



Nexus & SMART

# Case Study

Education | SMART Information Systems Infrastructure Project | Cornwall UK

# 01. summary

South East Cornwall Multi Academy Regional Trust (SMART) is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) that currently consists of three secondary academies and three primary academies, plus a Central Business Unit (CBU) accommodated at one of the secondary academy sites.

SMART was formed in April 2017 and wanted to maximise the benefits of common information and communications systems to more effectively access and share information across the organisation.

In addition, SMART works with many other external organisations and, as such, identified the need to establish easy-to-use, secure data sharing systems to make certain data accessible to authorised external users.

Following the formation of SMART, the trust had a requirement to streamline its processes and communication amongst the six schools, including

the centralisation of its electronic communications to simplify administration and reduce long term operational costs. Nexus worked with SMART to design and deploy a technical solution to address the communication and collaborative needs of the trust. This solution comprised of a new Active Directory forest and supporting physical infrastructure to provide domain services for the SMART organisation, and included the migration of user, computer, and server objects from the legacy domains to the new SMART domains with the aim of creating a standardised infrastructure model.

Nexus managed to create a single domain that connects all SMART sites on a centralised, fully-redundant and scalable system. This enabled certain key staff and groups of staff with pan-SMART responsibilities to work effectively from any location and to share access to key data sources.

The main challenge was to be able to make largescale key changes, with as little impact as possible, on all six of the schools, whilst the pandemic was at its height; Nexus achieved this seamlessly.



# 02. challenges

At the time of request there were around 3,000 managed devices and each of the six sites had its own:

Windows Active Directory-based domain

Internet connectivity, internet filtering and internet security

Information and communications infrastructure, including servers, wired and wireless networks, wired and VOIP telephones

System management arrangements in terms of protocols, data backup, account management and access arrangements

Each of these inevitably came with their own challenges.

Other unexpected challenges came from such things as each school being tied into different contracts so consolidation of the domains across the schools needed different timings. Other hurdles arose from each institution having their own ideas on what needed to be done. At times it proved challenging

to coordinate the requirements between various schools within the organisation, ensuring that needs were being met equally between primary schools and secondary schools. It wasn't just about the IT needs; it was also a battle of hearts and minds where it took a good amount of relationship-building with the internal IT teams for them to understand the changes that were happening.

Additional challenges also came from the need to facilitate mail migration into one single cloud-based system. This was made harder because staff and students had different security policies, each school had their own IT domain and, to add to this, issues also arose from IT systems all being inconsistent.

The whole project took 18 months end-to-end. After six to nine months of planning, the strategy was clear. Nexus was able to implement the systems and structure necessary to create a highly efficient centralisation of their electronic communications

by creating a new, self-managed Windows Active Directory domain, encompassing all six schools within the trust to include all the following implementations:

New Office 365 tenant for SMART where all staff and student mailboxes are hosted

Migration of the existing schools' e-mail domains away from their existing mail platform into the SMART Microsoft Office 365 tenant

Cloud-based storage hosted by Microsoft Office 365

Shared (data-sharing) areas for secure, single sign-on, exchange of files between individuals inside and outside of the domain, and inside and outside of the trust

Secure remote working to enable multiple external devices and users (including board members and governors) to access the domain

Where possible, fully scalable to support the trust's long-term goals

A resilient infrastructure, providing business continuity across the trust in event of a disaster

# 04. solution

In this case, the solution was not simple. After months of planning and implementation, Nexus managed to achieve all the project requirements, including:

The results were beyond expectation; since the centralisation of electronic communications has been implemented, ease of communication is at an all-time high as all six institutions now work together as one.

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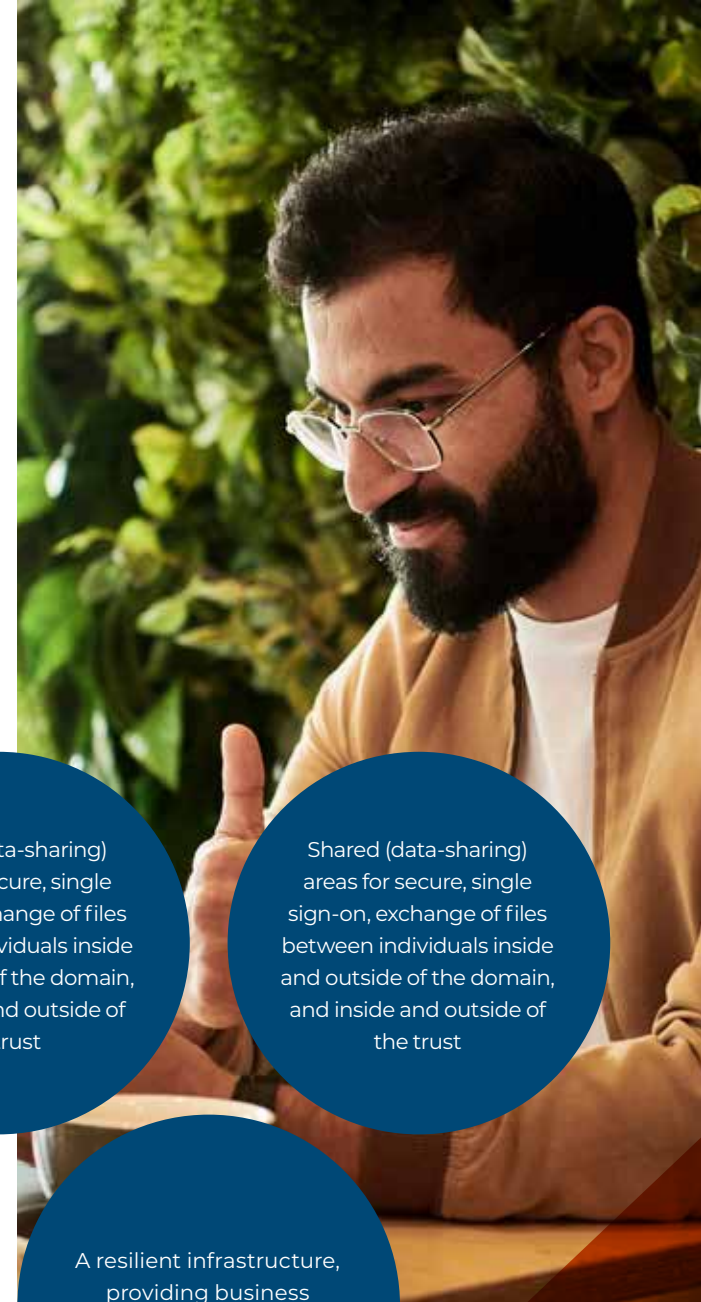
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“We knew that this was a largescale project that would meet bumps in the road along the way, but Nexus managed the process so smoothly and professionally. They were always on hand to not only manage the detailed technical aspects but also help manage the inevitable challenges that arise when merging the systems of six institutions. We were so impressed with the outcome and thoroughly enjoyed working with them.”

Anton Steinhardt | IT Officer | SMART Trust





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