

ELTE Project Help Sheet 3

supporting the development of technology enhanced teaching and learning in Social policy and Social Work in higher education

Uses of e-portfolios to develop reflection and assessment on social work degree programmes

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Introduction

This help sheet provides an introduction to the use of e-portfolios for social work educators. It examines some definitions of e-portfolios and general issues in their application, as well as considering some examples drawn from practice and lessons learned from this. Although examples are drawn from social work programmes most of the issues and tips are transferable to social policy courses.



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This Help Sheet is part of a series being produced for Social Policy and Social Work higher education teachers and support staff as part of SWAP's E-Supported Learning and Teaching Enhancement Project. The project is running between May 2006 and July 2008.

For more details on the project visit the SWAP website

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What is an e-portfolio?

There are numerous definitions for e-portfolios and their uses. Beetham (2006) summarises some of the elements that define an e-portfolio:

- ▶ a collection of digital resources;
- ▶ evidence of an individual's progress and achievements drawn from both formal and informal learning activities;
- ▶ resources that are personally managed and owned by the learner;
- ▶ resources that can be used for review, reflection and personal development planning;
- ▶ resources that can be selectively accessed by other interested parties, e.g. teachers, peers, assessors, awarding bodies, prospective employers.

Gottlieb (1995) uses the acronym CRADLE (collection, reflection, assessment, documentation, linkage, evaluation) to describe different types and uses of portfolios. Some provide features that enable content sharing and collaboration in producing or modifying resources.

This is a developing area with rapid changes in technology and terminology and there is now considerable blurring of the boundaries between virtual learning environments, e-portfolios, personal websites and social networking systems. The requirements for personal development planning and continuing professional development are examples of drivers for the extension of the use of e-portfolios. The potential for e-portfolios to develop reflective, personalised, lifelong and collaborative learning make this a particularly important area for professional education.

A range of e-portfolio systems are available, which have advantages and disadvantages depending upon the intended use. Examples include:

- ▶ open source systems, e.g. The Open Source Portfolio;
- ▶ e-portfolios embedded into virtual learning environments, e.g. Blackboard;
- ▶ commercial systems, e.g. PebblePad.

An important consideration in the choice of e-portfolio system is accessibility. Systems differ considerably in what they offer in terms of personalisation of the way information is displayed (e.g. font size, colour) and the capacity to work with assistive technologies (e.g. spell checkers and screen readers). Specialised commercial e-portfolio systems may offer more robust technology with better support and a greater range of templates to structure learning tasks in a flexible way.

E-portfolios combine all the advantages of paper based portfolios for recording, facilitating and documenting learning with the additional flexibility and accessibility which is available through electronic media. Further evidence suggests additional benefits to a paper-based portfolio, in particular:

- ▶ increased communication between the learner and their assessor, employer and academic tutor;
- ▶ more timely review of specific documents, which can occur remotely;
- ▶ the development of IT skills for all site users. (www.sweap.co.uk)

BA Social Work: Web folio for ECDL module

University of Wolverhampton

Why: To raise the profile of IT skills and to meet the ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) requirements of the social work degree.

What: The module uses a blended learning approach with lectures, seminars and small group work. The creation of a 'web folio' within the e-portfolio system provides a means for students to develop and evidence their IT skills. <http://eportfolio.wlv.ac.uk/webfolio.aspx?webfolioid=210711>

(make sure you type in the whole url)

How: An existing first year module was adapted to include an assessed web folio.

MA Social Work: Principles of safe practice module

University of Wolverhampton

Why: To enhance arrangements at short notice for assessing students' safety to undertake practice learning whilst overcoming resources problem (teaching time, teaching room availability).

What: Face to face teaching for the module was limited to four workshops, with teaching time focussed on designing the e-portfolio template and providing online feedback and support to students. <http://eportfolio.wlv.ac.uk/webfolio.aspx?webfolioid=123759>

(make sure you type in the whole url)

How: An e-portfolio module was devised as the most efficient and flexible way of meeting the requirements.

Social work electronic assessment portfolio (SWEAP)

Shropshire Social Care and Health, Stoke on Trent Council, Staffordshire University and Skills for Care (West Midlands) Learning Resource Network, developed by VIS Communications Ltd.

Why: To enable social work students to collect their evidence from practice settings using an e-portfolio rather than delivering a large, heavy paper base.

What: The system supports collection, review and development of evidence from practice settings to meet the assessment requirements of the social work degree programme. Students can complete documents online, which can then be assessed and 'locked' by practice teachers/assessors and viewed by tutors to capture a final version. See website www.sweap.co.uk

How: Development of a pilot project involving a small number of students and practice teachers to provide an online filing system for documents uploaded from the standard portfolio, messaging and administrative systems.

Tips for designing learning and assessment activities using e-portfolios

- ▶ Keep it simple. When writing introductions, assessment tasks or help sheets, use short simple sentences (Race 2004).
- ▶ Make sure learning outcomes, learning tasks, resources and assessment tasks are appropriate and aligned as much as possible.
- ▶ Consider individual differences in experience and access to technology.
- ▶ Consider diversity issues. Used appropriately, technology can enhance access.
- ▶ While ideas about learning styles may be contentious (Learning and Skills Research Centre 2004), where possible write in non sensory specific language, e.g. experience rather than see, hear or feel.
- ▶ Plan, prepare and pilot your ideas. Ask people to work through tasks not just read them.
- ▶ Provide a range of help and support services, if possible including people from outside the teaching team.
- ▶ Think about how the use of an e-portfolio fits with institutional rules and structures, e.g. rules about submission of assignments, anonymous marking etc.
- ▶ Consider how the use of an e-portfolio fits with other parts of the course, e.g. use reflective tasks around placements (Wengerif 2002).
- ▶ Give formative and summative feedback. Many writers (e.g. Ramsden 2003, Biggs 2003) have commented that students particularly value formative feedback. Indeed Laurillard (2002) has argued that action without feedback is completely unproductive for a learner.
- ▶ Consider the emotional aspects of learning; make tasks enjoyable, relevant and interesting to students.

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http://www.futurelab.org.uk/download/pdfs/research/lit_reviews/Thinking_Skills_Review.pdf

Online resources

- Blackboard** – a virtual learning environment
<http://www.blackboard.com/us/index.Bb>
- Educause E-Learning Initiative – e-portfolios**
<http://www.educause.edu/ELI/5524>
- E-learning centre: e-portfolios**
<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/Resources/eportfolios.htm>
- E-portfolio portal**
<http://www.danwilton.com/eportfolios/sitemap.php>
- European Portfolio Initiatives Co-ordination Committee (EPIC Project)**
<http://www.epiccproject.info>
- Higher Education Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)**
<http://www.swap.ac.uk>
- MERLOT – Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching**
<http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>
- PebblePad – a commercial e-portfolio system**
<http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/>
- Personal Development Planning Network**
<http://www.recordingachievement.org/pdpuk/default.asp>
- TechDis** – An educational advisory service in the fields of accessibility and inclusion
<http://www.techdis.ac.uk/>
- The Open Source Portfolio**
<http://www.osportfolio.org/>



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