# Charles Darwin University

## ePortfolio traditions that are ready to be broken

Sankey, Michael

*Published in:*
2023 Eportfolio Forum (Dual delivery). Emerging, Connecting, Sustaining

Published: 10/10/2023

*Document Version*
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

# eBook of Shortened Peer Reviewed Papers

**2023 Eportfolio Forum (Dual delivery)**
Emerging, Connecting, Sustaining
11-12 October 2023
**Charles Darwin University** – **Darwin / Larrakia Land** and Online

# ePortfolio traditions that are ready to be broken

**Michael Sankey**
Education Strategy
Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory, Australia

## Abstract

Although ePortfolio practices has been with us for a good 20+ years, in some form or another, the options that students and staff now have to represent their professional experiences has expanded over recent years. This is largely due to the plethora of online platforms that allow a user-friendly and templated experience, giving students freedoms they have not previously had, unless they had website development skills. This paper will report on a study of current ePortfolio options provided by institutions in Australasia, highlighting a divergence in, and opinions around, what constitutes contemporary good practice. It is fair to say that what was once seen as the responsibility of an institution to provide a dedicated ePortfolio platform for their students has started to fracture, and that many institutions are now opting to mediate third-party and/or discipline relevant options for their students. This paper will look at the pros and cons of these options.

**Keywords:** Third-party tools, Australasian universities, ePortfolio benchmarking, alternative ePortfolios, student centered.

## Introduction

Although ePortfolio practices for university staff and students have been with us and well-studied for 20+ years, in some form or another (Ospíšilová & Rohlíková, 2023), the options that staff and students now have in representing their professional experiences have expanded exponentially. Take for example 20 years ago, when ePortfolios were really the only option, unless one had web development skills; LinkedIn and WordPress were both in their infancy (both starting 2003), there was no ResearchGate (2008) or ORCID (2009) and institutional research repositories and information systems were rudimentary at best until 2013 when Pure was released by Elsevier (Elsevier, 2013). Figure 1 represents some of the current options that staff need to choose from in this space, particularly when looking to represent their practice, but not necessarily to fulfill learning, teaching and assessment activities, that may require the use some other features, that may be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 1.**

*The many options now available to academic staff representing their practice*
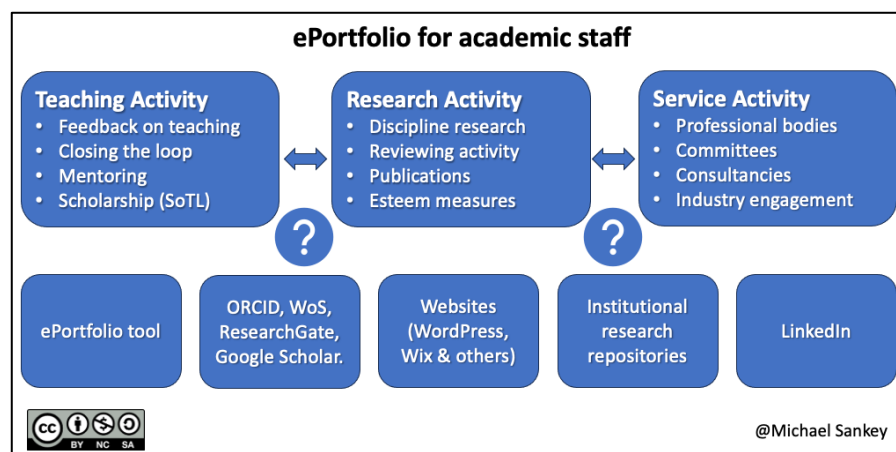


Today there are a large range of online platforms that allow for a user-friendly and often templated experience, giving staff and students options that a single institutional tool may not provide. This serves a purpose for certain disciplines, but is not necessarily all an institution requires to navigate the range of needs for their staff and students, particularly with a view to helping them secure a representation of their learning and skill acquisition to prepare for their future employment (Todeschini & Sollberger, 2023) and for academic staff to promote their practice (Rowley & Munday, 2018).

For students, more so, we are talking about providing platforms that allow them to contextualise their learning towards their desired profession and collating the evidence to support this goal (Ferns & Comfort, 2014). However, Figure 2 indicates also a different and expanding mix of technologies that might be applied to meet this goal for an institution, and different to those seen in Figure 1. But are these mutually exclusive or can there be synergies for an institution?

