

Dumfries and Galloway College

Centre/Organisation	Dumfries and Galloway College
Programme(s)	Access to Childcare SCQF level 3 /4 Access to Life and Leisure Studies SCQF level 3 /4 Pre-apprenticeship Construction SCQF level ³ / ₄ Introduction to Hairdressing SCQF level 4 Introduction Certificate in Construction SCQF 4/5 Advanced Certificate in Business SCQF level 4/5 Intermediate Business Administration SCQF level 5 Higher Healthcare SCQF level 5/6 HNC Computing SCQF level 7 HNC Photography SCQF level 7 Core Skills and Employability Skills
Awarding Body(s)	SQA
Learner numbers	800
Contact details	Elizabeth McDonald, Quality Manager

Background

Dumfries and Galloway College is a large multisite FE college in south west Scotland. It operates a range of traditional FE programmes for both 16+ students and adults. This includes the SQA Core Skills. As with many schools and colleges in the UK, the college has been investigating ways to improve the integration of core skills in the vocational framework and to extend them to include employability skills and to raise learner achievement. In autumn 2008, the college expects to move into new premises which will be part of Scotland's first super-campus accommodating not only the college but also the University of Glasgow, Paisley and Bell College.

In 2005 the college joined the ISLE Project (<http://isle.paisley.ac.uk/default.aspx>), a Scottish FE/HE transformational project that was designed to support individualised learning and achievement through the use of e-portfolios. ISLE stands for Individualised Support for Learning through e-Portfolios. The project was funded under the Scottish Funding Council's e-Learning Transformation Programme to look at how a shared model of Personal Development Planning (PDP) supported by e-portfolios can benefit the learning process.

The college currently uses two e-portfolio systems — the first is a more traditional S/NVQ system that manages the assessment portfolios on a range of S/NVQ style programmes. However, when the college began investigating the system to use for the ISLE project, they decided that they needed a more

flexible product that they could develop internally and which also provided learners with an opportunity to customise their space within the portfolio. The portfolio was also to have a wider use than the formal assessment element. The college saw a number of benefits to be derived from the use of the system, including:

- ◆ encouraging learners to reflect on their capabilities
- ◆ recording their achievements and progress
- ◆ identifying strategies for progress and improvement
- ◆ developing self-reflection and to assist with goal setting
- ◆ encouraging learners to use their portfolio as a 'shop window' to advertise themselves, whilst being more aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ encouraging reflective learning
- ◆ keeping an up-to-date CV
- ◆ using a range of diagnostic testing tools
- ◆ integrating employability concepts into the e-portfolio experience
- ◆ developing employability skills and to integrate work completed in other areas of their course into their e-portfolio
- ◆ developing the e-portfolio to include photo evidence from practical workshops and to prepare the learner for annual Jobs Fair in construction so that e-portfolios could assist with the interview process with a key focus on the work covered regarding employability
- ◆ introducing learners to the idea of PDP
- ◆ integrating PDP into the curriculum
- ◆ aiding preparation for transition from HNC to work or further study
- ◆ gaining experience of building an e-portfolio

SQA, as the primary awarding body, has been closely involved in the project, particularly in those areas that relate to the use of the portfolio for accrediting formal qualification outcomes.

