Scottish Local Government Digital Partnership

Case Study

e-Sgoil and Online Curriculum Development

Executive Summary

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has introduced a major transformational change programme within the Education and Children's Services Department in the Western Isles to enhance opportunities for learners, educators and the wider public.

e-Sgoil, an e-learning interface for planning, managing and delivering lessons using technological solutions, is a recognition of the fact that the ways in which young people learn are evolving and changing at an unprecedented rate. e-Sgoil makes use of our national education intranet, GLOW, and is effectively using this to bring teachers and learners together irrespective of their location. From their bases in Stornoway (Lewis) and Carinish (North Uist) they deploy GTCS registered teachers and current technology to deliver real-time, interactive lessons, to pupils throughout Scotland.

e-Sgoil has been incredibly successful across many factors. Pass rates in Gaelic have increased to 96% across Scotland, for those students using e-Sgoil; the curriculum has been expanded to offer a wider choice to Western Isles students and travel burdens have been significantly reduced for staff and pupils alike.

Background

Primary schools across the Western Isles vary in size from 8 pupils in Bernera to 438 in Stornoway. While the quality of the educational experience is very good, most schools are relatively isolated, have small staffing complements and at times can find broader curriculum opportunities difficult either to access or support. The same holds true for secondary education, with the added difficulty of recruiting and encouraging staff to live and teach across the council area.

As such, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar recognised they were at risk of limiting the educational choices, opportunities to explore alternate career options and ultimately the positive life chances for their younger residents. The concept of a virtual Gàidhlig school for Scotland was proposed, and accepted, by Scottish Ministers in 2014. Therefore, this combination of national and local interests, plus the transformational change agenda of the council created the concept and vision of e-Sgoil.

Drivers

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar wanted to provide a wider and more equitable choice of subjects for pupils across all secondary schools in the Western Isles:

- To ensure they could deliver an optimum primary curriculum across small, geographically dispersed primary schools;
- To support the expansion of Gaelic medium education locally and nationally;
- To develop a network of staff who can deliver online learning in all subject areas throughout Scotland and;
- To engage with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's workforce planning strategy in relation to adult learning and modern apprenticeships.

Results

This method of learning prepares young people extremely well for further education and helps bridge the gap between school and college or university; the implementation of e-Sgoil has been specifically responsible for:

- **95.8% pass rate in Gaelic exams:** Gaelic students across Scotland, taught either full time or with part time input using e-Sgoil, have a pass rate of 95.8 per cent which is significantly higher than the national average of 77 per cent;
- **Efficiently sharing limited resources:** e-Sgoil has facilitated the sharing of high quality music and drama resources, including music and arts expertise from outside organisations, and enabling larger class sizes by linking up young people from different schools. An e-ceilidh was recently hosted using e-Sgoil bringing hundreds of people together from around the globe to celebrate and enjoy Scottish culture;
- **Improving access to archived learning resources:** e-Sgoil enables schools and community groups to work together more effectively by facilitating opportunities for accessing archives of pre-recorded learning and teaching resources.
- **Financial savings:** avoidance of travel costs for teachers and pupils has benefited household and school budgets alike. Reductions in printing requirements for resources have already been noticed and these are being monitored for a full understanding of their impact.
- **Efficient learning:** pupils spend less time travelling, are less tired and can devote more energy to enjoying their education.The lessons are recorded so pupils can go over any revision areas at any time they need to.

ANNE MORRISON
E-SGOIL TEACHER

Anne Morrison, Teacher, e-Sgoil

Interview with teacher Anne Morrison who shares her experience of using e-Sgoil to teach pupils in the Western Isles.

DONALD MACLEOD
E-SGOIL TEACHER

Donald MacLeod, Teacher, e-Sgoil

Interview with teacher Donald MacLeod who shares his experience of using e-Sgoil to teach RMPS in the Western Isles.

Implementation

e-Sgoil was implemented using Vscene, Glow and Office 365 – all readily accessible and able to work on current council hardware platforms. Staff deliver lessons from an individual room using a laptop or PC but benefit from having a headset, mic and second screen. Individual pupils can use the same equipment for 1:2:1 lessons but access to a large screen is advisable for groups. Classroom observations through Vscene are carried out regularly by the principal teachers and they can link in remotely and observe without disrupting the lesson or impacting on classroom dynamics.

GTCS registered teachers use the above technology to deliver real-time, interactive lessons, to pupils throughout Scotland. e-Sgoil teaching takes place electronically and it is still done directly, with a teacher "in front" of a classroom at all times. Children and young people can do work online in one school, while their teacher at another school can see it and make comments on it in real-time; the teacher is solely focused on their online students with feedback, and lesson observations, suggesting there is more direct communication on a 1 to 1 level with the pupil using e-Sgoil than traditional classroom methods.

It is recommended that e-Sgoil should be used as part of a blended approach to learning, it does not replace the value of physical classroom teaching but it is a very successful method of teaching when used together with other methods. Pupils engage well with the teachers, even though they appear in the classrooms via a screen.

It is a very interactive method for teachers as they can focus on individual needs and work with pupils to advise real time using shared documents. Harnessing the use of learning through technology alongside existing educational provisions creates wider curriculum choices, supports existing programmes of raising attainment, creates associated links in Gaelic language and culture, and is also a mechanism to address rural inequalities by widening opportunities for all.

