



Music to everyone's ears:

Learn how the success of a pilot project involving primary school pupils taking music lessons over videoconferencing, encouraged Dumfries & Galloway Council to invest in upgrading their broadband network to deliver cost effective teaching to a greater number of pupils.

Pupils from Port William receiving their lessons via videoconferencing.

In November 2005, with funding from the Scottish Executive, four primary schools in the more remote parts of Dumfries & Galloway agreed to undertake a very special challenge. Thirty pupils in Drummore, Glentroot, Port William and Whithorn started lessons in their schools on a variety of brass instruments. Their tutor, Grant Golding, would only ever teach them remotely via video conferencing from many miles away in Dumfries.

The programme's evaluation team from Warwick University noted: "Pupils appear to be making progress on a par with or better than they would have done in 'normal' instrumental lessons."

In addition to regular weekly lessons, pupils enjoyed several live video conference lessons with Rod Franks, principal trumpet player with the London Symphony Orchestra. Rod's involvement gave a fantastic added bonus to the programme, enhancing the regular teaching and demonstrating clearly the benefits for pupils of having access to one of the world's leading musicians.

Although videoconferencing has been around for many years, it has rarely been used effectively as a music teaching tool with young children. Part of the reason for this was that the technology did not permit good enough pictures synchronized with high quality sound to make the experience stimulating enough for pupils to retain interest. Teachers also found that videoconferencing was cumbersome to operate and often unreliable – until now.

Alan Cameron, Education Officer and Project Manager for Dumfries & Galloway Schools' Music Service says, "The programme was a great success and gained national and international recognition. Following on from this unique teaching project, we are currently upgrading our broadband connectivity to be able to run videoconferencing over the internet. Soon, tutors will be able to teach a far greater number of children on a weekly basis."

The University of Warwick's Centre for Education and Industry conducted an evaluation of the project and reported the following findings as part of its evaluation of the project.

### Project Research Findings

- The project has nurtured pupils' self-esteem, respect for others and positive interdependence through the emphasis on co-operative learning in small groups. In particular, there has been a strong move towards pupil autonomy.
- Improvements in pupil behaviour and confidence have been marked during lessons, as has willingness to take responsibility for learning.
- A significant number of parents have taken an active role in encouraging their children to learn an instrument.
- Pupils are making excellent progress in instrumental technique and are conscious of the importance of regular practice.
- Learning an instrument by video conference is highly motivating; this is reflected in the exceptionally low drop-out rate. Also, pupils were enjoying lessons more after one year than when they started and many now want longer sessions.
- Most pupils appear to be more motivated to learn an instrument for its own sake than because of the presence of video conference technology.
- Many pupils have been highly motivated to perform in public despite initially limited skills levels.
- No pupils or teachers have encountered difficulties in learning to operate the video conference technologies.

Alan adds, "We've been working with Videonations, our specialist video suppliers, for the past four years. Most recently, we have procured from them, videoconferencing infrastructure that will allow our schools to communicate over IP rather than ISDN. This will not only improve the quality of the experience, but will also remove all call charges associated with making a video conference connection."