

# Self-Customisation: Using a Portfolio to Enhance Learner Independence

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## Abstract

This article is based on the principle that traditional in-class teaching does not have to be radically overhauled for individualised learning to take place. The premise is that students need to be trained as effective independent learners so that, having recognised a specific learning need, they are empowered to fulfil it rather than wasting time searching for the perfect bite-size course.

To this effect, the FL section of RHI has been requiring a Portfolio of Independent Study from students on all courses since September 2002. The Portfolio has been developed, and constantly revised, not only as part of a learner-centred approach to teaching and a drive to increase student motivation, but also as a lifelong learning tool. Considerations such as tutors' workload and the limitations imposed by quality assurance procedures also had to be taken into account.

RHI offer an Institution-Wide Language Programme, where courses last 11 weeks and can be taken as part of a degree. However, most students take them as an elective, and most are international students. With such a variety of backgrounds and needs, a learner-centred approach was a necessity. By completing a Portfolio of Independent Study, students are given a chance to take charge of their own learning by assessing their current level / capabilities; setting realistic goals for themselves; planning learning activities; selecting relevant, level-appropriate materials to work from; evaluating the effectiveness of an activity; assessing their own progress both in terms of language competence and in terms of learner-training; setting new goals for themselves and taking advantage of learning opportunities arising in daily life.

Over the last eight years, we have been in tune with the students' reaction to what is seen as an unconventional learning approach. This article thus highlights the difficulties and successes of this endeavour.

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## 1 Introduction: Requirements, Constraints and Opportunities

The "one size fits all" approach to education, as obsolete as it sounds, is still predominant in many Higher Education institutions: most students are taught as a group assumed to have homogeneous background knowledge, learning practices and objectives, and are expected to benefit from instruction in roughly the same manner, as attested by their examination results. Individualisation of teaching and learning is perceived as financially and logistically unrealistic. However, as educational psychologist Carl Rogers already suggested in the 1960's (1995: 292), it is a necessity "to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning." With the emergence of new technologies, the free-flow of individuals and information around the globe and fluctuating employment requirements, i. e. what R. J. Freund referred to as the "new paradigm", individualisation of learning and a life-long commitment to it is now more of a requirement than ever (Freund 2005: 316).

Nevertheless, the question remains: how can this be achieved within the constraints of a restricted budget and limited facilities?

Royal Holloway International, which delivers an Institution-Wide Foreign Language Programme in four languages, is a case in point: the courses last 11 weeks and can be taken as part of a degree. They are open to anyone working or studying at Royal Holloway University of London and most learners are international students who take the course as an elective. Nevertheless, a member of staff studying in their free time for their own pleasure and an undergraduate student taking the course as part of their degree will not have the same motivation, goals and expectations from the course. With such a variety of backgrounds and needs, a learner-centred approach is a necessity. Moreover, being credit-bearing, the courses have ambitious learning objectives, e. g. achieving Common European Framework of Reference for Languages level A1 in 40 contact hours (as opposed to a traditional 100 to 120). Additionally, class size minima are set at twenty students per group. In these circumstances, taking into account individual students' learning styles and practices, background knowledge and expectations, beliefs and representations about learning (cf. Gremmo/Riley 1995: 158) appears a considerable challenge.

Considering the giant leaps made in the field of Computer Assisted Languages Learning in the last ten years, mass customization – defined as the customisation for individual use of mass-produced products or services – appeared to be a solution. However, with a limited budget and little expertise in Information Technology or indeed in Linguistics (RHI is not an academic department and therefore does not have a research remit or budget), the Foreign Languages section of RHI (catering for around 180 students per term) would not have had the resources required to design and implement sweeping changes in the organisation and delivery of courses. On the other hand, one consensual demand that can be made on HE students is a strong commitment to their studies, even though, all too often, students do not have the tools and strategies to be effective independent learners.

Given the above constraints and opportunities, going one step beyond mass customization by asking students to take over the individualisation process, in other words encouraging self-customisation, appears like a suitable solution, provided that they are given the tools necessary to make the right decisions in order to benefit fully from this customisation. That is to say, students need to be trained as effective independent learners so that, having recognised specific learning needs, they are empowered to fulfill them. To this effect, the FL section of RHI has been requiring a Portfolio of Independent Study from students on all courses since September 2002. The Portfolio has been developed, and constantly revised, not only as part of a learner-centred approach to teaching and a drive to increase student motivation, but also as a lifelong learning tool (cf. Guard et al.: 2003). Considerations such as tutors' workload and the limitations imposed by Quality Assurance procedures also had to be taken into account.

