

## 5R Review Framework: Supporting the ePortfolio Transition

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### Abstract

Many Australian higher education institutions have embraced electronic portfolios for enhancing graduate capabilities and employment skills. The technology provides a student-owned and managed canvas to create and curate evidence of student learning. The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) adopted PebblePad™ as the University-wide electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) platform in 2013.

The University successfully implemented PebblePad™ into its repertoire of Educational Learning Technologies through a three-phase process: feasibility study, early adopters phase and an institution-wide ePortfolio Implementation Project (2012-2015). Since the conclusion of this project, USC has faced a range of contextual changes and challenges.

This paper sets out the current challenges USC is facing in this transition and the key factors in the approach taken in sustaining educational innovation with ePortfolios. In particular, how the University's Centre for Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CSALT) have employed a variety of people-centred and distributed support models to build staff capacity for using PebblePad™.

The key factors and the levels of support that facilitated success are framed and discussed using a 5R Review Framework: Readjustment, Rebuilding, Responsiveness, Reflective evaluation and Refocus.

The **Readjustment** required in the transition from strategic project to the operational phase; **Rebuilding** from a single point of support model; **Responsiveness** demonstrated in the variety of support models developed to build individual and team capacity; **Reflective** evaluation and **refocus** in the next stages of planning to improve student outcomes.

**Key Words:** *ePortfolio, capacity building, support, learning-centred*

### Introduction

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) is committed to student success through developing and supporting strategic, innovative and distinctive curricula (USC Strategic Plan 2016-2020). The USC Curriculum Design Principles support such curricula and encourage a blended learning approach as the standard mode of delivery (Blended Learning Strategy 2017-2020). To support the curriculum design

principles of *learning-centred* and *career and future focussed*, an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio), namely PebblePad™, was introduced in 2013. The Centre for Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CSALT) implemented an ePortfolio project and supported both the technology and the curriculum design. Hallam et al. (2010) noted that appropriate funding and staffing, along with academic scaffolding, IT support for students, good planning and appropriate staff development are critical success factors in ePortfolio initiatives.

USC is rapidly growing and expanding the use of ePortfolios whilst balancing resourcing constraints. Considerable research is available concerning the adoption of ePortfolios and the implementation within a funded project, however, little has been published about how institutions sustain and expand their use of ePortfolios against the landscape of resourcing constraints (Allan & Clelland, 2012; Coffey & Ashford-Rowe, 2014). A review framework is discussed that meets the ePortfolio needs of the University community in the post-project phase. The key factors in the approach to the transition phase and the levels of support that facilitate success are discussed using what emerged as the 5R Review Framework: Readjustment, Rebuilding, Responsiveness, Reflective evaluation and Refocus. Each of the phases of the transition are discussed further.

## The 5R Review Framework

This model emerged through the reflective evaluation process undertaken within CSALT after the conclusion of the ePortfolio Implementation Project, providing a framework for the support of future ePortfolio initiatives across programs.

### Phase 1: Readjustment

The project concluded at the end of 2015 and ePortfolios were operationalised and considered business as usual. However, an evaluation of the ePortfolio Project established a changed institutional and sectoral context with some crucial developments pertinent to the University's ePortfolio capability. In addition to this, increasing demand from within the health disciplines to utilise the ePortfolio technology in support of clinical practice courses in the Bachelor of Nursing Science (BNursSc) program, returned large-scale support to the CSALT agenda.

#### *University context*

The Blended Learning Strategy (2017-2020) identifies core focus areas in blended learning over the next four years and ePortfolios are an appropriate technology for actioning the curriculum design principles of:

- *Learning-centred* – 1. strengthen technology-enhanced learning, assessment and feedback practices 2. support staff and students to use a diverse range of personal devices for learning and teaching; and
- *Career and future focussed* – develop programs that include technologies for students to develop and apply skills in current and future contexts.

