Case studies extracted from the final project report

December 2009

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Australian ePortfolio Project

ePortfolio use by university students in Australia: Developing a sustainable community of practice

Final project report: December 2009
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Case study 1

Australian Flexible Learning Framework: E-portfolios Community of Practice

Website:  tp://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios
Blog:     http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfoliosblog
Contact:  Allison Miller, E-portfolios Business Manager, allison.miller@tafesa.edu.au

Context
Since 2005, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, the e-learning strategy for the Australian vocational education and training sector (VET), has conducted research into the role ePortfolios can play in supporting learner mobility and lifelong learning. In 2008 the Framework established the E-portfolios — Managing Learner Information business activity to focus on infrastructure (services, resources and standards) with the aim of developing a sector-wide approach to business and technical standards and policy.

The current research activities have principally been guided by an E-portfolio Reference Group that encompasses a broad membership base. As well, a VET E-portfolios Community of Practice (CoP) has been established and facilitated by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework in response to those practitioners and early adopters working in this area who can share best practice. Membership is informal and includes teachers and learning and teaching support staff in the sector, as well as ePortfolio tool developers.

Aims and outcomes
Broadly, the VET CoP aims to encourage the adoption of ePortfolios by connecting areas of good ePortfolio practice and supporting those early adopters who may feel isolated in their current ePortfolio activities. The technical architecture of the community is principally a website and blog, but dissemination activities include workshops, conference presentations and forums in both a virtual and face-to-face context. A yearly event is planned to facilitate interaction between the various stakeholders. Both the website and the blog link to current ePortfolio resources and information specific to the business activity and the VET sector, as well as ePortfolio activities and initiatives within Australia (for example, AeP).

Critical success factors
Funding and the organisational context and support has made a significant impact on the development of the CoP. Facilitation and administration is funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, who has determined the information needs of the community around raising awareness and disseminating the current ePortfolio activities in Australia.

Key CoP ‘personalities’ can also provide the stimulus for discussion and the sharing of knowledge. Hearing from those who have travelled down the implementation path and utilised ePortfolios in their specific context can provide a sense of relevance and purpose for community involvement.

Challenges
How people utilise the CoP has required consideration. Different technological and social platforms are offered in the CoP, for example, some members prefer RSS feeds; some are comfortable participating in an online forum, while others prefer workshops. Information and resources have been arranged in various formats to accommodate the various levels of members’ technical knowledge so that they do not feel alienated by the nature of the online environment.

Sustainability
Sustainability will be determined by the continued relevance of ePortfolio progression in Australia. The VET CoP currently sits as an awareness raising process within the current business activity of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. Management has already considered the CoP as a relevant activity and has supported facilitation via funding of an administrator and various dissemination activities. Developing and sustaining relationships with ‘aggregators and agitators’ will help develop ideas and activities for the group. Activities and resources are also carefully considered so as to accommodate the long-term member and the newly arrived individual, and bring together the two with common interests.
Personal learning plans and ePortfolio

Website: edna Groups — password access only
Contact: Pru Mitchell, Senior Education Officer, and Cecily Wright, Education Officer Education.au: pmitchell@educationau.edu.au, cwright@educationau.edu.au

Context
The new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) has developed a module for senior secondary students around a personal learning plan (PLP) (http://www.futuresace.sa.gov.au/plp.htm). Evidence of learning is to be provided through various formats, with electronic portfolios suggested as one of the options. Various school associations received funding for 2009 from the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme (AGQTP) (http://www.qualityteaching.deewr.gov.au) to consider ePortfolios in the school sector.

In order to prepare teachers to make use of ePortfolios in secondary schools, Education.au (http://www.educationau.edu.au/jahia/jsp/index.jsp) was asked to put together a professional learning activity for South Australian teachers around using ePortfolios and implementing PLP in their schools. Hands-on workshops introduced teachers to the concepts, using the edna Groups Moodle learning management system as a social space to accommodate resources and course material. This online membership space provides access to pre-readings, website links, workshop presentations, polls and news and introduction forums.

