

## **HE5P Project.**

### **University of Plymouth Sub-project.**

**Final Report January 2010.**

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#### Context

##### 1. Location and settings.

This sub-project was based in SW England, a predominantly rural environment with few large employers. There are few major urban areas; the largest is Plymouth with a population of 300,000.

Outside the naval dockyard (5000 employees), the largest employers in the area tend to be public sector organisations such as the University of Plymouth (3,000 employees), the armed forces (navy and marines), and the health service.

The majority of SMEs find it difficult to release staff for further training/up-skilling unless there is a pressing need to do so because they do not have the capacity. The majority of HE-level workforce development demand in the region therefore comes from organisations such as the NHS and other public services (local authorities, police, fire and probation services, social services etc).

The University of Plymouth has traditionally focussed provision on its post-18 learners, through the delivery of 3-year full time undergraduate programmes, although more recently (2009 onwards) it has begun to adopt a more enterprising approach to course design and development which involves local employers and training providers more intimately.

The University is the focus of substantial network of 19 FE colleges spread across the peninsula and extending from Bristol in the NE, to Weymouth in the south and Truro in the far west. These colleges provide the overwhelming majority of workforce development opportunities and are historically more fully engaged with employers than the main University itself. The HE provision offered through these partner colleges is co-ordinated and managed by the University Faculty of Colleges (UPC), but delivered locally at the colleges by staff employed at the colleges.

The colleges therefore have much better developed relationships with their local employers and consequently have often developed understanding and insights into what their local workforce development needs are.

City College Plymouth is a large FE college in the city, providing a wide range of programmes and courses, including foundation degrees (FDs). CCP has a separate Faculty responsible for these programmes which are all developed in collaboration with the University. There are 850 registered HE learners at the College.

Employer Partners.

Employer partners included in this sub-project include Devon and Cornwall Police; Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service; Devon Probation Service; the Prison Service; voluntary sector organisations (Salvation Army, Community Worker, disability support worker).

It was originally planned to include the local NHS trusts (Plymouth, Devon and Exeter) but the project team were unable to make effective contact with academic staff, employees and Trust managers to facilitate interviews and focus groups with learners who shared common times, mentors, working contexts and managers. Therefore engaging with NHS-based employees and employers working across such a wide geographical region would have required resource beyond this project and this element of the sub-project was eventually dropped.

2. What types of provision and curriculum areas have been involved in this project and why?

- Be specific (include full titles of modules/course if relevant, level of provision, size of 'chunks of learning', number of learners for each example of provision etc)

The focus of this sub-project is the Foundation Degree (FD) in Public Services delivered at City College Plymouth. This FD has been running for 4 years and draws students employed by Devon and Cornwall Police; Devon Fire Service; Plymouth City Council; voluntary sector organisations.

In 2008/9 (the academic year in which this research was undertaken) the FD had 22 part-time students and 12 full time students. Full time students were not seconded by their employer, but had to engage in work-based learning as a major part of their programme (120 hours minimum plus additional work based learning on a voluntary basis). Part-time students were seconded by their employers to undertake the course.

Details of the course are appended (Appendix A, Page 20). These are extracts from the programme handbook 2009-2010, produced for the students and shared by them with their employers. (The full document can be made available, but is 77 pages in length).

The course is best described as "Accreditation within a generic learning framework (accreditation of outcomes from a negotiated/personalised curriculum)".

3. Does your institution have a strategy or mission statement with respect to employer engagement? If so, please attach it.
- Has this situation changed since the start of this project? (If so, what, how, why?)
  - How big or small a part did this project have in relation to these changes?

There are two institutions involved in the development and delivery of the course/programme which is the focus of this research: the University of Plymouth and City College Plymouth. The positioning of each institution with respect to mission and strategy must be taken into account.

The University was in the process of revising its Teaching and Learning Strategy through the 2008/9 academic year, which resulted in a new strategy covering the period 2009-2012. Employer engagement occurs in three of the ten themes:

Key Theme 3 To consolidate existing work-related, work-based and placement learning and extend its provision to better support students, employers and those in employment.  
*We recognise the value of work-based, work-related and placement learning for students and those in employment. As we develop as an enterprise-led university, work-based learning will become more prominent, fulfilling professional imperatives and addressing business needs, as well as offering opportunities to enhance students' future employability.*

Key theme 7: To continue to develop opportunities for employers to use the university for Continuing Professional Development (CPD).  
*CPD improves and broadens an employee's knowledge and skills, developing the qualities required in their professional lives. At Plymouth we believe learning takes place throughout a lifetime. We aim to respond to the increasing variety in expectations for professional updating, by providing opportunities for full and part-time study, in parallel with employment or during a career break.*

Key theme 10: To strengthen connections between the university, the city and the region, to our mutual benefit.  
*Alongside our international agenda, the university has a key role to play in the city and the region, by raising aspirations, building intellectual capital and providing opportunities for workforce development and lifelong learning.*

Employer engagement therefore figures significantly in the new strategic vision of the University. Given that this strategy was under development before the inception of the project, and that strategic development discussions took place at a high level within the institutional structure, it is most unlikely that this project had any impact on the outcomes.

4. Does your institution have validation framework(s) specifically designed for/adapted to this type of provision?

The nature of the Foundation Degree embeds both work based learning and PDP. Through the planning and approval stages of the award employers are at the 'core' of developments to ensure that the programme meets the needs of the employment sector and local region.

