

# Ceangal: croitearachd cosnadh cultar

*(Loosely translated: Connecting to crofting careers culture)*

## Case study: The Nicolson Institute, Lewis

“ Pupils should register in the school assembly hall at 8:55am on Monday. Please note that the conference begins at 9:15am at the Auction Mart in Steinish. Suitable footwear and outdoor clothing must be worn to the mart.

Please join us at the Ceangal ceilidh in the Stornoway Golf Club at 7:30pm on Monday 22 June. Put on your dancing shoes and join in!”

*- School note*

A slightly unusual start and end to a school day perhaps. But this note to senior pupils at the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway framed a unique two-day event during which the school's 123 senior pupils directly related their school courses to the social, economic and cultural context of the Western Isles. Many of them said it was 'eye-opening'.

Serving the whole of Lewis, the school occupies a large site in the heart of Stornoway, with around 1,050 pupils and 120 teaching and non-teaching staff. In its handbook it aspires for its pupils to be 'well prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century'. The island's economy is one of those challenges.

Over the past three years, the school has been actively involved in Crofting Connections, blazing a trail in using crofting as a context for certificated courses including Higher Geography, Modern Studies, Biology and Gaelic, and Skills for Work. Angus MacLennan, depute rector says, "It is well recognised that relating school-based learning to the world of work and enriching pupils' experience through involving non-teaching professionals in the curriculum is highly beneficial."

“ The presentations were fantastic, informative and added value to our Higher course.”

*- Biology teacher*

So, the Ceangal event was the culmination of the school's 2015 programme for its 101 S6 pupils and 22 S3/4 Rural Skills and Aquaculture pupils. Involving the Gaelic, Music, History, Geography, Modern Studies, Business Studies, Home Economics, Chemistry, Biology, Aquaculture, Rural Skills, and Technical departments; 17 teachers; three community learning and development staff; as well as Crofting Connections, Highland and Islands Enterprise, Harris Distillers, Scottish Water, Hebridean Seaweed Company, Ishga, Museum nan Eilean, Blue Pig Gallery, Brue Highlanders, The Harris Tweed Authority, Scottish Salmon, Carloway Mill, Kenneth Mackenzie Mills Ltd, Shawbost Mill, Lewis Auction Marts, BBC Radio Highland and MG Alba, Charles Macleod (makers of black pudding), Bifab Fabrication Yard, Gearein Village Trust, SEPA and Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsain – the list of participants is impressive, and so is what came out of the event.

So what did happen over the two days, and since then? On day one, the pupils went out of school, on field trips, to small businesses all over the island, seeing for themselves the potential of their environment and matching this up with their own interests and aptitudes. On day two, the experts, entrepreneurs and consultants came to school.

Along with subject teachers, they ran workshops on topics from National and Higher courses using the field trips as their starting point.

They also explained to pupils how they started their businesses, and how they use the local environment to market their island-based products, many of which have an international reputation for excellence. It made a strong

impression and, almost certainly, a lasting connection.

*- Geography teacher /Duke of Edinburgh award coordinator*

Simon Erlanger, managing director of Harris Distillers, inspired pupils when talking about the planning process and vision for the new distillery in Tarbert, Harris. But he was also impressed with the careers initiative saying, "I really enjoyed my time at the school. I do hope you will repeat the event next year. I am very keen to maintain a connection between our organisations."

Pupil reactions are evidence of the new bonds created. "Amazing!" said one. "I have been able to set up a work experience placement as a result of this event". And according to another, "Ceangal opened my eyes to local opportunities. This has helped me to think clearly about my future."

Angus says that the Ceangal initiative worked on many levels. "It is very much in keeping with the recommendations of the Scottish Government's 'Developing Scotland's Young Workforce'. Opportunities like this are invaluable for pupils when it comes to preparing CVs and applications for jobs, college or university places.



we generated.

"I thought the whole event was excellent and really highlighted the opportunities for work on the island."