

PebblePad at the University of Wolverhampton

Learning Impact

Context and History

The University of Wolverhampton is a regional university with a reputation for serving under represented students. One way it has achieved this is through the intelligent use of technology. Back in the days of web 1.0, a small team at the university began to develop exciting new technology where the content and access was owned and controlled by the learner. PebblePad was born.

- * a diverse student body
- * 22,000 students, 9 Schools, 200 Subjects
- * Intelligent use of technology
- * Owned and controlled by the learner

Impact 1 - Embedded Use

- * Learning is personal, life-long and life-wide
- * Used by half of the university every day
- * Promotes planning, reflecting, connecting
- * Used for: group work, projects, research, placements
- * Used by: teachers, students, overseas learners, employers

Impact 1 – Embedded Use

Learning is personal, life-long and life-wide. Every day about half of the university population log in to use PebblePad to support their studies or to reflect on their diverse learning experiences. Tools in PebblePad promote essential learning skills like planning, reflecting and connecting.

“You can store all of your experiences and you can take your time to reflect on those.”

Impact 2 – Assessment for learning/Assessment of learning

Assessment both promotes and evaluates learning. Assessing approximately ½ a million eportfolio assets requires powerful functionality. PebblePad provides gateways through which teachers, mentors and peers can share instant, iterative, scaffolded and developmental feedback or grades.

- Impact 2 - Assessment**
- * Promotes & evaluates learning
 - * Over ½ million assets on 3000 gateways
 - * By teachers, mentors, moderators and peers
 - * Instant feedback

“...my tutors' feedback helped me to develop my work and get the most out of my placement.”

- Impact 3 - Sharing**
- * Embraces web 2.0 concepts
 - * Private unless shared
 - * 26,000 items currently shared
 - * 195,000 comments received

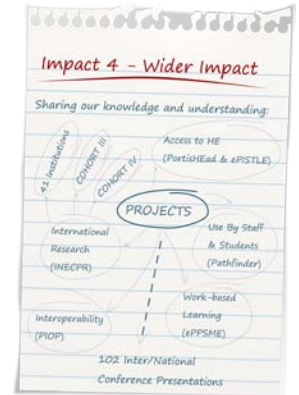
Impact 3 – Sharing

PebblePad embraced web 2.0 ideals since before web 2.0 existed. Everything a user creates is private unless it is shared with others. Powerful permissions allow users to choose exactly who they share with and our statistics indicate that this is very important with over 26,000 shared items receiving 195,000 comments.

“We use PebblePad blogs which act as virtual critiques and gives students industry real-life experience.”

Impact 4 - Wider Impact

We are at the forefront of learning with and about eportfolios and have willingly shared our knowledge and understanding with the UK learning community and beyond. Our leading and learning is through projects that improve access to higher education; promote use by staff for their own development; promote work-based learning; embed personal development planning; develop new interoperability standards and contribute to two international research coalitions.



“Their work in the eportfolio domain is leading-edge ... and has an impact far wider than just within their institution.”

- Impact 5 - Professional Impact**
- * 90,000 members of the IFL
 - * Learner-centred focus, highly reflective
 - * Ongoing professional development
 - * Now used by other professions

Impact 5 - Professional Impact

The exciting work and outstanding results at our School of Education inspired one of the UK's largest professional bodies, the Institute for Learning, to adopt PebblePad to support its members' professional development.

“It's transformative and life-enhancing. Teachers have changed their whole approach to learning and teaching.”

Conclusion

From its roots as a tool to support learners new to university, PebblePad now supports learning well beyond the traditional university reach. Its impact on learning starts from when learners prepare for university through their early experiences and their later research projects. Ultimately it supports their transition from university into employment and their ongoing professional development.

Conclusion

- * Supports learners and learning throughout the university
- * Used beyond a university's traditional reach
- * Impacts on many facets of learning
- * Supports life-long, life-wide, development as learners

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PebblePad at the University of Wolverhampton

Although PebblePad is now used from schools through to professional bodies it was originally developed to support personal development planning at the University of Wolverhampton. Starting from a small pilot of 100 users in 2004, by 2010 over 40,000 learners have now used the system at the university and over 3/4 million in the 100+ other universities where PebblePad is now being used.

Because of its flexibility it has been used to support a range of additional processes including as a teaching tool; for assessment; for appraisal; for placement learning and for research projects.



In March 2010 the university was shortlisted for a prestigious Learning Impact award and this brief case study has been used to help summarise some of our achievements to-date.

Our animated presentation and a webfolio of this case study can be viewed at www.pebblepad.co.uk/lia

About PebblePad

PebblePad is an innovative web-based personal learning system which allows users to make and store records about their learning, achievements and goals. Simple scaffolding helps users create new records for a variety of purposes or they can choose to upload existing files including rich multimedia. Records or evidence is collected over time and can then be used within digital portfolios (webfolios) that can be created for a variety of purposes including assessment; appraisal, accreditation; advancement or simple story telling. Users choose to share their work with others who can be invited to feedback, comment or collaborate on it.

An open architecture and extensive use of web-services means that PebblePad is able to maximise the use of data in institutional systems; link to social software and publish creations to application or filtering services. Although PebblePad is technically very sophisticated its ease of use was a key priority for the developers, teachers and students who sat down to design it. The result is a highly visual and engaging interface developed in Flash – and one which can be significantly customised by the user to suit their individual needs or moods.

When developing the system we envisaged some possible barriers and designed in simple solutions:

- **Many users are still terrified of technology**
Make the system easy on the eye, so it doesn't look complex; and easy on the mind with simple easy to follow work flows
- **Some users will need support in writing meaningful records for their eportfolio**
Design simple 'wizard'-like forms to provide some scaffolding for common tasks like action planning and recording meetings
- **More learning takes place outside the institution than inside**
Make the system course, qualification and context independent, allow users to record anything they decide is meaningful and allow the system to be used for multiple purposes in parallel
- **Different audiences will expect different kinds of portfolios**
Portfolios are only evidenced based stories so design a system that supports any kind of story writing whether formal or informal, structured or free form
- **Users will only use an eportfolio when they have to**
Not if it's interesting, social, easy to use and personal...

PebblePad is very much a personal learning system but one which delivers myriad institutional benefits.

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