

Hwb helps digitally excluded learners stay connected with Google for Education and Neverware



As the Coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt education across the world, the Welsh Government is supporting the distribution of around 10,000 refurbished devices, upgraded to Chrome using CloudReady by Neverware, to digitally excluded learners across Wales. The rebuilt devices will provide learners with access to the Hwb learning platform, which provides cloud-based tools such as G Suite, Adobe Spark and Office 365 to ensure teachers can continue helping learners with their studies even outside the classroom.

The impact of COVID-19 has made digital learning universal for schools across Wales. Hwb users in Wales have managed to avoid major disruption to their teaching and learning thanks to the content, collaboration tools and professional networks offered by [Hwb](#).

Hwb is the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales. It provides a large community of around 550,000 users from over 1,500 schools, including learners, Governors and around 70-80,000 teachers, with access to a wide range of centrally-funded, bilingual digital tools and resources. The platform allows teachers to quickly and easily create private networks for their schools, where they can collaborate, share ideas and materials that can be made available for other users across Wales.

In the current environment, access to Hwb is helping deliver a smooth transition to distance (and soon blended) learning.

However, while [98% of Welsh households with at least one child under 16 have internet access](#), some learners remain digitally excluded. These learners either lack access to a suitable device or reliable internet connection at home.

In response to the pandemic, the Welsh Government Hwb team, Neverware and Google for Education have embarked on an ambitious programme to support digitally excluded learners in having the equipment they need for distance learning. Working in conjunction with local authorities and schools, existing school devices have been transformed into fully functional Chrome devices using Neverware's CloudReady OS. CloudReady, built on the same technology as Chromebooks, turns older hardware into Chrome devices, delivering faster boot times and increased speed, security, and manageability. This approach has enabled schools to supply their learners with the equipment they need, without the delays currently being experienced with purchasing new equipment and for a fraction of the price.



The coronavirus crisis has made learning from home necessary for most children at the moment. Modern technology allows us to learn remotely, with a wide range of brilliant learning tools available online through Hwb. It is my priority that no child or family is left behind during this crisis and all children have the opportunity to continue learning.

Our Hwb Platform and tools like Google for Education play a key role in supporting families, ensuring that their children continue on their education journey, wherever they are learning from.”

Kirsty Williams, Education Minister

Supporting digitally excluded learners

Welsh local authorities are using CloudReady to transform around 10,000 existing school devices. The devices are then bundled with Welsh Government funded MiFi devices where required, and being allocated to learners across Wales who lack access to technology or the internet at home.

To date, more than 7,000 old machines have already been upgraded into CloudReady devices and are being delivered to learners.

The programme forms part of a wider Hwb EdTech initiative to ensure learners have access to the best possible equipment and computing resources. Prior to COVID-19, the Hwb EdTech programme had procured 16,000 Chromebooks. The innovative bulk purchase approach is an example of how schools and local authorities in Wales have changed the way they purchase technology.

In conjunction with the Welsh Government, local authorities have developed a ‘catalogue’ of technology devices that meets their schools needs and then buys items in bulk for their schools – a move which has led to significant savings to date.

Ready for remote learning

Hwb has been on a journey towards digital transformation over the past few years, creating a platform that would boost digital competence for the country and prepare students and teachers for a future of digital working. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a significant surge in active users on the Hwb platform since distance learning became mandatory with over 99% of schools across the country being classed as ‘actively engaged’.

Fortunately, the Google tools built into the Hwb platform have put Welsh schools in a strong position for dealing with the disruption created by COVID-19. For example, by using Google Classroom, teachers were able to quickly contact their pupils, share assignments and track their progress as soon as the nation-wide lockdown was initiated. As a result, the Welsh Government has been able to mobilise distance learning support for schools swiftly.

Google for Education and Hwb have worked together to make Google Classroom as accessible as possible, including providing it in both English and Welsh. A dedicated Classroom button has also been included in the Hwb user management portal, allowing teachers to create a fully populated virtual classroom with a single click.

Digital learning has raised many new and unfamiliar challenges for teachers across the world, as they struggle to collaborate with their colleagues. Hwb has provided a critical lifeline in Wales, enabling teachers to collaborate, share useful materials and best practice on a national basis throughout the lockdown.



