**PDP/Employability/MyFolio Report May 2012**

Kent began piloting e-portfolio software in 2007 with the introduction of PebblePAD. This was done in response to a review of PDP practice at the University in 2006 which found that PDP opportunities existed throughout the curriculum but that they were often so well embedded that they were hard for students to perceive. In 2010 Kent responded to increased national interest in employability with its own employability strategy and by switching to new e-portfolio software, Mahara (MyFolio), which could be rolled-out to all students across the University. MyFolio was introduced at Kent campus-wide in September 2011. Since then 4298 licences have been taken-up. This report will consider three things: whether the e-portfolio has helped to highlight PDP and employability opportunities at the university, how effective the e-portfolio is as a tool to gather, share and promote new PDP practice, and how use of MyFolio has changed students' perceptions of their skills and employability.

1. **The extent to which the e-portfolio has highlighted PDP and employability opportunities at the university.**

   **Introduction**
   One of the aims of introducing new e-portfolio software was to highlight the many opportunities for PDP and employability skills that are available to students at the University. There are two key ways in which MyFolio does this; firstly, it has space within it to provide students with Kent-specific help on PDP (the PDP planner and the skills audit), secondly it has the facility to create group pages within it which represent the different stakeholders who contribute to the Kent employability strategy.

   **PDP planner/skills audit**
   The PDP planner and skills audit are accessible from the dashboard (homepage) of MyFolio. They are written as self-study guides to PDP processes or as complimentary resources for staff to use with their students. The planner contains seven sections within it starting with a page introducing the notion of PDP, the second section aims to help students consider their prior skills and learning, the third section, 'Employability', sets out the skills identified in the university's employability strategy and provides advice on how students can improve those skills, section four explains reflective learning, section five gives information on setting goals and SMART plans, section six lists many of the personal development opportunities which are available to students at Kent and the final section explains the importance of keeping a regular record of personal development so that students can see their progress during their time at Kent. Skills audits are a commonly used tool to start the process of reflection

on skills. The skills audit in MyFolio is a generic questionnaire which students use to rate their confidence levels in skills.

Students' views on MyFolio were gathered during March 2012 via a BOS survey. In total 182 students responded to the survey this represents approximately 4% of users. Students were asked if they used the PDP planner and skills audit. Responses show that only 18% had used it however many students reported that they hadn't known that this resource was available and that had they known they would have used it.

> *"I did not realise there was a PDP planner, I would use it now"*

Feedback on the PDP Planner and skills audit range from some students who found them useful especially the sections on recording skills and goal setting and to others who thought there was too much information or that it was too complex.

**Group pages representing employability stakeholders**

The group function in MyFolio allows representation of all of the different PDP/employability stakeholders at Kent. This has been done by creating group pages representing the services which provide students with skills development opportunities. There are currently five group pages including; the Careers and Employability Service, the Students Union, the Student Ambassadors Scheme, the Academic Peer Mentoring Scheme and Kent Innovation and Enterprise. These groups provide information on the service they represent (much the same as web information) but they also provide the facility for students to become members of the group to exchange information such as experiences of being a student ambassador or peer mentor, and there are forums for students to post questions this gives a sense of a community of users and participation which web 1.0 information cannot provide. This moves the Kent from a situation of publishing information for students to being in the position to facilitate student participation in services which is recommended by O'Reilly (2005).

**Conclusion**

The introduction of MyFolio has been an important element in Kent's drive to raise the profile of PDP and employability opportunities at the University. The PDP planner and skills audit give a structured approach to PDP which was recommended by Dearing (1997). However both of these tools could be improved; the skills audit could be made more subject-specific to follow ESECT's recommendations of presenting skills as 'skilful practices in context' (2006). Representation of employability stakeholder services within group pages brings together all of the opportunities for PDP and employability which provides students with a more

holistic experience of skills development and shifts the information from sharing to participation. However MyFolio has only been available for less than a year, the PDP planner and skills audit require development and group pages for services need to be extended and maintained so that academic schools are represented and new information is updated and chat functions are kept current.

