Using ePortfolios for Recruitment: Employers' Perspectives

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Using ePortfolios for Recruitment: Employers' Perspectives

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Introduction

Increasing numbers of institutions are realising the potential of ePortfolios as a tool for students to construct and manage their own learning experience and for staff to manage and document their continuous professional development. However, little research has addressed the extent to which employers review ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process.

As suggested by Samardzija and Balaban (2014), the goal of a showcase ePortfolio is to motivate students to start managing their private, academic and professional career as early as possible. They outline the benefits of using ePortfolios as a showcase, which includes enhanced students' self-understanding (of their goals, skills, interests) and the opportunity to create online evidence of their skills gained through the learning process.

This survey forms part of a greater project, *An ePortfolio strategy to enhance student learning, assessment and staff professional development,* which aimed to create an ePortfolio framework to encourage and enable academic staff to incorporate ePortfolios into their programmes/modules, to empower students in their own learning, to allow for more authentic forms of assessment and to foster a student-centred approach to learning.

The project is funded by the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* under the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund 2015 (Building Digital Capacity). The partner institutions are Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB), Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITT) and Hibernia College.

As part of the data collection phase of the project, an online survey was administered to employers to examine the extent to which employers access or review ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process. The data arising from this survey will help to inform the development of an ePortfolio framework for use in higher education in Ireland.

This report summarises the main findings that emerged from the survey.

Methodology

An anonymous online survey was developed to explore the extent to which employers access or review ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at DIT, the lead partner of the project. An email outlining the project and including the survey link was sent by the Careers Office in ITT to GradIreland, who included the survey link in their employer newsletter. The survey link was also distributed to employers involved in the student placement process in DIT.

The survey remained open for May and June 2016 and 39 responded to it.

The survey comprised 14 questions made up of a combination of multiple-choice and open-response questions. The open-response questions allowed respondents to include their own comments in relation to ePortfolios and to add a qualitative dimension to the findings.

The survey questions are provided in Appendix 1.

Survey Findings

The settings of the online survey software allowed quantitative reporting of findings from each question. These findings are outlined below.

Respondents' industry type

There were 39 respondents to the survey across a range of industries, the majority of which were working in Hospitality, Tourism, Entertainment and IT as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Which category best describes the industry you work in?
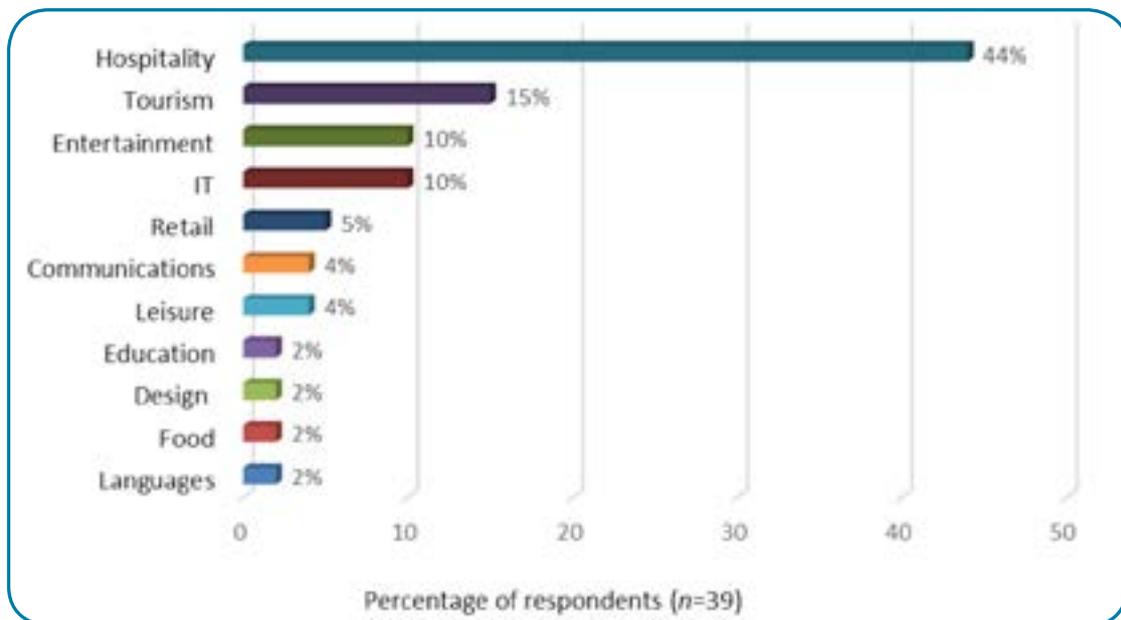
Conducting online research

