

# Centre Guidance for E-Portfolios

For external use

The use of and speed of change of electronic technology as a support tool in the education and skills sector will continue to increase. This guidance provides Recognised Centres an overview of the areas to consider when developing, implementing or operating an e-portfolio system.

It is also important to have an understanding of the key terms within this area, for example.

- **e-learning-** in the business world, refers to the strategies that use a company network to deliver training courses to employees. In the education sector, e-learning is used to define a specific mode to deliver course content and activities or programme of study online;
- **e-assessment-** in its broadest sense, e-assessment is the use of information technology for any assessment-related activity. This definition embraces a wide range of student activity ranging from the use of a word processor to on-screen testing. Due to its obvious similarity to e-learning, the term e-assessment is becoming widely used as a generic term to describe the use of computers within the assessment process;
- **e-portfolio-** is a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. Some e-portfolio applications permit varying degrees of audience access, so the same portfolio might be used for multiple purposes. The use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) has led to an increased activity in the creation of e-portfolios for a variety of reasons.

The use of e-portfolios for assessment purposes has been developing incrementally for the past 8 - 10 years. In non HE settings many of the early developments originated from efforts to use technology to improve and streamline portfolio creation in NVQs where there had been considerable debate over the potential bureaucracy involved in the creation, assessment and verification of portfolios for the award of NVQs.

A range of tools have evolved to fill the space and these can be by both learners and tutors as innovative ways to create e-portfolios. These include:

- e-portfolio modules within learning platforms such as Blackboard, Moodle etc.;
- Freely available wiki and blog technology;
- Provider developed solutions.

Unlike the NVQ e-portfolio systems, these are often less structured, will not include pre-loaded assessment data and will allow the user greater flexibility in the format and nature of the evidence that can be included. Furthermore, they will not necessarily include the features found in the NVQ models that allow appropriate, structured and secure access by the learner, the assessor, the internal verifier, approved internal verifier or the external verifier. Often these structures need to be created.

However, their value lies in the flexibility they give users to create portfolios that match the assessment requirements, allow reflective learning and be integrated with learning platforms.

The structure of most e-portfolios replicates the typical paper based portfolio but with added features that allow the user to store a range of material; text, video, audio, images etc. and which enable the material to be managed and accessed by assessors, internal and external verifiers and other authorised people. In simple terms, assessment e-portfolios are sophisticated document management systems.

As with most technology, there is significant innovation and this now includes, for example, systems that will work with mobile technology, the use of hand-held devices – PDAs, i-phones etc. Both staff and learners are finding innovative ways to use the technology and provide evidence.

The overarching principle remains that assessment evidence needs to meet the requirements of the qualification standards and to be reliable, sufficient and authentic.

In developing an e-portfolio system, Centres attention is drawn to the Ofqual and QCDA web sites which provide up to date information on the development, implementation and use of e portfolios.

It is good practice when developing and implementing an e-portfolio system that Centres use the Ofqual e-portfolio checklist from “E-assessment-Guide to effective practice”. The checklist provides a good template for on going self assessment.

### **Awarding organisation acceptance criteria**

The Ofqual guidelines for the use of e-portfolios suggest that awarding organisations, whilst not responsible for the procurement or monitoring of e-portfolio systems should, nevertheless, have a consistent approach for accepting e-portfolio systems and e-evidence and should base their acceptance on a set of criteria as to the way in which the Centre operates the system(s) they use.

*(see Regulatory Principles for e-assessment: April 2007)*

This will be undertaken during the centre monitoring process, using the principles of risk assessment. Centres wishing further information on this process, should contact their Laser Learning Awards Quality Reviewer.

### **Resources**

Unless the Centre is using an e-portfolio with their VLE, most e-portfolios systems are web based and therefore they do not normally require a Centre to install or maintain any locally based software. IT support resource is therefore limited. Centres using VLEs or other locally provided software will already be supporting the other uses of that software within their organisation. Assuming that the operation of their VLE is adequately supported, there will be no additional IT support needs arising from the use of an e-portfolio module with the VLE.

### **Access to IT**

Centres should be able to demonstrate that they can provide adequate access to IT facilities for the learner to be able to access and maintain their portfolio and for assessors and internal verifiers to manage assessment and verification. Where learners are part-time or work based, the Centre should be able to demonstrate that learners are able to access IT in other places e.g. at the workplace, at home or in other community facilities.

Access via broadband of any speed would usually be adequate although low broadband speeds may slow down the uploading of larger evidence files to portfolios.

Centres should also demonstrate that they have processes in place to ensure that all learners have appropriate IT skills as well as specific training in the use of the e-portfolio system.

### **Equality of access**

No learner should be disadvantaged by poor or limited access to IT facilities or by any barriers that they may have to their effective use of IT.

### **Contingency plan**

Centres should demonstrate that they have contingency plans in place if:

- IT systems become unavailable;
- Particular learners are unable to access IT.

### **Internal Verification**

As part of their role, internal verifiers should:

- Initially, monitor the use of e-portfolios to ensure that:
  - The evidence collected continues to meet the assessment needs of the programme.
  - The e-portfolio system does not disadvantage any learners.
  - The system maintains appropriate records and is providing an audit trail of activity.
- Work with assessors to develop the assessment process to take advantage of the facilities provided by the system e.g. where evidence can be collected using alternatives to narrative text.

### **Authenticity of learners work**

The issues associated with authenticity do not change significantly with the use of e-portfolios and Centres should undertake all the normal precautions as they would with any form of learner-centred and provided evidence.

In some cases, the use of e-portfolios may help avoid authenticity issues by providing opportunities to store evidence that can only have been provided by the learner themselves e.g video and audio descriptions where the learner is obviously providing the evidence.

E-portfolios can also help with identifying contributions to group work. Software exists and is being used by some providers that provides data to assessors that enables them to make judgements on who within a group has provided the most input, original thinking etc.

### **Staff development**

Successful implementation of e-portfolios depends on good quality training for a number of people involved in the process.

For the Centre, training in the use of the system should be provided by the system provider by the Centre's own IT support process. However, for tutors, assessors and internal verifiers, training should encompass not only the "mechanics" of using the system

but also the assessment possibilities and innovations that may be opened up by the use of e-portfolios. Centre staff should see the introduction of an e-portfolio system as an opportunity to improve the assessment process not just as a process for transferring what has previously been done on paper into an IT based solution.

The Centre should also have in place a training policy for learners. This should complement any general IT support made available to learners and include how to make best use of the system to develop a high quality portfolio of evidence that contains strong, reliable and appropriate assessment material that best meets the requirements of the qualification whilst making good use of the technology.

Laser Learning Awards staff that need to access systems will also need training in their use. Whilst the principles that support most e-portfolio systems are the same, there are, of course, differences of detail between them. Staff may, therefore, need to understand the “mechanics” of a number of systems. In general, training in the use of a particular system should be provided by the Centre wishing to deploy it. Whilst most access will be on the Centre’s premises, there will be occasions e.g. standardisation where Laser Learning Awards staff will need to access the system and learner evidence remotely and Quality Reviewers, for example, should have password access to systems for their Centres/qualifications.

### **Sources of information**

Due to the speed of change within the sector, the following are only provided as an indicative list.

- Ofqual website [www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk);
- QCDA website [www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk);
- E futures website [www.efutures.org](http://www.efutures.org);
- Regulatory Principles for e-assessment, QCA, 2007;
- e-assessment-Guide to effective practice, QCA, 2007.