A survey of e-pdp and e-portfolio practice in UK Higher Education

Undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Academy by

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Introduction:

In 2005 the Centre for Recording Achievement[1] became an Associate Centre of the Higher Education Academy in the UK (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk) with a brief to lead on the development of personal development planning and e-portfolios in UK Higher Education. As part of this brief the CRA was asked to undertake a survey to identify provision for e-PDP or e-portfolios by:

- mapping and identifying existing practice;
- documenting the approaches taken;
- establishing a directory of practice and key contacts.

Methodology:

In undertaking a survey of ePDP and e-portfolio practice we were aware from the start of some serious problems. These included:

- **Who should respond?** Different institutions organise their workforces differently, with different job titles. Furthermore we knew there is often a chasm between the personnel who understand the technological and technical implementation issues and those concerned with pedagogy and usage. Consequently we chose to make our survey non-anonymous and to ask for job titles as well as names and institutions. We also invited multiple responses from institutions.

- **What definition of e-portfolio would the respondent be using?** We were well aware of the debate around the concept of e-portfolios. We chose to allow respondents to respond according to their own definition, in the hope that there would be sufficient contextual information, particularly in the questions about purpose and functionality (but also in the naming of systems) to interpret their perspective.

- **Would any respondent be able to give a complete picture of their institution?** Again, we were well aware of the devolved nature of many HEIs and the somewhat opaque way in which decisions about acquiring new technology may seem to be taken in some. As a result, institutions may have many systems operating in different areas, occasionally without even the knowledge of the institutional 'expert' on e-portfolios. We included the question on the nature of institutional policy-making as an attempt to give a perspective in this issue but also,

[1] The Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) is a national network organisation and a registered educational charity (see http://www.recordingachievement.org). It seeks to 'promote the awareness of recording achievement and action planning processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment'.

because the responses were not anonymous, we could cross-check some of the information from our own knowledge of practice.

The survey questions were trialled on several groups of respondents, including the Heads of e-Learning Forum and the E-portfolio Creative Thinking Group and questions were refined as a result. It was decided to use an online survey tool (Bristol On-line Surveys) with the option that respondents could ring the researcher and give their answers through a telephone interview. Four people took advantage of this option.

The online survey was available between June and August 2006. A letter from the Higher Education Academy was sent to all Vice Chancellors inviting them to take part by delegating to the most appropriate person within their institution. Reminders were also sent out on a number of different mailbases as the deadline approached. Subsequently data was added from 5 institutions which missed the deadline for the online survey but supplied responses on the questionnaire proforma.

It was also recognised that, despite the appearance of hard data produced by the use of the online survey tool, the responses were likely to need a considerable amount of interpretation and follow-up clarification if the Academy's aim of a reliable and fairly complete map of UK practice were to be achieved. Following the close of the online survey, several HEIs were contacted individually to clarify their response and/or to gain additional data. This was either because the information received from more than one respondent was contradictory; or because the institution had failed to respond to the online survey but was known to be an important location of practice in ePDP/e-portfolio development.

Respondents:

Responses have been received from 71 separate institutions, of which 66 are UK HEIs. The other five included FE colleges and one overseas university. Multiple responses were received from 13 institutions, all UK HEIs.

Findings (by question):

Is Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the process of being implemented in your institution?[2]

Only 6 responses claimed that PDP was not in the process of being implemented. 2 of these were part of multiple responses which contradicted this claim (and were therefore likely to be referring to a specific programme or programmes rather than the whole institution), 3 were FE institutions and 1 was the overseas university.

[2] Personal Development Planning is defined as "a structured and supported process undertaken by and individual to reflect upon their own learning and achievement and to plan for their personal educational and career development". All UK HEIs must offer opportunities to students to engage in this process.

Is the PDP system in your institution supported by any kind of electronic tool or system? If not an e-portfolio, how would you describe it?

- 55 of the UK HEIs (83%) said that their PDP process was supported by an electronic tool.

- 39 of these (59% of the total) said that they would not describe this tool as an e-portfolio Amongst the responses from these 39 institutions, 3 cited use of RAPID (developed at Loughborough University) and 2 cited LUSID (developed at the University of Liverpool), both of which store individual student data and thus have some of the functionality expected of an e-portfolio.

- Most common alternatives for supporting PDP electronically were a website (16 mentions, some referring to university-wide systems, others to departmental web pages); or the VLE or modules within a VLE (14 mentions: where the VLE was named, 5 mentions of Blackboard, 3 mentions of WebCT and 1 each of Moodle and Merlin).

Several respondents distinguished between an e-portfolio and a PDP support tool. These were variously described as:
"an e-progress file system on the web";
"Personal Development Planner";
"LUSID, a home-grown PDP support tool";
"LUCID – system developed by University of Liverpool as e-PDP";
"it may loosely be described as an e-portfolio but the preferred description would be an online personal development planning tool";
"Students have their own secure space on the Managed Learning Environment (MLE) where they can create and maintain personal development records. They can choose to share these with their personal tutor";
"Some of our engineering students are required to use RAPID (PDP system developed by Loughborough Univ.)";
"The Department of the Built Environment has decided to use RAPID (an electronic tool) for all its courses".

