

# making the case

## PebblePad: The benefits of an efficient system.

In an era when institutions are under mounting pressure from a variety of stakeholders to increase efficiency and reduce costs, it makes sense for institutions to evaluate return on investment. It is reassuring to know that using PebblePad can improve efficiency, streamline processes and reduce administration costs whilst improving the student experience and maintaining, or indeed raising, standards. There are real benefits to using PebblePad - for your students, for your staff, and for your institution.



“ Compared to using a paper-based portfolio, using PebblePad has been convenient and efficient. Being able to see the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> markers' discussions in the tutor blog enables the Programme Leader to feel more involved in the programme and confident about processes. ”

*Matt Willet, Senior Lecturer & University Teaching Fellow, University of Cumbria, UK.*

### Retention

The communication and collaboration facilities in PebblePad make it a very useful tool to support institutional retention strategies. For example, students keep a learning journal (blog) in PebblePad when they first arrive at an institution and share it with their tutor or mentor. Instant feedback can be attached to the blog entries enabling students to feel confident they are heading in the right direction. As they progress the blog becomes a durable record for the student to look back on as they develop. Many institutions are also using PebblePad to support personal tutorial meetings. Students create a record of meet-

ings and set goals based on their discussions with their Personal Academic Tutor. The tutor is given access to the meeting record and can give supporting feedback to ensure the student is on track. The student updates the record and shares other appropriate assets with their tutor who can periodically review and comment upon progress. The whole process ensures that progress can be monitored and action quickly taken if a student is not engaging or indicates there is cause for concern.

### Student Satisfaction

The 2010 NUS Charter says 'students should usually receive personalised feedback within three weeks of the assessment submission deadline.' An NUS/HSBC report found that over a quarter of students have to wait more than five weeks to receive feedback.

Students repeatedly call for more and better feedback (NSS 2010, National Union of Students' Charter 2010, Bols 2011), with low levels of feedback likely to affect student responses to the national student satisfaction survey. The challenge is to provide timely personal feedback, whilst not overloading tutors. PebblePad has tackled this issue by including a facility for comment banks. Tutors create a bank of statements to address common issues and these can be drawn upon to ensure time

is not wasted writing similar feedback to multiple students. The tutor can tailor the fine detail of any comments to ensure the feedback is personalised whilst having the convenience of drawing upon standard responses for the main body of the feedback. Tutors can respond with more detailed feedback in less time resulting in students receiving the best possible support in their development. For more information see our website at <http://www.pebblepad.com>

## Reducing costs

Moving away from a largely paper based practice to a predominantly online model needs careful planning, but it can guarantee substantial savings in time and money. Progressive programmes that have introduced assessment via PebblePad have found that they have reduced the cost of paper alone by up to £30 per student per course as well as reducing staff time photocopying and also making a significant saving on postage. This brings the total saved to over £40 per student.

In addition to these substantial savings the security of a well supported system with robust backup strategy means institutions have effectively eliminated the risk of losing or damaging an irreplaceable paper portfolio.

If lecturers are travelling to visit students on placement, using PebblePad to support monitoring of progress and using communication facilities to stay in touch can significantly reduce the cost of travel without having a negative affect on the student experience. Our research has found examples of savings of between £5 and £20 per student per placement.

## Savings for Students

- ✓ Students can submit work and receive marks and feedback without the need to travel to campus.
- ✓ Heavy paper portfolios do not need to be carried around.
- ✓ Students don't have to bear the cost of producing a portfolio – no folders or paper to buy, no printing costs.
- ✓ No risk of losing a paper portfolio and having to collate all the evidence again.
- ✓ Ability to share evidence of learning and collect comments and feedback remotely – reduces travel time and costs.

“ *Managing the assessment of an eportfolio is certainly quicker and easier than a paper-based portfolio, and it's reduced assignment turnaround time significantly. Our academics also say that it's enhanced student learning, especially the students' reflective ability, and it's improved their own ability to provide constructive feedback to their students.* ”

Carole Hunter, Charles Sturt University, Australia.

## Savings for your department

- ✓ Staff do not have to spend hours copying and distributing manuscripts to 1st and 2nd markers, completely eliminating the risk of losing manuscripts and improving turnaround time.
- ✓ Storing paper manuscripts is a thing of the past as submissions can be digitally archived and easily retrieved.
- ✓ Markers do not have to download multiple files; instead they can easily access the online submissions from a secure area within PebblePad.
- ✓ External Examiners can be issued with a single log on to the assessment gateway to view the selected manuscripts, course documentation, feedback and marks all in one place. With PebblePad there is no need for External Examiners to travel to the institution the day before an exam board to scrutinise the assessment process - it is all visible on a PebblePad gateway.
- ✓ Sharing examples of good practice with future cohorts of students is now a simple process as there is no need to photocopy mountains of paper for everyone to view exemplar work.
- ✓ Feedback and marks are released to students electronically as soon as staff are ready.
- ✓ Students can include multimedia files to evidence their learning without the need to submit separate media.

“ *The consequences of losing a paper portfolio are enormous, they are irreplaceable. They have to start from scratch. If it's certificates they have to see if they can get a reissue. Sometimes they have handwritten things and then they are gone for ever.* ”

Claire Hamshire, senior learning and teaching fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.