LEARNING TO LINK-IN
Teaching undergraduate sport students how to professionally network via social media using a Pebblepad platform

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Summary

Increasingly, professional social networks are being used to connect, collaborate, make valuable contacts, source 'experts' and for recruitment purposes. The majority (92%) of employers use social media to recruit, and 1 in 6 employees state that their current post is as a consequence of social media. 'LinkedIn' is the most popular social media network used by recruiters and it is reported that more than a third of job seekers use this platform to enable them to find work.

Pedagogy
Universities are expected to produce employable graduates who can adapt and manage their future careers. However, debate exists about whether employability skills can be developed in the classroom. In a highly competitive job market self-promotion and self-assertion are considered key skills, if prospective employees are to come to the attention of recruiters. Therefore, given these advances in recruitment practice it could be argued that curriculum time should be devoted to ensuring that students have the capacity through reflection to evidence the knowledge, skills and experiences that they have developed during their studies.

Technology
Pebblepad is an e-portfolio tool which allows students to collate and reflect upon achievements, as well as to set themselves objectives and actions for personal development. Students are able to import or use Pebblepad technology to create assets, including web-folios/pages, within their portfolio.

Innovation
This paper details how tools within Pebblepad have been utilised to give students guided practice in professional networking to foster employment prospects. Assessment issues, including reasonable adjustment for those with learning disabilities, are considered as well as student testimonials recounting their experience of participating in this form of learning.

Usefulness and benefits of the innovation
Student feedback was very positive and there was evident appreciation of the opportunity to articulate what they had to offer to a prospective employer in this format. Students recognised the value of receiving guidance and feedback, as to what information was appropriate to include in a professional outward-facing web-based platform.

Introduction – *Technological context*
More than a third of the world's population now use the internet, and social media is used regularly by 91% of online adults - almost a quarter of adult online time is spent engaging with social media (Internetworldstats.com, 2012). Student populations are considered keen consumers of social networking technology (Barkhuus & Tashiro, 2010) and consequently, these platforms are now being used as learning spaces (Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Ettinger & Kijl, 2009). It is recognised that engagement with technology within courses may improve learning (Alexander, 2008) and that using social network platforms as adjuncts to learning can increase student connectedness (Hung & Yuen, 2009). However, their use as learning tools still causes some debate (Selwyn, 2009) with any utilitarian value coming from increasing staff and student engagement and opportunities for informal learning and peer support (Junco et al., 2010). Some students have expressed the view that social media is an enclave for their private not their classroom lives (Madge et al., 2009), and this can explain their reluctance to participate with these media for learning.

Pedagogy – Employability Context
It is widely acknowledged that universities have a responsibility for producing employable graduates (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Schomburg & Teichler, 2006) who have the ability to adapt and manage their future careers (Bridgestock, 2009). However, there is some debate about whether these employability skills can be developed in the classroom (Cranmer, 2006). Whilst some note that teaching and assessing employability skills does not impact on performance in the labour market (Mason et al., 2009); others state that assessments that allow students to test the development of graduate attributes provide an opportunity for formal and informal feedback thus, enhance skill development (Treleaven & Voola, 2008).

Increasingly, professional social networks are being used to connect, collaborate, make valuable contacts (Chen et al., 2009), source 'experts' and for recruitment purposes (Backstrom et al., 2006; Cohen & Clemens, 2005; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). The Jobvite Social Recruiting Survey for 2012 notes that 92% of employers use social media to recruit, and 1 in 6 employees state that their current post is as a consequence of social media. LinkedIn is the most popular social media network used by recruiters and 38% of job seekers use this platform to enable them to find work (Jobvite, 2012). LinkedIn describes itself as 'an online network of experienced professionals' with a membership of more than 225 million (7.9 million adult users in the UK).

