

Blossom Project Interviews

Problems

David Eddy – Sheffield Hallam

I guess one of the difficulties for us at Sheffield Hallam is that PebblePad is utilised by a number of members of staff on a range of courses across the institution but it is not actually supported by the institution. So there are a number of enthusiasts who've seen the system, used it and somehow secured funding to enable them to embed it and utilise it in their course programmes. So that makes it slightly difficult in that our use of PebblePad isn't centrally supported. Having said that the support that we receive from PebblePad where we have problems or any difficulties which I have to say are few and far between is very quick and very responsive and most things are normally sorted within a day which is really good. The attitudes of staff who are using it, they're all obviously very positive and they're all enthusiasts, other colleagues within the faculty are less enthusiastic which is perhaps not unnatural in that similarly the use of the VLE is very diverse within the faculty, there are some people who use it very effectively and are very into that mode of learning and there are others who just engage with it as much as they need to, to satisfy university requirements for the students. So, those are the key things, we've not really had any technical problems to speak of in terms of PebblePad because it's hosted externally and they resolve that for us but the technical problems that we've had we could count on one hand over three years and the only problems we get are when students initially start to use it, in that you get questions about 'I can't log on', and that's usually because they're using their VLE password and log in. Because the University doesn't support it we can't have a single log in and password so they have a separate login and password. So it's usually that they've used the wrong log in and password. Or if they can log in the next most common query is 'I can't view anything' and that's because they forgot to go to the home page to download the latest version of Flash so that they can view it. And those have been the two main problems really, apart from that we don't have any, any issues in terms of utilising it.

The financial difficulties I guess it varies across the different teams because they're all getting their funding from different pots and sometimes you're having to fight for funding on an annual basis. We were quite fortunate on my programme in that I was able to get the fees of PebblePad embedded into the course fees for students as well so that on an ongoing basis we can continue to utilise it. And I don't need to worry about chasing funding every year to support that, until the University makes a decision about what they're going to do.

Neil Carrant - Bradford

I think the most noticeable difficulties that we've had recently have been around technical issues, I mean I know it's not a technical issue, but people getting to grips with the software is actually quite a big barrier, in the initial understanding of what it can do and what it does do. But the technical things are sort of small individual user-based errors that sort of, it doesn't work at home when people can't access it at home because of some sort of setting, we've had problems with people's wireless routers, we've had problems with people's internet browsers and so forth. It's difficult to solve these things because we don't have control over people's settings, and I've had someone come in with their laptop and it worked fine, on their laptop on the University wireless network, took it home and it won't work. So it's all those little things, how do you support that? And there's nothing really we can do as a university, but it's actually quite important for the individual user, if they can't access it at home. In terms of some, actually in terms of privacy some of the benefits it's actually one of the few learner-centred, really learner-centred pieces of technology we have and I think people are quite surprised when we explain to them really how

private it is, and how no one really has any kind of access to it, unless they make that decision themselves as a user, so I think that that has been quite an interesting one.

Sarah Chesney - Cumbria

Staff have generally been very positive towards the introduction of an e-portfolio although it has always been voluntary here, at the university of Cumbria unless you're part of the post graduate certificate in learning and teaching in higher education however some of the staff that have been resistant have been able to see the benefits of an e-portfolio in the longer term so for instance it's very frequently compared with say a word document or an email attachment, "*why can't I just put it on an email*" or "*why can't I just write my appraisal in a word document*" so the attitudes have tended to be say a reliance on the existing ways of working rather than actual resistance to an e-portfolio. Some of the reasons why people have actually enjoyed using it is because of the privacy and confidential nature of the system that we've chosen. And even to the point where our system is actually hosted externally and some people have expressed the view that they're quite, they're more comfortable with that than the university hosting a system that records their own reflections and their CPD. So generally I would say that staff are very receptive to actually trying out an e-portfolio, now that doesn't mean that they've actually been using it extensively they've then accounted for things like the time to learn the new system and as mentioned previously about using it with their line managers and the support of other people who are looking at the work that they produce and they decide to share.

With regard to technical problems they've been probably kept to a minimum I'd say the system seems very robust. The things that we have encountered, that have caused barriers have of course been the necessity for Flash player to be installed on the pc they are using it on and staff have assumed that when the log on and if they haven't got Flash player installed it's their own lack of skills that are causing the problem rather than the fact there isn't the appropriate plug in installed. But we have got around that in a number of ways, by putting a note on the front log on page and had continued discussions with ICTS about making Flash player available to all staff.

Phil Vincent – York St. John

At present we haven't come across any technical difficulties, or obstacles when using the e-portfolio software. We have a hosted service, it's relatively small scale we've around about seven hundred and fifty licences at the moment so the technical difficulties have been non-existent to be quite honest.

In terms of financial difficulties there'll be implication on resources perhaps for training and whether or not our pilot is successful will inform whether we go ahead with a campus licence or a larger scale licence agreement. Obviously that will have financial implication and in terms of privacy and confidentiality I guess it is just a case of allaying staff fears and letting them see that it's not as insecure, hopefully putting policies and procedures in place so that we have the whole service there aren't direct links with our Virtual Learning environment just to ensure that staff are reassured that administrators or IT professionals don't have access to their personal PebblePad accounts.

Susi Peacock- Queen Margaret

Our main issues have been with staff visualising what the e-portfolio system is and getting confused between thinking about an e-portfolio system of that means me taking a paper based portfolio and bringing it online. And because we're using PebblePad particularly this is a huge

system and it's them understanding that this is a system that has potential for them in many many different ways they can obviously use it with their students and that is going to be their number one priority. They can obviously use it for themselves for their own studies, and they can also use it for their own CPD and understanding that it is a flexible tool that can be used in that way takes an awful lot of time - so that is our first issue.

A second issue is obviously technical skills some of our staff are very technical, like our radiography staff and they walk through it. Whereas other staff are less comfortable with IT per say let alone IT for anything else. So that takes us a lot of time to get them comfortable, even with PebblePad which is very easy to use.

Issues regarding, just trying to think of any other issues we may have had, obviously there are other issues including initiative fatigue, time - getting time in the curriculum when staff are working with students as the curriculum is already overloaded- that's quite hard. And the final issue I suppose is the technical issue when students and staff are with Queen Margaret it is possible to access PebblePad and most staff and students have no problems but if you're working in a hospital and a lot of our staff are part-time and will work in a hospital, you have issues with firewalls.