By completing a Portfolio of Independent Study, students are given a chance to take charge of their own learning by assessing their current level/capabilities; setting realistic goals for themselves; planning learning activities; selecting relevant, level-appropriate materials to work from; evaluating the effectiveness of an activity; assessing their own progress both in terms of language competence and in terms of learner-training; setting new goals for themselves and taking advantage of learning opportunities arising in daily life. Over the last 8 years, the FL section of RHI have monitored the students' reaction to what they see as an unconventional learning approach. This article will thus present the aims and objectives of the Portfolio of Independent Study, its content and structure and evaluate its effectiveness from the point of view of students, tutors and Visiting Examiners.

## 2 The Aims, Learning Objectives and Assessment Criteria of the Portfolio

The Portfolio of Independent Study aims primarily to enhance students' efficiency in language learning by requiring them to customise the learning process to fit with individual goals and needs. Considering students' variety of backgrounds, representations and level of autonomy, this can only be achieved by developing their independent study skills, which represents the secondary aim of the Portfolio. This also has the considerable benefit of equipping students with the tools and strategies needed for life-long independent learning.

The learning objectives thus cover the development of skills transferrable to a wide variety of settings, including current or future employment, e. g. the ability to gather and evaluate resources, to identify and prioritise needs and goals, to manage time efficiently, to draw and adhere to a study/work plan, etc. They also cover the development of independent learning skills such as setting realistic learning goals, designing a learning strategy based on needs and interests, selecting relevant and level-appropriate materials and evaluating the effectiveness of the learning process; in other words, enhancing the student's self-awareness as an autonomous learner. Finally, as the ultimate aim of the Portfolio is for students to increase their language competence, students will need to provide evidence of progress in the domains of their choice (reading, writing, speaking or listening skill, but also accuracy, vocabulary or intercultural competence).

Traditionally, students are assessed based on their level of knowledge and understanding of the particular academic subject they are studying. However, as learner training is an essential learning objective, it is integrated in the assessment criteria. Additionally, although it only represents 30% of the students' final results, the portfolio constitutes the essential part of the students' independent study, itself representing up to 100 hours per course. Below is a sample of the assessment criteria, representing the mark band of 60–69% for the Portfolio mark.

Criterion	60–69%
<b>Standard of work</b>	The effort, level of commitment and standard of work produced are good. There is evidence of frequent independent learning. The presentation and general organisation of the portfolio are of good standard and additional tasks are relevant in terms of level and content.
<b>Task fulfilment, incorporation of feedback and progress made</b>	All required tasks have been completed and complemented with additional materials. Student has taken most feedback into account and amended his/her work accordingly. The final language learning portfolio demonstrates good progress.
<b>Language learning strategies and reflection on learning process</b>	Needs Analysis, Self-evaluation and Reflections on task have been completed fairly thoroughly and with a good degree of detail. Student is clearly aware of his/her needs and goals. The variety, level of challenge and suitability of activities and materials are appropriate. Evaluation of progress is adequate.

Table 1: Portfolio Assessment Criteria, 60–69% band.

## 3 Portfolio Structure and Content: Adjusting the level of guidance provided

The Portfolio of Independent Study is structured around a Needs Analysis questionnaire, completed at the beginning of term and representing the starting point, and a Self-evaluation questionnaire, completed at the end of term and concluding the project. Students record all completed tasks and activities onto a Record Chart and include samples of revised homework.

Additionally, students are given guidance notes and an extensive list of Recommended Resources. The portfolio is handed in twice, in weeks 5 and 10. The first submission is not formally assessed, but extensive feedback is provided by the tutor. This allows students to try their hand at this new method of learning without being penalised if they find themselves going in the wrong direction.

The level of guidance provided is a crucial element of the learner training process: the Needs Analysis was originally designed as an extensive questionnaire, where students were required to reflect on their past as language learners, their current strengths and weaknesses in each language skill (reading, writing, speaking and listening), their motivation for studying the target language, their needs and their goals. They were then required to conduct a survey of the resources available on campus (viewing rooms, RHI student resources library, CALL lab software) and via the Internet. Also required was a visit to a learning styles survey website. Finally, in the last section of the Needs Analysis questionnaire, students had to prioritise learning goals and design a self-study plan for the term.

