

# **E-portfolios for RPL Assessment**

**Key findings on current engagement in the VET sector**

**March 2009**

**Final Report**



## Acknowledgements

The researcher, Wendy Perry, would like to acknowledge the cooperation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) leaders and key stakeholders from across the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector in responding to interview requests and surveys.

The researcher would also like to express thanks for the encouragement and support from key representatives from the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, particularly Allison Miller, E-portfolio Business Manager, and Owen O'Neill, E-standards for Training Business Manager.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Australia.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2009. Licenced under AEShareNet Share and Return licence.

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced without prior written permission. However, permission is given to trainers and teachers to make copies by photocopying or other duplicating processes for use within their own training organisation or in a workplace where the training is being conducted. This permission does not extend to the making of copies for use outside the immediate training environment for which they are made, nor the making of copies for hire or resale to third parties. Requests and inquiries concerning other reproduction and rights should be directed in the first instance to the Director, ICT Policy Section, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT, 2601.

# Table of contents

<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Scope and outcomes.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Setting the scene – Principles of good RPL practice .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>E-portfolio use in RPL .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Ways an e-portfolio supports the RPL process .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Capturing, accessing and verifying learner evidence to support the RPL process.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Key findings and recommendations.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Examples of e-portfolio use to support RPL .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Example 1: Charles Darwin University and Desart .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Example 2: Lifeline Tasmania .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Example 3: Swinburne University of Technology .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Trialing methods of using e-portfolios to support the RPL process .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Trial 1: Adult Learning Australia .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Trial 2: Brisbane North Institute of TAFE .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>For more information .....</b>	<b>28</b>

## Executive summary

Recognition of prior learning (RPL), or skills recognition, provides an assessment or snapshot of an individual's skills and competencies at a point in time. The term 'skills recognition' is used in this report by the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework), as an RPL client friendly term covering recognition of prior learning, recognition of current competency, recognition of informal learning and credit transfer.

A good practice RPL model includes facilitated self-assessment, links to units of competency and qualifications, evidence validation (not gathering and collection), use of a variety of evidence forms that corroborate the individual's competence and a conversational approach to assessing.

Although current engagement with e-portfolios in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, and in particular, for RPL, is limited, this report demonstrates how e-portfolios are supporting all components of good RPL practice through effective evidence capture and validation; by establishing linkages to existing forms of evidence, and by complimenting the conversational style of good RPL process through regular asynchronous dialogue.

The use of an e-portfolio benefits all RPL candidates, and in particular individuals who are geographically isolated or live in different time zones from their assessors, by:

- utilising templates to structure the presentation of RPL evidence, and tags to organise and find artefacts, which helps streamline the assessment process
- reducing the need for paper based, hard copy evidence and limiting excessive evidence collection
- developing and strengthening information and communication technology (ICT) or digital literacy skills.

Successful uptake by individuals to utilise the e-portfolio during the RPL process occurs when the e-portfolio is utilised beyond the RPL process, when the individual is adequately supported to use the e-portfolio system, and where the individual has basic ICT or digital literacy skills.

Other considerations for effective e-portfolio usage relate to the individual RPL candidate:

- being in control of their e-portfolio, by deciding who has access
- being able to link to existing evidence as much as possible and knowing that their information will be secure
- having ongoing access to their e-portfolio after their engagement with a registered training organisation (RTO), and whether there will be any ongoing costs to the individual.

For RPL candidates to utilise their e-portfolios beyond the RPL process, the on-going benefits need to be made clear, including the value add of social networking functionality and their ability to use it for job applications, professional and career development, and re-accreditation/licensing requirements.

In the context of the RPL assessment process, the e-portfolio is able to streamline evidence identification and validation, and enable assessors to effectively make judgments about the authenticity of evidence when it is verified through existing legitimised sources, such as Student Management Systems (SMS) or Learning Management Systems (LMS). Improved means of capturing and managing evidence in the RPL process, through the audio recording of interviews, could better address AQTF 2007 (Australian Qualifications Training Framework 2007) requirements.

Consideration of the understanding of what e-portfolios are was reflected in feedback with comments implying that 'e' means e-learning, which some VET practitioners haven't embraced, and that a 'portfolio' is a concept in current RPL practice that is being moved away from, as it conjures up the idea of large lever-arched folders and collections of evidence which is no longer considered good practice.

Nonetheless, many RTOs indicated that they are interested in exploring the use of e-portfolios to support the RPL process. However they needed to know more about e-portfolios, how the RTO could get started and what skills and structures were required to manage them. Some RTOs indicated that they plan to trial an e-portfolio in the near future to replace their existing heavy paper based processes.

Implementation considerations include:

- selection of a suitable e-portfolio system
- providing appropriate professional development for staff and assessors
- understanding the level of ICT skills required of candidates and assessors
- ensuring adequacies in internet access, server storage capability, security of data, privacy issues and meeting AQTF 2007 requirements.

## ***Summary of recommendations***

**Recommendation 1:** The Framework should seek closer collaboration with the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) RPL initiative to ensure the benefits of e-portfolios for RPL are widely communicated and supported in the VET sector.

**Recommendation 2:** Examples of the use of e-portfolios to support 'live' evidence generation in the RPL process which involves a variety of RTOs, RPL candidates and industry contexts should be trialled, documented and shared.

**Recommendation 3:** The potential of an assessor's or 'group' e-portfolio which integrates RPL, evidence validation and results recording should be investigated.

**Recommendation 4:** Further trials should be undertaken to identify the factors that contribute to the successful implementation and use of an e-portfolio in the RPL process, particularly in relation to supporting national COAG initiatives such as skills shortage areas and fast tracking apprenticeships etc.

**Recommendation 5:** Support should be provided for VET practitioners through professional development links to national and jurisdictional initiatives to build capability across the VET sector in the use and application of e-portfolios in the RPL assessment process.

**Recommendation 6:** Support materials and a toolkit should be developed for assessors and RPL candidates on good practices in using, capturing, managing, presenting and validating evidence in e-portfolios.

*The key findings and recommendations can be found on page 13 of this report.*

## Purpose

The purpose of this study, by the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework), is to investigate the development and implementation of e-portfolio applications and systems which support recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes. This study will help inform the development of e-portfolio systems and the implementation and use of relevant standards and technologies in the national training system.

At present, RPL assessment processes are many and varied, and largely manual. There is a need for individuals to be able to identify and describe evidence for RPL claims in a meaningful, consistent way, which would enhance their chance for a successful RPL claim, as well as support the RPL assessment process.

E-portfolio tools similar to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relation's (DEEWR) Employability Skills e-portfolio<sup>1</sup> or the Europass<sup>2</sup> skills passport have been identified<sup>3</sup> as systems which could facilitate RPL claims.

Such services should assist learners in documenting their RPL claim and maximise their chances of making successful claims, as well as make the process more streamlined, and potentially usable beyond the RPL process.

## Scope and outcomes

This study investigates the relationship between e-portfolio systems and RPL practice as it occurs in the Australian VET system.

The key activities were to:

1. Determine how e-portfolio tools can support the RPL work flow.
2. Identify the requirements for storing, presenting and validating learner evidence for RPL.
3. Review and document the RPL Support System trial outcomes.

The outcomes of this report include:

- principles of good RPL practice
- e-portfolio use in RPL
- ways an e-portfolio supports the RPL process
- capturing, accessing and verifying learner evidence to support the RPL process
- key findings and recommendations
- examples of e-portfolio use to support RPL
- trialing methods of using e-portfolios to support the RPL process

---

<sup>1</sup> DEEWR (previously the Department of Education, Science and Training) provided funding to education.au to develop and trial a website for e-portfolios. The e-portfolio is a skills portfolio database and tool that will allow people to easily record their academic, vocational and employability skills to support job applications, career planning, and entry into further education and training. This tool is currently not publicly available (June 2008).

