

**National Portrait Gallery  
London, United Kingdom  
[www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)**

Founded in 1856 the United Kingdom's National Portrait Gallery holds the country's national collection of the portraits of people who are making or have made a contribution to British history, life and culture. Its Primary Collection consists of 10,000 items with a further 320,000 in the archives. Paintings constitute the greatest proportion of the exhibits, but they are not the only art form on display. Sculptures, photographs, drawings, cartoons and engravings also feature as part of the gallery's objective of promoting portraiture as an art form.

With works by many of the greatest -and lesser- artists to have worked in Britain, the earliest portrait is a painting of King Henry VII dating from 1505 although visitors are just as likely to see the Beatles or a David Hockney.

A WolfVision VZ-9 Progressive Scan Visualizer is helping one of the UK's most prestigious art galleries to deliver an important educational outreach programme. The programme contributes to the art and history modules of the UK's National Curriculum covering all stages from Key Stage 1 upto 6<sup>th</sup> forms. Typical topics range from "Growing up in the Past" for 5-6 year-olds (the painting of King Charles II as a baby is useful for this); upto art appreciation lessons for 6<sup>th</sup> formers.



*The National Portrait Gallery is located in London, but modern distance learning equipment enables access from around the world!*

The sessions are delivered remotely via the Global Leap schools videoconferencing service which, as Learning Manager, Clare Gittings points out: "enables us to reach pupils and students throughout the country many of whom may not have the opportunity to visit the Gallery. We have to remember," she adds, "that this is a national collection, owned by the people and must be made available to all irrespective of where they live."

Usage is intense with between six to eight sessions each week with additional individual sessions for children with special needs. By introducing the Gallery to a much wider audience, videoconferencing has generated greater awareness of the collection and interest in it leading, for example, a college in Devon arranging a trip to London to visit the Gallery.

Not just UK schools and colleges benefit from the facility. The British School in Cyprus is a regular user; a school in Germany have used the "Growing up in the Past" module as part of their English lessons, while educational establishments on the East Coast of the US also link into the resource.

A major problem for Clare Gittings and her team of educators was how to show the portraits and associated objects via the videoconferencing system. Initially, they positioned posters on a wall so that they could be picked up by nine of the system's camera pre-sets, the tenth being dedicated to the teacher. To display objects they had to hold them in front of the camera.

"It was not a satisfactory solution," Clare says. "Apart from the complicated procedure, the image quality was nowhere as good as we would have liked and that lessened the impact of the lessons."

Connected to the videoconferencing system, the WolfVision Visualizer has transformed the situation. Instead of the posters the education team can now show 35mm slides from the Gallery's library of 7000 images, through the system's slide viewer. If necessary the educators can zoom in to show details and can also freeze the slide while they put the next slide into position. Objects can be placed on the VZ-9's worksurface rather than hand-held and, as only two camera pre-set positions need to be used, set-up is simpler and quicker.



*Presenting slides - a simple task with the VZ-9!*

Image resolution is of such a high standard that fine details such as brush strokes and colour can now be highlighted to improve the art appreciation lessons while the historic symbolism inherent in many of the portraits and objects can be more clearly seen and explained.

"The VZ-9 has significantly improved our ability to deliver the educational programme," says Clare Gittings, "There is no doubt that it has enriched the teaching and learning experience for all those involved."

To receive the National Portrait Gallery's Education Programme visit their website [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)

To videoconference with the Gallery, please register with Global Leap, a Non-profit organisation funded by UK member subscriptions, [www.global-leap.org](http://www.global-leap.org)