

Virtual School virtually anywhere – a digital case study

This is an innovative tri-partnership initiative that is sustainable and environmentally sound. Pupils access curriculum through interactive online-classrooms from across the UK's largest council area covering 1/3 of Scotland's land mass. Senior Phase pupils in rural Highland schools had a limited choice of curriculum compared to pupils elsewhere in Scotland, particularly urban areas. Many pupils would have to travel huge distances to college campuses in major towns.

Virtual School was developed in partnership with schools and the local authority, and has become a sustainable digital approach to learning since its initiation several years ago. Each year we have enhanced the approach and further developed the brand. This provision is not only about giving choice of curriculum to pupils in tiny high schools, but also about progression pathways and building a regional curriculum from lower levels up. This model provides the only sustainable way to offer a choice of Foundation Apprenticeships and senior phase curriculum across multiple schools in very remote and rural areas. The Virtual School model has the potential for a much wider adoption across Scotland.

Virtual School is just like any on-campus timetabled class, except they attend online-classroom with pupils from other schools often well over 200 miles apart. Pupils benefit because they now have access to the range of curriculum offered to urban based high school pupils. Schools benefit by a greatly expanded curriculum with sustainable class sizes. Due to agreed timetabling across all high schools, Virtual School curriculum is seamlessly integrated into timetables. Across 29 schools, every senior phase pupil has the same choice of 27 subjects ranging SCQF 5-7.

Pupils learn, talk and collaborate together with their teacher in their online-classroom and benefit from getting to know people from other parts of the region. Not only do pupils learn new subjects, but they gain an enhanced level of digital communication and collaboration skills whilst studying, improving their employability and digital literacy. Student feedback is very positive and retention is high. Virtual School provides continuity to pupils with illness/disability who can't always physically attend their local school but do attend Virtual School. It is a viable and accessible option for home schooled children. Schools and the authority benefit by having a consistent approach and access to a school's website for guidance teachers, parents and pupils. This model is efficient and helps towards a greener Scotland. There is no loss of time and cost of travel, reducing the local authority travel expenditure. All Virtual School classes continued seamlessly through lockdown and started as planned and as usual in August 2020.



Struan Robertson studied at Mallaig High School, but lives on the Isle of Eigg. He worked on a project with Sitekit to help promote a Highland-based charity to a global audience.

He said: "It's definitely a great feeling knowing your work is making a difference to people's lives. On top of that, it's a bonus that I'm getting experience in an area that I've always been interested in while I'm still at school."

Struan is now studying Computing at Dundee University

Mairi MacRae studied the FA Creative and Digital Media in 2017-18, and as part of this, worked as part of the social media and design team within the Marketing Department of West Highland College UHI.

"Taking the course boosted my confidence in my professional skills and confirmed for me that Design was what I wanted to study. It certainly helped me gain unconditional offers for university as it set me apart from my competition.

I've now been at Edinburgh Napier for 2½ years studying BDes (Hons) Graphic Design and would still thoroughly recommend the course as giving a great, practical insight into the world of design and the skills and attributes needed to succeed."

