Leeds City College: Anytime, Anywhere, Any Device Access to Cloud Communication and Collaboration Tools and Resources

Summary

This project aimed to improve the provision of standardised email, data storage and communicative and collaborative functionality by replacing an out-dated client-based system with an online cloud solution. The change has been positively received and resulted in cost and time savings for Leeds City College already. Moving to the cloud has allowed the college to deliver a cutting edge solution promoting productivity and collaboration whilst reducing costs, providing a safe, secure, flexible and affordable solution.

About Leeds City College

Leeds City College is the UK’s third largest FE establishment, offering a diverse curriculum to over 45,000 students. They provide a vibrant, multicultural learning environment, delivering excellent and innovative education which is supportive, inspiring and life changing. Their courses cover almost all subject areas and include full and part-time academic and vocational qualifications through from basic skills to apprenticeships and A Levels to Foundation Degrees. They operate out of six main campuses as well as many smaller community centres across the region. Leeds City College has an annual turnover of over £90m and employs more than 1,700 staff, making it one of the area’s largest employers.

The challenge

Key driving factors behind this project were to improve standardisation of tools and functionality available across all Leeds City College’s sites, and reduce organisational costs while improving operational efficiencies and learning outcomes. The IT team, led by Graham Eland, Head of IT Systems and Strategy, identified an opportunity to change from using an aging client-based
student email system to an online ‘cloud’ solution that would provide more functionality. A solution with enhanced tools provides improved communication and data management while strategically helping students achieve success throughout their studies more efficiently. In addition, it helps to prepare individuals to interact and work with similar technologies in their future working environments.

Key business drivers for the College were:

- Improving user experience
- Delivering improved, more efficient services
- Embracing the college ethos to drive IT forward
- Automating processes
- Reducing costs
- Providing tools familiar to users

**The activity**

This project involved a pilot and subsequent roll out of a cloud-based solution that improved student email, communication and collaboration functionality while replacing an internally managed out-dated client-based email system.

An initial pilot was established due to the need to provide improved online collaboration opportunities with a technology-based organisation that already had a contract with the Technology Campus. Following this success, the IT team worked with Salford Software to transform the student experience and rolled out Microsoft Live@edu to students at all six campuses in August 2011. The online solution provides access to information and resources needed based upon students’ identity within the college and the courses they are on. Graham says that “students want to be able to access the information and resources they require, whenever they want to. Our task was to ensure that they could do this effectively and efficiently.”

Students’ Live@edu accounts are generated automatically at enrolment. Almost immediately students have access (at home, on campus or anywhere else, whenever they wish, from laptops, tablets and even smart phones) to:

- An educational (.ac.uk) email address
- 10GB email storage
- 25GB document storage space
- Microsoft Office Online

A key part of the installation is that students are now able to reset forgotten passwords themselves (currently via a networked computer).
In order to ensure that as many users as possible signed up to use the new service, the IT team at the college introduced a learning and adoption strategy through:

- Widening awareness via tutors and college staff
- Initial student induction via library teams
- Global messaging to students
- Training workshops or drop-ins for assistance

Graham confirms that “the IT team is passionate about taking full advantage of technology to create a superior learning environment, and have come a long way in a short space of time.”

**The outcomes**

Taking the decision to move to the cloud has allowed the college to deliver a cutting edge solution promoting productivity and collaboration whilst reducing costs; providing a safe, secure, flexible and affordable solution.

The project has the following specific outcomes:

- Processes in place automating the creation of students’ Live@edu accounts at enrolment
- All students are provided with online access to; an educationally linked email address, storage, communication and collaboration tools
- Established links between the Live@edu accounts and electronic registers enabling teachers to easily send group messages
- Single Sign On access
- Access to tools (including email, SkyDrive® and Windows Live® Messenger) from wherever they are; at home, on campus, or anywhere else; whenever wanted. Link on Active Desktop to drive adoption rates and improve ease of access
- Online solution accessible via most mobile devices. Students are encouraged to BYOD (bring your own device), helping reduce strain on college hardware
- Added opportunity: 410 students have purchased Microsoft software at discounted prices.

