

4. The AeP community of practice

4.1 Overview

The primary goals of Stage Two of the Australian ePortfolio Project (AeP2) were to develop strategies to encourage interest in and engagement with community of practice activities for ePortfolio practitioners and researchers in the higher education sector. The project team sought to build on Stage One of the AeP project in order to invigorate ePortfolio research and practice and encourage dialogue and collaboration across academic institutions, across discipline and professional areas, and across the education and employment sectors, both nationally and internationally.

Chapter 2 of this report presented a review of the literature on communities of practice, considering factors that impact on the effective organisation of both face-to-face and virtual communities. The literature review has informed the current process of research into practice, with the AeP2 project encompassing six key areas of activity that have contributed to building a sense of community amongst ePortfolio stakeholders:

- The AeP Toolkit, comprising a suite of six published concept guides about ePortfolio practice.
- The AeP2 Symposium, as a face-to-face forum to explore and discuss innovative practice.
- The AeP2 Showcase, to develop shared understandings about the features and functionality of the ePortfolio platforms available in Australia.
- The AeP2 Technical Issues and Opportunities meeting to consider the topics of policy, standards and interoperability.
- The ePortfolio Practice Group, established as an online community space within the ALTC Exchange.
- The ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study, introduced as an example of an industry-wide opportunity for ePortfolio practice to support learning and career development.

In this chapter, these different areas of ePortfolio community activity are reviewed to present a detailed picture of the AeP2 project team's endeavours to stimulate and foster interest in ePortfolio learning in education. Beyond these formal strategies, members of the project team were also involved in a number of informal community interactions within and across different institutions, in cross-sectoral contexts and internationally.

4.2 The Australian ePortfolio Toolkit

Findings from Stage One of the Australian ePortfolio Project, presented in the final report for the project, revealed that there was a clear need to work towards a shared vocabulary to articulate the main issues in ePortfolio learning and development:

The literature abounds with definitions of 'ePortfolio'; it can be argued that the various definitions encompass similar attributes, but there is no single, collectively accepted definition. Consideration must therefore be given to the different terminology for electronic portfolios presented by designers, users and stakeholders. It is also evident in the current research literature that different terminology is employed to present the electronic portfolio in specific contexts.

(Hallam et al., 2008, p. 2)

The AeP report also underscored the diversity of perspectives that were intrinsically linked to the multiple stakeholders who could be involved in the implementation of ePortfolios in a higher education setting, including:

... staff directly involved in learning and teaching (lecturers, tutors, educational developers etc.); academic management (vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, executive deans, as well as IT/ICT directors etc.); and those involved in human resources (HR, organisational development etc.)

(Hallam et al., 2008, p. 1)

One of the first tasks for the AeP2 team was to develop an ePortfolio toolkit, comprising a suite of ePortfolio ‘concept guides’, which would address the needs of the different stakeholder groups and encourage common understandings of the issues through a shared vocabulary. The suite includes six titles:

ePortfolio concepts for learners

ePortfolio concepts for academic staff

ePortfolio concepts for information technology & teaching and learning support staff

ePortfolio concepts for institutional managers

ePortfolio concepts for employers, professional bodies and careers services

ePortfolio concepts for staff/employees

To underscore the need for community interaction, each concept guide includes a reminder that the reader is not alone, that other stakeholders need to be involved in the ePortfolio process, and gives details of the related documents provided. The six concept guides, forming the AeP Toolkit, are available on the project website at www.eportfolioppractice.qut.edu.au (AeP2, 2009a).

Each concept guide offers an overview of the key information about ePortfolio practice to define the concept and to introduce the particular audience to some of the benefits of ePortfolios in education and also to the principal issues they needed to be aware of. These principal issues are presented in each concept guide as a series of questions, with associated sub-questions, that are pertinent to the specific audience. Questions for learners focus on the student’s interaction with an ePortfolio:

- What is my main reason for creating an ePortfolio?
- How do I go about creating an entry in my ePortfolio?
- Who will have access to my ePortfolio?
- What sort of experiences and artefacts should I induced in my ePortfolio?
- What will happen to my ePortfolio in the long term?

Academic staff, on the other hand, may well have different concerns, with questions focusing on teaching and learning issues:

- teaching philosophy
- pedagogy
- curriculum
- tools for learning
- commitment
- resources and support.

Questions for information technology and teaching and learning support staff highlight the area of support that they are involved in: teaching quality, support for learners and for teaching staff, technical standards, privacy and legal issues, information management, and accessibility factors. Institutional managers are prompted to consider questions about institutional culture, institutional policy, strategic direction, resource allocation and management, and quality teaching and learning outcomes. The concept guide designed for an audience of employers, professional bodies and careers services, to consider the issues of employability skills, recognition of prior learning and graduate recruitment. This concept guide includes a number of brief case studies to help illustrate the value of ePortfolios in recruitment and employment. The final concept guide targets staff and employees, covering similar issues to the questions for learners, but contextualised for an employment situation.

The AeP Toolkit has been well received by the Australian ePortfolio community, with positive feedback received about the role the documents have played to bring different groups together within an institution. Academic staff have found that the concept guide for learners has, to some extent, ‘validated’ the introduction of an ePortfolio tool to students who might be skeptical about the reflective approach to learning. All delegates attending the AeP2 Symposium received copies of the five original concept guides [the sixth guide, *ePortfolio concepts for staff/employees*, was developed post-symposium], and since

then there has been a steady flow of requests for additional copies, with the highest demand for the guides for learners and academic staff. It should be noted that the concept guides have been published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence, which allows for further distribution of the information. Under these arrangements, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (2009a) has produced a related series of ePortfolio brochures for specific audiences in the vocational education and training sector.

4.3 The second Australian ePortfolio Symposium

The second iteration of the Australian ePortfolio Symposium, commonly referred to as the AeP2 Symposium, was held at QUT in Brisbane on 9 and 10 February, 2009, with pre-symposium workshops and a welcome event for delegates taking place on Sunday afternoon, 8 February 2009. More than 200 presenters and delegates attended the AeP2 Symposium, representing a broad spectrum of the higher education sector in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the vocational education and training sector, the schools sector, employers and professional associations.

One of the main objectives of Stage Two of the Australian ePortfolio Project was to host a forum that would offer further opportunities to explore and discuss ePortfolio research and practice, with the explicit goal of establishing, facilitating and encouraging an Australian community of practice for ePortfolio researchers and practitioners, as well as to continue the development of an ePortfolio symposium model that could be adopted for future events. The AeP2 Symposium therefore sought to build on the significant energy and momentum achieved through the Australian ePortfolio Project itself – with the first symposium held in February 2008 – in order to further engage those people who were already working with ePortfolios in education or who wished to learn more about the diverse issues and tools to develop their interest and understanding.

The theme of the AeP2 symposium was *Establishing an ePortfolio community of practice*, which aimed to meet the specific project objectives:

- To disseminate the findings from the Australian ePortfolio Project.
- To explore innovative practice in ePortfolio use in higher education.
- To articulate policy developments.
- To stimulate discussion on international ePortfolio issues.