<sup>2</sup> [http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/preview.action?locale\\_id=1](http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/preview.action?locale_id=1)

<sup>3</sup> Curyer, Leeson, Mason, Williams, Developing e-portfolios for VET: Policy issues and interoperability, <http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/news-older-items.htm#a5>

The source material has been generated through examination of e-portfolio systems, through stakeholder consultation, desktop research and through reference to the other investigations conducted by the Framework's E-portfolio business activity<sup>4</sup>, which include:

1. The development of a national roadmap for implementing interoperable e-portfolio systems.
2. A study investigating access and authentication issues across and between organisations.
3. A study to identify the privacy and security requirements of learner information in relation to e-portfolios.

## Setting the scene – Principles of good RPL practice

The AQTF 2007 (Australian Qualifications Training Framework 2007) essential standards define RPL as:

*"An assessment process that assesses an individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification." (2007, p 49)*

Principles of good RPL practice relate to:

- the upfront identification of the motivation to gain RPL by the candidate, and where relevant, the employer
- the RPL assessor's ability to link an individual's existing skills, knowledge and experience to nationally accredited units of competency
- the RTO having a clear and client focussed RPL process
- the RPL candidate and/or their employer understanding the processes and costs involved
- managing the expectations of the candidate and the assessor by the RTO.

RPL candidates require:

- information about how their skills and experience fit against units of competency and qualifications
- information about what is involved in the RPL process, the level of work involved and the flexibility of the approach of the assessor
- an understanding of when and where the process will occur, as they are not necessarily initially interested in enrolling in a course or qualification
- having their experience acknowledged as part of the process

RPL assessors require:

- supportive systems, tools and processes, without excessive paperwork
- well advised candidates

---

<sup>4</sup> The E-portfolios business activity supports the development of national e-portfolio standards to improve the portability of learner-collected evidence of learning. This will support a learner's ability to move between training and other forms of education, learning and employment:

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios>

- flexibility in their approach and the ability to use their professional judgement, which is supported by colleagues and managers
- an RPL process which is embedded into the RTO's training and assessment business model
- the promotion and application of good RPL practice.

### The Skills Recognition (RPL) Good Practice Model

The *Skills Recognition (RPL) Good Practice Model* (Diagram 1) starts with a facilitated self-assessment competency conversation whereby a discussion between the candidate and the assessor based on the candidate's background, current job role (where applicable), current skills, knowledge and abilities, skills gained outside of their job role (volunteer work, community activities), potential types of evidence, and the identification of the RPL candidate's interest areas, takes place. This self-assessment and competency conversation draws out potential matches of the RPL candidate's skills to units of competency and qualifications, which maybe from multiple training packages.

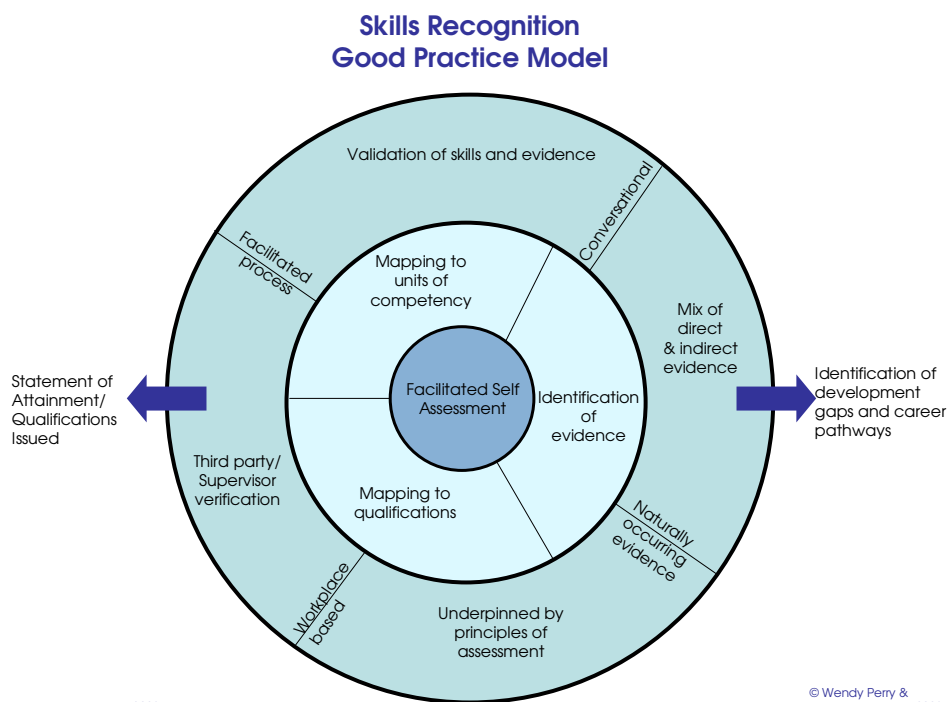
Mapping evidence to relevant competencies is primarily the task of the assessor and requires sound knowledge of the units of competency and the training package as well as confidence in the specific evidence requirements.

Evidence validation involves considering a mix of direct and indirect evidence, while meeting the principles of assessment, including sufficiency and authenticity, and utilising third party/peer or supervisor verification, where relevant.

Outcomes of RPL assessments can include demonstration of competence in individual units of competency or 'skills sets' from a single qualification, right up to a whole qualification or multiple qualifications, and/or units of competency across a multiple of training packages.

The following diagram illustrates a good practice approach to skills recognition<sup>5</sup>.

**Diagram 1: Skills Recognition (RPL) Good Practice Model**



<sup>5</sup> Perry (2008)

An e-portfolio can support this good practice model by capturing self-assessment results, skills profiles and reflections, the validation of a mix of direct and indirect evidence, third party reports and can aid communication between the candidate and the assessor.

The *AQTF 2007 essential standards* do not specifically refer to the use of e-portfolios but they do state that RPL should be encouraged and the process should be supportive of the learner. The good practice approach to skills recognition has been designed with the AQTF standards in mind, specifically where the AQTF standards call for a learner centred approach, customisation of learning and assessment services and sound record keeping. An e-portfolio supports all of these.

The COAG (Council of Australian Government) RPL initiative, facilitated through state and territory governments, has a goal of increasing the uptake of skills recognition and supporting good RPL practice. This provides an opportunity for the Framework to collaborate with the COAG projects on introducing and promoting good practice e-portfolio use for RPL.

## E-portfolio use in RPL

Current use of e-portfolios in the RPL process in the Australian VET sector is limited. There are few examples where e-portfolio systems are being used systematically to support the RPL process. Some activities identified include two projects supported through the Framework's 2008 E-learning Innovations<sup>6</sup> funding and Swinburne TAFE<sup>7</sup>. However, the consultation did identify that there were a considerable number of RTOs who are investigating the use of e-portfolio tools and are keen to use e-portfolios for learning and assessment, including supporting the RPL process.

Those practitioners who are utilising e-portfolios for RPL assessment are identified as having a keen interest in e-learning and/or skills recognition and could be best described as 'early adopters'.

To use e-portfolios in RPL both the assessor and the candidate needs to have basic information and communication technology (ICT) skills. This includes skills in accessing the internet or online tools, uploading files, searching for information, operating relevant software packages and sending emails or messaging. For the assessor, they need to have a good foundation of assessment practice, be client focused and open to new ideas. In terms of support and professional development required for VET practitioners there are three levels – general awareness, beginner use and advanced use.

### General awareness of e-portfolios in the RPL process

General awareness of e-portfolios across the VET sector needs to be built and most people are interested in knowing:

- What is an e-portfolio being used for in VET?
- What e-portfolio systems are available?
- What are the required skills by an RPL candidate and assessor to effectively use an e-portfolio in the RPL process?
- How is an e-portfolio different from a paper-based portfolio and process? How do you limit over-assessing?

