

Mahara

Background

Mahara (<http://mahara.org>) is an open source e-portfolio system with a flexible display framework. Mahara is a Te Reo Māori word that means 'think' or 'thought'. The system is a user-centred environment with a permissions framework that allows different views of an e-portfolio to be easily managed. Features of Mahara include a weblog, a Curriculum-Vitae (CV) (or resume) builder and a social networking system enabling users to connect and create online learning communities.

Mahara grew out of a project, established in 2006 by the New Zealand higher education community and funded by New Zealand's Tertiary Education Commission's e-learning Collaborative Development Fund (eCDF). Further development was made possible by further support from the Ministry of Education and Mellon Foundation funds; awarded as the result of founding partner Open Polytechnic's winning of 2007 Mellon Award for Technology Collaboration.

Since July 2007, Richard Wyles from the Flexible Learning Network has guided the development of Mahara with open source software specialists - Catalyst IT as the maintainers of the core code.

Mahara Users

There is a growing international community of Mahara users. The Mahara Community is made up of 3000 members worldwide and 17 partners <http://mahara.org/partners> including 6 in the UK and Ireland and others covering New Zealand, Australia, Bolivia, Germany, Hong Kong, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland and the USA.

UK users include:

Solent University (<http://mahara.org/view/view.php?t=baDLMt0dq2rTXXskumP2>). Solent chose Mahara as it integrates with the Moodle VLE that is already established at the University and it is also capable of creating various templates for staff and students as required by the University. The integration of Moodle and Mahara has become known as 'Mahoodle'.

Stow College in Glasgow is another example of the integration of Moodle with Mahara. David McDade – Section Leader, Computer Networking at Stow College has integrated the complementary open source learning systems to provide a single sign on process, minimising barriers for learners and reducing administrative overheads. In a podcast recorded for JISC RSC Scotland South and West David talks about how the e-portfolio element is not mandatory at the College and is being piloted in some areas. Special guidance sessions on the use of Mahara have been offered to the students who will be encouraged to build up CVs and reflective outputs. He reports that students are starting to see the benefits of using the e-portfolio and are enjoying using it. A podcast and related article on Stow College's experience is available on the Videos and Soundbites section of the e-Portfolios resource <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/e-portfolios/media/index.html>.

The **University of Glasgow** offers Mahara to students alongside Moodle. It also provides Mahara Guides to users that have been produced by students at the Science Faculties. Further information is available at: <http://www.cvso.co.uk/services/employabilityandpdp/pdpfor/students/mahara/>

Further afield the e-portfolio initiative in the Faculty of Education, **The University of Auckland** reports that students found Mahara easy to use <http://sites.google.com/a/auckland.ac.nz/e-portfolio/Home>

Examples of the use of Mahara by students at the **University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign** (<http://illinois.edu/>) are available on the University's website at <http://ctefile.ed.uiuc.edu/mahara/view/view.php?id=327>.

Mahara Development

As an open source tool Mahara is dependent on its user community and partners for developments. An example of a development funded from sources in the UK is:

- **JISC** funding enabled the addition of import/export functionality to the Mahara e-portfolio system, as part of the 1.2 release. The work was developed by the [University of London Computer Centre](#), **University of Glasgow** and [JISC CETIS](#).