

E-portfolio Implementation Trial

TAFE NSW Sydney Institute

February 2010



Australian Government

**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

Acknowledgment

This report was produced by:

Stephan Ridgway – Research Manager, Learning and Innovation, TAFE NSW
Sydney Institute

Gail Watt, Hairdressing, Ultimo College, TAFE NSW Sydney Institute

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Australia.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2010.

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced without prior written permission. However, permission is given to trainers and teachers to make copies by photocopying or other duplicating processes for use within their own training organisation or in a workplace where the training is being conducted. This permission does not extend to the making of copies for use outside the immediate training environment for which they are made, nor the making of copies for hire or resale to third parties. Requests and inquiries concerning other reproduction and rights should be directed in the first instance to the Director, ICT Policy Section, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT, 2601.

Table of contents

Purpose	1
Organisational overview	1
Trial overview	1
Implementing the e-portfolio system.....	2
<i>Strategies to enable e-portfolio use</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Barriers to implementing e-portfolios.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Additional considerations.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Future directions</i>	<i>5</i>
Additional materials	5
<i>Learner feedback.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Resources.....</i>	<i>6</i>
For more information	6

Purpose

The purpose of the E-portfolios Implementation Trials¹, conducted by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's (Framework²) E-portfolios business activity³, was to identify the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of an e-portfolio system which supports learners move into, through or out of vocational education and training (VET) quickly and easily.

Organisational overview

TAFE NSW Sydney Institute (SIT) is one of the largest VET providers in Australia. SIT has over 70,000 students, and offers 800 VET courses and training programs each year, across seven SIT colleges, in the workplace, online and via distance learning.

SIT 2009-2012 strategic plan includes a commitment to embed personalised recognition services into all mainstream courses.

SIT aims to:

- increase customised programs and employment based delivery in enterprises
- embed new technologies and personalised approaches in training and assessment
- enable fast-track pathways to qualifications
- maximise opportunities for recognition through flexible delivery, employment based delivery and customised training recognition services.

Trial overview

SIT's E-portfolio Implementation Trial involved the Hairdressing program at Ultimo College of SIT. The trial tested how well the Mahara⁴ online e-portfolio system (Mahara) supported the existing skills recognition services and workplace assessment processes being offered to learners undertaking *Certificates III & IV in Hairdressing*.

SIT's hairdressing program delivers both on campus and work place based skills recognition processes to enhance flexible learning pathways. The program is supported with resources and professional development from SIT's Workforce Development Unit. SIT's E-portfolio Implementation Trial extended this by using a range of technologies and techniques to capture, edit and publish digital media to the Mahara e-portfolio system, which was then used as evidence in the skills recognition process.

¹ <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/content/e-portfolios-funding>

² The Framework is the national training system's e-learning strategy: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

³ The E-portfolios business activity supports the development of national e-portfolio standards to improve the portability of learner-collected evidence of learning: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios>

⁴ Mahara: <http://mahara.org/>

The project explored:

- using an e-portfolio as a tool to support and enhance the existing skills recognition and workplace assessment process with students
- uploading or embedding a range of digital media into the e-portfolio
- the use of point of view (POV) cameras⁵ and camcorders to record evidence.

Implementing the e-portfolio system

SIT used the Mahara program hosted by VETSA Teaching and Learning⁶, as it was a freely available install of Mahara to the VET sector. The positives and negatives of using Mahara were identified as follows:

Positives

- Staff and learners with good digital literacy skills found Mahara easy to use.
- TAFE NSW has a trial install of the Mahara software, so SIT can export its data from the VETSA Teaching and Learning install and import into TAFE NSW's install, if needed.
- Multimedia can be uploaded to Mahara.
- Learners can control who is able to view the content of their e-portfolio.
- Mahara integrates with the Moodle⁷ learning management system (LMS).
- Mahara has application beyond the VET sector (ie for the school and higher education sectors).
- Mahara is an open source (free) e-portfolio system, with support for open technical standards.
- Mahara contains good support for contemporary web 2.0 services, such as embedding video or aggregating information from other websites through RSS⁸.
- Mahara's social networking functionality worked to engage learners.