Prior to 2009, proposals for employer-driven provision were handled by the University and partner colleges on an ad-hoc basis. Collaborative proposals arising through partner colleges would have been considered by the University's Partnership Faculty (UPC).

In 2009 the University validated a new shell framework to cover all proposals for CPD programmes whether proposed by an employer, resulting from internal scoping and the recognition of a gap in the provision which needs to be filled, or arising through a partner college.

5. How well does the technological infrastructure of your institution support this type of provision?

- Does your institution have e-portfolio tools? If so, which?
- Are these available to work-based learners?
- Are there e-portfolio tools used specifically with/for work-based learners?
- Has this situation changed since the start of this project? (If so, what/how/why?)
- How big or small a part did this project have in relation to these changes?

The University runs Microsoft-based software for learning and teaching and had developed its own Microsoft-based learning and teaching functionality around its Outlook/Sharepoint intranet, but had no proprietary, externally visible VLE. The College runs 'Moodle' as its virtual learning environment yet students have access to University systems for subject specific e-resources and other University support services such as its very proactive students union.

In September 2008 the University decided to investigate e-portfolio products to satisfy growing demand from staff and students and decided to purchase licenses for PebblePad.

The process of deciding which e-portfolio product to buy included consideration of partner college students since we recognised that they comprise 11,000 of our total student population (30,000). Many students engage in short-term work-based learning as placements or interns, and a high proportion of language students study abroad. Our work-based learners will become an increasingly significant proportion of the total student population (currently 30,000). We therefore needed a web-based tool that would enable learners to work via the web and to share their assets with tutors in the University, the college and the workplace. Although a number of proprietary products could manage this range of functions, we decided that PebblePad best suited our e-portfolio needs.

PebblePad was piloted with some student and staff groups from January 2009 and rolled out across the institution and partner colleges in September 2009. This roll out includes all HE-level students in partner colleges who already have access to the University intranet via the web. The group of students who are the focus of this research were selected as a pilot/trial group and had access to PebblePad from January 2009.

The University has recently (2009) appointed a Senior Manager to orchestrate work based learning and employer engagement. Establishing a new institution-wide data base to support the management of work based learning will be part of the role of this new post. The management of work-based learning is currently undertaken at individual faculty and School level. The Faculty of Health and Social Work has recently implemented a work-based learning management system (ARC: ARC Technology Limited) for its Health students (nurses, midwives etc) who have particularly challenging work placement schedules. The University will be exploring the interface and inter-operability issues around using ARC to manage placements and PebblePad to facilitate and capture learning.

Each partner college in the University network runs its own separate IT infrastructure to support learning and teaching. City College Plymouth runs Moodle, so the students in the group in this study had access to this and the University of Plymouth portal as well as PebblePad. As a result of the success of the PebblePad pilot project and the advocacy of staff concerned, City College Plymouth has now decided to purchase its own PebblePad licences in order to roll out to their FE students as well.

Other IT Infrastructure:

- What systems do the work based learners have access to?
- Are these systems the same as the mainstream? If the systems are different what systems are used and why?
- Are there issues around some or all of: licensing, firewalls, work-based mentors accessing systems e.g. virtual learning environments (VLEs). If so, please describe as specifically as possible (include the name of any tool you mention).

Some of the employer organisations from which the study group are drawn run their own e-portfolio software to underpin their CPD programmes. However this is by no means universal, and even within organisations which appear to have such software, it is often not widely used. Devon and Cornwall Police for example use Sharepoint (which can be configured into a type of e-portfolio) and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has developed a simple e-portfolio product for its own staff.

This project has helped raise the profile of “proper” e-portfolios amongst senior staff in these service areas and as a result some are asking for further information on costs and implementation procedures with a view to adopting force-wide as and when they have the resources.

There are no issues around the use of PebblePad by learners/students moving between learning settings. The University has been proactive in linking usernames and passwords therefore not dis-engaging the students with numerous log in requirements. The product is web-based, so accessible from anywhere at any time. Pebblepad assets (files) can be shared with peers, with academic tutors and work-based mentors provided they have internet access. As far as we can ascertain, no students have yet tried to migrate their PebblePad assets into an employer-run e-portfolio, but learners can maintain their PebblePad account on graduation/leaving the University for 12 months, so most will not reach the point where they need to do this for at least 18 months (summer 2011).

## Data you have gathered

1. Have you conducted interviews/surveys/had conversations? (Whether with employers, learners or institutional staff) If so, please attach the questions.

Student Sample: The sample was drawn from students undertaking a Foundation Degree (FD) in Public Services. The degree is validated by the University of Plymouth and run by City College Plymouth under a franchise arrangement. The sample comprised 22 part-time and 12 full-time students. Of these 6 were Police Community Service Officers (PCSOs); 14 were mid-manager fire officers; the remainder came from a range of employment settings including the Salvation Army, Plymouth City Council, the Probation Service, the Prison Service, and some were regular serving police officers. We are unable to reveal exact numbers or ranks as this may breach our terms of confidentiality and enable individuals to be identified.

Employer sample: Senior and Middle Managers in each organisation were interviewed as appropriate. We are not able to identify individuals or ranks within the organisations as we need to safeguard individual identities.

Institutional staff: the member of staff who delivers the FD core modules which include PDP and work-based learning also runs the PebblePad system in the College and was the individual who conducted the research on the ground. Staff have been supported through training opportunities from the university.

