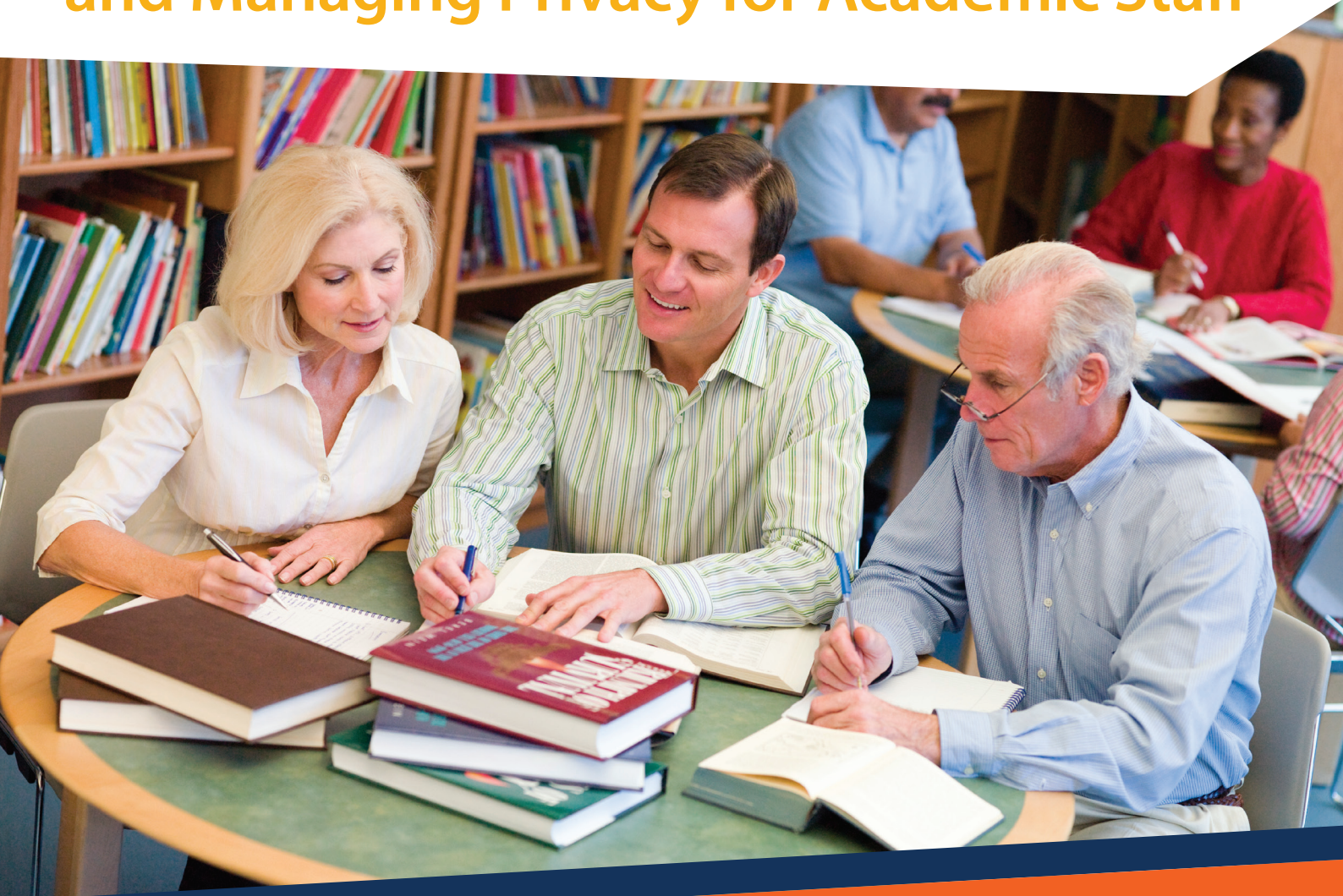# ePortfolios

and Managing Privacy for Academic Staff

The following information provides some general guidelines to help you manage your students' privacy when using ePortfolios; however, it is also advisable to refer to your institution's or ePortfolio provider's privacy policy.

What is privacy?

Privacy is the right to control the access and use of personal information. This means that students have the right to decide what and how much of their personal information is shared, with whom it can be shared, as well as the right to know how their personal information is being used.

Why protect student privacy?

