

Coleg Cambria transforms teaching and learning with Chromebooks and Google Apps



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Roll out a cost-effective, flexible mobile solution to a large number of students and staff

What they did

- Bought 2,000 Chromebooks and moved all students and staff onto Google Apps for Education

What they accomplished

- Transformed day-to-day teaching and learning

Background

Coleg Cambria in North Wales was formed following the merger of Deeside College and Yale College, Wrexham in August 2013. It is now one of the largest colleges in the UK, serving over 7,000 full time, and 30,000 part-time, students, and is spread across six campuses. Coleg Cambria caters for a wide range of specialisms and has a 900 acre dairy farm and land for forestry, offering courses on subjects from hair and beauty through to agriculture, engineering and ICT.

Challenge

As the College has expanded, the need for more computers has increased – putting pressure on its IT department. Mark Brandish, Head of IT Services, Coleg Cambria, explains, “We desperately needed more computers, but didn’t want to build any more IT suites full of desktop PCs. The rooms just weren’t flexible enough for teaching, and we wanted a more mobile solution. We considered buying netbooks, but weren’t convinced they were good value for money.”

Solution

Brandish believed that Google Chromebooks, (laptops that provide fast, affordable, and easy-to-manage computing that allows students to learn anytime, anywhere), were the answer. These would be used in conjunction with Google Apps, Google’s collaboration and communications suite. “My team weren’t sure how they would be used, but I could really see the potential. Students had Microsoft Live@edu accounts, which they mainly used for shared storage. Staff all had Microsoft Exchange accounts. I knew that if we moved to Google Apps, they’d see what can be achieved when you collaborate with others,” he comments.

In September 2011, Brandish bought 30 Chromebooks. “The students made use of them immediately and feedback was positive. The day the trial started, everyone wanted to know what they could achieve with the Chromebooks and Google Apps,” he says.

“The great thing about Chromebooks is that they are really easy to roll out to large numbers of people. The most complicated thing about setting them up is taking them out of the box when you get them.”
—Mark Brandish, Head of ICT Services, Coleg Cambria

Although there was initial resistance about replacing desktop applications, it was short-lived. Following the initial trial, the demand for more Chromebooks grew, driven by students and staff. By the end of that academic year, the College had purchased 700, and at the beginning of Summer term 2012 that number had risen to over 1,000. It now has close to 2,000.



The Chromebooks are kept in classrooms around the College for students and staff to pick up and use when they need to. They are lightweight and have a long battery life, so this also offers a practical solution.

Benefits

Brandish hasn't purchased a desktop PC for the College since the Chromebooks were introduced. "The great thing about Chromebooks is that they are really easy to roll out to large numbers of people. The most complicated thing about setting them up is taking them out of the box when you get them. If we had decided to roll out laptops, it would have taken ages to set them up with the right software, issue them, and then keep them updated. I can't see how we would have done it – I would have needed to hire more staff."

The fact that the Chromebooks can be managed centrally through a console or through the Chrome browser is also a key benefit. The devices themselves do not become cluttered with individuals' applications. Instead, students simply log onto their Google Apps account to view all their documents, emails and resources. Tutors can customise the applications specific groups of students can see when they sign in, and then they can access them on whatever device they are using, wherever they are. Students are also encouraged to install apps they think would be useful for a particular project.

"The Chromebooks have been so positive for us. You can go into any class from welding to hairdressing and they are being used. Training has also been minimal."

—Mark Brandish, Head of ICT Services, Coleg Cambria

Brandish says, "The freedom for students and tutors to find and work with interesting applications - anything from anatomy to mind-mapping - has changed the way they think about learning and teaching. Traditionally students and teachers have just taken what we've provided - now we're a facilitator, giving them access to tools that allow them to be more innovative.

About Google Apps for Education

Over 30 million students, faculty, and staff use Google Apps for Education worldwide. Google Apps is a free suite of hosted email and collaboration applications exclusively for schools and universities. You can learn more and sign up to try it out by visiting our website:

www.google.co.uk/a/edu

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are fast, portable computers that give students access to the web's rich educational tools & resources. Educators can manage Chromebooks easily from their web-based Admin Console. And starting at just £199 per device including Google Apps for Education for free, these computers make technology affordable for schools. You can learn more here:

www.google.co.uk/intl/en/chrome/education/devices/

"The Chromebooks just work," he continues. "They are reliable, and give you quick and easy access to Google Apps. Students love collaborating on projects both in and outside of classes. One student from the Travel and Tourism department missed the bus, but was still able to participate on a group presentation with the rest of the class through Google Apps."

The use of Google Apps and Chromebooks was also beneficial as Coleg Cambria was formed. Although Brandish was working across Deeside College and Yale College during the merger, the fact that they both used Google Apps and Chromebooks made the job of integrating the two Colleges much easier.

Brandish explains, "The Chromebooks have been so positive for us. You can go into any class from welding to hairdressing and they are being used. Training has also been minimal. Once students have been shown collaborative editing through Google Docs, they instantly see the benefits and pick up the Chromebooks."

In the future, Brandish wants to change the College's IT suites into flexible teaching spaces. "Once you put computers in a room and bolt them down, they become sterile environments, which aren't inspirational for teaching in. Each time you walk past one of the rooms that has a Chromebook in it, the layout is completely different. Our strategy is to move away from buying desktop PCs – it's more likely that we will take them out and replace them with Chromebooks. That way, our students can continue to find new and inspiring ways to work together and get the most from using Google Apps and online resources for their studies," he says.

