

Case Study

Operability of PebblePad as a medium for assessment and PDP development in second year computing students preparing for placement.

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The background context

The University of Derby is an institution proud of its teaching excellence. In this context it is always looking to explore emergent technologies and new software capabilities which will deliver added value to staff and students in terms of delivery, teaching, assessment and development in a new and interactive format.

In September 2009, the School of Computing based in the Faculty of Business, Computing and Law decided to facilitate the use of PebblePad in its Personal and Professional Development Module.

The premise of the pilot was two fold:

1. to engage a 3rd year computing student in employment in administering the pilot and provide them with a work based platform for the submission of their Independent Studies module;
2. to utilise the capabilities of PebblePad to create a portfolio of work and personal development capable of initiating and securing a placement year for second year students and being effective in showcasing a student's skills and capabilities after graduation to potential employers.

The current practice

Students are taught face to face. Technology is not used to facilitate teaching or capture elements of PDP within the development process of students engaging in employability and developing skills fit for purpose. C.V. production is paper based and involves large scale administration to support the students in procuring placement. Paper based engagement does not fit with employer practises, which is largely electronically based for job application purposes. Student records for PDP are not portable or accessible after graduation.

Assignment hand in is a manual process and feedback is provided by a paper based system.



Feedback in this format does not allow for continuous summative assessment or a portable record of formative assessment.

The challenge

- Student engagement with virtual environments provides a driver for this change.
- Opportunity to utilise new technology and software in an assessed pilot programme.
- Electronically recorded pro-forma of professional development, portable and accessible to students after graduation.
- Integrated environment for academic work, professional development and access to social networking sites.
- Engage with the student employability agenda by securing funding to employ a third year computing student to administer the PebblePad platform and train students in its use, ensuring timely access to materials and engagement with assessment criteria.
- Provide the employed student with project management experience and a basis for their 3rd year independent studies module.

The approach

Six months before proposed project start date in September 2009

- Dean's approval was sought and gained for the project.

Four months before project start date

- visits were made to colleagues at other institutions to look at the feasibility of the project.

Three months before project start date

- the Module Leader was presented with a project plan and the perceived value and benefits of the project, and became a stakeholder in agreeing to allow the preparation for placement module to be taught, administered and

assessed via PebblePad.

- funding was secured from the Student Experience Strategy Group to secure a salary for the 3rd year student.

One month before project start date

- interviews of third year students were undertaken having first advertised the post via the Student Employment Agency and via text to third year computing students. PebblePad Administrator employed.

A model was created for co-operation between academic, administrative and student communities via dialogue and project planning. Academic matters were to be agreed by the Module Leader and structures were to be developed by

the PebblePad Administrator. The Administrator was to be managed as a member of Faculty Administrative staff and to be integrated into the team. The PebblePad Administrator was to

work closely with the student body ensuring access and skills sets of students meet required levels to engage with the project effectively.

The issues

Some students showed resistance to the concept of handing in assignments electronically. However, with patient guidance and open and transparent communication, the student body has engaged fully.

Some students who were unable to enrol fully at the beginning of term due to financial difficulties were unable to access the system in the first two weeks. Alternative manual methods were used for this small group of students. There was no resistance politically due to the University moving to electronic hand in September 2010.



The result

The Module is now fully functional in PebblePad. Employers have welcomed the opportunity to engage with electronic submission of CVs and portfolios of student's work. The PebblePad Administrator is essential to the project and being a student who has been on placement and undertaken this module has been a big benefit.

The assignment brief and notes have been posted onto the platform to include the required descriptors in order to meet the learning outcomes.

“ Students have used the PebblePad gateway in the facilitation of the assignment hand-in process. ”

The system has given evidential credence to correct hand-in within agreed formats and timescales. Students have welcomed this transparency and the opportunity to hand-in work off site. Feedback from this has been very positive. The Tutor has used the gateways to give individual feedback and supply grades across elements of their work. The opportunity to give more formalised and evidenced feedback has again received a very positive response both from the tutor and the students. Students have also had the opportunity to clarify aspects of

the feedback that require further explanation on their behalf.

Further informal use of the platform has been undertaken by students involved in project work as part of other modules outside of the pilot module. Students are now confident with its use and will continue to use the system when out on placement to record their achievement and assessments.

The student who administers the project is using the web folio as a means to track his development and the progress of his dissertation. The student is finding PebblePad very useful as it allows him to collate his thoughts and ideas for future use via the use of the mobile application. The student feels that there could be some improvement in the administration side of the PebblePad gateways, for example the ability to include support for students with extenuating circumstances.

The student found that administering PebblePad was easy, clear and straight forward. He felt that he was able to accomplish the resolution of any problems within acceptable time frames

and was able to help fellow students with their uploading, sharing and gateway access.

The process will be repeated for 2010/2011

The learning

- Essential that all stakeholders are fully engaged. Would have welcomed the opportunity to give the student body more notice of the proposal.
- Employability of students can ensure that the student body has someone of their own background available to answer their queries and effectively reassure them. Some resistance to the authority of the student employee in the first instance.
- Timescale for full functionality of a new project is around 9 months in total.

In brief

- Students are resistant in the first instance and engagement should be sought before the new academic year to ensure students fully understand the project and its perceived outcomes.
- Employing a student to administer the project technically is very positive both in terms of the student body and the employability agenda. Can be added to HEA.
- Employers welcome the electronic nature and access to the students' portfolio when access is granted by the student.
- Students welcome the opportunity to manage the environment and have the opportunity to have an integrated social networking environment.
- Project has provided a basis for a third year Independent Studies assignment.

Acknowledgements

Case study by Scott Jones and Claire Bylo
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