Case Study

PebblePad implementation: You DO need to walk before you can run

Margaret Faulkner

Institution-wide Implementation, University of South Australia, Australia

The background context

The University of South Australia (UniSA) has students at 4 campuses based around the city of Adelaide, 2 regional campuses in South Australia, as well as offshore locations. Approximately 5,000 of the approximately 36,000 students are based offshore. Around 80% of our students are completing undergraduate qualifications in a wide range of programs across 4 Divisions (faculties): Business, Education, Arts & Social Sciences, Health Sciences and Information Technology, Engineering and the Environment.

UniSA is transitioning from an in-house learning management system to learnonline, a Moodle environment integrated with other systems that support learning. This change was required to support the online learning technologies and services envisaged in UniSA's teaching and learning (T&L) framework (Lee, 2007). Release of the framework coincided with investment in curriculum renewal, particularly in practice-based learning, service learning and teaching-research nexus experiential learning opportunities.

The framework retained seven Graduate Qualities (GQs) embedded into the curriculum and explicitly linked to student assessment. In ad-

dition to GQs, a large number of our programs require the development and evidencing of professional competencies for accreditation.

Paper-based portfolios are the primary method used but recent technological changes provide

an alternative that also strengthens involvement with external stakeholders. Previously, the tool Transcript2 recorded achievement of GQs, linking learning outcomes with career management. As with other systems developed in-house, this tool required replacement.

The challenge

ePortfolios are an appropriate vehicle to support the implementation of our Teaching & Learning Framework. PebblePad, and other systems that offer eportfolios, support learning in ways that were not previously possible with paper portfolios (AeP, 2008).

An example is the flexibility to create multiple portfolios from the same data sources tailored for specific purposes. ePortfolios were perceived as providing systems aligned with supporting student engagement, with learners empowered to create portfolios to suit their individual needs and broader audiences.

The trial of eportfolio concepts at UniSA through the Law pilot provided an opportunity to explore how PebblePad supported learning for assessment and lifelong learning that year and examine its potential for providing links with employers, accreditation bodies, industry and our community in Law and other areas.

Another driver to provide eportfolios at UniSA was Australia's response to the Bologna process in Europe and its future implications for

UniSA and its graduates. The Australian version of the European Diploma Supplement was announced in September 2008 (Gillard, 2008), called the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement. ePortfolios compliment this requirement by capturing both formal and informal learning to provide a holistic perspective of graduates.

The approach

In 2008, UniSA funded a trial of PebblePad in the School of Law to explore how eportfolios enhance the learning environment. This project incorporated lessons from the literature on implementing eportfolios with plans to embed the system in incremental stages to avoid confusion, frustration and disillusionment (Love, McKean & Gathercoal, 2004). This was aided by mapping relevant opportunities to embed eportfolio concepts across the program prior to implementation.

The institutional wide interest in eportfolios led to the formation of an umbrella team (Lambert and Corrin, 2007) that consisted of staff from both academic integration and technology infrastructure areas. Establishment of a reference group that included a representative from

each Division, a Law student, and support staff, provided interaction with a wide range of stakeholders.

Cross-institutional links were established with external stakeholders. Initially this was with a fellow Australian Technology Network (ATN) university, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), experienced in eportfolio implementation. QUT later became the lead institution for the Australian ePortfolio Project (AeP 2008) that examined Teaching & Learning eportfolios in Australia and internationally. Links were also established with a local institution, Flinders University, and RMIT University, another ATN member that we have ongoing collaboration with in this area.

In 2009 following evaluation of the 2008 pilot, UniSA expanded its trial of PebblePad purchasing 2000 licences to support projects that covered each of our Divisions in the following schools:

- Engineering (across all schools embedded into the common first year undergraduate program and pilots with third year and postgraduate students)
- Natural and Built Environments (Postgraduate students)
- Health Sciences (fourth year Occupational Therapy undergraduates)
- Education (professional placement undergraduate students)
- Nursing and Midwifery (third year Midwifery undergraduates)
- Global Experience students (elective course across many programs)

The issues

Political

Although primarily driven by needs of the pedagogy of teaching staff, eportfolio concepts were supported by UniSA's Divisional Vice Chancellor, Academic and included as an element of learnonline. The promotion of the incumbent to Vice Chancellor of another institution during 2009 withdrew support from an institutional champion.

