Huntingdonshire Regional College - Motoring students to success: OneFile e-portfolio system improving learning delivery and organisational efficiency

Summary

The Motor Vehicle department at Huntingdonshire Regional College has revolutionised its teaching and learning delivery, improved organisational efficiency and helped students achieve qualifications quicker by introducing the OneFile e-portfolio system. Bundles of paper have been scrapped, students can now upload video and audio as reflective evidence, and assessors no longer have to go on unnecessary visits to collect papers and signatures. The department has saved time and money, diversified learning and made an impact on its carbon footprint.

About Huntingdonshire Regional College

Situated in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire Regional College offers courses for students of all age groups, starting from 16 years. The college offers Higher Education, Further Education and Apprenticeships. Some of the subjects include Hair and Beauty, Engineering, Business and Administration, as well as Apprenticeships in catering, carpentry, and plumbing.

The challenge

“Before the OneFile e-portfolio system was introduced to the Motor Vehicle department, External Verifiers had problems with the varying standards of the paper-based portfolios from different assessors. The VRQs would follow a slightly different format to NVQs. Because of this, External Verifiers would highlight inconsistencies in observations and feedback to students.

The paper-based portfolios would also create a logistical nightmare as they used to literally ‘roll into a burden’ at the end of the year.
“It used to snowball into a big problem. We used to have a week solid of sitting down with students trying to sort out their paper records.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

The motivation for implementing the e-portfolio system was to modernise and increase the efficiency of learning delivery. Having assessors running around the countryside to gain one signature was neither efficient nor cost-effective.

“We were also looking at professional image and our green credentials. We didn’t like having the paper portfolio files stored on shelves, and we also wanted to save paper and reduce our carbon footprint.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Some of the problems and challenges students and staff faced before OneFile included lost and messy portfolios.

“We had difficulty acquiring them for internal verification, and even had one student who set alight to his portfolio.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Students had one training folder and one assessments folder containing different papers, so with 150 students, the team had to store 300 folders.

“It caused real problems as we had to transport them around from garage to garage. Now all we need is a laptop and we can see whichever group that we want by the click of a button.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Mike Bartlett can now access students’ e-portfolios at the click of a button
The activity

In 2008, the Motor Vehicle department was busy with paper-based portfolios and had looked at other e-portfolios that were being used around the college.

They then explored the idea of using OneFile after seeing it recommended on the City and Guilds website. From there they initiated a demonstration via a webcasting.

“Mike Bartlett had used other e-portfolios as part of his internal verification qualification but found OneFile much quicker and easier to use.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles

The team then had a training and demonstration day at the college, and asked staff to log on as an assessor and then as a student to see how it all worked.

OneFile has a simple log-in screen for students and assessors

At the start of the 2008-09 academic year assessors introduced it to the Train to Gain NVQ students

“The pilot for the NVQs went very well and the feedback was that it was speeding up delivery and stopping duplication.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

For Mark and his team, the investment in the OneFile system was repaid very quickly.

“We achieved everything we wanted and it was paid back within one year of buying it. We paid £1,000 for the training day and the one-time licence and
some folders in the system. We then got the full-time students to buy a licence for £30 as they would buy boots and overalls. That way they’ve got ownership.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles

The timescales moved very quickly for the department:

- They first used the system with the Train to Gain NVQ students for 6-9 months;
- They then introduced it to the apprentices, who used it for a year;
- Finally, they rolled it out to the full-time VRQ students at the start of the 2010/11 academic year.

“We had another pilot after we knew the Train to Gain NVQ students could use it. We got our work-based apprentice learners to do the framework which consisted of VRQ, NVQ and Keyskills. We knew it worked with the NVQ students so we used the same methodical approach when we introduced it to the VRQ students.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

The team have faced some obstacles and challenges along the way with staff lacking IT skills and others showing resistance to change. However, once the majority of assessors secured some help and training, many of them flourished.

And although many of the students have picked the system up very quickly, even teaching the assessors in some cases, some students have found it hard to cope with any changes in the system.

“When there have been small hiccups in the programme, the challenging students haven’t liked that. They like familiarity, so it’s important that everything goes to plan.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

The Motor Vehicle department has made all of the decisions about purchasing and introducing the e-portfolio system without any support from other areas of the college.

“We took a leap of faith and implemented the system on a shoestring budget and now it’s starting to be recognised across college. The developers and senior management have had a look and have praised it.” Mark Stringer, Head of Curriculum, Motor Vehicles

The outcomes

“The motivation of the students has improved. The students have bought in, taken ownership and accept e-based material as it’s a natural progression for them. It’s also helped students to complete portfolios quicker than if they were completing paper-based portfolios.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles
Assessors can easily track students’ progress on OneFile

Students and assessors have certainly benefitted as all of the tracking is built into the system and they can continually monitor their progress.

