

Scottish Island Schools Network: Bringing the Remote Rural Voice to Networked Professional Development

Thursday 5 August 2021 - Parallel Session 5 – 12.45pm to 1.45pm (GMT+1)

FRASER - Building Enduring Partnerships

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Place limits us, defines us and shapes us. There is a growing evidence base for the need for place to be further examined in designing the curriculum and pedagogical approach (Corbett, 2015) within rural education and the impact on learning (Corbett, 2015; Massey, 2005; Coomber, 2015). However, the complex current focus on governance that requires standardisation of national curriculum, testing, guidance on teaching strategies pays little cognisance to the local place (Corbett, 2020). This is true of professional development opportunities in Scotland today and one which the Scottish Islands School network is seeking partly to address. The dilemma with a small staff and a small budget of balancing the needs of the school and the needs of the teacher to ensure their development and career progression is not limited by location. During the global pandemic much was made of technological developments, the enabling of those in remote/rural areas to now access the previously inaccessible. However, this opportunity to join with mainland and urban colleagues on a more equitable basis brings with it the risk that the rural voice, often conflicting island priorities, the nature of teaching within a close, small community, is lost against the weight and number of urban based voices. The Scottish Island Schools Network emerged during the pandemic as a vehicle to bring those individual voices together, to create a bigger collective voice with regards to professional development needs, wants and desires onto the national stage. Using Microsoft Teams, the network was able to easily connect island leadership teams with each other, to discuss remote rural issues specific to the islands, while also enabling the sharing of external opportunities to engage with mainland colleagues and raise awareness and profile of island schools.