I have loved being able to stay in touch with everyone while we have been learning from home. I miss them so being able to talk to them helps.” **Julia**

I have used tools that I hadn’t chosen in class before, learning something new was fun. I could show my family too.” **Lana-Rose**

I like all the tools on there to choose from, it makes learning fun!” **Jessica**

Learners from
St. Andrew’s Primary School



The Hwb tools and resources have been invaluable to teachers throughout the crisis. A dedicated distance learning page was created to provide users with useful tips, advice and video content on remote teaching. Hwb also offers a vast content library, which includes The Encyclopaedia Britannica and the fully bilingual People’s Collection Wales.

A sustainable model for future teaching

The wider Hwb EdTech programme is providing the national digital infrastructure, including hardware, software and training that teachers need to support their teaching during lockdown. However, much depends on the ability of teachers to make the most of the tools available.

Hwb and Google for Education continue to support teacher professional development by hosting webinars on how to effectively use the Hwb platform and Google tools, which maintains the support Hwb provided before lockdown. The programme is intended to level up digital capabilities among the teaching profession, ensuring they all have access to the latest tools and digital aids.

The work by Hwb and Google for Education has ensured that schools have the tools and resources they need right now for distance learning. It also means that schools in Wales have a sustainable plan that ensures teaching and learning can continue to improve, and teachers and pupils will have the skills they need for the digital world.



Supporting teachers at this time is our number one priority. Helping them to master our tools and software is key for ensuring their students can continue their education, with unrestricted access to the Hwb platform. Yet, the resources we’re investing now aren’t just for today – levelling up digital skills will lay a strong foundation for future digital learning. Even once the lockdown has lifted, we’re confident teachers will find Google for Education through Hwb a valuable and sustainable resource in the long run.” - **Kirri Gooch**, National Accounts Manager, Google for Education

This programme encapsulates exactly how we view CloudReady’s role in education,” said **Will Smith**, Head of European Operations for Neverware. “Ensuring digital equality, especially student device access, is a challenge for educators everywhere, so we’re really pleased to partner with the Welsh Government and Google for Education to ensure that students throughout Wales can use these newly transformed CloudReady devices to access Hwb’s resources and Google tools no matter whether they’re learning at home or in school.”





As a school we have used Google and Hwb since we opened in September 2017. Using Hwb has provided all staff with a learning platform which made the transition to remote learning seamless. Staff and children staff were very familiar with the suite of tools available so were able to transfer this knowledge to setting and accessing remote learning. Each class has a Google Classroom which provides a consistent approach across the school for setting learning opportunities. Teachers and Teaching Assistants use this to interact with children and provide feedback. Children, particularly those in Years 3 - 6, were confident in using Google docs during their time in school so they are able to access their learning without being held back due to a lack of digital skills.

From a whole school perspective, the use of Google has supported the ongoing strategic development of our school. We continue to use Google Slides each week for interactive and collaborative Professional Learning and Development sessions for teachers and Teaching Assistants. The leadership team has been able to work remotely, using Google docs, to collaborate on key strategic documents as we planned for the school closure period and now as we plan for our return to school. All staff are aware of how to use Google Drive and Shared Drive which has enabled highly effective communication during the last fourteen weeks. This has had a huge impact on staff wellbeing.”

Cat Kucia,
Headteacher, Jubilee Park Primary School



Our learners were used to utilising the range of tools available through Hwb in the classroom, so being able to keep in touch with classmates and teachers as well as utilising the tools to showcase their learning provided a level of consistency and comfort for our learners during the period of remote learning.

Being able to distribute refreshed devices has had a significant impact on remote learning for our school. We have been in constant contact with our families through our teachers and management/leadership team and we identified the families most in need of a device through these conversations as well as a parent questionnaire. From this, we were able to provide devices for almost 17% of our learners which was around 65 households and 115 learners in total. After distributing the devices, levels of engagement from these learners reported by teachers were significantly higher and have remained consistently high since.”

Ellece Davies,
DCF coordinator, St. Andrew’s Primary School



As a result of Hwb’s historic investment in digital technology they have been well placed to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. I commend them on their commitment to keeping learning happening and to bridging the digital divide. This has been achieved through innovative investments in Neverware, devices and teacher professional development. As they enter a new phase of learning Google will continue to support them in their efforts.”

Liz Sproat, Head of Education EMEA, Google