



Education Authority (EA)
of Northern Ireland

From complexity to simplicity



Dedicated to the education and support of children and young people, the Education Authority (EA) of Northern Ireland worked with Fujitsu to modernise and simplify the organisation's finance, procurement, HR and payroll functions, finding solutions to existing and future challenges.

Challenge

The EA merged five separate legal entities into a single business system. It needed a complex data migration to replace disparate finance, procurement, HR, recruitment and payroll solutions.

Solution

Fujitsu worked with the EA and Deloitte to replace many complex systems and solutions with one Oracle EBusiness platform. It also migrated the solution from on-premises data centres to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure.

Outcomes

- Merged five disparate functions into one platform
- Delivered a country-wide transformation
- Provided one source of truth for educational information

“It's probably one of the unsung successes of the project that we managed to do this [cloud migration] in its entirety, without a glitch, in just a few days.”

Seamus Wade, Director of Finance and ICT, The Education Authority of Northern Ireland



1 weekend of migration from on-premises to the cloud

Big responsibilities call for expert support

The Education Authority (EA) of Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body responsible for funding and education delivery in the country. Its performance affects children, young people and school employees in all 1,100 schools in Northern Ireland.

The organisation was established to merge five separate Education and Library Boards that covered different geographical areas of the region. The EA now employs over 40,000 staff across the country and supports the Department of Education, with its additional 20,000 teachers, in the delivery of educational outcomes for children and young people.

Mindful of the huge challenges ahead, the EA tasked Fujitsu with implementing and maintaining integrated finance, procurement, HR, recruitment and payroll systems for the EA and schools across Northern Ireland. It also engaged Deloitte for its expertise in resource augmentation and business change.

Working for a more resilient future

“No one had ever embarked on anything of this size or scale before in the education sector,” says Seamus Wade, Director of Finance and ICT at the EA. “Bringing together five previously separate legal organisations into one, each with its own structures, systems, processes and culture was quite a challenge. It meant five sources of truth for payroll information, finance and procurement systems and recruitment arrangements as well as 260 different sets of terms and conditions. To bring those together and have solutions designed, costed, funded, tested and implemented was a very significant constraint in terms of the projected timeline. It was a huge challenge with the additional limitation of having to work with the school academic year as well as the business year.”

What’s more, the pandemic significantly impacted the ability for the EA, Fujitsu and Deloitte teams to collaborate in person, which they’d been doing since 2015. Despite this challenge, they continued to work very closely as one unit to merge the five disparate administrative functions into one manageable platform and later add separate Department of Education HR and payroll functions.

The finance and procurement modules of the new integrated system were implemented first and went live in December 2016, followed by the recruitment module of the new system in January 2020. The core Oracle EBusiness HR and payroll modules were the most significant undertaking, implemented in phases from September 2021 to March 2023. The fact that each legacy organisation had two separate payroll systems, one for salaried employees and one for hourly employees, significantly increased the challenge. The EA payroll is also unusual due to the huge number of staff that hold multiple posts with different contracts, often spanning the salaried and hourly payrolls. “The complexity in the EA payroll is immense and the HR payroll implementation for the Education Authority was a very significant undertaking,” comments Wade.

In all, 10 disparate systems were phased into two, bringing almost 42,000 employees under one umbrella. With the upcoming addition of the payroll system for the Department of Education, 60,000 salaries and wages will be managed by the new system.

Complex data migration underpinned the collaboration from beginning to end. In another undertaking, to future proof the organisation and ensure resilience, Fujitsu migrated the EA from on-premises data centres to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure using Fujitsu CloudScale solutions.

Industry:
Public sector

Location:
Northern Ireland

Website:
eani.org.uk

About the customer

The Education Authority (EA) of Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body established under the Education Act 2014 and sponsored by the Department of Education. The EA is responsible for effective primary and secondary education services and the support of efficient and effective youth services. The EA is relied upon to help with all aspects of a child's journey through the education system.



60,000
employees covered



10
payrolls rolled into two

"We didn't have the luxury of taking the system down for significant periods of time because that meant schools wouldn't have been able to procure or process financial and payroll transactions," says Wade. "We had to plan everything in minute detail, but the actual move to the cloud happened over an extended weekend, which is a phenomenal achievement. It is probably one of the unsung successes of the project that we managed to do this in its entirety, without a glitch, in just a few days, with at least five different sets of key stakeholders involved in that."

Schools deserve the best solutions

Despite its scope and impact, the achievements of the EA are almost invisible because they were delivered so smoothly. "For a system implementation that brought with it a cultural change, to go off so quietly was a testament to Fujitsu, Deloitte and our teams," says Wade. "Ultimately, this is a system covering a range of functions that should just happen in the background, unnoticed. The main objective is to allow staff at the frontline, looking after our children and young people, to do just that and not be distracted by administrative processes."

Focusing on children and staff was a priority and much of the success of this project can be linked to the flexible nature of the collaboration between the EA and Fujitsu, that focused on the outcomes and the journey itself. "We had situations where Fujitsu was very flexible," comments Wade. "On many occasions, they amended what their normal implementation or delivery arrangements might be to facilitate either a complicated financial year end, issues with schools, COVID-19 or a whole host of other arrangements."

The existing achievements can now be used as the foundation for future improvements. For example, thanks to the new and single source of truth, the EA can invest more heavily in its data analytics team because it finally has a solid base for meaningful evidence-based decision-making. The organisation also intends to move to just one payroll system for the entire sector.

Additionally, ambitious goals and ideas can now be set for the future. "We are the largest organisation in the education sector," says Wade. "We've got state of the art technology and we operate on a huge scale already. It wouldn't be too difficult to envisage a situation where we could not only provide services to other bodies within the public sector, but potentially also some financial services to private sector bodies. This way, private sector businesses would have an opportunity to contribute to the cost of education in Northern Ireland and, surely, that has to be a prize worth pursuing."

Although the journey was long and complex, it was also extremely well planned and executed. Everyone's commitment and dedication to the best outcomes powered the implementation. "The public sector has sometimes been criticised for its failings in delivering IT projects," comments Wade. "So, this has been a phenomenal achievement, and a success that we should be shouting from the rooftops. This is a very clear example of the public sector and the private sector working hand-in-hand to deliver services focused on excellent outcomes for children and young people and the broader public sector."

Customer:



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