



# ETWINNING IMPACT GUARDIAN EDITORIALS 2015

FIVE WAYS ETWINNING CAN TRANSFORM

## FIVE WAYS ETWINNING CAN TRANSFORM STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

From helping students become global citizens, to giving teachers a community of like-minded professionals, eTwinning can improve many areas of school life.

From catching up online with a pen pal who lives hundreds of miles away to taking part in an overseas exchange, international collaboration between schools is a great way to open young people's minds and horizons.

The potential benefits include raised achievement levels and improved motivation not only for students, but for teachers, parents and the wider school community too.

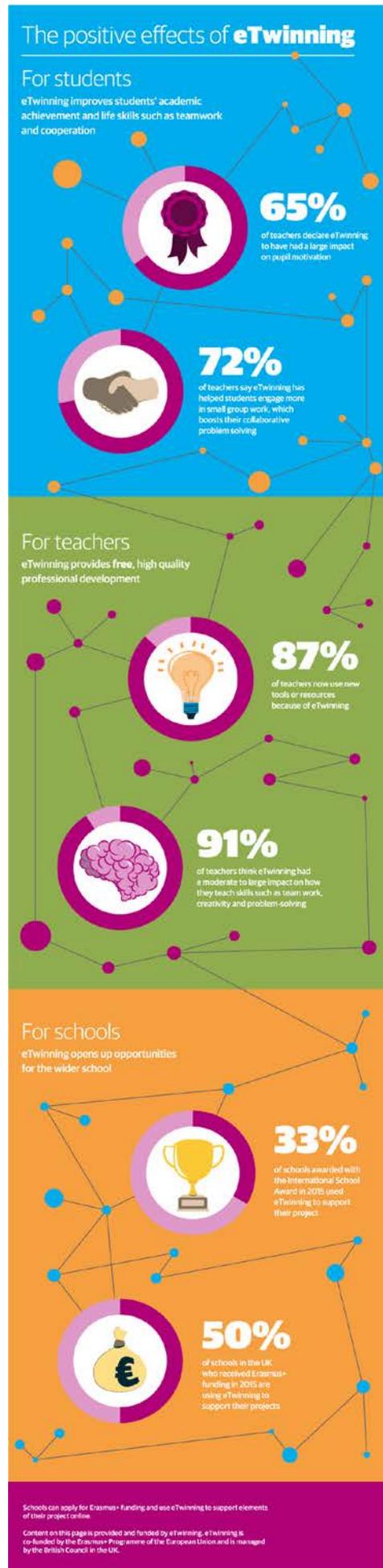
The **eTwinning programme** which is managed by the **British Council** in the UK, is an online community that enables schools in Europe to partner and collaborate on projects. It has been bringing together students and teachers from across the continent for the last decade.

We asked a handful of teachers who have taken part about how it could transform your lessons, your students' development and school.

### BETTER STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

One of the key features of eTwinning is its use of technology to encourage collaboration and bring learning to life. Projects might involve pupils chatting with students in other countries via webcam to improve their modern language skills, or sharing photographs and emails to encourage learning about different cultures and customs.

Many eTwinning teachers have reported greater motivation among students as they are keen to share their ideas with peers in the partner school. Quality of work is often raised because learning has a real purpose, and communication and ICT skills are improved. International collaboration can be particularly beneficial for students with low self-esteem and those who find more formal teaching methods challenging, according to John Rolfe, schools engagement manager at the **British Council**.



Sue Salisbury, a teacher at [Johnstown Junior school](#) in Wrexham, agrees. Pupils in years 3 to 6 achieved some “wonderful results” as part of an eTwinning project which saw students across Europe share local myths and legends via PowerPoint presentations which they had created in pairs and small groups. Constant communication, via the secure Twinspace platform, and a strong focus on using ICT meant staff and pupils “were able to go above and beyond what we wanted to achieve”, according to Salisbury. “Children not only learned how other schools look but they learned a lot about different cultures and countries too,” she added.

[The Academy at Shotton Hall](#) in Peterlee, County Durham, saw a similar increase in pupil attainment, staff-student collaboration and cross-curricular work thanks to an eTwinning project involving 20 European countries. The initial focus was on improving modern language skills and enhancing employability, but the project went on to encompass a wide range of activities, for example, students created the national cuisines of their eTwinning partners in cookery lessons.

As teacher Ian Kell from the academy says: “This project has brought an international element to the curriculum, empowering students to share their work on an international level and motivating them because they can see their work can be prepared for an audience beyond their classroom.”