The AeP2 Symposium was structured to present delegates with new information, as well as to provide the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, with a spread of plenary presentations, track sessions, breakout focus groups and round table discussions. The program was designed to cover policy, interoperability and practice issues, with the aim of developing strategies to encourage delegates' engagement with CoP activities. While the program facilitated discussion on the outcomes and findings of the initial Australian ePortfolio Project in 2008, it also encompassed issues about the educational impact of ePortfolio use, discipline-specific initiatives, graduate attributes, reflective learning, Web 2.0 and technological aspects of ePortfolio use. The full program, with slide presentations and audio recordings, is available on the AeP2 website (AeP2, 2009b). A selection of papers is also being published in a forthcoming issue of the online journal *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts*.

The event attracted a number of champions, practitioners and researchers in the field of ePortfolio practice as speakers and presenters. The keynote presenters included Wijnand Aalderink from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, who serves on the NL Portfolio Steering Committee of SURF NL, and Marij Veugelers, who is Community Manager of the SURF NL Portfolio special interest group. Their presentation, *Creating sustainable ePortfolio development: An update from the Netherlands higher education community, with an international view*, opened the discussion on international perspectives of ePortfolio practice, which were further developed by Rob Ward, Director of the Centre for Recording Achievement in the UK, who delivered his presentation, *ePortfolio communities of practice in the UK*, via video link. The topics of ePortfolio policy and interoperability in the UK ePortfolio context were elaborated on in the papers by Peter Rees Jones from JISC-CETIS and Emma Crawford from the University of Nottingham. Strong linkages with other ALTC projects were made through Simon Barrie (University of Sydney) and Clair Hughes (University of Queensland), who presented an update on the ALTC National Graduate Attributes Project (University of Sydney, 2009).

Institutional perspectives in New Zealand also received attention, with plenary presentations from Cathy Gunn from the University of Auckland, who covered *ePortfolios: A bridge from strategy to implementation* and Philippa Gerbic from the Auckland University of Technology, who outlined the *Frameworks for ePortfolio practice*.

In addition to the invited papers, there was an open call for papers to encourage academics and educational technologists to prepare papers that highlighted the diversity, innovation and practicalities of ePortfolio practice in higher education. Presenters' viewpoints and use of ePortfolios ranged from the student-centred approach to a managerial, structured, top-down approach.

The Australian presenters represented a broad range of educational implementations of ePortfolio practice in Australia, from Ruth Wallace's work in the Northern Territory on *Empowering disenfranchised learner identities through ePortfolios*, to ALTC Senior Fellow Sally Kift who addressed the issue of *Harnessing ePortfolio to support and enhance the first year experience*, where ePortfolio initiatives encouraged reflective practice and a deeper understanding of learning by students, often incorporated into the assessment requirement of students. Delegates commented that they learnt a great deal about the importance of embedding ePortfolio practice in student learning:

Integration in undergraduate education

The need to raise staff awareness and to work at a course/program level to develop ePortfolio concepts and understanding

Better methods for promoting student use of ePortfolios with an emphasis on teaching critical reflective practice

Beverly Oliver showcased the innovative implementation of 'iPortfolios' at Curtin University with her paper, *Curtin's iPortfolio: Focussing student reflection on achievement of the triple-i-curriculum*, where small screen technologies (iPods) were being used to capture and encourage the students' involvement in ePortfolios. The concept of 'mPortfolios' (using mobile devices) attracted considerable interest:

mPortfolio focus in implementation of ePortfolio

Implementing mobile technology with ePortfolios

Cross-sector issues were further explored in the paper by Allison Miller from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, which discussed the document *Managing learner information: Important considerations for implementing e-portfolios in VET* (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2009b). Delegates recognised the importance of the extended use of ePortfolios:

Opportunities for implementation in different ways, eg capturing mandatory training requirements

The concept of how ePortfolios are a lifelong user experience; seek to make my university aware of this when implementing an ePortfolio

Many of the issues were explored further in the track sessions, which covered the topics of ePortfolios in the health science disciplines, in law and in education; institutional and academic development strategies; factors impacting on employability; and the industry pilot study in the use of ePortfolios in the library and information services sector, which is discussed in Section 4.7 of this chapter.

The roundtable session 'Building communities' provided the opportunity to discuss the preferred focus and the needs of participants in an online community of practice for ePortfolios. The participants provided valuable feedback on their expectations and requirements for the functionality and versatility that an online community should be able to provide. A panel discussion was held at the symposium midpoint to shift the focus away from the individual presentations to the main issues and challenges facing the delegates in terms of the development and sustainability of communities of practice.

The ePortfolio Practice Group site hosted by the ALTC Exchange was also promoted to symposium participants, with members of the project team presenting an overview of the 'ePortfolio Practice' online community. Instructions for joining the community were included in the symposium satchel. Discussion of the online ePortfolio community is presented in Section 4.6 of this chapter.

The total number of registered delegates was 246, representing 87 Australian and New Zealand institutions and agencies. As a proportion of delegates had attended the 2008 symposium, the forum provided the opportunity for people to build on the relationships that had begun to emerge in the previous year. The track sessions specifically allowed delegates to meet others who were interested in the same or related discipline areas. Those delegates who had not attended the 2008 event reported that their interest in ePortfolios had been stimulated by their awareness of the AeP project work and that they welcomed the chance to learn more about the topic through the AeP2 Symposium. The project team took advantage of the chance to promote and disseminate information about the Australian ePortfolio Project in general, with all delegates provided with a copy of the AeP final report, together with a set of the *Australian ePortfolio concept guides*. In terms of international collaboration, the symposium satchel also contained a copy of the resource *Effective practice with ePortfolios: Supporting 21st century learning* published by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the UK.

It was apparent that the symposium effectively sustained the initial strong interest in ePortfolio practice achieved through the 2008 symposium, with evidence of further momentum demonstrated by:

- an increase in attendance numbers from 2008 to 2009
- repeat attendances from the 2008 symposium
- the ability to attract international speakers
- the cross-sectoral representation of delegates.

Delegates noted the ‘surprising number of delegates’ and ‘the amount of activity in the area of ePortfolios’. The symposium effectively addressed concerns about academics ‘working in silos’, with the importance of networking and establishing a community of practice widely acknowledged, both within and across institutions:

Importance of the community of practice, I will seek to extend this at my workplace, with both teaching and support staff

Contacts with some other institutions that I will follow up ...

My learning has come from networking with others. Have established some collaborative relationships with others ... we have agreed on some actions that I will work on when I return [to work]

Informal networking during the opening wine and cheese evening, the evening BBQ and the lunch gatherings contributed to the atmosphere of collegial sharing, with additional opportunities for delegates to meet more informally to establish some initial interaction at the regional, disciplinary or ePortfolio platform level as a foundation for further community of practice activities.

The symposium therefore not only became a forum to consider and discuss the needs of stakeholders in the implementation of ePortfolio communities, but also for delegates to meet with other practitioners to discuss diverse implementation strategies and the relative strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the use of ePortfolios in student learning activities. Comments from delegates highlighted the value of the perspectives presented:

*... how important it is to ‘put the purpose first’- identifying needs and goals, then implementing a solution
ePortfolios need to be tailored rather than one size fits all*

... taking a strategic approach and learning from others who have already implemented ePortfolios

Evidence of the value of the AeP2 symposium to the delegates was captured in the evaluation survey conducted at the conclusion of the event. A total of 62 responses were received, with the overall score of 4.29 on a 5.0 scale. Average scores of 5.0 were recorded for the question about the degree of relevancy of the symposium in terms of ePortfolio practice in the delegate’s own organisation, along with the question about the potential for further dissemination of AeP2 information to other colleagues. Positive feedback (average scores of 4.0) was received for all other questions, highlighting the significance of the event as a forum to extend the delegates’ thinking about ePortfolios in education, to support the exploration and discussion of ePortfolio research and practice, with good examples of ePortfolios and ways to implement them in practice that would stimulate new approaches to teaching and/or professional practice. The forum was found to be a satisfying experience that stimulated an emergent community of practice by offering a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with others and to discuss a range of issues.

