



Using SMS to add ePortfolio blog entries

Why?

As part of the JISC funded EPICS-2 project we looked at ways in which mobile technologies could support learners by interacting with ePortfolios.

We extensively researched several available options including providing a web interface to their existing ePortfolio via a PDA's web browser, third-party form-building tools, and a web framework. The most suitable option was deemed to be using text messaging to allow students to add content to their blogs.

The key benefits of using SMS text messaging for this are: -

1. The technology is familiar, meaning less training is required
2. The learners are providing the technology themselves, meaning capital expenditure is reduced
3. The cost of sending messages is relatively inexpensive
4. It does not need to rely on a wi-fi network or 3g connectivity.

Early Indicators

Although this part of the project is not yet complete, we do have some early feedback from users.

Although the consensus is generally positive, there have been some potential issues raised, including the cost, professionalism and that using personal mobile phones could be a potential conflict between the personal and the educational spheres.

A final report on this work will be made available via the EPICS-2 Website.

What?

Newcastle University has provided a service for undergraduate students allowing them to add blog entries to their ePortfolio at any time and from any location by simply sending a text message.

The core functionality is provided by JanetTxt, a service provided by Janet (through a company called PageOne), which is designed to provide low-cost SMS services for the education sector.

In order to add text messages into the ePortfolio we have used the SOAP web services which are provided as an add-on to the core service.

How?

The learner sends their message to a pre-defined number. This message is collected by the JanetTxt service, which forwards the message via the SOAP protocol to a Newcastle University server.

This server checks what number the message came from, matching it to central university records, and adds the message to the corresponding student's ePortfolio blog as a 'private' entry.

When the student next logs in to their ePortfolio, they can amend these records, changing security details and attaching supplementary files.

More...

Further details are available on the EPICS-2 Website - <http://www.epics.ac.uk>