Negatives

- Work is needed to create templates in Mahara to map the training package/ recognition requirements.
- Learners with low digital literacy and little experience of web based services and social networking technologies found the system hard to comprehend and navigate.

⁵ Point of view technologies: <http://www.edupov.com/>

⁶ VET SA Teaching and Learning: <http://eportfolio.vetsa.net.au/>

⁷ Moodle: <http://moodle.org/>

⁸ RSS (is most commonly known as “really simple syndication”): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS>

- VETSA Teaching and Learning Mahara install is currently version 1.1, which has no easy way to export a learner's e-portfolio from one install of the software to another, or to another e-portfolio system. However, this functionality is available in the more recent version of Mahara (version 1.2).
- SIT found the file size limit set in the VETSA Teaching and Learning Mahara install was too small for uploading video files from POV cameras, as was the overall e-portfolio size limit for each user.
- Uploading learner video to YouTube caused privacy concerns among learners.
- For organisational auditing purposes, SIT had issues concerning authenticity and access to RPL (recognition of prior learning) evidence. For example, if a learner placed restrictions on who could view their e-portfolio, assessors were unable to access them for audit purposes, and needed to request a 'copy' of the learner's work.

Strategies to enable e-portfolio use

The SIT Workforce Development Unit ran hands-on workshops for SIT teachers on how to use Mahara and POV cameras. The resources from these workshops are available:

- Getting started with Mahara:
http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Eportfolios_Getting_started_with_Mahara
- Point of view cameras:
[http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Point_of_View_Cameras_\(POV\)](http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Point_of_View_Cameras_(POV))

To support the trial team's collaboration, SIT created a project wiki and used the social networking features of the e-portfolio.

Additional trial team support included:

- Constant IT back-up and support for teachers and learners.
- Weekly team meetings/contact to maintain motivation.
- Creation of easy to follow user/candidate and teacher/assessor guides, coordinating the organisational/AQTF⁹ requirements.
- Participating teachers attended a workshop conducted by NSW Training Services, *Validation in Action – Streamlining Recognition Practice*. This workshop provided teachers with current best AQTF practice on validating digital evidence for the skills recognition process.
- A team blog in the e-portfolio was used to track the progress of the project:
<http://eportfolio.vetsa.net.au/view/view.php?id=303>.

⁹ The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) outlines the standards for assuring national consistency of high-quality training and assessment in Australia's VET system:
<http://www.training.com.au/aqtf2007/>

Barriers to implementing e-portfolios

The following were barriers to the trial:

- SIT experienced significant problems with the size of the video files captured by learners being too large to upload to their e-portfolio.
- Most of the learners and teachers did not have the basic skills in producing good video footage and converting/compressing it to a format and size suitable for upload into their e-portfolio.
- Learners required knowledge of what an assessor needs to see to satisfy evidence requirements. Initially, some learners wanted to submit one-hour long videos, far in excess of what was uploadable into their e-portfolio or YouTube. Some sample videos and digital evidence guides were required.
- Younger learners (ie younger than 25 years of age) required considerable follow up and support to enter their information into their e-portfolio, although this was more about the recognition process in general rather than the use of an e-portfolio. Simply being able to submit online does not guarantee greater engagement with the recognition process.
- Older learners (ie 40 years and older) required considerable support in using Mahara and video cameras, as well as computer literacy support such as file management and how to use a web application. These learners required less support to organise themselves to gather evidence for the RPL process.
- There is a significant initial investment of time required to learn about the e-portfolio system, digital file formats and capturing techniques. This may be a disincentive for some practitioners; however, in the longer term this process may save time.
- There is considerable confusion among VET practitioners and assessors about digital evidence requirements under AQTF. For example, many practitioners and assessors still believe all evidence must be kept for audit requirements.
- The original proposal to test the Moodle and Mahara (Mahoodle¹⁰) single sign-on¹¹ as part of this trial did not eventuate. In part this was due to the fact that the SIT Hairdressing Moodle install was not ready for learner use, nor was it on the same server as the Mahara install, which was on the VET SA Teaching and Learning site.
- Skills Express, which SIT also intended to trial in conjunction with Mahara, was not released until late October 2009. However, SIT will be trial this system in 2010 in conjunction with Mahara.