---

<sup>6</sup> The Framework's E-learning Innovations business activity integrates and embeds e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, tailored to local priorities: <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/innovations>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tafe.swinburne.edu.au/>

- How interactive or static are e-portfolios?
- How secure are e-portfolios?
- How long will the RPL candidate have access to and utilise their e-portfolio beyond the RPL process?
- What are the costs involved in using an e-portfolio?
- What features in an e-portfolio support the RPL process?
- Are e-portfolio systems linked to national units of competency and training packages?
- What are the benefits in using an e-portfolio system in the RPL process?

### **Beginner use of e-portfolios in the RPL process**

Beginner use builds on the general awareness level and puts knowledge into practice. Here practitioners would work with individuals or a small group in building an e-portfolio for RPL, identifying and validating evidence. They may be supported by an expert, mentor or coach to help build their confidence in using e-portfolios in the RPL process.

Other considerations for professional development of VET practitioners include the requirements of the AQTF 2007 standards, in particular, the records management requirements of the RPL assessment and the use of e-portfolios.

### **Advanced use of e-portfolios in the RPL process**

Advanced use would include the every day use of e-portfolios in RPL as well as other training and assessment practice, and be used with large groups of learners, and a wide variety of employers and industries. This would also include the use of e-portfolios beyond the RPL process for such outcomes as performance management, training needs analysis, job applications, career development, describing team, organisational and consortia capability, and regional development.

### **What's required**

Through the consultations and discussions with trial participants it is clear that VET practitioners need support and professional development along the continuum of general awareness to beginner and advanced use. This is an opportunity for the Framework to collaborate with the COAG RPL projects in providing pragmatic, good practice, case study and action learning based professional development.

Another issue relates to the term e-portfolio. VET practitioners gave feedback that the language and terminology can be a barrier for people in understanding what an e-portfolio is and how it can support the RPL process. Comments from the consultation process reflected that practitioners are still working on their RPL practice and introducing another (as they see it) complexity is off-putting. The term e-portfolio seems to also imply to some practitioners the need to be highly tech savvy, and for those not confident in their ICT skills, they self-select not to use such systems. The issue of language, definitions and terms is linked to the need to raise the level of awareness of the opportunities to use and apply e-portfolios in VET.

## Ways an e-portfolio supports the RPL process

From the consultative process the following areas were identified as ways an e-portfolio can support the RPL process:

### Facilitated self-assessment

Self-assessment tools such as Skillsbook<sup>8</sup>, Skills Pro Generator<sup>9</sup>, TAFE NSW Prove It tool, Skills Express<sup>10</sup> and the Skills Recognition evaluation tool<sup>11</sup> can support the RPL candidate in identifying possible units of competency, skills and qualifications for which they may be able to receive skills recognition. This process generally results in an individual skills profile that can be used as a form of evidence and as a starting point for evidence validation with an assessor. Candidates can use the profile to begin and match evidence to relevant units of competency through an e-portfolio.

### Supporting communication

Principles of good RPL practice enable a facilitated discussion and conversational style of RPL assessment. An e-portfolio supports the self-assessment, evidence identification and validation sections of the RPL process, provided the RPL candidate is given ongoing support through face-to-face or telephone discussions, via email or online using communication tools. This may include embedded feedback on their e-portfolio pages or within evidence files, comment posting mechanisms within the e-portfolio system or through the use of other online virtual meeting technologies, eg instant messaging or virtual meeting spaces.

The use of journals and/or blogs by the RPL candidate to reflect on their own skills and/or the RPL process can provide the RPL assessor with a more insightful understanding of their client. Participation in group forums and postings can also be a form of evidence and/or a way to communicate and share information throughout the process.

### Presentation and validation of evidence

E-portfolios can streamline the RPL work flow through the online validation of digital evidence, which had been identified in the self assessment process, and thereby limiting the need for excessive evidence collection and gathering.

A number of e-portfolio systems contain resume wizards and templates which would assist the RPL candidate in organising their information in a way that makes sense to the candidate and the assessor. Web pages within an e-portfolio can be designed by the candidate and/or assessor to also facilitate that process.

When investigating the examples of e-portfolio use for this report it was identified that the motivation of the candidate to gain RPL influenced the way the e-portfolio systems were set up. For example, where a candidate specifically identified a qualification or units of competency that they required, guidance and structure was often provided by the RTO on how to present evidence and information. On the other hand, where the use of an e-portfolio was in the exploration stages and/or candidates were using them proactively to capture evidence throughout their career, the candidate generally determined the structure and format of their e-portfolio.

Where the candidate may already have an e-portfolio, pre-existing information (ie existing electronic evidence, samples of work, learning plans etc) about the candidate would

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.skillsbook.com.au/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://flexways.flexiblelearning.net.au/studies/ross.asp>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/ezone/year\\_2007/may\\_jun/skills\\_recognition.htm](http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/ezone/year_2007/may_jun/skills_recognition.htm)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.skillsrecognition.nsw.gov.au/>

already be available and potentially validated by a third party such as a teacher or employer providing a supporting statement or claim. Validation by third parties and/or the assessor can be captured and supported through the opportunity to comment on the applicant's evidence.

The potential ability for an e-portfolio to access information about a candidate already stored on third party databases and information systems, such as a SMS, would help the assessor determine whether any prior formal training would support current competency. This could include statements of results, copies of qualifications and assessments.

### **Assessor tools**

An e-portfolio tool is ideal for providing initial data generation, storing of information and samples of work in a variety of digital formats for candidates, capturing 'live' on the job performance and the adaptation of online training record books and assessment tools.

Developing templates for the presentation of this evidence to meet training package and/or licence requirements as well as adapting assessment tools for e-portfolio use, are ideal to assist the assessors to effectively manage the RPL process. While there should be flexibility in the layout of an e-portfolio, standard templates could be developed for use by an assessor, an RTO and for particular training packages.

When working with groups of candidates or employees, particularly on team based evidence sharing of files and information, group e-portfolios are a possibility where skills and capability can be described at an aggregated level. For example employees of a small to medium based enterprise could have individual and group e-portfolios to showcase their work, experience and client projects.

Although there weren't any examples of assessor or group e-portfolios during the consultation process, it is an area worthy of further exploration, as those practitioners currently using e-portfolio tools identified how this additional functionality would be useful during the RPL assessment. These additional functions included group communication and evidence tagging, matching of skills to units of competency, progress updates, and validation/verification mechanisms.

### **Managing the RPL process**

Regular access, communication and feedback via a candidate's e-portfolio by the RPL assessor provides ongoing support to aid the management of the RPL process.

An e-portfolio system can support the RPL process by providing an immediacy of material, therefore speeding up the process. Steps in a conversational approach would generally include an initial discussion with the candidate (either face-to-face, via the telephone or online), a self-assessment, and an identification of units of competency, qualification and national training packages that link to the candidate's skills, evidence identification and evidence validation.

Using an e-portfolio avoids a heavy paper based approach and expands the range and type of evidence that can be provided for an RPL claim. In a good practice RPL model, evidence is validated through verbal and/or written communication, and can be captured in an e-portfolio system, through audio recordings of conversations, document sharing, and online communication.

Rather than pulling all the evidence together and bringing it into the RTO assessor, e-portfolios allow naturally occurring evidence, existing files, documents and samples of work to be shared online and for ongoing feedback from the assessor to occur. This process should be two way and active, by validating existing evidence and providing encouragement to the candidate through the RPL process.

