

Transcript of podcast interview with Fiona Mulholland about e-portfolios at Carlisle College

KH: Okay so I'm here at Carlisle College on a fairly sunny Thursday morning and it's the calm before the storm because it's a week before the students come back. Is it a week?

FM: Yes, well about a week and a half.

KH: And I'm here with Fiona Mulholland so Fiona would you like to introduce yourself?

FM: Yes, I am the learning resources and technologies coordinator at Carlisle College and one of my roles has been to introduce the e-portfolio into Carlisle College and also the e-assessment tools. I've had to purchase the e-assessment tools to use with the e-portfolios. Does that make sense?

KH: Yes it does. So what e-portfolio systems have you gone with?

FM: We decided to go with paperfree. There were 2 or 3 different e-portfolios that we looked at and lots of people came into the college giving demonstrations. I had a group of staff looking at the demos and between us we decided we liked the Paperfree e-portfolio. One of the reasons we liked this one was the support we felt we would get, and got. I know I can call or email Richard or John any time day or night and they'll respond within the hour and that to me is worth it. So we started off with 7 candidates in May 2008 and by September 2008 we hoped to have 100 candidates for the 2008/9 academic year and we actually had 190. This academic year the whole of the hair and beauty dept have decided they will use the e-portfolio and I think we'll have at least 300 candidates just from that curriculum area, but we've also got students from motor vehicle, wood occupations, business admin, plumbing, electricals, site supervision and all the train to gain students are using the e-portfolio.

KH: So what's the point of an e-portfolio, what were they using before and what are the advantages?

FM: Before the e-portfolio everything was paper based and we were very reliant on the students to bring the portfolio to every lesson which they often did forget to do, also with e-portfolio students can find evidence and upload the evidence and it enables the assessor to assess at any time of day. They don't have to wait until they see the student if the evidence is uploaded it can be assessed immediately and we've found that with level 1 beauty students last year they finished their course 8 weeks ahead of schedule because they used this e-portfolio. The level 1 beauty lecturers had never seen anything like it; they actually finished 8 weeks ahead of schedule.

KH: It was interesting to you earlier about the different technologies you had used with the e-portfolios.

FM: We use a lot of the small video cameras, there's a lot on the market, we tend to use the cheaper ones because they're droppable and if you're going to take them into a construction site, you want to know the students aren't going to break them and worry about them, so we use a lot of video evidence. We use small scanners because it's quite a big transition from truly paper based to truly e-portfolio so we still scan a lot of the paperwork but we've bought some smashing portable scanners which assessors can take with them onto the workplace. We've bought net books with

internet access, so that while the assessors are in the work place they can access the e-portfolio with the student, attach the scanner and upload onto the e-portfolio.

We use digital voice recorders and these have been really good with foreign students who tend to be able to speak the language very well but when it comes to writing it down they tend to struggle a little bit and they've found it quicker just to record using a voice recorder. So we've got lots of professional discussions, we've bought head cams, they're a bit of fun but ideal for motor vehicle so when the students got his head under the bonnet of a car we can actually see what he's doing and that can be uploaded to an e-portfolio. All of these devices have got audio attached to them so, not only do take video file but we can speak at the same time and we've found that really important. We've bought digipads, which can be taken into the workplace. We can fill-in a form and upload it directly to the pc, we've bought a z pen which is the next best thing to a digipads I think. I think we'll buy some more Z-Pens, you can write something down and upload that text directly to the e-portfolio. So what it's doing, it's actually speeding things up and actually reducing the paper work.

KH: Have you found that assessors have been okay to accept the evidence in this range of formats?

FM Yes, they love it. It's change and change isn't easy and at first it was difficult but they've grown to like it and I think they've come to realise that a 15 second piece of video footage, can take 15 seconds to shoot, and they get so much evidence from that, whereas before the students would spend hours writing all sorts of things out and assessors would spend hours writing things up on observation logs, where as they find the video footage is so much easier.

KM: One thing you have mentioned to me in the past is Bluetooth dongles, what are they and how have they been used.

FM: We have small video cameras, which we suggest to the students that they use however, nearly all of our students have mobile phones and they love using the mobile phones, but our problem when a student comes in with evidence on a mobile phone, is getting the evidence from the mobile phone onto their e-portfolio, because they never come in with the leads. What we've done is installed Bluetooth on some of the computers in our learning resource centre. We've also bought Bluetooth dongles which we've given to various members of staff for use in their staff room or classrooms, so if students have gained evidence on their mobile phone we can Bluetooth it to a PC and upload it immediately.

KH: Of course they have their phones with them pretty much all the time they can always get their phone out and video or take photos.

Is there any equipment that you've trialled that hasn't been as successful as others or has it all worked well?

FM: It's all worked pretty well. I think we bought too many digipads. The digipads are great but I think we've bought too many. They haven't been used as well as I'd thought they'd be used and that's about the only piece of kit that hasn't been used.

KH: So have you got any ideas on how this project is going to develop in the future?

FM: No, it's a case of watch this space, at the moment we use the e-portfolio with nearly all our NVQ courses, full or part time. I understand we should be able to use e-portfolio with BTEC courses so we are going to trial that. This year we're looking at key skills and we've put key skills onto e-portfolio; communication and ICT, even though they're going to change to functional skills next year. We thought we'd try the key skills out because it's such an easy way to gain evidence. We've found that our students don't tend to bring their portfolios into key skills lessons so it's really difficult to get the evidence from the workplace but with the e-portfolio they can do this. We are trying key skills this year with a view of moving onto functional skills next year

KH: It sounds like exciting times so thanks for speaking to us today Fiona.

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