**Recommendations**
- Update the PDP planner on an annual basis to take account of new PDP opportunities at Kent
- Make the planner more visible on the dashboard page and highlight it in training sessions
- Build-in reminders for students (email messages) to prompt them to complete a goal/task
- Collaborate with Schools to develop multiple skills audits which can be discipline specific
- Encourage Schools to create group pages for modules

2. **Effectiveness of the e-portfolio as a tool to gather, share and promote new PDP practice amongst staff.**

**Introduction**
Another key indicator of success for new software is the extent to which colleagues (academics and service providers) engage with it; however there are many barriers to engagement. Colleagues need to be convinced of the efficacy of new software and they require time to introduce it in a professional way. Conole (2010) notes that two of the most important factors in embedding new technology are; giving subject-specific examples of use and providing contacts with experienced colleagues who can give practical advice on usage. Therefore the MyFolio Community of Practice (CoP) was set-up to meet both of those needs and also to enhance awareness within the university of the services which contribute to the success of the employability strategy. It is intended that this group will provide support to current users and a resource bank of ideas for new users. The CoP led a showcase and networking event (Embedding Employability through E-portfolios) which demonstrated the expertise of the CoP and sought to encourage more staff to join.

**MyFolio Community of Practice**
In October 2012 the C&ED team established a 'MyFolio Community of Practice group' to capture and share practice. A MyFolio CoP group page was created and managed by a member of the C&ED team. The group is set-up to allow membership to any Kent staff. The group homepage provides information on four things; a brief description of the purpose of the group, a forum for members to chat, details of all

of the members and space for members to upload pages detailing their use of MyFolio. There are currently 33 members of this group and there are 14 pages detailing practice. A template was provided for the practice pages so that information can be easily accessed.  Telephone interviews and face to face interviews were used to gather feedback on why people joined the group and what they gained from it.

All members of staff who joined the MyFolio CoP did so after encouragement from the PDP Curriculum Developer. Many of the pages were written by the Curriculum Developer after working in collaboration with colleagues on their ideas for portfolio practice in the curriculum or in the wider context of the university. Therefore the main reason for people joining the group was simply because they were asked to. However other secondary reasons were that they wanted to see how MyFolio worked before they used it, they also wanted to avoid mistakes that others had already made and they wanted to learn more about the software.

> *"I wanted to see how it (MyFolio) worked before I used it".*

> *"I wanted to be one step ahead before I introduced it to a group" (of students).*

Most of the feedback on the group has been positive with staff generally finding it to be a useful resource. The main elements that staff want more information on are links to students' pages so that they can see how students are displaying their work and information on what and how colleagues are assessing work in the e-portfolio.

**Embedding Employability through E-portfolios**
In October Kent was successful in getting support from the HEA to join the 'PDP Academy'. This initiated a small working group comprising two academics and two members of staff representing student services to further promote e-portfolio practice at the University. An output of this group was to strengthen the CoP by holding two events, one at Canterbury, the other at Medway, named 'Embedding Employability through E-portfolios'. These events were both held in March 2012, forty five members of staff attended in Canterbury and five in Medway. The aim of the events was to showcase staff and students' work with MyFolio, to encourage further use and create links between colleagues.

Of the fifty staff who attended one of the EEE events, thirteen were academic staff the rest were support staff or staff representing services such as the Careers and Employability Service or the Students' Union. Staff were asked why they attended the event they stated three main reasons; they wanted to get ideas on 'situated

practice', they had been asked to attend by a line manager or they had heard about the e-portfolio and the employability strategy and they wanted to find out more with a view to using it in their work.

*"I want case studies of use from people who are working in a similar context to me. "*

*"I want to see how others are using because I think I'd like to use it next year"*

Feedback on the events was generally positive attendees particularly enjoyed seeing posters of students' pages and talking to them about their portfolio work. However some people said that there was too much information presented which they found overwhelming, and they would have liked to have more time to network and talk to each other. Since the events last month five new academic schools have expressed interest in using MyFolio next year (KLS, SMSAS, the School of Biosciences, the School of Arts and the School of Physical Sciences).