Finally, some institutions were using one or more separate tools:
"an online on-entry self-assessment of skills and knowledge"
"a system designed in-house… which provides the facility for a student to maintain a logbook of their reflections and …to write 'statements' which are shared with their Personal Tutor"
"an on-line 'Learning Log'"
"Interactive computer games, online questionnaires with reflective prompts etc."
"We currently use a profile application – students can use this to record PDP activities, create action plans etc and then create CVs"
"We have developed, in-house, a PDP web-base which sits within [University X's] VLE (WebCT) and which all students are registered for. The PDP web-base (BOLD PDP Online) contains tools (designed to promote increased self-

awareness, reflection and planning for academic, career-related and personal development) and guidance in how to make the most of the process". [3]

Do you have one or more electronic resources which you would describe (separately or together) as e-portfolios?

37 UK HEIs (56%) answered YES to this question.

22 of these said that they had an e-portfolio tool or system in addition to some other electronic system which was NOT an e-portfolio to support PDP.

This might suggest that e-portfolios are being used, or considered for other purposes than PDP – possibly by staff rather than students. However answers to the question below about the main purpose of e-portfolio use indicate that this is not the case. The implication here is that some of these institutions were in transition from a current PDP support system to a full e-portfolio. Some were about to pilot their e-portfolio system; in other institutions an e-portfolio system was being used within a specific area or for a specific purpose but the main support came from other tools.

Some confusion may also stem from individuals' uncertainty about the definition of an e-portfolio and their decision to treat e-PDP systems as legitimate objects of investigation for the purposes of this survey. This was evident in responses to the question about which system was being used.

Terminology remains a problem in two ways. Firstly, institutions frequently change the name of a product as soon as they acquire it, to stamp their own institutional identity on it. Respondents were sometimes either not aware of the generic/commercial name or failed to record it. Secondly, the question was deliberately phrased to gather the widest possible selection of tools which respondents might regard as e-portfolios, rather than offering respondents a tight definition. The responses do indicate that some institutions are using a variety of tools each of which has some of the functionality associated with e-portfolios, and few respondents showed much concern for terminology. While this makes surveying the terrain more difficult the resulting picture is richer: however, more accurate details of adoption have been sought from the producers of the more popular systems to give a better indication of uptake (Appendix 2).

With these caveats, a graphical representation of the number of mentions for different software is given below.:

[3] Quotes are given verbatim except for substitutions (indicated by square brackets) where the originating institution could be identified.

Table 1: Electronic resources described as e-portfolios

Blackboard or WebCT														
PebblePAD														
ePET														
RAPID														
Other commercial products														
Other open-source products														
In-house solutions														

Number of institutions claiming to have this type of e-portfolio software

The most frequently cited (12) was the Blackboard e-portfolio which is bundled with the content system (Blackboard CS), sometimes in use on its own, sometimes as part of an ongoing trial. Next most popular was PebblePAD (developed at the University of Wolverhampton)[4] with 6 mentions. ePET (developed at the University of Newcastle)[5] received 4 mentions but 2 of these were trials. RAPID (developed at Loughborough University)[6] was mentioned twice, but with disagreement as to whether it was actually an e-portfolio system. LUSID (developed at the University of Liverpool)[7] was mentioned by 2 respondents but not regarded as a full e-portfolio system. The WebCT[8] portfolio was being trialled by 2 respondents and 2 more expected to be using it eventually. The Nuventive iWebfolio[9] was being trialled by 1 respondent. OSP[10] was being used in some departments in 1 institution. Six other systems mentioned as being used or on trial were Profile (developed at the University of the West of England)[11]; Concord Scioware[12]; It'sLearning (a Norwegian VLE mainly used in schools)[13]; Uniservity (a commercial product also mainly used in schools)[14]; PROSPERO (developed at Queen Mary, University of London); Mercury Learning Log; and Microsoft Class Server[15]. 10 other institutions claimed that their own internally-developed system was an e-portfolio.

[4] See http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/
[5] See http://www.eportfolios.ac.uk/ePET/
[6] See http://rapid.lboro.ac.uk/
[7] See http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/lusid/ ; http://lusid.liv.ac.uk
[8] See http://www.blackboard.com/company/press/release.aspx?id=846879
[9] See http://www.iwebfolio.com/
[10] See http://www.osportfolio.org/
[11] See http://www.profile.ac.uk/profile/login.htm
[12] See http://www.concord-usa.com/scio_ov.htm
[13] See http://www.itslearning.co.uk/
[14] See http://www.uniservity.com/
[15] See http://www.microsoft.com/education/classserver.mspx

Who are the target users?

