

making the case

The use of PebblePad for reflective practice in the Keele MPharm programme.

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Theme(s)

Learning: Reflection

Teaching/Professional practice: Continuing Professional Development

The background context

PebblePad is used within the School of Pharmacy by undergraduate pharmacy students in all four years of the MPharm programme. PebblePad hosts the templates for a reflective portfolio of personal professional development over the duration of a student's studies. The portfolio is completed over the course of an academic year with each student having access to a professional mentor. This professional mentor is a member of staff who maintains Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records as part of their professional requirements. The majority of these mentors are registered pharmacists but our list includes a Registered Pharmacy Technician and a medic. In years 1 and 2 of the course, each student has formal, timetabled meetings with their mentor, allowing full discussions around reflective practice. Students are enabled to develop their own reflective "style". In the final two years of the course, students are encouraged to reflect independently but have access to a mentor for guidance should they wish it.

Why PebblePad?

PebblePad provides a feature to 'push' web-based templates out to students for them to complete as our course progresses. Templates can be designed to be structured or without any structure inviting the student to reflect on their own experiences individually and without any explicit direction. The facility for staff and students to share the same space and for it to be academically led (where necessary) helped its adoption into the MPharm programme.

Students were able to assign their reflective work against a set of key course themes or objectives. Consistently recording work against a set of pre-defined targets, whilst also providing

the student with features to record work against their own defined goals, retained the principle that a personal portfolio is a student's individual space.

To compliment this, PebblePad's close integration with our Learning Management System (LMS) Blackboard 9 and our central student records system (SITS), allowed our students to consider their portfolio as an extension of their existing teaching and learning online space. Students used their Keele username and password to access many online services, and to grant their access to their portfolio directly from the LMS. Additionally, administrators did not have to manage a separate set of usernames and passwords to implement the service within the School, saving significant time and effort, as well as avoiding confusion for the student on how to access the service.

The purpose

There are two main drivers for the introduction of a reflective portfolio of professional development to the MPharm course.

The first, and arguably the most important, is the role that reflection plays in personal development – both academically and personally. In 2000, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) produced guidelines on HE Progress Files (which emerged from the Dearing Report in 1997). An integral part of a student's Progress File is the aspect of Personal Development Planning (PDP). The QAA define PDP as "...a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development." (QAA, 2000). The Professional Portfolio used by the Keele MPharm aims to deliver this process over

the four years of the MPharm degree. It does not, however, form a part of the students' HE Progress file. Rather it takes the principles of such a file and applies them to the context of the profession of pharmacy.

Moon (2001) defines reflection as:

“... a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess.”

(p2)

Within the context of the MPharm degree, students are encouraged to reflect upon situations or incidents that have, in some way, made them think seriously about an issue or change the way they approach certain situations. This process then allows them to use what they have learned about themselves and apply it (potentially) to future, similar situations. Whilst most individuals go through this process at a subconscious level, a reflective portfolio encourages active recording of the thoughts and feelings involved. Within the MPharm Professional Portfolio, the emphasis is on what the student has learned **about themselves**, rather than what facts they may have added to their knowledge base.

The second driver for the production of a Professional Portfolio is that of the requirements of the profession of pharmacy. Once qualified, an MPharm graduate completes one year of pre-registration training. Over the course of this training year, the graduate must compile a portfolio of evidence which is assessed by their tutor (GPhC, 2012a). This portfolio forms part of the formal assessment of the pre-registration trainee prior to registration as a pharmacist. Once registered, a pharmacist is required to record their CPD activities, preferably in an electronic format endorsed by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). Pharmacists must make 9 CPD records annually and these can be called in by the GPhC at any time for revalidation purposes (GPhC, 2012b).

The Professional Portfolio used on the Keele MPharm programme is therefore designed to prepare undergraduate pharmacy students adequately for the demands of reflective practice once qualified and registered as a pharmacist.

The approach

The Professional Portfolio is compiled in a step-wise process over the four year period of the MPharm degree. The School of Pharmacy at Keele University is a new school and so the Professional Portfolio was an entirely new development. PebblePad allows the uploading of pre-defined templates for the students to complete online and tutors can record electronic feedback on the work as well as giving face-to-face feedback. The detail of each year of the Portfolio is outlined below.

Level 1

Portfolio comprises: Profile Statement 1, six reflective pieces, Profile Statement 2.

In Profile Statement 1 the student is asked to write a 500 word reflective statement covering the following points:

- Their understanding of the role of a pharmacist.
- Their understanding of the role they anticipate taking on in their career as a pharmacist.
- Their hopes and concerns about the coming year as an MPharm student at Keele.

The first two points allow the students to begin to plan their professional development, while the third allows them to begin to plan their academic development.

The six reflective pieces are structured. The student is asked to describe and reflect upon incidents that have affected them either personally or professionally. These incidents must be recent (i.e. to have happened within the four months prior to the start of the academic year and during the academic year itself). They are then asked to link their reflections to personal development within one (or more) key topics. These key topics have been chosen to reflect the essential attitudes and values in which a first year pharmacy student should show a degree of competency and insight. The key topics are: professionalism, communication, collaboration and teamwork, problem solving, and self-management.