Methodology: Students were organised into small focus groups (3/4) representing the organisations from which they were drawn and each focus group was led through a semi-structured questioning and discussion process. Notes on the discussions were made by the staff member leading the discussions. Focus group sessions were allowed to digress from the structured questions if the lead felt that there was benefit to the project outcomes. Focus groups lasted from 1.5 hours to over 3 hours depending on the level of interest and commitment of participants.

One-to-one interviews with employers were conducted over the telephone at pre-arranged times by the same member of staff who had established good working relationships with these individuals over a long period (5-6 years in many cases). This was a key factor in successfully obtaining relevant and honest responses from senior staff who might otherwise have been more reticent to voice what sometimes might have been perceived to be "politically-incorrect" views. Telephone interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours in one case.

The questions put to both student focus groups and employer representatives are appended (Appendix B, page 27).

2. What have been the findings? (Be specific and detailed - methodology, results, analysis)

Findings.

**Students.** These findings are composite reflections/summaries of the focus group work with the students and are organised in the same order as the questions listed in the Appendix. Responses to questions 1-9 cover both full time and part-time students. Responses 10 onwards are from part-time students only. (Part-time students are actually employed by the organisation as opposed to undertaking compulsory long-term work-based learning in that organisation as an integral part of their FD. Most full time students are working on a voluntary basis for the organisations and can expect to be employed by them on completion of their FD. All PCSOs from previous cohorts for example secured permanent regular police constable roles immediately on completing their FD). Part-time students come from a wider range of backgrounds and tend to be slightly more mature. They have a greater range of technical ability and academic background. All students are taught together which is why these focus groups were mixed for questions 1-9.

*1/2. Are employees in your organisation encouraged to engage with an e-portfolio, and if so is the completion of an e-portfolio compulsory?*

There was broad agreement amongst all students that all have to engage in CPD and appraisal, but this does not involve an e-portfolio. Their experience of using an e-portfolio began with the commencement of their FD. As the students began to show employers the e-portfolio based work in which they were engaged, employers became very interested and supportive, to the extent that these particular students were encouraged to share their experience with peers and to use the outputs as part of their appraisal.

*3. Does your organisation make allowances for your lack of IT background or are you simply expected to get on with any IT-based work, including your e-portfolio?*

No allowance was made by any employer for students who did not feel confident in the use of the technology. However, considerable support is provided by Plymouth City College and in particular the member of staff concerned with the delivery of PDP, work based learning and e-portfolio work. The software concerned (PebblePad) is intuitive, simple to use and has a broad range of on-line help sheets at every level of the package. Once demonstrated, even students who were IT-averse found it quite straightforward to use and grew in confidence. Many of this mixed-age group are mature students/returners who have children and often these younger members of the household were able to provide help and guidance at home. (Some local schools use e-portfolios as well, so children are familiar with the pedagogy as well as the technology).

*4. You have been taking part in the piloting of PebblePad as part of the institutional roll out process. How have you found the product as an e-portfolio? How has it gone for you personally?*

The response to this question was overwhelmingly positive. The students had actually enjoyed using the e-portfolio. "It was actually effortless"; "didn't have to think or worry too much about the technology, just got on with reflection and recording".

5. *Did the e-portfolio tool help you to reflect on your work?*

“Yes because I could do it on the move, from wherever I happened to be. I didn’t have to wait until I got back to a particular computer.” (PebblePad is not only web 2.0 technology but also has the ability to interface with any internet-enabled device such as a PDA or mobile phone). “Being able to send any type of file to my PebblePad was great: it helped me remember what had happened during the day or even a week before”. (PebblePad can take in jpeg, mpv and mpeg files). The versatility of the system clearly helps learners to capture their critical incidents in ways that suit them. However, the reflective learning process is not something that depends on the technology and students still need to be helped to engage with reflection as part of learning design. This is not always an intuitive process.

6. *You were able to use the e-portfolio to capture learning from outside the curriculum. Did you do this and was it helpful to do so?*

None of the students in the focus group had used the e-portfolio tool to capture extra-curricular learning because a) they had not been asked to do so, and b) they did not think it would be “recognized” by their employers. Nevertheless they could see that if it were to become a recognized element of their progression, they would not find it challenging.

7. *Do you think an e-portfolio is potentially a lifelong learning tool?*

All students could see the potential value of an e-portfolio as part of a lifelong learning process, but would only use it if they felt their employer provided the support and valued the effort which it took on their behalf. Several had already heard their employers talking about e-portfolios within the context of appraisal and career progression and felt that it was worth the effort. (Students who top up to an Honours Degree at the University continue to use their e-portfolio and those students in these focus groups who intend to progress would certainly continue to use the tools even if their tutors and lecturers at the University did not wholeheartedly support them).

8. *What if anything, did you find frustrating about the e-portfolio/reflective learning process? If you identified an issue which you couldn’t solve did you know where to get help/support? When you eventually identified the appropriate point for help, did you get the help you needed?*

Time: “Making time available to “play” with the technology and become familiar with it so that I could use it to its full potential”. “Making myself use it outside the classroom or work”.

Confidence: “Overcoming my initial lack of confidence with the technology”.

Technology: using the wrong password, old version of Internet Explorer installed on own PC/laptop, limited functionality of older desktops and laptops, slow internet access from home (all students had internet access).

Support: first point of call was always the academic member of staff at City College Plymouth, although sometimes not the most appropriate source of support for technical issues.

