

## Forum Insights

### PROJECT TITLE:

#### An ePortfolio strategy to enhance student learning, assessment and staff professional development

#### Overview

This project seeks to create an ePortfolio framework that will encourage and enable academic staff to incorporate ePortfolios into their programmes, in order to empower students, allow for more authentic forms of assessment and foster a student-centred approach to learning. The development of this framework will include consideration of appropriate ePortfolio organisational principles and reflective approaches, the production of exemplars and guidelines, and the exploration of ePortfolio systems and models appropriate to the higher education and student context. Resources, guidelines, exemplars and training materials to support these approaches will be created and made available on the ePortfolio Hub website.

#### Partners

The partner institutions are Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB), Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITT) and Hibernia College. A steering committee was established comprising of a representative from each of the participating institutions and a project co-ordinator was appointed.

#### Steering Committee

- **Dublin Institute of Technology**  
Dr Frances Boylan: frances.boylan@dit.ie
- **Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown**  
Daniel McSweeney: daniel.mcsweeney@itb.ie
- **Institute of Technology, Tallaght**  
Margaret Keane: margaret.keane@ittdublin.ie
- **Hibernia College**  
Dara Cassidy: dcassidy@hiberniacollege.net

#### Project Co-ordinator

- **Orla O'Loughlen**  
Hibernia College  
eportfolioevent@gmail.com

The project team have held weekly meetings via BlackBoard Collaborate and occasional face-to-face meetings. These meetings, emails, the use of Trello, the web-based project management tool, and the sharing of resources online have all helped to encourage collaboration within the project team to achieve the project outcomes.

#### Key outcomes

To date, we have:

- Created a project website – ePortfolio Hub (<https://eportfoliohub.wordpress.com/>)
- Set up a Twitter account (@ePortfolioHub) and a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/eportfoliohub/>) as part of our communications strategy

- Organised and hosted a three-day ePortfolio conference – 'ePortfolios in Ireland: What now, where next?' (DIT, 21-23 March) and disseminated resources from the event on our ePortfolio Hub website
- Conducted participative 'Think Tank' sessions and video interviews at the ePortfolio conference – these provided an opportunity to consolidate the knowledge and expertise of attendees, which will be used to inform the structure for our ePortfolio project framework
- Initiated a desk-based review examining current ePortfolio practice and collected data from academics, students and employers
- Developed and piloted an ePortfolio planning tool

#### Project website 'ePortfolio Hub'

This website was initially used to develop awareness of the project and to launch and promote the ePortfolio conference 'ePortfolios in Ireland: What now, where next?', which was held in DIT from 21-23 March. After the event, the presentation slides, video recordings of speakers and resources gathered were uploaded to the website to make them available to a wider audience.

#### ePortfolio conference

The ePortfolio conference 'ePortfolios in Ireland: What now, where next?' took place in DIT from 21st -23rd of March. This three-day event focused on learning and sharing practice about ePortfolio use, and was structured around three themes – planning, process and product. Well-known international speakers and speakers from higher education institutions throughout the country gave some interesting insights into how they are using ePortfolios. Topics covered included ePortfolio projects, tools and platforms, assessment and reflection, digital identity and career development. Feedback from the conference was very positive – 90% of respondents agreed that the conference met/exceeded their expectations – and we have gathered a wealth of resources from the event which will inform the development of the ePortfolio framework.

Dr Helen Barrett, a leading international researcher of ePortfolios, delivered the keynote on the first day of the conference 'Balancing the two faces of ePortfolios: reflection and assessment'. This 'balance' was a recurring theme throughout the event – the tension that exists between using ePortfolios for accountability purposes such as assessments, versus using ePortfolios for reflection and personal development.

Some findings from the presentations of people's experiences of using ePortfolios in their teaching included:

- A wide variety of ePortfolio products are being used.
- Continuous training must be provided to people developing ePortfolios.

