

## E-portfolio use in the Kent School of Architecture

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### Context

**Discipline/Course/Subject area:** Architecture

**Length of time project has been running:** two years

**No. of students:** 250

**Level/Year of students:** Stage 1 undergraduates

**No. of staff involved:** five

### Summary of Case Study

*'Architecture is about bringing things together in space, making sense of these things to the user and creating a unique experience in the process of doing so; in this way, a good e-portfolio is a small piece of architecture.'* (Stonor, 2008)

This case study details a joint project by the Kent School of Architecture and the University's Learning and Teaching Unit. The project introduced stage 1 Architecture students to the use of e-portfolios (PebblePAD) to showcase their work and reflect on their design development.

The project employed a 'student-led curriculum development approach' (Stephenson, and Yorke, 1998) by first working with a stage 2 student to develop an example e-portfolio. The example e-portfolio was published on the web and used to inspire other students to develop their own e-portfolios. An unexpected outcome of the project was the external interest which resulted from the example e-portfolio.

**Key Words:** E-portfolio, Reflection, Design Studio

## Key Points of Good Practice

- The use of a local student-led example (a Kent student's e-portfolio) was useful for the other students to see. This example is available on the web and has attracted a lot of national attention from: The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science Engineering and Technology (UKRC), Spacesyntax and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC).
- Development of structures through the use of e-portfolios to support students' reflection on their design development.
- Collaboration between the Department of Architecture and the University's Learning and Teaching Unit.
- Training students to use the e-portfolio software.
- Use of e-portfolio software that is publishable to the web.

## Description of Implementation

The University of Kent's School of Architecture was set up in 2005. It is a very fast growing school which now has approximately 320 undergraduates enrolled. At the end of stage 1 of the degree programme, all students must submit a portfolio of their work for a public crit. The department worked with the University's Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UELТ), training students to use the software was done by a UELТ learning technologist. UELТ also provided curriculum development advice.

The e-portfolio was introduced to students as a non-compulsory element which students could do in addition to a physical portfolio. The aim of introducing the e-portfolio was to give students a tool which they could use to reflect on their design process and describe their personal development as well as show-case their work. The brief that students were given was to select highlights of their design work from throughout stage 1 to showcase their design development and narrate their personal development as a student of Architecture. The e-portfolio was non-credit bearing in the first year but the intention was to attach credit once the project was evaluated.

The first stage in implementation was to seek volunteer students who were willing to create an e-portfolio which could be used as an example to show other students. One student, Rachel Thapa Chhetri, produced an excellent e-portfolio which she allowed the department to use as an example to show other students what an e-portfolio does (<http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/kent/viewasset.aspx?oid=1894&type=webfolio&pageoid=1895> see Appendix 1).

Students were given some freedom in how they put their e-portfolio together but typically they included an introductory page to say something about themselves and their motivations for studying Architecture. They then selected their own work to showcase. Some students arranged their work by the modules they had taken, others

by the skills they were developing (see Appendix 2).

The outcome of the project so far is that a small number of students (seven) took up the opportunity to submit an e-portfolio of their first year's work. Feedback from students has been sought via a focus group. The students in this group were a mixture of those who had developed an e-portfolio and some who had not. Despite the low participation rate the feedback from students was very positive. Students expressed their desire to have portfolio development built into their whole degree programme. They suggested that they should be prompted to update it at the end of every module. All students who responded said that they would like the e-portfolio to be a compulsory element of the degree programme. A new communications module is being set-up which will have e-portfolios incorporated into the assessment from the beginning of the year. The students who did not develop an e-portfolio cited the fact that the course is very demanding and they gave prominence to credit bearing assignments over non-credit bearing ones. All students agreed that the e-portfolio would be a useful addition to their employability skills.

## Perceived Benefits

### For Students...

- The e-portfolio provides a vehicle for students to reflect on their work and on the crit of their work.
- Enables students to remember and reflect upon their design development.
- It enables students to easily communicate their work digitally.
- It enhances students' computer skills.

### For Teaching/Support Staff...

- It is a way of recording and archiving students' work.
- Teaching students to use the software is very quick.
- It frees up some teaching time: the software can be used to communicate with groups of students rather than on an individual basis.

## Issues/Challenges

### For Students...

- Although the software is easy to use it can be slow when uploading large files.
- Motivating students to use the software when it is a non-assessed element of the module.

### For Teaching/Support Staff...

- The e-portfolio was offered to students as an option; as such it was not widely taken up.
- It would be much more successful if e-portfolios were embedded into the curriculum and awarded marks.
- Assessment of the e-portfolio is a concern.

