Country Report (Ireland)

1. Introduction

This report outlines the Irish aspect of the EUFolio Classroom ePortfolio project, including the implementation of the pilot project in Irish schools. The report will give an overview of Ireland's educational and ICT background (Section Two) and will detail the pilot implementation, including outlining the focus of the implementation in Section Three. Section Four details participating schools and CPD support provided. Section Five of the report will outline the data collection process engaged in and Section Six provides a detailed analysis of the data collected. The results of the pilot implementation are explored in Section Seven. Conclusions drawn based on the implementation and results of the pilot are presented in Section 8.

2. Country Background

2.1 Context

In this context of Irish Education, strategies for the integration of technology in education are pursued through the work of the Ministry in collaboration with other agencies, support services and representative bodies as appropriate. Work is now underway on developing a new Digital Strategy for primary and post primary schools to ensure the continued integration of ICT into teaching, learning and assessment. ICT is important in the context of the future skills needs for the economy and the uptake of STEM subjects. ICT is seen as central to the achievement of the key reforms outlined in Ministerial policy at a number of levels including the national Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the new Framework for Junior Cycle (lower secondary level).

2.2 Current Policy on ePortfolio Use

There is no one ePortfolio solution in use in secondary education in Ireland. Schools are autonomous and can choose an ICT solution/platform that suits the particular requirements of the school.

2.3 Access to ICT Support & Infrastructure

The Ministry though the Professional Development Service for Teachers (Technology in Education) provides advice and support to schools on the integration of technology in education. All secondary schools in Ireland have been provided with 100mbits broadband which facilitates the integration of technology in education.

3. Emphasis of the pilot implementations

From the perspective of the Irish partners the emphasis of the pilot is on curriculum, pedagogy, technical capacity and professional capacity.

Since the Irish partners represent a number of facets of the education system including the Ministry; those with responsibility for developing curricula and those who provide support to teachers, the implementation and findings of the EUfolio project will provide a very solid foundation for articulating policy and recommending best practice across the second level system nationally.

3.1 *Curricular Reform*

The new Junior Cycle referred to above commenced on a phased basis from 2014 (with the first subject being English) and features new specifications or subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills. It contains new approaches to assessment and reporting, designed to embed assessment both for and of learning in the classroom. For assessment for certification in the new programme, it is proposed that for all subjects, there will be a school work component completed in years 2 and 3. The school-work component may include assignments, projects, case studies, performances, oral activities, written pieces and tests of different kinds. It is envisaged that the school work component will lend itself very well to the use of electronic portfolios. Assessment of short courses, which are a feature of the new Junior Cycle programme, also lends itself to the use of ePortfolios.

3.2 *21st Century Skills*

The Irish partners see the potential of ePortfolios to support the implementation of the Junior Cycle. The Irish EUFolio project links with 21st century skills through fostering the new key skills of Junior Cycle and supports the assessment of key skills. The elements of the key skills most relevant to the EUFolio pilot are highlighted in orange under each heading in Figure A below.

Figure A: Junior Cycle Key Skills & EUFolio

Managing myself	Staying well	Communicating
• Knowing myself • Making considered decisions • Setting and achieving personal goals • Being able to reflect on my own learning • Using digital technology to manage myself and my learning	• Being healthy, physical and active • Being social • Being safe • Being spiritual • Being confident • Being positive about learning • Being responsible, safe and ethical in using digital technology	• Listening and expressing myself • Performing and presenting • Discussing and debating • Using language • Using number • Using digital technology to communicate
Being creative	**Working with others**	**Managing information and thinking**
• Imagining • Exploring options and alternatives • Implementing ideas and taking action • Learning creatively • Stimulating creativity using digital technology	• Developing good relationships and dealing with conflict • Co-operating • Respecting difference • Contributing to making the world a better place • Learning with others • Working with others through digital technology	• Being curious • Gathering, recording, organising and evaluating information and data • Thinking creatively and critically • Reflecting on and evaluating my learning • Using digital technology to access, manage and share content

Framework for Junior Cycle (2012)

3.3   *Design & Communication Graphics*

In addition to piloting ePortfolios in the Junior Cycle, the pilot implementation has also explored the use of ePortfolios at Senior Cycle level. Design and Communication Graphics at senior cycle level requires the student to present a portfolio of their work for summative assessment which is assessed externally. This subject focuses on

graphicacy/graphic communication, creative problem solving, spatial abilities/visualisation, design capabilities, computer graphics and CAD modelling and data on the use of ePortfolios in this subject is also included in this country report.