Technical

In 2009 the uptake was lower than expected. One of the reasons was technical problems faced moving from a hosted environment in 2008 to our own systems in 2009. This change led to errors for assets that recorded dates, e.g. action plans. These were instrumental to the use of PebblePad by 4th year Occupational Therapy students and resulted in a high level of frustration for both staff and students until the issue was identified and resolved.

> " ... over 70% elected to use PebblePad over other choices ... "

The Engineering pilot for the common 1st Year Undergraduate program required over 250 students to create webfolios to display their learning in two courses. Technical problems marred the experience of many of these students, particularly those that left the assessment task until the last day. With an average of 5mb files being uploaded by each student the system was incredibly slow and a task that should take minutes took hours. News of some poor experiences soon spread throughout UniSA. However, when this cohort were later provided with an opportunity to select their preferred mechanism for presenting a collaborative experiential learning assessment piece, over 70% elected to use PebblePad over other choices including word documents and web authoring tools.

<u>Learning Culture</u>

Key learning from our pilots include:

- Pedagogy may not go as planned. Without strict guidelines, some engineering students ended up with over 100 assets linked to a webfolio (i.e. all their work in that course). This not only led to strain on the ability of the server to cope with the uploading of files, but exceeded both student workload guidelines and what an assessor can review for feedback. This highlighted tension between scaffolding the learning process through highly structured templates and fostering the potential for creativity through less guidance.

- Appreciation of an eportfolio approach takes time. Law students experienced a staged approach to gradually develop necessary academic and technical skills for eportfolio thinking. However, this delayed many from experiencing the benefits of an eportfolio approach. The initial association was as a mechanism for assessment, leading to comparisons with Word or other tools. Only later did connections across the program provide a more holistic perspective. Pilots also re-

vealed the need for further support to develop reflective and self-assessment skills.

<u>Teaching Culture</u>

PebblePad offers an opportunity to positively transform the learning environment. As with any change, this requires the commitment, development and support of all stakeholders. Commitment is unlikely from most staff until PebblePad is used beyond one year at a time, and perceived as easy to use with benefits that outweigh effort required for change.

Example: Global experience students were given a career management assessment task previously completed in hard copy. The fourteen individual elements were not synthesised but uploaded within webfolios. Assessment required an enormous amount of clicks with the process of marking online onerous and beyond any perceived benefit for use in one course.

Staff leading pilots are innovators prepared to invest time into a system that supports their teaching philosophy and engages students and external stakeholders with the learning process. An ongoing challenge is to extend this approach across the institution (Quinn & Sherville, 2009).

The result

UniSA has gained valuable experience of eportfolio implementation and developed eportfolio and PebblePad communities of practice, not only within UniSA but with other Australian institutions. The hosting of a Showcase event in September 2009 provided an opportunity for staff and students to share their experiences and suggest a way forward in 2010. This was followed by a joint Review and Planning forum hosted by RMIT in December 2009.

In 2010, UniSA planned further increase of the use of PebblePad with 3000 licences purchased to support experiential learning in:

- Medical Radiation (undergraduate students)
- Division of Health Sciences (common 1st

year course)
- Division of Business (common 1st year course)
- School of Communication, International Studies & Languages
- School of Computer and Information Science

The learning

Our experiences confirm the developmental nature of stakeholders' understanding of eportfolio concepts and its associated challenges (Joyes, Gray & Hartnell-Young, 2009). Implementation challenges have created communities of practice to share experiences and disseminate good practice.

The evaluation of eportfolio approaches and systems is more complex than other support tools due to the lifelong or lifewide philosophy requiring a program rather than assessment task or course evaluation timeframe. This is further complicated when underlying concepts, such as reflection, are not universally understood or interpreted.

Although the desire to provide an eportfolio system for our students to support a shift to experiential learning and the capturing of graduate qualities were initial drivers for choosing PebblePad, other aspects were implemented (action plans, forms, blogs, profiles) in addition to webfolios. These functions enable a balanced approach to eportfolio implementation supporting the learning process and outcomes (Barrett, 2009).