Concurrently, to complete the first part of the portfolio, students were required to include in their study plan two set tasks (e. g. finding an apartment to rent in a French town using a set of websites) serving as models for the completion of other tasks of the student's own choosing, in accordance with their study plan. At the end of the term, the Self-evaluation questionnaire was also quite comprehensive: the students had to re-state their motivation, needs and goals (and indicate whether any had changed), which resources they had used, how much of their study plan they had completed, as well as to evaluate **in detail** their progress in language and independent learning skills, by answering a set of questions. This level of detail in guidance was thought to be necessary in order to raise students' self-awareness as learners and encourage effective independent learning.

Unfortunately, this was badly received: "students were unclear how the information they provided on the forms were used and how this affected the learning process" and they felt that "the bureaucratic nature of the portfolios had become a de-motivating rather than a motivator for independent learning." (RHI staff-student committee meeting, 26.02.2003) Additionally, tutors were struggling to mark the questionnaires as processing and evaluating all the information provided by the students also took precious marking time. Conversely, students felt that completing the two model tasks did not provide them with the guidance that they needed to select and design their own additional tasks. Mass customization was proving a difficult concept to implement: if students were provided too much guidance, then there was less space for individualisation of learning. On the other hand, too little guidance made assessment increasingly difficult, as benchmarks were lost. In terms of learner independence, freedom to design personalised learning plans and to carry out self-selected tasks was appealing to confident, mature and autonomous students, while it left others wondering exactly how to fulfil the criteria to obtain good results.

The Portfolio was consequently modified to accommodate this feedback. Year on year, the Needs Analysis became stripped to a very simple format, to contain only three sections related to the students' motivations for learning the target language, their short-term goals and a simple action plan, where students specify the type of activity they plan on carrying out, how this is expected to help them and a ranking system for prioritising these activities. The set tasks were also modified: a matrix of 8 possible tasks was proposed, with a focus, guidelines for completion and a suggested output. The wording allowed for confident students to propose alternative activities or output, while giving sufficient guidance to less autonomous students. To facilitate logistics and marking, the eight tasks were designed to be non-language specific and similar from one level to the next (with increasing complexity). Below is an example of two tasks for Stage I b (Elementary, CEF A2):

Focus	Writing a Biography	Going on a Cultural Visit
<b>Guidelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose a famous person, book character, friend or native speaker with a close link to the target language</li> <li>• Find out some information on their life (via interview, internet research...): date of birth, likes / dislikes, family members, current and past jobs, where they live/have lived, interests, life story, etc.</li> <li>• You should be able to use the past tense.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out on the internet what the Goethe/French Institute or Instituto Cervantes (in London) offer.</li> <li>• Choose one aspect, section or event. Go to the Institute and gather information about it orally using the target language.</li> <li>• Gather related printed materials.</li> </ul> <p><u>Note:</u> If you plan on visiting the target country during the term, please talk to your tutor about choosing this task.</p>
<b>Suggested Output</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written biography using full sentences</li> <li>• Reflection on task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written/recorded oral account of visit, comments on aspect, section or event and experience</li> <li>• Sample of materials gathered</li> <li>• Reflection on task.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Two Portfolio tasks for Stage I b**

The mention "Reflection on task" refers to a paragraph placed at the end of a task or activity where students explain why they chose it and how they benefited from it. This gives the tutor some indication of the student's level of self-awareness and control over the learning process, as well as encouraging them to make an informed choice of task.

Along the same lines, the Self-evaluation questionnaire was repeatedly redesigned to be more user-friendly, following a box-ticking format with some space for targeted individual comments, the final product covering just one page of A4 paper. The first section now requires the student to re-state their original goals, to outline 3 of the activities that they have completed in order to achieve these goals, the skills involved and the progress that they feel they have made (1 being the least and 5 being the most), and then to comment on how helpful these activities were for them. The students then evaluate their experience of independent learning and give themselves a grade for the following aspects: progress made, level of achievement of their goals, level of confidence gained, level of motivation and time management. More importantly, they must write a paragraph evaluating their experience of independent learning. As with the "reflection on task", this often indicates quite clearly the level of involvement, self-awareness and control over the learning process that the student has achieved. Finally, students are asked whether they will continue to learn the language and why, thus giving the tutor/marker a final indication of the student's overall experience.

