

## Symposium 2: Enhancing Learner Progression (ELP): Understanding the Learners' Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of use of e-Portfolios in support of learning and teaching in all education sectors in the UK is being driven by a range of government policies (Beetham, 2005) that are based on the premise that progress files (portfolios) can make the outcomes of lifelong learning more explicit to the learner, their tutors and employers (Universities UK, 2003) thus increasing aspiration and attainment. This JISC funded **Enhancing Learner Progression (ELP)** project aims to evaluate the application and potential of e-portfolios in supporting learners through their lifelong learning journey by examining ways that e-portfolios can provide learners support at key transition points in this journey, in particular, from school and Further Education (FE) into Higher Education (HE) and from HE into professional practice. The foci of this symposium are the extent to which the learners' experiences match this policy ideal at these two key transfer points in the learning journey and improving our understanding of the factors that impact on their experiences through an examination of other stakeholder perspectives.

### Keywords

e-Portfolio, access, student lifecycle, lifelong learning employment, work experience, learner experience, stakeholder views

### INTRODUCTION

The use of e-Portfolios in support of learning and teaching is rapidly extending across the "*14-19, HE, Adult, Community and Lifelong Learning sectors in the UK*" (Beetham, 2005). This is largely being driven by national policies that are based on the premise that that "*Progress Files help make the outcomes, or results, of learning ... more explicit, identify the achievements of learning, and support the concept that learning is a lifetime activity*" (Universities UK, 2003).

ELP is a one year, JISC funded, Distributed e-Learning project that aims to evaluate the application and potential of e-portfolios in supporting learners through their lifelong learning journey, with a particular focus on the ways that e-portfolios can provide support at key transfer points in this journey. The project examines the learners' experiences at two key transfer points in this lifelong learning journey: transferring from school/FE to HE, and from HE to professional practice. The papers in this symposium report on work in progress in developing our understanding of the extent to which the learner experience matches this policy ideal at particular stages in the learning journey and the factors that can impact on these experiences.

### METHODOLOGY

ELP used the Student Lifecycle Model (Figure 1) (University of Bradford, 2004) to identify discrete contexts that could be used to examine the role of e-portfolios in supporting students through key transition points in their lifelong learning journey. The project research questions require both an in-depth qualitative understanding of how e-Portfolios can support and enhance students' learning, aspirations and motivation as well as a more generalisable quantitative measure of their impact on student progression and attainment. ELP drew on the experiences of a previous JISC project (Bricheno, Higgison and Weedon, 2004) that used a case study design as this allows for both breadth and depth of investigation within individual contexts. This is necessary as the analysis needs to explore the impact of e-Portfolios in a range of contexts within individual institutions as well as within a range of institutions across the sectors within the region. ELP is evaluating the use of e-portfolios at two key transfer points in the lifecycle:

1. Moving between school/FE and University (stages 1 and 2, Figure 1)
2. Moving from University into the workplace (relating to both placement experience and moving into first

career positions, stages 4 and 5, Figure 1).

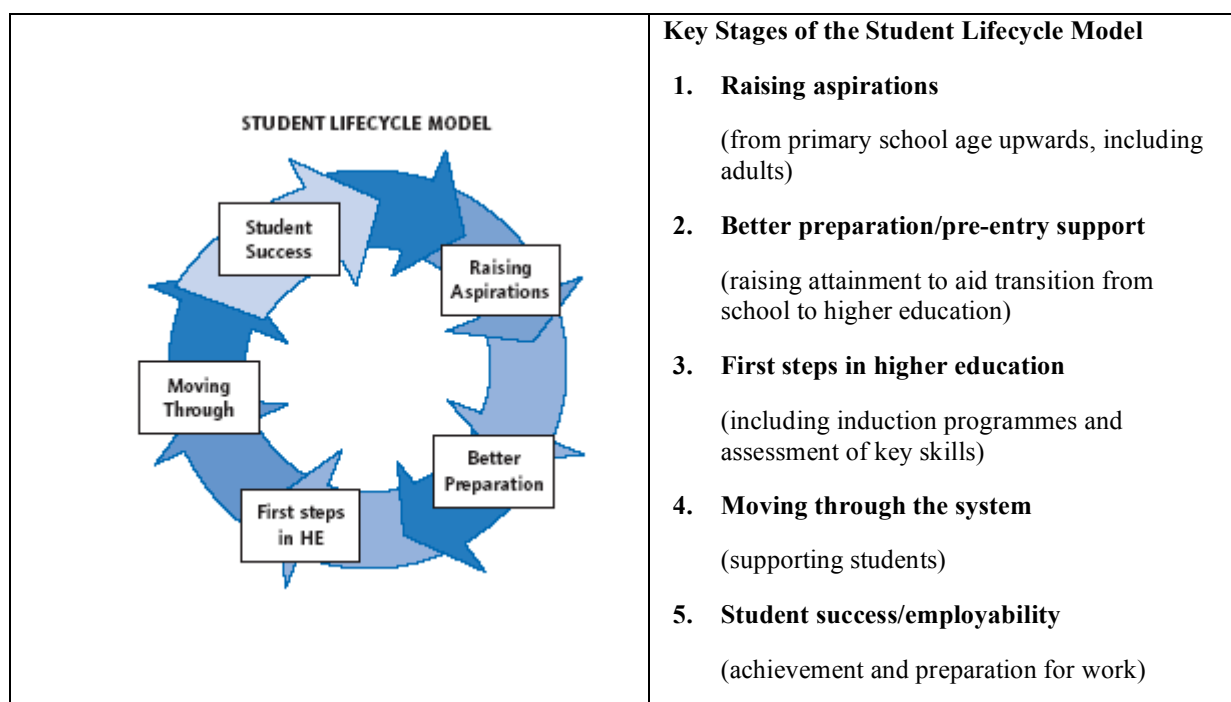


Figure 1: The Student Lifecycle Model showing Key Stages

This design allows both qualitative and quantitative data to be gathered along with an analysis of secondary sources using institutional documentation and allows for triangulation of data within each context. Replication by multiple case studies allowed some degree of external validity to allow tentative building up an explanatory theory (Yin, 2003). Six case studies have been selected so that they replicate each other “*either predicting similar results (literal replication) or contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication)*” (Yin, 2003). Thus, whilst it is not possible to generalise from a single case study our design allows us to relate our findings to the literature in order to develop an explanatory analysis and to identify research questions and hypotheses for future research.

The papers in this symposium address two key questions

- To what extent to the actual experiences of the learners match the rhetoric and expectations of the other stakeholders (institutions, staff and employers)?
- What factors impact on the student learning experiences and how do the perspectives of other stakeholders influence these factors?

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