Providing a centralised communication system has enabled Leeds City College to include it within their marketing and communication strategy; occasionally contacting all students to promote events.

**The impact**

The new system is safe, secure, flexible and affordable. One of the key impacts of this project is that the cost of delivering a similar system in house would have required an initial outlay of more than £150,000 – and that figure does not include running costs, training requirements, energy, or replacement hardware costs. Looking beyond the more obvious cost savings, the
password self-service solution is a simple but effective tool. With 50,000 students, the potential for a password reset queue was huge. Now students can reset their own password by answering questions (set originally themselves) correctly, freeing up staff time. The IT team can focus on other issues and further improve services. Graham says, “We’re experiencing a reduction in the costs associated with licensing and hardware maintenance which has reduced our impact on the environment.”

From August 2011 there were 25,491 emails sent from Leeds City College staff to students’ college email addresses, and 8629 emails from students college email to staff. The following statistics and quotes from users show the advantage of easy communication between teachers and students:

"I have used the college LIVE@EDU email system extensively this year for various reasons and have set up distribution lists for each group of students. I email each group of students ICT assignment work for example when the chefs need to send out information for the students vocational courses i.e. time and work plans and standard recipes for practical assessments. This has been really useful" ICT Tutor – Hospitality

"The college cloud system has allowed me to complete course ICT practice assessments away from college and submit for marking online. I was worried about falling behind in my vocational studies, but the system allowed me to work on my course documents at home whilst I was away from college " Full Time Hospitality Student

"The College student email system has been very important for my ESOL students who are beginners, the students are just getting to grips with the English language and basic email usage. As part of their functional skills ICT course the students receive an email containing their lesson objectives, as a group we logon, open and read the emails, which improves the use of ICT and English at the same time" ESOL Tutor

Leeds City College students now benefit from:

- College email and increased storage
- Familiar tools promoting a productive learning environment
- Better collaboration and communication with peers

The College IT team has delivered a solution that demonstrates:

- Reduced costs for hardware, running costs, energy and training
- Significant reduction in IT time and resources required and greater efficiency as Live@edu accounts are automatically created at enrolment
- Improved ways of collaborating and engaging

Graham concludes, “We believe that the learning environment provided through IT at Leeds City College will allow our students to develop their skills in preparation for the workplace or further study. We’re delighted to be on the
road to achieving giving each student an enhanced learning experience regardless of their equipment, what time it is or where they are.” He adds, “cost savings have been a second benefit.”

**The lessons learned**

If other organisations are thinking of implementing a similar cloud solution Graham pointed out the importance of ensuring appropriate processes are in place in regards to the status of individual’s email after their course of study has finished. Leeds City College are currently evaluating their best solution. The three options that need to be explored for suitability are:

- Close the account completely, though users would lose all associated data which could be a bigger issue if any collaborative work had been used towards assessment.

- Allow users to continue with the same email and account, though they would still appear to be currently associated with the college.

- Move email addresses and accounts to an Alumni. They would still have access to all data, and would be contactable for ongoing marketing purposes.

Graham adds that “it is important not to underestimate the power of having a few days worth of consultancy from an organisation that fully understand the solution” as that can ultimately save both time and money as the project progresses.

Next steps for Leeds City College include enabling external password resetting, potentially via the college’s virtual learning environment (Moodle) and to improve access and ease of use for remote and/or part-time learners without easy access to networked computers.

Graham enthuses: “Here at Leeds City College we are thrilled with the results of the Microsoft Live@edu implementation. The uptake by students and feedback has been very positive and we expect this to continue. We are looking forward to the next phase which we anticipate will see similar improvements for staff.”

The College will also be exploring the use of Live@edu with staff and students on another campus added to the organisation via a recent merger. The additional issues of this are that they are currently already using Google apps and email – though this could be an advantage that they are already open to using online / cloud solutions.

**Useful links**

- [Leeds City College](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
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