Just over half of respondents (51%) selected 'Yes' when asked if they conduct online research about job applicants as part of their recruitment process. All of these respondents indicated that their findings would influence their selection decision.

Figure 2: Do you conduct online research about job applicants as part of your recruitment process?
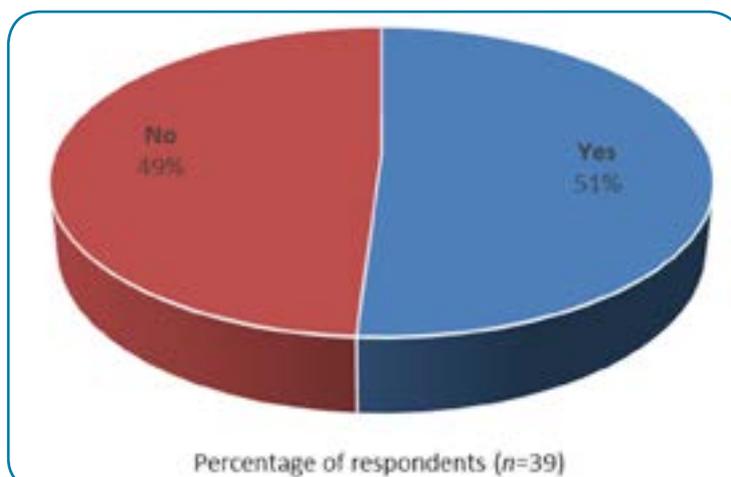
## ePortfolios as part of the recruitment and selection process

As shown in Figure 3, 80% of respondents indicated that they do not include ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process and nearly all of these (96%) indicated that this is because they are not familiar with ePortfolios.

Figure 3: Do you include ePortfolios as part of your recruitment and selection process?

Percentage of respondents (*n*=35)
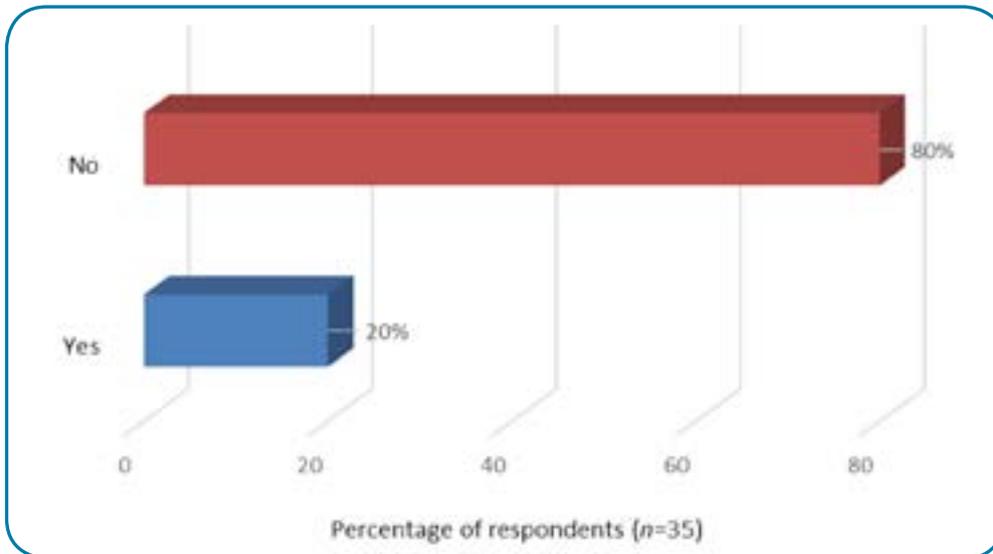
This could indicate an opportunity for higher education institutions to familiarise graduate employers with ePortfolios by demonstrating and showcasing samples of student ePortfolios to employers through the careers office.