Nevertheless, delegates also identified areas for improvement for future ePortfolio symposia, which predominantly focused on the desire to see more case studies and more practical examples of ePortfolio use, especially in academic subjects and programs:

More examples of implementation – what people have tried, what has worked, examples of innovative practice etc. Too much focus on theory and identifying the issues that we are all very aware of. No answers!

Evidence that ePortfolios assist student learning

Findings from the first stage of the AeP project underscored the current lack of research into practice in Australian universities. It is hoped that, by establishing a community of practice, there may be a stronger interest in developing a rigorous evidence base to inform future practice.

It was found that the diverse stakeholder groups tended to seek further information that was directly relevant to their interests:

Management development and academic development strategies

Technical aspects of ePortfolio implementation

The students' view on how it's useful, what they like or don't like; what else they would like to have, first year student view and final year student view across a number of disciplines

Head of institutions, policy issues

Academic staff ePortfolios

Uses other than study – professional development etc

ePortfolios for the general public – outside the academic environment

There was also interest in having increased opportunities for discussion and small group breakout sessions. Delegate feedback will help inform the structure and program of future ePortfolio events.

The symposium, the roundtable sessions, the panel discussion and the informal interactions became focal points for stimulating the delegates' interest in and engagement with an evolving community of practice. The introduction of the ALTC Exchange online group at the conclusion of the symposium, the availability of the symposium presentations on the AeP2 website and the forthcoming issue of the online journal *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts* have ensured that communication has continued beyond the face-to-face event.

4.4 The Australian ePortfolio Showcase

A further objective for the AeP2 project was to host an ePortfolio showcase, in conjunction with the symposium, as a forum for strengthening understanding on the part of the diverse stakeholders in the higher education sector of the features and functionality of the different ePortfolio platforms. While the AeP project team has argued strongly that the *process* of ePortfolio learning is an essential aspect of effective practice, ePortfolio *products* also represent an integral aspect of the topic.

Software vendors were invited to present and demonstrate their products at a pre-symposium event held on Sunday, 8 February. The AeP2 ePortfolio Showcase was promoted to delegates, with around 70 people taking the opportunity to attend the software demonstrations and to speak with the vendors about their educational and technical needs. Presenters represented the following vendors and products:

- CareerHub (<http://www.careerhub.info/demo.aspx>)
- Desire2Learn (<http://www.desire2learn.com>)
- PebblePad (<http://www.pebblepad.co.uk>)
- Netspot, agents for Mahara (<http://www.netspot.com.au>)
- Sakai OSP (<http://threecanoes.com/sakaiosp-services>).

The AeP2 showcase was well received by delegates, as recorded by comments in the evaluation survey:

ePortfolio culture new to me, so terrific introduction. Sunday showcase of software excellent entrée to the symposium

[The showcase] extended my knowledge of ePortfolios and their uses and the variety of tools available. Also features to look for in ePortfolio software

It was found that the opportunity to view the various software applications and interact with the vendors helped delegates build concrete links between the educational theories and pedagogies underpinning ePortfolio practice and the practical application and building of individual ePortfolios. It should be stressed that it is the process by which the tools are used and combined that effectively defines the ePortfolio experience and captures its potential.

4.5 Technical issues and opportunities in ePortfolio practice

On Sunday, 8 February 2009, a special panel session chaired by Wendy Harper from QUT was held to encourage symposium participants to consider the Technical issues and opportunities in ePortfolio practice. Forty participants attended the session to hear five brief presentations that led into an open floor discussion. The presentations were:

- *E-Portfolio to support recognition of existing skills:* Alison Miller.
- *Standards for what?* Jon Mason.
- *Apprenticeships: Breaking the glass ceiling to higher education:* Peter Rees Jones.
- *Interoperability and the impact of Web 2.0:* Jerry Leeson.
- *Interoperability for e-portfolios: Lightweight vs holistic approaches:* Owen O'Neill.

The presentations stimulated discussion on a number of technical issues, which fell into the following key themes: standardisation, access, authentication, data and storage, learning and user uptake and collaboration. The topics naturally led to the consideration of the interwoven issues of privacy, sector and outside sector engagement and the changing nature of learning technologies and Web 2.0.

Standardisation

One of the most critical technical issues discussed at the meeting was the question of standards of practice, although it was noted that standardisation need not always be a 'technical' issue and could encompass policy explications or agreements on paper. The discussion around standardisation was broad ranging and led into other issues, such as the changing nature of technology and the rapid emergence of Web 2.0 technologies.

It was noted that not every aspect of ePortfolios needed to be standardised. Panelists agreed that it would be better to identify the core components of an ePortfolio, rather than aim for a monolithic and inflexible ePortfolio standard. A number of standardisation initiatives were discussed, including:

- *IMS ePortfolio Specification.* This is a creation of the IMS Global Learning Consortium, a US originated, 'non-profit collaboration among the world's leading educational technology suppliers, content providers, educational institutions, school districts, and government organizations' (IMS Global Learning Consortium, 2009).
- *LEAP 2, from JISC/CETIS in the UK.* 'LEAP2A is the specification, based on Atom, developed and agreed by the partner developers. LEAP 2.0 is a wider, forward-looking framework, assembled by Simon Grant using ideas from many others, and kept up to date to reflect all developments in LEAP 2A. LEAP 2.0 is more clearly directly based on Semantic Web concepts, and does not have the validity of having been agreed or implemented by anyone. LEAP 2.0 therefore acts as a conceptual testing ground, where ideas can be put in place ready for possible agreement and adoption within LEAP2A. LEAP2A is agreed and relatively stable, currently being steadily extended, but LEAP 2.0 constructs that are not part of LEAP2A may be changed or abandoned at any time, when new insight or agreement emerges' (JISC, 2009a).
- *QualSearch (2009).* Australian electronic verification service that allows for checking of qualifications by institutions.

- *PESC (Postsecondary Electronic Standards) (2009)*. An American standards group. The Rome group has representation from PESC and agrees to have 12 standards in common; they may have other local variations but agree on the 12. Vendors have signed up for it.

While IMS was seen as inflexible in its approach to ePortfolio content and moving very slowly, PESC was singled out as moving very quickly. With multiple vendors already on board, PESC was felt to be the most likely candidate to develop standards that could be introduced in the near future. It was noted, however, that PESC had no representation in Australia. Without having international groups involved, the meeting argued that the standardisation process would not deliver the desired outcomes.

A further problem that was explored was the perceived gap between the innovation and standardisation communities. While there was a sense that a great deal of innovative practice was emerging in the web space, there was little confidence that this was percolating through to the discussion on standards. In the past ten years many standardisation activities had been pre-emptive, yet with little of lasting value. The meeting attendees believed that closer consultation was required between innovators and users of ePortfolios. It was also noted that standards needed to be flexible enough to respond to changing demands. It was argued that lightweight standards could potentially make it easier for the users to control the content of their ePortfolios.

