

The Highland Council puts students and teachers at the heart of learning with Google for Education tools



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Put students and teachers at the center of their technology strategy
- Provide students with anywhere, anytime learning
- Support the technology needs of various schools and demographics

What they did

- Launched a Chromebooks pilot with one secondary and two primary schools
- Introduced Google Apps for Education for 14,500 users
- Implemented a 1:1 device model

What they accomplished

- Gave students the resources to guide their own learning
- Focused classroom time on student and teacher collaboration
- Created continuity between primary and secondary school
- Supported a digital culture across the district

Background

Located in northern Scotland, the Highland Council is the largest local government area in Scotland – it's the same size as Belgium. The council includes 225 schools of varying sizes: some schools have hundreds of students, while others in remote islands have only a few students. Overall the council teaches 30,000 students and employs 4,000 teachers.

Challenge

When Highland Council schools wanted to better meet the four focus areas of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence – to enable each student to be a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor – they realized they needed a new technology solution. The goal was and is to put students and teachers at the heart of the technology strategy.

The schools wanted to provide more students with internet-enabled devices, so they could learn anytime, anywhere. Since the Highland Council serves a wide range of students and teachers, the region needed an affordable, flexible solution that would improve the learning experience for every student and teacher at every school. Sharing resources across the district is an important goal since schools are spread geographically across the region.

"At any point, we want to make sure that pupils in the north of the region who want to learn about astrophysics but don't have a professor specializing in that can access the resources 150 miles away at a school that does," says Louise Jones, ICT in Learning Manager of The Highland Council.

To understand the needs of the community, Jones and her team talked with teachers, students, parents and instructional technology experts. They dug into research and current practices to learn what worked for other districts and evaluate their current technology situation. They put together a strategy that focuses on providing every student with learning technology.



“During the pilot, we wanted to have absolute visibility and transparency of our journey with the schools, the council, teachers and students. We created the Highland Chrome Pilot blog to share what we’re doing and hopefully support schools beyond our council who introduce Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks.”

*—Louise Jones, ICT in Learning Manager,
The Highland Council*



Once the technology plan was approved by the council committee, The Highland Council focused on addressing five key pillars: infrastructure and networks, appropriate technology, supporting leaders to expand their technology use, staff training opportunities and the Council’s pedagogies.

Solution

After talking with schools in East Lothian about their use of Chromebooks, The Highland Council considered Chromebooks to be the right choice since they provided students with the ability to guide their own learning and improve their communication and collaboration skills. The Highland Council launched a **Chromebooks** pilot in May 2015 with one secondary and two primary schools. The three schools introduced 250 devices total, using a 1:1 model. At the same time, the schools introduced **Google Apps for Education** and **Google Classroom**.

Google Apps for Education use grew organically; once other schools saw how Google Apps for Education improved the learning and teaching experience, they wanted to use it as well. The council now has 14,500 and rising Google Apps for Education users.

Many of the Highland Council schools still use legacy devices, and Google Apps for Education allows them to access the same information, and use the same cloud technology, as students and teachers using Chromebooks through the Chrome Browser. Jones created the **Highland Chrome Pilot blog** to share the council’s experience forming a strategy, rolling out the technology and using the devices to build on the four educational areas.

“Google Apps for Education is the glue that binds it all together because it’s device neutral,” Jones says. “For example, students can use different devices – one on a Chromebooks, one on a Windows device and a couple on iPads – to collaborate on a creative writing story about Hamish and the Beanstalk.”

Currently, the council support a variety of technology solutions, including 1:1 student devices, plan to introduce student and teacher BYOD programs alongside the managed windows devices. Since Chromebooks have such positive impact on the educational experience, the council and school leadership put together a plan to roll out Chromebooks on a 1:1 model for students in the last two years of primary school and all secondary school students.

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*—Louise Jones, ICT in Learning Manager,
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Benefits

Putting students at the center of their learning

With Google Apps for Education, students have the resources to learn independently and take responsibility for their education. For example, when a teacher unexpectedly couldn't teach a supply chain class, students opened their Chromebooks and started working from a copy of the lesson plan. Jones adds: "Students were motivated to do the work and had the resources to truly put self-guided learning into action."

"When we introduced the new technologies, we knew we needed to show students that technology is truly about learning," Jones adds. "Students' learning has flourished because they're using the right tools."

Students also have the tools to reflect on and critique their own work. For example, students can see their writing progress using the revision history **Draftback** in **Google Docs**. Since there's unlimited storage with Google Apps for Education, a student working on a drum solo can record himself practicing so he can see areas for improvement. In the past, this type of self assessment was limited by storage space on school servers.

Increasing student and teacher collaboration

Having the right technology frees up classroom time so teachers can focus on providing personalized instruction and students can learn from their peers. Since students have the ability to work on assignments at home, students and teachers have more personalized discussions during class time.

Chromebooks are helping students voice their opinions and ask teachers for more instruction on certain topics. For example, students can use a Pupil Voice on their Chromebooks to give teachers feedback in a private setting. Once a student clicks on the app, she's taken to a **Google Form** and the response from that form is sent directly to the teacher.

Students also have more time and the right tools to collaborate in the classroom. For example, after primary school students draw pictures write stories, they share their "books" with peers, who give them feedback. With Chromebooks and Google Apps for Education at their fingertips, students are turning spaces like an area that's typically used for break time and lunch into a learning space where students collaborate on assignments.

Removing barriers to learning

When students transition to secondary school, they're in a new location with new teachers and peers, but the technology they're using remains the same. Since students start using Chromebooks and Google Apps for Education

About Google for Education

A solution built for learning and designed for the classroom that includes easy-to-manage, affordable devices like Chromebooks, productivity tools like Google Apps for Education with Classroom, and limitless educational content in Google Play for Education. Together these tools help teachers inspire curiosity, while students learn better together, wherever they are.

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in primary school, they're already familiar with the technology. In fact, it's something that comforts them when everything else feels new.

"When Cameron entered secondary school, knowing that his Chromebooks was going to be there with him made the transition easier," Jones says.

Creating a digital culture

The Highland Council introduced technology to improve the educational experience for students and teachers, but soon realized that these tools aren't just about digital learning and teaching. They're about creating a digital culture across the region.

If a school doesn't have a teacher with a certain specialization, they can access tools that engage them in their learning from a teacher at a different school using Google Apps for Education. "We're overcoming the barriers of distance learning, independent learning skills are developed because of access to technology and tools for learning," Jones says. Feedback is incredibly important and the personalized and group feedback in Classroom is valued by the student.