### Enablers that helped the project to work

- One student, Rachel Thapa Chhetri, produced an excellent e-portfolio which she allowed the department to use as an example to show other students what an e-portfolio does (see <http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/kent/viewasset.aspx?oid=1894&type=webfolio&pageid=1895>).
- The department was supported by the University's Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UJET) which provided curriculum development advice and e-learning support.

### Details of project evaluation

The project was evaluated by conducting a focus group discussion with students (not all of the students had done an e-portfolio). The students were asked the following questions

1. Was the software easy to use?
2. Was the training that you received adequate?
3. Do you think that developing an e-portfolio helps you to think about and see your design development?
4. Would you use the e-portfolio as a communication tool, for example, with prospective employers or to show-case your work?
5. Would you welcome e-portfolios becoming a compulsory element of your degree programme?
6. Will you continue to use the e-portfolio?
7. Do you have any other comments?

The responses can be summarised as follows:

1. All students said that they found the software easy to use.
2. Students found the training useful. Some said they would have liked a follow up session or more tutor feedback on their portfolio.
3. All students responded positively to this question. They particularly commented on the advantage of being able to update the portfolio, being able

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to view all their work at once, and being able to keep track of their development.

4. All students saw the communication value of the e-portfolio, not as a replacement of a physical portfolio, but as an easily portable addition.
5. All students, even those who had not done an e-portfolio responded positively to this question. They suggested that it be a compulsory, assessed element of the programme and they were keen for it to be built in to the whole programme rather than just one module.
6. All students said that they intend to continue to use the e-portfolio but that they would welcome being prompted to do so by tutors. Due to the time pressures of their degree programme non-compulsory elements are not prioritised.
7. Students used this question to emphasise their enthusiasm for the use of e-portfolios.

## Possible improvements/enhancements

This project would have reached more students had it been embedded into the curriculum. The department is planning to this for the next cohort of S1 students.

## Points of advice for others who may wish to replicate the techniques used

Students need to see immediate tangible benefits for engaging with the initiative i.e. marks. The software needs to be easy to use.

## FURTHER READING

### Relevant publications by those conducting the case-study:

Frith, L. (2007) How does e-portfolio software support students' engagement with learning? *4<sup>th</sup> Learning Development in Higher Education (LDHEN) Symposium. How Do Students Engage with Learning?* Bournemouth University 12<sup>th</sup> April 2007

<http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/bmth07.htm>

Frith, L., Martin, R. & Osborne, S. (2008) Web-folios for assessment of practice in social work degrees. *Telling ePortfolio Stories 'The Road to Stickiness' Conference 2008*. University of Wolverhampton: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/Default.aspx?page=16960>

Frith, L. (2007) Students' engagement with PDP at Kent. In *PDP UK*, Issue 10, March 07 <http://www.recordingachievement.org/pdpuk/newsletter/Issue10.pdf>

Frith, L. (2008) Things to do with an e-portfolio. In *PDP UK*, Issue 13, Feb 08 <http://www.recordingachievement.org/pdpuk/newsletter/Issue13.pdf>

Frith, L. (2008) A year in the life of an e-portfolio. In *PDP UK*, Issue 15, Dec 08 <http://www.recordingachievement.org/pdpuk/newsletter/Issue15.pdf>

**Publications in the research literature:**

Stephenson, J. & Yorke, M. (1998) *Capability and Quality in Higher education*. Kogan Page: London.

Stonor, T. (2008) <http://www.ukrc4setwomen.org/html/women-and-girls/getsetwomen-blog/?id=8> Blog entry, [last accessed 28/04/09]