The evolution over the years of each of these three documents (Needs Analysis and Self-evaluation questionnaire, and set tasks) demonstrates the issue at the heart of the mass customization concept: how to successfully customise a product (here a learning tool) to cater for individual needs and requirements without compromising on its effectiveness and the benefits of mass production (i.e. groups of 20 students following the same course specifications with strict quality assurance policies, requiring detailed marking criteria and strict marking standardisation procedures).

#### **4 Issues related to the provision of feedback: the respective roles of learners and tutors**

Providing students appropriate feedback also proved a challenge as it had to demonstrate how the development of independent learning skills had an impact on actual progress in language competence. This meant confronting both tutors' and students' representation of their own roles as providers and receivers of knowledge.

One key element of the completed Portfolio is the inclusion of a revised version (based on extended tutor feedback) of the first two tasks. This is considered as evidence of the degree of progress in language competence. However, progress in independent learning skills is more tricky to assess (and markers with little experience often had difficulties identifying it). It is mostly evident in the self-evaluation form, where students have to describe their experience as independent learners: the depth of their reflection and the nature of their comments can reveal the degree of self-awareness and control over the different stages of the learning process. Whether a student actually completed their action plan (stated in the Needs Analysis) is useful to assess, but more importantly, mention of changes in priorities/goals, exploitation of fortuitous language learning opportunities or acknowledgement of being overambitious reveal that the student has actually reflected on the learning process and evaluated their own strategies. To a lesser extent, Reflections on task are also significant as they reveal the level of awareness students have of how they can benefit from completing the chosen task. Finally, by comparing the information listed in the Needs Analysis, the Record chart and the Self-evaluation forms, the tutor/marker can identify the level of consistency in the learning strategy. Thus the final marking procedure is time-consuming: a minimum of two revised tasks in the target language needs to be marked and compared with the original versions, and two more tasks assessed. Needs Analysis, Record chart and Self-evaluation, as well as Reflections of tasks need to be checked individually and compared for consistency, and the overall final product needs to be assessed based on the marking criteria mentioned in section 2 above.

Tutors with little experience of this had difficulty adjusting to it. They were often unclear about the importance of commenting on independent learning strategies and found the process too complex to implement in the limited amount of marking time they had. They instead often relied heavily on criteria such as presentation, task fulfilment (whether all the documents required had been provided), and progress made in language competence (a domain they were very familiar with) to award a mark. As a consequence, several measures were implemented: informal meetings now take place to explain the learning objectives behind the Portfolio and regular formal feedback and marking standardisation meetings are organised at the end of each term, where portfolio samples are exchanged, double-marked and any discrepancy in marking is clarified and discussed. Since it was implemented, this has proved an effective way of improving reliability in marking: after one or two sessions, marking becomes more consistent amongst tutors.

Increased reliability in marking is also due to improvements made in feedback forms and written guidance offered to tutors. For example, a sample filled-in form offers tutors some options for comments to write for each category. Additionally, final feedback is facilitated by providing tutors with a set of guidelines, as illustrated in table 3 below. (The final feedback form itself follows the same criteria as mentioned in table 1, Marking Criteria):

Criterion	Detail
<b>Standard of work</b> <i>(organisation, presentation, evidence of commitment to independent learning)</i>	How well <b>organised</b> is the Portfolio? Is each section clearly labelled? Are the different activities easy to identify (especially extra activities vs. tasks)? Is the <b>presentation</b> neat? <b>Effort:</b> Is all text word-processed? Are additional materials carefully selected for their appropriate level and content? <b>Evidence of commitment:</b> Did the student produce supplemental work that demonstrates that they are using / working on the language on a regular basis (see Record chart)?
<b>Task fulfilment, incorporation of feedback and progress made</b>	<b>Task fulfilment:</b> Has the student completed all the tasks and submitted all the documents required? Has the student taken your first submission <b>feedback</b> into account? Have they revised any checked written work (excluding homework) based on your comments? Have they taken action based on your comments? <b>Progress:</b> it could be interpreted as the overall difference between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> submission, in terms of language (improved Tasks 1 and 2), but also of awareness of the learning process (better choice of tasks and extra activities, deeper reflection on task, added detail in N.A., etc.)
<b>Language learning strategies and reflection on learning process</b>	Are N/A, Self-evaluation and Reflections on tasks <b>detailed and coherent</b> ? Is there a clear <b>link</b> between choice of tasks + extra activities and general goals + action plan? In other words, does the student demonstrate a clear <b>sense of direction</b> in their independent study? Is the Self-evaluation Questionnaire in line with the student's goals (N.A.) and reflections (Tasks), and with their ratings of extra activities (Record Chart)? Does the student <b>demonstrate clearly what they feel they have gained</b> from completing the Portfolio, both in terms of language skills (Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening, fluency, range of vocab., confidence) and in terms of transferrable skills (e. g. realistic goal-setting, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, time management, ...)?