### Conclusion

This has been the first year of full access to MyFolio. Usage has developed from the early adopters such as the School of Architecture and Social Sciences Medway to other areas including Classics and Archaeology, the Centre for English and World languages, Pharmacy and German. Many other Schools have expressed interest in using MyFolio next academic year. The CoP has helped overcome some of the barriers which stop people from engaging with new technology by providing local examples of MyFolio work and professional contacts. The EEE event raised the profile of MyFolio and facilitated face-to-face networking.

### Recommendations

- To continue to record new practice with MyFolio through pages within the MyFolio CoP.
- To collect and share practice on assessment of e-portfolio work
- To continue to encourage students to share 'finished' pages
- To hold annual Embedding Employability through E-portfolios events which showcase work and facilitate networking.


3. **The ways in which use of MyFolio has changed students' perceptions of their skills and employability.**


### Introduction
For Kent the most important reason for introducing new e-portfolio software is to provide students with a coherent way of recording and making sense of all of their

experiences at University so that they feel equipped to make decisions about their futures. The student survey shows that the three main reasons that students used MyFolio were because; it was part of their course, it improved their employability or it helps them to reflect on their personal development. Many students added their own comments most of which were positive:

> *"I have been able to show all of the extracurricular activities I do, and MyFolio is a great way to showcase my small achievements which may not be included in a CV."*

> *"I sorted out the mess of my different life and work experiences"*

> *"I thought it was just a boring blog, then I realised it has lots of functions and I think it will be very useful for me in the future."*

However a few students did not like the software or did not see the point of it:

> *"I do not really like it as I would rather stick to a normal CV"*

**Personal Development Planning**

PDP has been a compulsory part of the HE curriculum since 2005. Students are provided with opportunities to develop their PDP within the Curriculum. PDP is described  by Dearing (1997) as a structured and supported process which helps students to reflect on their learning and plan their future development. The e-portfolio has been designed to support this process. Within the MyFolio survey students were asked five questions about their PDP:

1. Has MyFolio given you a new space for recording your learning and presenting your achievements?
2. Does MyFolio help you to reflect on skills development?
3. Do you think that MyFolio has helped you to assess your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Does MyFolio help you to integrate different aspects of life? (Such as your academic study, paid employment, volunteering, hobbies, sports, reading etc).
5. Do you share your MyFolio pages with others? – If so, who?

Responses to the first two questions were overwhelmingly positive; 70% of respondents said the e-portfolio had given them a new space to record their learning and achievements and 66% said that it helps them to reflect on their skills development. Responses to questions three and four were more mixed; 54% said they thought MyFolio helped them to assess their strengths and weaknesses whilst 47% said that it helped them to integrate different aspects of their lives. Just over a

quarter of all respondents (26%) said that they shared their MyFolio pages with others. The most likely person to share with was an academic tutor.

## Who do you share your Myfolio pages with?



- Academic tutor
- Friends and family
- Personal tutor
- Student services
- Employer
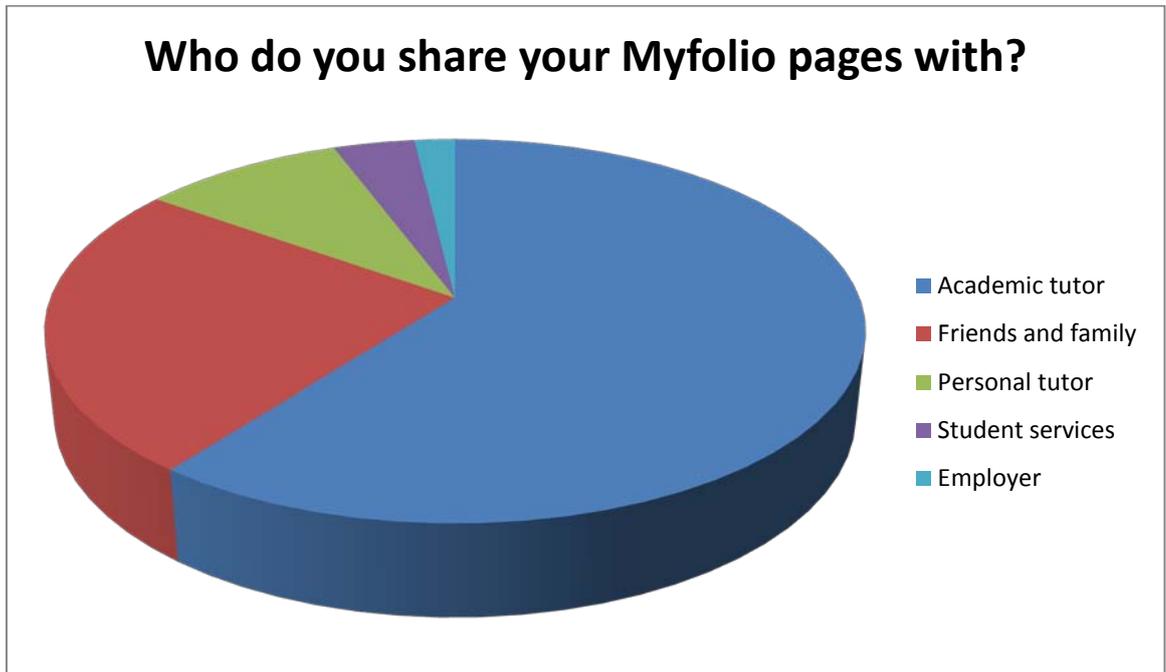
**Employability**