9. *Can you see where you might use an e-portfolio outside the specific PDP and WBL modules in your FD?*

Students have not been encouraged or directed to use their e-portfolio outside the specific modules led by this member of staff, although quite a bit of their learning in other modules is supported by Moodle. When the opportunities were pointed out to them in the focus groups they all agreed that there are opportunities but doubted that the staff teaching these modules would support them. Given that the College has now purchased PebblePad licenses for all students and staff it will be interesting to see whether the software is used in a more integrative way in the near future.

10. *What does your employer organisation want in regards to CPD? Is an e-portfolio really linked to CPD/PDR in the workplace? Are they up-to-date with e-portfolios?*

Most students seem to understand that their organization has clearly linked appraisal/CPD with (e)-portfolios, but not all are clear about how this works, nor what is expected of them as individuals.

Generally students can see that organisations want employees to embrace the technological support systems which are already in place within their organization. Some organizations have recently migrated from one relatively poor portfolio system to another which is equally disliked by the employees, especially when they have experience of using PebblePad and therefore have a basis for comparison. Students believe that technological infrastructure changes seem to be driven by technocrats rather than their user needs.

Most public sector organizations seem to be convinced of the value of e-portfolios, but are looking for guidance from outside to help them decide which e-portfolio system is best suited to their needs. In the meantime they are making what their employees regard as inappropriate decisions.

11. *If your employer uses an e-portfolio, what system is it?*

Devon and Cornwall police force: own system plus Microsoft Sharepoint.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service: Own system but in development. Employing external consultants to deliver e-portfolio.

NHS Trusts use ARC for placement management but no e-portfolio.

12. *How confident are you in using the technology /e-portfolio that your employer uses? Have you received training in its use?*

Responses ranged widely as might be expected and depended to a large extent on age and experience of IT. "Extremely confident because I have an IT background in previous work"; "I am not at all confident and I get no support from anyone in my organization"; "I'm OK if I am left to get on with it in my own time, but it does take me ages to get to become confident". No respondents have received training in the use of e-portfolios.

13. *Are you allowed any time within your working hours to get used to using PebblePad?*

Some of the students have allocated CPD time within their contracted hours, but the majority have left their CPD because they have no time, no access to the technology

(desktops), or are expected to go home after a long shift at work and complete it in their own time. If the organization places value on e-portfolios, then there is an incentive to do the work out of hours, but if little or no value is attached (eg appraisal or promotion or competencies linked) then there is no incentive and the matter is left.

14. *Does your organisation provide support for you in the use of an e-portfolio?*

"I can never get help when I need it". The organizations tend to provide very basic introduction to the technology then leave their employees to get on with it. Some systems have limited on-line help-sheets but most do not. There is a very sharp contrast between the user-friendliness of an e-portfolio system pedagogically driven from the design stage and those which are competency/appraisal based. Students really appreciate the PebblePad system and are very critical of their organizational ones when they are in a position to make comparisons. The only driver which keeps them engaged with their organizational system is organizational promotion policy (ie they *have* to use it!).

**Employers/managers.**

These responses are grouped into broad ranges of responses to each question asked of managers during semi-structured telephone interviews. We have avoided the identification of the organizations as if we named the organization concerned in each response we would breach the confidentiality of the respondent (it would be easy to identify the role, position and individual concerned).

These interviews were conducted after the focus group research with the students had been completed.

1. *Do you know what an e-portfolio is and can you very briefly describe one?*

Many managers could not clearly say what an e-portfolio was and needed some help to articulate a definition. When this had been clarified the researcher went on to the next questions. If (as in a few cases) the individual concerned was still unclear, the researcher terminated the session and agreed a fresh time to re-start the interview some week later and sent the respondent a personal letter or e-mail explaining what an e-portfolio is and a copy of the questions. (We made the assumption that since the employees knew which e-portfolio was in use in their respective organizations that their managers would also be familiar with the concept and hopefully the system in use in their organization)

2. *Do you use an e-portfolio within your organisation?*

There were a range of responses to this question which were illuminating: "Yes we do have one for policy documentation purposes but we never use it"; "Yes, it's great because it has freed us up from so much paperwork"; "Yes we use it all the time and it drives our appraisal system".

3. *If so, how long has the software been in place?*  
 NHS : 5 years; Fire and Rescue Service 12 months for early adopters; Devon and Cornwall Police Force still looking into a new system to replace Sharepoint in which they may want to include some e-portfolio functionality.
  
4. *Who is responsible for the implementation of the practice associated with e-portfolios? Is this an organisation-wide system or framework (eg across the service nationally, regionally or locally)?*  
 Practice across police forces varies. There is no national policy in respect of e-portfolios. The fire and rescue services have a national policy although implementation is in its infancy.
  
5. *Who is responsible for making the system work effectively? Is the policy “policed”?*  
 Responses to this question have to be dealt with cautiously, but the broad sense of the overwhelming number of responses was: “Everyone is supposed to do their e-portfolio, from top to bottom in the organization, but most senior managers do not engage with it so it only gets done by the junior ranks. If we don’t do it ourselves we cannot enforce it, even though all our policy documents say we do”.  
 At face value therefore anyone looking at any of our organizations from outside will be led to believe that e-portfolios are widely used, but in reality this is far from the case, particularly for middle and senior managers in some organisations.
  
