

eP Foundation Users' Survey

Intro

In July 2012 an online survey was conducted of all Foundation ePortfolio users at the request of the UKFPO. The survey ran for three weeks and generated 2,425 responses. Although the results were available immediately, the survey coincided with ePortfolio Review and as the information was commercially sensitive the results are only being made widely available now. This paper summarises the most common comments of respondents, but is not a systematic evaluation of the data.

Responsibility for the ePortfolio falls into two broad categories: content and technical.

1. The Foundation *content* of the ePortfolio and all associated process flows are determined by the *UKFPO and deaneries*. This included the number and format of assessments, the frequency and structure of reflections, the curriculum, the rules around linking/association, permissions (who has the ability to do what within the system), and communication about content, processes and changes.
2. The *ePortfolio team* is responsible for the *technical* dimensions of ePortfolio, i.e. software code and testing, the infrastructure/hardware (servers), database backup, security and technical support.

Content/process

The ePortfolio team works in collaboration with the UKFPO to deliver their content requirements.

Every comment received during the survey was passed on to the UKFPO.

Advantages

Many respondents had positive comments about the content and processes of the Foundation ePortfolio, citing the “ease of documentation and evidence linking” and “simple to use”. Many appreciated the ePortfolio as a “single repository” for their work that could be accessed anytime and anywhere. One trainee reported it is “a great tool for doctors to record training and assessments in one place encourages reflection and discussion of interesting cases, reflect on clinical practice and evaluate yourself and improve through assessments and constructive feedback” – a comment reflected by many others. The system was seen to “ensure fair assessment” and “encourage you to complete e-learning.”

Many appreciated the educational framework the UKFPO has designed, as it “allows progress to be monitored and builds on experience through training”, it “focus(es) attention to the requirements of the foundation programme” and it is an “easy access and brilliant way to demonstrate our achievements and shortcomings”.

“Tick-box”

By far, the most often reported comments were that the ePortfolio was a “Government-driven tick-box exercise” or “an over complicated maze of box ticking”. With so many reporting they saw it as a tick-box exercise the educational value was frequently not appreciated: “The ePortfolio is an easy to use system that has no evidence base in terms of its beneficial impact on training”. Balancing these comments however, were others who appreciated the structure, or came to: “At first I viewed it as a bureaucratic nightmare but with time I began to see how its presence forced me to undertake crucial reflections”.

Uniformity

There were mixed views on having a (largely) uniform system across the UK for Foundation. Numerous respondents had negative views of the “prescriptive nature” and “formulaic” as restraining factors, seeing the standardised system and structure as “spoon feeding” and “making everyone look the same”. (As noted above however, many others appreciated the standardisation and structure.)

The perceived lack of ability for local areas to alter practice was sighted as a problem. Conversely, others said the ePortfolio was “used slightly differently by different deaneries so not always clear what the requirements are”. Individuals frequently had specific issues on how the ePortfolio was used in practice: “I felt it was unfair to be asked to complete the eportfolio 2 months before finishing our last job as I am now unable to include skills I have done since closing point same”.

Other comments noted the standardised content did not always reflect the post, notably General Practice posts.

Change

Numerous respondents felt strongly that change (even annual) happened too frequently to the ePortfolio. This was balanced by a large number of requests for more change from other users.

Complexity

Many felt the Foundation content was too complicated: “Certain events are long winded and complex” and “Forms too detailed, most seniors do not know how to use the portfolio”, were common comments.

A lot of people reported they felt much of the content/forms were redundant, and that the ePortfolio should be “streamlined, (with) reduced number of meetings, reduced supervisor number, reduced mandatory requirements, and more input from colleagues”.

Reflection

The reflective components of Foundation were generally welcomed. A representative respondent commented that ePortfolio “encourages us to undertake reflective practice and PDPs which are valuable focus your training. Helps identify areas which need further development supports workplace learning”.

There were however a good number of comments that reflection should/could not be recorded, as well as suggestions that the format of the reflective sections be altered.

Training

Some respondents spoke of a “Lack of orientation/training” having a detrimental impact on the use of the ePortfolio and there were others requests for “a basic “idiot’s guide”. “The fact that no one (even the deanery) seems to know the answer to our eportfolio questions” was an often cited theme, as was “Assessors do not know how to use it, this included my educational supervisor”.

Time required

A frequent comment was there was insufficient time to complete the ePortfolio, and that “We should be given time away from work in order to complete the portfolio”. This was reported by both trainees and their supervisors.

Specific aspects of ePortfolio (e.g. the amount of linking required) were cited as being particularly time consuming. (note: requirements for linking are determined by each deanery and there is variation across the UK.)

Many also noted that completing the ePortfolio “is incredibly reliant on other very busy professionals”, and consequently a widespread cause for concern.

