



Starting Your Professional Development Portfolio: a guide to (e)Portfolio practice for those who teach in Higher Education

This guide is designed to introduce you to portfolio practice for supporting your professional development to enhance academic practice.



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Section 1: Introduction

This resource is designed to support those who wish to create – or update – a professional development teaching and learning portfolio to document and evidence their engagement in professional development to enhance academic practice in Higher Education (HE). There is a growing body of literature highlighting the use of portfolios to support academic professional learning activities and reflective practice in Higher Education (e.g. Hamilton 2018; Hoekstra and Crocker 2015; O'Farrell 2007; Pelger and Larsson 2018). Described as ‘a purposeful collection of evidence, consisting of descriptions, documents and examples of what is good teaching for the teacher’ (de Rijdt *et al.* 2006, p.1086), portfolios are being used in multiple ways to support PD: to provide evidence of a quality approach to professional development, to document teaching practices for the purposes of promotion, to showcase and reflect on academic practice and to provide evidence of engagement with PD activities. An eportfolio adds an extra dimension to the affordances of a more traditional portfolio through the potential inclusion of multimedia artefacts such as audio, video and text to capture, share and reflect on academic practice.

It is broadly recognised that professional development to enhance academic practice amongst those who teach in Higher Education encompasses a range of approaches, from formal accredited programmes to non-accredited or informal professional development activities such as workshops, projects, conferences, professional dialogue, experimental approaches or activities related to the scholarship of teaching and learning. This has been recognised in the Irish National Professional Development Framework which is underpinned by an ‘acknowledgement of the spectrum of activities that could be considered under the umbrella of PD’ (National Forum 2016a; 2016b). Therefore, a considerable amount of the professional learning that is undertaken to enhance academic practice takes place through experiential or work-based practices including communities of practice, conversations with colleagues and practice-based innovations. An electronic professional development teaching and learning portfolio allows for those who teach to document and evidence their engagement in professional development and to share with a variety of audiences, as appropriate.

This guide has been developed as part of the *FLEXIpath* project¹ in order to support HE teachers who wish to create or update their professional development eportfolio. This may be required as part of an accredited programme, award submission or application for career progression. Alternatively, HE teachers may decide to create a professional development eportfolio to have a space to document, evidence and reflect on their professional learning. Creating an eportfolio also facilitates greater portability and the sharing of learning with different audiences and in different contexts. It is hoped that this guide will provide support and tips, regardless of the purpose of your portfolio.

¹ Funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Section 2: Adopting a Reflective Approach to Enhancing Academic Practice

(Note that some of the material in this section has been adapted from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Open Course on ‘Reflective Practice in Teaching’).

Portfolios support a reflective approach to enhancing academic practice and enables us to make ‘our tacit, automatic knowledge and methods more explicit, allowing us to build on good practice and develop a professional “repertoire” for future problem solving’ (Hughes and Moore, 2007: 12). While professional development portfolios can take multiple forms and approaches, a common thread running throughout is a focus on reflective practice and engaging in continuous cycles of reflection in order to continuously enhance and improve practice. A focus on the *process* of creating a portfolio through evidence-based reflection and planning (see Section 3 below), rather than on the *product* or output, enables the development of a portfolio to support the enhancement of academic practice.

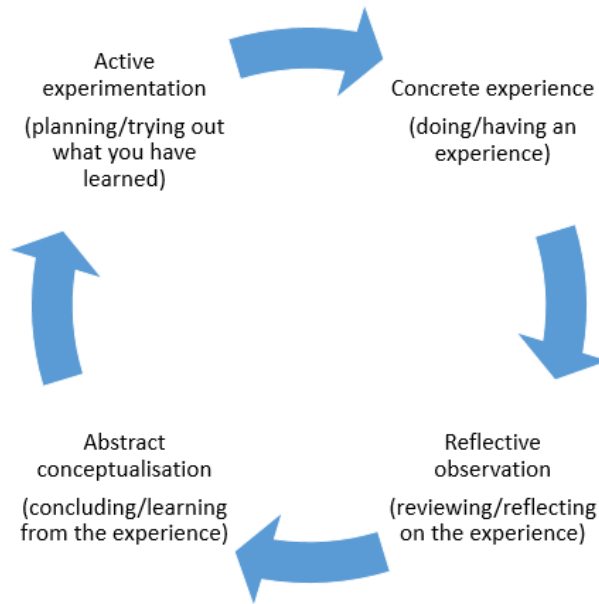
Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985: 19) define reflection as ‘an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning’. Reflection can be prompted by specific incidents (sometimes termed ‘critical incidents’ following Brookfield, 1995), be automatic or intuitive or be prompted through conversation or dialogue with others. Moon (2004: 84) suggests that the following outcomes can result from the use of reflection in the academic context:

