

Welsh Government marks the launch of new Rural Education Plan with innovative 'E-sgol' project

Based on the successful 'E-Sgoil' initiative introduced by the Scottish Government in the Hebrides, 'E-sgol' will use video technology to connect classrooms. This means that pupils from one school can join classes at other schools remotely, and can access a greater range of subjects in both English and Welsh.

The project aims to bring all schools in Wales into the digital age by introducing innovative teaching techniques. It is just one of the measures in the Rural Education Action Plan which also includes the introduction of a presumption against closure of rural schools, a new Small and Rural School grant, and working alongside BT to improve connectivity in schools in difficult to reach areas. The 21st Century Schools capital investment programme which aims to create modern and sustainable education communities across rural Wales will play an important role in achieving this.

The action plan also sets out additional training and support opportunities for teachers and head teachers in rural areas through the Business Manager Pilot and National Academy for Education Leadership (NAEL) programme; improved emotional and mental health support through the CAMHS in-reach project and aims to ensure schools play a more central role in their communities.

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams said:

"Today's E-sgol lesson has been great fun and has demonstrated how technology can provide solutions to some of the issues rural schools face. I am delighted to launch the project and am grateful to the Scottish Government for their help in getting the technology to Wales.

"This project will connect pupils in Welsh schools with other schools across the country, and ensure they're given the best learning experience even in the most rural parts of the UK.

"If we ensure that pupils and schools in rural Wales have the right support to succeed, then we can ensure that our rural communities and economy will go from strength to strength."

Scottish Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary John Sweeney said:

"Our languages and culture are important to both our nations and we have strong visions of growth for Gaelic and Welsh going forward.

It is particularly pleasing to see the innovative E-Sgoil model for digital learning, designed and championed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with support from the Scottish Government being adopted by the Welsh Government to support their young people's language learning.

"In these times of uncertainty, it is important that we continue to work across our different Governments to identify further potential projects that could benefit our prosperity."

Cllr Angus McCormack, Chairman of Education, Sport and Children's Services at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, said:

"Supported by the Scottish Government, we are constantly discovering new ways that e-Sgoil digital learning allows us to deliver education in ways which we have never before been able to do.

"Our vision is that all learners can experience an education enriched by digital technology. Given the aspirations we have for our respective languages, we are very pleased to be working in partnership with the Welsh Government in order to support their young people's language learning."