**Figure 2**

*The many options now available to students to represent their learning.*
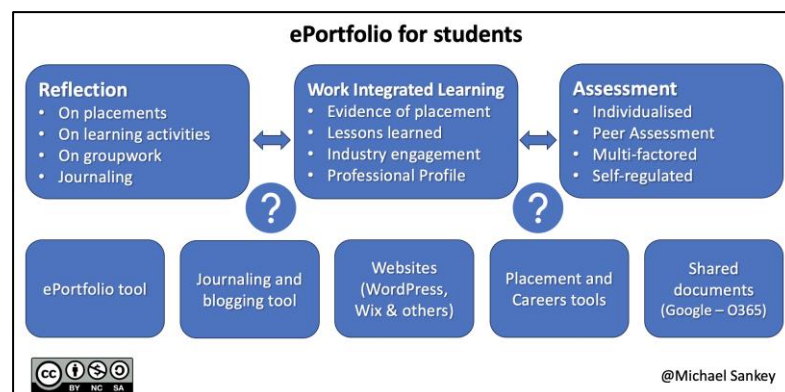
This paper will report on a recent study of current ePortfolio options that are across some 49 Universities in Australasia, highlighting a divergence in practice and opinions as to what constitutes contemporary good practice. Of note is that what was once seen as the responsibility of an institution to provide a dedicated ePortfolio platform to meet the needs of their students and staff may not be achievable or even desirable. This is because many institutions are now opting to mediate third-party and/or different discipline relevant options for their students and some offer multiple tools, where they had previously only provided one. This paper will look at the pros and cons of some of these options and report on the current mix of systems used across the sector.

## Still a place for ePortfolio

Although there are now many technology solutions to represent one's thoughts, ideas and achievements, there is still something that modern ePortfolio platforms provide that cloud-based and public platforms do not, and that is their ability to host private information and make this viewable to a select audience, often associated with a Learning Management System (LMS), but also for those who may be provided with a direct and private link. This might include reflections, assessments, group work, that the general public do not need to see (Hui, et.al. 2023), but can be viewed by teaching staff and possibly other students.

Thanks to increased interoperability with the LMS we have still seen the adoption of ePortfolio systems within universities in Australasia continue to expand (Miyoshi, et.al., 2021). For example, in 2017, the author, on behalf of the Australasian Council on Open Distance and eLearning (ACODE), conducted a benchmarking activity of universities supporting a centralised ePortfolio platform. In that activity there were 7 out of 48 universities that did not offer a centralised and supported ePortfolio system (Sankey, 2017).

**Figure 3**

*Change in ePortfolio tools use over the last 6 years (2017 - 2023)*
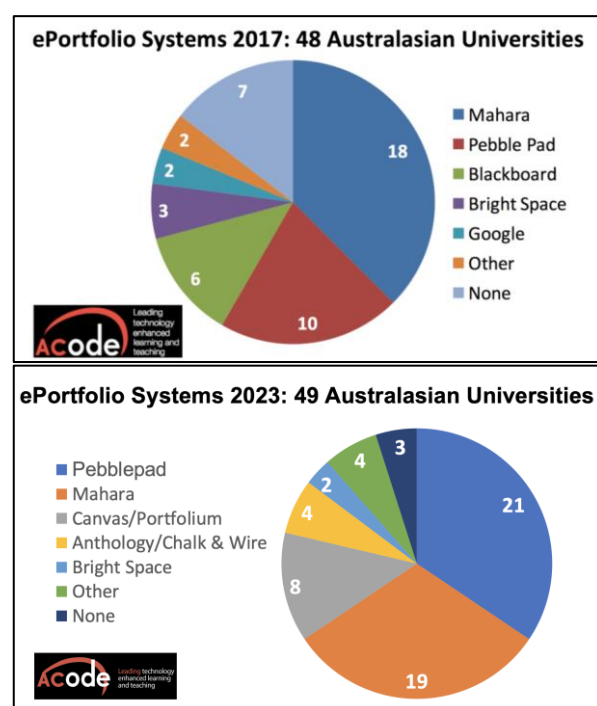
In July 2023 the author again, on behalf of ACODE, conducted the same benchmarking activity, six years on.  Since that time one further university had been added to the sector (Avondale University). Figure 3 shows the change in ePortfolio tools used over the last 6 years. Of note, is now only three (3) institutions had no formal ePortfolio system. But all the Public Universities now supported some form of system. Also of interest is that some 11 institutions are now supporting the use of two tools.

The largest growth in the market has been experienced by the one particular platform (PebblePad) that has more than double its acceptance. This is not surprising given this platform serves multiple purposes for an institution, offering both an ePortfolio platform but also more advanced assessment features (known as ATLAS). However, the other growth that has been seen is that of certain LMS providers enhancing their ePortfolio functionalities in their own systems, by buying in the functionality of what were once stand-alone systems: Canvas acquiring the Portfolium Platform and Anthology (formally Blackboard) acquiring Chalk & Wire.

## But what next

However, in relation to how students and staff are sharing other professional elements of their practice, there has also been a significant growth in the use of the LinkedIn platform, primarily thanks to its links to job search and recruitment (Quigley, 2022). When the above data was recently shared on LinkedIn on 8 August, there was quite the response. At the time of writing 78 people responded positively to this, 12 people had reposted it and 35 people contributed further thoughts.