- Learning, knowledge and understanding
- Some form of action
- The process of critical review
- Personal and continuing professional development
- Reflection on the process of learning or personal functioning (metacognition)
- The building of theory from observations in practice situations
- Clarification and the recognition that there is need for further reflection; and
- Unexpected outcomes.

In practical terms, reflections are evidence of the mental processes of reflection and can be in many forms, including written (e.g. diary/journal/log/essay/poetry), oral (speech/song), aural (music), visual (drawings/pictures/photographs) or any form of multimedia using a combination of approaches. Eportfolios particularly support multimedia reflections and enable the articulation of ideas in multiple formats.

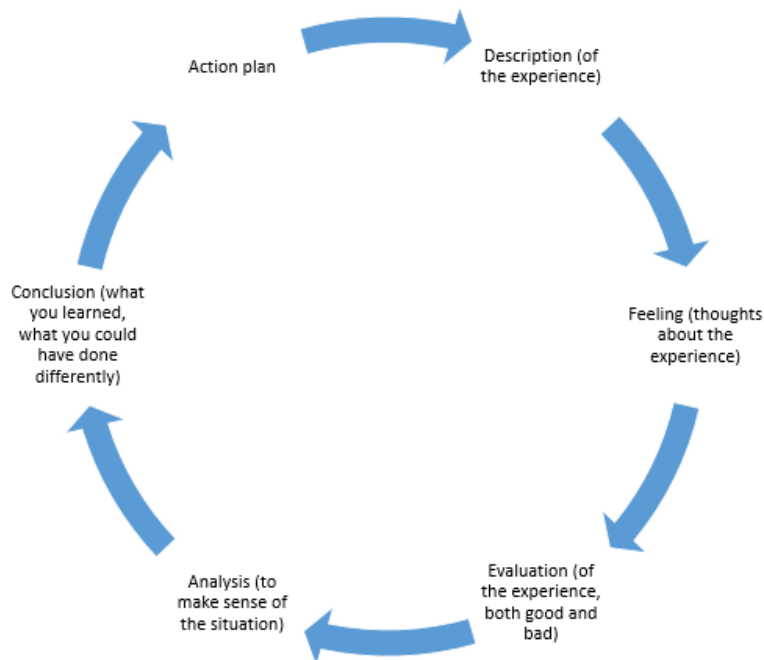
It can be helpful to consider using a reflective model or series of prompts to support a more structured approach to reflection; see for example:

- Kolb’s model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984):



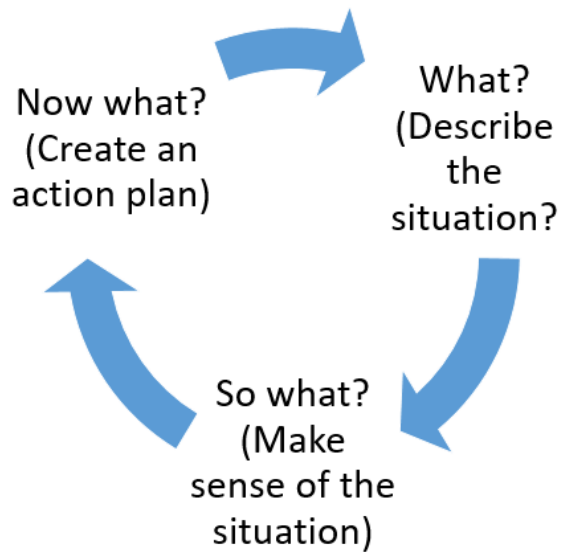
To read further about how Kolb's model of experiential learning can support reflection, click [here](#).

- Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1998):



To read further about Gibbs' reflective cycle, click [here](#).

- Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's 'What' model of reflection (Rolfe *et al.*, 2001)



To read further about the 'What? So what? Now what?' reflective cycle, click [here](#).

Section 3: The National Professional Development Framework

The National Professional Development Framework (NPDF) for all who teach in Irish Higher Education was launched by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Its purpose is to assist and empower staff in developing, planning and engaging in professional development activities and has been designed to be flexible and inclusive so as to be used by all those who teach in higher education across a broad range of professional identities. It is underpinned by a set of core values and provides a structured outline of professional development domains for teaching and learning within the Irish Higher Education sector. For anyone who is creating or updating their professional development eportfolio, the NPDF offers a useful starting point and guide to map previous PD activities and establish PD goals.

The following values underpin the NPDF:

- Inclusivity
- Authenticity
- Scholarship
- Learner-centredness
- Collaboration

The NPDF centres around five domains, which can be summarised as follows:

Domain 1: The Self

This domain emphasises the personal values, perspectives and emotions that individuals bring to their teaching, including self-awareness, confidence, life experience and the affective aspects associated with teaching.

Domain 2: Professional Identity, Values and Development in Teaching and Learning

This domain emphasises the importance of the development and self-evaluation of professional/disciplinary identity and its associated roles, responsibilities and action plans. It encourages staff to consider their professional and/or disciplinary identity in their context at a particular point in time.

Domain 3: Professional Communication and Dialogue in Teaching and Learning

At the core of this domain is the importance of the excellent, clear and coherent communication skills required for the changing learning environment. It emphasises the key skills of written/verbal/visual communication, listening, dialogue and collaboration with others in the professional learning process.

Domain 4: Professional Knowledge and Skills in Teaching and Learning

This domain emphasises the importance of both disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary approaches to teaching (disciplinary pedagogies), while also drawing on inter-disciplinary experiences and approaches. It supports an active student role in the learning process, moving

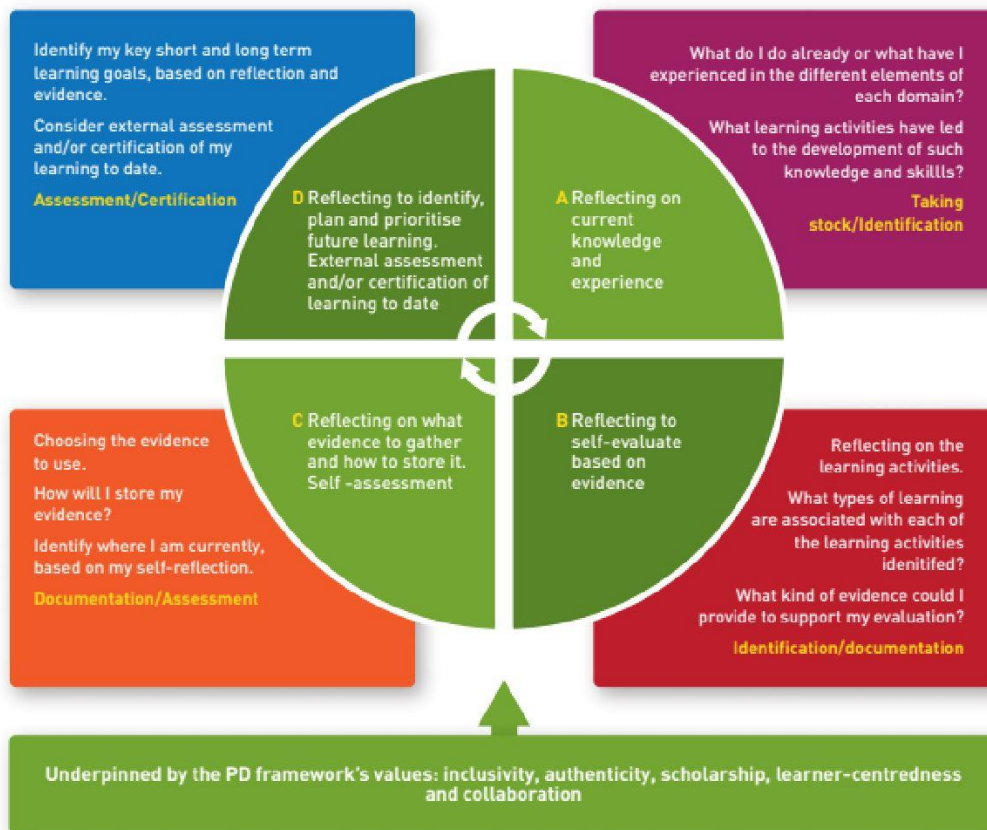
towards a partnership in the teaching and learning process, essential in the higher education environment.