What subjects can be supported using e-Sgoil?

Any subject has the capability to be delivered via e-Sgoil, the currently supported curriculum is comprised of the following list:

Subject	Other uses
Higher Modern Studies	Training groups of teachers to use technology at point of need.
Advanced Higher Geography	
Higher Maths	
Advanced Higher Maths	
National 5 Physics (support for learning)	
National 5 Physics	Delivering Child Protection training to community groups.
National 5/ H Biology	
National 5/ H Chemistry	
National 4/5 Business Studies	Facilitating high-end music tuition from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to enhance local provision.
Primary 1 Gaelic	
S1-S5 Gaelic	
Eachdraidh BGE (History delivered in Gaelic)	
Spanish	
Fiddle and Chanter Tuition	Promoting on-line professional learning communities for subject networks.
Brass Tuition	
Melodeon Tuition	
Higher RMPS	Setting up an infrastructure for primary schools to engage in listening and talking activities as part of the Government's 1+2 language strategy.
Higher Psychology	
Higher Computing Science	
Easter study support	

e-Sgoil learning has been delivered between islands in the Western Isles, in other areas of the Highland and Islands and to Argyll and Bute, Aberdeenshire, Perth and East Dunbartonshire. There have even been international links for language and cultural teaching with both students and staff being involved from countries such as Spain and India.

Moving Forward

e-Sgoil will continue to grow and expand. Currently Comhairle nan Eilean Siar are focusing on responding to demand from existing schools and community groups, helping the education system adapt to how pupils learn in the 21st century and delivering the Education and Children's Services Department's vision.

e-Sgoil has Scotland wide relevance and the council will continue to collaborate with other councils on how they could support learning and teaching opportunities. e-Sgoil offers real solutions to real challenges, and the resultant evidence from the programme suggests that this is a resource with huge local and national transformational potential.

Universities are becoming more flexible in the planning and delivery of teacher education opportunities at all levels. Some aspects of Initial Teacher Education have already been delivered by distance learning methodology across the Western Isles. The advantage that e-Sgoil brings, with every school having access, means that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar can efficiently deliver teacher education locally. This will give far more residents who have an interest in becoming a teacher the chance to do so, and tackle a long-standing equalities issue not only in the Western Isles but elsewhere in rural Scotland.

There is an opportunity to introduce a modern apprenticeship programme as part of the Comhairle's workforce planning programme. Where traditional approaches would have directed young people to Stornoway or perhaps the mainland to gain such experiences, the potential that e-Sgoil provides suggests a far more even distribution of opportunities across the islands with minimal disruption to family life.

There is a significant community of Syrian refugees now living in the islands and there are plans to recruit a teacher to offer Arabic lessons. Angus MacLennan, head teacher of e-Sgoil said *"The refugees are learning English, but there will be a time when the children are able to develop their Arabic. This will enable them to communicate with their grandparents in years to come. It's at an early stage but it is being planned at the moment."* There are also plans to recruit Mandarin teachers in response to high levels of investment from China in Western Isles businesses.

STEVEN GRAHAM
PRINCIPAL TEACHER OF STEM (E-SGOIL)

Steven Graham, **Principal Teacher of STEM at e-Sgoil**

Steven will be looking at how he can develop learning stores for use by e-Sgoil. Over his time as a Maths teacher he has set up a really popular store of video tutorials and topic reviews where pupils can revise material. He has set up a website https://mrgrahammaths.wordpress.com/about/ and he is also on Twitter @mrgrahammaths1.

The e-Sgoil management board has recently expanded with representatives joining from both Shetland and Highland Council. If you would like to get involved with e-Sgoil, please email e-sgoil@gnes.net.

Biggest Challenges

The main challenges for e-Sgoil have not been technological and instead relate to the already continuous challenge of planning and delivering education in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. These challenges relate to the scattered nature of the population, the declining school rolls in most, but not all, of the communities and ensuring that there is a well-qualified workforce available across the four secondary schools and twenty-two primary schools with the provision of a curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.

In addition, there is a national challenge in providing a Gaelic medium secondary educational experience to the growing numbers of Gaelic medium pupils across the country.

e-Sgoil has successfully risen to the initial challenges, in fact has exceeded expectations, so there is every expectation that it will continue to grow and transform educational delivery and attainment not just in the Western Isles but across Scotland as well.

Recommendations/Lessons Learned

BERNARD CHISHOLM
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES · COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Bernard Chisholm, Director of Education and Children's Services

Interview with Bernard exploring the introduction of e-Sgoil and how it has impacted learning and teaching in the Western Isles.

Participant Details

With thanks to Bernard Chisholm, Angus MacLennan, Jane Watson, Anne Morrison, Steven Graham, Donald MacLeod, Kenny Matheson, Mira Byrne, Aileen MacSween, Karen Cormack, Ruaraidh Cormack, Hamish Budge and Catriona Currie.

For further information, please visit www.e-sgoil.com or use twitter handle @eSgoil.

A supporting summary infographic can also be found on the Digital Office website.

If you have a project that could be shared as a case study to other members of the Digital Partnership, please email info@digitaloffice.scot.