Access

Another issue discussed was that of access to the ePortfolio on the part of users, often made difficult by the individual approaches of universities to data access. A proprietary approach could be restrictive and often conflicted with how students might want to use the technology, in a 'take whatever you want and combine it how you choose' manner. In one example offered, the Mahara approach to free ePortfolio space and interoperability was seen to go a long way towards alleviating these issues. It was also noted, however, that some areas of activity were subject to legislation, so that laws and boundaries needed to be observed. Delegates discussed the current decentralised approach in Australia, noting that there were some initiatives that were currently seeking to introduce greater harmony, as evidenced, for example, by a number of state-based approaches, as well as the National Diploma Supplement, which aimed to have the capacity to include university approved extracurricular activity.

Authentication, data and storage

Closely linked to the question of access is that of authenticating data sources to share learner information. It was noted that there was already an ability to share digital objects quickly (for example, almost instantaneous transfer of pictures from mobile phone to the web) and that technical work was making this possible in the context of ePortfolios. Examples offered included one initiative in the UK that is looking at the use of authenticated documents to build a complete learner record; along with a Swinburne University situation where technology is used to take objects from the WebCT Learning Management System to verify them for import into an ePortfolio.

Granularity was identified as a major hurdle, along with the problem that, while technically the incorporation of Web 2.0 functionality was simple, when data is merged with other data, there may be specific issues associated with authentication, as well as access. While these barriers should be acknowledged, each implementation should be looked at on its merits. Other aspects of data that were considered at the meeting were the issues of ownership, privacy and storage. These were seen as not simply individual issues but key for all of the institutions concerned. The relationship between the person, as the subject of the ePortfolio, and the content was significant, and it was critical for users to access content that was understandable and verifiable. This, in turn, raised issues of the longevity of data, with discussion about what the components might look like in five years and whether they would still be usable.

Learning and user uptake

Delegates felt that it was crucial not to lose sight of the purpose of the ePortfolio as a technology platform and its various uses in lifelong learning, mentoring, capturing skills and experience, supporting transitions, empowering the user and aiding reflective practice. There was agreement that, from an academic perspective, institutions and their staff and students should be less concerned with the technology per se, but should have a clear focus on reflection and other ways to consider learning for a range of other academic and career purposes. It was felt that too little attention was paid to the learner at the centre of the process.

One way to further learner uptake and usage was to scaffold students using ePortfolios, just as other elements of the curriculum are scaffolded. This could include mentoring, since many students don't always want to be in a broad freeform 'open to the world' space but sometimes want to be in a more scaffolded space where they can get guidance and/or be mentored. Another example of use is the issue with apprentices and ways to assist with skill recognition and help with their progression in their careers and education. In a similar way, ePortfolios could be used for admission to higher education. Potentially, it could help more non-traditional groups gain access to higher education, but it was acknowledged that these groups would need guidance in a world that is strange to them as learners. Again, this brings to the fore a number of issues associated with the authentication of the claims made by learners and the role of digital signatures to authenticate. It was mooted that perhaps an advisor could represent a digital signatory so the learner could take a piece of work to the supervisor, who could identify the digital signature. This could then facilitate entry into higher education, removing unnecessary barriers. Those at the meeting also acknowledged the fact that a considerable amount of learning occurs outside of formal learning structures; there was a clear need to consider the use of ePortfolios to recognise and capture this.

Collaboration

The unifying theme behind all of the issues explored during the session on technical issues and opportunities was the need for continued and effective collaboration, since all the subgroups were grappling with the same questions and problems. There was a desire to raise awareness of ePortfolio practice, not only to ask about the reasons for use and to consider the optimum solutions, but also to help identify the best tools and the best processes. While the meeting recognised the need for an ongoing dialogue about all the issues, it was felt that there was a lack of clarity about who to involve in the particular discussions. The meeting stressed the fact that effective collaboration was critical to the adoption of effective practice. However, the group was reminded that ePortfolios were not to be thought of as the 'holy grail' and should not be expected to be the final answer. It was important for ePortfolios to be used in situations where they are most powerful; for instance, in reflection, recognition of prior learning and to provide evidence of learning outcomes.

4.6 The ePortfolio Practice community site on the ALTC Exchange

One of the main objectives for the second stage of the Australian ePortfolio Project was to develop a forum within the ALTC Exchange to support an ePortfolio community of practice. Prior to the AeP2 Symposium the project team worked closely with ALTC Exchange staff to create an online group. The ALTC Exchange has been specifically developed as 'a new online service that will provide learning and teaching resources and support communication and collaboration across the national and international higher education sector' (ALTC, 2008d). As such, it is felt to be well placed as a resource to support the identification, dissemination and embedding of good individual practice, as well as best institutional practice within the higher education sector, to support 'networking and the development of communities of practice across the higher education sector' (ALTC, 2008e).

Members of the project team explored the functionality of the ALTC Exchange, paying attention to some exemplar sites. While subsequent research activities within the AeP2 project would consider the specific requirements for an ePortfolio community of practice, the value of the symposium as an event where an embryonic online community space could be presented and promoted to prospective members was an important driver for the timing of establishing the virtual space. Bearing in mind that the future participants of the online community would potentially be drawn from a range of sectors and would have varying levels of experience with online communities, it was decided that a basic 'structure' for the online community would be required.

The purpose of the ePortfolio Practice community site was not to specifically create new content but to concentrate on providing a virtual space to encourage online interaction between people who were interested in ePortfolios in education. Thus, there was no intention to replicate information about the project itself, which was already available on the AeP2 website, but rather to point interested participants to the information that they needed about the wider context of ePortfolio practice and to provide a venue for interaction.

The stated aim for the community was presented on the opening page of the group site:

This online community is part of the Australian ePortfolio Project which is examining the current levels of ePortfolio practice in Australian higher education. The focus of this ePortfolio community of practice is to enable participants 'to share knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries' and to work around the potential problems of slow-moving hierarchies in organisations.

