

## **Feedback and reflection on Routes to Success Portfolios: Sustaining Success**

Creating the third portfolio is an exercise designed to guide students through an exercise of self-reflection and evaluation. Skills of critical self appraisal can be very constructive, and can be used to help plan future approaches to study, and identify any problems which may benefit from early intervention (e.g. seeking assistance from the mentoring service, attending support workshops, focussing on building language skills).

Among the students who completed the portfolio and attended the interview, marks ranged from 95% for a few of the very best students, to 10%. The vast majority of students had marks above 60%. In this type of activity it is never possible to get a full 100%.

In the best cases students worked hard to create an interesting and insightful portfolio, and their effort was reflected in the insight they were able to demonstrate during the interview. Writing a reflective document is not necessarily an easy task, and this year we introduced the opportunity for discussion so that students were able to engage in a discussion during their interview.

The discussion and the interview provided opportunities for individuals to identify their personal strengths and weaknesses, and use the exercise as a means of commenting on their progress, or define future plans based on examples of evidence (for example achievements and experiences during the foundation year). It enabled students who had weaker writing skills to demonstrate insight which they may not have communicated so effectively in the portfolio.

Many students, including those who had less extensive recordings in the portfolio document, were able to identify some issues, and were able to use these observations as a means of identifying future plans.

Some students either experienced difficulties, or did not think the exercise particularly important. In these instances, the contents of the portfolio were not large (occasionally people tried to mask this by making the font larger!!). In these instances, the contents were often descriptive, rather than analytical.

A few students may have taken a cursory approach to the activity. This may not have been a good strategy, since marks were available, and potentially wasted. A very few students tried to attend the interview without a portfolio. They were not interviewed. No mark was awarded.

It seems that the interview has acted as an incentive to complete the task, and I appreciate those students who made an effort to engage with the activity. I hope by completing the portfolio, and attending the interview, you have been able to gain some insights into your behaviours and academic performance. Reflection does not have to be undertaken in such a self-conscious written form (although the current fashion for blogs is an example of this in general life). However you find time to reflect in future, I hope that you will be able to build on this activity to your advantage in your future studies in whichever manner works best for you.

Su White, Summer 2009

Previous feedback, which may also be helpful can be found on Edshare  
<http://www.edshare.soton.ac.uk/1705/>