

School No 201

Using Video Conferencing for Distance Learning at 'A' Level

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Subject Coverage:	Various
Key Stages:	5
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Related Documents & Links:	
www.hertsandessex.herts.sch.uk	
Additional links below	

The Hertfordshire & Essex High School in Bishop's Stortford is a girls' secondary school with just over 1000 students on roll. The school has used video conferencing through the Hertfordshire Grid for Learning for a number of years, for different educational projects. During this time it has established the delivery of some 'A' Level subjects through distance learning providers, using video conferencing for regular tutorials between the teachers and students.

Background

The school chose to offer Distance Learning courses, supported through video conferencing, in order to be able to offer a wider range of subjects to Sixth Form students. As it can be difficult to find teachers for certain subjects, using distance learning options enables smaller groups of students to study subjects such as A Level Law, which the school might otherwise not be able to offer.



The distance learning courses are provided through Nelson Thorne, who describe the approach as "*supported self-study. Students receive prepared units of work, weekly video conference tutorials and regular visits from their tutor. Some subjects are also supported by online resources.*"

The school feels that, in addition to being able to choose from a wider range of subjects to study, learning in this way provides the students with an extra set of learning and study skills which will stand them in good stead for university and other higher education settings.

Video Conferencing during 2010/2011

During the 2010/2011 school year Herts & Essex delivered two subjects in this way: A Level Law and A Level Government and Politics. Each subject included one weekly video conference with the tutor. The students know when they are choosing their subjects that these are studied through distance learning based on independent study.

During the tutorials, students are set assignments which are emailed back to the tutor for marking. She returns the marked assignments along with model answers. Students can email the tutor at any time as necessary. In addition to delivering the tutorials and subject support, the tutor is able to 'attend' parents' evenings via video conference and talk to parents and carers in much the same way as if she were working directly at the school. Senior Leaders at Herts & Essex commented that one tutor in particular had

worked with the school for a number of years and they had built up a good professional relationship through this continuity.

The tutors visit the school in person once a term, and the reaction to this form of learning by students, parents and other teachers has been very positive, as have the exam results of the students learning in this way.

Technical

The video conferences take place using 'H323' video conferencing technology. The school owns a hardware based endpoint (in this case an Aethra Vega X3 unit) which is connected to a large plasma-screen television screen. As users of the Hertfordshire Internet and Connectivity Services (HICS) the school is able to register the endpoint equipment with the Hertfordshire video conferencing gatekeeper, which makes it possible for them to make and receive video calls using an e164 number (similar to a telephone number for video conferencing.)

Conferences with Nelson Thorne are hosted through the JANET Video Conferencing Service (JVCS.) All the conferences are booked with JVCS by Nelson Thorne, and at the start of each tutorial JVCS call out to each endpoint (the school and the tutor) to connect the two together.



The equipment is turned on and checked about 10 minutes before each conference by school technical staff. Each conference lasts for an hour.



The bandwidth necessary to deliver the conferences is not significant enough to impact on the other network/internet needs of the school, and in general the video and sound quality experienced during the conferences is very good.

Aethra Vega X3, as used by the school.

Further information

Full information on the video conferencing services offered through HICS can be found on the Hertfordshire Grid for Learning:

<http://www.thegrid.org.uk/learning/ict/technologies/videoconferencing/index.shtml>

Additional information about using the JANET Video Conferencing Service (JVCS) and to register your endpoint(s): <http://www.ja.net/services/video/>

Information about Nelson Thorne Distance Learning:

<http://www.nelsonthornes.com/distancelearning/>