

PDP and reflective learning on the year abroad

What did/do you do?

I introduced the ePortfolio as a tool of personal development planning and reflective learning for SML students on their Year Abroad. The ePortfolio was also used to enhance communication and exchange between PTs and their tutees abroad.

Who is involved?

QuILT and the ePortfolio development team: Lydia Wysocki first helped me define the project. Helen Lowther then helped me develop it and Simon Cotterill supervised all the technical changes during the pilot phase. In the SML, I started with a team of 8 stage 3 students who volunteered to test the ePortfolio during their YA. Following this pilot study, I was awarded an Innovation grant from ULTSEC in order to develop the project on a school-wide scale. The pilot phase took place between 2011-12 and the full project has been running since September 2012. All SML UG PTs and Stage 3 students are now using the ePortfolio as a result of this project.

How do you do it?

- I started a pilot study in 2011-12 with 8 volunteer stage 3 students who agreed to use the ePortfolio during their Year Abroad. I acted as their PT and communicated with them also via the ePortfolio
- Once I was awarded the UTLSEC grant, I hired two of my 'pilot' students to create short instructional/promotional videos aimed at stage 2 SML students. The videos were designed to explain to future students abroad what the ePortfolio was and what benefits they could gain from using it during their Year Abroad.
- With the help of Helen Lowther and Simon Cotterill, I then conducted a series of training meetings with SML staff to promote the ePortfolio and explain to colleagues how we planned to use it with students abroad.
- SML Stage 2 students were also trained on how to use the ePortfolio
- Over the course of AY 2012-13, I monitored the students' use of the ePortfolio and collected staff and student feedback.

Why do you do it?

I did it for various reasons:

- To enhance the quality of the students' PDP whilst abroad. Evidence shows that SML students gain many professional and transferrable skills during the YA, but they are often not fully aware of the advantages this gives them in terms of employability. The aim of the ePortfolio was to give students abroad the opportunity to record the skills (professional, academic or personal) they acquired whilst abroad and reflect about the increased intercultural awareness they experienced during their period of residence abroad.
- To enhance the way Personal Tutors communicate with their tutees whilst they are abroad. The previous support and monitoring system was a little lifeless and bureaucratic. With the ePortfolio, the aim was to make interactions between PTs and tutees a bit more spontaneous, interactive and beneficial to the students' development. The presence of a 'community' on the eportfolio also allows students to communicate with each other and share experiences, something they were not able to before.

Does it work?

It's still a bit early to tell but what I can say for now is that feedback –both from students and staff– has been really positive and there is a clear consensus that the new support system is much more convivial and interactive than the previous one. Evidence of peer support and genuine reflective practice could also be observed, although a more thorough study will be required to assess the real impact of this project on the students' Personal Development process.

Teaching and Learning Case Study

2013/14

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Coherent Curriculum themes:

- Student engagement

Other keywords:

eLearning, reflective learning