Domain 5: Personal and Professional Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning

This domain emphasises the importance of personal and professional digital capacity and the application of digital skills and knowledge to professional practice. The domain focuses on the development of personal confidence in digital skills to develop professional competence and the identification of opportunities for technology to support and enhance student learning.

For a more comprehensive overview of the NPDP see <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/NF-2016-National-Professional-Development-Framework-for-all-Staff-Who-Teach-in-Higher-Education.pdf>.

The image below proposes how the NPDP can be used to support a cycle of evidence-based reflection and planning for individuals who teach in Higher Education:



When compiling and developing your teaching and learning professional development portfolio, the NPDP can be used to structure reflective activities, set goals and monitor ongoing efforts towards enhancing academic practice and supporting student learning.

Section 4a: Getting Started – choosing the platform

Within Your Institution

When choosing a platform, it is worth checking within your institution to see if a platform is available that is hosted and maintained by your institution and that you can freely access. This version may have additional features compared to free versions and may contain access to colleagues within your Institute. However, these eportfolio accounts are often linked to your institutional email and if you change positions and move to another institution you may not be able to keep the account and may not have access after your leave.

Some of the more popular platforms include:

- Mahara - <http://mahara.org/>
- PebblePad <http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/>
- Brightspace <http://www.d2l.com/en-eu/products/eportfolio/>
- MS Office– OneNote Classnote, Sway

These may be linked to the existing VLE being used within your institution.

External ePortfolio Platforms:

There are many free platforms that you can sign up to and setup an account. Using an external platform can be useful if you move from one institution to another. These may be subject to advertising however you can upgrade to remove ads if you want. The following are some of the more popular free platforms that can be used to setup an eportfolio:

- FolioSpace - <https://www.foliospaces.org/>
- PBworks - <http://www.pbworks.com/>
- Wordpress - Weebly <http://www.weebly.com/>

A more comprehensive list is available here: <http://eportfoliohub.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/examples-of-eportfolio-platforms.pdf>

For further guidance and resources on selecting the most appropriate eportfolio platform to suit your needs, please click here: <http://eportfoliohub.ie/index.php/how-personal-plan/>

Section 4b: Getting Started – how to structure

Once you have selected the most appropriate portfolio platform, the next step is to develop an outline plan or structure for your portfolio. This will likely be determined by the purpose of your portfolio, and the structure may be guided by the requirements of an accredited programme or award submission. For example, applicants to the Midwest Regional Teaching Excellence Awards are advised to structure their professional development portfolio using the following guiding headings:

- Statement of Teaching Philosophy
- Teaching Performance and Effectiveness
- Planning and Preparation
- Assessment and Examination of Student Learning
- Professional Development: past, present and future

If you are developing an eportfolio for own use and to support your own development, you may have more flexibility regarding how you choose to structure your portfolio; if this is the case, it is important to think about how the portfolio-building process can best support your PD goals. You may choose to use your eportfolio to document the following, for example:

- Teaching responsibilities
- Innovative and effective teaching, learning and assessment approaches
- Student and peer feedback
- Ongoing reflections on practice
- Useful readings and resources

Regardless of the purpose and intended audience, it is important to be selective with the evidence and artefacts that you include (see Section 5, below); the eportfolio should be reflective of a cross-section of your activities as a teacher.