The breadth of PebblePad beyond the traditional eportfolio system means that functions used to support or assess learning can be undertaken in multiple ways at UniSA. This makes training and support a challenge. A fully integrated system is expected to simplify implementation and enable a greater focus on pedagogy.

Compelling reasons for using PebblePad are required when introducing the tool due to the long-term perspective of eportfolio approaches. The collection of UniSA relevant examples are one method being explored to explain the approach and portray the value of reflecting on learning.
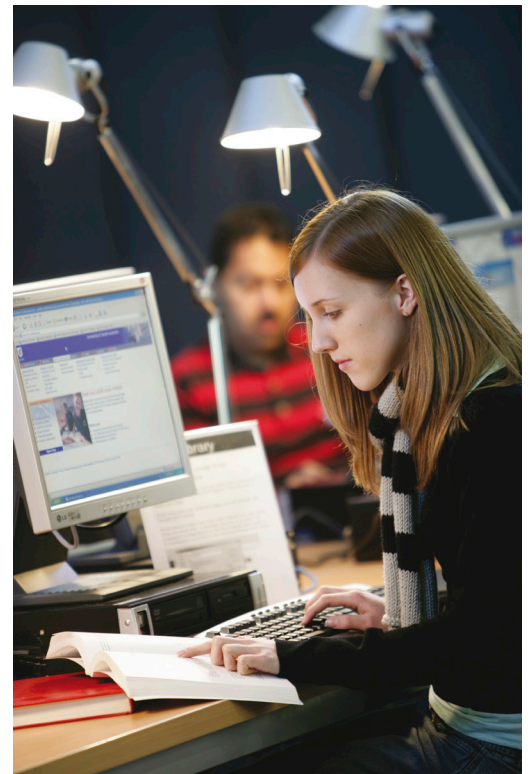
In brief

- Implementation requires buy-in from all stakeholders, a clear purpose, lifelong and lifewide perspectives with pedagogic support and technical support.
- Staff and students seek greater integration between systems (internal and external).
- Communities of practice assist implementers to overcome challenges and maintain focus on the potential benefits to learners, the university and society.

References

Australian ePortfolio Project, 2008. *Australian ePortfolio Project*. [Online] (Updated 10 March 2010) Available at: http://www.eportfoliopractice.qut.edu.au/, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Barrett, H., 2009 *Lifelong ePortfolios: Creating your Digital Self,* Keynote address, ePortfolio 2009. [Online] Available at: http://www.slideshare.net/eportfolios/eifel2009keynote, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Gillard, J. 2008. *Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement*. [Online] (Updated 04 Sep 2008) Available at: http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/AustralianHigherEducationGraduationStatement.htm, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Joyes, G., Gray, L., & Hartnell-Young, E. 2009. *Effective practice with e-portfolios: How can the UK experience inform practice?* [pdf] (Updated 2009) Available at: http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/procs/joyes.pdf, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Lambert, S., & Corrin, L. (2007). Moving towards a university-wide implementation of an ePortfolio tool, *Australasian Journal of Education Technology*, [Online]. 23 (1), pp1-16, Available at: http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet23/lambert.html, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Lee, P., 2007. *University of South Australia: The Teaching and Learning Framework 2007*, approved by Academic Board June 22, 2007.

Love, D., McKean, G. & Gathercoal, P., 2004. Portfolios to webfolios and beyond: Levels of maturation. *Educause Quarterly,* 27(2), pp24-37. Available at: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0423.pdf, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Quinn, D., & Sherville, S. 2009. From little things big things grow: scaling-up assessment of experiential learning, Assessment of Experiential Learning, [Online]. 26 (5), pp329-344 Available at: http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/viewPDF.jsp;jsessionid=0510F089EC04EDAB75C6604A63953A74?contentType=Article&Filename=html/Output/Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/Pdf/1650260501.pdf, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

University of South Australia, 2009. *Divisions, Schools and Administrative Units* [Online] (Updated 29 October 2009). Available at: http://www.unisa.edu.au/about/divs/default.asp, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

University of South Australia, 2009. *Learnonline Project* [Online] (Updated 24 November 2009) Available at: http://www.unisa.edu.au/learnonline/Site%20Content/FAQs.asp#Why%20is%20the%20learn%3Cb%3Eonline%3C/b%3E%20platform%20necessary, [Accessed 26 March 2010].

Acknowledgements