- Support and buy-in from staff is needed, everybody involved needs to be behind it.
- Student engagement and involvement (feedback) is important. They need to feel that their input and feedback is valuable.
- Clear rubrics for content and assessment are helpful.
- Clear guidelines for reflection and examples of reflection are also important.

Helen Beetham on the final day highlighted the importance of digital identity management for career and personal development.

## Video interviews

Over the course of the three days of the conference, we conducted several video interviews with presenters at the event. The purpose of these interviews was to invite individuals who had experience of using ePortfolios themselves or within an academic programme, to share their experiences and offer any insights they might have about it.

A sample of the questions asked were:

- What prompted you to introduce ePortfolios?
- What is the purpose of the ePortfolio within your class?
- What approaches or activities do you think gives you the most chance of having students engage with the ePortfolio?
- What are the main challenges you encountered? What would you do differently?
- How do you assess your students' ePortfolio work?
- Did your thinking/approach change as you became more immersed in the process?
- What do students and academics need to consider when interacting online in the public space?
- Tell me about some of the ways that ePortfolios are being used to help students evidence their skills and increase their employability.

The responses to the questions will help to inform us when developing resources for the ePortfolio framework. The videos will also be available on the ePortfolio Hub website as part of the set of ePortfolio resources.

## Think tank sessions

On each afternoon of the conference, we held a 'Think Tank' session. The aim of these sessions was to consolidate the knowledge and expertise of invited speakers and delegates who already have experience of using ePortfolios. These participative sessions were aligned with the three themes of the days and structured around 'Lessons Learned' combined with 'ideas to share' opportunities related to ePortfolio processes. Participants worked in small groups to exchange ideas and experiences that will be used to inform the structure for the ePortfolio project framework as well as to encourage reflection on their own practice.

## Desk review and data collection

The data collection and analysis phases of the project will inform the development of the ePortfolio framework.

We are currently completing the following elements of the data collection and analysis phase of the project:

- Desk-based review examining current practice
- Evaluation of technology tools and their suitability for ePortfolio usage
- Online surveys to faculty and students in HEIs in Ireland to establish ePortfolio awareness and use
- Online surveys and interviews with employers to establish use and potential use of ePortfolios in the recruitment process

Once the data collection and analysis phases of the project are complete, we will evaluate the findings and pull together all of the project research into an easy-to-follow guide for use when developing an ePortfolio. All of the resources, guidelines, exemplars and training materials will be created and made widely available on the ePortfolio Hub website.

## ePortfolio planning tool

We created an ePortfolio planning tool that could be used to kick start the planning process for individuals and programme teams who are interested in introducing an ePortfolio element in their courses. The planning tool comprises a set of questions that need to be considered at the planning stages of an ePortfolio project. We piloted the tool with participants in a workshop that we held at the 2016 Showcase of Learning and Teaching Innovations in DIT and received some useful feedback that has been incorporated into a subsequent draft of the planning tool.

## Benefits to students and staff

This project benefits students and staff in a number of ways. It will provide access to a comprehensive set of ePortfolio resources that will be available for students and academic staff who want to develop their own ePortfolio or incorporate an ePortfolio into their programmes. This project will collate, develop and share guidelines and exemplars for use by students and academic staff when developing an ePortfolio. It will provide guidance on the introduction of an ePortfolio into an academic programme and guidance on the various uses of an ePortfolio – teaching, learning, assessment, reflection and showcase. This project will also evaluate current technology approaches and their suitability for ePortfolio usage, and develop guidelines for using the various systems.

## Benefits to the higher education sector nationally

The hosting of the ePortfolio conference 'ePortfolios in Ireland: What now, where next?' provided attendees with an opportunity to network, discuss, share and showcase the work that is being done with ePortfolios in institutions throughout the country. The recorded presentations and resources from the event are available for viewing by a wider audience on the website.

The project will provide a framework that includes a comprehensive set of ePortfolio approaches for incorporating ePortfolios in higher education nationally. It will develop and publish resources, guidelines, exemplars and training materials on the ePortfolio Hub website, which will be easily accessible to anyone in the higher education sector wanting to develop an ePortfolio.