It could affect learning outcomes – learners are more likely to share information about themselves, whether it's how they went about an assignment or sensitive cultural or family matters, if they trust that their privacy will be respected.

An ePortfolio can contain a lot of your students' personal details such as grades, comments on assignments, employment history. Without care in setting up the system or processes, learners using an ePortfolio may inadvertently disclose inappropriate personal information. This could have considerable repercussions for them, ranging from embarrassment, to harm to reputation, to impact on current or future employment, and can increase the possibly of identity theft.

Failure to support learners to use ePortfolios safely, may lead to privacy complaints, risk to reputation or poor take up of your ePortfolio activity.

Privacy issues to think about when introducing ePortfolio based learning to your teaching

A clear understanding of the ePortfolio's purpose and learning objectives will make it easier to decide on steps to protect privacy.

An ePortfolio system may have broad open-ended objectives or it may be set up to meet a very specific set of objectives – for example, to meet a course objective, build learner IT skills, or to record evidence of employment skills demonstrated towards certification. The purpose and objectives are likely to determine matters such as the content of the ePortfolio and who will need access, and in what circumstances.

The ePortfolio may be used just for your course or for many different purposes. Be aware of the extent to which the ePortfolio may be used, as you think about what you have to do.

What will the ePortfolio contain?

List likely content which will be stored in your students' ePortfolio and consider the parameters of this content. For example, can the learner include extraneous material, for example CVs or other material not related to the learning activities?

Factors such as your students' age and experience in using ICT tools and ePortfolios can affect privacy risks. Guidelines on social network sites about how much personal information is shared in the public domain, how much between known contacts and what should remain private can assist you in raising initial awareness of privacy with your students.

Consider providing advise to your students about content which may infringe on others' rights or responsibilities, such as:

- copyrighted material
- intellectual property (eg sharing information about an employer's competitive advantage or a piece of collaborative coursework)
- sensitive or culturally sensitive material (eg personal reflections on health)
- personal information about third parties
- links to external collaborative websites such as Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. (Links to these sites can inadvertently direct a viewer to the wider content of these sites)
- information which is actionable under your mandated responsibilities.

The possibility of such content highlights where to put in the effort to manage these risks and may require you to set specific rules or limits on the content of your students' ePortfolio.

Targeted information, guidance and training for students will minimise the likelihood of inappropriate content. When in doubt about likely content or guidelines, try to gain feedback from some sample students.

Consider who else might need to add material to a student's ePortfolio such as other students; a lecturer, tutor or other staff member; and external parties, for example employers, workplace supervisors or mentors.

Who will be able to access the ePortfolio and under what circumstances?

Consider the potential audiences of your students' ePortfolio and their need to access it. The following matrix (which has been populated purely as an exercise to show how it might be completed) suggests one approach to undertaking this analysis.

Table 1: Example Access Matrix

Content	Roles						
	Learner	Manager of Learner Info	Site Admin	Tutors	Other teaching staff	Employer	Wider world (eg. www)
Qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓	Where relevant	With consent	With consent
Assessment results	✓	✓	✓	✓	Where relevant	With consent	With consent
Assignments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	With consent	With consent
Work samples	✓	With consent	✓	With consent	✗	With consent	With consent
Works in progress	✓	With consent	✓	With consent	✗	✗	With consent
Personal details	✓	Where relevant	✓	Where relevant	✗	✗	With consent
CVs	✓	Where relevant	✓		✗		With consent
Reflections	✓	With consent	✓		✗	✗	✗
References	✓	With consent	✓		✗	With consent	With consent

Source: VET EPortfolios Privacy Guidelines, Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2010, page 8

The learner should be informed of whether the system will log use of the ePortfolio; what will be logged; how will the logs be used and how long will they be kept; who will access these and for what purposes. Provide information about how the learner can access these logs if possible.

Learners should also be advised who may have 'administrative' access to their ePortfolio, (ie. ePortfolio site administrator, lecturer/tutor, mentors or employers etc.)

Responsibilities

If you are using your institution's ePortfolio system, under privacy law general obligations are likely to be your institution's responsibility. However, you also need to know what these obligations are and how they are being managed.

If you are encouraging students to use an ePortfolio provided externally by another organisation or company, your institution will need to ensure the same privacy safeguards will be met by that company. Include such terms and conditions of use in the information provided for students

What is your responsibility as a lecturer asking learners to use an ePortfolio?

