

# Case Study

## Using electronic portfolios to demonstrate achievement of professional standards in Initial Teacher Training (ITT): Effective and efficient?

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### The background context

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In September 2004 the School of Education launched the PGCE Early Years Initial Teacher Training programme for 30 trainees. In order for trainee teachers to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) they have to produce a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate their competence

In the initial two years of the programme trainees presented their evidence using a paper based portfolio. Following discussions with staff and a questionnaire completed by the students which showed dissatisfaction with this method, the possibility of using electronic 'e' portfolios was explored.

against a wide range of 'Q' standards (TDA, 2007).

Whilst many trainees will never enjoy gathering and presenting evidence for achievement of standards, it was obvious that using paper based portfolios was not particularly efficient or effective. The paper based portfolios were very cumbersome to carry into college and schools every day and there was a lot of duplication of paperwork as the trainees also had files for teaching practices and job interviews. Tutors also found the paper based portfolios cumbersome to take in and assess.

## The challenge

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*There has been much research over the last five years into the benefits of eportfolios. According to Murray et al. (2006) they 'promote reflective learning and practice', a key skill for trainee teachers. They are also more likely to be valued as they promote ownership and personalisation. Transition and progression within learning is supported, with trainees able to view distance travelled and plan future aims and objectives whilst keeping important documents safe and secure.*

It was hoped that eportfolios would make the logistical difficulties of having to have a portfolio which was accessible to many different people much easier, also that eportfolios would help trainees to be more reflective as they would have a wealth of tools within PebblePad to assist them. This would then help the trainees to appreciate the value of this reflective learning and encourage them to use their ITT portfolio as a working document towards future Continued Professional Development (CPD).

In a questionnaire completed by the 2005/6 trainees, 88% had a negative opinion of the paper based portfolios and only 24% of trainees thought that they would use their paper based portfolio as part of their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year and beyond. Obviously this was a serious concern as it was not conducive to encouraging a reflective approach to learning.



As 92% of trainees said that they would prefer an eportfolio it was decided to pilot eportfolios from September 2006.

A lot of tutor time was wasted chasing up trainees who were not keeping their portfolios up to date. There was also a problem with trainees not making their portfolios accessible to tutors on agreed dates – this was something that was commented on during an Ofsted inspection.

## The approach

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*ePortfolios were trialed during the 2006/7 academic year with much success. Trainees attended a two day Summer School in May prior to the start of the course in September. During these two days the trainees were introduced to the college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and PebblePad.*

It is essential that trainees become competent users of these as Priority 2 of the E-Strategy is to 'ensure integrated online personal support for learners' (DfES, 2003). The E-Strategy also recommended that every school and college provides a personalised learning space for every learner that can encompass a personal portfolio by 2007/8.

Clearly, many schools have not achieved this. It is our hope that the trainees will be able to offer support in this area to schools when they begin their teaching career as they will be competent users themselves. During the Summer School

the trainees became familiar with PebblePad and were asked to produce a CV and some reflections on their learning over the Summer. This meant that they came to Induction with some knowledge of using PebblePad.

The trainees followed a two week Induction programme at the beginning of September. This is designed to prepare them for the course ahead as well as encouraging a supportive atmosphere. The importance of trainees having access to a laptop with internet connection, as highlighted in the Summative Evaluation of TDA's E-learning Communities ITT Programme

(Foster et al., 2006), is recognised by the College and these were issued as required. Trainees also received a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) along with appropriate training.

“ We found that this equal access to appropriate technology was vital to the success of eportfolios on our course. ”

The trainees were presented with a webfolio template of the Standards that they needed to achieve. This included a page for each of the standards plus additional pages for targets and feedback, review points and guidance. They then personalised their own template and

shared it on the Gateway. This meant that the portfolios were accessible to others easily.

Trainees then began adding reflective statements to show achievement of the standards, linking to evidence as appropriate.

Tutors were able to make comments on an ad hoc basis and also provide formative feedback at key dates throughout the year. This feedback then fed into a final summative assessment at the end of the programme to decide whether each trainee had met the Standards.