20 institutions (54% of those with an e-portfolio system) said that their system was available to all students across the institution. 11 of these (30%) also made the system available to all staff. 14 institutions were currently only using their system with specific programmes/modules or at specific levels but several of these commented that they were in a pilot stage and were expecting to extend the facility to all students. It was also noted in these comments that some institutions had what they regarded as 'separate versions' of their system for different user groups:

"Two parallel systems – one for undergraduates and taught postgraduates and the other for research students"
"There are a number of 'variations' which have given rise to different versions of X for different audiences"

Sometimes this went as far as completely different systems for different user groups:

" [System A] - postgraduate research students (all faculties)
- *medicine*
- *denstisty*
- *biomedical sciences*
- *speech and language*

[System B] - taught postgraduates
- *other undergraduates"*

Several interesting issues appear to be reflected here, over and above the confusion arising simply through the anarchic nature of HEIs and the lack of centralised planning for IT. One concerns the flexibility of the system itself, the extent to which it can customised to the requirements and preferences of different user groups in the same institution. A second is the effect of external drivers – the Roberts report training requirements in the case of postgraduate research students and the expectations of professional bodies in the case of health care students. A third issue is related to this: the perception within discipline/subject communities of the special requirements of their own area and the need for a tool built with those requirements specifically in mind.

What do you see as the main purpose(s) of this e-portfolio system?

This was a key question in understanding the development of e-portfolios in the UK HE context, where the search for solutions in response to the PDP policy initiative is a unique driver. Because respondents could tick multiple boxes and respondents from the same institution sometimes had different perspectives, absolute numbers of responses for each category rather than percentages are given below:

Table 2: Purposes of e-portfolio systems

To implement PDP	29
To support formal learning/learning to learn	26
To support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts)	30
To support formative assessment	22
To provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment	17
To create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression	24
To support transition between different learning environments (into and from the institution)	19
To support CPD for staff	14

Additional comments included:
" For evidencing achievement; for professional registration"
"Foster independent learning and the concept of the (more) autonomous learner"
"To enhance personal skills and attributes"
"To give students more control over their learning environment"
"To log and assess dental procedures performed"
"Support for end-of-year appraisal (Medicine)"
"To promote reflection"
"To support and develop communities of practice"
" Used to monitor research governance, ethics and health and safety procedures for staff and students".

The emphasis on PDP would have been expected in a UK context: it is interesting that "*to support overall development*" scores as highly. The presentational function is well represented (though not necessarily seen as the same as supporting transition), but no more so than support for learning/formative assessment. Fewer still are exploiting its potential as an assessment management tool. In several cases, multiple responses from a single institution showed variation but it is not clear without further investigation whether this results from different conceptualisation or different uses in different contexts.

There was no discernable pattern of systems adopted related to key purposes. Further investigation is needed to check whether in fact individuals or institutions are attempting to select systems best suited to their main purposes. Even more importantly the question needs to be asked to what extent the system(s) available to individuals and institutions meet their main requirements.

Can learners set viewing permissions for all their data?
Does anyone else other than the learner have routine permission to view their data?

34 institutions responded to this question. 26 respondents said that learners could set viewing permissions for their data, 10 said they could not (multiple responses showed a contradiction in two cases). 7 institutions had systems which gave others besides the learner (such as tutors) routine access to records.

How is the security and authentication of Transcript information assured and maintained?

There was predictably some confusion in response to this question. 39 respondents attempted an answer, if only to say they did not know and refer the question on. The picture that emerged was split between those institutions who had no link between their e-portfolio system and whichever system (presumably their Student Record System) which provided the Transcript (15 respondents) and those where such a link was established (these 7 respondents mentioned single-sign-on or LDAP). Some institutions were planning this link-up but had not yet achieved it. However rather more seemed to see no need:
"not envisaged to be used to record transcript materials, but rather results of reflection and self-appraisal as well as artefacts such as CVs, Personal Statements etc."

This tallies with the findings of the *Progress Files: Are We Achieving Our Goal* survey carried out by the CRA on behalf of the Higher Education Academy during the period from March to June 2005 (see http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/PFWorkingPaper.pdf) which noted that, despite the linkage between Transcripts and Personal Development Planning in Dearing's original vision of the HE Progress File, these developments were typically being implemented by different personnel in different parts of institutions. Not surprisingly different systems were being used and system integration was often a low priority, or positively discouraged by Information Services departments because of worries about security. However this clearly has implications for the use of e-portfolios as a presentation tool and /or to support transition. It may or may not have implications for the support of learning.

What editing rights and facilities do learners have?

This question was designed to tease out the functionality of the systems currently being used. Responses here are given in percentages:

Learners can:	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**	**Total**
Enter, edit and save text	100	0	0	100
Upload files as evidence of learning/competency etc	82	16	2	100
Hyperlink to files as evidence	77	21	2	100
Export files	84	12	4	100

Create their own web page templates	49	40	11	100
See all their data and a list of uploaded and linked files	92	4	4	100
View/link to their developing transcript/awarding body record during study	30	56	14	100
View/link to their institutional transcript as authenticated evidence of achievement after their study	28	58	14	100

In what ways does this system address accessibility?

