EUFOLIO

EU ePortfolio Pilot Project 2013-2015

SUMMARY REPORT - IRELAND

Lifelong Learning Programme

What is EUfolio?

EUfolio - EU Classroom ePortfolios is a two-year project funded by the European Commission under the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme. The aim of the project is to design and test ePortfolio models which will inform and support the implementation of innovative learning environments using ICT across Europe.

A number of European countries including Ireland came together with a common interest in implementing electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) models as part of the research into ICT in education policy at national level. Other partner countries included Slovenia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Austria, Lithuania and Spain. Five of the countries (Ireland, Slovenia, Cyprus, Lithuania and Spain) piloted ePortfolios in classrooms using either the Mahara or Office 365 platform.

EUfolio ePortfolio Model

The ePortfolio model used in the pilot implementation was developed based on the work of Abrami & Barrett (2005). It defines three main student-centred functions of the ePortfolio in the second-level classroom: Student Repository, Student Workspace and Student Showcase.
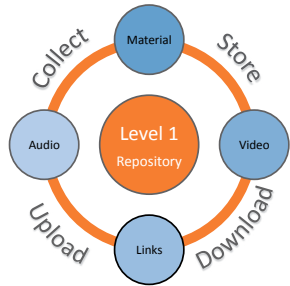
Level 1: Student Repository

Students use their ePortfolio space as a storage, where they create and collect artefacts that can be used to develop their ePortfolios. In addition, they can download exemplars of work to support the development of success criteria for the task or assignment they are working on. Due to the digital nature of the ePortfolio a range of file types such as text, video and audio can be accessed and stored.
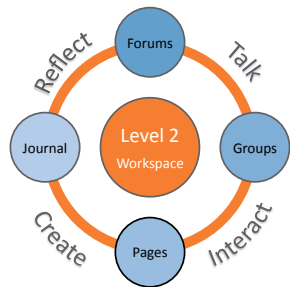

Level 2: Student Workspace

At Level 2, students start planning their goals, organising their learning experiences, collaborating with their peers, reflecting on their own learning process and constructively comment on the work of their peers. Within the student workspace, they can collect and upload artefacts; discuss the selection of their artefacts, work collaboratively or alone and organise their resources. This can lead to a cycle of self and peer reflection within the learning process. In this level, both the teacher and peers can provide formative feedback and teacher feedback can be provided in a timely manner.

Level 3: Student Showcase

The showcase ePortfolio demonstrates students' competences, achievements and products. When the ePortfolio process is ready to become a product, students can critically organise and review their learning experiences. They can edit and select their artefacts in consideration of their own reflections and their peers' contributions and teacher feedback in order to create their showcase or achievement ePortfolio. This product, the showcase ePortfolio, is what the teacher can evaluate as a summative assessment of learning.
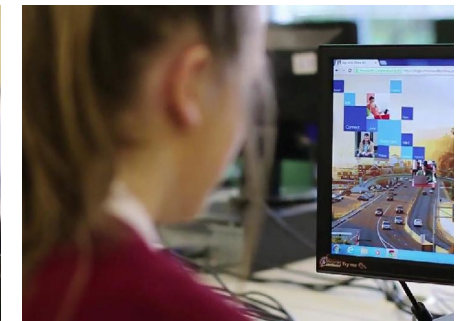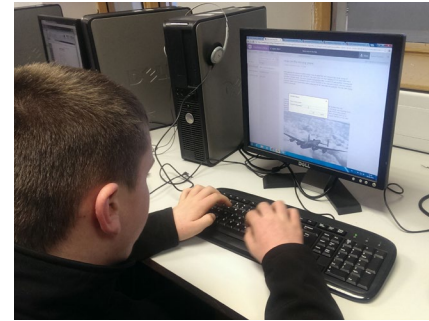
Defining ePortfolios

As part of the project, EUfolio partners worked collaboratively to develop an ePortfolio definition that reflected the purpose and functions of the ePortfolios used in the pilot implementation. This definition reflects the three levels of the EUfolio ePortfolio model:

> ePortfolios are student-owned dynamic digital workspaces wherein students can capture their learning and their ideas, access their collections of work, reflect on their learning, share it, set goals, seek feedback and showcase their learning and achievements.

EUfolio Pilot Implementation

In Ireland, twenty-six schools piloted ePortfolios with a focus on investigating the potential of ePortfolios to support teaching and learning in second-level classrooms. Teacher training focused on three areas: training in both technological skills and ePortfolio pedagogy; action research by the teachers throughout the pilot implementation and mentoring. Each school was assigned a mentor to support the teachers and students throughout the project. Data was collected from schools at the beginning, mid-point and end of the project using online surveys, student focus groups, teacher focus groups and interviews and this data was analysed both in an Irish context and in the context of the project as a whole.

Benefits of ePortfolio Implementation

Data collected and analysed throughout the pilot implementation in Ireland revealed three main benefits of integrating ePortfolios into classroom practice:

- digital storage capacity
- potential to support formative assessment
- fostering the development of 21st Century Skills.