Aims and outcomes
Although not essentially emerging from a community of practice (CoP) ethos, the group operates within a community framework and describes their online environment as a ‘space for collaboration and discussions between members of the ePortfolio Professional Development program’. The ePortfolio group has linked the aims of their professional development project with two of the specific outcomes of the AGQTP (summarised below):

AGQTP Outcomes
- Outcome (1): Teachers will have strengthened the currency and depth of their pedagogical knowledge and skills.
- Outcome (4): Teachers will have engaged productively in collegial networks that extend and support knowledge and skills

Aims of this project
- To build knowledge and skills related to ePortfolios
- To create and extend online collegial networks
- To further develop ICT skills and capabilities
- To trial the processes involved in creating an ePortfolio

Critical success factors
While the CoP is more structured and directed than other organic entities, the online activities have helped engage the group throughout their development, particularly as the teachers were able to develop their own ePortfolio or digital tool as a way of understanding the process. What is noted is that both the facilitators and the community members are coming from a position of ‘investigation’ around ePortfolios and are able to share and collaborate. Feedback and reflection on the workshops and activities will also assist in the development of future activities.

Challenges
The varied ICT skills of the community members have been a significant challenge in this inaugural activity. While the introduction of ePortfolios is in itself often a new concept, the idea of working and contributing in an online community has provided further challenges for some participants. The direction and guidance from the facilitators has proved invaluable in this aspect of the CoP.

Sustainability
Plans are in place to continue the provision of professional development workshops in the future around ePortfolio options in SA secondary schools, and the facilitators envisage that the community will continue with participation of some of the foundational members. Additionally, these members will bring their new-found knowledge to the next influx of members. Maintaining the momentum in the community has relied heavily on the organisation and facilitation of Education.au and on making connections and sharing information with various organisations using and implementing ePortfolios.
RMIT University: Introducing ePortfolios

Website: http://www.rmit.net.au/eportfolio
Contact: Meaghan Botterill, ePortfolio Project Leader, RMIT University meaghan.botterill@rmit.edu.au

Context
As part of RMIT’s e-Learning Advancement Program (REAP) the ePortfolio tool PebblePad is being trialled. REAP aims to ‘improve e-Learning and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) at RMIT and enhance active learning opportunities for students’ (REAP website). Consequently, the use of wikis, blogs and ePortfolios constitutes a large amount of the interest in online learning environments, assessment and career development.

The PebblePad trial (2200 licences at this stage) has resulted in the development of a CoP essentially focused around professional engagement with the scholarship of learning and teaching and is supported through an internal staff wiki that operates as a space for the collaboration and dissemination of ideas, pedagogy and research as well as a professional development site (Botterill, Allan, & Brooks, 2008).

Aims and outcomes
The PebblePad trial began in mid 2008 and will finish at the end of 2010, extending across different areas of the university in line with the strategic goals of the institution as a whole and professional support services. Principally, the trial aims to support the introduction of ePortfolios into teaching and learning across the university. The development of the CoP has provided staff with a means of organisational support and connectivity across RMIT.

Due to the diverse location of the CoP across campuses, both local and international, engagement is supported through electronic means (email and Skype), as well as face-to-face events (lunches and forums) at different campuses. Notification of and dissemination about events are supported via email and the wiki. Professional development days, both internal within RMIT and externally with the Australian PebblePad Users Group (see Case study 5), have also assisted to build the CoP and foster inter-university relationships around ePortfolios.

Critical success factors
Essentially, there is a sense of security amongst the CoP members who might otherwise have felt isolated in the trial. The voluntary nature of the community has meant that the trial participants have been able to take ownership of their projects, feel they can contribute and are engaged in the learning process. The CoP has successfully allowed for the sharing of knowledge and experience amongst staff working in quite diverse contexts.

Challenges
As a dual sector university, RMIT accommodates both the vocational education and training (TAFE) and higher education (university) sectors. Aligning the various teaching staff across the sectors around the utilisation of an ePortfolio can be problematic. However, PebblePad has been able to accommodate the two different frameworks of graduate attributes (higher education) and competency standards/employability skills (TAFE) and the CoP has fostered strong connectivity amongst the staff.

Sustainability
External motivators have been as important as the internal motivation around the CoP. Regular national symposiums and events have kept the discussion around ePortfolios in Australia current, particularly in the educational context. RMIT’s ongoing commitment to evidence-based assessment and career readiness has also justified the role of ePortfolios. Scaffolding and instigating support for staff using ePortfolios via a CoP is a means of producing early adopters who might ultimately support and champion ePortfolios in the future.
Case study 4

ePortfolio Practice: ALTC Exchange

Website:  http://www.altcexchange.edu.au/eportfolio-practice
Contact:  Ann Gillespie and Gillian Hallam, Exchange facilitators and members of the AeP2 project

Context
This online community was set up as part of the Australian ePortfolio Project’s second stage (AeP2) and launched to prospective members during the second Australian ePortfolio Symposium in early February 2009. The site is hosted by the Australian Learning and Teaching Exchange (ALTC), a professional networking site that enables members to ‘contribute, collaborate, and share knowledge about innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education with like-minded professionals’ (http://www.altcexchange.edu.au). The main purpose of the ePortfolio Practice community site was to provide the beginnings and structure for online involvement and interaction. Interested participants are pointed to relevant information and resources about ePortfolios in higher education.

