

SQA: DeskSpace e-portfolio Case Study



Skills for Work – *Financial Services* at St George’s School, Edinburgh



St George’s School, Edinburgh
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OVERVIEW

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. We fulfil the dual roles of awarding body and regulatory authority in Scotland.

For some time, we have been aware of the need for vocational courses that would help young people expand their knowledge and skills in preparation for the world of work. With this in mind, SQA has developed Skills for Work Courses that offer a positive learning experience and provide young people with the opportunity to develop their self-confidence.

One of the Skills for Work Courses we offer is *Financial Services*, assessed at Intermediate 2 level (SCQF Level 5). It contains four mandatory Units:

- Introduction to the Financial Sector;
- Personal Financial Awareness;
- Building Positive Relationships with Customers and Colleagues; and
- Employability Skills.



Learners maintain a portfolio for each Unit, which demonstrates evidence of preparation, planning and participation in a range of activities.

SQA, along with a technology provider, has developed a customised e-portfolio called DeskSpace to cater for learners taking Skills for Work Courses. It was designed in line with *Regulatory Principles for e-Assessment*, in particular with Principle 13, ‘Use of e-portfolios for

assessment'. DeskSpace has been in use for over two years and is available to all SQA Skills for Work learners.

DeskSpace allows learners to record their course evidence online, keeping everything together and making it accessible to teachers/tutors, assessors and verifiers. Work can be uploaded and submitted online, while the user-friendly interface helps learners structure their learning through the use of online templates.

SQA is piloting the use of remote verification, including e-verification of DeskSpace e-portfolios used for Skills for Work Courses. One verifier commented that staff in all centres could see the benefits of using DeskSpace, had taken ownership of the system (perceived to be of paramount importance) and were doing some '*cracking work*'.

Feedback has been very positive, and more and more centres are offering this support to their learners. One such centre is St George's School in Edinburgh.

St George's School exists to promote educational excellence for girls. The school works in partnership within Scottish education in a global context and is open to change and improvement in every aspect of its activities as a flexible and open learning centre.

RATIONALE

The Skills for Work *Financial Services* Course was successfully piloted at St George's after the school identified a gap in its curriculum in the area of personal financial awareness.

To make the Course interesting and bring it alive, the school sought to create hands-on experiences at every opportunity and to take an interactive approach to teaching and learning.

The introduction of the DeskSpace e-portfolio was a sensible and logical extension to the Skills for Work Course offered to S5 and S6 students. The school found the e-portfolio application straightforward to implement and reports that it quickly became popular with students.



Teaching staff, too, welcomed this '*valuable tool*', which combines set tasks with the option for students to customise and personalise their own e-portfolios.

The school uses DeskSpace to focus on specific Units within the *Financial Services Course*. These Units are:

- **Personal Finance Awareness**, which encourages students to research online for information to find ways of borrowing and saving; and
- **Introduction to the Financial Sector**, which covers issues such as legislation, financial institutions, the Stock Market, and general financial rules and regulations.

This internet-based approach clearly appealed to the students. Teachers confirmed that the young women made good progress when using DeskSpace and were able to upload spreadsheets, video files and images when required.

BENEFITS

St George's considers DeskSpace to be a stable, very practical product that is easy to use and is comprehensively supported by SQA. Its standard website access makes it effective. The subject department has welcomed opportunities to give demonstrations to other schools that are considering the introduction of the e-portfolio model to their curriculum.

DeskSpace allows students not only to learn but also to personalise their web portfolios and customise their workspace. It also allows them to see at a glance when their work projects are due for completion. If they have any queries, they can email their teacher for clarification, explanation or comment. The work that students complete ties in with future projects, allowing them to update and continue their self-evaluation.

Teachers like the e-portfolio application because it helps them keep track of their students' work without the risk of paper-based work going missing.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CENTRES

Teaching staff from other Scottish schools have visited St George's to see DeskSpace in action. It is free to introduce and implement for a number of Skills for Work Courses. As St George's has discovered, staff with an interest in IT can readily introduce DeskSpace to help students progress in a controlled, step-by-step manner.

St George's is in no doubt about the benefits of the e-portfolio application and recommends that others try it.

DeskSpace ticks all the right boxes, definitely. It offers checklists, the chance for students to customise their e-portfolios, and a great way for students and teachers to communicate, not

necessarily confined to classroom time. It's an extremely helpful and effective evaluation tool that students clearly enjoy using. Sometimes I'm surprised by just how quickly they become familiar and creative with it as they personalise their web space. It's easy to introduce and to understand, yet opens up so many possibilities via the internet for appropriate research and other tools.

Sandra Stenhouse, Head of Business and Enterprise at St George's School

Updating information and making sure projects are on time are really useful features. And making our own e-portfolios personal, with our own touch, is fun.

S5 Student

The course included personal finance and the financial sector, so the e-portfolio application helped me research quickly lots of material. It was a step-by-step form of learning online, and I found it all very interesting and am glad I got the chance to be involved.

S6 Student