"I think that the students were more engaged, especially by the multi-media aspect and that opened the door for weaker students to be able to look at higher order literature"
EUFolio Teacher

Digital Storage Capacity

Both students and teachers acknowledged the benefits of the digital storage capacity of the ePortfolio. For teachers, it was a good means of getting an overview of student progress. It was helpful to have all of the student's work in one place and supported the student in seeing their development in the class. It facilitated the teacher in planning and posting work, and starting discussions in advance. Pre-teaching was seen as a real benefit for many teachers in the pilot implementation as they could share materials in advance and spend the class contact time on a wider variety of activities to support learning. The repository function also assisted students in collecting exemplars which they could use to guide the development of their own work.

Students were motivated by the fact that the ePortfolio could store files in multi-media formats, such as videos, images and music. This flexibility in presentation allowed them to be more creative in showcasing their work. They could also use the ePortfolio to manage content for projects and had a facility to share and collaborate on research activities.

"It was handy to be able to store examples of work in the folders and to use these to see what the report should look like and then it was also good to have all the work stored in one place when the teacher was looking for it"
EUFolio Student

Formative Assessment

The ePortfolio implementation supported formative assessment in a number of ways including providing effective feedback, promoting student reflection and peer assessment.

Effective Feedback

ePortfolios offered teachers the opportunity to provide both written and recorded oral feedback to students. Timely feedback can be provided and the ePortfolio allowed the teacher and student to engage in conversations on ways to improve student learning. ePortfolios support discrete formative feedback interaction between teacher and student in ways that are not permitted in other settings. Teachers found that while providing digital feedback is initially time consuming, students benefit from feedback in this format and in many cases were more responsive to the digital feedback. Due to the multi-modal capacities of ePortfolios, students could also get feedback on oral work which was particularly useful when working with languages.

"The students paid much more attention to my feedback…. It was an excellent vehicle for providing feedback to the students in a timely and meaningful way"
EUfolio Teacher

Student Self-Assessment & Reflection

The ePortfolio allowed students to track their learning journey, supporting them in monitoring their own progression and identifying how to bridge the gaps in their learning. Using their ePortfolios, students took an active role in managing their own learning, reflected on their accomplishments and could identify areas for improvement. The use of the ePortfolio platform also resulted in students engaging more in self-assessment with piloting teachers observing a marked increase in student reflection. Consequently, teachers observed more student autonomy and self-direction.

"In class using the ePortfolio I was thinking more about what the teacher told us to do to improve than I would normally because I was getting feedback all through my work"
EUFolio Student

Peer Assessment

The file sharing properties of the ePortfolio provided a platform that facilitates the sharing of work with fellow students. A number of schools involved in the pilot implementation used the ePortfolio platform to support students in giving and receiving constructive feedback throughout the learning process and thereby promote social interaction and collaboration.

"Collaboration skills were definitely better. Some stronger students were helping others without being asked to"
EUfolio Teacher

Developing 21st Century Skills

Data gathered in the pilot implementation demonstrated a strong connection between the digital portfolio model and the development of 21st Century Skills which students require for the next phase of their learning in school and beyond.

In particular the ePortfolio allowed students to reflect on their learning, manage their information and thinking, be responsible and ethical in the online environment and displaying work using multiple modes of presentation. It supported students in being creative in their approach to work, learning with and through others and using digital technology to access, manage and share content.

The development of critical thinking skills was also identified as a strong theme alongside the encouragement of independent learning and the development of both discrete and explicit IT skills. Students reported being much more engaged with their work when using IT.

The implementation also promoted teacher collaboration as they developed learning scenarios to embed the ePortfolio in their teaching and shared ideas and good practice with colleagues.

Conclusions

- The ePortfolio provided an **excellent vehicle for formative assessmen**t, supporting student self-reflection and assessment, enabling peer assessment and enhancing effective teacher feedback.

- The **multi-media capacity** of ePortfolios offers opportunities in all subjects, including those with an oral component and provides **a safe and secure repository** for student work.

- ePortfolios support the development of **21st Century Skills** and enhance **IT competences.**

- Successful ePortfolio implementation is strongly dependent on the teachers' professional learning. It is essential for implementing teachers to have **pedagogical and technological support before** (training, workshops), **during** (coaching, mentoring, peer to peer) and **after** the implementation (communities of practice).

- **Technological infrastructure** in schools and lack of technical support also impacted on the momentum of the implementation for teachers.

- Having **a supportive school management team** was also a factor in successful implementations.

- Schools considering introducing ePortfolios should develop **an individualised plan** for their ePortfolio implementation.

Some Irish Pilot Implementation Findings:

80% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their students were more autonomous in their learning.

77% of teachers surveyed somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they would suggest the ePortfolio approach to colleagues.

88% agreed or strongly agreed that the project had a positive impact on their students.

94% of teachers surveyed somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ICT supports students' organisational skills.

83% agreed or strongly agreed that the ePortfolio facilitated student self-reflection.

For further information email **eufolio@education.gov.ie**
or follow **@eufolioirl** on twitter