Mayrhofer et al., (2005) note that in a highly competitive job market self-promotion and self-assertion are key, if recruiters are to identify prospective employees. Indeed, Knight and Yorke (2003) state that self-awareness and self-promotion are important career management skills. Therefore teaching students to use these social network platforms for professional purposes and to enable their profile to come to the attention of employers, would seem timely. Many university programmes that prepare students to enter the traditional professions (medicine, dentistry, law, nursing, teaching) insert guidance on using social networks responsibly within their programmes of delivery. It's recognised that the existence of, and engagement with, social media can make it difficult to separate personal and professional lives (McCartney, 2012) and manage aspects related to privacy (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Printed text on social media platforms leave a lasting footprint for the author which can negatively impact on the graduated student's future employment prospects (Schurgin O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Therefore, the premise of this intervention is that when students use a social network platform to showcase their skills, experiences, areas of knowledge and attributes to prospective employers it is important that they are provided with feedback as to the relevance of materials included, their communication skills within this medium, and their ability to self-promote in a professional context.

Intervention - *Innovation*
Sport students at Abertay University participate in a placement experience at each stage of study, supported by weekly tutorials. They are required within these sessions to reflect on practice and update and develop personal portfolios (PDPs) that appraise strengths, summarise skills and experiences, identify opportunities, and areas for development linked to objective setting. These

activities are encapsulated within a module titled 'Contexts in Sport' and in recent years Pebblepad has been utilised as tool to enable them to conduct and record this ongoing self-reflection. A new unit of assessment was developed for the 2012/13 academic session which required the students to prepare and submit a webfolio, in the style of a Linked-In profile, to a Pebblepad gateway for grading and feedback.

The students were given the following brief for the assessment:-

> *Title = submit in Pebblepad a Webfolio asset that is maximally 1000 words long but acts as a 'Linked-in'-style professional connections platform that showcases your skills, strengths and experiences to prospective future employers.*
>
> *To pass this coursework, the student is expected to:*
> *(a) Choose a template which balances the need to be professional with the ability to catch a prospective employer's attention.*
> *(b) Provide a summary of skills, experiences, and personal achievements/assets that would act as a 'showcase' of what you can offer prospective employers in the sport and exercise industry.*
> *(c) Articulate these skills, experiences, and achievements/assets in a manner which demonstrates an ability to balance detail with conciseness.*
> *(d) Demonstrate an ability to be self-reflective.*

Staff from the university's Technology-Enhanced Learning Support team worked alongside the module team in initial tutorials to introduce the students to the software and its capabilities. Weekly tasks required the students to undertake self-evaluation of placement experiences, as well as reflect on feedback from other units of assessment/classroom activities that they were engaging with. The students were then encouraged to update their Pebblepad accounts with this ongoing appraisal of their skill/knowledge acquisition and personal development.

Students were advised to browse the 'Linked-in' website to have oversight of how professionals network and the type of information that is presented in this forum. They were also encouraged to consider what information they would extract from their CV to specifically present within the webfolio. As part of the students' assessment preparations, a member of the university's Career Service team delivered a well-received session on 'Netiquette'. Students were further invited to submit early drafts of the webfolio ('share their asset') to the module team for formative feedback.

Outcomes – *usefulness and benefits of the innovation*
One hundred and forty-three students registered to take the module in 2012/13 and their profile of grades for this unit of assessment is illustrated in Figure 1.
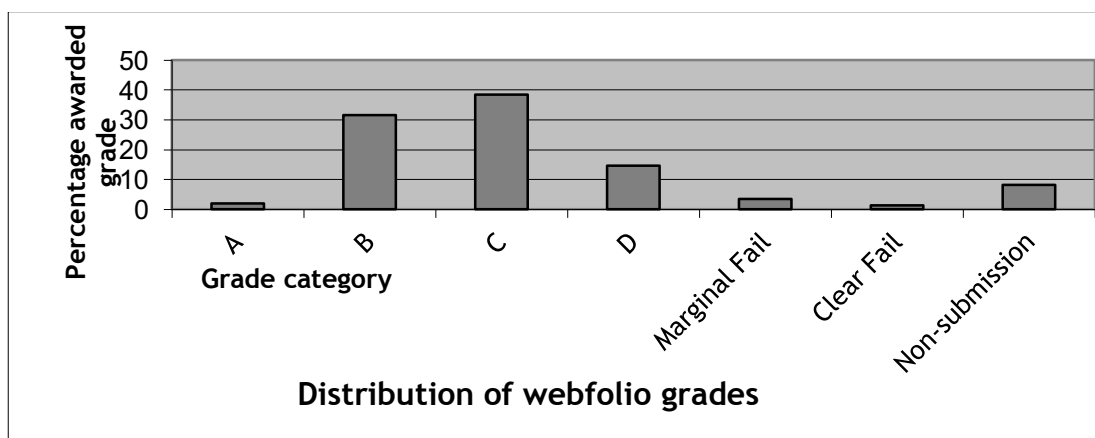