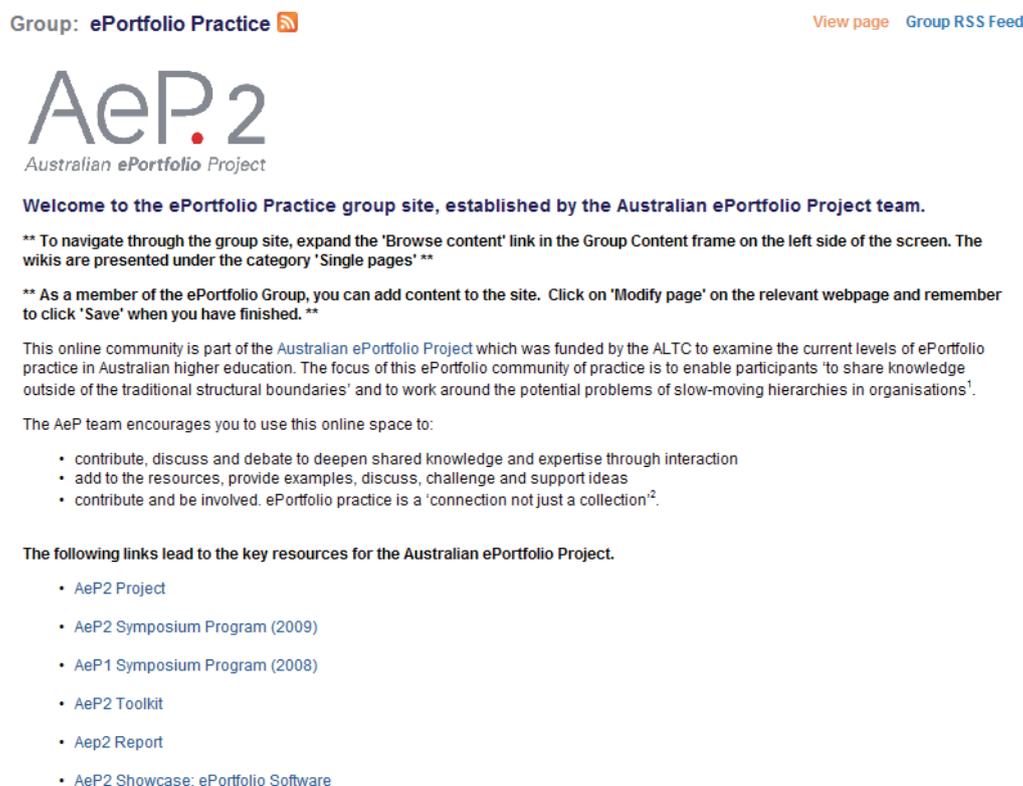
(Lesser & Storck, 2001)

Use this online space to contribute, discuss and debate to deepen shared knowledge and expertise through interaction; add to the resources, provide examples, discuss, challenge and support ideas, contribute and be involved. ePortfolio practice is a 'connection not just a collection'.

(Stuckey & Arkell, 2006, p. 7)

For members of the project team, working with the online community proved to be an example of experiential learning, or a 'journey of discovery', to develop their understanding of the features and functionality of the service. Problem-solving strategies were captured in a blog within the ALTC Exchange that could be referred to during the ongoing development of the site. When the evolving site was pilot tested for its usability, difficulties were reported in terms of the overall navigation, especially for those people who were unfamiliar with Web 2.0 utilities. As there were specific concerns about the need to scroll down the screen to locate and view items of information, particularly as the site might ultimately hold a considerable amount of information, the need for increased structure within the site was acknowledged. Consultation with ALTC Exchange staff helped resolve some of the issues and introduce alternative strategies for the structure of and navigation within the site.

The opening page of the group site was developed as a static page, managed by the group owners. The key function of this page was to provide links to the basic concepts of ePortfolios and to the activities and resources associated with the Australian ePortfolio Project (Figure 4.1).



Group: **ePortfolio Practice** 

[View page](#) [Group RSS Feed](#)

AeP.2

Australian ePortfolio Project

Welcome to the ePortfolio Practice group site, established by the Australian ePortfolio Project team.

**** To navigate through the group site, expand the 'Browse content' link in the Group Content frame on the left side of the screen. The wikis are presented under the category 'Single pages' ****

**** As a member of the ePortfolio Group, you can add content to the site. Click on 'Modify page' on the relevant webpage and remember to click 'Save' when you have finished. ****

This online community is part of the Australian ePortfolio Project which was funded by the ALTC to examine the current levels of ePortfolio practice in Australian higher education. The focus of this ePortfolio community of practice is to enable participants 'to share knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries' and to work around the potential problems of slow-moving hierarchies in organisations¹.

The AeP team encourages you to use this online space to:

- contribute, discuss and debate to deepen shared knowledge and expertise through interaction
- add to the resources, provide examples, discuss, challenge and support ideas
- contribute and be involved. ePortfolio practice is a 'connection not just a collection'².

The following links lead to the key resources for the Australian ePortfolio Project.

- [AeP2 Project](#)
- [AeP2 Symposium Program \(2009\)](#)
- [AeP1 Symposium Program \(2008\)](#)
- [AeP2 Toolkit](#)
- [AeP2 Report](#)
- [AeP2 Showcase: ePortfolio Software](#)

Figure 4.1: The opening page of the ePortfolio Practice community site

Three further sections of the site were set up using the ALTC Exchange wiki facility; these would allow all members to make contributions to the community. The focus of these sections were resources about ePortfolios in learning and employment; upcoming ePortfolio events, including seminars, workshops, symposia and conferences; and links to other online forums and communities (Figure 4.2).

Contribute and share with the ePortfolio Practice wikis

- [ePortfolio Resources](#)
- [ePortfolio Events](#)
- [ePortfolio Connections](#)

Figure 4.2: Links to the ePortfolio Practice wikis

During the symposium, a roundtable session on the topic of ‘Building communities’ encouraged participants to explore their anticipated needs and expectations for a community of practice; the blueprint for the ePortfolio Practice community within the ALTC Exchange was presented to stimulate feedback on the site. It was noted that some participants (who had identified themselves as ‘experienced users’ of online communities) argued that the ePortfolio Practice community needed to be more intuitive for users if interaction was to be encouraged. During the roundtable session some of the issues associated with the future management of the community were raised and discussed.

The ePortfolio Practice community within the ALTC Exchange was introduced to delegates in the closing stages of the symposium. Delegates had received an instruction sheet in their satchels to provide guidance about becoming a member of the Exchange and joining this ePortfolio community. It was stressed that the online group was embryonic and that the future growth of the community was very much in the hands of those who wished to participate and share their resources and understandings.

Finding the ePortfolio Practice Group within the ALTC Exchange can be achieved using the ‘search for groups’ function of the ALTC Exchange. Beyond this, finding specific information about ePortfolios has been enhanced with the addition of ‘tags’ when the entries or resources are added to the site by the owner or group members. The process of ‘tagging’ the entries can be achieved either by using structured headings provided by the ALTC Exchange or by adding user-created headings such those used in the social bookmarking website Delicious and other Web 2.0 tagging applications. The tags ultimately enhance the searchability of the information held in the community site (Figure 4.3).

Tags & Keywords :

[Discipline Communities](#), [Assessment tools](#), [Collaborating and Communicating](#), [Education](#), [Evaluating and reporting](#), [Evaluation](#), [Flexible learning](#), [Publishing and presenting](#), [Social networking technologies](#), [Work-integrated learning](#), [Learning and Teaching](#), [Technologies for Learning](#), [e-portfolio](#), [e-portfolios](#), [eportfolio](#), [eportfolios](#), [reflective practice](#), [student assessment](#)

Figure 4.3: Tags added to the ePortfolio Events page on the group site

In the time since the ePortfolio Practice Group was created in February 2009, the community has progressively attracted 46 members. While the wikis were set up with the intent of allowing collaboration about ePortfolio resources and events, as well as stimulating a sense of ownership by the members of the group, it was noted that the initial interaction on the part of a range of group members from the higher education and vocational education sectors did not follow the anticipated structure of the site. Members have preferred to add content directly to the main page, rather than to the topical wikis, meaning that the team failed to avoid the lengthy ‘blog style’ page with the need to scroll through the accumulated content.

