Co-Managed Trials School Case Study

School	Epsom Girls Grammar School (EGGS)	MoE Id	64
Roll Year 11 cohort	2,201 459	Region	Auckland
School Type	State Girls Yrs 9-15	Decile	10

Epsom Girls Grammar School was involved in the previous digital examinations:
2015   eMCAT and Online Practice Examinations
2016   Digital Trials in L1 Geography, L1 Science and L1 Spanish
        Digital Pilots in L1 English and L1 Media Studies
2017   Digital Trials in L1 English
        Digital Pilots in L1 English, L2 Classical Studies and
        L2 English

Situation

Epsom Girls Grammar School is a BYOD school, although device usage in the classroom varies from subject to subject. In those subjects for which there was a digital examination, devices are used extensively within the classroom.

The school uses the G Suite for Education platform and has a customised EGGS Google Apps for teaching and learning. This provides students with a free suite of online tools and learning environment through the school wi-fi.

E-Learning is an ongoing Professional Development focus. Teachers are using digital pedagogies in the classroom and as a result students are very familiar with their devices and online learning and assessment.

Epsom Girls Grammar School has been through the Schools Network Upgrade Programme twice and has good wi-fi coverage across the school. The school infrastructure manages close to 3000 laptops in addition to a range of other devices.

In 2017 Epsom Girls Grammar students participated in a range of Digital Trial examinations: English, Spanish, Geography, Economics and History.

        English: 195 students
        Spanish: 28 students
        Geography: 64 students
        Economics: 14 students
        History :   139 students

Examination Management

The school experienced some issues with the Level 1 English Digital Pilot examination in 2016, which created a degree of concern at the time. In 2017 the school took a pragmatic approach to the Digital Trials and Pilots and understood the approach taken to test the readiness of both NZQA and the school for digital assessment.

Students used their own devices (Macbooks, Toshiba laptops or HP laptops) for the Level 1 Digital English Trial. An additional 15 school devices, which were fully charged, were available as back-up. The examination was held in eight classrooms, spread across three floors. There was an IT technician on each floor.

Students sat in desks that were facing each other, with some students facing a wall at the back of the room. This set up provided the supervisors with a good view of the screens. A few multi-plugs were strategically placed around the room, but few students required them.

Each room had three supervisors – a teacher (rostered as they would normally be for school examinations), an examination supervisor, and a university student designated as a technical support person. The Exam Centre Manager (ECM) and Digital Lead Supervisor roved between the rooms.

The supervisors met about an hour before the start of the examination. All logged into the ECM dashboard (used to observe student progress during the examination) and were briefed on what to read to the students, and when to start the examination with the examination code.

The URL for the English Digital Trial had been uploaded to each student's landing page in the school's learning management system. The teacher in each room had the slips with username and password to be handed out to students once they were seated.

Staff impressions

The 2017 Digital Trial examinations alleviated most of the concerns that staff had from their 2016 experience, where a number of students experienced a series of lock outs during the digital examination.

All staff used the Familiarisation Activities with their classes as preparation. The Level 2 English teacher used the Level 1 English Familiarisation Activities, and one teacher used them over two lessons. Staff commented that, as the Familiarisation Activities were full examinations, students tended to adapt to them easily. Staff felt they were good preparation for what students could expect from a digital examination.

Student impressions

The students interviewed had taken part in a range of digital examinations, commonly English, Geography and History. They had all used their own devices. One student had an older laptop that did not hold its charge for three hours and was concerned about how she was going to manage the Pilot examinations. The school intended to have power points available, as they did for the Digital Trials.

One student was locked out of the Trial examination when her device was idle. This was related to the way she had set up her device energy saving settings.

The students used the Familiarisation Activities as a classroom activity and for homework. They felt the Activities were good for preparing them for the Digital Trial examinations.

Students enjoyed the ability to get their ideas down and create an essay in faster time, thereby enabling them to have time to edit and recraft their essay. Students also appreciated the ability to cut and paste within the examination. They liked the idea of creating a cleaner and neater essay that flowed.

Typing an essay for an examination was viewed as a natural extension of the way students had worked in class. The students are used to accessing resources in a digital context and only half used the paper resource for the unfamiliar text achievement standard in English. Most students used the planning space for noting down some ideas, and/or typed in the quotes they wished to use.

One student commented that in Geography there was no word count (which was available in other examinations), and she was therefore, unsure of how much to write.

Some students also commented that in some of the examinations, there was too much scrolling required.

All the students interviewed preferred to do digital examinations compared to paper examinations.

2017 Digital Pilot experience

Epsom Girls Grammar students were entered in the Level 1 and Level 2 English, and Level 2 Classical Studies Digital Pilot examinations. The school was very pleased with its experience. The few issues encountered during the Pilot examinations could be attributed to what students were doing or their device, rather than the function of the examination itself and were easily resolved. No student reverted to the paper examination.

The school kept the URL link on its student learning platform (ELearn), so that students did not have to transcribe anything long to get to the website. Students were also given their logins and passwords as they entered the examination and sat down.

The desks were set-up as for a paper examination, rather than in face-to-face groups. The school felt that students would not be trying to look at other students' screens, as this behaviour is not useful for an essay-type examination, and would also be easily noticed by the examination supervisor.

The school IT staff were on hand for the full duration of the examination, but did not have much to do. In future, Epsom Girls Grammar intends to have the IT staff available at the start of the examination, and then use a rover or the phone system to call IT should they be needed later. In the event of a computer failure, school laptops would still be available for loan to students.