## Types of evidence

The following are the types of evidence which can be stored in or managed by an e-portfolio to support an individual's RPL claim:

- repository – for documents, all types of files, including multimedia such as digital photos, videos, audio
- job description, previous experience, resume
- reflections, work samples, work/learning plans, question and answers, notes
- samples of work such as pictures of projects completed, agendas of meetings/events, reports, plans, budgets, drawings, diagrams, presentations, tenders
- letters of support and third party feedback
- multimedia files demonstrating competency including videos, music, images, mp3 files, voice recordings, point of view recordings
- copies of or links to qualifications, academic records and certificates of participation/ attendance, assignments, records of attendance
- information on licences, industry association membership
- professional development activities, a training plan, performance records
- publicity and published articles
- details of volunteer or committee work and/or membership.

Where evidence is not already available electronically, other strategies could be explored, including capturing demonstrations, observations, conversations, and workplace tasks using voice recordings, photos and videos or through personal reflections, case studies, and challenge tests.

## Functions of e-portfolio systems which support the RPL process

The following table utilises the four primary process or activities of a VET e-portfolio system, and details how each process relates to RPL.

<b>Source/identify learner information</b>	<b>Manage the e-portfolio</b>	<b>Communicate and collaborate</b>	<b>Present and share the information</b>
Aggregate information from existing sources including SMS	Tag or describe the evidence, match to units of competency or qualifications	Journal and blogs allow for reflective thinking	Notify assessor when evidence has been uploaded for comment/sufficiency
Upload existing or 'live' evidence	Use of templates where relevant	Commenting by assessor, messaging, forum posts	Share evidence with other parties
Self-evaluation of skills/Self assessment tools	Assessor able to easily search for types of content and evidence	Validation or verification of evidence	Export information into other systems for a range of purposes

## **Considerations when using an e-portfolio in the RPL process**

It is important that the use of an e-portfolio is a choice of the candidate/learner, driven by them and that they are supported, mentored and guided in using the system. Both the RPL candidate and the assessor need to have confidence in using e-portfolios and have basic ICT skills.

Access to the internet and bandwidth can have an effect on the functionality of the e-portfolio system and the patience of the users. Value added benefits of using an e-portfolio such as social networking provides another reason to use an e-portfolio and this was found to be particularly important when consulting with younger candidates.

## **Capturing, accessing and verifying learner evidence to support the RPL process**

As mentioned previously, any form of electronic evidence can be stored in an e-portfolio system. However the following actions are required to support efficiencies and satisfactory outcomes for the RPL process:

### **Capturing learner evidence**

Examples of evidence which are being captured in an e-portfolio to support an RPL claim include:

- photos of completed construction projects such as a chair for apprentice carpenters
- video footage of on-the-job tasks including installing a hot water service for apprentice plumbers or cutting hair for apprentice hairdressers
- log book information from hours on the job in aircraft maintenance for post-trade mechanics
- examples of art work for Indigenous artists
- MP3 recordings of interviews with existing workers on their skills, and
- learner feedback from trainers and assessors.

To effectively capture evidence:

- The storage and presentation of evidence needs to be flexible with e-portfolio owners having control over how they present their e-portfolio.
- Access to devices which effectively capture information, such as mp3 recorders, mobile phones, digital/video cameras, and point of view devices, is required.
- Consideration is required to the e-portfolio's storage capacity and interoperability capability.
- Exemplars are required of the numerous ways evidence can be captured, such as using audio or video for recording the conversations between the candidate and the assessor, either in the workplace or during in the interviews. These conversations make up a large part of RPL evidence and can be captured and uploaded into an e-portfolio simply and easily in this way. This process would also satisfy AQTF 2007 record management requirements.

The following table identifies the components of the RPL workflow, types and ways that evidence can be stored in an e-portfolio system:

<b>RPL workflow</b>	<b>Types and ways evidence can be captured</b>
Facilitated self assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- audio recording using mp3 recorder</li> <li>- recording of online meeting</li> <li>- completion of online self assessment checklist</li> </ul>
Mapping to units of competency and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- audio recording using mp3 recorder</li> <li>- recording of online meeting</li> <li>- mapping of online self assessment to units of competency</li> <li>- aggregation of units of competency against qualifications providing a percentage match</li> </ul>
Identification of evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- audio recording using mp3 recorder</li> <li>- recording of online meeting</li> <li>- use of messaging and communication tools</li> <li>- uploading of evidence samples</li> <li>- self-assessment; photos; videos; all types of electronic files; samples of work; copies of qualifications and results; resume; job description; work based projects; references and letters; volunteer or committee work; assignments; reports; plans; drawings; log books; quotes; publicity; presentations.</li> </ul>
Evidence validation including third party is appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- audio recording using mp3 recorder</li> <li>- recording of online meeting</li> <li>- use of messaging and communication tools</li> <li>- verification of evidence from another source</li> <li>- workplace assessment</li> </ul>

## **Access**

Evidence stored in an e-portfolio system needs to be easily accessible, easy to use, familiar to the both the RPL candidate and assessor, and sorted into a searchable database.

The ability for the RPL candidate to have access to the e-portfolio beyond the RPL process is very important. This could either occur through continued access to the initial e-portfolio system or through the ability to export the contents of the e-portfolio to another e-portfolio system (portability). Any on-going costs to the individual need to be identified.

As evidence contained in the e-portfolios can be private and confidential, the ability of the owner to determine who has access to their e-portfolios is essential. The ability to control levels and time-spans of access is also desirable. The question of who can have access, how and why remains in the control of the e-portfolio owner however for use in RPL, support materials and guidelines should be developed to assist both the candidate and the assessor to fully understand the privacy implications.

It was also seen to be important for the e-portfolio system to be web based so that the candidate and assessor can both access it at a time which was suitable to them, therefore the ability to have access to the internet needs to be taken into consideration.

Immediacy of feedback through an e-portfolio system means that the ability to have any notifications by the assessor or candidate sent to an email account, mobile phone, instant

messaging or 'live feed' – similar to the way web 2.0 tools such as Facebook track and map such notifications and interactions – helps the communication process.

E-portfolios support levels of candidate and assessor interaction and connectivism<sup>12</sup> that is not just focused on uploading or downloading content but allows interaction and social networking through live streaming, video/voice conferencing, notifications, and other interactive methods, when adequate bandwidth is available.

## Verification

The process of verifying evidence using an e-portfolio was generally not seen to be any different to verifying evidence in any other digital or paper based format. Assessors are able to use the e-portfolio to question and corroborate forms of evidence as well as do some independent checking to inform their decision about authenticity of evidence. Third party verification and challenge testing or authentication of qualifications and/or results would support the validation process, however, the ability to link to a LMS and/or to share information across RTOs would make the process of validating 'formal' evidence far more streamlined.

Many assessors suggested that evidence would be verified by an interview process, either face-to-face or via teleconference, phone calls, email or video conferencing, or through third party support documents/statements.

The ability to streamline the verification process of documents and evidence submitted online, would be a useful e-portfolio function, particularly for the verification of qualifications and results by linking or accessing third party databases and information systems such as SMSs and LMSs, or digitally signed or encrypted documents. However, 'current competency' would also need to be assessed.

## Key findings and recommendations

### *Understanding the benefits of e-portfolios for RPL*

Using e-portfolio systems for RPL provides a number of benefits to both the RPL candidate and the assessor.

Through a web based e-portfolio tool, the RPL candidate can confirm their skills and competence through a range of digital evidence such as audio, video, photographic files. The potential for better file management reduces the risk of losing important evidence and files. Workplace evidence can be easily captured, uploaded and identified in an e-portfolio on a dynamic and ongoing basis, creating an inventory of existing and current skills and abilities. The ability to tag or add key words to all digital objects enables quick and easy organisation and location of evidence and artefacts.

E-portfolios support the conversational and communicative approach to current RPL practice by the assessor progressively viewing and commenting on the evidence which supports the validation of the candidate's skills. Ongoing dialogue throughout the self-assessment, skills profiling and evidence validation stages is important and can be enabled through a variety of communication tools, including instant messaging, VOIP, virtual meeting spaces, telephone, email etc. An e-portfolio compliments a conversational style to RPL assessing by capturing collaborative forms of evidence through audio and video recordings, and helps move RPL practice from a heavily documented evidence-based approach to one where evidence is living, dynamic and easily accessible.

