

E-portfolio case study

GLEN URQUHART HIGH SCHOOL

Glen Urquhart High School is a small school but its ambitions are “enormous” - so its website proudly declares.

Having moved to its present building in August 2002, the school is continuing with its long and successful history of education in Drumnadrochit stretching back some 130 years.

It prides itself in high achievement both academically and in additional extra-curricular opportunities.

The school roll is currently just over 230, ranging from S1 to S6, supported by 25 teaching and 12 non-teaching staff.

Most pupils are from its Associated Primary Schools but there are a number of placing requests from other areas. Glen Urquhart's catchment area covers the West Loch Ness area - from Abriachan in the North to Invermoriston in the South and West as far as Cannich.

OVERVIEW

The forward-looking school's interest stemmed from an SQA workshop attended by one of its staff members.

The SQA Desk Space product initially impressed thanks to its design and interface and the school was struck e-portfolio application was similar in style to social network sites such as Bebo and Facebook and, as a result, pupils immediately liked it, felt comfortable using it.

When it was decided to introduce it to the Skills for Work Course: Construction Crafts in 2008, it also became apparent that the e-portfolio base for studies complemented one of the main aims of the Skills for Work courses, namely learning employability skills plus working with others.

This course was one of the first to explore SQA computer assisted assessments including check lists and tests.

RATIONALE

Introducing the e-portfolio was described by staff as “very straightforward” and pupils became familiar with it very quickly as a result. A total of eleven S3 and S4 pupils were the first to use Desk Space and all liked the way they could personalise their files by changing personal settings, colour schemes and layouts.

The effective combination of serious course work and an element of constructive play contributed to the successful introduction. Writing blogs was a real novelty while emailing friends and colleagues in the group, as well as their teacher, noticeably boosted their skill levels.

Desk Space helped them reflect on what they had learned in practical activities. Their notes were written using the e-portfolio tool, which they preferred, as this was previously done on a paper worksheet. Pupils favoured the new e-portfolio capability to quickly outline their preferences, what they liked and what they didn't.

The school pointed out that a practical level, e-portfolio made SQA final verifications straightforward, quick and cost effective, eliminating time and travel demands.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

The school reported very few practical issues or problems as the internet-based product was extremely user friendly. A reasonable introductory period was established for the pupils and this important element helped greatly to allow the e-portfolio work to be undertaken without difficulty.

BENEFITS – SHORT AND LONG TERM

In the short-term, the e-portfolio base introduced new skills for pupils – previously on the course they would write notes long hand but the e-portfolio allowed them to develop IT skills such as keyboard skills and improve their literacy.

Uploading images also helped pupils outline and explain the work they had completed at any given time.

In addition, they relished updating their personal files with their hobbies and the like, but this then developed into them compiling their CVs on e-portfolio.

Longer term, if the pupils move on to Further Education courses, their personally created CVs are available with their original log-ins still valid.

ADVICE FOR OTHER POTENTIAL CENTRES

The school believes that e-portfolio really suits pupils – they are focussed and interested in doing the course work well before engaging in the more “play-type” aspects of the programme.

Staff who are comfortable with IT are best suited to be involved with e-portfolio work but this school did not experience any difficulties in this matter.

COMMENTS

Andy Hay, technology teacher for four years at Glen Urquhart HS, is a big fan of e-portfolio.

“There are no negatives as far as I’m concerned. I am struggling to find anything other than positives.

“The pupils enjoy it, they stay focussed, interested, totally engaged – so what could be better from a teaching perspective?

“This is an excellent tool as it motivates pupils even those with low ability reading and writing skills. They are at ease with the tool.

“E-portfolio means pupils’ work can be signed off efficiently and effectively by the SQA. I would whole heartedly recommend it.”

Andy’s endorsement means that the school is starting up another couple of Skills for Work courses with e-portfolio at their core.

S4 pupils have also been enthusiastic in their responses to the application. They include the following:

“Its more fun to use than hand written”

“Easy to use and you can talk to other people in the class”

“I enjoy uploading photos of construction work and making blogs”

“Dead easy to pick up and I like being able to customise my account”