

case study



Wootton Bassett School launches revolutionary e-learning initiative

Unified Communications solution saves thousands on teaching cover, drives up exam results, and increases staff productivity

Background

Having opened its new state-of-the-art campus, Wootton Bassett School in Wiltshire continues to receive government funding to deploy leading-edge technologies that enrich the learning experience of all its pupils aged 11 to 18. Today, it is one of the leading proponents of e-learning in the UK.

The Challenge

As a technology college with an active e-learning strategy, Wootton Bassett School was searching for innovative methods to extend educational support to its pupils, particularly outside school hours. The school's objectives were to enhance the learning environment, stimulate interest, increase knowledge and build students' confidence. This would in turn help boost exam results and the school's position in the national league tables. Steve Gillott, IT Manager at Wootton Bassett explained, "We had piloted an after school e-mentoring chat scheme that gave pupils the opportunity to gain more time with staff than they could during lessons. While the project was a real success, we needed more advanced technology that would support the use of visual teaching aids such as whiteboards and slide decks to enhance teacher-pupil interaction."

However, if the school was to extend educational support to its pupils, more

dynamic communications between teaching and administrative staff would be essential. Gillott continued, "Valuable time was already being lost trying to locate and communicate with other members of staff, access diaries, and schedule meetings and extra-curricular activities. If we were going to introduce dynamic e-learning sessions that could be organised quickly, staff would need a more advanced communications platform to ensure the right staff and the correct resources were in place every time."

The Solution: A Media Rich Communications Experience

Following the e-mentoring pilot, Gillott approached Microsoft regarding implementing Office Live Meeting 2007. "Having understood our broad collaboration needs, Microsoft suggested that we work with Eurodata," said Gillott. "They offered three unique advantages that ensured we would be in safe hands. These included their multi award-winning Microsoft Gold Partner status; their singular experience in Microsoft's flagship unified communications technology as one of only a handful of accredited UK partners; and a fully operational unified communications platform implemented within their own business."

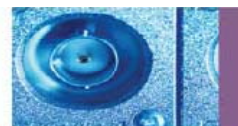
Des Lekerman, Managing Director of Eurodata noted, "We welcomed Wootton Bassett's approach because of

their enthusiasm for using advanced technologies to innovate teaching methods. The school had recently implemented Exchange 2007 and we wanted to help optimise that investment by expanding the system's capabilities, as well as creating an integrated communications platform."

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Eurodata designed a solution that comprised Office Live Meeting 2007 and Microsoft Office Communications Server (OCS) 2007 which would be integrated with Exchange 2007 creating a media-rich communications experience for users. "Integrating these technologies allowed us to create an e-learning facility for children, delivered securely over the internet. To ensure this application was completely secure, Eurodata, Microsoft's global security partner of the year, also implemented the Internet Security and Acceleration Server (ISA) from Microsoft," explained Gillott. "It's an integrated edge security gateway that protects our network against digital threats yet provides all users with secure, high-speed remote access to all the applications they need."



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The Benefits

Unified Communications delivers rapid increase in staff productivity

By creating an OCS environment, staff now benefit from a more streamlined and integrated communications system. Office Communications Server uses the same familiar Microsoft Office applications, so the benefits can be realised immediately and there is no need for additional training. Presence and status information allows staff to contact the right person, at the right time, using the most appropriate medium: mobile phone, office extension, instant messaging (IM), email, or video conferencing. This increases communications efficiency and, because staff are not wasting time attempting to locate colleagues, it increases their productivity. When time is of the essence, OCS also provides an escalation facility to move communications immediately from, for example, IM to voice to a video conference. This is ideal in a school setting where staff are often moving between classes and downtime for administrative duties is limited. "We've had an excellent response from all staff to OCS", remarked Gillott, "they're now able to focus more of their time on critical administrative work and on supporting pupils, rather than being delayed and frustrated by an inefficient communications infrastructure."

Remote working is enabled

For those staff working at home or at another educational facility, OCS enables them to communicate with staff at Wootton Bassett as effectively as if they were on site. Teachers and administrative staff can work

collaboratively on projects from wherever they are, yielding further productivity gains. "With our extended learning programme, having integrated communications capabilities and access to calendars and presence information also allows staff to schedule e-learning sessions and invite or notify their colleagues in real time," enthused Gillott. "This means staff can react quickly to the needs of pupils, and gaps in learning are swiftly closed."

Office Live Meeting delivers flexible, accelerated learning for pupils

By implementing Office Live Meeting, Wootton Bassett School is truly at the leading edge of educational innovation in the UK. "The technology can support up to 200 pupils at any one time and it has truly revolutionised the way we teach here," said Gillott. "We know that pupils enjoy this less formal teaching method and their confidence is growing which we believe will translate into improved exam results."

Pupils receive more teaching time, enabling them to explore their subjects and achieve more insight than they would solely within the classroom setting. Furthermore, pupils who are unable to attend school temporarily can participate in lessons via the internet, ensuring continuity of learning.

Exam coaching is enabled, as pupils can request and access revision classes and materials tailored to their exam concerns.

Learning is enhanced: qualitative feedback shows that pupils appreciate being able to ask questions in the relative anonymity of the virtual environment, boosting confidence and accelerating learning.

The cost of supply teachers is cut: savings of between £160 to £180 per day per supply teacher have been achieved at the school. Office Live Meeting allows teachers to give lessons remotely, thus negating the need for a qualified supply teacher on site - as a cover sponsor can be enlisted instead. In this way, students receive greater educational continuity and maintain important pupil-teacher relationships.

Inter-school education is facilitated: Wootton Bassett students are exposed to new cultures and languages by hosting and participating in international lectures. Currently their partner school is in China.

Time and cost of extra-curricular activity is reduced: pupils can make virtual visits to educational venues such as The National History Museum. This reduced the time and cost implications of study visits and means pupils do not miss an entire school day.

Applications sharing: students can access and share certain learning applications and resources at home allowing them to help their peers, which encourages team-working and mentoring.

"We are delighted with the results of our OCS implementation and look forward to helping Wootton Bassett school integrate this platform with their IP phone system to create a true unified communications platform that will keep them firmly at the forefront of education", commented Lekerman.

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