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm>

By linking to existing evidence and providing a central location for evidence storage, an e-portfolio can fast track the RPL process by allowing the assessor to view evidence and provide advice on its sufficiency, as it is generated.

In relation to evidence storage and electronic evidence, there is an opportunity to reduce paper waste, duplication and bulky records storage. The use of an e-portfolio demonstrates good practice in responsible use of resources, which fits in well with an increased focus and awareness of sustainability issues.

Where geographic distances or time differences prohibit face-to-face or real time communication and validation of evidence, e-portfolios are particularly useful in the RPL process, provided the RPL candidate receives appropriate support and mentoring.

Whilst using an e-portfolio system itself requires basic ICT skills, it is also a demonstration of ICT literacy and could be used as evidence to validate specific ICT units of competency as well as the Employability Skills facet 'Technology'<sup>13</sup>.

To foster greater understanding of the potential benefits of e-portfolios to the RPL process, there is an opportunity for collaboration between the Framework and the COAG RPL initiative, with potential links into national VET initiatives where e-learning and/or RPL is identified as a priority.

**Recommendation 1:** *The Framework should seek closer collaboration with the COAG RPL initiative to ensure the benefits of e-portfolios for RPL are widely communicated and supported*

### **Using different types of electronic evidence for RPL**

E-portfolios can be used to link to, store and maintain all types of electronic evidence far beyond the traditional paper and text based formats, through the use of photos, videos, online interactions (forums, meetings, emails, messaging), digital stories, podcasts, vodcasts, voice recordings, presentations, web pages, blogs, wikis, reflections, testimonies, samples of work, copies of qualifications or results, to create a living resume and skills profile. The ability to capture and load evidence using mobile devices such as mobile phones and point of view devices<sup>14</sup> allows for quick and easy development of the e-portfolio.

With continuing technological advancements in the capture of 'live' evidence through video streaming and mobile devices, naturally occurring evidence, often produced as a direct result of a candidate undertaking their workplace tasks, can be captured, uploaded and identified (tagged) within an e-portfolio to support the RPL process.

**Recommendation 2:** *Examples of the use of e-portfolios to support 'live' evidence generation in the RPL process involving a variety of RTOs, RPL candidates and industry contexts should be trialled, documented and shared.*

### **Structuring content and evidence in e-portfolios**

As e-portfolio systems are electronic and usually web-based, they offer flexibility in the way content can be organised, and can streamline the process of identifying and including relevant content and evidence through the use of pre-determined templates. It is normally accepted that the individual should have ownership and control over the structure of their e-portfolio and be encouraged to use their e-portfolio beyond the RPL

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/policy\\_issues\\_reviews/key\\_issues/es/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/es/)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.edupov.com/>

process. This supports the view that the overall structure of the e-portfolio should not be pre-determined or mandated.

Currently there are examples of assessors creating their own e-portfolio structure to enable linkages with individual candidates' e-portfolios, often set up as a group. Further investigation into the tools which assist assessors to manage content/communication as well as meet AQTF 2007 records management requirements during the RPL process should be undertaken.

**Recommendation 3:** *The potential of an assessor's or 'group' e-portfolio which integrates RPL, evidence validation and results recording should be investigated.*

### ***E-portfolio usage beyond the RPL process***

An e-portfolio provides many benefits beyond the RPL assessment, including a means of building upon the individual's skills profile, supporting any additional identified gap training and workplace performance management.

As e-portfolios can be customised to suit the purpose for which they are being used they can be used in a number of contexts, such as in applying for a job or a promotion; as a showcase of person's work; for occupational licensing, registration or compliance; for career planning; and as a way of recognising, rewarding and reclassifying employees. . In the current Australian economic context, we are seeing some jobs disappear and others emerge, as organisations go through structural changes. An e-portfolio can support transitioning workers reflect on the transferability of their existing skills to new and emerging job roles.

Group e-portfolios can also be used to enable communication, collaboration on shared tasks or project work as well as ongoing learning and development.

To support the use of e-portfolios beyond the RPL process, the interoperability requirements for e-portfolio services should be considered beyond 'e-portfolio to e-portfolio' communication to include interoperability with systems such as:

- student records systems
- LMSs
- content management systems
- authentication and authorisation services
- persistent identifier services.

The points identified above relate to the use of e-portfolios across the board but in particular provide a focus on the ways evidence in the RPL assessment process can be captured to support current competency, where evidence already exists in learning management, student records or other content and information management systems, but which requires authorisation to access.

Electronic records of evidence can be stored in multiple formats, from multiple sources, so being able to correctly identify the RPL applicants in a consistent way is very important. Work related to these areas is being undertaken by other areas of the E-portfolio business activity, such as the VET E-portfolio Roadmap, Learner Information Security and Trust Federations research activities.

**Recommendation 4:** *Further trials should be undertaken to identify the factors that contribute to the successful implementation and use of an e-portfolio in the RPL process, particularly in relation to supporting national COAG initiatives such as skills shortage areas and fast tracking apprenticeships etc.*

## ***Potential for e-portfolios to support the RPL process***

The potential application for e-portfolios to support the RPL process is only just beginning to be explored by the VET sector.

Where e-portfolios in the RPL process are working well, the RPL assessor must possess a high level of confidence in their own:

- ability as an RPL assessor
- ability to use and integrate technology, especially in the area of e-learning
- understanding and awareness of e-portfolios.

Additional success factors include:

- an holistic approach to RPL and the use of e-portfolios in the RTO's training and assessment practices
- an employer's understanding of the value of RPL and the use of an e-portfolio to improve their business outcomes.

To enable the wider adoption of e-portfolios in the RPL process support is required in:

- developing the underpinning skills required to use e-portfolios
- raising awareness of the use of e-portfolios through shared good practice
- providing opportunities to use e-portfolios in context through action based learning activities.

***Recommendation 5:*** *Support should be provided for VET practitioners through professional development links to national and jurisdictional VET workforce development initiatives to build capability across the VET Sector in the use and application of e-portfolios in the RPL assessment process.*

## ***Capturing, presenting and verifying evidence in e-portfolios***

More and more RPL candidates, assessors and RTOs are exploring the possible use of e-portfolios to identify, capture and verify evidence to support the skills recognition process. Expectations of how much evidence, how old the evidence can be, what evidence is relevant, and the type/form of evidence appropriate for RPL varies between assessors, organisations, industry sectors and candidates. Guidance on developing an e-portfolio for RPL or assessment purposes from a candidate's perspective as well as validating evidence from an assessor's perspective, which supports good practice and provides practical examples and advice, is required.

Feedback indicated that the following areas should be covered in a support document, providing guidance to organisations on the use of e-portfolios to support RPL:

- the kind and variety of evidence which is appropriate
- security of information
- authenticating documents and/or validating with issuing bodies, where possible
- simple and clear directions and step by step procedures on how to use the e-portfolio
- equity issues
- technical skill of student and assessors
- potential ICT barriers – ie bandwidth, internet access etc

- information about good practice RPL
- use of e-portfolios in the RPL process
- information about pitfalls, danger areas
- frequently asked questions
- information about managing and facilitating e-candidates.

**Recommendation 6:** *Support materials and a toolkit should be developed for assessors and RPL candidates on good practices in using, capturing, managing, presenting and validating evidence in e-portfolios.*

## Examples of e-portfolio use to support RPL

In considering current examples of e-portfolios for RPL, the researcher came across the use of e-portfolios for recognising skills in a number of different contexts including:

- recognising the business and administration skills of rural women by TAFE NSW Western Institute
- assessment in fabrication and welding (with a strong focus on photo and image evidence) at TAFE NSW Illawarra
- an RPL professional development tool being developed by DFEEST<sup>15</sup> in South Australia which will include information about how e-portfolios are supporting the RPL process.