6. *Is your e-portfolio linked to a competency framework and/or appraisal?*  
 In all cases the e-portfolio is linked to appraisal, so everyone should be engaging with their system. (This conflicts with responses to Q5).  
 In most cases organizations expect their competency frameworks to be articulated via an e-portfolio. In other words they expect that their competency framework is sent out/distributed via the e-portfolio and their employees to be evaluating themselves against the competency criteria using their e-portfolio entries.
  
7. *Do you have an e-portfolio training programme in place for employees?*  
 Most managers believed they have some kind of initial awareness raising or training programme in place, but were not sure exactly what it entailed. They did not think there was any need for follow-up or up-dating for employees after this initial training and expected employees to “work it out for themselves”. Although the organizational policy might express an expectation that managers should reinforce the importance and value of e-portfolios, they rarely did so.
  
8. *Do you allocate time for employees to train in the use of their e-portfolios whether or not you have a training programme in place?*

In principle all managers allow their employees time for CPD, but many admitted that the pressures of work often mean that employees have to find their own time in which to complete these tasks even when linked to appraisal.

9. *Who monitors what the learners/employees do in respect of their e-portfolio? Do your employees for example have mentors? Does the e-portfolio feed into an appraisal system?*

Immediate line managers are on the whole expected to monitor their staff, although in some cases organizations have mentoring systems whereby a mentor is assigned to new recruits and helps them engage with their e-portfolio. In many cases the training officers rather than the line manager is left to chase up staff. Sometimes the training officers have to chase the line managers to get them to engage with their own e-portfolio in an attempt to ensure buy-in at all levels.

10. *Are employees expected to maintain a regular log in their e-portfolio, and if so who keeps a check that they are doing so?*

All managers expect the employees to keep their e-portfolios up-to-date (daily or weekly is a common expectation). Critical incident logs are also a common expectation in the police and fire services.

11. *Do you think generally that your employees have the appropriate technical background to enable them to make effective use of an e-portfolio?*

The aggregate response to this question might be summarized: "I assume they have because I have never heard anything to the contrary". This is clearly a rather sweeping/tenuous assumption.

12. *What kind of reactions have you witnessed employees being instructed to use the e-portfolio as part of their FD? (Do they for example embrace the technology and the concept?)*

Our employees seem really interested in what they are doing and stimulated to engage in the types of practice we want to encourage. They come back into the organization full of enthusiasm for the technology and the process in ways that we did not see with paper-based portfolios.

13. *Are all levels of management in your organisation expected to use an e-portfolio? If so, do they all use one as part of day-to-day practice?*

All levels are expected to use an e-portfolio but in reality this is quite rare. Where a middle or senior manager can see that the e-portfolio brings significant benefit in reaching their targets they will support, reinforce and drive the process. Without these incentives they tend to ignore e-portfolios and need to be convinced of their intrinsic value for workforce development.

14. *Does an e-portfolio figure in promotional procedures?*

A universal “yes”. All managers agree that at least in principle an e-portfolio provides an efficient vehicle for reflection and articulation of achievements, attitudes, competencies and skills, and is an ideal basis for evaluating candidates for promotion.

The main leverage for engaging employees in e-portfolios is appraisal and promotion. Practice in all organizations is supposed to be auditable, but because relatively few senior managers in these organizations buy into the idea/practice of e-portfolios, it is difficult to see how they can press the case. It is widely accepted that everyone in these organizations has to engage with CPD, but senior managers see an e-portfolio as only one way of evidencing/articulating CPD activity.

### **Student/employee concerns**

Students are comfortable with the **technological aspects** of e-portfolios as experienced in the educational setting. However, exposure to a properly configured and fit-for-purpose e-portfolio has created new concerns about the value they attach to the systems used by their employers which they now widely regard as inferior products. Employees now face a dilemma: carry on using the e-portfolio which they like and value, or migrate to their employer’s one which they dislike and do not value (neither do many of their employers!). This may bring them into conflict with their employers, but perhaps they might bring pressure to bear on their employing organisation to ensure that any e-portfolio is fit-for-purpose.

The **cultural contrasts** between traditional CPD and appraisal and the approach to individualised learning, PDP and e-portfolio-based learning activities is brought into sharp focus for these students/employees. Students are very comfortable with the pedagogy and delivery of the work-based learning, both in the classroom setting and at work, but the employer organisation does not always attach value to their efforts or the outcomes of e-portfolios. This means that students often have to re-work the contents of an e-portfolio to fit into a schema which they do not like. This could be solved if the employers took the time and effort to research e-portfolios properly and develop or purchase systems which are fit-for-purpose from the employee’s perspective. Changing the culture of organisations so that there is closer strategic alignment between what happens in educational settings and the workplace is a much greater challenge!

Some employers (or line managers within organisations) now seem to be more open-minded about new e-portfolio products and have expressed an interest in exploring their potential in collaboration with the University and our partner colleges.

3. Specifically, what findings/information do you have about the value of e-portfolios in:

E-portfolios are key elements in supporting these groups of employees/learners (staff teaching them and the learners/employees themselves).

- identifying learning/training needs for the employee/learner, and those opportunities/functionalities that exist or need to be developed in the e-portfolio context in order to satisfy such needs;

*The software used by these learners (PebblePad) is intuitive and user-friendly to the extent that all learners could use it after brief introductory workshops. The software is web-based and can interface with other systems easily, but that will only happen if the will to do so is there in the employer organisations.*

4. And what evidence does your project provide that e-portfolio systems and services can help to:

- ensure a better fit between the requirements of employees/learners, employers and HEIs;
- incorporate mentor support;
- support transparent goal setting;
- provide a structure for monitoring progress and progression;
- provide evidence of the achievement of outcomes for assessment.