**Figure 4**
*Likes on my recent LinkedIn post.*
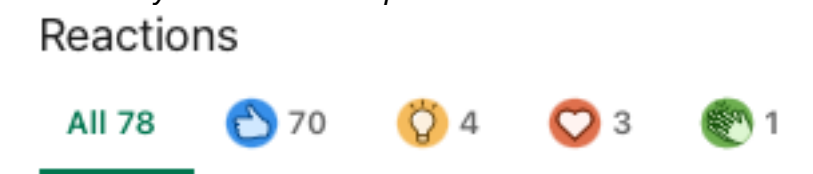


These comments point to some interesting and emerging trends and can be summarized into three main categories:

1. The use of Linkedin as an alternative platform: It was felt by some that this platform provided a place where students can professionally represent their skills. However, this did not support activities associated with things like placements and peer interactions based in their studies. But then neither is it designed to do so. Thus a platform to do this was still important. Having said this, it is important for institutions to build this into their practice for students.

2. Debate about the suitability and portability of an ePortfolio tool: There was some concern that some ePortfolio platforms did not make it easy for students to export their data and make that usable on platforms such as WordPress or Wix, etc. This is of some concern, but in reality, this is not a major incumbance to using other platforms, as only certain data can be shared publicly anyway.

3. The types of information that should be shared online, now that identity theft is rife: A growing concern that universities are starting to take more seriously, which leads

systems to make more personal data private. This requires a platform that can be shared internally but not publicly for things associated with assessment and work placements.

What this demonstrates is that platforms that are being used need to allow for a combination of outputs for their students, allowing them to represent themselves for different audiences and in ways that are conversant with their future profession. But as the data is demonstrating this range of uses is not necessarily found in just one platform. Having said that, those systems that an institution provides its student's and those that they recommend, must be able to provide an increased level of privacy, particularly due to the unintended consequences of sharing content and discussion of events, images and data that should not be seen by the public (Siddiqui, et.al., 2023), but that weighed against what a prospective employer may want to see.

The data indicates that we are seeing an expansion of ePortfolio practice across the Australasian University sector. But that practice has become and is becoming even more eclectic, using multiple platforms to achieve the professional goals of our students and our staff.

## References

Elsevier (2013). Award Management. *Press release.* July. Retrieved from: https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/pure/pure-support/releases/pure-4.16

Ferns, S. & Comfort, J. (2014). ePortfolios as Evidence of Standards and Outcomes in Work-Integrated Learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 15*(3). pp269-280. Retrieved from: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1113655

Hui, L., Ippolito, K., Sarsfield, M., & Charalambous, M. (2023) Using a self-reflective ePortfolio and feedback dialogue to understand and address problematic feedback expectations, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2232960

Miyoshi, M., Ueki, M., Ohno, K., & Ohmori, M. (2021). Creating an LMS ePortfolio Building System That Enhances the Quality of College Life from One That Supports Self-Regulated Learning. *Yonago Acta Med. 64*(4) pp. 324-329. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33160/yam.2021.11.001

Ospíšilová, L., & Rohlíková, L. (2023) Reforming higher education with ePortfolio implementation, enhanced by learning analytics. *Computers in Human Behavior*. Vol 138. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107449

Quigly, J. (2022). The Power of LinkedIn for Students & Graduates. *The Accredible Blog.* April 19. Retrieved from: https://www.accredible.com/blog/the-power-of-linkedin-for-students-graduates

Rowley, J. & Munday, J, (2018). The evolved landscape of ePortfolios: Current values and purposes of academic teachers and curriculum designers. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 9(1), 3–22. Retrieved from: https://ojs.deakin.edu.au/index.php/jtlge/issue/view/109

Sankey, M. (2017). ePortfolios in today's universities. *Education Technology Solutions Magazine. Special University Issue,* (Eds) S. Kinash & J. Bigelow., Education Technology

University Learning and Teaching Solutions. pp.16-18. December. Retrieved from: https://educationtechnologysolutions.com/2018/07/eportfolios-in-todays-universities/

Siddiqui, Z.S., Fisher, M.B., Slade, C., Downer, T., Kirby, M.M., McAllister, L., Isbel, S.T., & Wilson, C.B. (2023) Twelve tips for introducing E-Portfolios in health professions education, *Medical Teacher, 45*(2), pp. 139-144. DOI: 10.1080/0142159X.2022.2053085

Todeschini, B.S. Sollberger, E. (2023). From learning pathways to career: Building e-portfolios in higher education to demonstrate skills acquisition for career readiness, EDULEARN23 Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies. pp. 3317-332