Engagement of supervisors

The survey highlighted that many felt supervisors were not engaged with the Foundation ePortfolio and its processes which was seen as a major obstacle to its use. Trainees reported: “Lack of knowledge by supervisors as to how to use the site, timescales and understanding of the importance of assessments” as a common problem and “Supervisors need more training on how to use it as they don’t get updated with the changes”. Others claimed, “No supervisors take it seriously”. Given their central role this reported disengagement with the content and processes would have serious consequence across a wide range of activities.

Trainees are also reliant on others for the Foundation ePortfolio to work and many commented that “99% of assessors don’t know how to fill in eportfolio” or “My main problem is hounding and begging for assessments from reluctant nurses, registrars and consultants. I believe this adds unnecessary stress to a job that is already high pressured.”

On a more positive note, others saw the ePortfolio as a tool that provided “good opportunity for feedback with trainees” as saw the framework provided as supporting engagement.

Improving ...

Finally, it should be noted that many commented on continual improvement to ePortfolio content and process: “I can see how it is improving with time – well done”, “Definitive improvement from 2011-2012 to 2012-13”, and “It has improved with time and familiarity”.

TAB was widely mentioned as a very respected and useful assessment tool, both for feedback and early identification of struggling trainees.

And numerous comments requested an extension of ePortfolio: “There should be a place to put medical school achievements” and should be “an eportfolio which starts at medical school and continues throughout your training.”

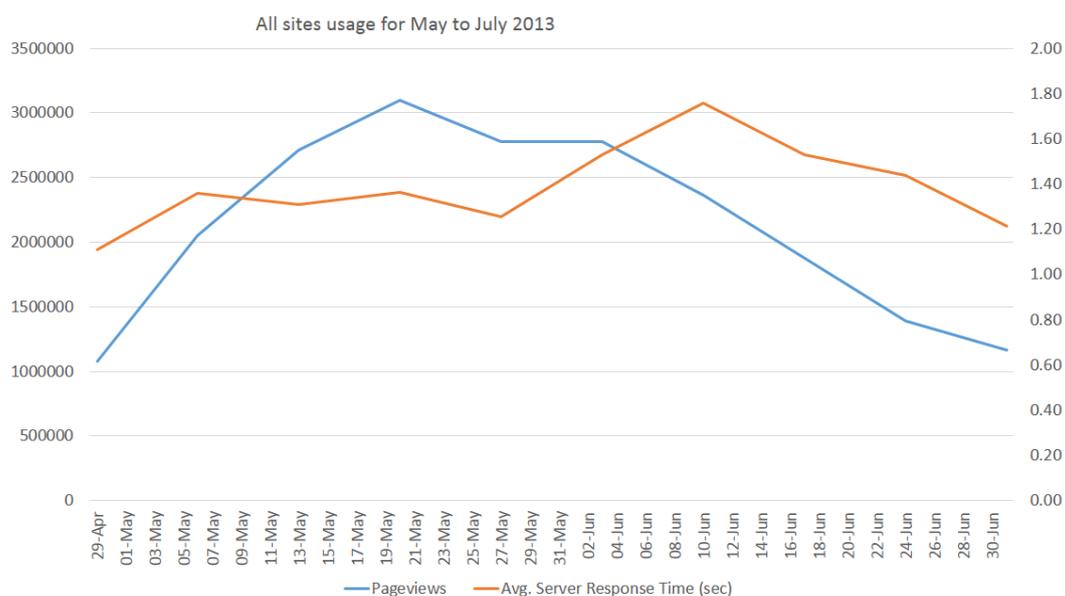
Technical (software/hardware)

Speed

There were numerous complaints about the system being “Slow, especially on NHS computers”. Whilst some reported that “It is quick” or the “speed and convenience” of eP as being a positive thing, many more comments spoke of periodic frustration with the speed.

eP response: The issue of ePortfolio speed comes down to a variety of factors, the primary ones being the speed of the application and the network it is being accessed on. Whilst there is nothing we can do about a busy or slow network connection we have made considerable progress on the speed of the application itself. This has included the regular improvements to the code itself to decrease page load time, but also the hosting move to a private cloud environment.

The graph below depicts the speed of the Foundation ePortfolio during Foundation ARCP this year, a time of high traffic. Complex pages or resource intensive searches (such as an admin doing user searches across the entire database) would take more time, but the application was performing well and further improvements have been noted since this period. Several recent user groups have reported no issues with the application’s speed.

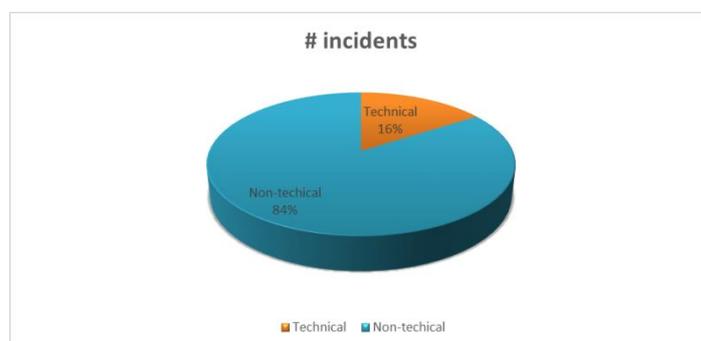


Technical support response time

The were numerous concerns raised about the speed at which technical support issues were resolved.