Aims and outcomes
Six months have passed since the ePortfolio Practice Group was created, and as AeP2 nears completion the group has around 40 members, specifically from the higher education and vocational education sectors.

The members are able to add additional areas to the wiki to enhance the interactive nature of the group. Members can also interact using a forum and adding blog entries that can be made private or remain publicly available. Short-term objectives have been around increasing awareness, for example, to highlight initiatives that various institutions are involved in, such as pilot projects, examples of early adoption, etc. In the longer term it is anticipated that the site will support those members interested in sharing information.

Critical success factors
A broad spectrum of members became involved during and immediately after the Australian ePortfolio Symposium. This ensured that diverse interests were discovered to help colour and add to the information base about the current use of ePortfolios in Australia. Ultimately, a key role was played by the facilitator, under the auspices of the AeP2 project, to assist in laying down the foundations and starting points for novice ePortfolio practitioners.

Challenges
The functionality of the ALTC Exchange is very structured and communication between members has not been as seamless as with other online technologies. Consequently, members have not been as actively engaged in the forum as had initially been anticipated, relying instead on the group facilitator to post resources to the Exchange and to manage the site.

Sustainability
As the AeP2 project concludes, the role of facilitator of the ePortfolio Practice Group on the ALTC Exchange will no longer continue. The ability to sustain a group such as this, without ongoing funding or staffing, will ultimately depend on any future activity that might continue the current momentum in ePortfolio use nationally. The impetus to drive such a group may come from individuals with a passion to coordinate the information resources to meet a wide cross-section of needs and requirements. Changes to the technological infrastructure of the ALTC Exchange may also have the potential to reduce some of the barriers to participation and networking.
Case study 5

Australian PebblePad User Group (APpUG)

Contact: Meaghan Botterill, meaghan.botterill@rmit.edu.au

Context

With the growing awareness of the benefits associated with the use of ePortfolios in education across Australia, there has been an increase in ePortfolio software systems and applications. One product, PebblePad (developed by the University of Wolverhampton, UK), is currently being trialled or run with site licences in 15 universities across Australia. This has offered an opportunity to develop a Community of Practice (CoP), the Australian PebblePad User Group (APpUG), to support professional development and inter-university collaboration across areas such as research, learning and teaching, discipline-based networking and resource development.

Aims and outcomes

The inaugural meeting of APpUG was held at RMIT University in December 2008. An invitation was extended to all institutional PebblePad users to attend either in person or through video conferencing. The aim of this CoP is to extend practice and praxis across the use of ePortfolios in universities, as well as provide a professional network of PebblePad users for collaboration and knowledge sharing across technical, pedagogical and professional practices.

Due to the geographic distribution of members of the CoP across Australia, engagement is supported through both information and communication technologies (ICT) and face-to-face events (such as phone, email, Skype, video conferencing, a PebblePad blog and forums or conferences at different institutions). Notification of and dissemination about events are supported via email and the blog. To increase relevance beyond general information sharing across PebblePad, the events also have a thematic session, for example, Career Development Learning, in order to extend professional capability and inter-university knowledge, networking and resource sharing.

Critical success factors

The networks established through this CoP have been a critical success factor. The importance of the face-to-face events for meeting people and knowing what is occurring in their institutions has helped to facilitate inter-university collaboration across research, resourcing and technical support. These networks have also been critical for linking disciplinary groups together across the different institutions. Again, this fosters collaboration, while also allowing the sharing of exemplars from the different institutions. It is also important to have people willing to develop the CoP as it theoretically sits outside of their institutions.

The personal involvement of the PebblePad developers has, to date, also been a critical success factor in this CoP. The face-to-face events have coincided with their visits to Australia so far and have contained both product information and pedagogical insights. However, in their absence, it has been important to develop other ways of maintaining the CoP. Organising events that address specific ePortfolio initiatives, for example, ‘ePortfolios and Engineering Accreditation’ and ‘ePortfolios for the recording of Recognition of Prior Learning’ have been successful. The CoP has successfully allowed for the sharing of knowledge and experience amongst staff working in quite diverse contexts.