39 respondents attempted to answer this question. This relatively high level of response might be an indication that the UK Higher Education sector is very aware of the importance of the recent disability anti-discrimination legislation. However the variety of the responses also indicates the very varied progress made by different institutions:
"Users can change their settings, which cover how the font, colour, background etc is displayed - this can be applied throughout the portfolio. Users can also apply style sheets to the system if preferred. The system works with assistive technology software such as JAWS";
"Extensive testing and consultancy by TechDis has influenced design";
"Compatible with W3C and Bobby accessibility standards";
"CSS, scalable font sizes etc. Roving profile across University systems";
"Our VLE has a profile and the ePortfolio system will work with this. Useability testing including students with additional needs will go on. [University X] has a rep on the IMS group looking into accessibility for ePortfolios. Alternatives may need to be considered. Main problem is accessibility of material uploaded by students and shared to other students";
"a limited amount of testing with JAWS screen reader"

and at the other end of the spectrum:

"We rely solely on the accessibility features built into the Blackboard framework by the manufacturer";
"Whatever comes with the software. Probably some of above";
"Browser configuration only";
"It doesn't deal with accessibility".

10 respondents claimed that other accessibility aids could be integrated with their tool, 5 said this was not possible and 27 did not know.

As with other aspects of this survey, the responses to these questions indicate the lack of communication of expertise across many institutions, even in relation to an issue which is acknowledged in law to be an institution-wide responsibility.

What interoperability standards, if any, does the system conform to? Which systems is it integrated/interoperable with?

23 respondents attempted to answer the first question with something more than “don’t know”. The responses evinced quite a wide variance in understanding of the question (it should be remembered that respondents were as likely to be educational developers or careers advisers as technical staff). Six claimed compliance in broad terms: *“with the latest standard (the developers are working with JISC)”; “the PACE section of RAPID meets the general interoperability requirement”.* Five showed awareness of IMS but three of those had not yet achieved compliance: one who had specified IMS LIP, UK LEAP and EUROPASS CV. One claimed conformance to *“W3C recommendations”*. One answered *“Windows/Unix”* and another said *“The database is SQL and the user interface is HTML”.*

These responses show a considerable degree of confusion about interoperability standards. Interestingly, users of the PebblePad system, regarded by some as a leader in terms of interoperability, seemed to have a better understanding than most. Currently many are relying on the word of the supplier, with little real transfer of portfolios between institutions to test out claims.
More respondents (30) attempted the second question, again with varying degrees of sophistication:
“ePARs has a single sign-on within the Portal - ePARs can then be viewed in its own channel. It is integrated with the University’s MIS. Externally it is interoperable with UCAS Apply, the City of Nottingham Passport and [University B’s] ePDP system”;
“UCAS; WebCT; SRIS; Data Warehouse; LDAP”;
“working on interoperability with [College C] through LP3 project”.

Other responses simply mentioned the Student Record system, User Authentication system or VLE with which integration was achieved, “loosely” achieved or in the process of being developed. 6 didn’t know or referred to another source of information: 4 said none.

How much space does the institution allocate to each learner’s records/files?

There was a wide range of responses to this question, 23 respondents attempting a specific answer. 10 said that no limit had yet been set. A few of these were monitoring usage:
“Currently limits are not set, but individual files are around 4mb”
“Situation monitored. Most use in the area of 10Mb, some exceptions 70Mb+.”

Where limits were set they varied from 2 MB to 200 MB but most were in the 10-50MB range.

How long are learner records retained? Are there plans to alter this policy? Is it likely that the institution will offer to continue to host records for their alumni?

29 institutions offered an answer to the first part of this question. 1 institution answered, *"Indefinite, there are no plans to remove records and users can access them after graduation".* 14 said that this was undecided, still under discussion or that a policy was being developed. 5 said their institution retained student records up to graduation, four others cited periods from six months to six years with longer envisaged:
"The Data Protection Policy envisages retaining learner records for at least 6 years after a student leaves and recognises the need to provide personal and academic references for up to 10 years after a student leaves".

Clearly a few of these responses related to Transcript information rather than e-portfolio records, despite the context of the survey. The general picture was that e-portfolio records are too new a problem for institutions to have clearly developed policies. 12 respondents agreed that there were plans to alter the current policy and 16 thought it likely that the institution would offer a hosting service to their alumni in the future.

How did the institution arrive at its current position in relation to e-portfolios?