The following pages detail specific examples of the ways RTOs are using an e-portfolio to support the RPL process. The RTOs are:

- Charles Darwin University and Desart
- Lifeline (Hobart)
- Swinburne TAFE.

## Example 1: Charles Darwin University and Desart

### ***Organisational overview***

Charles Darwin University<sup>16</sup> is working with Desart<sup>17</sup>, the Association of Central Australian Aboriginal Art and Craft Centres, in the use of e-portfolios for art workers.

Desart represents Art Centres which support the following objectives:

- authenticity of artworks with 100% returns to Aboriginal people and their organisations
- promotion of professional art practice and ethical dealings with artists.

The Art Centres that are members of Desart are Aboriginal owned and controlled. They provide much needed income and employment opportunities as well as being a focus for

---

<sup>15</sup> Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology:

<http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cdu.edu.au>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.desart.com.au/>

family connection, social and cultural activities and the means to celebrate Aboriginal identity.

Desart's strategic direction is to:

- increase resources to Central Australian Aboriginal artists and their Art Centres
- improve communication and information sharing and increase our advisory services across the Desart Art Centres
- strengthen advocacy for Aboriginal owned Art Centres and progress an Indigenous arts industry that is ethical, professional and productive
- ensure Desart remains an effective and sustainable enterprise.

## **Overview**

Desart's Strategic Plan identified an initiative to formalise the current skills of Arts administration workers across Central Australia. Sixty art workers are aiming to achieve the *Certificate III in Arts Administration* via an RPL process and appropriate gap training. Charles Darwin University worked together with Desart in a mentoring capacity and liaised with the e-portfolio provider to facilitate improvements and provide project management support.

## **Key features of implementing an e-portfolio into the RPL process**

### **Selecting an e-portfolio system for the RPL process**

The e-portfolio tool used for this project is Skillsbook<sup>18</sup> with some customisation. This system was chosen for a number of reasons including nil costs, e-portfolio functionality and support from The Work Lab<sup>19</sup> who developed Skillsbook.

Art workers are supported and mentored to upload a range of evidence to their Skillsbook account including digital stories, MP3 files, videos, photos and a range of text documents. For Desart the e-portfolio system needed to be flexible, accessible to people across Central Australia, and provide for easy uploading of evidence. Some structure was implemented into the Art workers e-portfolios with a 'tab' for each unit of competency in the qualification.

### **Implementing an e-portfolio system to support the RPL process**

The two main requirements for the successful implementation of an e-portfolio system at Desart have included an expert coach/mentor from Charles Darwin University and a sound RPL process as a basis which included the use of a self-evaluation tool Competency Navigator, a product that complements Skillsbook (and also developed by The Work Lab), to work through the units of competency in which art workers were seeking RPL.

Another issue for Desart was the level of the art workers' IT skills which varied considerably, and required appropriate support.

Communication between Desart and Charles Darwin University as well as with the art workers and assessors, via the e-portfolio system with alerts and face-to-face contact, was regular, ongoing and supportive. This partnership arrangement meant that this initial trial was successful and demonstrated the type of structure required for implementing e-portfolios with this group of Art Centre employees.

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.skillsbook.com.au/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.theworklab.com.au/>

## **Ways an e-portfolio can support the RPL process**

The components of the RPL workflow that were supported by the e-portfolio system included initial self-assessment, evidence identification and validation. This was managed in a combination of online and face-to-face environments.

Evidence that was identified and validated included work samples, photos, videos, digital stories, MP3 files and recording of conversations as well as documents. The evidence was uploaded, accessed online by the assessor and validated through discussion.

## **Additional information to consider when using an e-portfolio in the RPL process**

The benefits in this project include outcomes for individuals with significant skills now being formally recognised, through support and mentoring from the project leader in the use of e-portfolios; inter-dependent with the RPL process was the development and demonstration of ICT and digital literacy skills.

## **Future directions**

Desart plans to utilise the Skillsbook e-portfolio for RPL and learning with its future learners and RPL applicants.

## **Contact details**

Alicia Boyle

Education Coordinator, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre

Charles Darwin University

Phone: (08) 8946 7267

Email: [alicia.boyle@cdu.edu.au](mailto:alicia.boyle@cdu.edu.au)

## Example 2: Lifeline (Hobart)

### **Organisational overview**

Lifeline (Hobart)<sup>20</sup> offers a confidential telephone counselling service, information and referral service.

Lifeline has specified standards for its staff to meet in terms of professional development and ongoing assessment. All Lifeline's counselling staff in face-to-face work are trained to a high standard of professional development and hold qualifications in social work, psychology, and counselling. The telephone counsellors are volunteers who have undergone a 20-week intensive training program. Following this, they are trialled for 12 months before becoming accredited as telephone counsellors. They are closely supervised during and after this period by experienced counsellors and must also attend regular 'In Service' information sessions to further refine and update their skills.

All Lifeline (Hobart) telephone counsellors are assessed yearly for re-accreditation and all Lifeline Centres must be re-accredited by Lifeline Australia every four years. These measures aim to ensure that standards in all areas of Lifeline's work continue to be of a very high level.

### **Overview**

The aim of using an e-portfolio system in the RPL process for Lifeline's volunteer workers was to capture naturally occurring evidence on a dynamic basis. That is, as the counsellors are taking calls, accessing databases and recording information, they are also able to generate and identify work based evidence for RPL purposes.

### **Key features of implementing an e-portfolio into the RPL process**

#### **Selecting an e-portfolio system for the RPL process**

Lifeline is using 'Moodle' as an e-portfolio to support RPL in the *Certificate IV in Telephone Counselling* for its volunteer group. Their main goal in selecting a system was that the volunteer counsellors could use it on a daily basis and capture existing evidence, with the availability of off site access.

#### **Implementing an e-portfolio system to support the RPL process**

Lifeline made participation in the trial of the use of an e-portfolio system voluntary, with an information session and briefing followed by the opportunity to express interest in the project. Other considerations for Lifeline were the sensitivity of information, privacy issues related to the evidence and embedding the recording of evidence into policies and procedures.

#### **Ways an e-portfolio can support the RPL process**

RPL applicants record naturally occurring evidence including details and recording of calls, follow up actions and responses to dealing with enquiries, and related sensitive issues from time to time. The aim in this process is to streamline documentation and to identify day to day interactions with colleagues and client services.

Applicants upload their CV, respond to quizzes and communicate within the tool itself to demonstrate competency in dealing with clients and various situations. Interaction with

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.lifeline.org.au/hobart/>

supervisors is recorded and feedback is incorporated into the e-portfolio from the assessor and/or supervisor.

### **Additional information to consider when using an e-portfolio in the RPL process**

The main benefit of using an e-portfolio system is to limit duplication of evidence and to include feedback from the volunteers' supervisors and assessors. An effective staff engagement process was emphasised as a key to successful use of an e-portfolio system.

### **Future directions**

The Lifeline pilot is still underway although plans for the future include the ongoing use of e-portfolios for RPL, training and professional development.

### **Contact details**

Christopher John

Chief Executive Officer

Lifeline Hobart Inc

M: 0437 241 627

E: [christopher.j@lifelinetasmania.com.au](mailto:christopher.j@lifelinetasmania.com.au)

## Example 3: Swinburne University of Technology

### ***Organisational overview***

Swinburne TAFE<sup>21</sup> is a large RTO with six campuses in inner and outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne and one in Malaysia. The School of Engineering designs and delivers customised training for many private and government organisations, both in Australia and overseas. Swinburne Aviation<sup>22</sup> works with the air transport sector across Australia in providing training and qualifications in airline and airport operations.

In consultation with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), the School of Engineering at Swinburne, designed, developed, accredited and now delivers the *Certificate IV* and *Diploma in Aviation Safety Regulation* for new and existing workers around Australia who are employed by CASA.