**Cross references to other materials/resources in the topic area:**

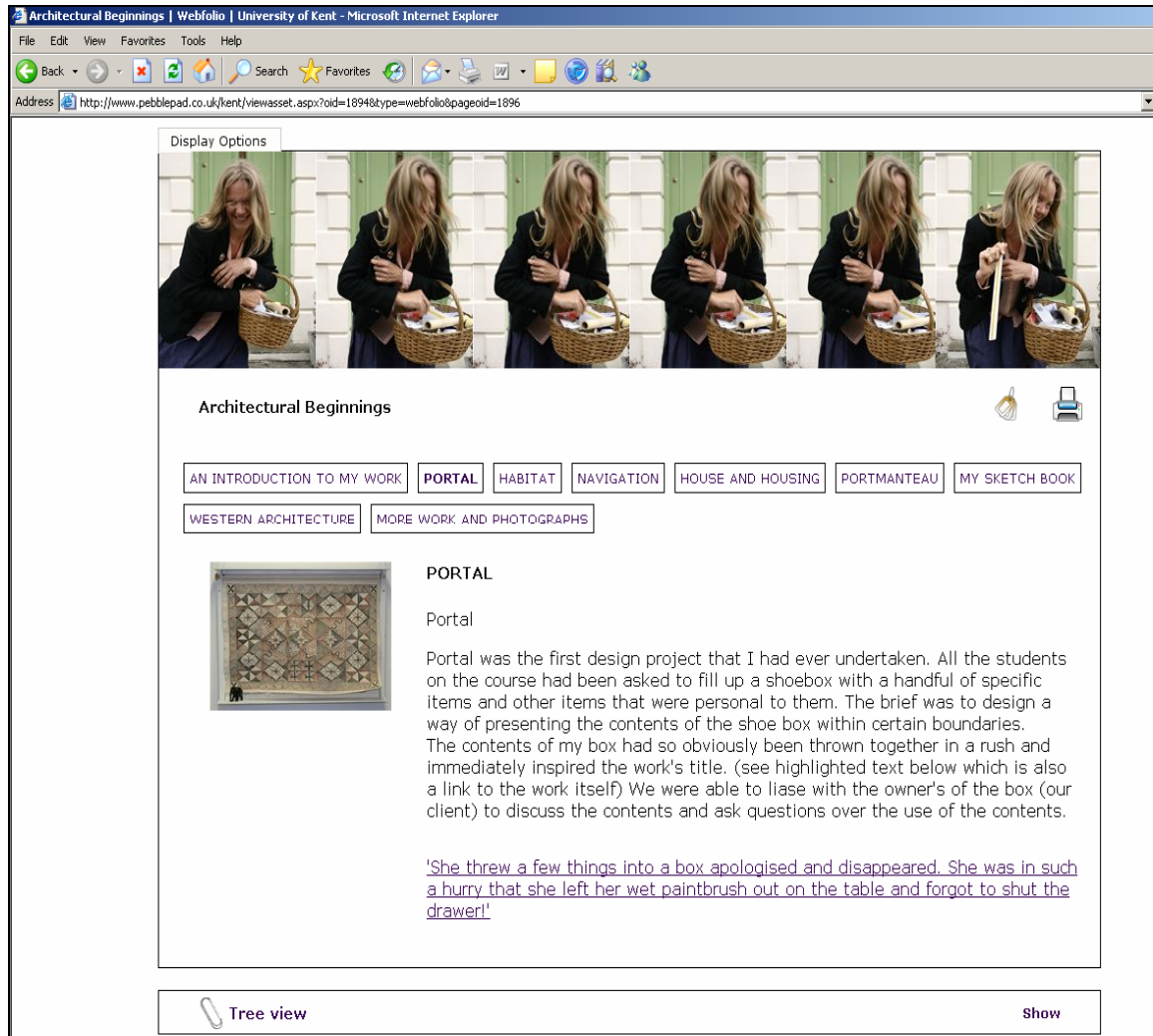
*E-portfolios for the 21st Century*, Napier University, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/learningandtech/230408\\_eportfolios\\_for\\_the\\_21st\\_century](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/learningandtech/230408_eportfolios_for_the_21st_century)

Strivens, J. (2007) *A survey of e-PDP and e-portfolio practice in UK Higher Education*.  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/news/detail/2007/Survey\\_e-pdp\\_and\\_eportfolio\\_practice\\_in\\_higher\\_education](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/news/detail/2007/Survey_e-pdp_and_eportfolio_practice_in_higher_education)

Higgins, M. (2002) *Personal Development Planning: A tool for reflective Learning*  
[http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/learning/casestudies/case\\_pdf/Higginspdp.pdf](http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/learning/casestudies/case_pdf/Higginspdp.pdf)

Unit for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, University of Kent (2009) Personal Development Planning e-portfolios <http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/ced/themes/personal-development/e-portfolio.html>