In view of the recency of many institutions' experience in this area, this was in many ways the most interesting question in the survey! Nearly 40 extended answers were received, giving a rich insight into the decision-making process (or lack of it) that goes on in HE in relation to new technology

We looked first at institutions using existing large commercial VLE suppliers. We found instances of decision-making by inertia:
"Came bundled with Blackboard Academic Suite - which we purchased for Portal functionality. Might as well try it out now we have it";
"Simplest way to go. Didn't want to buy another product. It is scaleable and maintainable";
"Automatically came as part of the updating of Blackboard."

There were slightly more instances of a clear policy to use large commercial vendors:
"The institution's usual policy is not to develop in-house or use opensource software but to rely on big commercial vendors";
"University has a policy of developing as little inhouse software as possible. Looks for software from reliable supplier with support available";
"Blackboard is the institutionally supported VLE and is currently used by over 1000 staff and 15000 students (or thereabouts). It made strategic sense, from an infrastructure and support perspective, to go with the Blackboard solution for e-portfolios";
"As a matter of policy we would buy in a commercial system if such a system existed";
"The decision to pilot pebblepad was taken by ELearning Services at [University X], with senior management support. However it is likely that we

will go forward with the WebCT eportfolio as they provide our MLE and will release the tool with Vista 4 this summer. Whilst the university servers run on Linux most of the software that runs on it is proprietary";
"Don't use open source. Institutional decision to use Backboard".

In contrast, 4 institutions mentioned a policy to develop in-house solutions:
"A tradition that software is usually developed internally to be compatible with other in-house systems";
"developed internally as is the institution's policy"
"[University X] has a IT team with significant experience of building and customising software for the student body";
"The staff system was built using the same architecture as the student system developed previously. Both are in-house solutions".

In at least 6 institutions the decision appeared to have resulted from careful trials, or at least consideration, of a range of products:
"Full external review, exploration of pilots, review of HEFCE/QAA requirements, internal stakeholder analysis";
"No strict policy. Decision about using LUSID was made after careful consideration of alternative systems available. Also important point was the principal developer working at [University Z] and continuing with the project";
"The decision on which system to obtain was based on several factors:
- in-house knowledge and expertise on PDP process;
- in-house technical know and experience of open source software;
- consultation with a sample group of staff and students;
- sourcing part of the software externally";
"The university has a working group for the implementation of progress files. This group has looked at various e-portfolios and is currently supporting the piloting of two systems, Blackboard and Pebblepad";
"We had a number of demonstrations from external companies (there was no intention to develop something internally)";
"We spent quite some time evaluating a range of electronic tools including those at Newcastle, RAPID, Chester, Lucid (Liverpool) together with a number of commercial products from the US. Based on experiences with paper based portfolios and the fact that [University Y] has a long-established VLE (since 1997), an ePortfolio tool was always our favoured option. The tool also needed to be able to be implemented at a institution level, which ruled out products with a discipline base. In addition it was important that any tool supported processes as well as being a repository".

A further sub-set of responses showed that the current position had evolved from involvement in a project (i.e. with external funding):
"Result of jointly developing this system to our requirements as part of a research project";
"RAPID started as a project in one Engineering department but it spread more widely and has proved successful so senior management has supported its use for the whole university";
"External software choices resulted from … software chosen for our Distributed e-Learning Regional Pilot (PebblePad) althought we bought a separate licence to host the institutional pilot".

"ePET developed in-house using OS platforms within Faculty of Medical Sciences, as part of successive collaborative FDTL and JISC projects, building on two prior projects funded by DfES. Institution developed a system initially modelled on first DfES project on centrally supported Microsoft platforms. Now has an ePortfolios Management Group aiming to converge the 2 platforms eg Web services approaches".

Finally there were a few instances of knowledgeable individuals driving decision-making:
"I have largely driven the OSP initiative. The ePDP initiative has been driven by the Head of Student Services…"
"Decision was made by ISS (Information Systems Services) to pilot Concorde as it is interoperable with Blackboard and it appeared capable of delivering all the main outcomes that would be required of an eportfolio(so decision was not academically driven). I am key client for pilot so encourage pilot team to consider education issues. The main purpose of pilot is to help inform the institution about direction for eportfolios".

How is your institution evaluating or planning to evaluate the impact/efficacy of your PDP process? Do you have separate plans to evaluate the e-portfolio tool(s)?

Again, responses showed that institutions were in very different places in relation to evaluation. A few, particularly where funding had come from an external source such as JISC, had a clear evaluation framework involving external evaluators. At the next level, some institutions were evaluating internally using existing staff, eg Faculty TQEF co-ordinators. Where the institution had a CETL with an interest in this area, evaluation plans were being channelled through the CETL. A further tranche of institutions were relying on their existing monitoring and audit procedures.

This left a significant number who declared themselves to be still in the planning stage, sometimes for the expressed reason that they were *"only just thinking about implementation at this point".*

32 respondents, just over half of those who answered this question, said that they had separate plans to evaluate their e-portfolio tool(s).