Plan your approach – be clear about why you want your learner to use an ePortfolio, and about the nature of the ePortfolio system the learners will use. Think about privacy risks, from content to how ePortfolio will be used. Decide which risks are manageable ensuring that learners have sufficient information and guidance. Take steps to fully explain privacy by providing guidelines and training for example on appropriate content, sharing permissions and potential privacy risks.

What is the student responsible for?

Managing potential privacy risks through following your established guidelines on appropriate content, giving permissions to view their ePortfolio, acknowledging and gaining permissions on shared projects and password security.

How will you inform your students of their responsibilities?

As well as guidance and training, a supportive approach should be developed which includes means by which your students can contact you or your ePortfolio provider if they are uncertain about their content or access or want to report misuse. The 'ePortfolios and Managing Privacy for Learners' brochure has been developed to provide this information to learners. There are also governmental sources of privacy advice, which you can pass on to students, such as http://www.privacy.gov.au/topics/youth.

Resources to think about

There may already be existing resources in your organisation that can assist you to support student privacy such as privacy guidelines or policies, guidelines on retention of data, codes of conduct or terms and conditions on internet and computer use. Ask the privacy contact officer, or ICT Department if these already exist.

This brochure provides some general guidelines to help you manage your students' privacy when using ePortfolios, however, it is also advisable to refer to your institution's or ePortfolio provider's privacy policy.

ePortfolio example to highlight privacy issues

The following example highlights the various privacy perspectives for users of an ePortfolio.

Using an ePortfolio to apply to university

Jane has been working for a number of years as a registered nurse at a city hospital. She has worked in a variety of settings, including on a paediatric ward. During this time Jane has been using the ePortfolio supplied by her employer to document her post-registration clinical experience and demonstrate her professional development.

Jane is now applying to her local university for a place on a postgraduate course in paediatrics and child health nursing to upgrade her knowledge and skills. She must be working over half of full time hours in a paediatric setting for this specialisation. Some of the Jane's previous study (ie. within the state health department) may make her eligible for advanced standing for some units within the graduate certificate. Jane is able to share evidence in her ePortfolio with the university to demonstrate which skills and qualifications she already possesses. She will also be able to provide her employer with an electronic academic transcript through her ePortfolio when she has the advanced qualification.

The major privacy issues here are likely to be:

- The employer as the ePortfolio provider will need to ensure Jane's use of the ePortfolio for her university application process will not compromise client confidentiality.
- Jane will need to ensure that the ePortfolio system provides her with enough control that she can be confident the university will only view necessary information in the application process.
- If Jane is going to provide the university with online access to her ePortfolio, Jane and the employer will want to be confident that she can safely give the university access without compromising system or content security.
- Depending on the conditions under which the employer offers Jane the ePortfolio she may also want to be sure that in giving her employer access to her qualifications other content will remain confidential.
- The employer may also be want to be certain of the veracity of the qualifications viewed however that issue is not strictly a privacy question.

Beyond the project

When the course is complete who will own the information and have access to it?

If the students will not have access to their ePortfolio then ensure that they are informed of the deadline and given instructions to export the contents.

If the students do have alumni access, are there systems in place for support information and retrieval of forgotten passwords or will you need to provide these resources? Remember that privacy includes the right to access personal information.

Consider what information you are required to keep for auditing and ensure students are aware of how long and which information will be stored/archived.

For more information about privacy and ePortfolios:

Visit www.eportfoliopractice.qut.edu.au to access these other concept guides about privacy and ePortfolios

- ePortfolios and managing privacy for learners
- ePortfolios and managing privacy for institutional information technology managers

Need more information about ePortfolios?

Visit www.eportfoliopractice.qut.edu.au

- ePortfolio concepts for learners
- ePortfolio concepts for academic staff
- ePortfolio concepts for information technology and teaching and learning support services
- ePortfolio concepts for institutional managers
- ePortfolio concepts for employers, professional bodies and career services
- ePortfolio concepts for employees

Further reading

Australian Flexible Learning Framework, (2010), VET EPortfolios Privacy Impact Assessment Research Report - Available from http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/files/VET_EPortfolios_privacy_impact-assessment-RRF.pdf

Australian Flexible Learning Framework, (2010), VET EPortfolios Privacy Guidelines - Available from http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/files/VET_EPortfolios_privacy_guidelines_FINAL.pdf

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