



**DIVA**  
digital media +  
ICT vendor alliance

## Islay may be surrounded by water but its high school is beating an ICT path to the rest of the world.

Students at Islay High are seeing their school go through a technological revolution and if their enthusiasm for learning under the new regime is anything to go by – they're loving it.

Each child will soon have his or her own mini PC to work on, as all staff already do. Blackboards will be replaced by wireless projectors and screens. And the revolution is not just in equipment, it's affecting the curriculum as well. Pupils are being taught professional-level web-design using industry-standard software – building websites not just for their school but also local organisations.

The school is part of a pilot programme set up by the Scottish Qualifications Authority to update and expand the ICT and digital media curriculum in Scotland, working with industry. Called 'DIVA' for short, it's a official name is the Digital media and ICT Vendor Alliance Programme ([www.sqa.org.uk/diva](http://www.sqa.org.uk/diva)).

In keeping with the school's digital revolution, ICT Co-ordinator Ian Stuart was quick to sign up when the SQA requested partners to help pilot a digital media course from one of the global industry leaders Adobe in August 2006 as part of the DIVA programme.

Mr Stuart said: "Embedding multimedia skills in the curriculum for our 21st century children was right for us. We want our children to have skills for the future not for the past. The SQA DIVA pilot fitted in very well in timing terms. We grabbed the opportunity when they came looking for people to pilot the Adobe Digital Design course materials."

### Paper, pens and pencils saved mainly for art classes

The digital media activity with DIVA builds on a wide-ranging investment to harness new technologies right across the school. Islay High is working in partnership with Microsoft, Dell, Diageo – a large local employer,

and Prodigy – a Certiport solution provider. The school has been granted £300,000 from the Scottish Executive for Schools For Excellence and Ambition for its project and its partners have offered more than £100,000-worth of 'in-kind' backing with support, hardware and software.

Pupils will use their own personal tablet PCs for almost all their work. The school has been trialing the project with three tablet PCs for students and in May 2007 the programme will roll out so they all get their own. These are small laptops like PSPs - Play Station Portables – with a lid that twists around providing a write-on screen.

The school will have a wireless network, with wireless projectors in every teaching area and a presentation space in the assembly hall. There will be no more handouts – all notes are to be sent straight to the pupils' PCs. Once they have them, they can highlight sections, add their own notes, chop and change it, and mark it up as they need to, and then it's all saved and backed up automatically, so they cannot lose it.

**"...Give it a couple of years and these kids will have these skills embedded in them. It's pushing their creative side on."**

### Reservations overcome

Parents had their reservations at first, particularly that the children would lose the art of handwriting with the use of computers. But their minds were soon put to rest as teacher Ian Stuart pointed out.

"Using the tablet PCs means that, if anything, the children's handwriting has to be neater as the computer recognizes the writing and turns it into text. It can't do that if their writing's not up to scratch," he said.

This has fitted in with the school's approach to ICT in general. There is no computer teacher at Islay

High, and all ICT work is done as part of the general curriculum, for example as 3-D graphics in art, or typing and databases in business skills lessons.

## Real-world learning

When the opportunity came up to use the Adobe Digital Design course through the SQA DIVA pilot, the school was already looking for a digital media course that would engage students in real-world learning, giving them work skills not just specific digital skills.

**“The staff can see the issues and can see possibilities. But it is the possibilities they are more excited by,”**

Adobe software is used by professional web designers across the world and the course is project-based. Entitled ‘Foundations of Web Design’, it focuses on project management, research and communication skills as well as web-design and technical abilities. Students start out by working individually on personal projects then move to working as a team on client projects.

## Driving new skills through the years

Mr Stuart took part in the initial training organised by SQA and provided by Adobe, who flew a trainer in from the United States. The school started with a group of sixth year students. The course provided the opportunity for students to make links with local organisations in order to work on real projects such as a website for the Islay Healthy Living Centre, linking into their enterprise skills work. An early benefit was a new website for the school itself.

Alongside its work with the sixth year students, the school began to integrate the Adobe Digital Design programme into the traditional curriculum, using elements such as basic web design, image making and manipulation with photography, and Flash animation creation.

Each first and second year was then asked to make a website about his or herself including a picture and a flash creation. Now Islay High is pushing these skills right through the curriculum.

Mr Stuart said: “We have got to a stage now where we are running courses for the whole school. Give it a couple of years and these kids will have these skills embedded in them. It’s pushing their creative side on.”