Members also have the ability to interact using a forum, to add blog entries that can be made either public or private, or to create further collaborative spaces — this is available through the ‘List members’ and ‘Invite member’ links (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: The functions available to members to contribute to the group site

However, it has been found that members are not communicating with each other on the site using the forum or any of the other tools available to them. It is possible that they communicate with each other directly outside of the community environment, after making reference to the profiles of members and by making contact through the group by requesting to become a colleague. This can enhance the sense of independence for members, but within the context of the AeP2 project independent activity remains invisible and, consequently, unmonitored from the perspective of the group owner.

Most of the content that has been added to the site has been sourced by members of the AeP2 project team, drawing on announcements from the various lists and from contacts within the sector. The information on upcoming conferences is one such area (Figure 4.5), and although this is located in a shared wiki, to date no other members have added content here. The addition of content of this nature inevitably requires ongoing maintenance to ensure that it remains current and differentiates between upcoming events and past events that might, in turn, have further content in terms of conference papers.

Upcoming Conferences and Seminars

[RMIT ePortfolio Forum 2009](#)
Hosted by RMIT University and University of South Australia
RMIT University, Melbourne, 4 December 2009

[Ninth Annual Residential Seminar of the Centre for Recording Achievement \(CRA\)](#)
Chancellors Hotel and Conference Centre, Manchester, 26-27 November 2009

[4th Annual Employability and PDP Conference](#)
Leeds MET, 19 March 2010

[Enabling a More Complete Education: Encouraging, Recognising and Valuing Life-Wide Learning in Higher Education](#)
University of Surrey, Guildford, 13-14 April 2010

[Researching and evaluating Personal Development Planning \(PDP\) and ePortfolio](#)
Nottingham, 26-28 April 2010
Hosted by: Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research (INCEPR), the National Action Research Network (NARN) and the Scottish PDP Forum
For details, visit the Centre for Recording Achievement > News and events

[1st PebblePad Conference](#)
Shifnal, Shropshire, 8-10 June 2010

[EHEL Learning Forum London 2010: ePortfolio for all!](#)
ePortfolio 2010 & Key Competencies 2010
Savoy Place, London, 5-7 July 2010
Themes: eP in: Healthcare education and practice; Initial education and personal identity construction; Employability and organisational learning; Policies and implementation; Technologies and system architectures.
For details on the call for papers visit: www.epforum.eu/conference/call/

[AAEEBL Annual Conference](#)
Seaport World Trade Center, Boston, MA, 19-22 July 2010
This event will be co-located with the Campus Technology conference.
The call for papers will be made available in December 2009.

Past Conferences and Seminars

[Australian Flexible Learning Framework VET ePortfolio Showcase](#)
Melbourne, 16 October 2009

Recordings of the several presentations can be accessed on the website.

[UniSA 2009 ePortfolio Showcase](#)
University of South Australia, Adelaide, 23 September 2009

Podcasts are available [online](#).
Summary of event: See [UniSA 2009 ePortfolio Showcase: Summary](#) (Attached MS Word document below)

[Ausakai 09: 3rd Annual Australian Sakai Conference](#)
Charles Sturt University, Bathurst Campus, NSW, 17-18 September 2009

[10th Sakai Conference](#)
Boston, MA, 8-10 July 2009

Figure 4.5: Notification of upcoming and past events in the group site

It is felt that the ePortfolio Practice Group within the ALTC Exchange has achieved the principal aim of establishing a new community space for those people interested in ePortfolios in education and learning. While the AeP website has provided a static space with links to the main project resources, the community site offers an additional pathway with enhanced features for interaction between the members. Further research has been undertaken within the AeP2 project to identify the potential requirements of ePortfolio practitioners and researchers for a community space, as well as to examine the critical success factors and the challenges facing existing ePortfolio communities within Australia and overseas. One important issue to consider is the concept of the community lifecycle, which is discussed in the literature review: the ePortfolio Practice Group is inevitably in its earliest days and will need further impetus and interest to become sustainable. It might be found that one 'common' ePortfolio community fails to meet members' diverse needs, meaning multiple smaller, more targeted communities of practice will naturally emerge.

The future of the community, together with recommendations for its ongoing sustainability, will be discussed in the conclusion of this report, drawing directly on the findings from the research into current national and international practice in the context of ePortfolio communities.

4.7 ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study

One of the principal objectives of the AeP2 research project was to consider the development of strategies to encourage interest in and engagement with community of practice activities. While the ALTC Exchange was established as an online community space, the project team identified the value of establishing and monitoring a community of practice that had its roots in a single industry sector. Working with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), a proposal was drafted for a pilot study on ePortfolio use in the library and information services (LIS) sector. The proposal was made public in a presentation to the ALIA New Librarians Symposium held in Melbourne in early December 2008, with an invitation to the delegates – who were predominantly early career professionals – to consider using an ePortfolio to support their learning and professional development. ALIA promotes its Professional Development Scheme (ALIA, 2009) to encourage members to undertake and track their continuing professional development activities.

Further announcements about the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study, with a call for expressions of interest, were disseminated via professional e-lists. The pilot project sought participants who could commit to being involved for two years (2009 and 2010). This study therefore extends beyond the life of the AeP2 project, but the project team, together with the senior staff of ALIA, felt that the optimum project outcomes would require longer timelines than was feasible with the AeP2 project itself. Prospective participants were also asked to be available to attend the AeP2 Symposium to develop an overarching understanding of ePortfolio practice and to participate in a half-day workshop as an introduction to the ePortfolio software. It was also hoped that participants would be supported by their manager and/or mentor so that there was a natural connection to their professional life.

Forty practitioners initially expressed an interest in being involved in the project, which was refined to a final cohort of 26 people. While the cohort was self-selected, there was a natural geographic distribution (Brisbane and South East Queensland, Central Queensland, Northern Territory, Melbourne and Adelaide), with those involved representing professionals (librarians) and paraprofessionals (library technicians) at different stages of their careers; that is, students, new graduates and/or early career (less than five years employment in the LIS sector, mid career (5–15 years industry experience) and senior career (16 years or more in the sector). There was also a good distribution of participants representing the different areas of LIS practice: public, academic, TAFE and special libraries.

The software selected for the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study was PebblePad, as it was felt that the platform would comfortably accommodate the cross-institutional nature of the cohort. The staff of PebblePad also strongly supported the initiative, given the use of the ePortfolio software for the 'Flourish' study (involving the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)) led by the University of Cumbria in the UK (JISC, 2009b). Importantly, all participants were aware of their involvement in and commitment to the project as a research study. Accordingly, there were opportunities to survey those involved to track their progressive interaction and engagement with ePortfolio over an extended period of time.

During the AeP2 Symposium brief interviews were recorded with the participants to gain insights into their motivations to join the project. The pilot study has included an initial ‘pre-ePortfolio’ survey (February 2009) to capture the participants’ expectations for their ePortfolio activities; this was conducted before they were introduced to the software. A subsequent survey (May 2009) was conducted to track the stages of development over the intervening months. The interim findings from the research are presented in this report but, as noted, the life of the pilot study extends beyond the timelines for the AeP2 project: a concluding report will be prepared in 2010 to present the complete findings of the industry study. The questionnaires, designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, were developed and distributed using the online tool SurveyMonkey. The survey questions drew on those used in the research activities during the first stage of the Australian ePortfolio Project, which have notably also been used by a number of other ePortfolio researchers at various academic institutions in Australia and New Zealand, enabling a comparative perspective of participants to emerge.

