



# **Review of Existing ePortfolio Policies and Practices**

Short version

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**Lifelong Learning**

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## Introduction

The EUfolio consortium brings together 14 teams from 7 European countries in a collaborative research and implementation process, establishing a network of policy experts, researchers, educational experts and practitioners.

The policy review analyses the current policy approaches and developments concerning the use of ePortfolios in education, including assessment and evaluation, learning planning, and professional development of teachers. The Policy Review is based on the following research questions:

1. How are ePortfolios defined? What functions could ePortfolios have?
2. How could ePortfolios be used as a tool for 21st Century Skills development and assessment? What are trends for 21st century skills assessment using ICT?
3. What are the advantages and considerations when implementing ePortfolios?
4. Which key policy decisions and implementation activities (action plans) within EU policies are relevant for the classroom use of ePortfolio? Which main practice areas can be observed in ePortfolio usage in schools?

All questions are covering theoretical and practical issues. The policy review ends with recommendations gathered from the literature review. Full version of report can be found in [www.eufolio.eu](http://www.eufolio.eu)

### I. ePortfolio definition and functions

For this review over 14 definitions of ePortfolio were analysed. All definitions are provided in the full version of the **EUfolio Policy and Practice Review**. The analysis shows, those definitions:

- refer to several types of ePortfolio, in respect to their purpose;
- ePortfolios are seen both as a product and a process (a combination of both, should be the basis for a suitable definition);
- Different contexts based on different ePortfolio definitions, depending on practices and evolution of ePortfolios.

An ePortfolio definition analysis shows that there are several key points that are characteristic for ePortfolios in all definitions:

- Authorship is ownership (the ePortfolio belongs to the creator, student or teacher);
- Organised content (ePortfolio content is organised in a contextualised and strategic manner);
- Selective collection (the content of an ePortfolio is a purposeful aggregation to document and illustrate learning);
- Artefacts (ePortfolios contain authentic artefacts proving learning and development of competences);
- Reflection (in all types of ePortfolios the learner reflects on her/his learning);
- Digital form (providing possibility to use digital artefacts, adaptability, ease of storage and display to various learner-chosen audiences).

For the EUfolio project, the following definition was chosen:

*ePortfolios are (student-owned) dynamic digital workspaces whereby students can capture their learning, their ideas, access their collections of work, reflect on their learning, share it, set goals, seek feedback and showcase their learning and achievements.* Remarks on the definition and clarifications on terms and stakeholder's roles:

- A *digital workspace* is a digital environment for learning. It implies active learning (i.e. active engagement of the learners). The term workspace also incorporates the notion that one might engage with the portfolio in many ways, for example collaboratively. A digital workspace, too,

has roots in software development and symbolizes a temporary storage area. The ePortfolio is owned by *the student*, s/he has control over: file management, to share with whom, to hand in to the teacher, etc.

- The teacher's role in working with ePortfolios is still important – if not more important than ever. The teacher supports the students in order to set and monitor learning goals, plan their strategies how to achieve goals, develop success criteria, collect evidence of their learning and reflect on and evaluate their learning, etc.

- Reflection and sharing of learning: Even though ePortfolios are completely controlled by the learners, they are not intimate diaries. They can be accessed by wide audience as required, such as teachers, fellow students and parents. Using ePortfolios can give teachers a new insight into the process of learning. When teachers integrate ePortfolios into teaching and learning it creates an opportunity to use a wide range of educational approaches.

An in depth description of ePortfolio functions is given in the **EUfolio generic functional specification**. The literature basis of this policy review results in the following summary of main ePortfolio functions, varying depending on the context of its use:

- representation of learning (showcase);
- process of learning (development, formative assessment),
- products of learning (learning and teaching, summative assessment).

Even ePortfolios created – for example - for formal assessment in school environments can be transformed to any other type of ePortfolio, because they base on a repository of learning artefacts that can be re-arranged if the purpose is changed.

## II. ePortfolio as a Tool for Developing and Assessing 21st Century Skills

ePortfolios are ideally suited to the assessment of collections of work produced by students and are thus particularly powerful tools for communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages and cultural awareness and expression. As they are digital tools, based on Web 2.0 technology, they are also very suitable for developing ICT skills and to embed learning products, made with various ICT tools (e.g. slide presentations, podcasts, videos etc.). They provide a rich context to construct and document learning through the working process and the artefacts produced, while they provide opportunities for self-, peer- and teacher feedback and assessment. Through the ePortfolio process, further skills are required and developed for collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, autonomous learning, decision making and effective communication.

To date, most ePortfolio implementations, so far, took place in higher education. Teaching portfolios, accompanying teacher education are quite well documented. Even though there are comparatively few reports on ePortfolio use in school, ePortfolios are already used in some European schools as a means of supporting the formative and summative assessment of students' creative productions. However, many of these implementations are based on teacher's initiatives rather than on a broader policy approach.

