

Assuring learning outcomes is a critical component of educational quality assurance and curriculum enhancement principles. The process is defined as the way educational institutions measure the learning outcomes of students against a specific set of program goals (Hall & Kro, 2006). Institutions are adopting this outcome based approach to education but are often finding challenges in getting staff and student engagement, as well as finding strategies that are efficient for large cohorts of students (Lawson et al., 2012). Another challenge centres on analysing students' achievement using final percentage marks (Yorke, 2008). This is a common method for assuring learning as the data is more easily accessible. However there is concern about adopting this evidence alone as there is no agreement on how student performance should be graded, and no understanding of how grades are cumulated into an overall index of achievement (the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (2002) found thirteen different grading scales in operation for reporting student overall achievement in undergraduate degrees). This gives rise to questions about what a percentage or GPA (grade point average) or degree classification (2:1 etc) really does tell us, which capabilities were actually assessed, at what level and how the grading was decided (Oliver , 2010).

Yorke (2008) has proposed that evidence of the achievement of standards can (some might say 'should') be created by students, in order to widen the assessment frame so that valued achievements can be recognised, and meaningful information conveyed to interested parties such as employers/external agencies. However with the emphasis on final percentage marks, students tend to gather evidence of achievement in a 'bottom up' way, collecting marks and grades during a course, until they have sufficient to graduate. This creates a focus on marks, grades and summative assessment. This is problematic because in reaching the conciseness of an overall grade a loss of detail is inevitable, which prompts the need for supplementary material. Yorke proposes doing assessment differently through a 'top down' method, asking students to question 'How have you satisfied, through your work, the learning outcomes stated for your particular program of study?' This opens up the possibility of the student making a case that they merit the award in question, by stressing their individual profile of achievement. It allows for a mixture of evidence including, qualitative assessments of performance in naturalistic settings (such as work placements), and claims of achievements that are not formally assessable by the higher education institution but can nevertheless be supported by evidence. The making of claims of this sort implies that the student has the relevant information to hand, which would require the collation of a portfolio of achievements.

ePortfolios allow students to demonstrate competencies and reflect upon experiences, documenting academic preparation and career readiness. Creating ePortfolios is said to enable students to enhance their learning by giving them a better understanding of their skills and attributes, as well as where and how they need to improve to meet academic and career goals (Yancey, 1999). The introduction of ePortfolios to Higher Education programs is not novel however limited examples show ePortfolios being used in a whole of program approach (where students take ownership of developing their program goals through collecting, collating, evaluating and selecting evidence from day one of the degree till graduation and beyond in some cases). This engages students with the learning outcomes and the expected standards at different stages, allowing both them and academics to monitor progress throughout the degree, as well as providing an evidence repository for internal and external quality assurance.

This session looks at how portfolios can be used in this 'top down' approach to provide supplementary and/or additional evidence to assure achievement of learning to students, the institution and external parties.