Summary and conclusions

The e-portfolio field is changing very rapidly, and this survey can claim to be no more than a snapshot, albeit at an interesting juncture, of an ongoing process. With that proviso, some trends can be distinguished:

- Almost all HEIs claimed that PDP had now been implemented in their institution and over three-quarters of these were using some form of electronic tool to support the process.
- Just over half of HEIs surveyed claimed to have an e-portfolio tool or system.
- Implementing PDP and supporting overall development were the most popular purposes for their systems, both cited by nearly all of those who claimed to have a system.
- Presentation/showing was cited by three quarters of respondents who had an e-portfolio, assessment by around two thirds and CPD for staff by a half.
- Commercial vendors who also supply the institution's VLE have the most powerful hold on the market by a significant margin.
- The main challenger is also a commercial system but purpose-built with UK PDP requirements in mind, and facilities for external hosting and support.
- Other systems have achieved some penetration of the market (i.e. they are used in more than four institutions in addition to the institution where they were developed). In this survey, only one of these was an open-source tool.
- Where commercial solutions have been rejected or not considered, open-source solutions generally lag behind one-off, in-house developments.
- Interoperability in terms of inter-institutional transfer is not yet a high priority.
- There is a high awareness of the importance of accessibility issues but only moderate practice.
- However, there is considerable interest in integration of systems within institutions, particularly between e-portfolios, VLEs and student record systems.
- Most institutions still regard themselves as being at a pilot stage and have plans to evaluate their experience. However very few have committed the resources to run trials of different systems in-house.

It was not thought possible to explore through the medium of a questionnaire the kinds of functionality which institutions were currently using and finding useful, and where they wanted more from their systems. To most respondents, the concept was still relatively new. Our experience shows that it is difficult for either educational practitioners or technical staff to identify further requirements in isolation from each other and without extensive trialling. It takes long enough to discover what a system does before one can start thinking about what it doesn't do! However, it is just this kind of information that institutions are seeking.

This makes it important for the HE community to continue to share their experience, to illuminate exactly how systems are being used and why some systems which appear ideal in one context fail to meet the requirements of another. The accumulation of this knowledge depends on continued association between the technologists and the practitioners, each with their own understanding of what is desirable and possible. Furthermore, in the context of the UK national policy on PDP/Progress Files in Higher Education, UK HE has a particular and special role to play in the worldwide development of e-portfolio practice.

Appendix 1: The survey instrument

Surveying e-pdp and e-portfolio practice in UK HE

This survey is addressed to all UK higher education institutions. It runs alongside, and is congruent with, the current HEA/JISC UK HE e-learning benchmarking exercise. It is being conducted by the Centre for Recording Achievement on behalf of the Higher Education Academy. It seeks to identify provision for e-pdp or e-portfolios, by:

- **mapping and identifying existing practice;**
- **documenting the approaches being taken**
- **establishing a directory of practice and key contacts.**

Information supplied by respondents in response to this survey will be confidential. However we may wish to ask supplementary questions as a follow-up and we have therefore requested respondents to identify themselves and to supply an e-mail address/phone number where they can be contacted. We may also wish to put some of the information into a searchable database, subject to permission from individual respondents. Such a database would be available to the community on the CRA website (http://www.recordingachievement.org). In time, subject to the contributions we receive, we also plan to include examples from the USA and elsewhere, making it an international resource. It will also allow us to work collaboratively on identified areas for development to the mutual benefit of all.

As appropriate, please:

- **Pass this request to those within your institution who you feel may be able to complete it most effectively on your behalf. It is quite possible the information requested is held by several different people from the same institution, so multiple responses are quite acceptable.**
- **Advise Janet Strivens, Senior Associate Director, the Centre for Recording Achievement, janet@recordingachievement.org if yourself or an appropriate colleague would prefer to complete this through discussion, and of an appropriate telephone number on which she can contact you to undertake this.**
- **Advise us of a 'nil' return by answering "no" to questions 1 and 3 and going to the "submit" button at the end.**

1. Your name:	2. Your institution:
3. Your institutional role:	
4. Your email	5. Your preferred contact phone number

6. Is Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the process of being implemented in your institution?

If the answer is **NO**, please proceed to question 8.
If the answer is **YES**, please continue with question 7 below.

7. Is the PDP process in your institution supported by any kind of electronic tool or system?

- If the answer is **YES**, but you would NOT describe it as an e-portfolio, please describe it here (this might be, for example, a website or a PDP module within your VLE).
- If the answer is **YES** and you would describe the tool as an e-portfolio, please go to the next question (8).
- If the answer is **NO,** are there any plans to do this in the near future?

8. Do you have in your institution one or more electronic resources which you would describe (separately or together) as e-portfolios?

If the answer is **YES,** please list them here. Please give both the generic name (if there is one) and the institutional name (if this is different).
If the answer is **NO,** please go to question 31a.