Figure 1 Spread of grades for the webfolio

Generic and individual feedback was provided for the students. The generic feedback explained the grade distribution:-

> *'A grades - well-written, well-presented, fluent and concise pieces which excluded personal information but made it clear what the student was studying, stage of study, achievements and accolades as well as qualifications. These webfolios also indicated what experiences the student had had (including placement) and included the tasks you were required to do but then also linked this to skills gained. There was a nice summary of strengths (linked to evidence), a brief sentence on future aspirations, and there were some nice reflections on learning/development. There was limited listing of information, allowing the reader to appraise the students skills in terms of constructing a short piece of prose. A positive attitude emerged from the work.*
>
> *B grades - generally well-written but there may have been some limited sentence construction/grammatical errors. Experiences, accolades and achievements were evident - the balance of information was still toward learning and gaining skills, though there wasn't always the fullness of details. Placement was referred to, as well as tasks undertaken, and it was evident what you were studying. Again there was limited listing of information.*
>
> *C grades - generally well-written but there may have been some sentence construction/ grammatical errors. Experiences, accolades and achievements were generally evident. Most provided details of work experiences/placement, though there wasn't always the fullness of information. Sometimes playing sport predominated over detail regarding studying sport. There was some listing of information and written sections were generally shorter meaning the reader had less of a chance to appraise skills in this area. The sections may not always have flowed from one to the other and there was some limited repetition of information.*
>
> *D grades - these contained the right type of information eg. experiences, qualifications, accolades but there was limited reference to study experiences or skill development. There were often issues with the layout of the webfolio eg.repetition of information, or in terms of general written English. Often personal information predominated over what a future prospective employer would expect to see showcased in this forum.*
>
> *Fail grades - these were generally too brief, too personal in style and information, and made insufficient reference to experiences from the domain of sport and exercise eg. had omitted to mention placement, or to consider skill/strength development'.*

It was evident from the profile of grades that the assessment was suitably discriminatory and able to differentiate student performance. However, the module team were disappointed that there were fewer students getting grades at the top end of the range, particularly when there had been opportunity for formative feedback in the weekly tutorial classes. It was of note that, despite preparatory tutorial tasks being set for the students to optimise the capacity for feedback, few students availed themselves of this opportunity. Therefore, this is something that staff will try to promote more heavily in subsequent academic sessions.

Student feedback, in respect of the unit of assessment, was very positive. Students appreciated the opportunity to articulate what they had to offer to a prospective employer in this format. They also appreciated being guided, via the feedback, as to what information was appropriate to include in a professional outward-facing web-based platform and how best to present this.

Student comments included:-
> *'It hadn't occurred to me that what I perceived as an innocent photo of me having fun might be interpreted differently by an employer'*
> *'I found this a really interesting exercise to do, as I hadn't ever thought about the need to promote myself to future employers via the web'*
> *'I liked being able to choose how I organised the information but it was difficult to know if I was including the right type of information for an employer'.*

Initially, the assessment brief had requested that the students submit a two page webfolio. However, module staff, when working in-class with the students, recognised that this was a somewhat restrictive format and instead the brief was revised to give the students a limit of 1000 words. This gave students the freedom to organise the material in a manner which they felt best allowed a prospective employer to easily access key information. Reflecting on the final student feedback led to a job brief for a community sports coach being used in the subsequent academic session to help give the students focus on what they presented within the webfolio.

