

Enhancing employability skills through electronic portfolios

Using PebblePad to develop personalised records of practice and reflection

The aim

As part of the process of securing graduate employment, nursing and midwifery students are required to produce personal statements outlining the skills and experience that make them suitable for a particular position. The tutor found that the quality of these statements varies considerably, and the use of paper-based portfolios, with their limited opportunities for tutor feedback, may have been a contributing factor. The tutor wanted to introduce a more structured approach to portfolio development to help guide students in their reflection and gathering of evidence of the skills and experience they have gained.

Benefits

- Improves quality of portfolio through increased reflection
- Assists students in articulating their skills and experience
- Encourages development of employability skills and evidence during the first year

The approach

An electronic portfolio was desirable as it would make the process of capturing evidence easier for the students while on placement and the review of that evidence more flexible for tutors and practice mentors. In addition, using an e-portfolio would better reflect employers' emerging Personal Development Planning practice.

The tutor was already familiar with electronic portfolios and, as PebblePad was being used elsewhere in the faculty, she decided to introduce it to her first year students. A set of templates were created to help students in writing reflections on their skills development for later use in their personal statements. The templates placed particular emphasis on the relevant employability skills and graduate attributes being developed by making explicit links between them and the work in their portfolio. The students used the templates throughout the academic year to record, reflect on, and provide evidence of, their learning both on campus and during placements.

PebblePad provides a method of sharing portfolios that allows changes to be seen as they happen, meaning a reader will always see the latest information and resources. Students were encouraged to use this, as it would allow tutors and mentors to provide feedback regularly, rather than only at specific points during the year. More people were able to read and comment on the e-portfolios' contents and offer new perspectives than with previous paper portfolios.

A mentoring scheme was created where first year students were allocated a third year student as a mentor. The mentors were able to view their allocated first year students' portfolios and provide advice and comments based on their own experience of the course and their placements.

The outcome

By sharing their portfolios with tutors, practice mentors, and others, students were able to receive feedback more frequently and in a more digestible format than was previously the case with infrequently reviewed paper portfolios. This meant that the students were better able to make use of the feedback by changing their work, and ultimately spread the tutor and mentor workloads more evenly across the year.

The outcome

The tutor has seen a general improvement in the personal statements and portfolios produced by the students. In particular, the students' ability to articulate their skills effectively appears to have increased across the cohort as a result of the increased emphasis placed on this through the templates and from the additional directed feedback received from tutors and mentors.

There was some reluctance to use the electronic portfolios from both students and staff. Some of this was due to a lack of skills or confidence in IT. Using the templates helped reduce this reluctance, and it quickly faded as people became comfortable with the system.

The mentoring scheme supported through PebblePad was successful, with students feeling comfortable sharing experiences with their peers and students from both the first and third year remarking that the discussions and additional perspectives helped them develop a richer view of their learning and, in particular, how it relates to their employability.

Profile

Tutor name:
Pamela Holland

Faculty:
Health and Wellbeing

Size of cohort:
Very Large (150+ students)

Technologies used:
PebblePad, Blackboard

If you would like your practice captured and shared in a similar case study, please contact Brian Irwin within Quality Enhancement and Student Success.

Future Development

The tutor plans to:

- Encourage students to develop annual action plans for their portfolios based on issues identified during placements
- Encourage practice mentors to use PebblePad to record their student reviews
- Obtain feedback on the design and implementation of the portfolio materials from key employers in the sector and use it to further refine the templates

Recommendations

The tutor advises anyone interested in this approach to:

- Source worked examples of reflective portfolios relevant to their subject area
- Add support materials on the use of ePortfolios and PebblePad to Blackboard
- Provide regular feedback through PebblePad to students on their progress