*The software used in this context already does help in all these, but software by itself cannot bridge cultural gaps between the various settings between which learners/employees move.*

5. Can you say anything on the basis of your project about:

- the costs and benefits to HEI staff and institutions in providing effective support for learner engagement and achievement;
- unanticipated benefits or problems in the utilisation of e-portfolio processes and systems to support learner achievement and employer engagement.

*The usual benefits that accrue from the use of e-portfolios can be identified in this project. (accessibility to learning spaces by staff from anywhere (not just on campus); paperless system (saves lugging large portfolios around); maintaining regular and sometimes informal contact with learners; monitoring learner progress and responding very quickly to concerns/issues.*

*Sometimes these benefits are accompanied by issues: learner expectations that if an issue arises that prompts them to contact their tutor via the e-portfolio, they often expect an instant response. This carries an expectation that the tutor is available almost 24/7. These expectations need to be managed carefully if they are to remain “within limits”.*

## Looking forward

1. What is going to happen in your institution after the February 2010 (at the end of the project) with regards to taking forward the needs of part-time work-based learners?
2. Are there any messages you would like us to give feed back to HEFCE that will support the formulation of policy in respect of employee engagement through e-portfolio provision? (please include details)

## Specific Areas

If you can answer any – or many - of the following questions, it would be helpful in providing us with a greater understanding of the context for some of the processes within institutions and how they may relate to development work. Include answers in your draft if you can, or we can pick them up in discussion.

### Internal employer engagement

- If an employer approaches you with a request for provision, what happens (what is the mechanism for handling employer queries? is there a one-stop shop, who are they referred to?)

*The University of Plymouth has an “Enterprise Centre” which acts as a high profile one-stop-shop for handling all our employer engagement.*

- How long will it typically take from an employer request for provision to be in place for the employer?

*No known.*

- How much of the provision is roll-on and roll-off?

*Very little.*

- How easily is the provision able to be timetabled?

*The University itself has a centralised timetable covering 3,000 staff and 20,000 F/T students across 6 faculties. Accommodating new programmes, particularly ones with small student groups on a part-time basis is particularly challenging. However, our partner colleges are more appropriately organised to deliver such new programmes.*

*What is a cost effective group size?*

*Not known.*

- Has the provision from individual to group cost effectiveness been worked out?

*No.*

- What is the credit-level framework?

*The new CPD shell framework reflects the SEEC credit framework.*

### Assessment

- Are there any typical forms of assessment aimed at provision for work based e-learners?

*Yes: their e-portfolio is assessed by the academic tutor through the e-portfolio sharing tool.*

- Are these forms of assessment up to individual schools/academic...?

*This level of decision-making would be cascaded down to individual staff.*

- If any of the assessment is portfolio type of evidence (i.e. collection of diverse forms of evidence), is the evidence assessed in the workplace? Who assesses?

*In the cases explored in this project the line manager would assess the learner's e-portfolio. However, in some cases they may not always use the electronic version and they may ask the learner to provide paper copies of documents. This may be driven by individual managers or may be the expectation of a professional body or organisational expectation.*

- Are there any restrictions on which system it's stored on (e.g. summative assessment)?

- How does the external examiner access materials?

*Students were told to share their presentational portfolio and some of their other assets which articulated learning with the external examiner.*

- What is the external examiner's relationship with the university?  
*Appointed on a 3-year standard external examiner contract. External examiners are nominated by programme managers/Heads of School and approved by the Quality Support Unit and Academic Board.*

#### General

- To what extent is the design of the learning experience able to have learning outcomes expressed in business/professional language? (e.g. how do employers/professional associations' language of skills etc fit into the university's language of learning outcomes?)
- How are employee learners registered?

## **Appendix A**

### ***Extracts from the City College Plymouth Foundation Degree (FdA) in Public Services student handbook 2009-2010.***

#### **About the Programme**

This qualification was devised following consultation with public services employers including the police and fire service. Unlike a traditional undergraduate degree the Foundation Degree is a more vocationally based qualification with a strong emphasis on career and employment skills directed towards individuals with a career aim of employment within the public services. It is aimed at developing relevant knowledge and skills to aide students in achieving their goals either through direct employment within the sector or progression onto a relevant honours degree.

#### **4.1 Work-based Learning and Employability**

Work-based learning, in its various forms, is one of the major defining characteristics of your Foundation degree. It plays a central role in enabling you to apply academic study to workplace environments and problems. In its turn, your programme of study at Level 5 should enable you to integrate knowledge and skills developed in work-based learning into your project work and study of taught modules. Every University of Plymouth foundation degree has a 20 credit work place learning module that is assessed at level 4 whenever it takes place in the programme.

An employable graduate is one who is able to meet the requirements of employers and fulfil their career aspirations at graduate level. They will be able to apply the skills, knowledge and personal qualities developed during their programme of study in the workplace and other contexts. An employable graduate will need to be able to:

- a. demonstrate and apply graduate attributes and skills;
- b. demonstrate and apply career management skills: preparing effectively for the recruitment and selection process, based on an understanding of their needs and career opportunities;
- c. demonstrate and apply lifelong learning skills: reflecting critically on their academic, personal and professional development, identifying and articulating their achievements and planning for the future;

- d. demonstrate business and organisational awareness: understand changing working practices, including self-employment, with particular reference to the professions and sectors relating to their programme of study;
- e. demonstrate an international outlook: understanding the attributes and breadth of outlook appropriate for working in a global economy.