### ***Overview***

Swinburne TAFE uses e-portfolios to support applicants in RPL across Australia for the *Certificate IV* and *Diploma in Aviation Safety Regulation*. The model is blended assessment and RPL with learners uploading evidence and identifying when they are ready to be assessed.

Recent developments have 75 students targeted to use an e-portfolio to support demonstration of competency. A combination of direct phone contact, e-news, email and messaging supports the applicants in uploading and identifying relevant evidence. The WebCT/Blackboard e-portfolio platform assists with the individual's learning plan and the RPL process.

### ***Key features of implementing an e-portfolio into the RPL process***

#### **Selecting an e-portfolio system for the RPL process**

Swinburne University uses the platform WebCT/Blackboard for e-portfolios. This system was selected because of the existing capability and familiarity with WebCT/Blackboard, and important communication functions such as e-news, messaging and notification of evidence upload and posting of assessor comments

Swinburne provided information in the e-portfolio system on the whole assessment process, created sections for the organisation of information and supplied help documents such as evidence guides, how to use guides and a hotline for learners.

The main functions required were easy evidence upload, notification and messaging, ability for an assessor to view an e-portfolio, accessible around Australia and overseas as well as a reasonable storage capacity.

#### **Implementing an e-portfolio system to support the RPL process**

Successful implementation related to both the assessor and learners' confidence with WebCT/Blackboard and an e-portfolio approach to evidence identification and management. Although initial issues with technology and error messages received by the learners were frustrating, these issues were quickly resolved by supplying detailed technical specifications to learners and an increase in the storage capacity of the e-portfolio to 50MB.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.tafe.swinburne.edu.au/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/feis/aviation/>

Swinburne developed a customised guide for using the e-portfolio based on the structure of the specific qualifications. Once the learners understood the system it has become a time efficient and convenient process for assessment.

### **Ways an e-portfolio can support the RPL process**

The WebCT/Blackboard e-portfolio system supported evidence identification and validation after an initial conversation with the applicant and their assessor. Evidence included documents, work samples, log books, reports and an individual learning and assessment plan.

Evidence was validated through discussion between the assessor and applicant as well as with their supervisor.

### **Additional information to consider when using an e-portfolio in the RPL process**

The key benefit in using an e-portfolio for Swinburne learners has been the ability to manage RPL and assessment efficiently across distance.

### **Other discoveries identified**

There have been mixed reactions from learners/applicants needing guidance on the functionality and use of the tool. Other issues and barriers with technical aspects such as storage limits, fire walls, cookies and JavaScript errors have been overcome to enable an efficient use of the concept. There was a frustration with limitations of technology rather than the concept of an e-portfolio RPL process per se, with the overall result being extremely positive.

### **Future directions**

Advice from Swinburne TAFE indicates that they are looking to increase the use of e-portfolios across the TAFE Division.

### **Contact details**

Jeni Sykes

CASA Project Manager

School of Engineering

Swinburne University

P: (03) 97261476

E: [jsykes@swin.edu.au](mailto:jsykes@swin.edu.au)

## Trialing methods of using e-portfolios to support the RPL process

Two RPL Support System trials were conducted in 2008, featuring typical scenarios of learners seeking transition into VET programs.

The first group focused on adult and community education (ACE) learners in New South Wales and Victoria by Adult Learning Australia<sup>23</sup>, with the second group focused on existing workers in the IT industry in Queensland with Brisbane North Institute of TAFE<sup>24</sup>.

The purpose of this activity was to trial methods of using e-portfolio systems to support RPL processes. This work provided practical experience to inform the development of e-portfolio systems and related standards and technologies in the national training system.

The researcher acknowledges those people involved in managing the trials as contributing to this section of the report. A review of the original action plans, communication via online meetings, review of the progress reports and one-on-one discussion was used to gain an overview of the trials.

### Trial 1: Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the peak adult learning organisation drawing membership from community education and training providers, individual practitioners, community colleges, TAFE institutes, universities and government departments across all states and territories, based in Canberra.

For these trials, ALA partnered with:

- Community Colleges NSW - a peak organisation supporting adult and community education in New South Wales and
- Community College East Gippsland – from regional Victoria

The aim of this trial was to identify and trial, specifically with learners from the ACE sector, an e-portfolio system to support and explore ways e-portfolio systems can support a RPL process.

For the Community Centres involved in these trials, the ability to utilise free web 2.0 tools, like Facebook, Wikispaces, Skillsbook, Zoho Notebook enabled them to introduce an e-portfolio to support the RPL process which supported portability of information and ease of use.

*“Our students are often only with their Community Colleges for a short time, so it was important that the information contained in any system they used was portable or exportable, rather than stored on the server of the organisation, which would not be accessible after completing their training” said, Debbie Littlehales, Member Services Manager, Community Colleges NSW. “We can not assume our students will have strong ICT skills, so ease of use of the selected e-portfolio tool was very important.”*

Jan Robert, Project Officer, Community Colleges East Gippsland said that:

*“Experience by both the RPL candidate and assessor with some of the tools associated with e-portfolios such as MP3/MP4 files, podcasts, blogs, wikis and social networking tools like Facebook, is advantageous.”*

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ala.asn.au/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.bn.tafe.qld.gov.au/>

The ability to have a 'private' space, which is controlled by the RPL candidate, which best suits their own purposes and skills, was also considered important.

With an increased focus on RPL in 2009 in the ACE sector, Community Colleges identified e-portfolios as valuable for RPL process.

*"The concept of an e-portfolio is very new to these Community Colleges, so the key challenge is to engage and support the trainers in this area" said Ms Littlehales. With appropriate resourcing, the Community Colleges identified that they could make a key contribution to the e portfolio implementation to enhance the RPL process".*

The following considerations were identified for the use of e-portfolios in the RPL process:

- The introduction of e-portfolios to students needs to be done slowly.
- Students need to understand the concept of RPL, as well as e-portfolios.
- Students need to understand what constitutes evidence.
- Evidence needs to be gathered over time – it is not ideal to try to put together an e-portfolio 'after the event'.
- Trainers need to understand the concept of e-portfolios.

By the end of the trial, the Community Colleges identified that in order to embed e-portfolios effectively professional development for key training and assessment personnel was required to:

- raise their awareness and understanding of the benefit of e-portfolios
- develop ways e-portfolios could be implemented into training and assessment.

An effective method of upskilling ACE staff in the past has been to adopt a 'whole of sector' approach by developing the skills of a team of 'local champions'. These 'local champions' are supported to develop their own skills in utilising an e-portfolio to support the RPL process, and then act as coaches and mentors. This has been found to be a successful way of implementing new skills without each Community College having to 'reinvent the wheel'.