A total of 23 pilot study participants completed the first ‘expectations’ survey. Questions about the demographics of the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio cohort revealed that the participants ranged in age from 21 years to over 45 years; two thirds of the cohort were aged over 36 years, with 26% of participants being 36–40 years, 17% being 41–45 years and 22% over 45 years of age. It is noted that the demographic data reflects the overall picture of the LIS profession, correlating with the national neXus study of the library and information workforce in Australia, which reported that 79% of LIS professionals was in the over 36 years age group (Hallam, 2008), Nevertheless, all participants in the study were female, compared with the actual figure of 85% of the library workforce being female (Hallam, 2008).

The majority of the participants were full-time employees (13), while seven were part-time employees. One was a casual employee and three indicated that they were unemployed, but currently studying; a total of 13 respondents indicated that they were also studying. There was a good spread of qualifications across the higher education and VET sectors: 15 participants held a bachelor degree, 10 held graduate diplomas and three participants held a masters degree. Thirteen participants held qualifications from the VET sector, with seven people reporting that they held a TAFE certificate and five held TAFE diplomas. It should be noted that in the library and information services sector there are different career pathways, with TAFE certificates supporting the training for library assistants and TAFE diplomas for library technicians, while librarianship qualifications are offered by universities at the bachelor, graduate diploma and masters levels. It is often the case that those in the LIS workforce enter the profession as a career change: those with earlier academic qualifications represented a wide range of disciplines including education, science, business, journalism, visual arts, psychology and hospitality. Eight of the respondents listed first qualifications in library and information science.

Participants were able to select the statement or statements that best described their understanding of an ePortfolio. Participants could select more than one response to this question. The statements included:

It is an electronic tool for self-assessment, a place I can record by education, something like a diary.

It is an electronic tool for self-assessment, a place I can record my experiences during my employment, something like a diary.

It is an electronic version of a paper portfolio.

It is an electronic filing cabinet filled with examples of my work and achievements.

It is a secure repository for me to collect and store my evidence of my skills and knowledge attainment.

It is a place for me to reflect upon my learning journey — where I have come from and where I’m going — it’s about the process of learning.

It is about evidence of skills, but there’s also an opportunity to show the process and to reflect on what this means to me.

All statements were selected, with the lowest score on any statement being 11, indicating that the statements captured the different perspectives of the participants. The highest score recorded was 16, for the statement that an ePortfolio *'was a secure repository to collect and store evidence of skills and knowledge attainment'*. Fourteen participants recognised that an ePortfolio could be a tool for reflection and 14 believed it could chart a journey of learning. All participants chose more than one statement, indicating that they were aware that an ePortfolio could cover a range of professional and educational purposes.

The survey sought responses from the participants on their perceptions of ePortfolios in regard to their education and career. The responses were very positive about the potential role of ePortfolios in learning, acknowledging that an ePortfolio could provide a space to store examples of their work; it would allow reflection and evaluation of learning processes and allow them to reflect on weaker areas; allow the storage of extracurricular activities and would assist them to become more independent learners.

Further questions on the possible outcomes of ePortfolios in career enhancement and education focused on career opportunities, continuing professional development, performance reviews and professional accreditation. Most participants saw advantages in using ePortfolios to organise their work in preparation for future employment and in continuing professional development. Participants recognised that ePortfolios would form a component of their lifelong learning activities; that they anticipated that their involvement with ePortfolios would go beyond the initial pilot project. To a slightly lesser extent, but still with positive responses, the participants valued ePortfolios as contributing to and being part of the performance planning and review process and in making a contribution to professional accreditation and registration.

Three participants had previously used an ePortfolio in postgraduate coursework, two had used an ePortfolio as part of a professional development program and one had used an ePortfolio independently. Twenty-two per cent of participants reported having their own websites, with 50% considering a website to be a type of electronic portfolio. Early indications were that the participants felt enthusiastic at being involved in this project (61%), with an additional 30% indicating that they had positive feelings about their involvement. Eight per cent were neutral or uncertain about their involvement in the ePortfolio project. No participants reported feeling anxious or confused.

Once the participants had attended the half-day workshop, they were given time to explore the PebblePad software and to consider its strengths and limitations for their own purposes. It was stressed that the goal was to enable the participants to formulate their own ideas about how they would use PebblePad, which was arguably a different approach to other more prescriptive scenarios of ePortfolio practice (for example, in academic coursework). The participants were not required to use the ePortfolio for any specific tasks or assessment activities.

Each participant began to use PebblePad to design, collate, format and present their professional portfolio to suit their own needs. Face-to-face user group meetings were held for the Brisbane and South East Queensland cohort on a monthly basis, with at least one user group held in all the other regions during the period March–June 2009. Participants shared ideas, assets and activities using the 'gateway' (shared space) feature of PebblePad. The face-to-face meetings were collegial and constructive, taking a 'show and tell' approach to encourage all participants to share their developing ePortfolios with the rest of the group. Those who were having technical problems were assisted, while the chance to view the ePortfolios of other participants proved an incentive to test out new ideas. A second survey was conducted in May 2009 to track the progress made and to capture the diverse range of applications to which the participants had applied the PebblePad software to build their ePortfolios.

In the second survey the aim was to track the changes in perceptions of the participants, as well as to try to capture the new and evolving skills that the participants may have developed. Participants' revised understandings of ePortfolios were captured in the second survey. The data revealed that there had been a shift in thinking since the participants had begun using PebblePad and sharing their ePortfolios in group meetings. Less value was placed on the ePortfolio as a 'product', that is, as a secure repository or an electronic version of a paper portfolio, with the emphasis moving to a clearer understanding of the 'process', with 17 respondents responding positively to the statements:

It is a place for me to reflect upon my learning journey – where I have come from and where I’m going – it’s about the process of learning.

It is about evidence of skills, but there’s also an opportunity to show the process and to reflect on what this means to me.

The participants were asked to provide responses to questions on how ePortfolios might be of benefit in their education and career. Ninety per cent agreed or strongly agreed that their ePortfolio was helping them with their career development. The majority of the participants (95%) indicated that they valued the ePortfolio as a space to store examples of their extracurricular activities (for example, volunteer work, life experience) that were relevant to their current and future careers. Almost three quarters reported that they were becoming more effective and independent learners, although one quarter remained neutral.

The survey probed into the features and functions of the PebblePad software that the participants had explored and used. All of the functions were listed and the participants were asked if they had used them, to what extent and if they had not used the functions, whether they intended to at some stage in the future. It was interesting to note that while not all participants had used all the functions of PebblePad, none indicated that they never intended to use them. This indicated that the participants were still exploring the uses and functionality of the software. All of the features of the PebblePad software had been used, some more than others. The features which were used ‘very often’ were My Assets, the CV and the Search function. As the participants accumulated assets or artefacts in their ePortfolio, the search feature becomes more crucial to findings the assets in their store. Overall, 75% of the participants had used the CV feature, with the other 25% planning to do so, indicating that at this stage all of the participants were committed to completing a CV using the PebblePad software. The other features that the participants were making the most use of are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Pilot study participants’ use of the features and functionality of PebblePad

Feature	%
Thought	90
My assets	85
Action Plan	75
CV	75
Webfolio	71
Experience	70
Activity	68.5
Ability	67
Blog	67
Gateway	65
Achievement	57
Profile	52

Some participants had become quite creative in their presentation, embedding links to YouTube videos, adding images and enhancing the interface.

