Designing a faculty-wide PebblePad strategy for future readiness

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A case study from PebblePad's 2016 'Future Ready' conference on preparing and equipping learners for their journey.

The Context

The context of this case study is an entire faculty (Health) within which programmes use PebblePad to different degrees and in different ways to meet pedagogic goals and prepare students for employment. The range goes from programmes with strong and innovative use (Midwifery, Radiography) to programmes that have almost no use, legacy misunderstandings of the system, and/or negative associations with it.

The Problem

This varied use was causing issues with student satisfaction and staff workload, and ultimately equipping some cohorts to be more future ready than others. Change was clearly needed and a dedicated faculty working group was set up. It called for a faculty-wide strategy. The aims were:

- to set an accessible level of minimum use standards which would enhance our graduates' employability and which all programmes could be supported to reach;
- to give recommendations to enhance already strong users;
- to make both standards and recommendations open enough to allow for different approaches as befitting the discipline, level, and mode of attendance; and
- to clearly show who was responsible for what in implementing this strategy.

The Approach

We set up a working group with academics, administrators, educational developers with specialisms in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), and a student representative. The group met several times to feed forward and collate ideas on current uses of PebblePad across the faculty, and to record issues with use. This information gathering process included a staff survey as well

as oral reports from working group members on their own and colleagues' experiences, including student voices. Early on it was decided to expand the group to include academic representatives from each school within the faculty; this proved vital to getting a complete picture and also to building academic buy-in, especially with schools with little or negative experience of PebblePad.

From collating and discussing the various data, the working group identified that the PebblePad Strategy should aid with (re)design of programme assessment strategies, should have inclusive minimum standards that allowed for large variance in programme type (e.g. short courses, distance learning, pre- and post-degree levels), and should include support for all staff and students. A strategy was drawn up to address these aims and which also presented the ideas within the context of the wider university strategy to ensure the plan's relevance and sustainability in future.

The strategy, presented in the next section, went through various iterations as the working group hashed out details to ensure that all stakeholder needs were met and that implementation would make both students and staff more future ready. The faculty's Learning and Teaching Committee approved the strategy, recognizing eportfolio-based learning as a key way to deliver Bradford's Curriculum Framework goals and to prepare students for future employment. Programmes are now beginning to engage with either the minimum standards or best practice recommendations according to their current level of PebblePad use.

The Results

The strategy consists of four discrete parts:

1. How the strategy aligns with University of Bradford's (UoB) institutional goals and strategic vision, in particular with our Curriculum Framework (University of Bradford, 2014).
   This part is omitted from the current case study as its specificity is unlikely to be helpful to other HEIs or organizations looking to design a similar PebblePad strategy for future readiness, but it is worth noting how important it is to highlight institutional fit to ensure senior management buy-in and sustainability of the project in the long-term. The pedagogic aims and clarity of our Curriculum Framework (ibid.) also proved deeply helpful in guiding the 'path' understanding of the strategy, allowing us to present use requirements at the holistic programme level.

2. The strategy itself, i.e. minimum use standards and best practice recommendations accompanied by technical considerations where needed.
   This is broken up into four areas following the linear progression of student experience: induction; the student learning path; assessment (which should be considered an element of the path but is presented separately here for clarity); and lifelong learning. The designing of programmes is of course a non-linear, recursive process so it is not suggested that

programme designers work through these four areas from start to finish. The finished curriculum, however, should form a cohesive whole across the four areas.

3. A full list of who is responsible for what in implementing this strategy.
   All stakeholders are included: senior management, programme and module leaders, academics, administrators, the Centre for Educational Development (where pedagogic design and TEL is housed in our institution), students, and IT Services. While other institutions may divide these responsibilities differently, the most important element is that the responsibilities are spelled out clearly and pragmatically, with support developed to help each stakeholder group do what is asked.

4. The plan for how this strategy will be disseminated and reviewed on an ongoing basis.
   This part is also omitted here for space considerations.