Embedding employability skills in the curriculum is well established in higher education. Many programmes of study have a strong professional focus such as Architecture, Pharmacy and Law. In other subjects there isn't a specific professional focus but students develop skills such as communication, IT, critical thinking and research which are highly transferable to many graduate employment situations. The survey also asked students how likely they were to use their MyFolio pages in a range of employability situations. The chart below shows the responses given.
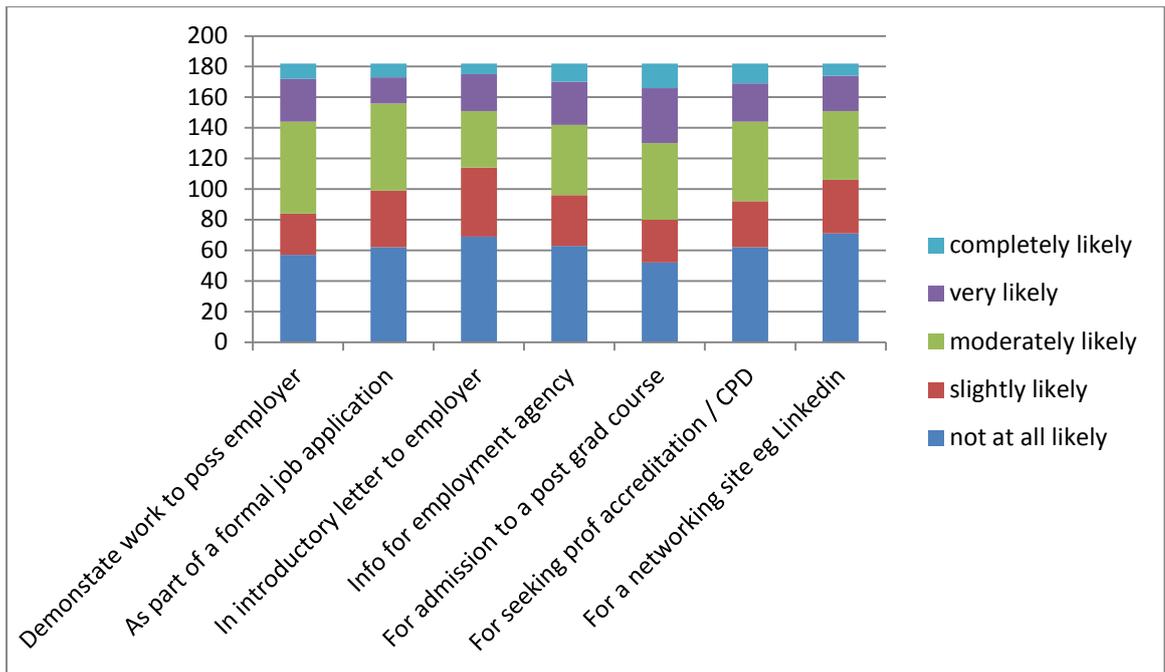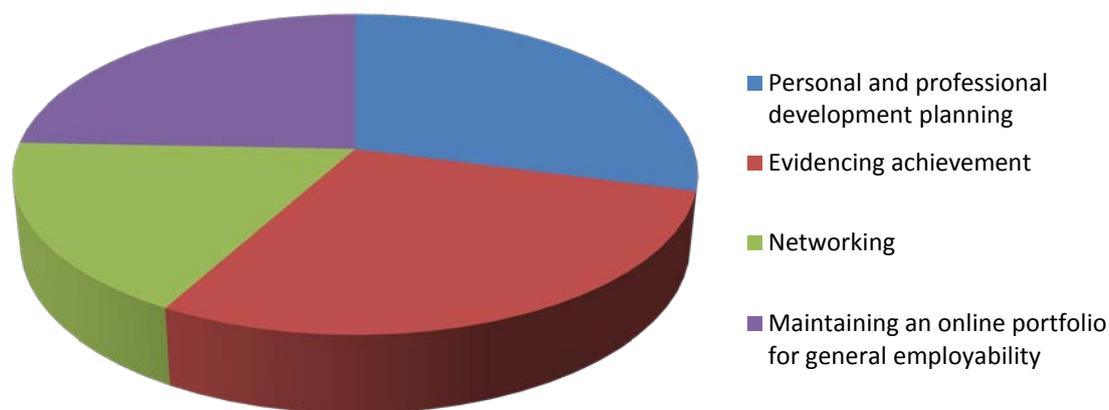
Most students said they would be unlikely to use their e-portfolio directly with prospective employers this view is borne out in the literature (Strivens, 2007) which says e-portfolios are a useful preparation for employability but they do not take the place of a CV. Students were then asked if they would be likely to use MyFolio for more than one year after graduation 58% said that they would be likely to use it whilst 42% said they would be unlikely to use it. Some students gave extra comments on this question expressing the desire to have access to MyFolio for a longer period after graduation.

