

# Introduction

**The impact of technology on schools has been increasing year by year and shows little sign of slowing. As the various technologies have converged in a digital platform, the *communication* potential of ICT has expanded dramatically. School students of all ages are embracing the digital revolution in the games they play and the text messages they send to each other's mobile phones. Harnessing the newest technology to support their learning in schools is a challenge to which schools must now rise.**

Video conferencing systems have been around for many years, but recent advances in technology now mean they are easy to use and have better quality picture and sound, so the video conferencing experience is much improved for all users.

This book sets out to explore the wide range of practical video conferencing activities that are already being undertaken in classrooms across the country. As well as exploring curriculum applications of video conferencing, through detailed case studies, the book is a guide to getting started, explaining the technology in simple terms and giving hints and tips to ensure successful use. At a basic level we aim to answer the question "what's in it for me?"

Imagine that you are a Key Stage 3 history teacher looking at England, 1066 - 1500. As part of a lesson on the Normans you link via video conference to the Public Record Office where actors take on the characters of a Norman and a Saxon and re-enact an encounter over taxation. Your pupils are able to question and challenge the characters and see artefacts, including a facsimile of the Domesday book.

Or imagine that you are a Key Stage 2 science teacher. You are studying the topic 'The Earth and Beyond'. You link your class via video conference to NASA, where experts lead your pupils in a discussion on living in space and link to astronauts in the space station, who answer questions from your pupils.

Or even imagine that you are a Year 6 pupil who wants to find out more about living in France and practise speaking French. Groups of children from a school in Exeter do just that every lunchtime when they link up with a primary school in Brittany.

Video conferencing offers enormous potential for enriching children's learning in ways that cannot easily be achieved by other means. It can radically alter the way children interact with one another and with the world outside the classroom walls. This book is intended to help teachers exploit this powerful learning tool.