We would like you to tell us more about the system you know best. Please describe it using the prompts below. You may not know the answer to some of the questions: please don't feel you have to answer them all, but you may know who else in your institution could answer these questions. It would be extremely helpful if you could enter the contact details for this person against the question.

9. What is the name of the system you are describing?

10. Does your institution host the system/data or is it hosted elsewhere? If so, where?

11. Was it developed in-house? If yes, how was its development funded? If no, where was it obtained from? Under what kind of licensing/use agreement?

12. Is it stand-alone or integrated with another system (eg as part of a VLE/MIS system)?

13. Who are the current target users/learners for this system?
e.g. available to all students across the institution? On specific programmes/modules only? At specific levels (undergraduate/postgraduate) only? Staff users?

14. What do you see as the main purpose(s) of this e-portfolio system? (please check all that apply)

- To implement PDP
- to support formal learning/learning to learn
- to support overall development (including personal and career areas, and experience/learning from less formal contexts)
- to support formative assessment,
- to provide an assessment management tool, for formal summative assessment
- to create a presentational portfolio/showcasing for progression
- to support transition between different learning environments (into and from the institution)
- to support CPD for staff
- Other purposes? (Please state)

15. What guidance and support is provided for users and how? (please check all that apply)

- Guidance on the purpose(s) of the system (online)
- Guidance on the purpose(s) of the system (handout)
- Guidance on how to use the system (online)
- Guidance on how to use the system (handout)
- A tutorial programme alongside to support the e-pdp/e-portfolio process
- On-line tutor/mentor support for feedback
- Any other human resources, such as tutor support, IT support for learner and system, IT developer support for further development.
- Electronic diagnostic tools
- Electronic skills development resources
- Any other form of guidance/support?

16. The following three questions relate to more technical aspects of the system. So if you can't respond to these, but know someone who can, please add their e-mail contact details here, and proceed to question 27:

Management and ownership of information:

17. Can learners set viewing permissions for all their data? If not, who sets permissions for sharing information? (Learner/Department/ School/ Faculty/Institution/ awarding body/company?)

18. Does anyone else other than the learner (tutor, director of studies etc.) have routine permission to view their data?

19. How is the security and authentication of Transcript information assured and maintained?

20. What editing rights and facilities do learners have? Can they:

- enter, edit and save text? (e.g. personal development records)
- upload files as evidence of learning/competency etc? (these might be text, images, audio, video)
- hyperlink to files as evidence? (text, audio etc)
- export files?
- create their own web page templates?
- see all their data and a list of uploaded and linked files?
- view/link to their developing Transcript/awarding body record during study?
- view/link to their Institutional Transcript as authenticated evidence of achievement after their study?

21. Is there a clear copyright/IPR policy viewable to users?
22. Are learners able to view the relevant Data Protection Policy within the e-portfolio system?

Accessibility issues:
23. In what ways does this system address accessibility? E.g. can each learner select preference settings for screen display – font style, size, colours of font and background, which are stored and automatically applied at log-in?

24. Can other accessibility aids be integrated with the tool? (e.g a pointing device rather than keyboard, ….)

Integration and interoperability issues:
25. What interoperability standards - if any - does the system conform to?

26. Which systems - if any - is it integrated/interoperable with?

27. The following two questions relate to institutional-level policies. So if you can't respond to these, but know someone who can, please add their e-mail contact details here, and proceed to question 31:

Storage capacity and storage duration:
28. How much space does the institution allocate to each learner's records and digital files?

29. How long are learner records retained? Are there any plans to alter this policy? Is it likely that the institution offer to continue to host records for their alumni?

30. Can you explain briefly how the institution arrived at its current position in relation to e-portfolios?
e.g. if any of the software was developed internally, is this the institution's usual policy? Does the institution have a policy in relation to open-source software? If some of the software was obtained externally, was this an institutional decision? If not, who made it? How was the decision made about which system(s) to obtain?

31. How accurately do you feel these prompts have helped you to describe your system(s)?

Very accurately/ somewhat accurately/ not really

31a. If you have answered NO to questions 1 and 3, there are no more questions. Thank you. Please submit the questionnaire by going to the "submit" button at the end as nil returns are important to our findings.

If you have answered YES to either question, please continue.

32. Do you have a demonstration site for your system(s) which you would be willing to give permission to access? If so, please enter the URL here.

33. Do you have any other public online information relevant to your system(s) or practice? If so,

please enter the URL(s) here.
34. If you have identified in question 3 more than one system you would regard as an e-portfolio in your institution, and you know of other people who can give us information about it/them, please enter their contact details here.
35. Evaluation issues: How is your institution evaluating or planning to evaluate the impact/efficacy of your PDP process? **36.** Do you have separate plans to evaluate the e-portfolio tool(s)? **37. With practitioners, CRA is currently developing an evaluation toolkit for PDP work, including PDP delivered electronically. Tick the box if you'd like to be kept informed of developments here.**
38. **Would you be willing to give permission for the information you have supplied to be included in an online searchable database? Would you wish to edit the information first?**

Thank you very much for your help. If you would like information about this survey, please contact Janet Strivens, Senior Associate Director, at the Centre for Recording Achievement on janet@recordingachievement.org

Appendix 2: Most widely used systems

Since the survey did not achieve a 100% response rate from all UK HEIs, it was thought useful to include some information from the producers/ distributors of the most widely used products on the numbers and types of institution using or trialling their product, and, where appropriate, the department/subject using the product. Where named, informants are happy to be contacted for more detailed information.

