboratively, e.g. by more than one learner, or by more than one organisation? What are the implications of shared information? ³		

implications of their own activities – see section 3d.

³ For all potentially shared data, considerations include: "Who has an interest, an obligation, a right with respect to these data? What is the interest, obligation,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative work involving other people's personal data • Work undertaken with another organisation, e.g. work experience placement • A record of a discussion at key review points • Learner information shared with the institutional MIS, and re-used for the purposes of managing the e-portfolio • "Does our portfolio system have suitable prompts about the use of other people's data, or other people's copyrighted material, at the point of incorporation?" • Other considerations? 		
<p>4) Managing information: How will a learner manage information? What editing rights and facilities will a learner need?</p>		
<p>; e.g. should a learner have rights/facilities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enter, edit and save text? (e.g. personal development records) • upload files as evidence of learning/competency etc? (these might be text, images, audio, video) • hyperlink to files as evidence? (text, audio etc) • export files? • create his/her own web page templates? • see all his/her data and a list of uploaded and linked files? • view/link to his/her developing transcript/awarding body record? • Other considerations? 	<p>The greater the flexibility the better the chances of a format that works for us and our learning. The more personalisation that is allowed the more learner ownership is established and the more it becomes a <i>personal</i> development portfolio. <i>'The first thing we do to new systems, whether its just emails or desktops, is to personalise them – make them our own.'</i></p> <p>However the capability for endless permutations and customisation by the committed might serve to confuse or overwhelm inexperienced users who want a simple, approachable system.</p> <p>So, the system should allow for all levels of</p>	

right?" e.g. Is the learner's sponsor aware of, and agreeable to, use of their placement data, (which may include commercially sensitive data) in the learner's portfolio?

"Does our portfolio system have suitable prompts about the use of other people's data, or other people's copyrighted material, at the point of incorporation?"

	interaction. There should be structure but for those who are capable flexibility is important.	
5) Privacy¹ and ownership/stewardship⁴ of information		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is our institutional Data Protection Officer (DPO) aware of our (planned) e-portfolio implementation? Do we have an ongoing dialogue with our DPO to tackle data protection issues as they arise? • What is our institutional data protection policy (DPP)? • How does our e-portfolio implementation relate to this policy? • Will a learner be able to view the institutional DPP from within the e-portfolio system? (Yes/No)⁵ • Who will have permission to view all or part of a learner's e-portfolio? • Who will set permissions for sharing learner information? (learner/Department/ School/ Faculty/Institution/ awarding body/company?) • How long may/must data be stored after learner leaves Institution /Organisation? What are the institutional obligations of stewardship? • Other considerations? 	<p>It is really important that students know about the Data Protection Policy. The first question is often <i>'Can anyone else access my work?'</i></p> <p>Some students have suggested a default setting as 'no sharing' i.e. all information 'owned' and managed by the learner, with different zones set up for different permissions.</p>	
6) Accessibility/usability		
<p>Accessibility/usability issues which should be taken into consideration include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does our e-portfolio system comply with our obligations under the DDA and SENDAⁱⁱ? • can each learner select preference settings for screen display – font style, size, colours of font and 	<p>We would like to be able to control screen display colours for font and background colour including logical tab orders.</p> <p>Accessibility for students who are visually impaired needs to be considered. In addition,</p>	

⁴ Where 'stewardship' is defined as 'the assumption of responsibility for the proper management of learner data'. See Q 4 of (1.) of a series of papers in the form of FAQs, produced by the JISC Study to Explore the Legal and Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record i

⁵ If 'yes', can a learner view information about the policy and institutional use/processing of their data, by means of collection notices at a point when personal data are collected?

If 'no', how are learners advised about DP implications of their own e-portfolio activities?

<p>background, which are stored and automatically applied at log-in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is accessibility via a keyboard (instead of a pointing device) available to a learner? • Other considerations? 	<p>accessibility for those whose first language is not English, and students who may be studying remotely or have limited accessibility to IT.</p>	
<p>7) Storage capacity and storage duration</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much space will be allocated to each learner's PD records and digital files? • How long will a learner's records be retained, so that learner may reflect back on progress between 'then' and 'now'? • Other considerations? 	<p>Space is important to us, particularly for those who come from an art/design/computer background. We will need to be able to upload work as part of evidence of our development. Limiting this again simply stops people engaging.</p> <p>We need to know for how long information will be retained. If the institution decides that there will be a limit to information being retained then perhaps a yearly subscription could be introduced.</p>	
<p>8) What does the system need to conform to e-learning standards?</p>		
<p>How will the system interoperate with other systems, so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a learner can transfer his/her PD information from previous stage, and to next stage of learning/organisation without re-keying information? • an organisation can transfer a learner's information from previous, and to next, stage of learning/organisation without re-keying information? • Other considerations? 	<p>Will it be portable and possible for us to take information with us when we leave, or access it from outside? Without access to the system after completion of the course, students may not complete or engage fully with the system. Being able to take the information away/or access externally will allow for continuity.</p> <p>Ideally, we would like to be able to transfer the information to other systems. That way we will not have to 'redo' all the work that has been completed over several years. It would encourage lifelong learning.</p>	
<p>9) What other resources do we require to run alongside to assure effective learner support?</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. human resources, such as tutor support, IT support for learner and system, IT developer support 	<p>See section 2: <i>'Get tutors to promote the use of the PDP more, - if tutors say students</i></p>	

for further development. • Other?	<i>should do it, they will'.</i> What about opportunities for on-line group support, a kind of chat room where users can develop their knowledge?	
10) Evaluation		
How might we evaluate efficacy, e.g. • level of use by learners • impact on learners • impact on staff • Other?	From the SU or other types of student feedback. This information needs to be seen to come from the student level rather than from the academics. If students are genuinely finding it useful then this should be reported back to other students.	

This perspective has been developed by Rob Ward and Helen Richardson with contributions from Kate Lester (NUS), Michelle Mcguirk (University of Wolverhampton), students at the University of Manchester taking part in the FDTL4 Student Transition and Retention Project, and John Peters (University of Worcester).

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Acronyms:

- DDA – Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- DPA – Data Protection Act 1998
- JISC – Joint Information Systems Committee
- MIS – Management Information Systems
- MLE – Managed Learning Environment
- PDP – Personal Development Planning
- PDR – Personal Development Record(s)
- SENDA – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
- VLE – Virtual Learning Environment

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- i A series of papers in the form of FAQs, produced by the JISC Study to Explore the Legal and Records Management Issues Relating to the Concept of the Lifelong Learner Record:
1. Legal Aspects of ePortfolios: A Short FAQ - http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Legal_Aspects_FAQ.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
 2. Data Protection, Lifelong Learner Record Systems and ePortfolios: A short FAQ - http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Data_Protection_FAQ.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
 3. Consortium Agreements: A Short FAQ - http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/Consortium_Agreements.pdf (accessed 23/12/05)
- (Further outputs and information on the legal study can be found at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_learner_records_legal_study.html) (accessed 23/12/05)
- ii Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm> (accessed 23/12/05)