Challenges

The primary challenge is sustainability. As PebblePad is being trialled in most of the universities, an institutional decision to adopt another ePortfolio program will impact dramatically on this CoP. Thus, the ability to move the CoP away from simply one around PebblePad as a product to a more sustainable ePortfolio CoP might help to alleviate this issue if it arises.

Sustainability

Connectivity is the key to sustainability. Participation in other external initiatives and events, such as AeP, and undertaking collaborative work across different institutions, for example, joint research papers and presentations, will help to strengthen the CoP. Furthermore, regular communication and participation in APpUG events will also sustain and strengthen the CoP and maintain its relevance and currency.
Case study 6

ePortfolios in the library and information services sector

Website: PebblePad Gateway — closed website
Contact: Gillian Hallam, community facilitator, g.hallam@qut.edu.au

Context

Digital portfolios, or ePortfolios, are being introduced into a number of professional disciplines to support professional accreditation and professional development. One of the major goals of Stage 2 of the Australian ePortfolio Project (AeP2) was to encourage ePortfolio stakeholders to establish a community of practice (or several communities of practice) to share learning and experiences of quality ePortfolio practice. In conjunction with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the AeP2 project team is running a two-year (2009–2010) pilot project within the library and information services (LIS) sector to consider the use of ePortfolios in learning and career development by library and information professionals. Self-selected participants include librarians and library technicians, whose roles range from students and recent graduates through to LIS professionals in the later stages of their careers, with direct support from educators, mentors and employers.

Aims and outcomes

The principal aim of the pilot program was for individual LIS practitioners to develop an ePortfolio to focus on career planning, professional development and performance review activities, enabling them to establish a rich portfolio of reflective evidence on their own learning and development over a period of time, and importantly, build a community of practice within the discipline.

The ePortfolio software tool PebblePad was chosen for the pilot, and participants were encouraged to seek the support of their employer to take part in the program. The second Australian ePortfolio Symposium, held in Brisbane in February 2009, included an introductory workshop for the LIS ePortfolio cohort. Three surveys have been developed around the pilot: an initial expectations survey, a further survey during the course of the pilot and a final survey to capture the actual experiences in the concluding stages of the AeP2 project in mid 2009. Participants in the LIS pilot project will be able to continue to use the PebblePad ePortfolio platform until the end of 2010.

To date, the community of 26 participants from all over Australia has come together regularly for face-to-face meetings in their regional groups (South East Queensland, Central Queensland, Melbourne, Adelaide and Northern Territory) and have communicated virtually via the PebblePad Gateway application.

Critical success factors

The community’s face-to-face meetings have enhanced the collegial, sharing and supportive nature of the group. Most of the participants have already made positive gains in their professional and academic focus with the use of the ePortfolios and their participation in the community. Some had used the ePortfolios to attain new jobs and career promotions. Building formative relationships, not only around using the ePortfolio but also around their shared professional interests will be a lasting outcome of the CoP.

Challenges

The participants self-selected from the library and information sector and thus their roles and demographical profiles were diverse. The geographical location of the participants also required a strong organisational role and this has been facilitated via the PebblePad Gateway application, which allows members to communicate online and share notes from the regional meetings.

Sustainability

Although a pilot project, the community has been provided with an opportunity to be directly involved in an initiative that seeks to address learning and development issues in vocational and higher education, and in the workplace within the LIS sector in Australia. At a higher level, the project will help the LIS sector to be acknowledged as a leader in the arena of professional development and lifelong learning, with the potential to nurture further communities around ePortfolio practice.
Case study 7

PDP and ePortfolios UK

Website: http://pdpandeportfoliouk.wetpaint.com (private wiki — password access only)
Contact: Tracey Madden, University of Hull, Higher Education Academy Physical Sciences Centre, t.madden@hull.ac.uk

Context
The PDP and ePortfolios group started in early 2009 as a small email list of practitioners with a key interest in personal development planning (PDP) and ePortfolio use in the higher education sector in the UK. The community utilises Wetpaint (http://www.wetpaint.com/), a wiki hosting service, to support the increasing number of ‘question and answer’ emails distributed within the group. The information generated is then archived in the wiki as a type of repository for resources.

Facilitation for the CoP is not funded and group members consist mainly of university practitioners working in learning support or as lecturers. They often meet each other at events and activities dedicated to ePortfolio practice.

Aims and outcomes
So far the focus in this community has been quite general, providing a forum for different experiences, opinions and foci around PDP and ePortfolios. Membership is promoted through various JISC email lists, and the wiki has provided a more comprehensive overview of members (for example, members can post photos and additional information about themselves and interests rather than just an email address). The networking consequences of this activity have ultimately assisted in the communication and engagement aspect of the community.