Your programme has been designed to put all this in perspective, and give you the opportunities to develop the requisite skills. Work relatedness is integral to the modules, and many specifically offer you the opportunity to view the world of work, even if you are studying full time. Your programme specification details the knowledge skills and understanding will be able to that you will have acquired should you succeed in passing the course. Your personal tutor will help you to complete a Professional Development Profile to evidence this.

### **Skills Plus and Professional Development**

For the purposes of this Handbook, Professional Development Planning (PDP) 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 educational and career development”*

(QAA, 2002, Policy Statement on a Progress File for Higher Education)

We have introduced the Professional Development Planning (PDP) to aid your academic and personal development. This is in conjunction with the University of Plymouth and it is highly recommended that you use this resource (see [www.staff.plymouth.ac.uk/pdp/intranet.htm](http://www.staff.plymouth.ac.uk/pdp/intranet.htm) )

In the early stages of your programme you will be introduced to the concept of PDP, and encouraged to develop your own profile record through a range of experiences. A number of modules lend themselves through their assessment mode to building a PDP. In addition, your personal tutor will review your PDP on a regular basis and support the process.

The level of engagement and what you get out of your period of higher education is your choice. You have responsibility for your own learning.

Taking stock of your position and setting goals in all areas of your life is a crucial step. But in order to maximise your potential you must be clear about how you can transfer the skills and knowledge you have acquired into other situations. You must learn to be able to communicate your unique skills and abilities.

The UoP online guide to Professional Development Planning is designed to help you do just that and to look strategically at where you are and where you want to be addressing the following areas:

- ✓ *Key Skills* - This section covers the important area of Key Skills: What are they? Why are employers so keen on them? Do I have any? How do I develop mine? Completing the online audit will help you to plan how you will move your key skills forward.
- ✓ *Background* - This section allows you to record your current skills, knowledge and competence in relation to qualifications, work-experience, positions of responsibility and extracurricular activities. Here is the chance to look in detail at how you have developed as a result of all these experiences, using both your own self-reflection and feedback from objective sources. There is also an opportunity to pinpoint your key strengths and key areas for improvement.
- ✓ *Learning Style* - The quiz in this section helps you recognise your learning style, a crucial step in increasing your effectiveness and reaching your potential.
- ✓ *Goals* - Setting clear goals for the different areas of your life can be invaluable. This section allows you to bring into focus your aspirations in terms of your career, your academic ambitions and your personal goals.
  
- ✓ *Planning* - Having set your goals, break each one down into manageable action points. Use this section to get a clear picture of what you need to do and when. A financial planning tool is also included.
- ✓ *Opportunities* - There are so many opportunities at College and in the local area, but how do you find out about them all? This section gives a comprehensive guide from voluntary work to round-the-world expeditions.
- ✓ *Progress* - During your time at College make time to assess how you are progressing towards your goals. Even if you only take a few hours each term, it will help to keep you on target towards achieving your goals and getting the most out of your time here. At the end of each academic year pull together all your thoughts and reassess your progress.
- ✓ *Job Applications* - This section contains useful tips on producing a professional CV. By completing the main sections of this guide you will already have done much of the hard work. It pays to keep track of things as you go along so that you have all the information at your fingertips when it comes to applying for your next step.
- ✓ *Reference* – This section includes a link to your Reference Summary page. This is the only part of your file which will be held by your tutor and will contain the information you want to be included in your references.

## **Stage 1 and Stage 2 Modules**

<b>Module Code and Title</b>	<b>Description</b>
PSFD100 - Work Based Learning	This module will give students experience of the working environment within public service organisations which will provide them with a real opportunity to link their academic studies to their prospective career. It will require them to critically examine the aims, attitudes, practices, procedures and operational effectiveness of those organisations and develop relevant work related skills.
PSFD102 - Political Economy	This module will examine structures of power in European, National, Regional and Local contexts considering the issues of cooperation, conflict and accountability. It will also give students a basic conceptual understanding of the objectives of macroeconomic policy the instruments for achieving them and associated political constraints within this process.
PSFD104 - Introduction to Criminal	This module examines the structure and roles of organisations within the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales taking into account current trends and prospective policies in law and order. It also examines issues of criminal justice in some European States.
PSFD111 - Working in Groups	This module explores issues in relation to Leadership, Group and Team working within the workplace, including the effects on individual and organisational performance.
PSFD112 - Diversity	This module aims to provide an understanding of the conceptual foundations of the term Diversity. It explores the changing nature of contemporary British society and considers how this has brought about changes to values and beliefs behind working practices in the Public Services.
PSFD109 - Personal and Professional Skills Development	This module will incorporate Personal Development Planning to enable students to identify, engage with, and reflect upon the personal and professional skills and competences required for entry to and