*"It would be sensible if the university extended it for at least 5 years for its alumni to make it worthwhile filling the information in"*

A follow-up question asked students if they were to use MyFolio after graduation what would they be likely to use it for.

## What would you use MyFolio for after graduation?



Legend:
- Personal and professional development planning
- Evidencing achievement
- Networking
- Maintaining an online portfolio for general employability

**Conclusion**

Kent provides students with many opportunities for PDP and the development of employability skills. MyFolio was introduced to help make these more visible to students and to provide them with a tool which would enable them to clearly articulate their skills to a range of audiences such as tutors, prospective employers and peers. Initial feedback from students gathered through the survey shows that students are using the e-portfolio for its intended purpose and the majority of them find it useful. This seems to have been a good start for the software on which to build greater awareness and use.

**Recommendations**

- Seek guidance from the Careers and Employability Service about how students can use their MyFolio pages to enhance their employability
- Recruit student e-portfolio ambassadors to promote e-portfolios to students, provide training on the software and give peer feedback on pages
- Support more academic staff to embed the use of MyFolio into the curriculum
- Pilot the use of MyFolio as a tool to support the Personal and Academic Support Scheme (PASS)
- Extend students access to MyFolio beyond the current one year post graduation or research open-source software which students can transfer their portfolio contents to after graduation

Overall the first year of MyFolio has been quite successful with nearly a quarter of all Kent students accessing the software. In conjunction with other initiatives at Kent it has helped to raise the profile of PDP and employability activities which are available

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to students. There is also the start of an active MyFolio community of practice amongst academic and service staff at Kent. This has helped to share practice and to raise awareness amongst staff in different areas of the university of all of the PDP and employability related activities at Kent. Finally, the responses from the MyFolio student survey show that students are mainly positive about the software and they are using it to improve their PDP and employability skills. Students site their main source of information and support with PDP and employability as being their academic tutor. It is therefore important for the continued improvement of Kent students' PDP and employability skills that the role which academic tutors play in embedding MyFolio into the curriculum and in the tutorial system is considered and fully supported.

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