Progress to date

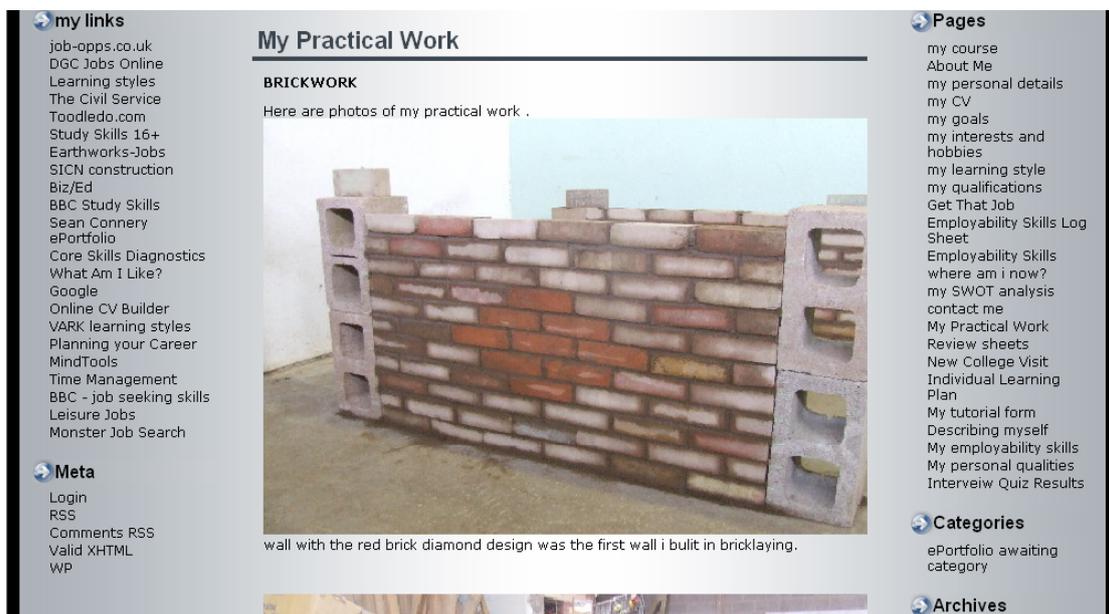
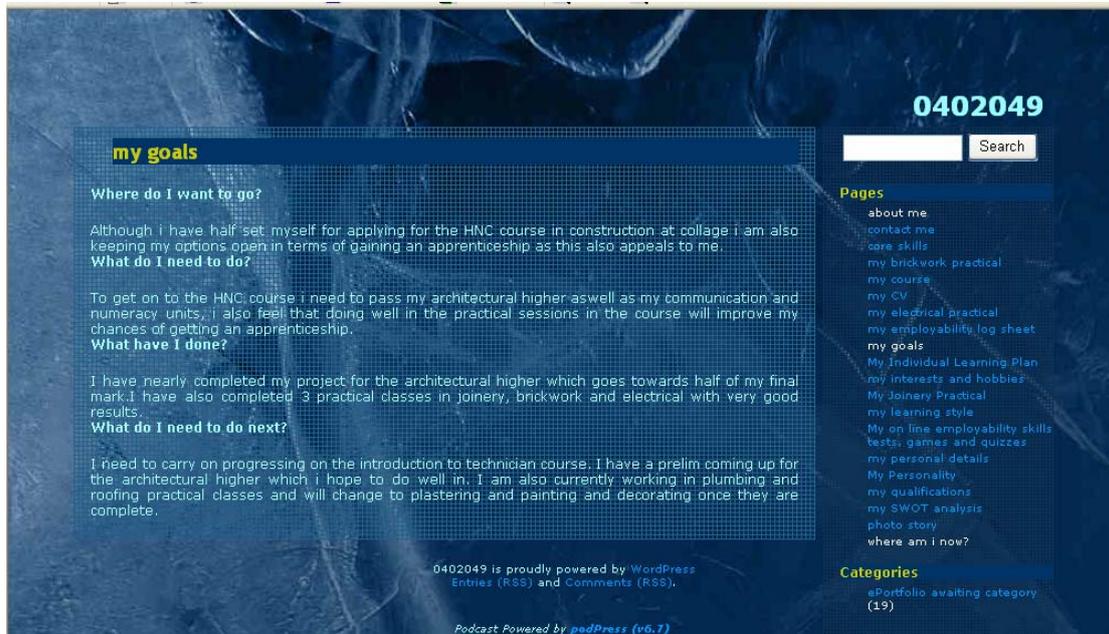
From 100 learners in 2005, 800 learners are now using the e-portfolio and the college expects this number to double over the next two years. The portfolio is being used across a wide range of programmes but it is within the employability skills and core skills element of programmes that the portfolio is initially being used as a basis for formal accreditation.

The college recognised that the choice of system was important for a number of reasons:

- ◆ ease of use for staff and learners
- ◆ flexibility of structure to accommodate a variety of programmes
- ◆ accessible internally and externally
- ◆ capable of providing secure areas to collect and store formal evidence
- ◆ design that was attractive to learners and akin to social networks
- ◆ ability to transfer data to other systems, eg Blackboard

- ◆ scalable as numbers increased
- ◆ able to accept a variety of media — text, audio, video, photographic

