University-wide implementation: Supporting the innovators program and working collaboratively with faculties

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Abstract

Griffith University has undergone a university-wide implementation of PebblePad as the ePortfolio system to facilitate students engaging with, and learning 21st Century skills and to compliment employability. Although wide-scale university implementations are not new, the use of an innovation model adds breadth and depth to the implementation. As part of the model, the central teaching unit supported the implementation and also provided staff resources specifically for the innovators program. These include a project manager, educational designers and specialised technically trained staff who worked closely with the group of innovators. This group consisted of approximately 60 academics who were trained and supported by both central staff and faculty based staff to build capacity and then allow them to have champion status in their school or academic group. This paper will outline the implementation of this university-wide program and how the innovators group have been supported by a central teaching unit through collaborative work within and across the academic groups. Lead by both the Science and Health groups, the implementation was across all of the university's academic groups. Early results at the completion of trimester one show the uptake of PebblePad can be tracked through the innovators courses and that these cohorts make up a significant number of overall PebblePad users across the institution.

Keywords: *university-wide implementation, innovators, academics, ePortfolio, PebblePad, early adoption*

Introduction

At Griffith University, the PebblePad implementation is university-wide spanning all five campuses with a combined total of over 45,000 students and 5,000 staff. This is a large implementation project involving courses and programs across all four academic groups. The implementation is being led by the central teaching unit (Learning Futures) and further supported by collaborative work within and across the academic groups. This paper will outline a part of the implementation to an expanding group of academics (currently around 60) known as the 'Innovators' who are each using PebblePad to support their teaching in a variety of activities and at a differing levels of complexity. These innovators come from all academic groups across the university and they teach on each of the campuses. The key to selecting the innovators academics and then implementing PebblePad at this level was the

desire for transformative change, championed by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic). This project builds on a history of university-wide implementation projects, including the 2008 Griffith ePortfolio project and the subsequent 2011 review of ePortfolios (Coffey & Ashford-Rowe, 2014).

Although university-wide implementations are not new (Hains-Wesson, Wakeling & Aldred, 2014; Lambert & Corrin, 2007) Griffith University has used an innovation model of implementation to ensure that staff are involved from all four academic groups, across many courses, at a program level and that levels of participation increase from trimester to trimester. These intended outcomes are supported by the elements in Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations* model which describes diffusion as "the process by which (1) an *innovation* (2) is *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) over *time* (4) among the members of a *social system*" (2003). The process around this innovators program began with identifying key areas of resourcing and support and then developing a support model. As Dennis, Pootheri and Natarajan report, technological innovators are far more likely to succeed when they have specific support models in place (1998). The Centre for Learning Futures provided staff resources specifically for the innovators program which included a project manager, educational designers and specialised technically trained staff who worked closely with the group of innovators. Once resourcing was in place, academics could then be identified and contacted to participate in the program. The specific steps involved in this process are identified in the methodology below.

The innovators program is running throughout 2017, and was developed so that academics could utilise the functionality of PebblePad while being supported by a core project team from Learning Futures and Blended Learning Advisors (BLAs) and Educational Designers (EDs) from their relevant academic group. The aims of the program are varied, and include:

- Allowing easy evidencing of employability skills
- Evidence of knowledge gathered across courses and programs
- Evidence of tasks completed for course assessment
- Evidence of tasks completed in co-curricular programs
- Course level assessment
- Reflective practice including process reflection
- Peer review
- Collaborative projects

However, most academics involved with the program will only be focusing on one of these strategies for implementation into their course(s). Many of the templates and workbooks also capture interactions between the students and the lecturers which allows for genuine feedback opportunities and meaningful formative assessment.

The 60 academics were trained and supported by both central staff and faculty based staff to build capacity and then allow them to have champion status in their school or academic group. This group also allowed an opportunity for Learning Futures to fully evaluate the implementation.