Professional development was recorded as the primary focus of the ePortfolio for 85% of the participants. Their comments demonstrated the professional and personal development they had undergone while involved in this project:

To outline all I have achieved in an orderly yet attractive way and to outline all my goals for the future.

Preparing for ongoing assessment – for employment recognition purposes.

To collate all of my professional development activities into one document, so as to become more focused on professional development.

I want to keep a record of what I have learnt, experienced, achieved over the three years of my Graduate Librarian position. I think this will be very valuable in the future when I am applying for other positions. It will also allow me to look back on and reflect on my learning.

I want to make this ePortfolio to assist me work out what career direction want to pursue and to prepare for any job selection criteria I need to develop and any job applications I wish to prepare.

Personally this has given me a sense of achievement in regards to what I have accomplished so far as a librarian. This is important when you change careers. I feel I am on the right path.

While the Profile feature was reported to be the least used feature at the time of the second survey (May 2009), subsequent work has been undertaken within the pilot study to introduce the participants to the feature. The Profile feature enables ePortfolio users to review and provide evidence of their skills, abilities or competencies. For the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study, a profile has been set up to allow the participants to rate their current levels of professional and generic skills. One of ALIA's policies — known as the 'core knowledge statement' — covers the areas of core knowledge, skills and attributes (ALIA, 2005). The different areas of knowledge and skills have been mapped to the PebblePad Profile tool and made available to participants via the gateway. This allows participants to audit their professional skills and to consider areas for further development. A number of participants have added further structure to their ePortfolio based on the areas of core knowledge by developing content and attaching evidence of their achievements. An ancillary research project will also use the pilot cohort to review the validity of the specific areas of core knowledge and skills (last reviewed in 2005) to determine the relevancy to current library and information practice.

Comments from some participants indicated that they would like the PebblePad software to be part of their workplace. One participant reported that she '*would like to expand content in ePortfolio to cover the breadth of current work role and record all the projects that I am responsible for*', highlighting the fact that some participants were ready to make the ePortfolio platform a meaningful tool for their workplace, beyond their own personal use. Participants realised that the process of introducing the software as a workplace tool or application would require changes to their organisation's work practices that went beyond their individual roles. However, some participants had taken the opportunity to share their ePortfolios with mentors and/or managers and to engage with their broader environment of their workplace or institution. The majority of participants reported positive responses and feedback:

They have been very interested, as they have little experience with ePortfolios. They have made it part of my job description to keep my portfolio and have been reading the assets that I add to my webfolio.

Positive and enthusiastic

Very encouraging

My manger has been very positive and supportive of the project. She was very impressed with what I have created so far. My mentor had prior experience with ePortfolios and PebblePad which assisted me in getting motivated to be part of the project in the first place. She is very supportive and excited about my participation in the project.

Nevertheless, some less positive comments indicated that there was still some reticence about the potential value of ePortfolios to employers:

Mixed – initially, one senior manager very against it, although not sure why. Middle management and immediate supervisor quite interested and supportive, although all in my own time, no funding available.

Some interest, but little interaction. Time is the biggest factor.

The respondents were questioned about who they had showed their ePortfolio to and what responses they had received. Forty per cent had showed their ePortfolio to their managers. One respondent stated that they were '*very impressed and surprised at how easy it is to access even without being a user*'. Forty-five per cent of the participants had showed their ePortfolios to their mentors, with positive developments occurring:

Wanted to know all about ePortfolios and how they are being used. Used a report on a meeting I had prepared to include in own report and was surprised at how easy it is to access.

Sixty per cent of the participants had showed their ePortfolio to their colleagues, with a further 20% indicating that they planned to. Comments were positive, including 'Where can I get one'. Half of the participants had showed their families their ePortfolios, and while they showed an interest, the comments were less constructive. Only 22% had showed their ePortfolios to friends. Comments here were positive, again with an interest in having an ePortfolio too. Seventy-five per cent of participants reported that they found it beneficial to show their ePortfolios to others, commenting that they valued the feedback and suggestions that were made.

The participants could see great potential for the PebblePad software. Comments for features that they would like PebblePad to incorporate indicated that there was much more that could be done to incorporate ePortfolios into the professional lives of the LIS participants. Comments for further functionality included:

Better formatting for blogs and RSS feeds

Being able to embed PowerPoint presentations

Chat facility

Shortcut bar to allow quick access to the functions frequently used

Easy linking to Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook

Finally, the participants were asked to indicate how they now felt about their involvement in the ePortfolio project. While the number feeling enthusiastic had dropped to 30%, 60% were still positive. One participant was still feeling anxious about the project and ePortfolios in general. All participants indicated that they considered the primary focus of their ePortfolio would be for professional development, and all anticipated continuing to work with their ePortfolios once the project had finished. Participants have been keen to disseminate information about their ePortfolio activities, with articles published in recent issues of the ALIA journal *InCite* (Cook & Ramm, 2009; Osborn, 2009; Randle, 2009). A collaborative multimedia presentation by a number of participants was developed using PebblePad as the presentation medium, and this presentation was given at the Library and Information Association New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, in October 2009 (Hallam, 2009).

Most of the participants reported that they had made positive gains in their professional and academic focus with the use of the ePortfolios. A number of participants had already used their ePortfolios to attain a new job or a promotion with their current employer. There was a clear appreciation for the face-to-face meetings, which had been found to enhance the collegial, sharing and supportive nature of the group. Much was gained in these sessions as the participants learned from each other and from sharing their ePortfolios. The value of the face-to-face group activities and workplace support, as an example of an active community of practice, should not be underestimated in the context of ePortfolio learning.

Although the participants in this project were drawn from the LIS sector, most have come into LIS from another profession. Participants have anecdotally acknowledged that the range of previous education and employment is a strong, positive aspect of the pilot project, with a belief that that the application of ePortfolios could suit other fields of employment beyond the library and information services sector. As ALIA, the professional association, has expressed interest in learning more about the value of ePortfolios to support members' involvement in the professional development scheme, this pilot project has the potential to stimulate new member services. A final report on the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Project will be released at the end of 2010.

4.8 Summary

The AeP2 project has effectively enabled a range of community building activities to take place, with the publication of six concept guides in the AeP Toolkit, and a second ePortfolio Symposium, with the associated ePortfolio Showcase and the Technical Issues and Opportunities meeting, providing face-to-face interaction. A virtual community space has been established within the ALTC Exchange, and an industry-specific community of practice has emerged through the ALIA/AeP2 LIS ePortfolio Pilot Study in the library sector. These activities have all helped the diverse stakeholders in ePortfolio practice to come together and share ideas and experiences.

In addition to these formal community activities undertaken under the auspices of the AeP2 project, members of the project team have also been involved in other ePortfolio community activities. Given the interest shown in PebblePad by a number of Australian universities, a user group has been established as a forum for support. The user group meetings have been a combination of face-to-face interaction and video conferencing. The AeP2 project team has worked collaboratively with colleagues in the VET sector, through the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, with representation on the reference group that has been established to ensure key stakeholders contribute to national and cross-sectoral agreement on ePortfolio standards, policy and business rules. Meetings have also been held with the emerging international body, the Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL). Beyond this, the AeP2 research activities, particularly the case studies discussed in the following chapters, have ensured ongoing collegial relations with ePortfolio communities within Australia and overseas.