



Royal College of  
General Practitioners

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(by email)

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Our ref: AH/sr/ep0711

Dear Dr Nair

Thank you for your letter of 16 June 2011 addressed to Dr Jane Mamelok, which has been passed to me for a response as your concerns relate primarily to the Trainee ePortfolio, and I chair the RCGP's ePortfolio Development Group.

I am very sorry to hear that you and your colleagues are having difficulties with the Trainee ePortfolio. The College issued a statement on 20 May which explained the work which has taken place in recent months and also a plan for work going forward. Please see the following link:

[http://www.rcgp.org.uk/gp\\_training/trainee\\_eportfolio\\_statement.aspx](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/gp_training/trainee_eportfolio_statement.aspx)

We value your feedback and we all I hope have the same vision for the ePortfolio, in that it should help learners to document their learning journey.

The recent problems have been twofold. One, due to the move from Princes Gate to Bow Churchyard and the use of a new server, which resulted in the site crashes. A lot of work was completed recently to address the site stability culminating in a rebuilt server being introduced in mid-March. The site has now had no unplanned outages since this time (16 weeks at the time of writing).

The other issue is around the planned development of the educational supervisors report. As with all IT projects there are unintended consequences, usually around linkages. It also uncovered loading problems with some of the reporting forms. A number of updates were introduced to address potential speed issues also in both the coding of the website and how the database is accessed. The speed-related work has now mostly been completed with the assistance of a technical architect and implemented in April/May. A number of 'hot fixes' applied in early May have improved the speed of the site considerably, but we are continuing to monitor this closely.

A review of the testing process has also been undertaken, and stricter timetables are now applied before releases, with more standardised testing practices being introduced.

A test analyst has also been recruited to work specifically on the Trainee ePortfolio with the web development team. This has freed up their time to concentrate on actual development work so I hope this reassures you that this area is now fully supported and professionalised.

We expect to be able to make a number of improvements to the functionality and usability of the Trainee ePortfolio in the next major release on 1 August 2011 – ordinarily we might have been able to make these changes much more quickly, but the issues with the stability and speed of the site have delayed this development work.

The College has an ePortfolio Development group that has representation from all elements of training and has regular reports from the deanery clinical and administrative champions. All of the suggestions for improvements and enhancements we receive from groups such as yours are considered by the ePortfolio Development Group and/or the WPBA core group as appropriate. All of those that are approved are in some way included in this plan of work so I hope I can reassure you that we do take note of users comments and suggestions but we have simply not been able to respond as quickly as we might have liked over the last year. I hope you have already seen some improvements and will start to see more from August onwards, and in the subsequent monthly updates.

I will now respond specifically to the other points raised in your letter, some of which are linked:

Emphasis on quantity rather than quality & Learner Centred Approach versus “demands of the ePortfolio”

I should emphasise that WPBA relies on the principles of portfolio learning, the learner building a portfolio of their learning experience providing evidence of progression using the tools within it as self-assessment tools gaining professional insight and defining future learning needs. It is primarily a framework for formative development and all of the tools have value by providing assessment *for* learning.

However, WPBA is one of three components of the licensing tripos (MRCGP) for GP specialty training and therefore there has to be a summative element. This is provided in the required assessment schedule and the summative element as assessment of learning. Both the clinical and educational supervisors global judgements based on their review of evidence is important as it informs the ARCP panel's final summative judgement.

Decisions about the change in WPBA design and implementation are not taken in isolation by the RCGP. The recent changes to the ESR for example, were introduced after piloting across several deaneries and canvassing views from deanery assessment leads (DALs) providing representation across “four nations” and working in collaboration with secondary care colleagues. London Deanery has been well represented and provided through DALs and ePortfolio champions and a way forward for future involvement for your trainers is to contact your deanery lead, Dr Nigel de Kare Silver.

Number of log entries per week

The RCGP does not, and has never, specified a minimum number of log entries per week. This may be a local requirement in your Deanery and I would therefore suggest you refer this to your local deanery lead.

### IT support for Trainers

I understand your concerns about the Helpdesk which was a problem earlier this year as it was a time of high demand around reviews which when coupled with the IT problems, meant that they were completely overwhelmed with both email and telephone queries.

Two temporary members of staff were recruited to assist and started work in early February, this increased the size of the helpdesk team and although improvements took a little time to be seen as they familiarised themselves with the system and worked through the backlog of enquiries, they were fully up to date by mid-March.

In anticipation of the current busy period in May-July, the College approved recruitment of an additional helpdesk team member on a 6 month contract, with additional assistance available if necessary, and this has proved to be satisfactory. We will continue to monitor staffing needs throughout the year.

In summary I hope my response has reassured you that we do take note of users comments and suggestions and that it goes some way to allay your concerns.

Yours sincerely



Professor Arthur Hibble  
Chairman, ePortfolio  
Development Group, RCGP