Figure 4: Why do you not include ePortfolios in your selection process?

Percentage of respondents (*n*=27)
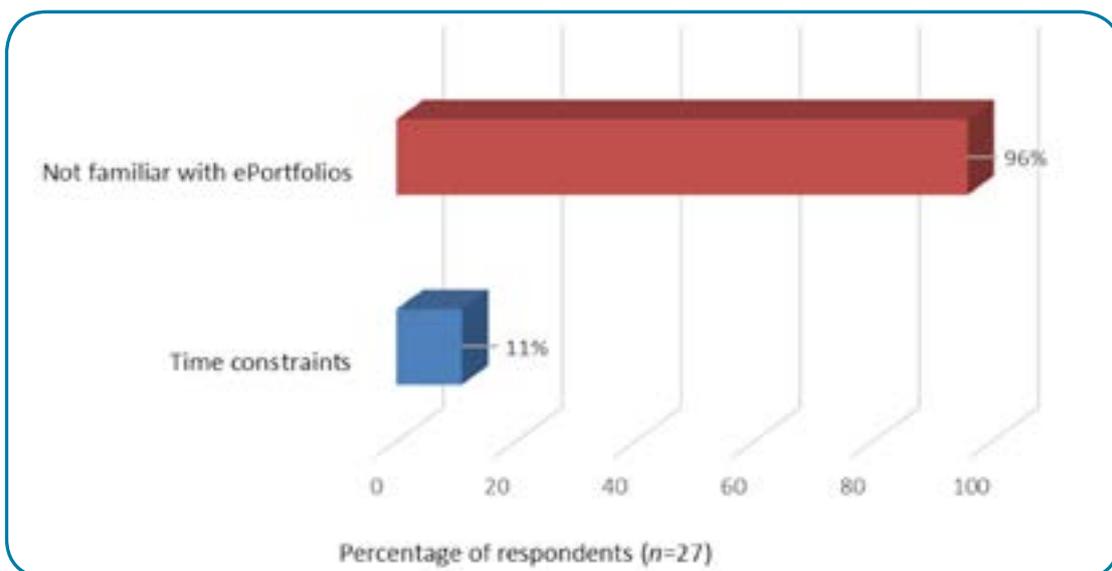
However, the majority of respondents (91%) indicated that they would view an applicant's ePortfolio if a link was provided indicating that including a link on CVs and applications could be beneficial to students in respect of attaining employment.

Through ePortfolios, students could highlight their academic achievements, videos of presentations, examples of writing and achievement of specific professional/ regulatory standards for viewing by potential employers as a means of differentiating themselves from the competition.

Figure 5: Would you view an applicant's ePortfolio if a link was provided?

