Chapter XXVII

A Flexible Component–Based ePortfolio: Embedding in the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides case studies of embedding the ePortfolio in the curricula of two medical schools in the UK, one of which is outcomes based, while the other uses a series of patient scenarios to inform the teaching of clinical skills within a curriculum that emphasises the scientific basis of medicine. These case studies describe the implementation, evaluation, and process of embedding the portfolio within the respective curricula. They also illustrate the flexibility of a component-based ePortfolio to serve different pedagogic requirements. Research and evaluation issues are discussed, including an action-research approach with “fine-tuning” of technical features and pedagogy during the evaluation phase.
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OVERVIEW

A component-based ePortfolio has been developed using Open Source software as part of a collaborative project (http://www.e-portfolios.ac.uk). The ePortfolio has been applied to a range of settings including Dentistry, Biosciences, postgraduate research students, and contract research staff. This chapter provides case studies of embedding the ePortfolio in the curricula of two medical schools in the UK, one of which is outcomes based, while the other uses a series of patient scenarios to inform the teaching of clinical skills within a curriculum that emphasises the scientific basis of medicine.

The first case is from the University of Newcastle where the ePortfolio was first implemented in the medical program in September 2003. The portfolio, initially developed as a stand-alone application, was integrated into the bespoke VLE used by the medical program. A new tool was developed for the ePortfolio to support Year 4 student-selected components (SSCs); its completion was mandatory. Students in Years 1 and 2 initially had the choice of completing a portfolio on paper or online. Following two years of experience implementing the ePortfolio, an assessed element was included, focusing on evidencing professional attitudes and behaviours.

The second case is from the University of St. Andrews where the ePortfolio was implemented in September 2004. This implementation included a number of existing ePortfolio components and a novel patient scenario component designed by curriculum staff of the medical program. Following group work sessions, students used the portfolio to set objectives and tasks related to each patient scenario in the domains of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Learning diaries have also been completed and shared with mentors.

These case studies describe the implementation, evaluation, and process of embedding the portfolio within the respective curricula. They also illustrate the flexibility of a component-based ePortfolio to serve different pedagogic requirements. Research and evaluation issues are discussed, including an action-research approach with “fine-tuning” of technical features and pedagogy during the evaluation phase.

POLICY REQUIREMENTS

A key policy driver across the UK Higher Education (HE) sector has been the requirement to support PDP (NCIHE, 1997). This is defined as “a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development” (QAA, 2001). Many institutions are implementing portfolios (electronic or paper) as a way of facilitating these PDP requirements. One issue is that many programs already have elements of PDP (such as reflective learning and action planning), though not necessarily referring to under that label. There may therefore be an issue of whether to (1) implement PDP as a distinct “add-on” to the curriculum, or (2) embed the PDP processes within the curriculum. Also, the employability and widening participation agendas also impact on PDP, as do subject-specific requirements and local factors, such as staff resources, access to careers services, and established practices in academic tutoring.

In medicine, in common with most modern professions, there are requirements for independent learners who are able to play an active role in their continuing development and career progression (GMC, 2002). The processes involved in maintaining an ePortfolio may help in