Critical success factors
The impetus for the development of PDP and ePortfolios UK has been from the members themselves rather than someone bringing them together. Self-motivation rather than external motivation has been the key success factor in the evolution of the community. There is the notion that people can achieve more collectively rather than in isolation. Members are able to pass on information from their particular experiences both in the face-to-face meetings and then additionally in the wiki environment.

Challenges
As a young community there is a degree of consciousness around the need to balance the ‘technological native’ with those individuals new to wikis. A simplistic wiki model is used here to accommodate all skill levels and the email list is the principal communication method.

Sustainability
The effects of a critical mass of members will become an essential feature of the CoP as it evolves and grows. Promotion and awareness around the CoP will be reliant on all members identifying other practitioners and ‘pockets of activity’ where individuals may be interested in PDP and ePortfolios. The community is aware that there is a need to accommodate those members who move out of the community and to replace them with regards to their particular contributions, if the momentum and activity created in the community is to be continued.
SURF NL Portfolio

Website: http://www.surfspace.nl/enK/themas/Portfolio/start/pages/overzicht.aspx
Contact: Marij Veugelers, community manager SURF NL Portfolio, Veugelers@uva.nl

Context
Established in 2004, SURF NL Portfolio is a community funded by SURFfoundation, a collaborative organisation for higher education institutions in the Netherlands that undertakes significant research around ICT and has a specific interest in eLearning activities (http://www.surffoundation.nl/en/Pages/default.aspx).

The CoP exists as a special interest group within SURF and the composition of the group is practitioners within higher education, as well as representatives from professional bodies and tool developers. The geographical profile of the Netherlands allows for regular meetings between the various community workgroups as well as collaboration with international organisations, inclusive of AeP. The community manager coordinates research projects across the sector and knowledge is shared via a monthly newsletter, web space, seminars and publications.

Aims and outcomes
The principle aim of the NL Portfolio community is to work together to build and share new knowledge around ePortfolios. Specific aims have been outlined on the ePortfolio website and the community has a current focus around (inter)national relationships and the concept of lifelong learning, in cooperation with current partners in education, employment and the government.

In the Netherlands there is an active network of contact persons from institutes who are working with ePortfolio. There is also an active scaling-up workgroup. NL Portfolio has successfully organised funding for six research projects that are facilitated by a project manager, produced several publications, participated in international ePortfolio symposiums and has enabled the development of international alliances.

Critical success factors
Community manager Marij Veugelers is nationally known as ‘Mama Portfolio’, a title bestowed on her due to the Netherlands’ long-standing commitment and profile in the ePortfolio community. The role of the community manager to coordinate and facilitate activities is crucial.

Challenges
From mid-2009 the community manager role will no longer be funded by SURFfoundation. However, the organisation will continue to provide logistical support and endorsement for the community. A team of six community members (including the community manager) will continue the ongoing progress of the community.

Sustainability
Despite the current funding issues for the community, the work achieved to date has sustained and will continue to effectively sustain the momentum of the group. The scope now for the community is to align with lifelong learning initiatives, thus taking the ePortfolio beyond the education sector. Regular face-to-face meetings have also assisted in enabling networking opportunities to expand into the international ePortfolio community.
Case study 9

University of Canterbury ePortfolio

Website: Membership access only, University of Canterbury, http://www.canterbury.ac.nz
Contact: Alan Hoskin, community manager, alan.hoskin@canterbury.ac.nz

Context
In 2009 University of Canterbury's (UC) Centre of Teaching and Learning provided funding for a pilot project to survey the use of ePortfolios within the institution and examine the future needs of students and staff. Emerging interest in ePortfolios has come about as a result of the increase in national and international research around ePortfolios in recent years.

The project has initiated a community of practice that aligns with the current pilot and is accommodated in a Moodle environment. Two specific groups make up the community of around 30 active members: (1) a working party in which members represent different departments examining the ePortfolio project at UC, and (2) a wider group of individuals who have joined out of interest around the project, inclusive of students and teaching staff. The ePortfolio CoP also has links to an institutional eLearning community.

Aims and outcomes
This pilot project aims to collect data around the use of ePortfolios in the university and provide a set of guidelines for those wanting to use ePortfolios in their courses or departments. The CoP enables this research and also assists in investigating the range of ePortfolio tools available that might be considered for use campus wide.

The working group meets regularly and the project has been able to bring out ePortfolio practitioners both nationally and internationally to participate in workshops and to enable ‘conversations’ around ePortfolios — ultimately acting as a catalyst to increase the scope of interest within the institution.

