

Oxford Brookes University prepares for a future of remote work

About Oxford Brookes University

Founded in 1865, [Oxford Brookes University](#) is one of the UK's top universities with 16,600 students, 2,800 staff, and a local, national and international reputation for teaching and research excellence. The university is spread across four campuses, with three primary sites based in and around Oxford, England and the fourth campus located in Swindon.

Connecting the Oxford Brookes community

In 2010, Oxford Brookes University began the process of adopting Google for Education solutions, replacing webmail software and other legacy in-house solutions with Google Workspace for Education Fundamentals. That step solved several problems, including poor usability and scalability.

When Oxford Brookes closed its campuses in late March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff familiarity with Workspace helped the university quickly pivot to remote work. Workspace offered a ready advantage, since staff could access documents from anywhere they had internet access and a web browser.

“It was quite frantic,” Crichton recalls of the days before the closures took effect. “We had to distribute a lot of Chromebooks.”

Crichton and other IT leaders also realized that the Oxford Brookes community needed broader access to video conferencing tools like Google Meet to help staff and educators. For this reason, the university upgraded to Google Workspace for Education Plus, which includes enhanced security features as well as extra functionality in Meet: livestreaming with up to 100,000 participants, adding up to 250 participants to meetings, and saving recordings to Google Drive.

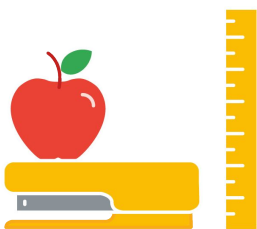


At first, we focused on the core Workspace applications, like Gmail,” says Greg Crichton, Brookes’ Head of Information Services. “But over time, we came to appreciate everything else built into Workspace. If someone needs a whiteboard, I can suggest they use Jamboard—if someone wants to build a website, I’ll suggest Google Sites.”

Carrying on business via Meet

For many higher education institutions like Brookes, video conferencing became the connection point for staff and instructors who are working off campus. The university has seen a rapid increase in use of Google Meet for virtual meetings among staff.

Meet proved vital to Oxford Brookes staff in the early months of the pandemic. “We’ve seen a massive change, with about a 2,000 percent increase in use of Meet in our organization,” says Crichton. “We attend so many meetings now that we’re working remotely.” As far as learning to use Meet among university staff, Crichton says the transition was relatively easy: “On the whole, it’s one button to click to add a Meet to a meeting invitation.” Moving into 2021, Crichton expects that even more staff may adopt Meet, given new features such as breakout rooms, as well as Meet’s ability to integrate with Google Calendar, will likely attract new users.



Safety and security for the community

As Oxford Brookes begins its spring 2021 term, Crichton plans to examine Education Plus features such as improved mobile device management, and better tools for detecting and remediating security incidents. “Enhanced security is what got us interested in the upgrade in the first place, back before the pandemic,” says Crichton.

For example, Crichton believes the discovery tools in Education Plus, such as search and audit features, will save time for IT teams.



“Having that search capability can make it much easier to respond to investigative requests,” he adds. “If we get a freedom of information request, or we need to respond to a police investigation, it’ll ease the burden on us.”

Document retention features will also help Crichton and his colleagues keep the university community safer. “We’ll know which documents people are sharing with others, and if someone leaves employment, we’ll have more control over access to the person’s documents,” Crichton says.

Crichton also appreciates the dedicated 24x7 support that comes with the Education Plus upgrade. “We can ask about anything without worrying about getting a bill. That’s quite a nice thing,” he says.

Prepared for a future of remote work and learning

With the disruptive first year of the pandemic behind him, Crichton is reflecting on the dramatic changes in the technology tools used to continue working even in the midst of a crisis—and is giving thought to which tools may be needed in the coming months and even years. Says Crichton, “I don’t see us returning to previous working practices in the next two years.”



What they wanted to do

- Ease the transition to remote work
- Broaden access to recorded sessions

What they did

- Upgraded to Google Workspace for Education Plus
- Planned to implement security features for discovery and auditing

What happened

- Increased use of Meet by 2,000 percent
- Improved the ability to schedule and start meetings with Google Calendar integration
- Used document retention features to respond to compliance requests