#### *Nursing Program context*

An ePortfolio was integrated into the clinical practice courses within the newly accredited BNursSc program in 2017 to support student learning and assessment and as a means of aligning with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's

[NMBA] requirements for nursing practitioners to maintain a professional portfolio. Existing paper-based approaches were re-imagined using PebblePad™ as an innovative clinical learning platform with student workbooks modelled on the 'Check In, Check Out' (CICO) process, simulating the patient handover process within a hospital environment. *Check-in* (briefing) prior to, or upon entry to, the learning space requires the student to prepare for their clinical practice experience. *Check-out* (debriefing/student confidence) supports the student to acknowledge their accomplishments and learning experiences at the completion of each clinical practice session. This active learning process enables students to collect evidence of their developing skills in readiness to be a Registered Nurse.

### **Phase 2: Rebuilding**

From 2014-2016 the project relied on a limited support model consisting of one Learning Designer dedicated to the project. The Learning Designer was an individual champion of PebblePad™ across the institution who developed customised pedagogical resources, assessment and professional accreditation resources for academic staff on an individual basis. Slade et al. (2017) highlighted the potential risks associated with the short-term nature of projects only building limited capacity, which is lost when resources cease. As the project came to an end the potential risk materialised and support became unmanageable as the resourcing of the position was not continued. The project lost sight of the programmatic approach of mapping an ePortfolio through the curriculum and focussed on individual course development. In the absence of this key position and with numbers growing, this way of supporting ePortfolio use across the institution was no longer sustainable and a significant knowledge gap became apparent that needed to be filled expeditiously.

A distributed leadership approach informed a sustainable model of support and the ongoing implementation of ePortfolios. Jones et al. (2012) identified the need for a cross-functional collaborative approach in building leadership sustainability in higher education. Consequently, CSALT Educational Technologies and Curriculum Support team members collaboratively built their knowledge and capacity to support PebblePad™. The distributed support approach enabled the entire team to draw upon pedagogic and technical expertise to support users, in context and at the point of need.

### **Phase 3: Responsiveness**

As all nursing clinical courses implemented an ePortfolio for the first time, CSALT invested in agile planning and responsiveness by building team member capacity, upskilling course coordinators and sessional academic staff teaching into the clinical courses.

#### **CSALT Staff Training Implementation**

Six face-to-face group sessions focussing on supporting academics with the design and creation of workbooks and technical troubleshooting took place. The topics covered in each training session are shown below in Figure 1.

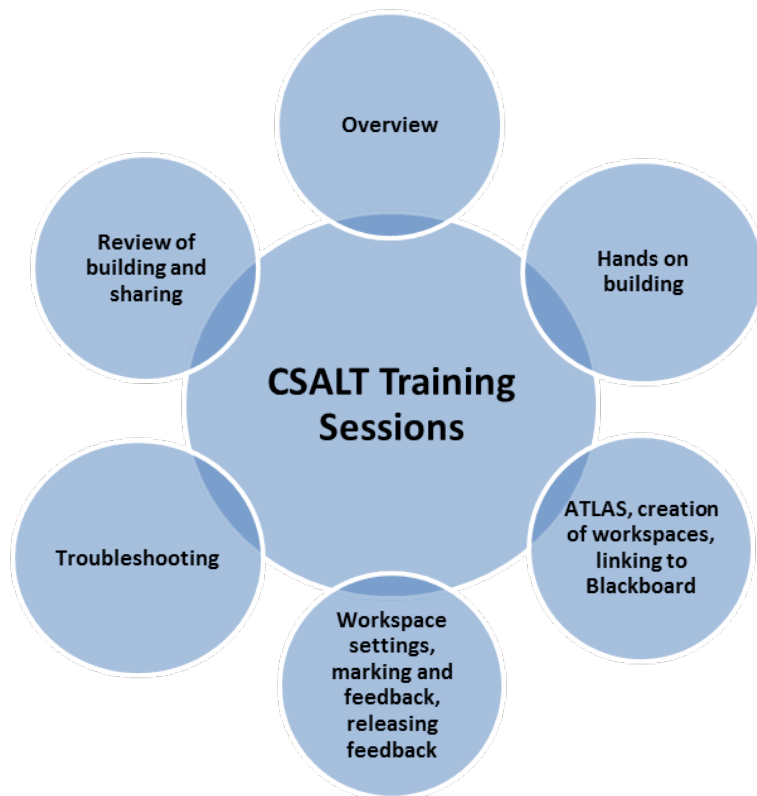


Figure 1: Training session focus for CSALT staff

### *Course Coordinators Training Implementation*

PebblePad™ was introduced to replace the existing paper-based approach across four courses in Semester 1, 2017. This initial implementation focussed on evidencing clinical competencies using workbooks and feedback templates and acted as the first step in launching a suite of undergraduate nursing courses implementing ePortfolios.