As the skills are still new, the teachers have to work on the same basics with the upper school students as

they do with years one and two. But as younger pupils go through, the school will be able to take the work even further. Already Islay High has been working with pupils at its feeder primary schools meaning they too push the skills level up. Now they arrive already equipped with the basics after creating and maintaining their schools’ websites and filming news items which are edited and put together at the High School.

“You have to be multimedia, but text is still the foundation of things,” said Mr Stuart. He points out that these are transferable skills that will, not only, kit out the children personally but also give them the underlying ICT confidence to go on and do much more.

“By the time they leave school all the software will have totally changed but it is about confidence to take those skills and say ‘I can learn this’. Having the confidence is the key,” he added.

## Reaching out and reaching industry

Mr Stuart has found that the new ways of working will have added benefits for Islay High because of its geographical situation.

Being part of the SQA DIVA programme means Islay is looking to create ICT and digital skills that are specifically important to industry. While distilling whisky is still the island’s key business, and is often done by very traditional methods, both island companies and the general community can see big benefits behind ICT savvy youngsters.

“Having really good ICT facilities in the school makes us a resource that’s particularly important to all. In the community they can see using ICT as a form of croft industry, with people able to work from remote areas with virtual communication to any business. They know that communication is one of those vital elements from here - communication with any part of the world.

“It also means we can access courses that we couldn’t teach before. We have full curriculum, but if a pupil wanted to do Spanish for example – we already teach Gaelic and French modern languages – we normally wouldn’t have the time or resources. Now they can have individual headphones on in the language unit and join a class happening somewhere else,” said Mr Stuart.

And the investment in technology will have a knock-on effect in higher and further education with students being able to stay on the island to access the University of Highlands and Islands virtual courses.

Already, Mr Stuart feels the school is in a very strong position to participate in the new GLOW project, the national intranet linking all Scotland's teachers and learners ([www.glowscotland.org.uk](http://www.glowscotland.org.uk)). GLOW will mean all pupils across Scotland being given a unique log-in via which they can pick up materials and advice, and take part in video conferencing dealing directly with any pupil or teacher, anywhere in Scotland.

Now the school is looking to build on its growing ICT capabilities by running more education courses for the community, meaning employers will not have to send staff to Glasgow or Edinburgh to train.

### Positive responses and future strengths

Mr Stuart has been impressed by the staff's response to the changes. They have had their tablet PCs since August and were offered voluntary training one night-a-week. Mr Stuart said there has been a great response, particularly from staff members who knew the least about using the new equipment and overall teachers are looking to the future with the scheme.

"The staff can see the issues and can see possibilities. But it is the possibilities they are more excited by," he said.



But for Mr Stuart the biggest bonus of this move is to inspire staff and students in the classroom.

"The real personal pleasure comes when you see pupils taking responsibility for their own learning. They are asking 'how do I do this, how do I do that' and they are so enthusiastic about what they are doing. They're proactive in their own educations and are saying 'this is what I want to do', or 'that's what I want to do'.

"I see them accessing information on courses that we wouldn't be able to deliver normally. I see our kids being very strong in terms of confidence to take on challenges which traditionally they would stand back from.

**"It's about equipping the students for the future worlds of work and pleasure. I see our pupils as being ready for change mentally and physically – ready for adaptation. This new technology is not going to go away."**

## ISLAY HIGH SCHOOL

A School of Ambition And Excellence: Islay High is a non-denominational six year comprehensive catering for 11 to 18-year-olds. The school serves the islands of Islay and Jura and is situated in the Bowmore, the main village in Islay. The island of Islay has a population of some 3,500 and the main industries are agriculture, distilling, fishing and tourism. The school has 13 classrooms, 14 practical rooms, a games hall, gymnasium and an assembly hall. There are 253 pupils, 29 teachers and 30 support staff. There is a large library resource room and two music practice rooms. The school also has a grass playing field and an all-weather games pitch. Frequent use is made of the local swimming pool.

[www.islay.argyll-bute.sch.uk](http://www.islay.argyll-bute.sch.uk)

*One of a series commissioned through the DIVA (Digital Media and ICT Vendor Alliance) Programme. DIVA is the Scottish Qualifications Authority's flagship initiative to collaborate with industry, education and employers on updating and expanding the Scottish ICT and digital media curriculum and awards.*

**Find out more at [www.sqa.org.uk/diva](http://www.sqa.org.uk/diva)**



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