Difficulties were highlighted through practice, questionnaires, and discussions with staff, trainees and external bodies. These difficulties were addressed the following year and further improvements made.

## The issues

*There were some ongoing technical issues due to the size of some of the portfolios. However, as a result of developing a good relationship with the eportfolio provider, this was rectified.*

It is also essential that trainees have access to scanners so that they can scan and upload important documents into their eportfolio. About half of trainees have access to scanners at home. There is also extensive access to high specification scanners in college which makes the process of uploading paper documents much less time consuming.

Initially there was some reluctance from tutors, particularly those who felt that they lacked adequate ICT skills. However, after a few staff training sessions over the summer the majority of tutors could see that the use of eportfolios would lessen their workload and make access to portfolios much easier.

After a few initial difficulties when tutors mistak-

Display Options

Kelly-Marie Palmer's PDJ

Personal Details | **Personal Targets & Feedback** | Review Points | Using the PDJ | PDJ Guidance | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q5

Q6 | Q7 | Q8 | Q9 | Q10 | Q11 | Q12 | Q13 | Q14 | Q15 | Q16 | Q17 | Q18 | Q19 | Q20 | Q21 | Q22 | Q23 | Q24

Q25(a) | Q25(b) | Q25(c) | Q25(d) | Q26 | Q27 | Q28 | Q29 | Q30 | Q31 | Q32 | Q33

**Personal Targets & Feedback**

**Personal Targets**

You are responsible for identifying your own personal targets and for providing evidence of progress and achievement. Following tutorials, teaching sessions in College and experiences in placements, you need to reflect on your developing learning needs. List suitable targets below, with an indication of how you intend reaching each one and a date by which you hope to have done this.

It is likely that you will identify targets to include aspects of subject and pedagogical knowledge, understanding relating to theoretical perspectives and skills within placements. Discuss suitable targets with your Academic Tutor, with subject tutors in College and with your mentor in school/nursery.

Personal targets will need to be reviewed and updated at least twice each term. You should maintain an ongoing record of targets rather than deleting earlier ones. In this way you can identify and celebrate the breadth of your extensive achievements.

**Term 1 Targets (September - December)**

As I have experience with nursery aged children I would like to further my knowledge of reception and KS1

only used 'comments' instead of 'feedback' they are all now using the system with no problems at all. No member of staff would like to revert back to paper based portfolios.

## The result

*At the end of the second year of running an eportfolio system 84% of trainees found the eportfolio easy to use and 94% thought that they would use it as part of their NQT year and beyond as part of CPD – a huge improvement on the paper based system. These percentages improve each year as we make small refinements.*

A grant from the TDA was used to purchase PDAs for all of the trainee teachers during the 2007/8 academic year to be used alongside the eportfolios. This further improved the reflective process of gaining QTS. PDAs assist trainees with organisation, an important skill to master if they are to be successful on a PGCE course. The PDA also acts as a digital camera and electronic file storage device, allowing the trainees to gather data as evidence towards achievement of the 'Q' Standards. Additionally, the PDA

Another new practice recently implemented was the use of eportfolios to enhance the job application process, a practice that has been highly praised by many local headteachers. Trainees create their own mini portfolio, showcasing their key achievements, make it available online and share the link with the headteacher in their job application.

allows the trainee to access their eportfolio from any location. Many of the trainees also use their PDA with children in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning, a strategy fully supported by BECTA in the paper *Handheld Computers (PDAs) in Schools* (Perry 2004).

During a recent visit from Ofsted our use of eportfolios was described as 'innovative' and 'cutting edge', leading to a judgment of a Grade 1 Outstanding Provider of ITT. The research will be developed this year to explore the future advancement of eportfolios, including the use of mobile phones and netbooks.

Although our electronic portfolio is used to show achievement of the 'Q' standards from the England professional standards for teachers (QTS), it would be valuable for any providers who require their students to produce a portfolio of evidence.

## In brief

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- Successfully managing the change from paper based evidence portfolios to eportfolios.
- Presenting this change to trainees, colleagues and outside agencies e.g. OfSTED.
- Continually developing eportfolios in order to utilise current technologies.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

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Case study by Helen Bird

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