Critical success factors
As an institutionally funded project the community has a sense of significance and influence as to the future direction of teaching and learning at UC. Members of the core working group not only represent the various departments, but are inclusive of individuals with specific interests in ePortfolios: current and prospective ePortfolio users, those involved with tool development and those involved with academic development and the pedagogical aspect of ePortfolio use.

Challenges
Increasing membership can be a challenging activity in an academic environment where teaching staff are coping with demanding workloads and are often time poor. As well, encouraging discussion and the posting of information on the community site has required a proactive approach from the facilitator in regards to summarising events and activities. The development of participation strategies in this young CoP will further the involvement of the existing members and encourage ‘lurkers’ to contribute.

Sustainability
Directives around the currency of ePortfolios in the education sector — at either an institutional or national level — will help sustain the interest and activity around ePortfolio use. The role of a funded CoP facilitator and the strengthening of links to national and international initiatives (inclusive of other CoPs) will sustain the community once the pilot project is completed.
AAEEBL: Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning

Website: http://www.aaeebl.org
Contact: Trent Batson, AAEEBL Director, trentbatson@mac.com

Context
Although still an emerging professional body, the Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL) represents a significant ePortfolio community that has formalised a tacit group of individuals who had previously worked collaboratively. Launched in early 2009, the core members of AAEEBL stem from the Electronic Portfolio Action Committee (EPAC) and bring together ePortfolio practitioners in both the education and professional sectors. AAEEBL has also identified a gap in annual ePortfolio conferences in the United States and views this as a crucial means of engaging a widespread group of practitioners. The technical architecture of the association is supported by an online website that accommodates affiliate, administrative and membership details as well as providing links to resources and discussion forums.

Aims and outcomes
The launch of AAEEBL was noted as being in response to three key issues:
• … to nurture the growth and improvement of portfolio practices and the portfolio technologies to support those practices
• … to help guide and inform academic transformation around portfolio practices
• ePortfolios are widely implemented but have not assumed the role that they will in the transformation of education. So that the current state of ePortfolio implementation is not mistaken for what should be, AAEEBL was formed. (AAEEBL press release, http://epac.pbworks.com/2009_05-EPAC-Webcast-AAEEBL)

Membership is categorised into two arenas: AAEEBL committees (representing technical, standards, corporate relations, conferences, K–12, research and governance) and AAEEBL Regional Chapters. These chapters are formed at either a local or regional level and will support regular communication, meetings, shared initiatives and grant projects. They will also be involved in a national AAEEBL meeting each year and represent a more theoretical CoP exemplar.

Critical success factors
Over half of all American colleges and universities are using ePortfolios of some description and yet, to date, no specific government policy exists about implementation in education and there is only dialogue around educational accountability. AAEEBL not only operates around advocacy but also seeks to set national benchmarks that will provide more scope and context around ePortfolio practice.

Challenges
A myriad of issues were associated with the formation of the organisation (marketing, communication, organising events, attracting membership, etc.). Dedication to organisation of the profession is considered to be a full-time obligation, sanctioned by the professional status of the community through sponsorship and membership fees.

Sustainability
The Regional Chapters will operate to sustain the community continuum of AAEEBL and will reach out beyond the national scope of the association. While the national agenda will continue to come from the AAEEBL executive, these chapters will assist to guide and inform current knowledge around process and change in the ePortfolio community.
Case study 11

Midlands Eportfolio Group, West Midlands, UK

Website: http://groups.google.com/group/rscmeg?hl=en
Contact: Kevin Brace, Coordinator West Midlands Regional Support Centre, Community Manager, k.brace@wlv.ac.uk

Context
The West Midlands Regional Support Centre (RSC) is funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), and along with the East Midlands Group is involved in the Midlands Eportfolio Group. RSC supports the development of educational e-learning in the further education, adult and community education and higher education sectors.

The Midlands ePortfolio community came together in late 2008 in response to the growing interest in ePortfolios in education. Its purpose has been summarised as offering 'support for people working in education in the Midlands region who are either using e-portfolios or thinking of using e-portfolios as part of their practice' (http://groups.google.com/group/rscmeg?hl=en).

The Midlands Eportfolio Group currently has around 60 members and uses Google Groups (with a subscription feature) as a means of interaction for their public face.

Aims and outcomes
The young community aims to not only share effective practice in an efficient manner, but also to build networks amongst practitioners using, piloting or considering the use of ePortfolios.