Blackboard (including WebCT)
(See http://www.blackboard.com/uki/)

Although many more institutions use Blackboard as a VLE, 45 institutions (33 HEIs and 12 FEIs) have acquired the Blackboard Content System, which includes the e-portfolio 'extension'. However, the producers do not have information on how many institutions are actually using the e-portfolio functionality.

The WebCT portfolio (launched in July 2006) is being used or trialled in 13 HEIs.

Profile (See http://www.profile.ac.uk/profile/login.htm)
More information from Stephen Gomez at Stephen.Gomez@uwe.ac.uk

Institutions can have their portfolios hosted on the Profile server or universities can set up their own Profile server. The program is not open source as adopters can adapt Profile for their own purposes simply by customising ordinary web-forms.

A total of 11 institutions are currently using the system and it is being trialled in 4 more.
Used to support placements in at least 6 institutions: subjects include Pharmacy, Engineering, Applied Science, Mathematics and Computer Sciences, European Studies and Modern Languages, Politics with Economics, Veterinary Medicine, Science, Dentistry, Systems Engineering.
Used to support PDP in 6 institutions: departments include Psychology, Vision and a School of Agriculture. Used to support postgraduate PDP in one institution.
Being considered for staff CPD in one institution.
Used for 5 Foundation Degrees in one institution
Used for a professional portfolio for the registration of biomedical scientists

ePET (See http://www.eportfolios.ac.uk/ePET/)
More information from Simon Cotterill at S.J.Cotterill@ncl.ac.uk

ePET is a freely available, standards-compliant open source product.

A total of 8 institutions are currently using the system, with trials in other institutions. Used in 4 Medical Schools; 2 Schools of Dentistry; 1 Department of Radiography, 1 Department of IT, 1 FE College. Also used with Contract Researchers and Bioinformatics students.

PebblePAD (See http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/)
More information from Shane Sutherland at sams@wlv.ac.uk

PebblePAD is hosted by Pebble Learning.

A total of 14 institutions and 7 local authorities are currently using the system, with trials in at least 17 other institutions. 25 HEIs are using the system, ranging from fewer than 50 users to over 10.000 users.

RAPID (See http://rapid.lboro.ac.uk/)
More information from Alan Maddocks at A.P.Maddocks@lboro.ac.uk

RAPID was developed as a support tool for Progress File development within the construction industries, and has been through several versions.

Currently there are 14 UK-based HEIs and 2 overseas HEIs licensed to use RAPID, with three more piloting prior to making a decision. Of the 14 UK institutions with a license, 10 are using RAPID, or some aspects of RAPID, on some programmes, often alongside or integrated with other tools within the institution. Departments include the Built Environment (4 School/Departments), Town Planning, Civil Engineering, Product and Engineering design, Mechanical, Aeronautical and Civil Engineering.

There is also a postgraduate version (RAPID PGR).

Appendix 3: Institutions which took part in this survey.

The following institutions took part in this survey, with multiple responses indicated in brackets:

Aston University
Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Bournemouth University
Brunel University
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (2)
Canterbury Christ Church University
City University
Cleveland College of Art & Design
Coventry University
De Montfort University (2)
Glasgow Caledonian University (4)
Kingston University
Lancaster University
Leeds Trinity and All Saints College
Liverpool John Moores University
London Metropolitan University
London South Bank University
Loughborough University (2)
Manchester Metropolitan University
New College Durham
Northumbria University
Oxford Brookes University
Oxford University
Prince Sultan University
Queen Mary, University of London
Queen's University Belfast (2)
Robert Gordon University (2)
Rose Bruford College
Sheffield Hallam University
Thames Valley University
The Open University (UK)
University of Central England
University of Bedfordshire (formerly Luton) (2)
University of Bolton

University of Bradford (2)
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chichester
University of Dundee
University of East Anglia
University of Exeter
University of Glamorgan
University of Gloucestershire
University of Greenwich
University of Huddersfield (2)
University of Hull (2)
University of Leicester
University of Liverpool
University of Manchester
University of Newcastle
University of Nottingham
University of Northampton
University of Paisley
University of Portsmouth
University of Salford
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton (2)
University of St Andrews
University of Strathclyde
University of Surrey
University of Ulster (3)
University of Wales at Lampeter
University of Warwick
University of the West of England
University of Westminster
University of Wolverhampton (5)
University of Worcester
Writtle College
York College
York University