Identifying and Supporting the Innovators

Initially academics were invited to an information session where the program and opportunities for participation were explained. The work of Dennis, Pootheri and Natarajan (1998) and Slade, Murfin and Trahar (2017) highlight the importance of specific use-cases of innovative technology in order for it to have more chance of success. For these reasons, one-to-one discussions were held with the attending academics to explore and tease out their ideas and/or areas of interest for implementing PebblePad. Interested academics were asked to submit an expression of interest to join the innovators group which was a form of gatekeeping (Rogers, 2003). The importance of having a problem to solve, or a specific need to address is also a key factor in the innovation-development process outlined by Rogers which moves through stages such as research, development, adoption by users and the experiences of the end user (Rogers, 2003). To further ensure that these early adopters were committed to using this technology to solve a need for their student cohorts, academics needed to commit time to scoping their proposal and to plan a design and development schedule with ongoing support from the Centre for Learning Futures or their group BLA or ED.

As this group of innovators were the early adopters of this technology, it was important to ensure they were supported throughout these crucial stages and for them to be set up for successful first experiences. Staff in Learning Futures set up a sub-committee consisting of the PebblePad implementation project manager, an educational designer and a technical support officer. Due to the popularity of this program, this team then grew to include a part-time educational designer. This sub-committee then designed and facilitated the group hands-on training sessions for the innovators. In the hands-on workshops, academics learnt how to use and implement certain tools within the PebblePad platform. These workshops were often the first introduction to PebblePad for many of the academics and therefore had to be structured to allow for initial exploration as well as future skill development. The session allowed academics to become familiar with the nuances of the platform and to delve into customised template creation using the built-in tools while being in a supportive environment. Research suggests it is important to set early adopters up with sustainable skills so that these academics have ownership and agency over the process and they then emerge as experts or 'champions' of the new platform Slade et al. (2017).

After the first round of initial training, academics were able to identify specific ways they would use PebblePad in their trimester one, 2017, courses. The project educational designer then set up one-on-one meetings with each academic (or in a few instances, teaching groups) to analyse the proposal and the suitability for implementation within PebblePad. Because the innovators were carefully chosen through a detailed expression of interest process, nearly all the innovator proposals were implemented in trimester one. In some instances an academic decided not to use PebblePad in trimester one and after consultation with their BLA or ED they discussed further learning support and then decided a later time to implement. Academics were also given the opportunity to engage in further professional development training, as well as through other activities such as participating in collaborative learning sessions.

Due to the hub and spoke model (Ling, Fraser & Gosling, 2013) of learning and teaching support at Griffith, many innovators were already working with a faculty (group) BLA or ED. In these situations, rather than having multiple contact points, the academic continued to work with their BLA or ED on their PebblePad implementation. For these reasons, it was essential to reaffirm communication between faculty support and centralised support.

The BLAs and EDs from the groups were further supported by Learning Futures through fortnightly drop-in webinar session, fortnightly (initially, and now monthly) advanced training workshops. These sessions have been significant in creating a culture of community and innovation and through sharing practice and examples, many BLAs and EDs have seen working use-case examples that have then been adapted for use with academics. These webinars and workshops have been complimented by a Google site where use cases, common support documentation, common language and naming conventions and further support materials are created and accessed. The Centre for Learning Futures project members also developed an internal and outward facing website which contained links to exemplars, and further support material designed to support both academic and student users.

Methodology for the innovators program

As mentioned above the innovators program included:

- invitational workshops and events,
- co-constructing learning experiences with the BLAs and EDs,
- advice and support throughout the teaching period; and,
- evaluation of the use of PebblePad in their teaching.

Through the program, academics embedded a range of learning activities and assessments in their courses, including:

- field trip preparation and reflections
- collecting evidence of skills against professional criteria
- collecting evidence of time on tasks for volunteer or work placement experiences
- development of professional portfolio pages, including recommendations

All of these were able to be presented in academic or professional ePortfolios which could also be assessed. The students also have the opportunity to share these portfolios, or a modified version, with external groups or potential employers who do not have a PebblePad account.

Academics can participate in an online survey as well as an interview about their experiences using PebblePad. Data has also been collected from the BLAs and the Eds as these staff have played a pivotal role in the innovators program and assisting with the implementation. They are often the staff who directly support the innovators academics.

Framework used in the Innovators program

The ADDIE model has been used as an underlying framework to support the innovators program. This model contains an analysis phase, design phase, development phase, implementation phase and evaluation phase and importantly these steps are not necessarily completed in a linear way, but one can move back and forth through the phases as necessary (Gustafson & Branch, 2002). Although known as a traditional instructional design model, it is important to note that ADDIE is thought of as a student centred model that is also goal oriented and assumes outcomes can be measured in a reliable way (Branch & Merrill, 2012) which is a strength of the ADDIE model. For this reason some of the BLAs and EDs have incorporated this model into their assistance with academics in the implementation.