## III. Advantages of and Considerations for ePortfolio Implementation

Although in research literature and reports, ePortfolios are mentioned as tools for 21st century skills assessment they have a much broader impact on teaching and learning processes. Yet, as all technologies, they have advantages and disadvantages.

ePortfolios provide benefits in several points:

- Creation of an electronic portfolio serves to develop multimedia technology skills
- ePortfolios provide a rich picture of student learning and competencies

- They facilitate the exchange of ideas and feedback
- They encourage students to reflect on their work and their reasons for choosing certain pieces to be incorporated in their portfolio.
- They foster a sense of pride of students for their work, a sense of personal accomplishment, and a feeling of satisfaction.
- ePortfolios engage students in the evaluation and assessment process.
- Many kinds of artefacts (learning products) can be incorporated into electronic portfolios.
- ePortfolios are easy to maintain, edit and update.
- ePortfolios are easy to “carry”, to share with others, and to transport into a new system or new working environment.
- They are easily accessible by a number of people (determined by the owner of the ePortfolio) and viewable by a possible worldwide audience.
- They are easy to organise and allow searching their content.
- They are easy and efficient to store.
- ePortfolios are inexpensive, especially to reproduce, although initial set-up costs in software and equipment have to be considered.
- They have the potential to be standardised across regions and countries.
- They can include a privacy feature.

Challenges connected with the use of ePortfolios are

- a rather high workload – especially for teachers (less in preparation of classes, but considerably concerning the mentoring activities for student’s ePortfolios)
- the need of scaffolding tools for the teachers and students in order to follow the progress and achievement of learning
- the ICT skills of both teachers and students (that are to a certain extent a prerequisite for the work with ePortfolio platforms)
- the hardware (schools have to be properly equipped with computers, notebooks or tablets; if homework is connected to ePortfolio work it has to be made sure that all students are able to do this homework on a proper device)
- a stable internet connection (ePortfolios are usually Web-based)
- privacy and data security issues

In implementation of ePortfolios, there are several areas that need to be considered:

- teaching practice (and/or the necessary CPD and support for teachers)
- quality assurance
- legal considerations
- development and support considerations
- Indicators for successful implementation and learning outcomes

#### **IV. ePortfolio Policy and Practice review**

The European Commission sees ePortfolio mainly as tool for the assessment, validation and recognition of skills and competences, particularly for transversal competences (critical thinking, creativity), as tools for collaboration, self- and peer assessment. In primary and secondary schools ePortfolios are receiving increasing attention and importance across Europe. Yet, in most European countries an “ePortfolio policy” does not exist. The ePortfolio is incorporated in ICT policy or other policy documents, related with student assessment, skills education for Language, students’ extra-curricular activities and teachers’ professional development, ICT implementation plans etc. EPortfolio use is mostly driven by organisational initiatives or single pilot project activities. Some local and regional initiatives show a lifelong learning approach to ePortfolios.

Scholars find benefits of ePortfolios in primary and secondary education. The ePortfolio is a powerful tool to increase student motivation:

- Students with ePortfolio artefacts had significantly higher grade point averages, credit hours earned, and retention rates than a matched set of students without ePortfolio artefacts.

- Active participation of learners in the process of creating their portfolios is motivating for students for a few reasons: they have ownership and responsibility over their creation; easy to get feedback; self-discovery and self-reflection that the learning becomes meaningful.

It has impact in developing skills:

- enhancing learners' understanding of writing;
- goal setting,
- problem solving,
- data gathering,
- work and peer interaction,
- student literacy,
- self-regulated learning.

### Policy recommendations

- Encourage the development of ICT environments and tools that holistically support curricula (IPTS, 2013)

- Encourage the development of ICT environments and tools that allow teachers to quickly, easily and flexibly create customized electronic learning and assessment environments. Open source tools that can be adapted by teachers to fit their teaching style and their learners' needs should be better promoted. Teachers should be involved in the development of these tools and encouraged to further develop, expand, modify and amend these themselves (IPTS, 2013)

- Encourage teachers to network and exchange good practice. Many of the ICT- enhanced assessment practices within schools are promoted by a small number of teachers who enthusiastically and critically engage with ICT for assessment. To upscale and mainstream and also to establish good practice, it is necessary to better support these teachers, encourage them to exchange their experiences, establish good practice and peer-review mechanism. (IPTS, 2013)

- Set incentives for research and development of promising technologies for the assessment of Key Competences (IPTS, 2013)

- Scenarios as a tool to support decision making. School heads, e-learning planners, policy-makers, etc. could benefit from these types of scenarios to better understand what can actually be done with ePortfolios (EUN, 2005).

The full benefit of ePortfolio can only be achieved if one person is able to grow and use his/her ePortfolio anyplace, anytime, for any purpose. While it is quite possible to develop an ePortfolio in isolation, in a single class of a school, or in a single discipline (e.g. ICT), the benefits of the ePortfolio in such a scenario is limited. A more holistic approach should support the ePortfolio as a LLL tool throughout educational institutions, workplaces and spheres of nonformal and informal learning. Such an approach can be achieved at different levels: territorial (national, regional, district, county or municipality) or sectorial (schools, universities, vocational education and training, organizations) (EifEl, 2009)

### Literature, quoted in this abridged version

Please consult the full version of the *EUfolio Policy and Practice review* for a complete list of resources  
EACEA (2011). European Commission *Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at School in Europe 2011*.

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/129en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/129en.pdf)

ElfEI (2009). *ePortfolio – a European Perspective*. A report on ePortfolio readiness and state of the art in technology and practice. [http://www.cde-pc.it/documenti/ave\\_eportfolio.pdf](http://www.cde-pc.it/documenti/ave_eportfolio.pdf)

EUN (2005). report *National policies and case studies on the use of portfolios in teacher training*. [http://www.eun.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=a7d4069c-9e37-4264-9d6f-af858f21031c&groupId=43887](http://www.eun.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=a7d4069c-9e37-4264-9d6f-af858f21031c&groupId=43887)

IPTS (2013). The use of ICT for the Assessment of Key Competences, JRC Scientific and Policy Reports, EUR 25891. <http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=5719>