4. Description of the pilot implementations of each country

The pilot implementation initially involved 26 schools across the country. These schools represent a cross-section of Irish second-level schools. Schools were selected by the project team based on the following factors:

- geographical spread
- small/large
- urban/rural
- gender – (boys school/girls school/mixed school)
- Irish speaking schools
- Adequate broadband/wifi

In total 54 teachers were involved in the areas of both English and Design and Communications Graphics (DCG). There were over 1300 students involved in the project, with the majority of English students being in first year or second year (12-14 years old) and the DCG students are predominantly senior cycle (16+). A small number of schools experienced a 'cascade' effect, where a number of additional interested teachers joined the implementation in Phase Two.

Schools used both the Mahara open-source platform and Office 365 platform and the emphasis has been on both the teacher and the student using the portfolio collaboratively.

The teacher integrated the portfolio into their teaching and maintains a class site in addition to their own portfolio page. Within the class site, each student has their own portfolio page.

The ePortfolio was used to promote collaboration and formative assessment, develop self- and peer assessment and as a repository of student work. The use of the ePortfolio was also intended to develop key skills, which are based on 21st Century Skills.

4.1   Implementation phases

Step 1 - TRAINING NEEDS IDENTIFIED

Pre-project data gave an overview of current practice in the use of digital tools and assessment, informed the team regarding digital competences & current approaches, and established that teachers would need supports and CPD in three key areas:

- Digital skills and use of the portfolio platform
- Assessment and the potential of the portfolio platform for assessment including formative assessment, peer- and self- assessment, reliability and validity
- Subject specific- Incorporating the portfolio platform into lesson design, including collaborative planning and student-centered task design, integration of digital tools.

Step 2 - PLANNED SCHOOL SUPPORT PROVISION

- Pre-implementation information briefing for school leaders, ICT Coordinators and teachers
- Advice for schools in choosing the most appropriate platform for their context and also in setting up their school accounts, to continue throughout pilot project
- Two days of platform-specific CPD provided with additional supports in assessment, task design, web 2.0 tools and collaborative planning
- A mentor was assigned each school and provided face-to-face and phone/online supports and collected project data

4.2 Workshops' content and activities

Workshop	Attendance	Total of Students
Launch Meeting 10th December 2013	41 school leaders, ICT coordinators and teachers	
Training Day One January 2014 **2 days**	**Mahara:** 16th January 2014 (16 teachers) **Office 365:** 17th January 2014 (40 teachers)	**1,300 +**
Training Day Two March 2014 **3 days**	**Office 365:** March 25th and 26th (total: 37 teachers) **Mahara:** 31st March (11 teachers)	

Launch Meeting

- Introduction to the pilot project, rationale, explanation of European context

- Collaborative anticipation exercise exploring key themes of the project

- Presentation on advantages of ePortfolios

- Activity-based formative assessment session

- Exemplars of potential use of EUfolio in the English classroom demonstrated.

- A participant evaluation was conducted

Training Day One

- Workshop One- ICT:

'Bring your own device' training for teachers in their chosen platform. Key areas such as creating class sites, creating profile pages, forums, comments etc covered

- Workshop Two- Assessment:

Exploring the notion of formative feedback with teachers and examining where the EUfolio could complement this approach to assessment.

- Workshop Three- English Task Design: (*see Appendix One*)

Applying the knowledge from Workshop One and Workshop Two to practice in the English classroom using a rich modelled task focusing on writing as a process. This task was developed by the EUFolio team and piloted in the classroom before dissemination. This task gave teachers the opportunity to experience the EUfolio as students and investigate the potential for use of the platform in their own classes.

