

# making the case

## Four fab ideas – including marking on iPads and the ‘why?’ question

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### **Theme(s)**

**Learning:** Reflection, Graduate Attributes, Employability

**Teaching/Professional practice:** Managing e-Assessment

**Organisation:** Environmental Impact

### **The background context**

These case studies and examples are drawn from various schools and departments across the University of Edinburgh. It is important to note that most of what is described only went live in the last few months.

At the University of Edinburgh, PebblePad is centrally supported and offered to all students and staff members. In my professional role, I am advising on how educators can enhance their current practices and setups using the PebblePad system. By introducing the system to new groups of users, I learn more about the critical factors for a successful implementation. I am very fortunate to be working with enthusiastic and passionate academics and administration colleagues who are coordinating these projects locally while making use of my ‘central’ PebblePad advice and support.

### **Why PebblePad?**

This snapshot of some of the recent PebblePad-linked projects illustrates the diversity of areas which can benefit from using the system. It also demonstrates how flexible the system can be when coping with tasks that normally belong to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) area (assignment collection).

### **The case studies/examples**

This review covers four recent and some very recent PebblePad-linked initiatives at the University of Edinburgh:

1. School of Law – collection and marking of all assignments

2. Nursing Studies – submitting e-dissertations and developing professional eportfolios
3. EUSA Volunteering Log – logging reflection and volunteering hours
4. MyEdGE and WAVE webfolios – recording skills developed through a variety of experiences

### **The approach**

The number of courses and programmes using PebblePad at the University of Edinburgh is growing. However, almost all of them use the system differently. They range from collecting and marking assignments online to recording reflection about extra-curricular activities. These four examples document a small variety of ideas for which PebblePad can be used at a university.

#### **1. School of Law**

*(A group of projects coordinated locally by Gillian Black, James Chalmers, Caroline Colliston, Nick Dyson and Jessica McCraw)*

During the first semester of 2011/12 the School selected PebblePad as its assignment collection tool. This covers all Undergraduate (UG), Postgraduate (PG), PhD and Centre for Professional Legal Studies students as well as early career and contract researchers.

Students are using PebblePad to upload and submit their assignments to relevant gateways. The School of Law is now using a total of 150 gateways for each semester; most gateways have at least five tutorial groups. Hundreds of submissions are sent during normal teaching weeks. The gateways are at their busiest around major work deadlines when 1000's of files are submitted.

Once the assignments are submitted, the gateways are locked automatically at the deadline. In order to keep the process fully digital, most markers are using iPad tablet devices to open and read the assignments. If necessary, they can insert in-line comments by converting documents into pdf files and re-submitting them as attachments to feedback comments. All submissions appear anonymous to markers who sometimes use the grade field to indicate their progress while marking (especially when working with huge numbers of files). Many PG dissertations are double-marked with internal comments exchanged via the validation functionality. Once the final grades and comments have been agreed, they are released to students through PebblePad by a course admin person. UG submissions are marked using a structured feedback form which was built in the Form Builder. All work submitted via PebblePad is also submitted to Turnitin to identify potential plagiarism. PebblePad does not at present allow for Turnitin reports to be anonymised. These, therefore, are not automatically made available to examiners. Instead, the Teaching Office and Postgraduate Office review the PebblePad reports and notify examiners. The examiner is then asked to review the originality report produced by PebblePad and advise on whether this creates any cause for concern requiring further investigation.

Accessing PebblePad gateways on iPads is seamless through the locally authenticated gateway 'direct login' link where tutors can log straight into the gateways area, skipping the Flash interface altogether.

This official and compulsory use of PebblePad allowed students to get familiar with the system and encouraged many course organisers to introduce more activities on top of collecting essays and dissertations. These include:

- gateway blogs for posting extra material and links for students;
- recording PhD progress using individual blogs shared between PhD students and their supervisors;
- School-wide competitions where participants can submit their entries via open-for-all gateway blogs;
- webfolios used for collaborative projects and group work;
- mentoring of early career and contract researchers via the log tool.

This big group of new initiatives is expected to be evaluated at the end of the 2011/12 academic year. The students, the academic staff and the admin support will be consulted on future improvements to the initial setup.

## 2. Nursing Studies

*(Projects coordinated by Anne Robertson and Jillian Taylor)*

Within Nursing Studies at all levels, professional requirements mandate the need for the maintenance of documentation to demonstrate competencies and experiences as well as illustrate academic performance and practical skills. Therefore, recording artefacts relating to academic/professional progress is a key component of their study.

### Digital essays/dissertations

The first group of Nursing Studies students who were introduced to PebblePad in 2009 included postgraduate students taking part in the MSc in Advancing Nursing Practice programme. Within that programme the traditional 'supervised reading' component was replaced with PebblePad webfolios (worth 20, 40 or 60 credits). Each student was given detailed guidance before they started work on their webfolios. The

personal and reflective nature of compiling a webfolio allowed students to deploy more flexible ways of presenting the topic of their self-directed study. In their collection, students compiled text, multimedia (pictures, sound and hyperlinks to video clips). Students developed and submitted the webfolios for assessment.

Assessment of webfolios is based on the same criteria as used for marking paper-based work. For example, elements such as referencing, cohesion and arguments are considered as well as the overall integrity of the piece of work. ePortfolio marking guidelines have been designed which highlight the importance of reflecting professional/personal growth, including evidence of self-reflection and assessment and identifying future professional/personal development.

From these early steps, the proposed new curriculum for UG and PG nursing students has seen many paper-based activities related to professional development and reflective learning being gradually converted so that they can be conducted through the eportfolio system. Therefore at the moment all traditional PG and UG nursing assignments (essays and dissertations) are submitted via PebblePad gateways.