## Appendix 1

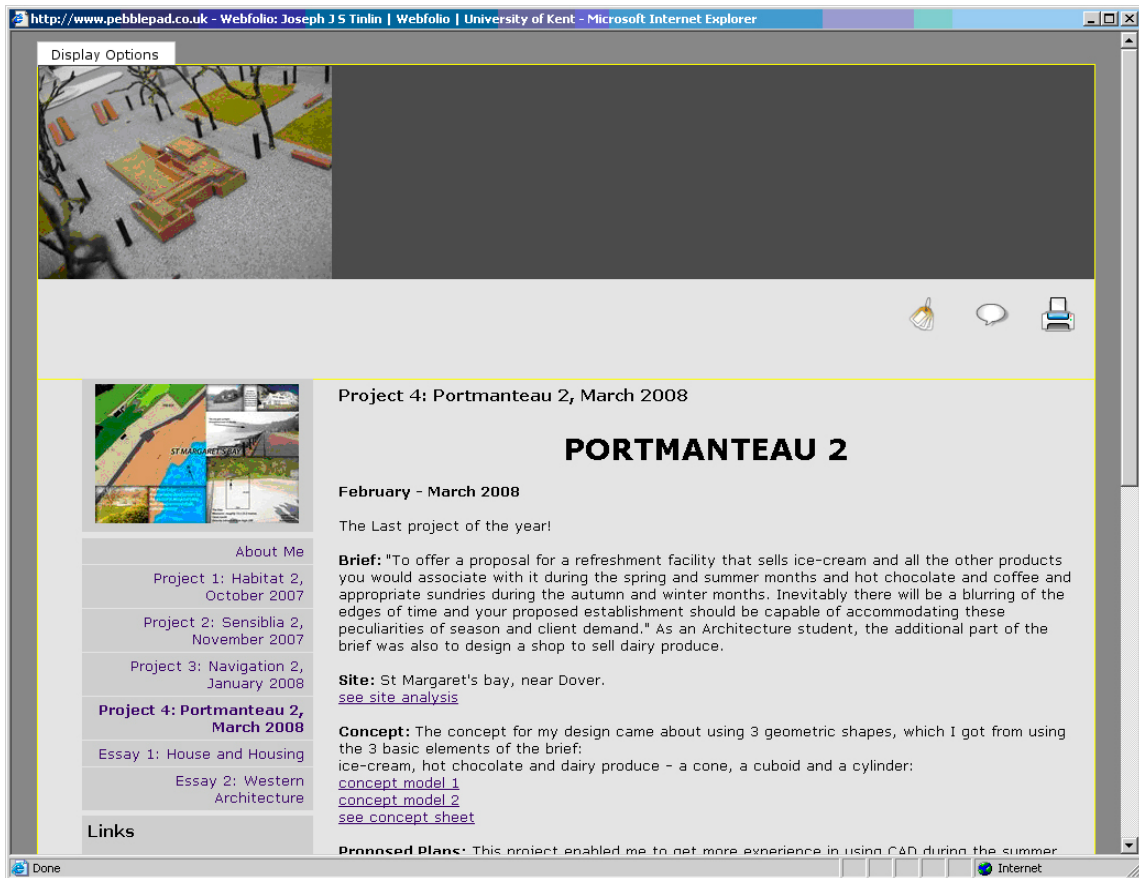


The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a portfolio page. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/kent/viewasset.aspx?oid=1894&type=webfolio&pageoid=1895>. The page content includes a navigation menu with buttons for 'AN INTRODUCTION TO MY WORK', 'PORTAL', 'HABITAT', 'NAVIGATION', 'HOUSE AND HOUSING', 'PORTMANTEAU', 'MY SKETCH BOOK', 'WESTERN ARCHITECTURE', and 'MORE WORK AND PHOTOGRAPHS'. The 'PORTAL' button is selected. Below the navigation is a section for 'PORTAL' featuring a small image of a shoebox and a paragraph of text. The text describes the project as the first design project undertaken by the student, where they were asked to fill a shoebox with specific items. The text is as follows: 'Portal was the first design project that I had ever undertaken. All the students on the course had been asked to fill up a shoebox with a handful of specific items and other items that were personal to them. The brief was to design a way of presenting the contents of the shoe box within certain boundaries. The contents of my box had so obviously been thrown together in a rush and immediately inspired the work's title. (see highlighted text below which is also a link to the work itself) We were able to liase with the owner's of the box (our client) to discuss the contents and ask questions over the use of the contents.' Below this text is a quote: 'She threw a few things into a box apologised and disappeared. She was in such a hurry that she left her wet paintbrush out on the table and forgot to shut the drawer!'. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'Tree view' button and a 'Show' button.

Example of student work: e-portfolio produced by Rachel Thapa-Chhetri. For further details please see

<http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/kent/viewasset.aspx?oid=1894&type=webfolio&pageoid=1895>

## Appendix 2



Example of student work