Percentage of respondents (*n*=32)
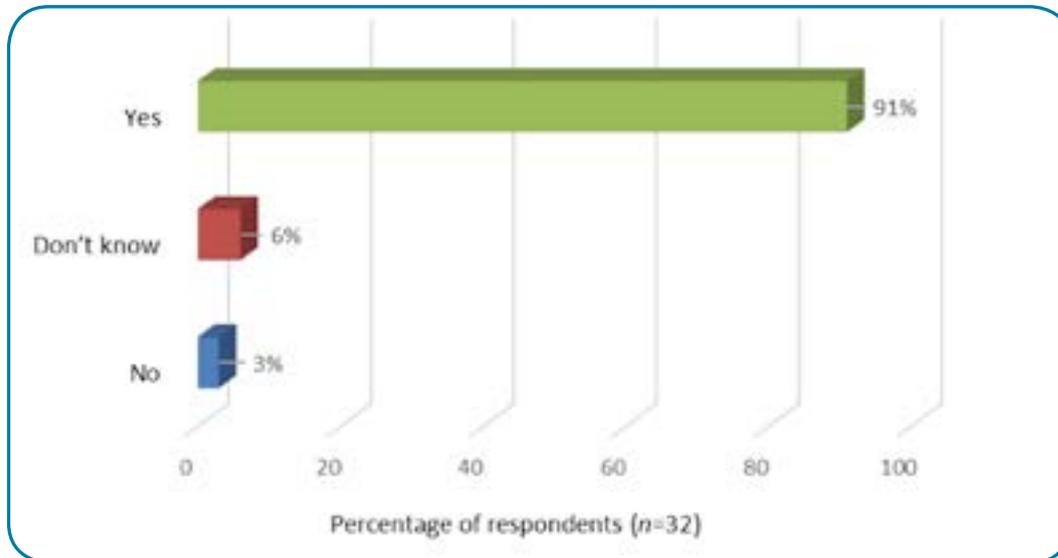
As shown in Figure 6, only 59% of respondents thought that requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process while 28% of respondents were unsure and 13% of respondents indicated that they didn't think requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process.

Figure 6: Do you think requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process?

Percentage of respondents (*n*=32)
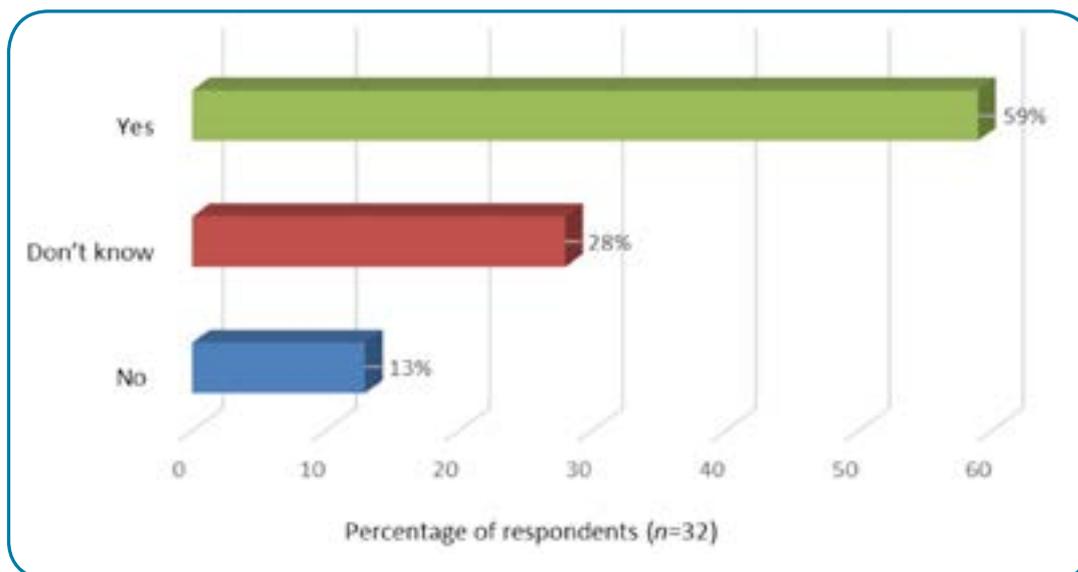
Employers were asked to give a qualitative response to the question 'why do they think requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process?'.

Responses given demonstrated that many were aware of the potential of ePortfolios to enhance the recruitment process.

One respondent stated that:

> 'The rule of theatre is 'show me, don't tell me' - I think this applies to recruitment too. Another cliche that springs to mind, for good reason: a picture paints a thousand words, using the word 'picture' loosely here to donate the e-portfolio.'

Another respondent referred to the initial approach as being important but that the ePortfolio would be an important next step in the process:

> 'I think I'd click through IF the initial approach email piqued my interest. It's the same as expecting me to open your CV. Your initial approach needs to be impactful and impressive enough for me to take ANY further action to suss you out. ePortfolio could easily be that next step.'

