E-portfolios for doctors

The e-portfolio is an electronic tool for doctors to store and record a collection of evidence that demonstrates their learning achievements and abilities.

It promotes life-long learning by encouraging doctors to reflect on their own needs and clinical competences, and the needs of their patients.

An e-portfolio can help you to:

- keep documents together to evidence your progress and learning
- reflect on your learning (very important - see section below on reflecting)
- think about your personal development plan (PDP), encouraging you to think about what you need to do next to help you progress in your career
- prepare for an interview
- develop your CV

Reflecting

Reflecting on your learning may be quite new to you so you may find this short guide useful.

Reflecting will aid your learning because the more you think about the concepts and issues in your role and connect them to what you know and see around you, the more you will remember and learn. Reflective writing is the expression of some of the mental processes of reflection. It is a technique that will be invaluable to you when completing your e-portfolio.

Reflective writing usually involves:

- looking back at an event, for example something that has happened at work, or at one of your assessments. It is often also useful to reflect forward to the future as well as reflecting back to the past
- analysing the event or idea - thinking in depth and from different perspectives and trying to explain them. It is an exploration and explanation of events, not just a description of them
- thinking carefully about what the event or idea means for you and your ongoing progress as a practising professional. This includes what you would do differently, if anything, next time

Reflective writing is therefore more personal than other types of academic writing. It is important to use the first person – "I...".
The e-portfolio promotes life-long learning

One of the benefits of reflective writing is that writing something down can help you to be clearer in your mind about an event. For example, if you are doing a presentation or some teaching, as well as describing the event you may want to evaluate your performance by questioning and perhaps challenging yourself. Others might have different views of the same event, so you may also consider the performance of others. You might even change how you initially viewed and wrote about the situation.

It is important to write knowing it is likely that someone else will look at your portfolio at some point. It is usual to share your portfolio with your educational supervisor, although you are not required to show all of it. Your educational supervisor will also be able to give you some help and guidance on how you can develop your portfolio.

Keeping your portfolio up to date is essential because it is used as evidence for your end of year sign off, so don’t be tempted to leave completing it to the last minute.

And from a careers perspective, your portfolio is absolutely essential. You will often be asked to show some of your portfolio in a specialty interview. See below for further information on how to present your portfolio in that situation.

The foundation portfolio

The Rough Guide to the Foundation Programme states that the contents of the Foundation Learning Portfolio should include:

- a list of competencies required to complete the foundation programme successfully
- example forms to record meetings with your educational supervisor, reflective practice and self-appraisal
- an educational agreement
- assessment forms
- a PDP, including your career planning

Find out more about e-portfolios on the UKFPO website [2].

Portfolios and interviews

Interviewers will usually have had access to your portfolio prior to your interview so make sure your portfolio is:

- neat with legible handwriting
- easy to follow, for example it has a contents page
- not missing anything
- well structured and organised

The portfolio will help the interviewer form an impression and from it you will know whether you have completed required tasks and if you are competent.
The portfolio should contain a:
- contents page
- summary CV
- full CV

Throughout your portfolio you should highlight your commitment to the specialty you have chosen and know when and where to refer to it if asked. You should demonstrate to the interviewer that you understand what you need to do to achieve your goals.

Preparation is very important. For example, before the interview, you should consider two or three strong points that you would like the panel to be aware of and highlight how it relates to the specialty to which you are applying. The panel's questions may be quite general so try and incorporate your points into your answers. The panel may also ask about the weak points of the portfolio, so make sure you consider this in advance.

You need to be prepared for questions about your portfolio and what you have done and the panel may ask you about your feelings in certain situations. Practising as much as possible will help with this will help you to relax and stay calm during the interview.

**Top tips**

Many specialty interviews now have a portfolio 'station'. Preparing your portfolio is time-consuming and it’s a good idea to prepare it early. Your preparation will refresh your memory and give you ideas for your application.

Our top ten tips are:

- add to your portfolio every week; don’t leave it to the last minute
- look at the requirements from the college and the local education and training board (LETB) to which you are applying. These will be published a month or so before the recruitment round opens and will usually give you instructions on layout and order
- be organised, make sure everything is in the right section. Organise a paper copy of your portfolio:
  - buy a quality ring-binder
  - consider using clear plastic pockets – put the pages in back to back – this looks nice and it is easy for the interview panel members to thumb through. The panel should not need to take any sheets out of the pockets
  - use a contents page with a tab system, using dividers which are wider than the main content, so that the panel can speedily get to the relevant pages
- if there are no guidelines from the college or LETB that is leading on the recruitment here are two suggested ways to organise your portfolio:
  - using sections in the order that they were mentioned in your application (this could look like an expanded CV)
  - using the headings from the GMC Good practice guide
  - but make sure you check first and follow any LETB/royal college instructions
- use reflective language (for more detail see above heading 'reflecting')
- include your CV and a copy of your application form; make this the first section of your portfolio after the contents page
- make your personal development plan (PDP) a section of your portfolio and make...
sure your goals are SMART and have a specific timescale

- your portfolio is a way of displaying evidence for courses/exams/audits etc that you have claimed during the application. You need to present evidence for everything you have claimed in the white-space area of the application. Therefore it is best to concentrate on this evidence, and then add additional achievements as desired. Also bear in mind the person specification for the specialty. The types of items you should include are:
  - teaching sessions with feedback received
  - certificates of courses
  - degrees
  - diplomas
  - prizes
  - other relevant courses.
  - documents you have used to record your foundation competencies eg your DOPs, mini-cex etc. N.B. It is a good idea to have done more than the minimum. That way you can include those that you are especially proud of and that indicate an improvement over time
  - printouts of audits, presentations and publications. Include reflections and feedback
  - emails of impending audits and publications
  - feedback, thank you letters and emails of praise from your colleagues or patients
  - your achievements from medical school. Allow time to chase letters of recommendation and evidence, if you do not have these to hand
  - however, don’t overfill your portfolio. The selection centre panel should be able to absorb the contents rapidly and easily

- if you're applying for more than one specialty you should have different portfolios for different applications. They will need to contain different material and may need to be ordered distinctly

- make sure you know your portfolio inside out. You should be prepared to answer questions such as:
  - what does your portfolio say about you?
  - how does your portfolio show your key skills and strengths?
  - how does your portfolio show your commitment to this specialty?

To demonstrate your commitment to the specialty you're applying to, you could also print off and add to your portfolio some of the self-assessment exercises you have completed on this website.

Find out more:

- about self assessment [4]
- look at a real-life story about using your e-portfolio [5]

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Links
[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Personal_development_plan
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