## IMPROVES TEACHER MOTIVATION

All the teachers involved with eTwinning are enthusiastic. That’s partly because greater student motivation gives staff a boost, as well as bringing together like-minded professionals who are keen to improve learning and teaching.

Lisa Blackwood, a teacher at [Rowan Gate primary school](#) in Northamptonshire, says spending time with other teachers in the programme gives her energy, which is especially helpful as her job can be challenging. “I am part of a community: the eTwinning community,” she says. “At my fingertips is a group of dedicated, enthusiastic, experienced and knowledgeable professionals who share a joint passion and commitment to improving the outcomes of their students.”

As well as a wealth of fresh ideas from colleagues across Europe, the [eTwinning programme also has a bank of ready-made resources](#). As Rolfe explains: “We are very keen that schools shouldn’t feel they have to reinvent the wheel; there are lots of lesson plans, case studies, and assembly ideas that schools can access already.”

## PROVIDES HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

From sharing good practice to collaborating on projects, eTwinning offers a range of high quality continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities. These include [online and face-to-face workshops](#) that take place in the UK and across Europe.

The British Council runs [free professional development webinars](#) for teachers throughout the school year, and eTwinning ambassadors (teachers) deliver bespoke training on how to get started and take projects forward.

Lisa Taner registered on eTwinning 10 years ago and now runs training workshops on global learning for schools. She recently attended an eTwinning conference in Brussels and was yet again inspired by the variety of development opportunities.

“There was a huge range of workshop choices, from sessions delivered by global citizenship experts such as UNICEF looking at girls’ rights, to others looking at how online tools can be used to enhance certain projects.”

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY

While international collaboration has many benefits for individual staff and pupils, [research has shown that it can also raise standards across the wider school community \(pdf\)](#).- In some cases a project relates to the whole curriculum so more teachers become involved, in others,

new ideas from partner projects influence teaching methods, which in turn improve working relationships between staff and students.

Parental involvement can also receive a boost as they support eTwinning work. As Rolfe says: “Although many of the activities are taking place in the classroom, there’s a wider group of stakeholders – parents, carers, governors – who also find it incredibly innovative.” International collaboration brings [wider recognition for schools through a number of high-profile award ceremonies](#) which flag up schools as centres of excellence in global education.

## WIDEN PUPILS’ HORIZONS

At the heart of international collaboration is a desire to promote cultural diversity, challenge stereotypes and equip young people to become global citizens.

One of the key aims of an eTwinning partnership between [Portlethen Academy](#) in Aberdeenshire and seven other secondary schools in Italy, France, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal and Turkey was to prepare students for life beyond school. Skills developed by students included video conferencing, the ability to use a range of hand-held technologies and the organisation of public events.

Recently retired teacher from Portlethen Academy, Doreen Scotland, has been registered on eTwinning since 2007. She believes that her students have not only developed “transversal skills”, but that eTwinning has encouraged them to stay in education rather than “leave prematurely”.

As well as looking to the future, eTwinning also helps students understand their cultural heritage. Rachel Yates, a teacher at [Wetherby High School](#) in West Yorkshire, organised a partnership for her class and students at [Friedrich-Ruckert-Schule](#) in Plauen, Germany. They created a radio show and shared each other’s work on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the centenary of the First World War.

She says: “Producing a radio show has been a great way of working and is something different to what we have done in the past. The students have been challenged but have enjoyed it. The project is about breaking down walls and ensuring that the students have a better understanding of our past and how that affects us today.”

The world really can be your oyster, says Pauline Walsh, who teaches at [St Clare’s primary school](#) in Glasgow. “Through our project Making Ripples, international education is really becoming embedded in our school, with three projects running in P5-7 classes and firm partnerships with schools in Portugal, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Norway.”

Teacher, Suzanne McCloskey from [Hazelwood Integrated College](#), Belfast, sums up eTwinning as an “empowering and thrilling tool”. She says: “The impact that eTwinning has had on me is the energy the kids give me and I can give in return to the kids. Learning a lot more ICT tools and just always going the extra mile... it’s wonderful what you get out of it.”

Rolfe adds: “It’s a great way of promoting cultural diversity and providing a better understanding of the world ... It’s about getting teachers doing great teaching and learning together. It’s about bringing the world into your classroom. It’s about giving young people the vital lifelong skills they need to live and work as global citizens.”