An issue that caused concerted deliberation for the module team related to how to assess the sometimes poorer presentation of material eg. mis-spelt words, poor sentence construction, if the student had a declared learning disability. This concern emerged when the team were providing formative feedback and allowed discussions to take place with the Student Disability Advisory Service (SDAS). There was the potential for tension in respect of reasonable adjustment given the assessment guidelines clearly stating that grammar, spelling, punctuation, fluency and presentation were integral skills that would be graded. Consequently, all of the students who had declared their learning disability and were enrolled on the module were provided with additional proof-reading support by SDAS. SDAS were also able to use this as an opportunity to signpost web-based tools that students could access as learning support for subsequent assessments, as well as promoting resources that could further enhance (if required) the student's written and visual presentation skills.

Conclusion

In an increasingly competitive job market it is important that graduates leave university with a skill set that they can professionally articulate on online platforms (Mayrhofer et al., 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003). Fleming et al.,(2009) note that developing entrepreneurial skills in order to be able to market themselves, in addition to developing a sense of 'professional ethics', are considered relevant competencies for graduates from sport programmes.

With the global reach and the variety of audiences accessing the worldwide web, as well as the growth in social media for networking and for recruiting (Chen et al., 2009; Backstrom et al., 2006; Cohen & Clemens, 2005; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Jobvite, 2012) it is increasingly relevant that students are taught to communicate professionally via this medium (McCartney, 2012). It is currently too early to evaluate if engagement with this type of assessment and specifically the guidance and graded feedback, has had an impact on this cohort's employability. Appraising communication skill development has proved to be a valued tool for this student population and one that the subject team will continue to engage with.

Whilst debate still exists about the value of social networking tools for learning purposes (Madge et al., 2009) as well as the worth of teaching employability skills in a classroom context (Cranmer, 2006; Mason et al., 2009), there is scope to consider the impact of this type of guided simulation using web-based technology to advance self-presentation.

Graduate employment statistics, as derived from Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey data, now form part of Unistats' Key Information Sets (KIS). Students report this as being a valuable tool in aiding them to make an informed decision about their chosen programme of study and their preferred location (HEFCE, 2013). Institutions, particularly those that are publically-funded are also expected to reflect on the effectiveness of their operations, particularly in a 'market-driven environment' (Universities UK, 2013). This can include consideration of programmes of study and the perceived value of their contribution to the economy. Therefore, the impact conferred by heightening student employability could extend beyond the graduate.

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Biographies

Andrea Cameron is the Head of School of Social and Health Sciences at Abertay University and is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She was the Director of Academic Programmes for the School from 2008-2013, leading on issues of Teaching and Learning, Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement. She has also been the programme leader for the BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise course and is the module tutor for the first year 'Contexts in Sport' module, co-ordinating the first year sport student placements. She has previously presented and published work in relation to Personal Development Planning and employability initiatives, including 'Clients in the Classroom'. Before becoming a sport scientist, Andrea was, and remains, a registered nurse teacher. She continues to produce patient publications for a Diabetes charity.

Carol Maxwell leads Abertay's Technology Enhanced Learning Support team. The team help staff maximise the impact of their teaching through the use of learning technology. Prior to this she developed training programmes for a paper making company when converting to a new ERP system. She has also worked in the Banking Sector where she managed their back office systems. Carol is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and has a PGDip in Blended and Online Education. Her interest in student employability stems from her background in HR and the affordances of learning technology including social media.

Dr James Cobley is an early career researcher and lecturer within the Division of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Abertay University. In 2009, James was awarded a first class honours degree in Sports Science from Edge Hill University. He then gained a distinction award in Sports Physiology (MSc) at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and stayed at LJMU, completing his PhD entitled 'The Effects of Life-long Training on the Ability of Aged Skeletal Muscle to Adapt to Exercise: Insight into Age-related Loss of Muscle Mass and Function' in 2013. James hopes to continue exploring how the elderly adapt to both acute and long term exercise and nutrition interventions. He is a member of the Physiological Society and the Society for Free Radical Research-Europe.

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