

Our Journey with Minecraft: Education Edition

In 2019, Welsh Government invested £1.2 million to give educators and 467,000 young people access to Office 365 and Minecraft: Education Edition via the country's Hwb digital learning platform. This investment reflected a national vision and commitment to create digitally competent young people, ready to flourish in an everchanging digital world. As many educators had not used Minecraft: Education Edition before, there was a need to provide support and guidance about how it could be used to develop knowledge and skills and effective learning and teaching across a range of curriculum areas.

We were delighted to be chosen by Welsh Government as a Hwb Minecraft Learning Centre in September 2019. As a school, we had been using Minecraft: Education Edition to create an engaging curriculum and develop knowledge and skills in a range of curriculum areas for many years. Minecraft: Education Edition has supported our learners to develop creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and coding skills. Our learners have developed leadership skills and authentic pupil voice through sharing their experiences with other learners both within and beyond their own school. Our next challenge was: how do we share this with other educators and help them to unleash the potential of Minecraft: Education Edition to enrich the curriculum for their learners?

In the beginning, we were both a little nervous about delivering a two-day programme to educators from lots of different schools. This was our first experience of delivering training to educators from outside our own school. Also, from past experience, some educators worry that they won't be able to use Minecraft: Education Edition effectively out of fear that their learners will know more than them. In reality, when they realise how the in-game education features can facilitate truly memorable learning experiences, everyone fully embraced the training and was excited and eager to start using it with their own learners.

The programme was structured perfectly – time to learn the basics and consider how it could be used within the classroom to develop knowledge and skills in an engaging and immersive way. The gap between the two sessions, allowed educators to put their ideas into practice and reflect upon success and areas for future development. The feedback from the training was incredible! We were over the moon to hear the impact Minecraft: Education Edition was having on so many classrooms as a result of our sessions.

As a Hwb Minecraft Learning Centre, we were asked to create schemes of work (SoW), lesson plans and challenges to support educators in using Minecraft: Education Edition in their classrooms. This process was very different to the way we traditionally plan our learning activities. Firstly, we needed to ensure that other educators could easily follow the planning; as practitioners our planning is normally for our own use so it wouldn't matter if we left something out. However, as these SoW and Lesson Plans were for other educators, we needed to ensure they included every detail and step to help them implement the use of Minecraft: Education Edition successfully in their own classroom. The SoW templates and lesson planning resources were a big help in providing focus and ensuring we included all the relevant parts within the planning. We also had the extra challenge of creating learning activities, across a range of Areas of Learning and Experience, underpinned by the four core purposes of the new curriculum for Wales. As we were just developing an initial understanding of these, it was initially quite daunting to be given the challenge of creating resources for others to use. It was important to take time to engage with the curriculum guidance, the teaching and leadership standards and think about how Minecraft: Education Edition could be used to enhance the new curriculum and meet the needs of our learners. All our SoW followed clear steps to success: researching, planning, building and sharing. It was also important to encourage educators to consider their learners and adapt the planning to suit their needs.

Hwb® Minecraft Learning Centre



A highlight on our journey



A particular highlight of the year was sharing our experiences with educators during the Central South Consortium Regional Digital Learning Event. As well as sharing our approach to enriching the curriculum with Minecraft: Education Edition, we shared a new challenge to help educators introduce Minecraft: Education Edition to their learners. It was amazing to introduce so many educators to the potential of Minecraft: Education Edition and to promote our upcoming programme dates. We also loved hearing so many stories about how educators in Wales were using Minecraft: Education Edition classroom and catching up with those who had attending our training events.

"We were incredibly proud to be a Minecraft: Learning Centre. Sophie and Darren have grown in confidence and inspired so many teachers across Wales create truly unforgettable experiences."

Chris Coole, Headteacher Darran Park Primary School

Other twists on our journey

Our role as a Hwb Minecraft Learning Centre took an unexpected twist during Spring term with the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. We hadn't delivered day two of the current cohort and lots of educators had already signed up to our May/ June programme. To ensure practitioners didn't miss out on the training, we delivered the sessions through Microsoft Teams. At first the lack of face to face interaction was very different to what we were used to, but we soon adapted the online delivery and educators taking part really appreciated the fact that they were still able to access professional learning even though they couldn't physically attend the programme. We were also delighted that so many schools started using Minecraft: Education Edition to support their learners through a distance learning approach.



The pandemic also had a significant impact on our approach to teaching and learning. Through distance learning we were able to use Minecraft: Education Edition to continue supporting our learners. We set learners weekly build challenges using the Monthly Minecraft: Education Edition Build Challenges and asked them to share them with us through Teams. This was a lovely way for learners to express their creativity, share their experiences and keep in touch with each other during very difficult circumstances.

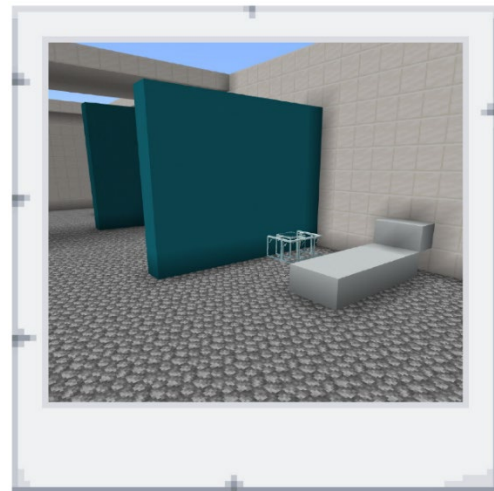
Hwb® Minecraft Learning Centre



Through using the join code function, educators were also able to check in with learners within a collaborative Minecraft world. This played an important part in supporting the wellbeing of learners by enabling them to communicate with their peers and educators.

One of the Hwb Minecraft Learning Centre project leads created a complete distance learning project: Amazing Architecture, through this learners researched interesting and unusual buildings from around the world. Following this learners designed and built their own examples of amazing architecture. As well as learning about architecture, this project helped learners to make sense of the situation around them.

After learning about the introduction of field hospitals, learners created the Phoenix Hospital inspired by the Nightingale hospital in London. The hospital included an isolation section for the treatment of patients with Covid 19 symptoms. We really felt this was a powerful example for how Minecraft: Education Edition can help learners make sense of the world around them.



We enjoyed sharing these experiences with other educators during the delivery of some online webinars to support distance learning with Minecraft: Education Edition.

A journey with many benefits

Being part of such an amazing project has had huge impact on so many levels. As practitioners, we have grown in confidence as result of the leading training and supporting educators to develop effective learning and teaching with Minecraft: Education Edition. We were delighted to become Minecraft Global Mentors and Trainers as result of the work we have done with educators from across Wales. From developing schemes of work and lesson plans to support others, we have developed a fuller understanding of curriculum design and game-based learning. On a national level, this project has resulted in thousands of learners using Minecraft: Education Edition to develop their learning across so many curriculum areas. We are really proud to have played part in introducing Minecraft: Education Edition to so many classrooms across Wales. Thank you to Hwb, Minecraft: Education Edition team and our Minecraft project leads Sarah Snowdon and James Protheroe for giving us this amazing opportunity to work with so many amazing educators across Wales.

Sophie Mills

Year 5 Teacher –
Darran Park Primary



Darren Hurley

Teaching Assistant –
Darran Park Primary