Innovators, who in this instance were akin to early adopters, were guaranteed support to assist in the design, development and implementation life cycle (centralised support) throughout the first trimester as they moved through Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation model (2003).The relatively large number of innovators who applied for this support indicate that this support model is highly sort after but for various reasons, is not often offered. This model of support is consistent with approaches at other universities during institution-wide ePortfolio implementation (Slade, Murfin & Trahar, 2017).

Evaluation of the innovators program

Ethics approval was obtained by the team to collect various types of data for evaluation. Data types include a student survey with a core set of questions and a bank of other optional questions that can be optionally included. This various question-option design allows for the academic to choose relevant questions depending on how they are using PebblePad. There is also ethics approval to gain access to various types of student data and students can choose to opt in to allow the academics and research team access to this. Other data types include user data, demographic data and their electronic artefacts that were submitted online. Focus group interviews can also be conducted of both the students and the academics as well as an online survey that the academics can complete. Finally data is being collected from the blended learning advisors and educational designers who have assisted with the implementation and supported the academic staff. This data collection will allow for a well rounded view of the implementation within the university. Data collection is continuing in trimester two.

Results of the implementation

As of June there were 5243 unique users in the system. This shows that there are many academics implementing PebblePad into their teaching and learning activities and assessment within their courses and also into various programs across the university.
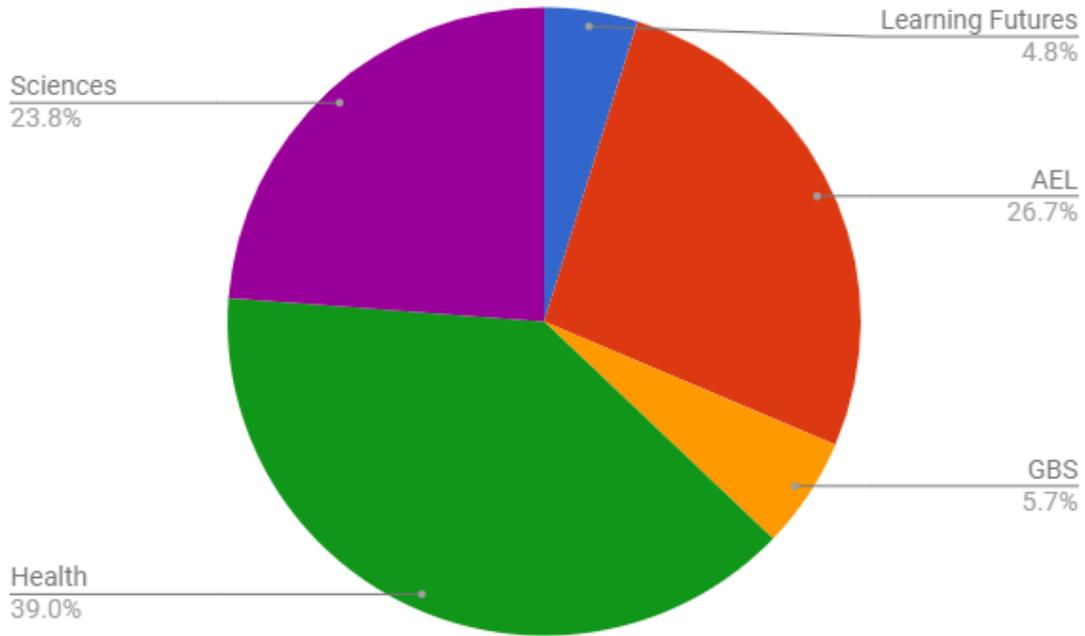
Figure 1:   Current breakdown of Innovators across the Academic Groups, plus Learning Futures.

