

SECTION D:

Making Contacts

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FINDING A SCHOOL OR EXPERT TO LINK WITH

Whatever your situation, there will come a time when you need to find someone to video conference with. For example:

- Farway and Branscombe Primary Schools worked on a project about toys, during which their Key Stage 1 groups video conferenced together for a number of sessions on all aspects of the topic. For the final session of the project, they wanted to contact a 'distant' school, ideally from a different country, to share their perspective on toys.
- A Year 10 English group at South Molton Community College in Devon wanted a Year 10 audience at another school for their speeches and also a group that was studying the same texts as them to discuss them with.
- Montgomery Combined School in Exeter wanted to talk to an expert about their science topic, 'The Solar System and Beyond'.
- Kimbolton School in Huntingdon wanted to talk with a South African poet to support their A2 Language and Literature unit of work on the role of language in protest writing from South Africa.
- Langleywood School in Slough wanted to link with a school in the Arctic.

So how do you go about making contacts?

Currently, there is no one definitive directory of schools with video conferencing capability or organizations which are video conferencing providers, but there are a number of useful starting points.

A good place to start looking for your contacts for video conference projects is the **Global Leap** website www.global-leap.com:

- *The Global Leap Directory of Schools* lists over a hundred schools in the UK and around the world that have video conferencing equipment and are keen to use it. Some of these schools' details are listed in *Section E*. There is also the opportunity for you to add your school's details and requirements to the directory AND to send a 'postcard' to the website, on which you can promote your school (including a photograph), your project, creative idea or appeal for a video conferencing partner.

- *The Global Leap Directory of Providers* offers links to a selection of video conference content providers around the world who deliver interactive lessons directly into the classroom. Some have off-the-shelf sessions ready to deliver, some are prepared to customise these sessions to suit your specific requirements and some may be interested in taking part in joint projects. Send an e-mail with your requests - there's nothing to lose!

Many of these providers are in the USA but there are an increasing number of providers in the UK - Museums, art galleries, archives and education centres are starting to offer a video conferencing service, many of them for free, although it is likely this will change as the demand increases.

Some of these providers' details are listed in Section F.

There are many other general lines of enquiry which may lead to video conference contacts:

- Your *Local Education Authority* may have advisory staff who can give you details of any relevant international links and projects.
- Many schools seek to form links with others in Europe by taking part in Comenius projects. European-funded initiatives involve schools in three or more countries linking to work on cross-curricular projects. These often involve real visits and are ideally suited to video conferencing. For more information, visit 'Comenius space', part of the European Schoolnet site providing a network for finding partners, examples of Comenius projects and a discussion area for schools involved in Comenius projects:
www.eun.org/eun.org2/eun/index_comenius.cfm
- The EU funds a number of European Resource Centres around the UK. These will be able to help to find partner schools abroad. The European Resource Centre for the South West has a useful website for finding out about all sorts of international projects. Check the 'International projects and partnerships' section of their website:
www.glosinted.co.uk/european/links/partners.htm
- UK Online Centres **www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres**, Excellence in Cities initiatives **www.standards.dfee.gov.uk/excellence**, local technology colleges and associated specialist schools through the TCT (Technology Colleges Trust) **www.tctrust.org.uk** are often involved in the development of curricular video conferencing. They have contacts in the UK, Europe and worldwide.
- Some commercial firms have established video conferencing links that are applicable, for example the Denford Remote Manufacturing Project:
www.denford.co.uk/videoconferencing.htm

- Ten Regional Broadband Consortia are establishing Broadband services across geographically grouped LEAs, where local/regional video conferencing is being promoted. See *the Building the Grid website* <http://buildingthegrid.becta.org.uk/index.php?loclid=143#res94>
- International websites such as the Pacific Bell directory www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/vidconf/directory.html. This extensive website contains details of video conferencing providers, virtual field trips and 12 other international video conferencing directories including CU-Schools Classroom Conferencing listing for the Global Schoolhouse Foundation www.globalschoolhouse.org/cu/
- There are some websites offering extensive details about video conferencing activities in a particular area. The British Columbia Ministry of Education, Canada, for instance www.videoconferencing.gov.bc.ca and the Department of Education, Victoria, Australia www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lt/telemat/index.htm.
- BECTa has been a repository of school and college video conferencing details since 1997. The recently-updated directory is available on the ICT Advice site <http://ictadvice.org.uk/>
- The BECTa Teachers Online Project website <http://top.ngfl.gov.uk/> currently provides four case studies of schools that have experimented with video conferencing. You may find it useful to e-mail the project asking for schools to video conference with top@becta.org.uk
- The British Council's Windows on the World website www.wotw.org.uk/intro/index.html is a free, easy-to-use database for schools and colleges that wish to develop links with other institutions worldwide. Some of the schools listed have identified video conferencing as an aspiration. Some schools are also using the Internet as their platform for video conferencing. The site also contains some useful project funding information.
- Although it's not directly linked with video conferencing, the United Nations Cyberbus website is a valuable source of information about activities around the world www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/
- Twinning groups. Your town may be twinned with another town in Europe. These links might be a good starting point for finding video conference contacts.

You need to be proactive to find a suitable video conference link. It may require some detective work, but the rewards are worth the effort.

- Using a general internet search to find contacts. Put in a search for '*yourtopic*'+videoconference+education. Pupils at Langleywood School in Slough found a remote Inuit school in Northern Canada this way. See *their case study* at www.becta.org.uk and www.global-leap.com for details.

- Additional funding to support your project might be available through organizations such as the British Council www.britishcouncil.org The British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN

Increasingly, museums and other educational centres are realising that they can reach schools and colleges through video conferencing. An expert who may not have the time to travel a hundred miles to talk to and meet with your class, might well have time for a 40-minute video conference.

Some educational centres view their video conference provision as an important part of their marketing operation and a means of reaching a wider audience.

Finally, if you manage to find a contact but they do not already have video conferencing equipment, they may be able to arrange to use someone else's video conferencing facility or to borrow some equipment. Working together, you could try a number of approaches:

The LEA in your contact school's area should have details of schools with video conferencing capability. One of these schools might be prepared to let you use their system at the school, or even to lend it to you.

Universities or higher education institutions usually have video conferencing facilities and may be prepared to make them available to your intended partner school. They may even want to join the project in some capacity.

Video conference companies have access to 'rooms' all over the world which they hire out to businesses by the hour. Identify and contact a video conferencing company near you and approach them with your request. You might find that they will support your project for a reduced charge, or even free of charge. They would benefit from any publicity the project received, so take that into consideration when you approach them and let them know that you have a plan in place to write press releases and involve the media where appropriate.

Local businesses may have video conferencing facilities they would let you use. Use the local press to make an appeal.

Global Leap www.global-leap.com can sometimes make special arrangements for the loan of equipment.