The second Profile Statement allows students to reflect upon their progress during the academic year both academically and personally.

Level 2

Portfolio comprises: Profile Statement 1, six reflective pieces, Profile Statement 2.

Profile Statement 1 is a 500 word reflection upon the student's personal and professional progress during their previous year's studies and any experience (work or otherwise) they undertook during the preceding summer vacation.

The six reflective pieces follow the same structure as for the first year, but the key topics are slightly different to reflect a higher level of skills and attributes. The key topics are: professionalism, communication, self-management, negotiation skills, and leadership skills.

The second profile statement mirrors that of Level 1.

Level 3

Portfolio comprises: Profile Statement 1, SWOT analysis, two full CPD cycles (action plans), Profile Statement 2.
Profile Statements 1 and 2 mirror those of Level 2.

At Level 3, students are asked to complete a personal, reflective SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). They are advised to consult their peers to gain insight into how others perceive them. Once the SWOT analysis is complete, students must identify a specific skill and a specific area of knowledge to improve during their third year of studies. The reflective action plan that is then developed for each of these two weaknesses is modelled upon Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle; this is a proactive learning cycle. The Keele version follows the four steps outlined by Kolb: active experimentation (planning to learn), concrete experience, observations and reflections, and concluding/learning from the experience. As with the previous levels, a standard template is available on PebblePad for the students to complete for both the SWOT analysis and the action plans.

Level 4 (M level)

Portfolio comprises: Profile Statement 1, seven CPD cycles, Profile Statement 2.

Profile statement 1 mirrors those of Level 2 and 3.

At this point in their academic career, the aim is to prepare students for their forthcoming pre-registration training year and the CPD requirements of the pharmacy profession. For that reason, the templates used at Level 4 are (almost) exact replicas of those used by the GPhC for pharmacists to record their CPD (see Plan and Record (GPhC, 2011, pp15-18)). Students are asked to complete seven reflective cycles based upon activities they have undertaken during the four months prior to the start of, and during their final year of studies.

Profile Statement 2 is a 500 word reflective summary of the students' development over the course of their degree studies and their thoughts on their forthcoming pre-registration training year.

Assessment

The Professional Portfolio is not graded but is assessed on a satisfactory/not satisfactory basis at the end of each year of study.

The result

PebblePad has provided us with a much more flexible platform for the production of eportfolio entries. Our previous system (the "bolt-on" portfolio element of the Blackboard Vista VLE) required students to upload templates prior to completion, a level of complexity many students found difficult to overcome. PebblePad allows us to pre-populate students' eportfolios with our own webforms which the students can complete on-screen, without the need for students to complete any prior setup work on their own portfolio.

PebblePad also allows submission of work via Turnitin (the antiplagiarism software) by enabling the students to convert their eportfolios into either .doc or .rtf files. When using the Blackboard system, three days' worth of IT technician time had to be factored in to convert all of the portfolio entries to pdf files for submission through Turnitin. This time has now been regained and the students have been empowered to accept the responsibility for the submission of their completed work.

The ability to set up a shared set of 'tags' for students of our School allowed us to push out to students a set of common goals where we wished to monitor their achievements. Previously this had to be specified in an induction session, and students were asked to pre-populate their own 'tags' which made the organisation of each student's portfolio inconsistent and potentially open to interpretation.

The Professional Portfolio has been running for six years now, two of which using PebblePad as the eportfolio system. A full review of the portfolio requirements will be carried out during July and August 2012 to incorporate more reflection upon academic progress as well as professional progress, the aim being to bring in more of the aspects of PDP within HE as outlined by the QAA (QAA, 2000).

The impact

The portfolio has been very successful in developing students' abilities as reflective practitioners. The professional mentors have found the comment facility to be extremely valuable for

reinforcing feedback given in face-to-face meetings. Access to previous years' work has also proven beneficial for students in the later years of the course as they apply the skills learned in the first and second year to the more complex reflective pieces. Most final year students instinctively include reflections upon their learning in their CPD records despite the fact that the CPD templates do not state a need for reflection. Two major benefits of the use of an electronic portfolio have emerged. Firstly, there is the flexibility for staff members to review work whenever and, to some extent, wherever, required. Secondly, students can share their reflective work with other individuals or organisations external to the Keele School of Pharmacy, which they are encouraged to do when applying for vacation work experience placements.

Lessons learnt

The flexibility of an eportfolio to be able to meet the needs of the end users is vital; PebblePad has provided this. One barrier that has been encountered is the desire for students to evidence their activities. Our forms were initially designed in a hurry as implementation deadlines were very close. At the time we were not aware of the facility to make direct links between templates and uploaded material in students' asset stores. In our upcoming review of the use of the Professional Portfolio we will be amending and improving our webforms to include this facility.

In brief – making the case for PebblePad

- A very flexible platform allowing a variety of uses.
- Templates can be custom-made to allow structured PDP and CPD to be recorded.
- Students can see their progress over a period of time.
- Close integration with the Learning Management System.

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