



JISC RSC Scotland South & West Case Study @Barony College

Student Self Evaluation & Mahara

Summary

Barony College has a Special Programmes course for its students with learning disabilities and Alison Halliday (Senior Special Programmes Co-ordinator) was present at an in-house Mahara demonstration. Alison had been using a paper based learning plan for her students for more than 5 years and had been looking for an online alternative. It was anticipated that this would provide the students with a portfolio of their work, plans and progress to take with them to reviews and to post-Barony life.

About Barony College

Barony College specialises in vocational training and education for the land-based and animal care industries. The College estate supports dairy, beef, sheep, cereals, trout and red deer enterprises. Commercial activities also take place within our forestry and horticulture sections. This enables us to provide students with "hands on" training in a real working environment.

The Challenge

To convert paper based learning plan documents for online use using certain elements of Mahara suitable for students with barriers to learning. Also, to record and track progress and an online system to keep the student's work for throughout the academic year.

The Activity

Using the following features of Mahara:

- My Files – creating folders and storing their teaching artefacts including images and Personal Development Plan Word templates within their My Files area. The student's are also embedding these files within their Views.
- Wall and Mahara Mail – Using Mahara's social tool, the wall, to communicate with Alison, Liz (another supported learning lecturer) and their fellow students. The students are also using Mahara's internal emailing system to message each other.

- Blogs - Keep a track record of gardening skills, healthy living skills, citizenship skills, community event skills and classroom skills. They also add tags to their blogs!
- Mahara views - Copying and adding their data to Mahara view templates which include reviews and learning plans and sharing them with Alison. The students are also personalising their views by customising their view columns and choosing different view theme colours.
- Friends - Adding friends and writing on their Mahara walls. One student even apologised to Alison on her wall for their behaviour in class.
- Multimedia content – Students are using You Tube to embed within their views. They are also uploading images to the My Files area and embedding the images within a view.
- Online documents - We revamped the 'How am I doing, Evaluating my progress' sheet, which had a rating score from 0 -5. Basically the student downloads the Evaluation template from Mahara, fills it out with smiley faces and uploads to their Mahara My Files area where they can embed within a view at a later date. We also revamped the 'All about you' sheet, again the student downloads the template but this time inserts Word's tick symbol to describe themselves. If they base themselves as 'Some of the time' or 'Not very often' then they need to add a comment in the 'Comments' section and add a tick symbol to the 'My Plan Task'. If they have ticked 'My Plan Task' the student needs to create a task within Mahara's My Plans.

The Outcomes

This paperless solution has provided an alternative format which has been embraced enthusiastically by most of the students. One student tried it and opted to continue using the paper based version. The use of Mahara is viewed by the students as a carrot at the end of their work and has greatly enriched their computer and review sessions.

The Impact

Start small, introduce Mahara elements a step at a time. Keep reinforcing the ownership, the personalisation and the reasons for its use to the students.

Each student led how far their own Mahara account would develop, making them all truly reflective of each person.

One of the main lessons learnt was to keep the Special Programmes Mahara installation inhouse and not accessible from outside the college. This enabled us to police the system entirely.

Lessons Learnt

Staff adopted an open minded attitude whereby we would try the system, if something didn't work, we'd discontinue, if it worked, we'd extend.

The plan is to continue building the accounts into the students' second years.

The first year group next year will move through the Mahara introduction in a much smoother way, and should achieve more in less time.

Documentation (paper and online) will be reviewed at the end of the academic session, using the student surveys to guide staff.

Useful Links

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Mahara <http://mahara.org/>

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