Quite a few respondents mentioned that ePortfolios could provide them with a better understanding of applicants' capabilities:

> 'I think it would add to the whole application process and assist in building a better knowledge and picture of the applicant.'

> 'It will increase information that we have regarding the employee so in turn it will support decision making process.'

> 'Narrow down the right people to interview'

> 'To gain a better understanding of the quality of candidate, experience, skills, communication skills etc.'

> 'Allows hiring managers to see more from the candidates'

> 'Better understanding of skills acquired by applicant'

> 'Better forum to display certain skills, ie. Chef'

When asked about how applicants could best share their ePortfolio content, 59% of respondents selected 'a link in an application email' and 47% of respondents selected 'a link at the top of their CV'.

Figure 7: How do you think applicants could best share their ePortfolio content?
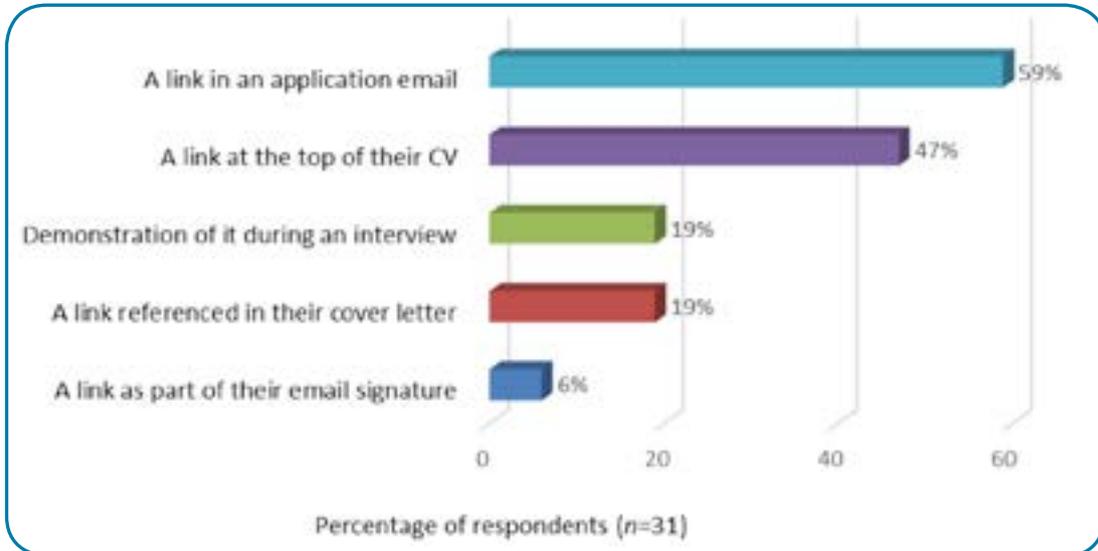
When asked what stage of the recruitment process would be most effective for an applicant to demonstrate their ePortfolio, the majority of respondents (84%) indicated that the initial screening stage would be the most effective.