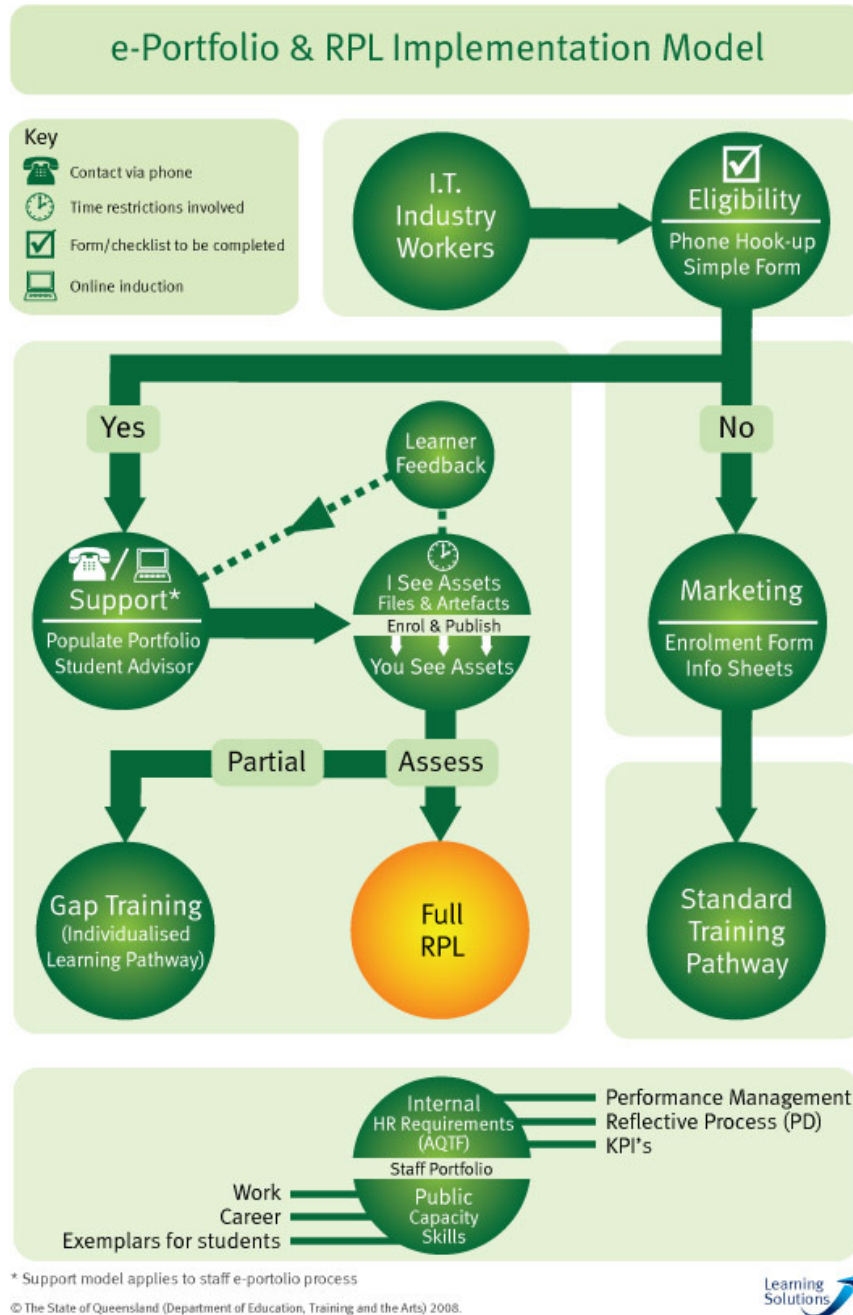
Resources were also developed by Community College East Gippsland to help inform RPL candidates and assessors about the use of e-portfolios in the RPL process are available at: <http://eportfolios-at-cceg.acfe.vic.edu.au/>

## **Trial 2: Brisbane North Institute of TAFE**

Brisbane North Institute of TAFE (BNIT) is a leading provider in Queensland of VET services to community, business and industry.' BNIT has five community-based campuses located at Ithaca, Grovely, Bracken Ridge, Redcliffe and Caboolture.

In early 2008, Glenn Searle, Manager of Blended Learning Solutions, developed an *e-Portfolio and RPL Implementation Model* (see diagram overleaf), to help streamline BNIT's RPL processes and to engage current IT industry workers to utilise an e-portfolio tool to gain full or partial RPL towards a qualification. The model is specific to the IT industry but is transferable to other VET areas and the wider national training system.

Diagram 2: e-Portfolio and RPL Implementation Model



BNIT’s trial identified that in order to generate enterprise-wide interest in the use of an e-portfolio tool in the RPL process, the purpose of the e-portfolio needed to address specific business needs which are explicit to both the employer and the employee.

BNIT utilised the Desire2learn<sup>25</sup> e-portfolio tool, based on two key factors: the need to integrate with existing BNIT IT systems, and the ability to be able to customise the e-portfolio tool as required. Other key areas of consideration in the selection of e-portfolio tool included: learner support processes and options; access to the e-portfolio beyond the individual’s connection with BNIT, and portability of the e-portfolio’s content.

<sup>25</sup> Desire2Learn: <http://www.desire2learn.com/>

As few people in BNIT are currently aware of the use of e-portfolios or their capabilities, it was realised that buy-in at a senior management level at BNIT was required. This buy-in will allow the benefits of using e-portfolios in the RPL process to be more widely disseminated throughout the organisation.

Further embedding strategies include undertaking an organisation wide educative and consultative process to enable potential users to fully understand the concept of e-portfolios (and evaluate the personal and professional benefits) before being required to engage with the technology in the RPL process.

It was identified that RPL assessors needed an e-portfolio tool which was easy to use as well as understand how an e-portfolio could provide a means for them to support the RPL candidate to easily generate evidence, mapped to identified skills sets or 'snapshots' for AQTF quality and audit purposes.

RPL candidate requirements include having a user friendly e-portfolio system that allows them to generate, organise, reflect on and present evidence and showcase skills to a variety of audiences.

Some additional considerations for using an e-portfolio in the RPL process include:

- The e-portfolio system needs to utilise language which aligns with a VET training environment.
- The use of a simple/sign sign on approach is important.
- The e-portfolio system needs to cater for low end technical users.

The following are ways that the e-portfolio system supported the RPL process:

- Enabling the creation of forms or templates where RPL candidates can identify the recognition requirements and upload artefacts to match these identified requirements.
- Enabling tagging of artefacts for ease of searching and linking to a variety of evidence pointers.
- Providing a repository for artefacts captured in a range of digital formats.
- Enabling communication between RPL applicant and assessor.
- Enabling reflective practice for individuals, peers, mentors, teachers, assessors.

BNIT anticipates potential interest in the uptake of e-portfolios in sectors where collection and sharing of information occurs as part of a natural communication process such as in the Community Services area.

In the case of RPL in children's services, a fairly draconian form of telephony and hand written notes are used by assessors to record interviews with participants. It is seen that the e-portfolio has the ability to assist both the assessor and candidate to provide a means to electronically store records of interviews that can be used as evidence of competency, through audio recordings. This will save an assessor's time and provide evidence of the interpretation of a candidate's skills and abilities for auditing requirements. Child care workers can also record processes in workplace situations in audio (and in some cases video) that can be used as evidence in their e-portfolios. The concept of a traditional portfolio is already extensively used in the child care industry to document child development, so it is anticipated that an e-portfolio would be readily understood by child care workers.

## References

AQTF 2007, *User's Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration*, Commonwealth of Australia

Australian ePortfolio Project, (2008), *ePortfolio use by University students in Australia: Informing excellence in policy and practice*, Final project report August 2008

Henson, M., *ePortfolio Implementation Guidelines v1.5*, eCDFePortfolio Project

I & J Management Services (2008), *2008 E-learning Benchmarking Project*, DEEWR, September 2008 <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-learningindicators>

JISC Innovation Group, (2008), *JISC Effective Practice with e-Portfolios, Supporting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning*, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

ONeill, O. and Lismann, S., (2008), *Discussion paper: Towards a trust federation for VET*, E-standards for Training Business Activity, DEEWR, <http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/docs/vet-trust-federation-paper-v1-0.pdf>

Perry, W., (2008), *Skills Recognition Good Practice Model*, Wendy Perry and Associates Pty Ltd

### **Websites:**

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au>

<http://www.elearnspace.org>

<http://electronicportfolios.com>

<http://www.mahara.org>

<http://www.mosep.org>

<http://partners/becta.org.au>

## For more information

### **E-portfolios Business Activity**

Phone: (08) 8348 4075

Website: [flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios](http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios)

Blog: [flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfoliosblog](http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfoliosblog)

### **Australian Flexible Learning Framework**

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Fax: (07) 3259 4371

Email: [enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au](mailto:enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au)

Website: [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au)

GPO Box 1326

Brisbane QLD 4001