- A participant evaluation of the day was conducted & mentors were assigned to schools

Training Day Two

- 'Check In Session' to foster sharing of practice amongst teachers and also highlight any areas requiring additional support.

- Workshop One- ICT:

'Bring your own device' training for teachers in their chosen platform. Trouble-shooting session, where teachers were invited to pose questions and technical support was provided to these teachers. In addition, teachers completed some training in uploading sound and video files.

- Workshop Two- Assessment:

The assessment workshop looked at the notion of valid assessment and through a number of group-work activities developed a professional dialogue around the area of validity and assessment. In addition, the teachers explored Bloom's Digital Taxonomy as a potential support in developing valid student tasks and assessments.

- Workshop Three- English Task Design: (*see Appendix One*)

Applying the knowledge from Workshop One and Workshop Two to practice in the English classroom using a rich modelled task focusing on oral language and sharing success criteria with students. This task was again developed by the EUFolio team and piloted before dissemination. The second half of this task invited teachers to work collaboratively on planning potential activities arising from the modelled task. These plans were shared amongst the participants. A further school-specific planning session was facilitated to help teachers to plan for their use of EUfolio for the remainder of the academic year.

- A participant evaluation of the day was conducted.

Outline of CPD content

Each CPD day was divided into three interlinked workshops focusing on both training and action research

These workshops were broken down as follows:

ICT Training:

- Hands -on training for teachers who bring their own device to the session with portfolio-specific skills demonstrated and trialed by the teachers.
- A collaborative problem-solving atmosphere is created with authentic classroom tasks provided for the teachers to use in a classroom setting.
- Individual support available for teachers if required. Each session incorporates trouble-shooting and sharing of experiences to promote a community of practice approach.

Assessment Discourse:

Informed by international best practice in assessment. To date, the assessment sections of CPD sessions have concentrated on formative assessment, feedback and validity.

Formative Assessment

- Formative assessment describes all those processes by which teachers and learners use information about student achievement to make adjustments to the students' learning that improve their achievements (Black & Wiliam 1998)

- The overarching document covering junior cycle curriculum reform, The Framework for Junior Cycle describes assessment as being the most significant change in introducing the Framework for Junior Cycle. Junior cycle assessment, both formative and summative will be school based, and will focus on supporting learning.

- To support teachers in incorporating this into their practice with the EUfolio, CPD in formative assessment was provided to teachers in the form of reflection activities encouraging them to shift practice and look for opportunities to use the EUfolio to do this.

Feedback

- Good feedback is a key element of formative assessment and providing quality feedback using the EUfolio formed part of the assessment CPD for teachers. Black & Wiliam (2010) note that feedback to any student should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other students.

- It is imperative that feedback is provided throughout the learning process and not just at the end. CPD provided to teachers explored the features of good feedback and looked at how the EUfolio can facilitate this type of feedback.

Validity

- Validity issues, on the other hand, are a key concern for classroom-based assessments. Within the classroom context, the validity of assessments is based on connections between the learning goal being assessed, the questions or tasks being used to gauge student understanding, and the way

in which teachers interpret and act upon student responses to close any learning gaps.

- Research (Heller et al 1998) indicates that using portfolios to support assessment can improve the validity of student assessment. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on their current assessment practices and valid assessment tasks were modelled in the CPD workshop.

English Task Design

- Pre-piloted English lesson plans incorporating the EUfolio and the assessment issues explored in the CPD workshops are modelled for teachers. Lesson design supports such as Bloom's Digital Taxonomy are explored to provide teachers with prompts for planning rich tasks and Web 2.0 tools that complement the EUfolio are modelled and used.

- Teachers engage in collaborative lesson planning to develop lessons that incorporate the materials from the assessment workshops. In doing this, teachers are working in a collaborative way, sharing best practice and developing a bank of valid task designs that are shared using the collaborative planning tool www.padlet.com.