	progression within their chosen profession.
PSFD119 - Citizen Focus and Service User Perspectives	This module is concerned with the importance of service user perspectives to the structure, culture and processes of public sector organisations, the services they provide and the individuals who work in them.
PSFD107 - Applied Psychology	This module will enable students to evaluate and analyse a variety of psychological approaches within public service environments. Students will be asked to identify, assess and comment on the effectiveness of psychological approaches within the public service environment. They will be required to reflect upon the relationship between communication and psychological strategies in order to utilise these in public service contexts.
PSFD110 - Human Resource Management	This module examines the way in which public service organisations maximise the use of resources. It concentrates on the development of human resources from recruitment to retirement within the constraints of public service finances and accountabilities, exploring cultural, legislative and financial constraints and requirements effecting the daily management of people..
PSFD210 - An Introduction to English Criminal Law	This module examines key elements of the English Legal System, with an emphasis on aspects of the criminal law, and its relevance to the public service sector. It also provides a focus on the relationship between the constitution, human rights and the law making processes, as well as the impact of legislation on law enforcement agencies investigations and criminal court procedures.
PSFD212 - The Public Policy Process	This module is concerned with the processes involved in the way public policy is driven, made and executed within the public sector, including government decision making.
PSFD208 - Research Skills	This module enables students to identify a range of different research methods, processes and considerations which are central in conducting a research project in their academic or professional discipline.
PSFD205 - Action Research	This module requires students to conduct

	<p>research in the context of a given problem from a public service organisation. This module will students through the process of constructing hypotheses / aims, choosing the appropriate methodologies, conducting valid research, analysing information and presenting results in both verbal and written forms.</p>
<p>PSFD207 - Criminology</p>	<p>This module studies the definition, extent and the wide ranging effects of crime for individuals and society. It examines in detail theoretical and practical aspects of the causes and effects of crime from the perspective of the individual, society and organisations within the Criminal Justice System.</p>
<p>PSFD209 - Managing People</p>	<p>This module explores aspects of the HR specialist's contribution to effective management of the employment relationship</p>

# Programme Structure for the Foundation Degree in Public Services (full-time) 2009/10

Course code: UF2443

Year 1				Year 2			
Module Code	Module Title	No. of Credits	Core / Optional	Module Code	Module Title	No. of Credits	Core / Optional
PSFD102	Political Economy	20	Core	PSFD100	Work Based Learning & Employability Skills	20	Core
PSFD104	Introduction to Criminal Justice	20	Core	PSFD210	An Introduction to English Criminal Law	20	Core
PSFD111	Working in Groups	10	Core	PSFD212	The Policy Process	20	Core
PSFD112	Diversity	10	Core	PSFD208	Research Skills	20	Core
PSFD109	Personal & Professional Development	20	Core	PSFD209	Managing People	20	Core
PSFD119	Citizen Focus & Service User Perspective	20	Core	PSFD205	Action Research	20	Core
PSFD107	Applied Psychology	20	Core	PSFD207	Criminology	20	Core
PSFD110	Human Resource Management	20	Core	* Two pathways are available on the Foundation Degree in Public Services, see following page.			
Work Based Learning & Employability Skills (PSFD100)							

## Appendix B

HE5P Question set.

Full time FD students.

1. Are employees in your organisation encouraged to engage with an e-portfolio?
2. Is the completion of an e-portfolio compulsory in your organisation?
3. Does your organisation make allowances for your lack of IT background or are you simply expected to get on with any IT-based work, including your e-portfolio?
4. You have been taking part in the piloting of PebblePad as part of the institutional roll out process. How have you found the product as an e-portfolio? How has it gone for you personally?
5. Did the e-portfolio tool help you to reflect on your work?
6. You were able to use the e-portfolio to capture learning from outside the curriculum. Did you do this and was it helpful to do so?
7. Do you think an e-portfolio is potentially a lifelong learning tool?
8. What if anything, did you find frustrating about the e-portfolio/reflective learning process? If you identified an issue which you couldn't solve did you know where to get help/support? When you eventually identified the appropriate point for help, did you get the help you needed?
9. Can you see where you might use an e-portfolio outside the specific PDP and WBL modules in your FD?

Part-time FD students.

Part-time students were asked the same set of questions but additionally:

10. What does your employer organisation want in regards to CPD? Are they up-to-date with e-portfolios? Is an e-portfolio *really* linked to CPD/PDR in the workplace?
11. If your employer uses an e-portfolio, what system is it?
12. How confident are you in using the technology /e-portfolio that your employer uses? Have you received training in its use?
13. Are you allowed any time within your working hours to get used to using the e-portfolio?
14. Does your organisation provide support for you in the use of an e-portfolio?

Employers/managers.

1. Do you know what an e-portfolio is and can you very briefly describe one?
2. Do you use an e-portfolio within your organisation?
3. If so, how long has the software been in place?
4. Who is responsible for the implementation of the practice associated with e-portfolios? Is this an organisation-wide system or framework (eg across the service nationally, regionally or locally)?
5. Who is responsible for making the system work effectively? Is the policy "policed"?
6. Is your e-portfolio linked to a competency framework?

7. Do you have an e-portfolio training programme in place for employees?
8. Do you allocate time for employees to train in the use of their e-portfolios whether or not you have a training programme in place?
9. Who monitors what the learners/employees do in respect of their e-portfolio? Do your employees for example have mentors? Does the e-portfolio feed into an appraisal system?
10. Are employees expected to maintain a regular log in their e-portfolio, and if so who keeps a check that they are doing so?
11. Do you think generally that your employees have the appropriate technical background to enable them to make effective use of an e-portfolio?
12. What kind of reactions have you witnessed to employees being instructed to use the e-portfolio as part of their FD? (Do they for example embrace the technology and the concept?)
13. Are all levels of management in your organisation expected to use an e-portfolio? If so, do they all use one as part of day-to-day practice?
14. Does an e-portfolio figure in promotional procedures?