

**e-Learning: Learner assessment, tracking and e-portfolios****7.2 Track learner participation with the help of e-learning****7.2.1 Use e-learning systems to keep accurate records about learner participation and keep them up to date****LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After working through this fact sheet you will be able to:

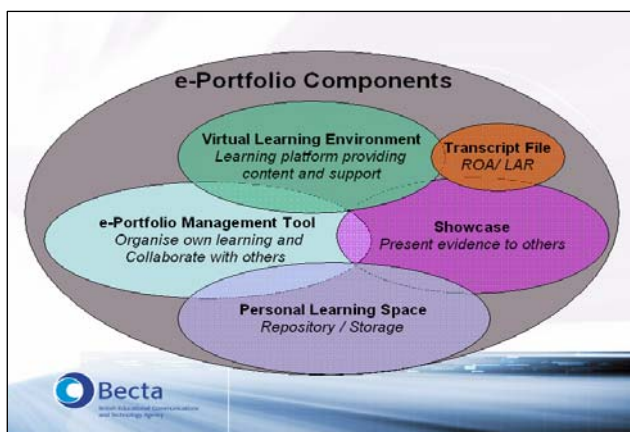
- Understand how learner participation can be monitored through a variety of systems
- Identify the key criteria that can be used to keep accurate records on learner participation
- Identify the key benefits of e-portfolios to learners
- Identify the main functional requirements of e-portfolios

**Recording & Monitoring Learner Participation**

A common feature of e-learning in colleges is the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which allows teachers and learners the opportunity to store materials, to communicate with one another, and to complete and submit assessments. Some colleges, and most schools, on the other hand, have opted to develop their own intranets, which are in effect 'closed' sites that are password protected and either partly or wholly accessible through the internet, to facilitate home study. This can be for reasons such as improved security, or increased protection for the intellectual property rights of learning materials created internally etc.

A good VLE should support the recording and monitoring of learner participation automatically, as it will:

- record individual students' login time and dates
- how long they have spent online (though this doesn't necessarily mean they were studying)
- participation in online forums (content and login time and dates)
- which pages they have visited and how often, and
- which assessments they have done and when they completed them
- record email communications



Examples of commonly used VLEs, amongst others, are Blackboard, Web CT and Moodle. Each has strengths and weaknesses, so colleges are increasingly considering changing VLE, as they become better acquainted with them. Cost is clearly an important factor, but all facilitate recording, tracking and monitoring learner participation as well as achievements.

Ultimately this is becoming associated with the concept of the e-Portfolio, as evidenced by this BECTA model.

## e-Portfolios and Learner Participation

The BECTA model of e-portfolio components is a good graphical indicator of the complex and overlapping combination of functions that are expected from this kind of tool, and the contribution a VLE makes to the process.

Importantly, the key thread in this model is the learner being core to all aspects of the tool and the functions that it supports. Potentially, for the learner, therefore, an e-portfolio is a tool for life, not just for an academic year, in one school or college. This presents many challenges, not least the interoperability of tools and systems, and the ownership of the portfolio.

E-assessment has the potential to support learning through initial, diagnostic, formative and summative methods. Linking up e-assessment with other tools that can provide a personalised repository for learner outcomes, can not only aid the learner to reflect on their achievements, but also encourage adopting ownership of their own learning. This, in turn, can assist personal development planning, as well as facilitating the recording, monitoring and tracking of learning to meet management, teacher and, potentially, employer needs. E-tools such as e-portfolios aim to meet these challenges amongst others.

## e-Portfolio

**Definitions** of e-portfolios vary, but can be summarised as:

A collection of digital resources that provide evidence of an individual's progress and achievements, drawn from both formal and informal learning activities, that are personally managed and owned by the learner; can be used for review, reflection and personal development planning; and can be selectively accessed by other interested parties e.g. teachers, peers, assessors, awarding bodies, prospective employers. (*JISC*)

## Potential Benefits of e-Portfolios to Learners

For a practitioner, this affords the opportunity of being able to continually monitor the progress and participation of a learner. Either through traditional review meetings, or virtual communication (particularly useful for distance learners), it is possible to see how much ownership learners are taking of their own learning, and how regularly. Equally, from qualitative and developmental perspectives, teachers can get snapshots or overviews of learner progress in one place. Fundamental to e-Portfolios making a difference, however, is the role of the learner being one of active participation.

## BECTA's view is that e-Portfolios can:

- Mirror the learning process and offer reflection
- Be personalised, valued and largely owned by the learner
- Enable learners to view their 'distance traveled' and support ongoing aims and objectives
- Support transitions and progression within learning (across sectors and into employment)
- Be supported by all learning providers
- Be appropriately accessible to the learners, practitioners, mentors and others ... any time, anywhere.

The model below, based on the JISC report cited below, suggests some of the potential benefits to learners. This requires the learner to be proactive, but also highlights the functional requirements to support them, if this is to be successful.

