

Supporters and sceptics of Reflective ePortfolios in an undergraduate science course



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Background

In 2020/21, a new Reflective ePortfolio was used to capture students' experiential learning and transferable skills development, and contributed to 25% of in-course marks for a core Year 1 biology course (368 enrolled students).



Feedback from Personal Tutors imply that some staff failed to endorse the portfolio to their students:

“Most of my tutees only partially filled it out and all thought it was a waste of their time.”

“The tutees dislike it, and the tutors don't have time to engage with it. It is an impenetrable mess to deal with: pointlessly time-consuming, for virtually zero return.”



ePortfolio

- 96% of eligible students completed their portfolio.
- 46% mentioned explicitly the benefits of reflective practice; oftentimes this followed an initial scepticism (see centre quotes).
- 84 students provided anonymous feedback in mid/end course surveys.
- 55% of respondents agreed the ePortfolio helped to identify areas to improve, however free-text comments demonstrate polarised views (see word clouds below).

Student shift: from initial doubt to finding value

“Before starting this module, I did not regard self reflection activities as crucial to my learning, however I now believe this is necessary for achieving my goals and having the confidence to rely on my own criticism.”
Year 1 Student

“Thanks to reflective writing in PebblePad, I was reminded of what I achieved and where I needed to work harder. This platform, in the beginning, seemed to be useless but now after using it for some time I realize that it helped me in my personal growth.”
Y1 student

Conclusions

- Reflective writing is a **new experience** for most science students.
- ‘**Built - in, not bolted - on**’. Ensure the portfolio is embedded in the course timetable and provide opportunities for peer-support.



- Following engagement with the portfolio through writing reflective entries, many initially sceptical students **shifted their viewpoint to supporters**.
- Staff need to be on-board and promote the use of portfolios to support students' learning and logging of attributes. While sceptics may never become advocates of the portfolio, they should at least **be supportive of students' engagement**.