Section 5: Building Your Portfolio

The elements and artefacts included in a teaching portfolio can vary, depending on the purpose of the portfolio. Artefacts are digital items that evidence achievements or accomplishments or are related to your goals or experiences. Artefacts can be drawn from your experiences within or beyond the classroom; the following is a range of evidence which could be included in a teaching and learning portfolio, aligned to the five domains of the NDPF:

Domain	Evidence
The Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on self/teaching style/attitudes towards teaching • Reflection on personal values, perspectives and emotions involved in teaching • Teaching philosophy statement • Quotes from student feedback • CV, lists of achievement, publications
Professional Identity, Values and Development in Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quotes from student feedback • Reflection on conferences/seminars/workshops attended • Reflections on teaching experience and research supervisor role • Reflection on the role of teacher in students' life, supporting the mental health of students
Professional Communication and Dialogue in Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on teaching experiences • Reflection on conferences/seminars attended • List of publications, conference talks • Reflection on communication processes and approaches with students
Professional Knowledge and Skills in Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on teaching practices • Personal reflection • Examples of class presentations and exercises • Reflection on theories and approaches to learning • Examples of in-class activities
Personal and Professional Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on technological practice/experience and technology used in teaching and the classroom • Examples of TEL practices

(Source: National Forum, 2019)

Some ideas for reflecting on teaching activities within the classroom:

- Identify, develop, implement and reflect on discipline specific active learning activity.
- Identify a goal from your institution's Teaching and Learning Strategy, implement it into teaching practice and reflect on the process.
- Identify, implement and reflect on an assessment strategy and its impact on the teaching and learning process.

- Develop feedback approaches and reflect on their impact on the teaching and learning process.
- Develop and integrate innovative approaches into a teaching and learning context of your choosing and reflect on their impact on the learning experience.
- Participate and complete a Peer Observation of Teaching exercise and reflect on the benefit of the process.
- Identify and implement a new digital tool and reflect on its impact on the student learning experience.

Some ideas for reflecting on teaching practice outside the classroom:

- Summarise and reflect on the proceedings of a conference and how they apply to teaching practice
- Review a research article related to the scholarship of teaching and learning and reflect on how the key findings could impact on your practice.
- Attend a CPD activity such as a workshop, seminar or equivalent and reflect what outputs or approaches could be incorporated into your practice.
- Reflect on the alignment of teaching practice to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). Identify where teaching practice is in line with the guidelines and where there are any gaps. Identify measures could be put in place to fill in these gaps.
- Reflect on any affiliations you may have to discipline specific bodies or organisations and how this supports and impacts on your teaching practice.
- Reflect on any accredited professional development that you have completed and the impact this has had on your teaching practice.
- Reflect on your own research and the impact that this work or any projects you have been involved in have impacted on your teaching practice.

Reflecting on future professional development

As well as considering activities that you have completed within and outside of the classroom it is also important to consider your future professional development and what goals you may want to achieve. You may want to use your portfolio to reflect on and identify any gaps that may exist in your professional development and what approach/plan can be implemented to achieve these goals.

Seeking feedback and engaging in critical dialogues

As part of the development of your portfolio, you may also wish to consider how you might use as an opportunity to engage in critical dialogues with peers and colleagues in relation to your academic practice. For example, you might ask a colleague or mentor to review your portfolio and to discuss your professional learning journey and future objectives; it could form part of an annual progress review if you think this is appropriate. Most eportfolio platforms allow you to select what elements of your portfolio that you would like to share, so consider sharing aspects with trusted colleagues and friends to support your PD goals.

Section 6: Resources

If you are interested in developing your PD portfolio, contact your institutional Teaching and Learning personnel in the first instance for advice in relation to institution-specific portfolio supports.

Web Sites and Resources

- Eportfolio Hub: a website to support those who are seeking to incorporate an eportfolio project into their own programme or looking to create their own eportfolio

<https://eportfoliohub.ie/>

- Eportfolio Ireland: a professional learning network for eportfolio practitioners and researchers

<https://eportfolioireland.wordpress.com/>

- National Forum Open Access Professional Development Courses: a suite of open-access professional development programmes, including courses on Reflective Practice in Teaching and PACT – Commitment to PD

<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/professional-development/open-access-professional-development-courses/>

- University of Edinburgh Reflection Toolkit: a space to find information and support on reflection and facilitating reflection in others.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection>

Books and Journal Articles

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