Figure 8: What stage of the recruitment process would be most effective for an applicant to demonstrate their ePortfolio?
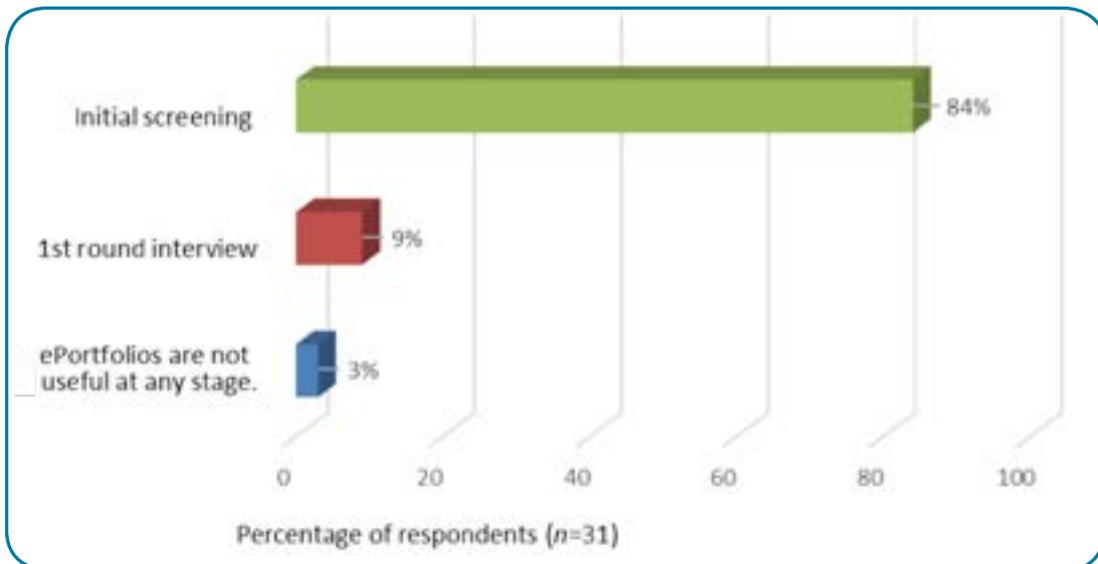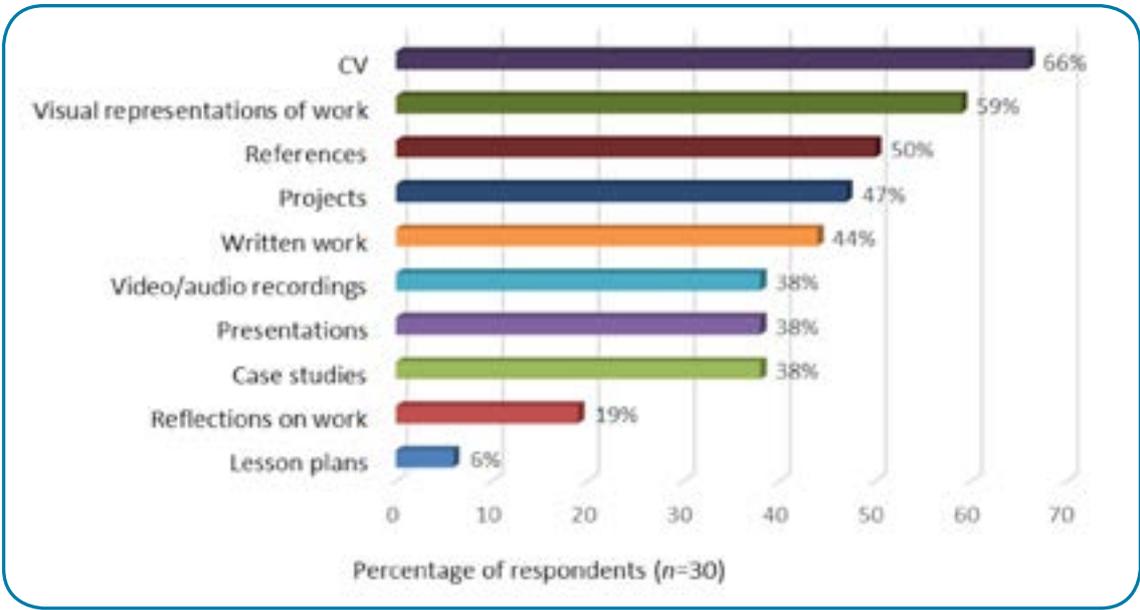

The survey asked respondents to select types of information they thought would be valuable in an ePortfolio.

As shown in Figure 9, 66% selected the 'CV', 59% selected 'visual representations of work' and 50% of respondents selected 'references' as the types of information that would be valuable in an ePortfolio to help evidence skills and increase opportunity in the recruitment process. Other types of information selected included projects, written work, video/audio recordings, presentations and case studies.

Top 3 types of information employers would find valuable in an ePortfolio:

1. CV

2. Visual representations of work

3. References

Figure 9: Select the types of information you feel would be valuable in an ePortfolio to help evidence skills and increase opportunity in the recruitment process.