Uptake across the university was quite varied across the academic groups. This is because Health and Sciences were already using ePortfolios and thus were able to implement more easily due to the numbers of academics already teaching using this style. Griffith Business School (GBS) have begun small with three courses implementing in trimester one, and then moving to six courses implementing in trimester two. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the course implementation for trimester one.
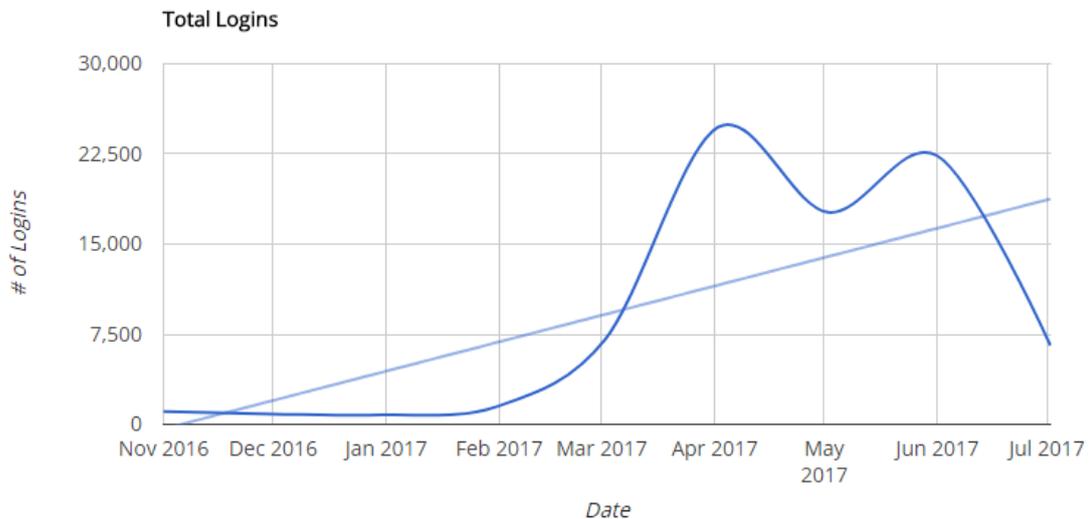

Figure 2:   Total number of logins per month since November, 2016.

Numbers of total logins across the university climbed steadily in trimester one. This went up in April and June as assignments may have been due at this time. As May was the end of the trimester logins steadily went down at this time. Also at the beginning of July logins continued to decrease due to the beginning of trimester.

The student submissions have increased during the trimester with a peak in April and then later in June (Figure 3) which corresponds with the total login graph peaks. The various workspaces have also increased each month (a workspace is similar to a course-site in an LMS and is where resources are distributed and submissions can be collected for feedback and marking).
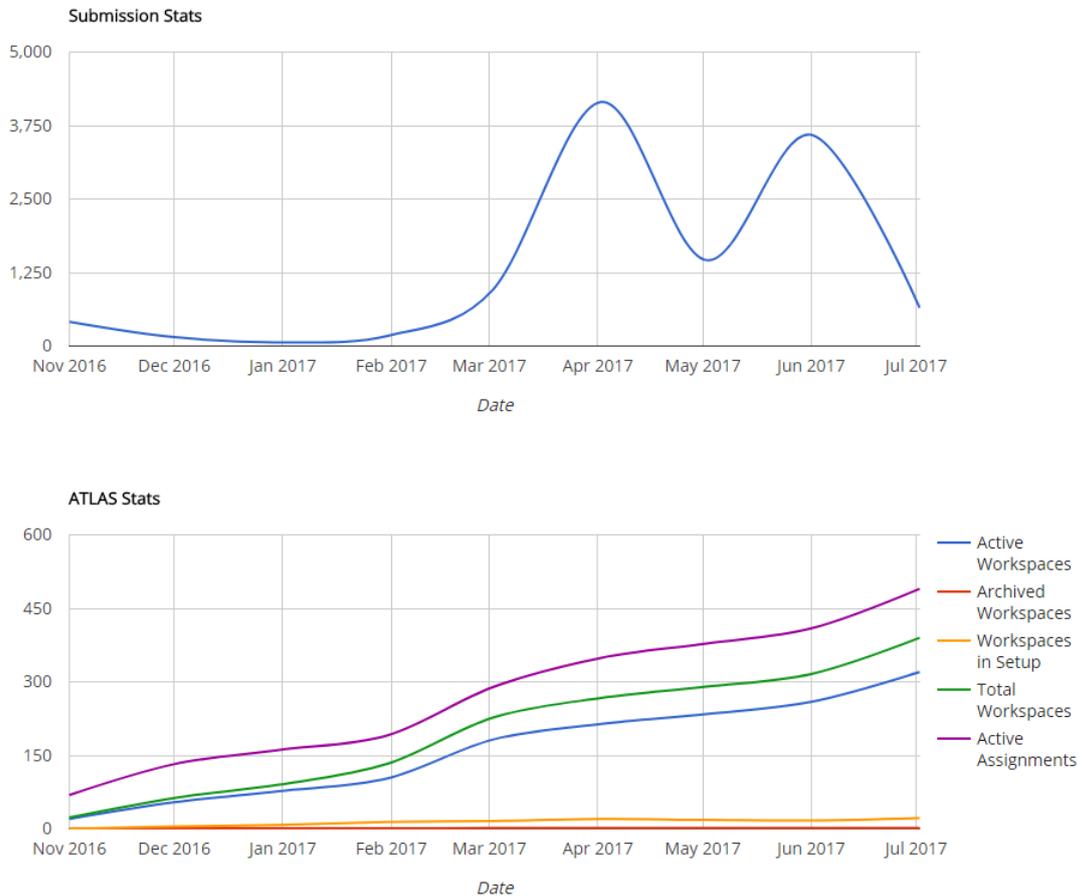

