Empowering students with cutting-edge facilities

The Sandwell Colleges, West Midlands

The Sandwell Colleges upgraded their IT facilities with Lenovo data centre, endpoint, and VR headset solutions provided by OX IT Solutions, helping to give students the best possible learning experience and prepare them for the workplace.

OX IT Solutions Ltd

SANDWELL COLLEGE
A CAREERS COLLEGE

Lenovo



Project Brief

The Sandwell Colleges include Sandwell College and Central Saint Michael's Sixth Form Centre in West Bromwich and Cadbury Sixth Form College in Kings Norton. The largest provider of 16-19 study programmes in the West Midlands region, England, offering over 100 courses including A levels, T Levels, vocational, and apprenticeship courses.

The Sandwell Colleges prepare students for university, apprenticeships, and employment, ensuring they develop the industry skills they need for their next step. The Colleges have invested millions of pounds into creating industry-standard learning environments that replicate real working conditions, from automotive workshops and digital media suites to healthcare wards and a Boeing 737 aircraft cabin for aviation training.

Many courses make extensive use of digital learning resources, which means that a large proportion of students need access to IT services. As some of the fastest-growing colleges in the UK in recent years, the Sandwell Colleges were facing scalability challenges in IT infrastructure.

"We have lots more students, which has led to an increase in demand for digital services," comments Rhys Lane, Senior Security Engineer & Deputy IT Director at the Sandwell Colleges. "This created a struggle for access to IT; we lacked the agility to meet requirements."

To meet the rising demand for digital access, the Colleges transitioned from traditional desktop-based computer rooms to a modern Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI). This move not only reduced the total cost of ownership but also streamlined and simplified ongoing maintenance for the Colleges' IT team.

However, as the existing VDI platform aged, the Sandwell Colleges began to experience performance issues. At the same time, many of Colleges' desktop PCs and laptops were reaching end-of-service-life. To continue providing its students with best-in-class facilities, the Sandwell Colleges set out to refresh both the backend VDI platform and the frontend devices.

The Solution

After evaluating the market and consulting with trusted IT partner OX IT Solutions, the Sandwell Colleges selected Lenovo for both its data centre infrastructure and endpoint fleet refreshes.

With help from OX IT Solutions, a Lenovo Gold Partner, the Colleges upgraded the data centre with 18 Lenovo ThinkSystem SR650 V3 servers, delivering the high graphics performance needed to support the Colleges' Omnissa Horizon VDI environment.

The new Lenovo servers complemented existing Lenovo ThinkSystem SR665 servers, which underpin mission-critical internal services, SQL databases, curriculum-specific resources, and backup and recovery services.

On the frontend, the Sandwell Colleges deployed around 1,200 Lenovo ThinkPad laptops, ThinkCentre desktops, ThinkStation workstations and Lenovo Chromebooks for students. They also invested in innovative AI and VR technologies to help them learn about AI in a safe and secure environment, and VR technology to support learning with Meta Quest 3 headsets bundled with Lenovo Integrated Solution Support.

By leveraging Lenovo Asset Recovery Services, the Sandwell Colleges were able to decommission and responsibly recycle existing assets while unlocking value to reinvest in new, next-generation Lenovo technology.

"Value for money is critical for us," Rhys said. "When it came time to refresh our server infrastructure and endpoint devices, we looked for the best price-to-performance ratio on the market.

"Thanks to Lenovo Asset Recovery Services, we were able to offset the costs of our endpoint refresh and acquire higher-performing Lenovo solutions which allowed us to further invest in our digital infrastructure to help acquire cutting-edge technology to support and enhance student learning opportunities."

The Benefits

Lenovo at the front and backend has proven a winning combination for the Sandwell Colleges. There has been a significant boost in VDI performance, enabling students to access the digital services they need for their studies, while the endpoint devices are robust, reliable, and easy to use.

“Lenovo technology supports teaching and learning across every department,” said Rhys.

Underpinning the hardware refresh and expansion is OX IT Solutions, who provide deployment and technical support around the clock, giving the IT team peace of mind.

Rhys said: “In a dynamic technical environment like ours, having a single point of contact for any questions through OX IT Solutions is indispensable. We can be confident that whatever we bring to OX, it will be dealt with.

“Lenovo and OX IT Solutions delivered everything we needed within time and budget.

“Crucially, there is ongoing engagement; we don’t just hear from them when a refresh is due. For example,

> “By having **one partner** and one vendor for both servers and endpoint devices, we have **significantly simplified** procurement and deployment.”
>
> *Rhys Lane, Senior Security Engineer & Deputy IT Director, The Sandwell Colleges*

Lenovo and OX IT Solutions both come in and exhibit on our Technology Days to showcase new solutions and talk us through upcoming releases.”

Rahul Masih, Sales Manager at OX IT Solutions, said: “As a Lenovo Gold Partner, OX IT Solutions works to help our clients access a wide range of Lenovo solutions and services, from desktop computers to servers. Providing budget-friendly solutions, we are the trusted partner of many schools and businesses across the UK and Europe, and we were proud to help the Sandwell Colleges select the best solutions for its students.”

Contact Us

Get in touch to request a consultation with a member of our team.



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