Training provided targeted 'just in time' support to scaffold learning. For example, rubric development and marking training was provided prior to and within the first 3 weeks of the teaching semester when staff were required to provide formative feedback. Academics reported informally that it is important for them to access support when they need it most, often when students are submitting online assessment and post submission when they are marking student work.

Nursing academic staff were offered support both prior to implementing PebblePad™ into their courses and during semester times via face-to-face training sessions, drop-in sessions and through the provision of technical assistance. The timeline of support and training instances across the semester are shown in Figure 2.

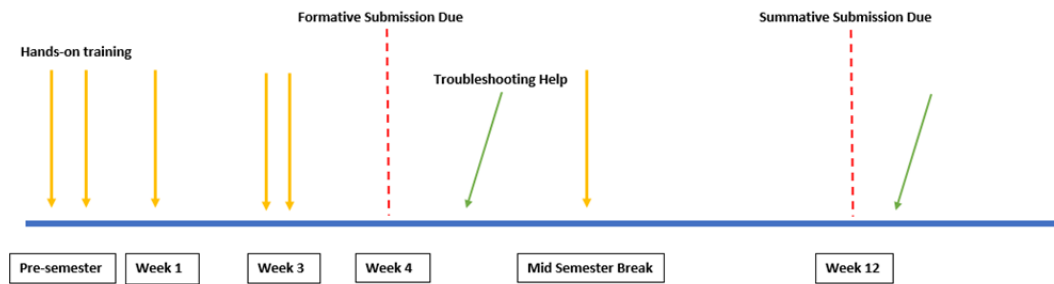


Figure 2: Support and training timeline for course coordinators across the semester

Training for course coordinators comprised of a suite of four face-to-face group sessions focussing on creating sets, developing rubrics and marking in PebblePad™ with an additional two videoconferencing training sessions for staff groups based at remote campuses. Customised and contextualised ‘how to’ tip sheets to support both themselves, students and tutoring staff were provided.

Course coordinators had the additional responsibility of acting as the support ‘touch point’ for clinical facilitators across fifty placement sites. These external facilitators were briefed on the use of PebblePad™ by course coordinators prior to students commencing their placement. The brief included a demonstration on how to complete both the formative and summative workbook assessments and outlined student and clinical facilitator responsibilities. Facilitators were provided with a customised tip sheet and support was made available during the placement to troubleshoot any potential problems.

Although online technical support via PebblePad™ was accessible to staff throughout the semester, this ‘one size fits all’ approach to academic technology support was not the preferred mode of seeking assistance. Informal feedback from staff supports the findings from Fisher and Hill (2015) that they have a preference to be supported by a person rather than proceed via online help. Most academic staff had the same permissions within the system as CSALT technical support staff yet most times they did not troubleshoot issues within PebblePad™ via these channels.

### *Sessional Staff Training Implementation*

Training for sessional staff was provided prior to, and early in the teaching semester with a strong focus on ensuring the consistency of messages for students from all teaching staff across courses. Training comprised of two face-to-face group sessions in computer labs for a hands-on learning experience. The session prior to the commencement of the teaching semester provided an overview of PebblePad™ and instructions on how to use the nursing CICO workbook. The second session focussed on marking and providing feedback using a rubric with an additional one videoconferencing training session for staff groups based at remote campuses. Staff were provided with customised ‘how to’ tip sheets to support both themselves and their students.

### **Phase 4: Reflective evaluation**

Informal training surveys and feedback from academic staff were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the distributed model of support. All CSALT staff members agreed that their level of knowledge of PebblePad™ had increased as a result of

taking part in the six training sessions with most also indicating their levels of self-confidence with the platform had increased. They indicated that the training sessions were timely and valuable in ensuring that they were prepared enough to support academics. Feedback from course coordinators acknowledged the significant effort required to provide both group and individual support to a large volume of staff in rolling out ePortfolios across the new program. Feedback determined that a hands-on collaborative approach was deemed to be the most valuable. Sessional staff also responded positively to the training and resources offered and discussed their increased level of confidence.