**Table 3: Final feedback guidelines for markers**

Feedback from non-established tutors show that this document provided effective marking guidance.

To sum up, customising language provision in an effort to empower students to take charge of their learning has been more challenging than anticipated as it is perceived as a non-standard approach to the objectives of a language course, at odds with the traditional representations that students as well as tutors have of their respective roles. If "in the new paradigm, learning should be individualised, localised, and globalised with aims to create unlimited opportunities for students' life-long learning" (Freund 2005: 316), then surely a lot more work needs to be done to encourage all stakeholders (institutions, tutors/markers, students, etc.) to question the validity of the current framework which could be referred to as teacher-led instruction in a classroom setting. Giving students opportunities to tailor their learning to their individual needs unavoidably means shifting the representation that they have of their own role, where they "normally" are not expected to make their own choices as to what needs to be learnt and when. Simultaneously, language tutors step away from their role as knowledge providers to adopt a position of learning facilitator. This in turn demands a re-definition of course aims

and objectives, therefore modifying the tried and trusted marking criteria to take into account less easily identifiable criteria such as independent learning skills, which are indispensable if students are to become effective autonomous learners.

## **5 Evaluation of the Portfolio as a language learning tool**

Considering students' variety of backgrounds, level and type of motivation (cf. Dörnyei 2001) as well as their expected level of investment (course counting towards their degree or not), the learning opportunity represented by the Portfolio of Independent Study was exploited to a variety of degrees. Students who felt less engaged could still obtain a minimum pass by simply completing the tasks required and providing minimal evidence of reflection on the learning process. However, examples of good practice abound: many students arranged to meet target language-speaking students regularly on campus or online and/or recorded and transcribed dialogues they had with friends and family members, thus exploiting often too rare opportunities to develop their speaking skills in authentic settings. They also took advantage of new IT tools to create multi-media reports on trips to target countries or to use social networks online. They recognised and took advantage of scheduled trips abroad as learning opportunities and designed their own tasks based on a particular aspect of the visit that they wished to exploit. Occasionally, the course motivated them to organise a trip to Paris themselves. Closer to home, they visited cultural institutes or events in London, which sometimes led to regular subsequent visits to attend cultural events such as film viewings. Considering that typically only one quarter of the students actually took the course as part of their degree, this demonstrates not only that these students invested time and effort beyond the required level of commitment, but also that the course (and more specifically the opportunities offered by the Portfolio) succeeded in encouraging students to take a pro-active role in their learning.

This evidence is corroborated by student feedback gathered on multiple occasions, notably via the end of term university-wide evaluation procedure, where targeted questions regarding the Portfolio were added. Unfortunately, the data obtained was so inconsistent from one group to another that no specific trend emerged. (Although this could be an indication of the influence that individual tutors had on students' views on the Portfolio.) More useful were the staff-student committee meetings, where student representatives could express their views. Year on year, after multiple modifications following student feedback, students and tutors began to believe in the Portfolio concept. In March 2009, a detailed student survey specifically on the Portfolio was carried out, answered by the majority of current students. The main points outlined by the survey are that:

Overall the portfolio is a good tool for individual/independent learning and does ultimately increase language skills. It encourages the students to be more organised / focused and to experiment with the language in practical, real-life situations, as well as explore language learning resources available. It forces them to do more independent work. (RHI Portfolio Survey 2009)

Concerning the tasks, "very little criticism was expressed and students were overwhelmingly satisfied with them." The link between Needs Analysis and self-evaluation was clear to roughly two thirds of the respondents, "mostly because they could focus on what they wanted to accomplish, design an action plan and evaluate how successful they were at the end of the term." The great majority of students also found the feedback clear and constructive. Finally, concerning the role of the Portfolio, "The feedback is overwhelmingly positive and students are clear about the purpose of the Portfolio of Independent Study." (RHI Portfolio Survey 2009) On the negative side, older and more autonomous students felt that there was no need to be so explicit about their needs and motivation to learn a language. This is probably an indication that, in this instance, mass customization has reached a limit: one can only

customise a learning tool to the extent that its effectiveness can be assessed using the same criteria for all learners.