Type	Percentage
CV	66%
Visual representations of work	59%
References	50%
Projects	47%
Written work	44%
Video/audio recordings	38%
Presentations	38%
Case studies	38%
Reflections on work	19%
Lesson plans	6%

Percentage of respondents (*n*=30)

Benefits of using ePortfolios to screen job applicants

The survey also asked what respondents thought were the benefits of using ePortfolios to screen job applicants. Respondent comments below demonstrate that access to an applicant's ePortfolio could give a wider and deeper understanding of the applicant's experience as well as the applicant themselves:

'Cuts to the heart of the matter.'

'Displays levels of candidate motivation.'

'Offer a much deeper level of information.'

'Involving the creative element'

'It would allow applicants to broaden the content of their cv.'

'A greater insight into the applicants history and experience and possible suitability for the position'

'It would definitely help shortlist candidates.'

'Gives more of an insight into the candidate and their capabilities'

'Allows hiring managers to assess the skills of an applicant before inviting them for interview'

'More information about the candidate and their values'

'I think anything that gives me an insight into the person and how they work and what work they've produced is valuable.'

ePortfolio as a replacement for the CV

When asked whether they could see the ePortfolio replacing the CV, only 35% of respondents selected 'Yes'. Respondents were asked to give their comments as to why the ePortfolio should or should not replace the CV and comments suggest that ePortfolios would better serve as an accompaniment to a CV in the recruitment process.

Comments suggesting the ePortfolio could replace the CV include:

'CVs are a staid format. They can only do so much. Real examples of what the candidate has done is more powerful.'

'More detailed information'

'Technology is advancing and with it so are (most) people. I believe for entry level positions the general CV will remain for some time, however eventually everyone will have an ePortfolio.'

Comments suggesting the ePortfolio should not replace the CV include:

'The CV distills everything and is probably the first point of contact, the point of embarkation. Other things (such as LinkedIn really focusing on it) might replace the CV, but the ePortfolio is likely to remain as an addendum, I feel.'

'CV is a snapshot, it's an important piece of information.'

'I believe that cvs will be still required to employment law requirements.'

'While being creative with ePortfolios - there is a lot of factual information required during screening.'

'Need basic personal information in a written format in order to communicate with the candidate.'

'The information should be different (content-wise).'

'I think they will both complement each other.'

'I think a combination of both works well.'

Summary

The purpose of this survey was to explore the extent to which employers access or review ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process. Due to the small response rate, it is acknowledged that it would not be possible to generalise the survey findings to a wider population.

The survey shows that over half of respondents conduct online research about job applicants as part of their recruitment process and that their findings would influence their selection decision.

As suggested by Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005), beyond academic evidence, ePortfolios give students the opportunity to create a digitised showcase of their work and skills that can be presented to prospective employers. It was encouraging to note that 80% of respondents indicate that they include ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process and those who do not include ePortfolios indicate that being unfamiliar with ePortfolios was the reason for non-inclusion.

Jisc (2008) note that employability can be a strong driver for students to engage with ePortfolios as they are able to personalise the view that they present to different prospective employers. Most respondents in this survey indicated they would view an applicant's ePortfolio if a link was provided further highlighting the importance for lecturers and faculty to inform students of the potential recruitment benefits when motivating students to use and develop ePortfolios.

Findings from this survey also indicate that applicants could best share their ePortfolio content via a link in an application email or through a link at the top of the CV itself. It also suggests that the initial screening stage of the recruitment process could be the most effective stage for an applicant to introduce their ePortfolio in the recruitment process. Also, the survey indicated that the top three types of information employers see as being valuable to include in an ePortfolio were a CV, visual representations of work and references.

This survey also sought to gain an insight into what respondents thought were the benefits of using ePortfolios to screen job applicants. Comments from employers indicated that many were aware of the benefits and capabilities of an ePortfolio in terms of offering a 'deeper level of information' and a 'greater insight into the applicant's history and experience'.

However, when asked whether they could see the ePortfolio replacing the CV, only 35% of respondents selected 'Yes' with respondents suggesting that a CV would still be necessary to provide certain factual information and that the ePortfolio would provide additional and complementary information and evidence to the CV.