### Nursing Practice ePortfolio

This is in an ongoing pilot project that started in February 2012. Selected students were offered an option of completing some sections of their paper-based nursing practice portfolio via PebblePad. As most of the sections of the portfolio need to be signed off by the NHS mentors, the students have been equipped with on-loan netbooks (including 3G dongles) which they can carry to their practical sessions at hospitals.

A webfolio consisting of all the relevant online versions of the forms was created (using the Form Builder). Some sections of the webfolio can only be edited by mentors. Each form is individually signed off by a mentor, while the academic tutor is overseeing the whole process through the gateway.

In order to minimise the network usage, the webfolios are accessed and edited directly through the gateway (no need for loading up the 'data heavy' Flash interface).

By the end of the 2011/12 academic year, the project should produce useful feedback (from students, mentors and academic tutors) on how this new approach can be improved and expanded.

## 3. EUSA Volunteering Log

*(Project coordinated by Hilary Wardle)*

Edinburgh University Students' Association is coordinating many types of volunteering activities for students. In order to recognise students' hard work and contribution to their communities, the association has recently introduced the Edinburgh Award. Once documented, the students' achievements in this area will appear on their degree transcripts (HEAR).

PebblePad is being used to record and archive the details of each participant's volunteering journey. Using the Activity Log tool, students have a set goal of at least 30 hours which they need to document in detail.

There are two face-to-face sessions (one at the beginning of the process, one at the end). In between, students are recording their volunteering activities and taking part in two online self-reflective exercises (structured forms with self-assessment

sections, goals and questions which are to be 'sent to' their logs). All the logs are monitored through the gateway by the project supervisor.

The pilot of the award started in February 2012 (ending in April 2012) and students are officially required to carry out 30 hours of volunteering during that time. If the pilot is successful, an expanded version will be run next year which should see volunteers log 100 hours over the course of an academic year.

#### 4. MyEdGE and WAVE Webfolio

*(Projects coordinated by Gavin McCabe)*

These webfolios are available to all University of Edinburgh students through a gateway (in the main gateway so that they can be copied by all users).

The MyEdGE Webfolio focuses on 'Graduate Attributes' – the range of skills, abilities and approaches students can develop during their time at the University of Edinburgh. Recognising and taking control of their development should help give students the 'Edinburgh Edge' – the journey from the students they are to the graduates they want to be.

The MyEdGE webfolio consists of:

- the Bigger Section section (explaining the Graduate Attributes Framework and the concepts of Enquiry & Lifelong Learning, Aspiration & Personal Development, and Outlook & Engagement);
- the Graduate Attributes profile tool (with question sets and self-rating scales);
- the MyEdGE blog which can be used to record thoughts about the process of developing graduate attributes.

The WAVE webfolio is a resource that helps students make the most of any Work And Volunteering Experiences they may have while at University by focussing on their personal progress.

All students can take a copy of the webfolio which features:

- four 'What? How? Why? Now what?' chapters with exercises and advice;
- the WAVE Graduate Attributes – rating oneself against individual skills and abilities that may relate to their work;
- the WAVE Blog – noting thoughts related to work experiences;
- Further Resources – a separate informative webfolio with links and content about various work and volunteering-related issues.

The use of the MyEdGE and WAVE templates is not mandatory. However, they are now officially recommended to students by our Careers Services (Employability) department.

#### The result and lessons learnt

Since the introduction of PebblePad at the University of Edinburgh in 2009 I have been focusing on expanding its usage across the institution. Over time, I have come up with some observations on the critical success factors. This recent group of projects have consolidated my views on how PebblePad can be utilised more widely and efficiently.

There are always three groups of participants that need to be fully aware of why the tool is being introduced (or even why there is a need for a new tool to be introduced): the students;

the academic staff; and the admin support. The answer to the 'why?' question is the most crucial here. There always should be a clear reason that is understood by all the three parties. However, the answer to that question may be different depending upon the group. Using the School of Law as an example, I will try to answer the 'Why?' question:

- Academic staff:  
Why? ..... because PebblePad provides me with seamless access to all my students' work through my iPad
- Admin support:  
Why? ..... because we have full control over the assignment collecting process and everything can be easily archived
- Students:  
Why? ..... because PebblePad gives me a secure space for all my assignments and feedback from all my courses/years

Again, all the three groups need to know their role in the process – and the technical part should be simplified to the maximum. PebblePad is a complex tool, but it should be presented as a very simple and obvious solution. When introducing PebblePad to a new group, one cannot afford to spend too much time on explaining the complex technology. Once more, I believe that most of the introduction time should be spent on answering the 'Why?' question. For example, if a marker is only interested in viewing assignments, they should be able to log straight into the gateway area. In the Nursing Studies case, when accessing webfolios using limited connectivity (3G network), the webfolio interface should be as light as possible. When asking students to keep a log (the volunteering example), although it is very easy to create one in PebblePad, the activity log can be pre-structured and distributed to all students through the 'copy and auto-publish' route. It removes an extra step and leaves more time for the 'Why?' question.

#### Perfect conditions for a personal learning space

When it comes to creating the perfect conditions for widening the use of PebblePad, it seems that the best starting point is to make it compulsory for students to submit their assignments to PebblePad gateways (e.g. the School of Law case). Using this route, students and staff become extremely familiar with the system very quickly. Introducing further reflective or extra-curricular activities is then far more straightforward as the vehicle is already there. Moreover, I strongly believe that any personal learning space is incomplete without these important 'fruits of education' – essays and dissertations with relevant feedback and grades.

This again, allows us to draw an even more convincing case when presenting PebblePad to students. When all their learning artefacts are orderly kept in one space, attaching them as evidence to their graduate attributes, and eventually creating an insightful CV becomes far more seamless and efficient (leaving some students with more time to spend on Facebook!).