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The Rocks From Space “Space Safari”: An example of remote public engagement in the planetary sciences.

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We describe an integrated online science programme incorporating Moodle virtual learning environments (VLEs) and Elluminate Live! virtual classrooms. The “Space Safari” was run as part of the Rocks From Space (RFS) programme hosted at The Open University (OU) and in partnership with Stockton City Learning Centre (SCLC).

Schools used these resources for direct science teaching or to incorporate them into the wider curriculum (arts/literature etc), after which they produce an output. Emphasis was on providing links between schools and scientists within the higher education sector. Live sessions with experts via Elluminate Live! were held regularly, including sessions with NASA scientists and astronomers in Mallorca.

Teachers and students have used Space Safari resources as part of the school science curriculum and to develop key skills and additional curriculum skills. They have also used it for informal (forums, online discussions) opportunities to engage with science.

Over 3 years of the project, over 1500 students have engaged, with the project. The use of virtual classrooms enabled direct interaction with many students; one session alone involved over 100 students. This project is now hosted on the eTwinning portal to enable sustainability and widen access.