



## ***JISC RSC Scotland South & West Case Study @ Barony College***

### **Student Self Evaluation & Mahara**

#### **Transcript of podcast**

Grainne: Hello I'm Grainne Hamilton from the JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland South and West. Earlier today, I met with Ali Hastie and Alison Halliday from Barony College to discuss their use of Mahara, the e-Portfolio system, with students on Special Programmes. I asked Ali to give an overview of what Mahara is.

Ali: Yeh, Mahara is an open source system, which was born in New Zealand about 6 or 7 years ago. It is free software, we've got it installed on a Linux box. It caters for blogs, we have Mahara Views, which are basically web pages where students can embed videos, their files within Mahara, they can also embed images, sound files, text boxes. They also have social networking within Mahara, where they can add in Friends and write on walls, send them messages internally. Basically that's what Mahara is.

Grainne: Great, lovely. So why did you suggest Mahara to Alison?

Ali: We've had Mahara for about 3-4 years now, so we've had very heavy experience using the system with our own students, as I mentioned before it's free and open source so we can customize it any way we want. That was the main reason we chose Mahara for Alison.

Grainne: Great. Were there particular tools within Mahara that you thought would be particularly useful for elements of the Special Programme courses?

Ali: Yes, most definitely. I'd say the heaviest area was the blogs. Alison kept a record of their gardening skills records, etc and they've used the blogs quite heavily as well as the files area within Mahara.

Grainne: Great, and what did using the blogs bring to the experience for the learners? What benefits did they get from that?

Ali: Yeh, basically, they did their tasks with their gardening skills then they went online to Mahara, where they logged in and wrote basically what they covered within their records and so on.

Grainne: Okay. Did you encounter any barriers or challenges to implementing the use of Mahara?

Ali: Yeh, there were certain elements that were missing from both systems, the paper based and online. Basically I had to make a workaround of creating Word templates, but kept the templates within Moodle itself. What the users do is

download the templates, fill them out and upload them back to the files area within Mahara. And then they can embed their files within their Views.

Grainne: Great, and have students found them quite easy to use?

Ali: Oh yes, yes.

Grainne: And what about staff?

Ali: Alison was very open-minded about using the system, which helps immensely. You need to have an open mind with a learning system like Mahara because there are some reports that it can be complex to use even though it's quite a small system. But she was open-minded and went with the flow and she's done a really good job.

Grainne: Were there any lessons you learnt during the process of implementation?

Ali: Yeh, I'm a very impatient guy and there are a few tools within Mahara which I was trying to push Alison to use straight away with her students but she held me back, rightly so, and it was baby steps. Taking those baby steps helped the learners, definitely.

Grainne: Great, do you have any advice for anyone else looking to do something similar?

Ali: Yes, take it easy, obviously plan it out. Look at both the paper based system and online system and what's best for the learner, not for the lecturer or the teaching staff but what's best for the learner.

Grainne: Great, thanks very much.

Ali: No problem.