Additional considerations

The self-registration process on the VET SA Teaching and Learning Mahara install allowed members of the trial team to create additional e-portfolio accounts when they could not remember their login details. This caused confusion amongst the team members when they were unable to find their previous work.

¹⁰ Mahoodle: <http://docs.moodle.org/en/Mahoodle>

¹¹ Single sign on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_sign-on

This issue will be addressed with the move to the Department of Education and Training New South Wales (DET NSW) Mahara install, which uses institution-based (DET NSW) authentication. However, using an organisational e-portfolio poses other issues in terms of learners not being able to access their e-portfolios when they are no longer students of TAFE NSW.

While being able to move between Moodle, Mahara, Adobe Connect, wikis and blogs with a single login (single sign-on) is great for usability and identity management, it does raise the issue of what happens to learners' digital identities once they are no longer enrolled at TAFE NSW. A DET NSW authenticated Mahara login will also make it harder for students to share their views with non-DET NSW account holders.

Future directions

SIT will continue to trial Mahara with the Hairdressing program and other targeted programs in 2010, but using the TAFE NSW install. Moodle v2.0 will be implemented in mid to late 2010 and SIT will offer integration with Mahara.

SIT, along with other TAFE NSW institutes, will be implementing the Equella¹² learning content management system (LCMS) and user content will be uploaded from across all SIT's e-learning systems, including Mahara. This will mean tighter integration and federated searching across systems; however, it will also pose new issues in terms of e-portfolio portability and privacy, as content will no longer be stored in the Mahara system.

In 2010, SIT will also continue to trial the live recording of workplace assessment activities using internet enabled student netbooks¹³, web cams and Adobe Connect¹⁴ web conferencing, with live synchronous chat with an assessor.

This will solve the problem of having to convert video before uploading it into Mahara. It will also provide greater assurance around the authenticity of the learner as well as providing a means for assessors to question candidates as they perform a particular task. The recording stored on the Adobe Connect server can be linked directly into Mahara.

SIT has been also trialling the Skills Book¹⁵ e-portfolio system, and will continue this testing in 2010. The new version of Skills Book has many e-portfolio features, so SIT will need to make an assessment regarding its suitability compared to Mahara.

In 2010, SIT's Ultimo Hairdressing program also plans to implement the use of the Competency Navigator Skills express.

Additional materials

Learner feedback

This short video details one learner's perspective on using an e-portfolio as part of the RPL process: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSTcqG-5mb0>

¹² Equella: <http://www.equella.com/>

¹³ Netbooks: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netbook>

¹⁴ Adobe Connect: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro/>

¹⁵ Skills Book: <http://www.skillsbook.com.au/>

The full transcript of the interview can be accessed on the project wiki:

<http://eportfolioproject09.sydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/Interviews>

A podcast of the trial team's presentation at the VET E-portfolios Showcase 2009¹⁶:

<http://talkingvte.blogspot.com/2009/11/ves09-hair-e-portfolio.html>

Resources

The following resources were used to enable the use of an e-portfolio system to support student mobility/learner transitions:

Project wiki: <http://eportfolioproject09.sydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/>

HairEBlog: <http://eportfolio.vetsa.net.au/view/view.php?id=303>

The Workforce Development Unit ran hands-on workshops for teachers on using Mahara and POV cameras. The resources from these workshops are available here:

Getting started with Mahara:

http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Eportfolios_Getting_started_with_Mahara

POV cameras:

[http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Point_of_View_Cameras_\(POV\)](http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/sydney/mylearning/index.php/Point_of_View_Cameras_(POV))

For more information

For more information on SIT's e-portfolio implementation trial:

Stephan Ridgway

Research Manager, Learning and Innovation

Workforce Development Unit, TAFE NSW Sydney Institute

Phone: (02) 9217 3911

Email: stephan.ridgway@tafensw.edu.au

Gail Watt

Hairdressing, Ultimo College

TAFE NSW Sydney Institute

Phone: (02) 9217 5133

E: gail.watt@det.nsw.edu.au

For more information on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework:

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au

¹⁶ The VET E-portfolios Showcase 2009 was held in Melbourne on 16 October 2009:
<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/content/e-portfolios-showcase>