

E-portfolio case study

ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL, EDINBURGH

St George's School exists to promote educational excellence for girls.

Founded in 1888 to provide a full education for girls and to take the lead in the movement for women's education in Scotland, it remains committed to these aspirations.

The school works in partnership with parents to provide learning opportunities, excellent teaching and individual support for the personal, social and intellectual development of young women of independent mind, who will each be prepared according to individual talent, need and interest for university and college education, lifelong learning, adult life and work and to make her contribution to society.

St George's School works in partnership within Scottish education in a global context and is open to change and improvement in every aspect of its activities as a flexible and open learning centre.

OVERVIEW

The Skills for Work - Financial Services Intermediate 2 course was successfully piloted at St George's after it identified a personal financial awareness gap in its curriculum.

To make the course interesting and alive, the school sought to create hands on experiences at every opportunity plus an interactive approach to teaching and learning.

RATIONALE

Introducing e-portfolio was deemed a sensible and logical extension to the Skills for Work course, run for S5 and S6 pupils. The school found the e-portfolio application straightforward to implement and reports that it quickly became popular with students.

Teaching staff, too, welcomed this "valuable tool" that combined set tasks with the option for pupils to customise and personalise their own e-portfolios.

The school uses the Desk Space tool, which has been in use for over two years, to focus on specific units within the Skills for Work - Financial Services Intermediate 2 course:

* The personal finance awareness-training unit encourages students to research on line for information to find ways of borrowing and saving;

* The introduction to the financial sector unit covers issues such as legislation, financial institutions, the Stock Market and general financial rules and regulations at a time when this sector has never been more prominent in the news worldwide.

Clearly, the work and the Internet-based approaches appealed to students as staff confirmed the young women thrived using Desk Space, uploading spreadsheets, video files or images, when required.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

Few have been encountered by the school, which strongly supports IT projects for its pupils. Staff confirm it was easily introduced as it has a state-of-the-art network that the school manages, controls and fixes, when necessary.

BENEFITS – SHORT AND LONG TERM

All in all, St George's believes Desk Space is a stable, highly useful product, underpinned by easy-to-follow procedures. The school says that Desk Space is effective as it has a standard website access and it has been delighted to give demonstrations to other schools considering introducing the e-portfolio model to their curriculum.

For pupils, the e-portfolio application allows them not only to learn but also to personalise their web folios and customise their own space at any time. In addition, the work completed ties into future projects allowing the pupils' self evaluation to be continued and updated.

When work projects are set, pupils can see at a glance on their e-portfolios when it should be completed – and if they have any queries, they can email their teacher for clarification, explanation or comment.

Teachers like the e-portfolio application as it helps them keep track of a pupils' work - without bits of paper going missing.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CENTRES

St George's is in no doubt about the benefits of the e-portfolio application and recommends others try it, especially as it is free to introduce and implement on a number of Skills for Work courses. Teaching staff from other Scottish schools have made visits to St George's to see Desk Space in action.

The school suggests that staff with an IT interest can readily introduce Desk Space to help students to progress in a controlled, step-by-step manner via this easy-to-use programme.

COMMENTS

Sandra Stenhouse, Head of Business and Enterprise, is very pleased with what she describes as a “valuable product” and the way it helps pupils progress through the course and her interaction with them.

“Desk Space ticks all the right boxes, definitely. It offers checklists, the chance for pupils to customise their e-portfolios and a great way for pupils and teachers to communicate, not necessarily confined to classroom time.

“It’s an extremely helpful and effective evaluation tool that pupils clearly enjoy using. Sometimes I’m surprised by just how quickly they become familiar and creative with it as they personalise their web space.

“It is easy to introduce and to understand yet opens up so many possibilities via the Internet for appropriate research and other tools.”

S5 pupil: “Updating information and making sure projects are on time are really useful features. And making our own-e-portfolios personal, with our own touch, is fun.”

S6 pupil: “The course included personal finance and the financial sector so the e-portfolio application helped me research quickly lots of material. It was a step-by-step form of learning online and I found it all very interesting and am glad I got the chance to be involved.”