“The ability to use OneFile as part of the assessment tool kit has developed the students’ ability to manage their tasks. Completion of assessment paperwork has reduced and allows for instant results confirmation.” Tony Howard, Assessor, Motor Vehicles

The system has made Mike Bartlett’s job much easier as he no longer has swathes of paperwork to wade through.

“I can now sort out all of the information for the e-portfolio online, rather than having to hunt for the paper portfolios or having to drag bundles of portfolios around the workshops.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

The system has enabled the team to introduce a wide variety of new teaching and learning methods.

“The use of more diverse methods of reflective evidence is limited with paper portfolios. Before we only had observations and job cards with all the questions, but now we’re uploading video and audio as evidence as well. We think this will help assessors to get the students to do their work, as students love the idea of video recording.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Using OneFile has also made the teaching and learning environment more inclusive.

“We’ve had dyslexic students, and although you can ask them questions, assessors have to write everything for them. Now you can record audio of
them speaking and giving their reflective evidence.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Mike has even had students logging on in the evenings and on weekends adding their work.

![Student logging in to work](image)

*Students can log-in to add their work anywhere they have a laptop and internet connection*

After frustrations with the previous paper-based portfolio system, the External Verifier’s job has been simplified, and the quality of his verifying has been improved by the OneFile system.

“The External Verifier spent all day answering questions rather than looking through all the paper portfolios like he did in the past. He had already looked at the e-portfolios in his office before he arrived so he could spend more time observing, answering questions and addressing any queries we had.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

NVQ students’ employers are also able to track their employees’ progress, and have given their feedback on the benefits of the OneFile system.

“This is an invaluable tool for assessors and candidates alike. It allows candidates to lodge evidence into their portfolio at any time and with the aid of gap analysis see what evidence they need to provide in order to fulfil the criteria.” Keith Popely, Production Engineering Manager, Tensor
The impact

As a result of the OneFile system, some students can now gain their qualifications much quicker than before.

- The City and Guilds recommend 460 hours for VRQ level 2 qualifications,
- The Motor Vehicle department can get work-based learners to complete their qualifications in 150 hours.

“We have been able to speed up the delivery of learning as we can cross-reference work from VRQs to NVQs. A few of the tasks that don’t occur often in the workplace can be referenced from the VRQ to cover the required NVQ evidence. OneFile makes this cross-referencing very simple.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

Also, out of the 400 students that have been introduced to the OneFile system only around 3 or 4 have shown any reluctance.

And, although the team hasn’t yet measured the quantifiable impact of the system, the OneFile product has affected every facet of the Motor Vehicle department.

“I can say that even if the introduction of the e-portfolio system doesn’t quantifiably improve recruitment, retention and achievement for this year, it has done its job by making the staff think about how they can improve their teaching and learning delivery style.
“It will also have an impact on improving the efficiencies and standards across the course programme and college in the future.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles

Members of the department are making an impact on their carbon footprint as they are cutting down on paper and folders, and are also reducing their mileage for visits.

“We still go out for observation visits, but we don’t have to visit them between observations as we see their work on the e-portfolio and can do the assessments and give them feedback without visiting. This speeds up theirs and your progress.” Mike Bartlett, Internal Verifier, Motor Vehicles

OneFile has improved the opinion of e-portfolios around the college, both with senior management and the Quality Assurance team.

“Our QA manager has seen different systems around the college and has been cynical about them. With OneFile it took her just five minutes to be won over. QA will now be able to use the system to plan audit checks. So the impact is cascading upwards.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles

“With OneFile the IV process is streamlined and available to all with some very useful reports.” Lisa Gentle, QA Manager

The lessons learned

If you give people options they will always stick with the safe one. However, if you tell them the paper option has gone and you must use the electronic option, you instantly build reluctance as you are forcing them do something.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles

Ultimately, Mark believes that if you introduce phased pilots and allow people to get familiar with the system, you have a better chance of success.

For any educational establishment looking to introduce an e-portfolio system Mark believes that teachers or assessors should be open-minded about what denotes evidence.

“It's almost limitless to what you can put on OneFile as evidence, so think outside the box. Don’t just think you have to submit written evidence. Time is precious in education, so think about what you would like to use to make it more fun for the students and yourself.” Mark Stringer, Curriculum Manager, Motor Vehicles
Useful links

iPadio for e-portfolio building screencast

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