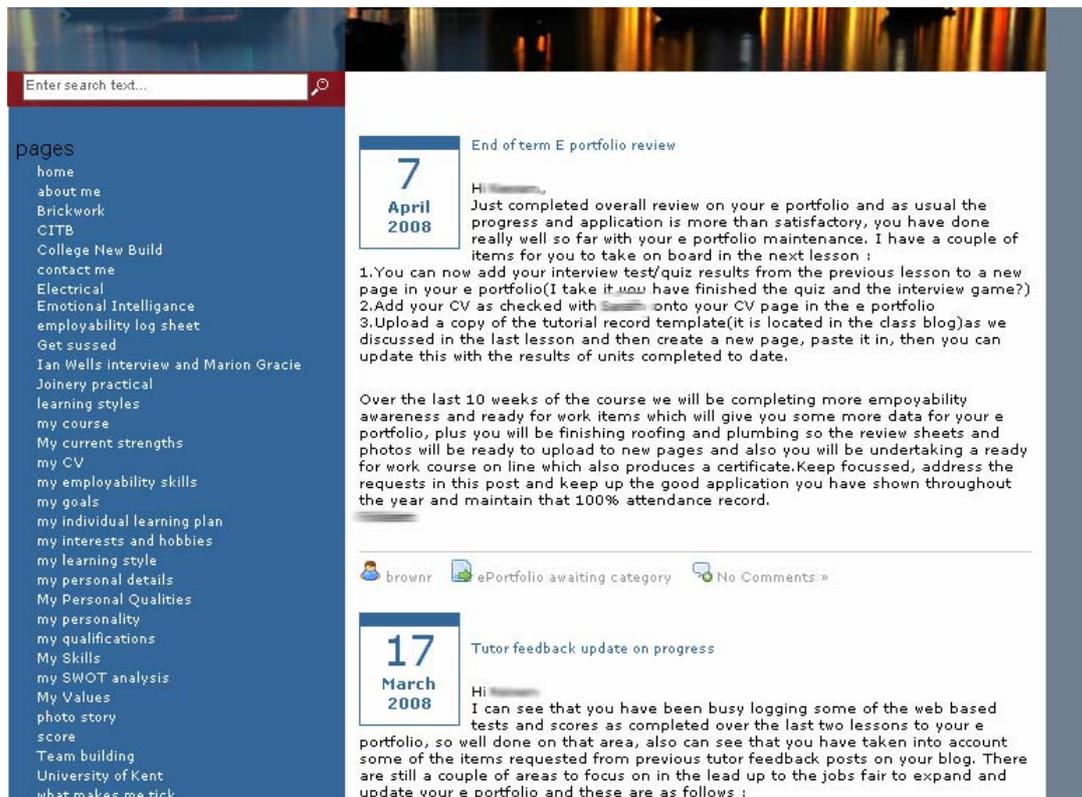
The system chosen was open source. Learners can ‘skin’ their space to their own design as a way of personalising their space and taking ownership of the portfolio, as these examples show:



The portfolio also acts as a ‘mini’ MLE but at a more personal level and these examples demonstrate the ‘personalised’ nature of the system, the range of uses to which both learners and staff can put it and an example of collecting evidence.

The system also enables staff to track progress and communicate with learners. This has proved to be particularly difficult in a multi-site college with some sites 40 miles away from each other. Communication is no longer limited to times when staff see learners, it can be a constant flow of

information and updating and, being within the system, is self contained rather than, for example, the use of e mail.



This screen illustrates the learner's view of their progress page with all the tutors comments displayed in one area.

The issues

As with all portfolio developments, the biggest concern for staff is the acceptance (or otherwise) of evidence by the awarding body and their External Moderators/Verifiers. The college is working closely with SQA, who has encouraged the development and promoted the project to others as an example of good practice. The SQA Verifier is now working with the Core Skills team to ensure that evidence to meet the needs of the qualification. Such co-operation is essential for any organisation considering the introduction of an e-portfolio system.

The second issue raised stems from problem faced by many colleges and post school providers of not receiving sufficient information from schools to enable tutors to make judgement about progress and achievement, particularly in relation to key and essential skills (core skills in Scotland). The college has been particularly concerned that engagement and achievement amongst some learners, particularly those a lower levels, has often been poor partly because young people have been unhappy at the perception that they have been repeating skills achieved elsewhere. To counter this, the college has begun hosting the e-portfolio systems on behalf of a number of local schools. The aim is to improve the transfer from school to college for both staff and learners.

Next steps

The college now wants to embed further the core skills components with its vocational programmes so that the portfolio can be used as a seamless repository for all examples of evidence collected towards accreditation whether that evidence is generated within a core schools session or a vocational session or, indeed, was already there from work undertaken in school.

This will involve further staff development, working closely with SQA Verifiers and, as more learners use the system, an expansion of the system capabilities. At that point, the college expects all internal assessment and some of the external verification to be taking place online.