The wiki offers access to relevant resources about ePortfolio practice, with both a national and international focus, and supports the first tier of members — those interested in viewing and learning rather than actively participating. A second level of members is already engaged in using ePortfolios or is developing pilot projects and these members are supported by Google Groups. The top tier of members is represented by the perceived ‘experts’ and early adopters who have been able to provide valuable assistance through mentoring and coaching.

Critical success factors
Planning has been a key factor in the early success of the community. Nurturing and facilitating the community to engage the ‘early adopters’ and to ensure that they continue their involvement in the future have been vital strategies to encourage members to ultimately manage their own community.

Challenges
The community has been essentially virtual, although some face-to-face events are planned. Face-to-face events will endeavour to further the community’s life and assist in cementing the relationships established in the virtual space. Identifying the appropriate technological platform to ensure member engagement has been a key element to consider. There has been a strong need to address the ICT and useability issues to ensure community engagement and participation. In July 2009 the community had its inaugural forum, an online webinar (using Instant Presenter) that covered the topic of ePortfolio pilots. Feedback from members regarding the event and its alignment with the wiki and Google Groups has been positive.

Sustainability
It is believed that the ability to maintain the current levels of impetus will depend on scaffolding and facilitation from the outset to offer support and feedback to members and to directly promote the community itself. The planning and effort already invested in the development and management of the virtual space has catered for the three different tiers of members with the ultimate aim of the group to become self-sustaining and driven by the members themselves.

Midlands Eportfolio Group
EPAC: Electronic Portfolio Action and Communication

Website: http://epac.pbworks.com
Blog: http://epaccop.blogspot.com
Contact: Helen Chen, Community Manager, Stanford University, hlchen@stanford.edu

Context

Initially, Electronic Portfolio Action and Communication (EPAC) drew together practitioners within the higher education sector who had an interest in the technical perspectives of ePortfolio tools and development. Meetings were either face-to-face events in a conference setting, via email or through video conferencing technologies. EPAC was at first supported through an EDUCASE pilot initiative known as EDUCASE Virtual Community of Practice (VCOP), which included facilitator training and offered an interactive multimedia platform (Chen & Ittelson, 2009).

Since 2005 the community has been supported by various collaboratives and continues to prosper through its partnerships with other bodies such as the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research (http://ncepr.org/index.html) and MERLOT (http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm). EPAC has also evolved from a technological perspective into a more specific focus around the use of ePortfolios in teaching, learning and assessment involving various sectors of education and lifelong learning initiatives.

Aims and outcomes

The ultimate aim of the community is to share and discuss ePortfolios and to support the following activities:

- Virtual interactions through online chats and discussions, audio and video conferences discussing ePortfolio-related issues, case studies, pedagogical approaches, assessment techniques and best practices
- Networking and face-to-face opportunities with EPAC members at conferences and meetings
- Exchange of resources via the EPAC email listserv and wiki
- Tracking of international and national conferences, requests for proposals and funding opportunities
- Active exploration and evaluation of tools and practices to support ePortfolio-related activities, reflective thinking, and community-building.


Membership, therefore, constitutes both individuals from the education sector as well as professional bodies and tool developers.

Critical success factors

Significantly, EPAC has drawn upon the guiding questions developed by Cambridge et al. (2005) to determine the effectiveness of the Community of Practice. Chen (2009) cites the examples of cross-institution partnerships for various conference presentations, participation in the online chats and webcasts and participation in review activities around ePortfolio tools. Regular events, whether virtual or face-to-face, have become a key factor in building the community and maintaining the interest around the group.

Challenges

In the virtual environment much consideration has been given to how the information on ePortfolios should be easily accessible and searchable. Web access is essentially by use of a wiki platform and the blog allows an additional opportunity to view resources and current news. The needs of the community have been thoughtfully considered so that news and resources are current but specific to the members.

Sustainability

Chen summarises how the community has been maintained by highlighting three main components: (1) organising and hosting online events; (2) facilitating face-to-face meetings; (3) keeping the web space current (2009, p. 112). It is hoped that the emerging interests of members may bring about the development of special interest groups — supported by EPAC — to maintain the impetus around ePortfolios.
Case study 13

Scottish Higher Education PDP Forum, UK

Website:  http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/aboutus/scotland/institutions/pdpforum
Contact:  Dr Alastair Robertson, Senior Adviser, Higher Education Academy Scotland, community facilitator, alastair.robertson@heacademy.ac.uk

Context

In recent years there has been extensive activity around personal development planning (PDP) and ePortfolios in the United Kingdom (UK). The sharing of general practice, along with collaboration in workshops and consultative activities over a period of time, highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to the implementation of PDP and ePortfolios in the Scottish higher education sector. The CoP (Community of Practice) is fundamentally practitioner-led and is co-facilitated by the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The agencies also provide modest funding to cover meeting costs, events, etc.