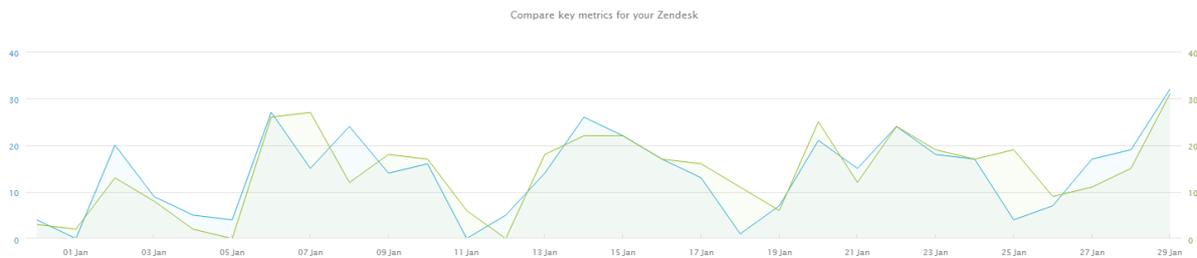
eP response: The level of technical support available is dependant upon the money available from the annual charge per trainee. The levels of support request also vary considerably at different times of the year. Available resource was constrained this spring, which decreased the speed at which we could address incoming requests.

*The ePortfolio also continues to receive a large volume of non-technical support requests which hinders our response time: **over 80% of queries received are not technical** and this volume has a very significant impact on our response time.*



As of September we have had an increase in available staff resource which has helped clear the backlog. This has been further improved by the implementation of new support software (Zendesk) which is proving far more efficient and flexible than the previous product. The response time has continued to improve in late 2013 and early 2014.

The chart below shows the support request stats for January 2014.



(No) telephone support

A number of respondents were frustrated they were “unable to telephone a helpdesk” for technical support.

eP response: Unfortunately, there is not enough resource to pay for a dedicated telephone support line. The number of requests for telephone support has been steadily declining and with the improvements in response time this will continue.

Personal Library

It was noted that many felt the Personal Library feature could be upgraded.

eP response: Plans to improve this area are under development in consultation with customer groups. The intention is to modernise the look and feel, as well as the functionality (e.g. enable drag & drop) and details should be available in early 2014.

Personal Library – 100MB limit

A number of people reported that 100MB was an insufficient amount of personal space.

eP response: Personal space allocation can readily be increased at the request of the customer (but costs need to be recovered).

Links to (other) e-learning

Respondents frequently spoke highly of the links with e-Learning for Healthcare, but requested further links with other e-learning sources, primarily BMJ Learning.

eP response: We would welcome the opportunity to link additional learning within the ePortfolio. The development would likely be straightforward and would require a change request from the Foundation customer group.

Rules/processes

Users commented that the system is inflexible and prescriptive, and does not allow (for example) the ability to enter things retrospectively

eP response: There are no technical reasons the system cannot be more “flexible”, but the software’s processes, permissions, timings etc. are specified by the customer/UKFPO.

Server downtime

There were several comments that the scheduled server downtime was inconvenient.

eP response: Unfortunately it is necessary to regularly service the platform and update the content as the customers require. We are dependant on staff working out of hours on a voluntary basis to do this, and schedule this time no more than once a week with widespread notification, including on-screen countdowns for everyone on the system. We are gradually increasing the amount of deploys (modifications) we make to the live system during the day which happen without any downtime, but can only do this when the stability and security of the system is not at risk.

Interface

Users had mixed opinions about the user interface. Some reported “the e-portfolio is a well designed GUI for a reasonably complex database. On the whole it is an easily navigable and intuitive system. I have never had a problem with the software.” Others maintained the process flow and layout were counter-intuitive and confusing.

eP response: The interface and layout are the responsibility of both the eP team as well as all the customer groups that are using it. There will never be a single solution that everyone feels works for them, but both the eP and the UKFPO take regular feedback from the users and incorporate it in the annual upgrades.

App/mobile use

Survey feedback from those that have used the app was uniformly positive. However, many people were not aware there was an app or wished more functionality could be added to it.

eP response: We appreciate there is strong desire to have a multi-functional app, but unfortunately no funding has been made available to develop one and all user groups have stressed the app should be free. Progress to date has therefore been slower than we would have liked, but those using it have been very supportive.

We launched a beta-version of the eP app in February 2013, and as a beta publicity has not been widespread. It currently supports ticketing and all reflective forms. The app is written in HTML5,

which is cross platform (works on all handheld devices) and (critically) works offline, syncing when the device comes back online. We aim to continue adding functionality to the app and will detail these plans in early 2014.

Approximately 15% of our total traffic is through hand-held devices, the majority of this still being web browsers (primarily iPad). The eP team regularly makes improvements to the code to optimise the system for browser use on hand-helds.