Lighthouse Learning Trust

Merging two domains into a single Microsoft 365 tenancy

Lighthouse Learning Trust's (LLT's) two founding colleges work together closely to deliver a variety of education and training programmes to post-16 students and adult learners across much of Hampshire. Together, Richard Taunton Sixth Form College in Southampton and St Vincent College in Gosport provide courses at levels 1 to 3 and a choice of full or part-time vocational training developed in partnership with local employers. For 2023/24 the trust introduced T Levels, and apprenticeships will follow in 2024/25.

Efficiency and collaboration

Between the two colleges, including the LLT Business Hub at Gosport, LLT had numerous M365 tenancies. They hoped that bringing them together into a single tenancy would bring many benefits including easier inter-college collaboration, but it was a complex task that trust IT staff didn't have time to manage alone.

"In an organisation like ours the IT environment is getting more complex all the time, and we want our own team to stay focused on innovations that benefit learning and teaching," says Lukasz Grochowicz, the trust's IT manager. "Spare capacity is always at a premium, especially for a project like this that I knew could throw up difficulties."

Lukasz decided to outsource the work which, under LLT's procurement rules, meant asking three suppliers to respond to the tender. Using a third-party provider doesn't only add resource and specialised expertise, it can also reassure risk-averse stakeholders and help with making the business case.

Trusted partner

We're happy to say they opted for Jisc.

"We chose Jisc for value for money and because they're already a trusted partner," explains Lukasz.

Jisc's cloud specialists work as an extension to an organisation's IT team. After a scoping meeting with LLT in April 2023 our experts ran discovery sessions to work out compatibility issues, identify tasks that might need to be done manually and plan ways to avoid disruption. We produced documentation to show how the finished merger would look and finalised the switchover date. Then, we did a tenancy health check; this was a pilot programme and the trust's feedback has helped us shape the service we've introduced since.

Work on merging the two tenancies started just before the colleges' summer break, aiming to get most of it done when college systems were quiet.

"We started moving some of the data before term ended, because this can happen in the background, but most of the heavy lifting took place early in the summer holidays," says Adam Newman, cloud product manager at Jisc.

In all, 2088 mailboxes, 1,784 OneDrives, 39 Teams groups and seven SharePoint sites were migrated into the new single tenancy remotely by Jisc engineers, working with LLT's IT staff on site. We've also provided aftercare services, including helping to nail down policies on end user devices.

New expertise

As Lukasz had predicted, LLT had a couple of curve balls for us.

"Teams, for example," comments our cloud engineer Kevin Egan. "LLT had many Teams set-ups with varied structures, and numerous embedded apps, and some didn't migrate correctly.

"We hand-built a solution to make it work. It took a few late nights to sort it out and keep to the schedule, but we did it, and now we have new expertise that will make future complex migrations easier."

Lukasz says:

"Jisc really put in the effort and resources to get everything right and finished on time. With a few weeks to spare I felt confident to go on holiday without worrying about the start of the autumn term."

Benefits

Merging the two domains has brought all the expected benefits for Lighthouse Learning Trust:

- Students can log in more easily and securely

- It's easier for staff to collaborate. Access to M365 is quicker and more reliable with single login across the two sites

- Security patching can be done more quickly

- Managing settings is less onerous

- The trust is operating all its systems under a single designation and strengthening its brand

Best of all, there were no nasty surprises at the start of the new academic year.

"Everything was ready to go and staff saw the benefits immediately," says Lukasz. "Students noticed no difference at all. It was 'business as usual', and business as usual is great."

Want to know more?

Contact your relationship manager, or send us an email: cloud@jisc.ac.uk

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