

Explore Learning brings tuition and a confidence boost to 33,000 pupils across the UK

Challenges:

- Maximizing efficiency of IT team
- Firefighting hardware and software issues in a large-scale organization
- Meeting growth demands with limited budget and resources

Solution:

L300 thin client solution by NComputing based upon 2 virtualized Windows Server operating systems per site providing optimal performance, redundancy and ease of local or remote management.

Benefits:

- 20% savings on cost of hardware=6000GBP savings per center.
- IT Team focused on core task of managing and deploying new centers.
- Software issues resolved in seconds.
- Speed, robustness, safety and tidiness of desks for pupils.
- Self-maintenance and time efficiency for onsite staff.

Two businesses, one common goal

Explore Learning and NComputing have a common ethos: to bring eLearning and technology to those who need it the most. Explore Learning is an inspiring business; created in 2001, the company brings mathematics and English tuition to 33,000 children aged 5-14 across the UK. Children typically become members and attend regular sessions at one of their 120 centers twice a week, complementing and mapping to the national curriculum. Coached by tutors and staff, students each sit at a desktop station and progress through a set of online courses adapted to their own unique strengths and weaknesses.



Limited resources managing a large scale project

With 120 tuition centers open seven days a week, 5000 desktop stations and 160 servers to support, Matthew Evans, Explore Learning's IT Director and his team of eight field, support and implementation engineers, had a sizeable challenge on their hands. The IT Director had always kept in line with smart technologies to maximize the efficiency of his headcount. Still, a physical device at each student station meant having to spend a lot of time resolving hardware and software issues. For example, if a virus should attack one of the servers, it meant "cleaning" every single machine, a task that would take days and restrict student access. It would also mean firefighting for the IT team, which would distract them from their core duty of supporting, managing, deploying and expanding tuition centers across the UK. The same applied to hardware: when an issue arose, the IT team had to hit the road to replace a workstation or ship clunky material to one of the centers, leaving the center's tutors or staff to install it. The IT Director wanted to maximize time efficiency and remove the firefighting headache from his team's daily jobs.

The company also had aggressive growth plans. In 2012-2013-2014 Explore Learning grew by 20%, 25% and 20% year on year – which meant doubling in size in 3 years. 2015 took the company over the 100 center mark. Finding the budget to scale was a challenge. In computing, hardware and software have a cost, but electricity is also a major cost to any deployment. They needed a scalable solution to support this growth.

Physical desktops need space too! And space also has a cost.

“NComputing allowed us to be smart without worrying about buying lots of clunky kit and hiring more IT staff!”

Matthew Evans
IT Director, Explore Learning

IT Director Matthew Evans made it his personal mission to find a cost effective solution and allow for expansion by working with smart and innovative technologies. The IT Director set himself the task of choosing a strategic technology partner who would enable Explore Learning to cut costs whilst enabling limitless growth and more importantly, providing an excellent service to the children.

Enter desktop virtualization - making cost, resource and time savings a reality

The IT team needed a solution to save budget on the cost of hardware, and to save time and energy troubleshooting software issues. The IT team first started looking at virtual desktops in 2011 and implemented the technology in April 2012.

They chose the **L300**, using virtualized server operating systems – initially Windows 2008R2, but later migrating to 2012R2. Explore Learning deployed on average 30 thin client devices per center making it a total of approximately 3600 thin client devices installed.

“Moving onto the **L300** took away the operational headache of managing hundreds of machines in hundreds of centers all over the country – with the **L300**, we only have a couple of machines to manage in each center - it is a much more scalable option. And it keeps us focused on our core duty: to deliver an excellent service to the children” says Evans.

For the IT Director, it also took away the worry of having to buy hardware, or replace damaged hardware: for Explore Learning, this meant a 20% saving on the cost of buying physical machines, representing a saving of approximately 6,000GBP per center on hardware costs only. The **L300** is also the “greenest” computing solution out there, with a 90% power savings over standard PCs.

“NComputing ticked all the boxes, it’s proven invaluable! The kit was easy to handle, manage and very user-friendly. The other solutions we looked at were clunky. One of the things we pride ourselves on as a company is that we look to build long-lasting relationship with our providers and we did get that feeling from NComputing, especially from the stellar technical team. It is definitely something we want to invest in to make sure we have a scalable future” concludes Evans.

A brighter future for Explore Learning’s pupils, tutors and staff

Every student now uses NComputing daily, and they have proven to be robust—standing up to use by 5-14 year-old students. The IT team wanted to make sure the deployments were complete before launching a new version of their core content in June 2016.

For the children, speed of access to tuition content is the main benefit of the deployment, “everything runs a lot faster”, adds Evans, “which enables them to do more, learn more and be more productive, without even noticing it”. Courses run smoothly with no interruption – allowing the children to keep focused and motivated.

With such a small footprint, the **L300** can attach to the back of the monitor, clearing desk space and hiding cables, keeping each pupil’s desk tidy, neat and safe.

For Explore Learning’s onsite staff, the NComputing solution allows self-maintenance, which was never the case before. Less IT input is required, which makes the solution more scalable. Explore Learning opened another five tuition centers in Dallas, Texas in 2015 with the ultimate goal of over 200 centers in the UK by 2020. The company is looking forward to saving 1/3 of their future implementation costs by keeping their partnership with NComputing aligned and using desktop virtualization as a core component of their expansion plans.