

EMP Awarding Body Ltd

Centre/Organisation	EMP Awarding Body Ltd
Programme(s)	NVQs
Awarding Body(s)	EMP
Learner numbers	n/a
Contact details	Andy Rotherham

Background

The EMP Awarding Body Limited is a nationally recognised awarding body for National and Scottish Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs) for the extractive and mineral processing, mining, and waste processing industries. This is obviously a very specialist area. It comprises small and large organisations, often, by their nature working remotely on sites that have inherent dangers. The AB works with a range of companies and smaller centres to offer specialist qualifications for the sector.

How they started

The nature of the sector has led to EMP supporting innovation in the collection of evidence for portfolios since, in many situations the traditional paper based portfolio is difficult to work with. EMP does not specify the use of any particular system but, through its full-time staff, it supports centres to work in ways that meet the needs of their particular operation effectively. Two examples of this are included in this case study.

Barry Robinson Consulting Services deals with heavy plant NVQ's in the quarrying industry. Evidence needs to be collected in very difficult circumstances and in challenging working environments. All evidence has to be collected on site with PDAs used to capture evidence which is then uploaded onto a laptop. The use of tablet PCs were considered but whilst these were fine for use indoors, they had severe limitations when used outdoors in tough, dusty environments.

Increasing use is made of video and photographic evidence and the technology is also used to undertake the testing of underpinning knowledge. A bank of questions covering both the NVQ and Health & Safety is answered by the candidate using mobile GPRS/3G technology on-site.

It is estimated that, overall, a saving of 3 to 4 hours is made in the assessment process which allows more assessments to be completed in a given time, saving the employer time and also providing realistic performance evidence.

Barbara Gilles of Alchemy Effects Ltd is based in Scotland and undertakes a range of assessment and verification work for awarding bodies including EMP across a number of disciplines including management NVQs. She has encouraged the use of technology across a broad range of programmes with candidates uploading their evidence through a portal on her company website to an on-line portfolio system. She sees the use of the internet as an enabler for all candidates to be working on a "level playing field".

She uses a variety of systems to capture evidence before it is uploaded depending both on the programme concerned and the location. These include:

- Capturing photographic evidence in quarries, and annotating the photograph with the nature of the evidence
- Using the Bluetooth feature on mobile phones to transfer captured evidence to the main system or to print it for review

- Using the recording feature on mobile phones or PDAs to capture professional discussion
- Using short videos as evidence
- Helping candidates to gather electronic evidence that already exists on their PCs or laptops – particularly important with management programmes

Barbara estimates that 90% of the candidates she manages now use the e-portfolio system. She sees this use of technology as helping her to encourage candidates to take responsibility for their own learning. Access to their portfolios via the website means that they do not necessarily have to wait for an assessor to capture evidence and upload it and most of them have the necessary tools – mobile phones or PDAs - to capture the evidence when its appropriate. This is also particularly important when candidates are spread over large geographic areas on remote sites such as those in Scotland working in the quarrying industries.

GQA is convinced that using the mobile technology will bring significant benefits to its operations and that of its centres. In particular its work to date suggests:

- Employers prefer the system because “down time” for employees is reduced
- Assessors prefer the reduced levels of paperwork
- The system is more efficient and needs less time overall for the assessment and verification process
- The system is safer to use in challenging locations where coping with paper is more difficult
- There is some evidence that candidates prefer this method of portfolio building and at least one example of a candidate who was not prepared to complete a qualification if they had needed to do so on paper

Next Steps

GQA has invested significantly in the system and are convinced that this will be the way forward for their centres.

They are now working with their centres to increase the number of users following the initial, successful trial project.