

EDUCAUSE Australasia 2009

**Topic:** ePortfolio strategies for the university sector

**Theme addressed:** Supporting scholarship, learning and teaching

**Type of Submission:** Symposium

**Session chair:** Dr Cathy Gunn, University of Auckland,

**Panellists:** Professor Lorraine Stefani, University of Auckland, Caroline Steel, University of Queensland and Associate Professor Gillian Hallam, Queensland University of Technology.

### **Background**

Increased focus on learner centred design and personalized forms of learning are national and institutional strategic aims supported by advances in technology and associated learning design opportunities. ePortfolios are a significant strand of development in this area, as experience of their use across the disciplines expands, and suitable software systems mature and become widely accessible. The prospects are good, according to high profile publications such as Stefani, Mason and Pegler's book, *The educational potential of ePortfolios* (2007), and the UK Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) *Effective practice with ePortfolios* (2008). The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) sponsored Australian ePortfolio project (AeP) found that the concept of the ePortfolio is still under development in the national context, and identified opportunities to share and further develop experience across the sector as a key contributing factor.

### **Focus**

While there is evidence of significant educational potential, and high-level strategies are designed to promote ePortfolio use across the higher education sector, the HEFCE report notes that the real point of change occurs at the level of practice. Research identifies tensions between rhetoric and common practice in applications of new technologies to educational practice (Conole 2008). This relates to ePortfolio use as much as any other application, and much can be learned from studying where these tensions occur. Hence, knowledge of the experience of practitioners is a key contribution to well-informed future development as well as a measure of success.

The AeP (Hallam et al, 2008) notes that local experience of ePortfolio implementation is still under development, and recommends a community of professional practice to support progress and positive change. The format of this symposium reflects that recommendation, as it aims to a) promote greater awareness of the potential of the ePortfolio as an educational tool, b) disseminate information on existing ePortfolio initiatives across the region and internationally, and c) to invite participants to engage in discussion of design and implementation issues within a group of more and less experienced practitioners. It is expected that this networking opportunity will contribute to ongoing collaborative ventures.

## **Session structure and activities**

The symposium begins with short introductory statements from four authors and practitioners with experience of ePortfolio strategy and concept development, activity design and implementation in a variety of institutional settings. A concluding question or statement from each panellist provides focus for subsequent discussion of ideas, experience and perspective with all participants. Two options are available for this part of the symposium, depending on numbers attending on the day. For less than 30 delegates, the discussion will involve the whole group. If more than 30 attend, then the discussion will proceed in two or three smaller groups, each with a panel member acting as facilitator and scribe. The key points from the discussion will be summarized and recorded during a concluding plenary session.

## **Symposium outcomes**

Participants in the symposium will increase awareness through sharing of information and experience of current institutional and discipline based ePortfolio initiatives. Alignment of this experience with national and institutional strategies will be discussed, and implications for progressing strategic and localized implementation initiatives drawn up. A summary of 7-10 key factors for successful ePortfolio implementation will be compiled as the concluding activity. This summary will form the basis of a co-authored submission to an international journal with full acknowledgement of the source of ideas, evidence and strategies. Participants will be able to continue the discussion through online communication channels and future face to face and virtual events.

## **Panellist profiles**

Cathy Gunn is Head of the eLearning Design and Development Group at the University of Auckland and external evaluator for a programme-based ePortfolio initiative within the university's Faculty of Education. Cathy will propose a strategy implementation perspective on ePortfolios.

Gillian Hallam is Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology and Project Leader for the ALTC sponsored Australian ePortfolio project. She will present recommendations from the project's final report for development of a community of professional practice for ePortfolio strategy implementation within the tertiary sector.

Caroline Steel is a Lecturer in Higher Education (eLearning) at The University of Queensland. She will focus on innovative approaches to professional development for ePortfolio strategy implementation and the use of test-bed projects to inform the wider use of ePortfolios at the university.

Lorraine Stefani is Director of the Centre for Academic Development at the University of Auckland and lead author of the Connecting with eLearning series title, *The educational potential of eportfolios* (Stefani et al 2007). Lorraine will introduce the educational and assessment design aspects of ePortfolios.

## References

Conole, G, (2008), New Schemas for Mapping Pedagogies and Technologies, Ariadne 58, accessed online at <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue56/conole/> September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008.

Hallam, G., Harper, W., McCowan, C., Hauville, K., McAllister, L., Creagh, T. et al (2008 in press). ePortfolio Use by University Students in Australia: Informing Excellence in Policy and Practice. Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Sydney.

HEFCE (2008), Effective Practice with ePortfolios <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/eportfolio>

Stefani, L., Mason, R. & Pegler, C. (2007), The Educational Potential of ePortfolios: Supporting personal development and reflective learning, Routledge, London and New York.