To date, the majority of activities and programs of support have been offered in a face-to-face environment to take advantage of the geographic location of the participants. An email list and web space provide the technical architecture for the community.

The community has been active for about two years and has an email list with around 100 people actively engaged. Workshops and meetings usually accommodate 40–50 members.

Aims and outcomes

Seven embryonic interest groups around research and evaluation of PDP and ePortfolio have developed so far (similar to the National Action Research Network — NARN — in England), which will ultimately lead to the Scottish network linking into activities and interest groups nationally.

The forum has also been involved in the production of a PDP Toolkit that is designed to help staff at all levels within institutions to consider, reflect upon and develop their strategies and policies for the implementation and enhancement of PDP. This is about to be published and a draft is available here: http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/ELF/default.asp.

The HEA recently launched EvidenceNet (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/evidencenet), a new web portal that will ultimately support the various CoPs; this will allow for closer networking as well as strengthen the online nature of the community.

Critical success factors

Buy-in has been a decisive element of the engagement with the CoP. The practitioners themselves have identified the priorities in their institutions and determined the themes and content within the community. Facilitation and financial support from the HEA, QAA and CRA have ensured the strengthening and development of the CoP.

Challenges

While ensuring the momentum of the CoP is important, effective engagement is considered a significant challenge in a CoP, whether virtual or face to face. Feedback provides a valuable reference point for the CoP as a means of determining the impact of CoP events and workshops. To date, the CoP has primarily sought feedback from members in post-workshop communication.

Sustainability

Despite the fact that the CoP is facilitated externally (that is, through the HEA, CRA and QAA), sustainability will ultimately depend on the members themselves leading discussions and activities. Providing members with the opportunity to discuss and investigate relevant issues will allow for the continued buy-in required amongst the 20 higher education institutions in Scotland.
Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), UK

Website:  http://www.recordingachievement.org/eportfolios/default.asp
Contact:  Rob Ward, Director, rob@recordingachievement.org

Context
The Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) is a national organisation that operates as an Associate Partner of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The central focus of the CRA is to support higher education with the implementation of personal development planning (PDP) and ePortfolios.

CRA’s Community of Practice (CoP) offers two levels: the first is an overall group of around 850 individuals in the UK and internationally, and the second is a CRA member community comprised of the higher education, school and college sector and professional bodies with links to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). In addition, this second community also emphasises links across the sectors as well as connections to employers.

Aims and outcomes
CRA’s CoP model is particularly about communication, enabling effective communication, and networking between the various stakeholders. In terms of the wider community, individuals subscribe to an email list with the main traffic focusing on specific questions associated with ePortfolios and PDP. This email list is also a means of promoting various events and activities that may be virtual or face to face.

This community also produces an electronic newsletter twice a year where members contribute short articles and advertise events. This is a group-driven newsletter and it can then be circulated within an institution.

As well as the communication and networking opportunities, direct CRA membership includes consultancy and training support, free or reduced rate access to seminars and conferences, and access to various publications. Most members in this group represent universities or other organisations.

Critical success factors
CRA is actively involved in the development of higher education sector policy in particular, and provides a context for policy implementation (for example, in areas of workforce development and the Higher Education Achievement Report). The critical mass of the community has allowed for informal participation in policy discussions without losing the independence or professional orientation of the community. Community members feel they have a voice in the future direction of PDP and ePortfolios.

Challenges
Email is the preferred method of communication amongst members. While many prefer the simplicity and directness of this it does raise issues of participation through newer tools, including those built to facilitate social/professional networking.

Key challenges for the CRA include the need to maintain a focus on outcomes, including the development of an evidence base to demonstrate the efficacy of the processes the Centre advocates, and to monitor and maximise the available finance to support the community, given the multiple project opportunities and the need to ensure that the different projects are conducted effectively.

Sustainability
Sustainability relates to ensuring members feel valued, welcomed and engaged in the network, but also ensuring that the members themselves take responsibility for engaging with others and participating in community activities. In addition, it is important for the community to retain a specific focus to remain relevant, but it also needs to pay attention to emerging policy drivers and contexts within the UK. Additionally, the CRA maintains a keen interest in extending partnerships internationally, reflecting the way in which the higher education sector as a whole now operates in a global environment.