This survey, although limited, gives a small indication of the employer perspective in relation to ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process. The survey findings will help to inform the development of the ePortfolio framework of resources arising from the collaborative project within which it was conducted. Beyond this project, a more in-depth survey of employers may be appropriate and beneficial in the future.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Online Employer Survey

Extent to which Employers Review ePortfolios as Part of their Recruitment Process: Findings from an Employer Survey

Survey: Introduction

You are invited to participate in this survey about the extent to which employers consult ePortfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process.

The survey consists of 15 questions and should take no more than 4 minutes to complete.

The survey is entirely anonymous. The results will be presented in the form of collated data and will not contain any personal or institutional details. This data may be used for publications, conferences, reports, etc. All data collected will be stored securely on an encrypted laptop/PC and in password protected folders.

Completion of this survey implies participant consent.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Orla O'Loghlen (Project Co-ordinator) (eportfolioevent@gmail.com).

Thank you for your participation.

What is an ePortfolio?

An ePortfolio (electronic portfolio) is a collection of digital artefacts that are presented to particular audiences for a range of purposes. ePortfolios have been used to assess student learning, as a means of reflection, or to showcase student work. ePortfolios also offer a way for job applicants to showcase their skills and achievements for prospective employers.

How can ePortfolios be used in respect of job applications?

An ePortfolio can allow a job applicant to create or collate artefacts relating specifically to the requirements of an advertised job such as video/audio recordings of presentations, examples of their writing, or demonstrated competencies in specific professional/regulatory standards, and display them online for a potential employer.

Survey Questions

1. Which category best describes the industry you work in?

   - ❏ Architecture
   - ❏ Construction
   - ❏ Design
   - ❏ Education
   - ❏ Engineering
   - ❏ Entertainment
   - ❏ Finance
   - ❏ Food
   - ❏ Healthcare
   - ❏ Hospitality
   - ❏ Insurance
   - ❏ IT
   - ❏ Manufacturing
   - ❏ Pharmaceuticals
   - ❏ Retail
   - ❏ Telecommunications
   - ❏ Tourism
   - ❏ Other (please specify)

2. Do you conduct online research about job applicants as part of your recruitment process?

   - ❏ Yes
   - ❏ No

3. Would your findings influence your selection decision?

   - ❏ Yes
   - ❏ No
   - ❏ Don't know

4. Do you include ePortfolios as part of your recruitment and selection process?

   - ❏ Yes
   - ❏ No

5. Why do you not include ePortfolios in your selection process?

❏ Not familiar with ePortfolios

❏ Don't think they are valuable resources

❏ Time constraints

❏ Cost

❏ Other (please specify)

6. Would you view an applicant's ePortfolio if a link was provided?

❏ Yes

❏ No

❏ Don't know

7. Do you think requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process?

❏ Yes

❏ No

❏ Don't know

8. Why do/don't you think requiring applicants to submit an ePortfolio could enhance the recruitment process?

9. How do you think applicants could best share their ePortfolio content?

❏ A link in an application email

❏ A link at the top of their CV

❏ Demonstration of it during an interview

❏ A link as part of their email signature

❏ A link referenced in their cover letter

❏ Other (please specify)

10. What stage of the recruitment process would be most effective for an applicant to demonstrate their ePortfolio?

❏ Initial screening

❏ 1st round interview

❏ Final round interview

❏ ePortfolios are not useful at any stage.

❏ Other (please specify)

11. Select the types of information you feel would be valuable in an ePortfolio to help evidence skills and increase opportunity in the recruitment process.

- ❏ CV
- ❏ References
- ❏ Written work
- ❏ Video/audio recordings
- ❏ Visual representations of work
- ❏ Projects
- ❏ Presentations
- ❏ Lesson plans
- ❏ Case studies
- ❏ Reflections on work
- ❏ Other (please specify)

12. What do you think would be the benefits of using ePortfolios to screen job applicants?

13. Can you see the ePortfolio replacing the CV?

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No

14. Why can/can't you see the ePortfolio replacing the CV?