Relevant extracts from Parts 2 and 3

Part 2 - PebblePad Strategy

   a. Induction/first weeks

Effective induction can play a key part in student success, particularly for international students (HEA 2014) and mature students (Bolam & Dodgson 2003), and is also required by the QAA (2013). Good and ongoing introductory support is particularly salient for PebblePad as research suggests students may need up to two months to understand the digital portfolio paradigm (Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera 2009). As PebblePad use is a programme requirement in this strategy, programme induction and/or initial weeks must at minimum:

1. Introduce students to PebblePad in context so that students can understand its purpose both during their degree and after they graduate (PebblePad accounts are free for life if students convert to an alumni account before leaving).
2. Show students how to log in/log out, use the Asset Store and Resource Centre, and use the Help menu.
3. Provide explicit, contextualised support and practice where PebblePad is used for summative assessment for the first time.

Best practice recommendations:

4. The purpose of use (#1 above) should be revisited throughout the curriculum to encourage students to draw connections between their current PebblePad use and future use in employment.

b. Student path

Students and staff benefit from a joined-up learning path that links modules into a coherent programme, allowing for feedback on literacies and knowledge learnt over time rather than just within a single module (Hartley & Whitfield 2012). Assessments are part of this path. This joined-up approach is required by UoB's Curriculum Framework and can be met through PebblePad. Minimum use standards are:

1. Following induction, all required use of PebblePad is taught and supported by the students' lecturers. Explicit, contextualised practice and support is built into the learning.
2. At least one programme-based (as opposed to modular) use of PebblePad, for example a Personal Tutoring workspace that students use throughout the whole of their programme.
3. Feedback and/or formative assessment are given via ATLAS wherever PebblePad is used. Summative assessment is implemented via ATLAS if appropriate. The aim is for students to build their work in their personal learning space, Pebble+, over the whole of the programme (see next section for assessment standards).
4. Students finish their programme with an awareness of how to use PebblePad to evidence lifelong learning and present to employers and professional bodies, i.e. the ability to create portfolios, not just fill in workbooks. This skill must be taught and supported over at least one semester, ideally more, as it requires both technical and critical thinking abilities. Note that Bradford students were found to get greater learning gain from year-long rather than semester-long eportfolio creation (Currant et al. 2010, p.10).

Best practice recommendations:

5. Programme-based use (#2 above) should tie all modules together so that students can see where they are on the learning path. The Flourish platform is a good way to do this.
6. Evidencing autonomous learning through portfolio creation (#4 above) is used for project- or enquiry-based learning and extends beyond one semester.

c. Assessment

Assessment should be mapped out as part of the programme learning path above, requiring students to develop analysis, synthesis, and self-awareness as they progress. PebblePad assessment minimum standards:

1. Programmes prioritise formative assessment for learning, reducing summative assessment volume.
2. Student work is submitted at the start of the term or particular learning element and then worked on till the deadline, not submitted at the end as in traditional assessment models. Submitted work in progress is used as a communication space between student and lecturer(s). (Note – other work by students in PebblePad remains entirely private).

3. Feedback is mostly formative, not summative as outlined in table below.

Increase	Decrease
In-class [and online] dialogic feedback within module time	Unidirectional comments after completion of module
Written feedback comments on first assessment task of module	Written feedback comments on final task of module
Feedback for first year students	Feedback for final year students

4. Feedback is given in PebblePad via ATLAS using feedback comments or templates.

Best practice recommendations:

5. Feedback (#3 and #4 above) should make use of feedback templates and comment banks where appropriate to standardise and to reduce marking time.
6. Marks should be given through the Grades field or, where multiple elements need to be assessed, by using the Scorecard feature.
7. Submitted work-in-progress is used as a tripartite communication space between student, lecturer(s), and workplace mentor(s).
8. The use of peer feedback and collaborative group portfolios (two less used features), should be developed and used across the Faculty to exploit additional learning opportunities.

d. Lifelong Learning

Part of the Bradford offer is that all students (and staff) get a PebblePad account for life. As a minimum standard, all programmes must:

1. Ensure that graduating students know how to convert their PebblePad account to an alumni account before they leave but after all marking, resubmission, etc. is complete. Students have a 90 day grace period from the date exam board decisions are received before their Bradford IT accounts are deactivated.
2. Ensure that non-graduating students who are leaving the university convert their Pebblepad account into an alumni account before they leave. Students who withdraw do not have the 90 day grace period.