### **Phase 5: Refocus**

The rapid expansion of USC highlights the need for clear implementation processes to ensure quality outcomes with ePortfolios for staff and students alike. Slade et al. (2017) suggest a critical reflective approach should be taken to achieve an effective integration of ePortfolios into multiple programs across an institution. A critical reflective approach guided by Marshall's eLearning Maturity Model (Marshall, 2010) provided an evaluation of the effectiveness of the 5R Review Framework.

Recommendations emerged for the ongoing implementation and support of ePortfolios in the curriculum:

1. Foundational values established in ePortfolio project – particularly around staff ownership and self-efficacy in using PebblePad™. There were fewer support issues from academics involved in the building and creation process alongside educational designers as opposed to those who had workbooks created for them. The success of an implementation is far more likely to be achieved when the whole team, including the academics, are involved and are using the system themselves from the initial build and design steps.
2. Program level approach – instead of designing for individual courses we need to investigate how ePortfolios will be threaded through the curriculum and signpost the key opportunities over a degree program. Also, taking into account First Year Experience, large student cohorts, and expanding campuses.
3. Recognition of the resourcing and lead time required in preparing teaching teams and sessional staff for PebblePad™ use.
4. Revisit ongoing iterative evaluative processes to gather feedback to guide the planning for the next phase of the cycle.
5. Raising awareness and building interest – showcasing our own customised resources and exemplars (when academics see other real-life examples then they can see how such a tool could be implemented in their own courses), monthly Q&A sessions.

There are several considerations for CSALT in supporting and advancing the next phase of ePortfolio use at USC. With a number of schools across the University including ePortfolio related goals in their 2017/2018 Blended Learning School Plans and the continued uptake of ePortfolios institution wide, support and capacity building of staff will continue to be a priority for CSALT. The distributed approach ensured a greater number of CSALT staff are skilled in the use of PebblePad™

allowing the training of new academic and teaching staff to be achieved on a greater scale than in the past.

The training of student support 'touch points' beyond direct teaching staff into other areas within the institution such as library, IT services, academic skills support and career guidance services will be included in the next phase. With the introduction of any new technology it is crucial that students are advised, guided and instructed through the portfolio development process (Chow, Herold, Choo, & Chan, 2012). To support students, we will assist by increasing the ePortfolio support network which will additionally alleviate the troubleshooting workload from course coordinators.

With the expansion of ePortfolios into a greater number of courses in the BNursSc program, planning for the next iteration is focussing on several key considerations: the refinement of content in existing workbooks, particularly in first year courses, support for the development of reflective and self-assessment skills in students; and finding a balance between assessment driven tasks and the compilation of a professional portfolio. Additionally, a further level of training will assist with supporting external facilitators as placement sites expand.

## Conclusion

The 5R Review Framework provided a way to support a large-scale implementation in the post-project phase. The distributed approach and responsiveness of the team to support ePortfolio use enabled the success of the nursing clinical courses to ensure a learning centred and career and future focussed approach to the curriculum. A phase of reflective evaluation enabled us to make recommendations and refocus our support for future implementations. Recommendations included the re-establishment of foundational values and a programmatic approach, recognition of resourcing and raising awareness throughout the institution. Ensuring that the 5R Review Framework remains agile beyond sustainability, offers the institution a strategy which continues to effectively support ePortfolio engagement at USC.

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## Biography

### Angela Hansen

Angela Hansen is an Educational Designer with the University of the Sunshine Coast's Centre for Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching (C~SALT). Angela has 13 years' experience as a teacher within Queensland State Schools in Early Childhood and Primary classrooms and in the higher education sector, as a sessional academic in the School of Education. In her current role, Angela provides learning and teaching support to academics to design curriculum and utilise educational technologies that enhance the student experience across a variety of teaching and learning environments.

### Ruth Greenaway

Dr Ruth Greenaway is a Senior Academic Developer at the University of the Sunshine Coast leading the Curriculum Support team. Ruth works with academics to design curriculum that attends to the University priorities, including first year transition pedagogies. She also supports academics by offering professional learning opportunities that support student learning. Ruth's current research interests include innovations in learning and teaching, the integration of educational technologies and the work of educational designers.