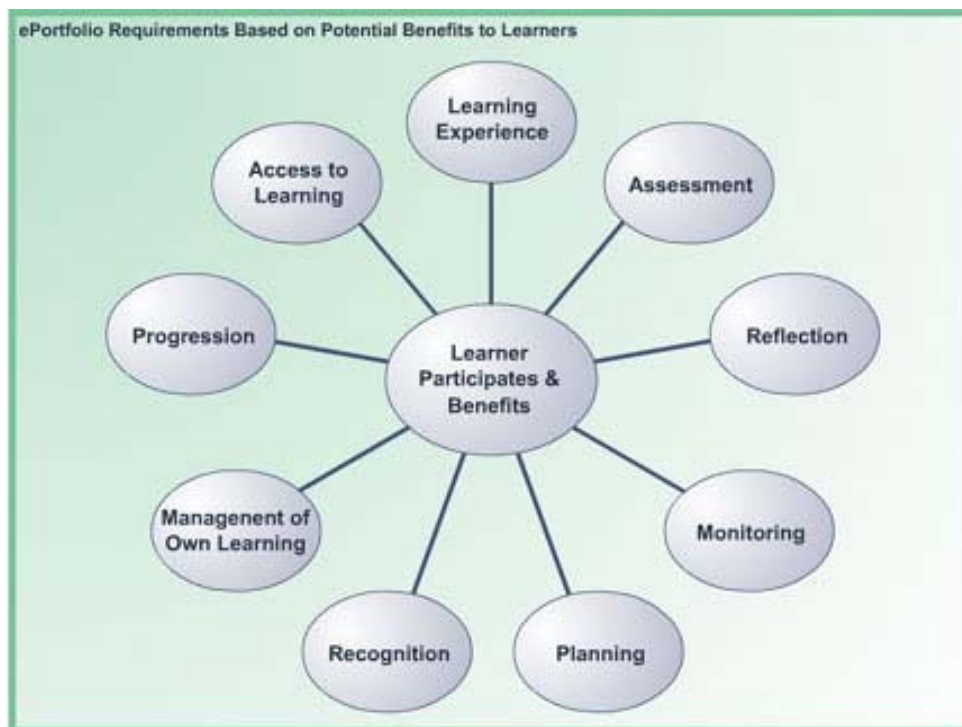
*Learning Experience* can be enhanced through:

- Personalisation of provision
- Ownership of the process of learning
- Continuity of support

**Assessment** can be enhanced through:

- Selection of own evidence
- Rapid feedback
- Security and efficiency

The process for **reflection** is facilitated by the ease of capturing learning, which in turn supports self-evaluation. Similarly, **monitoring** learner progress and giving appropriate feedback can take place during the regular **planning** opportunities that are afforded. A major benefit surrounds the **recognition** of competences and skills from across programmes as well as within them, and ties in with the learner **managing their own learning**. The e-Portfolio should be easy to transfer during **progression**, whether from one course to another or across organisations. Ultimately it should give the learner improved **access to learning**.



*ePortfolio Requirements Based on Potential Benefits to Learners*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The JISC e-learning and pedagogy strand has recently produced a review of learner differences (Mayes, T. (2004) *Learner-centred pedagogy: individual differences between learners*, available online from [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/learner-differences.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/learner-differences.doc)) which will be used to develop a more sophisticated set of requirements.

## Interoperability

An issue that can present a problem with regard to a VLE is that of *interoperability*, that is, the ability of one system to 'talk' to another. For example, if you are using subject specific software that contains formative assessment material, that has been commercially produced, there is the possibility that it cannot be housed within your college's VLE, and that therefore any learner results cannot automatically be recorded to on its monitoring system. Consequently before purchasing any software, it is important to check that it is compatible with your VLE.

**NB.** In an attempt to tackle this issue, Instructional Management System (IMS) standards have been recommended by the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to facilitate interoperability between all educational software and VLEs. It is hoped that vendors will comply with these standards, so that eventually all systems will be able to 'talk' to each other – an issue of particular importance to e-portfolios.

## TASKS

If you don't already know, find out how your VLE or intranet records learner outcomes or achievements. Then set up one of your classes on the system, so that you can input and monitor their progress. Make a note of the different features available to you, e.g. can you bring up whole class records at once or just individuals? Can you see information sets graphically or just as tables? Can results from tests, in other software you are using, be stored, imported or merged to your VLE?

Set up an online discussion for one of your groups in the forum area of your VLE. Follow the contributions that are made by your students, and contribute to it yourself. Do you find this effective? Can you see when they have logged on as well as what they have said? Does the content they have contributed give you any insight into their learning?

## WEB LINKS

- FERL     '**Technologies for e-Learning: Features of a VLE**' outlines the main features and issues surrounding a VLE. <http://ferl.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?page=247>
- BECTA    '**BECTA's View - e-Assessment and e-Portfolios** (2006): This document provides a short introduction to e-assessment and e-portfolios, how they might develop, and why Becta strongly believes that they will support engagement and achievement in learning. [http://www.aclearn.net/content\\_files/acl/resources/keydocs/Becta/e-assessment%20and%20e-portfolios.pdf](http://www.aclearn.net/content_files/acl/resources/keydocs/Becta/e-assessment%20and%20e-portfolios.pdf)
- JISC     '**e-Portfolios in post-16 learning in the UK**': a report prepared for the JISC e-Learning and Pedagogy strand of the JISC e-Learning Programme by Helen Beetham (e-learning consultant) [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/eportfolio\\_ped.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/eportfolio_ped.doc)
- JISC     '**Choosing an e-Portfolio System**': a general introduction to e-portfolios systems and useful links to relevant papers on developments in the area <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/InfoKits/effective-use-of-VLEs/e-portfolios/e-portfolio-choosing-system>

## CROSS REFERENCES TO OTHER INFORMATION SHEETS

- Unit 4 - 4.1
- Unit 7 - 7.3