Figure 3:   The assignment submission figures and the ATLAS statistics showing the various types of workspaces that have increased each month.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Early in trimester two the number of innovators has increased in each of the academic groups with some groups promoting the use of PebblePad very successfully. This model allows for flexibility in both the implementation and the evaluation and is showing that uptake of this tool is growing. The innovators feel supported in the use of PebblePad when implementing in class, which indicates early success with this implementation and support model. The BLAs and EDs have said that they have received enough training in PebblePad and the resources that are supplied and available are quite helpful.

In the future, it will be important to ensure we are still attracting innovators to the implementation, however all signs are that this is happening with trimester one innovators already showing that they are keen to implement again in trimester one, 2018.

Overall, the use of PebblePad in trimester one demonstrates that the model of the university-wide implementation with the innovators program has seen early success and this model can be continued through the remainder of the supported PebblePad implementation.

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Biography

Dr Chris Campbell

Dr Chris Campbell is a lecturer in Learning Innovation at the Centre for Learning Futures, Griffith University. As an emerging research leader, Chris has been involved in numerous grants and projects around emerging and new digital technologies. Her skills in implementing and trialling new technologies are documented in numerous publications where she has conducted research in online tools in educational settings, including LAMS, Second Life and Assistive eXtra Learning Environments as well as research in technology integration, mobile learning and augmented reality. Chris has previously taught pre-service teachers and trialled interactive and emerging technologies in lectures. In 2016, Chris was a Queensland-Smithsonian Fellowship holder where she investigated the Smithsonian Learning Lab and implications for teachers.

John Bourke

John Bourke is an Educational Designer with Griffith University. As part of the university's implementation of PebblePad John has set up and maintained the Innovator program with 60 academics from across all four academic groups. The program is an early adopter initiative and John is working with the Innovators to design and implement inspiring and engaging PebblePad activities within their courses and programs. John is also responsible for conducting PebblePad training and supporting the academic group learning and teaching professionals across the university.

Priscilla Trahar

Priscilla Trahar is an experienced Learning and Educational Designer, having worked on the University-wide PebblePad implementation project at USC from 2014-2016. In this role, Priscilla was part of the team that won a LearnX Impact Award for the best new technology implementation and is involved in several grant projects focussing on developing and using ePortfolios both across programs and for graduate employability. Priscilla was a featured speaker at PebbleBash 2016 and has presented numerous case studies on implementing and using ePortfolios. Priscilla is now working on medium and long-term projects involving ePortfolio implementation and practice across the Australian Higher Education sector and is part of Griffith University's PebblePad implementation project team.

Kristina Nisova

Kristina Nisova is a Senior Support Analyst at Griffith University who is currently supporting the university-wide implementation of PebblePad. Kristina has played an integral role in the implementation by facilitating training workshops, creating technical support documentation, supporting students, academics and staff in their everyday use of PebblePad and administering the relevant configuration settings for PebblePad