Best practice recommendations:

3. Where professional bodies use PebblePad (e.g. Chartered Society of Physiotherapists), encourage 3rd year students to open professional body account, and to link it to their alumni account.
4. Survey graduates each year to find out what elements of their PebblePad work have been most useful in gaining or maintaining employment.

Part 3 – Responsibilities

Programme and Module Leaders

1. Design learning to meet the above minimum standard uses of PebblePad, and engage with the best practice recommendations where appropriate.
2. Design PebblePad workbooks and templates where needed, and make them available through the Resources tab of the ATLAS workspace or the school's shared PebblePad account as appropriate.
3. Put structures in place to support all staff – lecturers, administrative staff, learner support, and workplace mentors/externals – in developing necessary PebblePad skills.

All Academics (including Leaders)

4. Support student use of PebblePad so that students understand its purpose, their responsibilities for using it, and how to use it. Handbooks, information on Blackboard, and instructions in PebblePad resources should support this understanding.
5. Give feedback via ATLAS.
6. Run reports in ATLAS to assess student engagement and understanding, and use information to inform teaching practice.
7. Use PebblePad for own CPD.
8. Maintain skill level required to successfully use and teach with PebblePad.

Administration responsibilities

1. Create workspaces and add assignment deadlines and resources as appropriate. Where workspaces are not tied to Blackboard modules and therefore not auto-populated, batch add users.
2. If groups are needed, create and maintain 'sets' (aka groups).
3. If externals are needed, add/edit/maintain externals.
4. Review and remove work from Assignments, e.g. if student withdraws before deadline.
5. Check that permissions on the workspace align with use, e.g. externals can see all sets if needed, programme leaders are 'lead tutors' while other teachers are 'tutors'.
6. Run reports in ATLAS for needed admin info.
7. Put structures in place to support administrators in developing necessary PebblePad skills and in maintaining required skill level to safely and securely administer PebblePad workspaces.

Centre for Educational Development responsibilities

1. Coordinate and where appropriate, develop training in the pedagogically informed use of PebblePad for staff in partnership with IT Services and Faculty staff.
2. Advise on learning design at the programme level and at the level of Resource creation.

3. Advise services supporting student eportfolio skills (e.g. Academic Skills Advice, Careers, IT Services).
4. Manage the University's institutional PebblePad account.
5. Support research and projects involving PebblePad and its use.
6. Keep abreast of new PebblePad developments and disseminate/train appropriately.

[As noted above, Part 3 also outlines responsibilities for other stakeholders.]

Implementation to date

The clarity of the strategy has been praised and it is currently being used as a building block to develop staff PebblePad skills in preparation for new programme design and rollout. The success of this process so far owes much to clear involvement of all stakeholders from the beginning, use of standards that allow for varying programme goals and differing staff skill levels, non-threatening TEL support that includes pedagogic development, and clear requirements for everyone involved, ensuring implementation that will lead to future readiness.

How this can help others

The strategy lays out some straightforward ideas on basic and enhanced use of PebblePad that will be useful for anyone guiding PebblePad use within their institution or looking to scale up / create new use which puts student employability at the heart of the learning design. Specifically, people may find it beneficial to use or adapt the following points from the strategy, or to compare to their own institution as a means of clarification:

- suggested standards of use and best practice recommendations for induction, student learning path, assessment, and lifelong learning
- suggested responsibilities for programme/module leaders, other academics, administrators, and other involved teams
- technical considerations within the above two points

In Brief – Showcasing 'Future Readiness' with PebblePad

- ePortfolio-based education as provided through PebblePad is a key way to assist Health students (and staff!) to develop the reflective learning skills needed in the field while at the same time accumulating the evidence needed for professional body accreditation and, eventually, revalidation.
- This future readiness needs to be supported across the school/faculty/institution in a way that is sustainable (doesn't put too much responsibility onto one teacher or group), flexible enough to meet the varying needs of differing programmes, and also helps enhance practice.

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