Established Foreign Language Tutors have been taking integral part in yearly revisions of the Portfolio design and completion procedures. (Considering the small size of the team, only impressionistic comments could be collected on the latest version.) Despite the many efforts to clarify and simplify the marking process, their main complaint remains its time-consuming nature (20 minutes per Portfolio). However, increased student motivation, confidence in speaking and awareness of opportunities to practice the language were mentioned, as well as improvements in transferrable and independent learning skills such as self-confidence, self-reliance, refined research skills and improved time management skills. Additionally, tutors felt that the Portfolio allowed students to connect the classroom with authentic cultural environments via increased contacts with native speakers (often becoming friendships), opportunities to watch films and to attend festivals, etc.

Tutors/markers' time and efforts have been consistently rewarded by enthusiastic comments received year after year from Visiting Examiners of all languages: "I am very impressed by the strong element of reflective practise of the courses, even at an early stage, and also by the encouragement to independence in the students learning experience. I would like to commend both. It is excellent practise." (French VE's comments, June 2003). More recently (2010), the Spanish VE found the "Portfolio and the way the assessment was organised, of a very high standard, well planned and assessed." The French VE's latest report also praises the effectiveness of the Portfolio, this time from the students' perspective: "I was particularly struck by the positive comments of students in the Needs Analysis and the Self-Evaluation Questionnaires of their Portfolios." All in all, after eight years of continuous monitoring of student, tutor and Visiting Examiners' feedback, the design, assessment and feedback procedures of the Portfolio of Independent Study have now reached a certain maturity.

Nevertheless, certain issues remain: despite all our efforts, quantifying the effectiveness of a highly individualised learning tool such as the Portfolio of Independent Study is a task that would need proper time, funding and research expertise to ensure reliability of results. Additionally, there is still a strong tendency towards conservatism regarding value placed on work done by students outside of class. Students and tutors agree that, considering the time and energy spent on the Portfolio, its mark should represent considerably more than 30 % of the final average mark for the course. Yet, an increase in this percentage could not be validated by the college. Additionally, college archiving regulations impose that all assessed work should be kept on premises for future reference. Therefore students are not allowed to retain a piece of work that they often are proud of and could showcase later on. Students certainly deserve a better recognition of their achievement.

## **6 Conclusion: a way forward.**

In order to participate fully and effectively in today's ever-changing world, in other words become life-long learners, students need to acquire transferrable and independent learning skills, and tailor their learning to their own needs. However, as HE institutions heavily rely on classroom teaching and standardised assessment procedures, customising learning represents a considerable challenge. By introducing the Portfolio of Independent Study, the Foreign Language section of Royal Holloway International is seeking to reconcile the issue: this learning tool is standardised for assessment and quality assurance purposes, yet students can customise it to fit their own language learning needs and objectives. Instead of mass-customising the product, the solution is therefore found in self-customisation, without heavily compromising the advantages of standardisation.

Obviously, some adjustments have proved necessary: marking criteria are indeed standardised and, after many years of implementation, refined to be as valid and reliable as possible. However, markers are still required to take into account students' individual choices, which makes the marking process time-consuming. Additionally, finding the correct balance between learner training and language task completion proved a challenge, as confident and autonomous students felt that they did not need such training, while some others did not feel that the responsibility for choosing appropriate tasks should rest on them rather than on the teacher. Streamlining the Needs Analysis and Self-evaluation questionnaires and offering a wider choice of tasks (while giving autonomous students the possibility to design their own) proved an effective answer to students' concerns. Concurrently, extensive guidance and training have increased tutors' understanding of this learning tool as well as their confidence in marking it.

From the beginning, students have been encouraged to make use of Information Technology and resources available online (via a VLE or the web). More recent developments in technology have widened students' choice, with podcasts and online social networks at their disposal, which they are generally eager to take advantage of. The next step would therefore logically be for the Portfolio to be based online, possibly in the form of students' blogs. This would not only allow students to use a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning but also expand the work-in-progress approach: tasks and homework can more easily be revised and feedback better targeted. However, the danger of fragmenting the learning and evaluation process might increase.

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