Chapter 1
Mapping UK ePortfolio Developments within a European Context

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the European context of lifelong learning and educational cooperation across member states and the relationship of eportfolios to current development. It focuses specifically on the priority given to portfolio developments in Higher Education in the UK through reports and policy documents and particularly through the extensive funding distributed via the Joint Information Systems Committee of the Higher Education and Further Education Funding Councils (JISC). The chapter provides an overview of current eportfolio use and points to future trends for technical and pedagogical development, drawing on the extensive JISC project archive, which covers examples from many disciplines and for a range of purposes. The authors are JISC expert consultants in eportfolios and have an in depth knowledge of completed and ongoing work in this area. In this chapter we present a model that we developed by analyzing current practice and a matrix for identifying eportfolio developments in relation to purposes and learning processes, useful also for mapping key areas for future work.

INTRODUCTION

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THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The 1999 Bologna declaration of Ministers of Education in Europe emphasized the importance of education and educational cooperation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies (http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/990719BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.PDF). Since then, the aim has been to create a European Higher Education Area and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. The Bologna Process, as it is known, demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning in Europe, seen as essential to meet the challenges of increased global competition and the spread of new technologies. Lifelong learning is defined as:

all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 9).

Institutions in Europe are now encouraged to develop courses and curricula with significant European content and to engage in joint partnership activities and curriculum development, including joint degrees. The purpose of these activities is to improve quality and ensure standards of higher education, to remove obstacles to student and academic mobility within Europe and beyond and to simplify comparisons between qualifications by adopting a European approach to degrees at bachelor, master and doctoral levels. This will be aided by the establishment of a European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement, a document for students that provides a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of studies successfully completed.

Although the UK has played an active part in the development of the Bologna Process, and its qualification framework broadly matches the three cycle system (up to the degrees of master’s and doctorate), the general level of awareness of Bologna and its implications is lower than in many other European countries. Implementation of the European Diploma Supplement is not widespread, and the Europass scheme, which promotes mobility and aims to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe, underpins Bologna’s objectives, yet relatively few UK institutions are actively promoting it (UK HE Europe Unit).

However, other developments are occurring in the UK to encourage students to record, reflect and build on their achievements systematically in a process known as Personal Development Planning (PDP). This is defined as:

a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement to plan for their personal, educational and career development (Dearing, 1997).

In order to increase the range of students participating in post-16 education, including at university level, the Widening Participation agenda (Department for Education and Skills, 2003), promotes recognition of learning in both
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