Oasis Community Learning Presentation

By Jim Gardner

The Shard - July 2019

[Notes from the Transcript of the Presentation by Jim Gardner, Head of Strategic IT Projects & Director of Oasis IT Services]

Introduction:

As Head of Strategic IT Projects since October 2018, Jim Gardner was responsible for the implementation of Bromcom and the management of the migration from the trust's old MIS to Bromcom.

The presentation will focus on three key areas:

- Why Oasis Community Learning switched to Bromcom from our previous MIS
- The benefits that we saw being accrued from that process and the experience of rolling out to 52 schools which we completed in a 6-month period.
- Reflections on the outcomes of the project, where we are a year after the migration concluded and a number of lessons that we have learned.

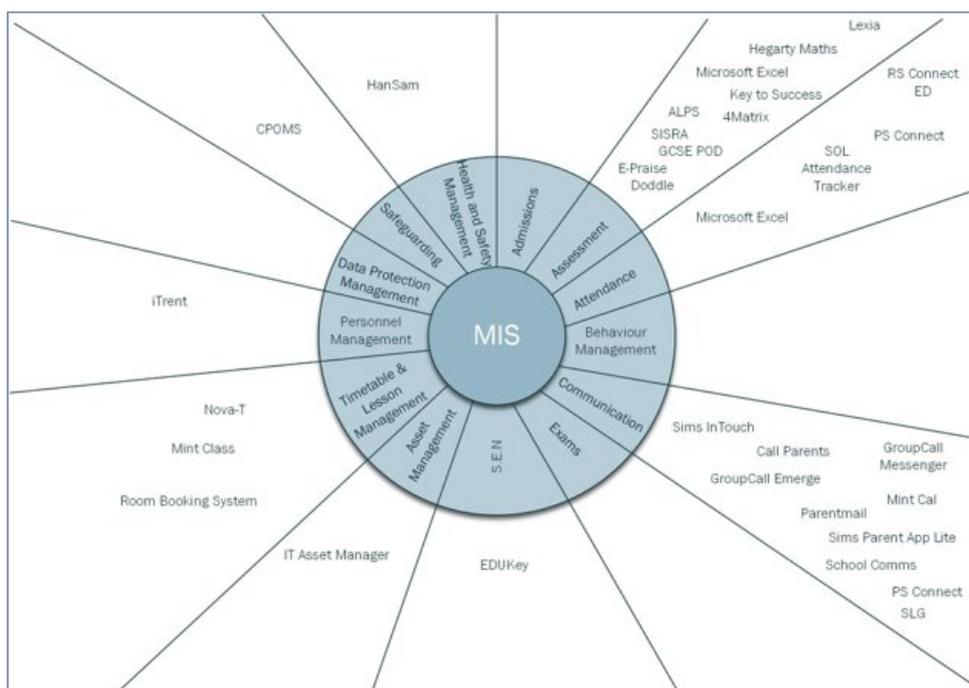### Why the change to Bromcom MIS?

The old MIS was too expensive. We did our sums and worked out fairly rapidly that Bromcom would be cheaper for us as a Trust.

Dealing with the previous supplier was difficult in a number of ways, particularly areas such as the quality of support. We had different configurations and little standardisation across our 52 schools.

There were a lot of third-party solutions that academies had contracted independently. It cost them money, they needed to manage those locally and the quality of managing those locally was diverse in areas such as assessment, communication, attendance.

We had very little control over the variety of applications centrally in terms of the quality of the outputs or how different applications were being used by schools. The advantages that we felt would be offered both financially and in other terms of value, by centralising all those into a single system, would be significant.

Lexia
Hegarty Maths
Microsoft Excel
Key to Success
ALPS 4Matrix
SISRA
GCSE POD
E-Praise
Doddle
RS Connect
ED
PS Connect
SOL
Attendance
Tracker
Microsoft Excel
HanSam
CPOMS
Health and Safety Management
Admissions
Safeguarding
Assessment
Data Protection Management
Attendance
Personnel Management
MIS
Behaviour Management
iTrent
Timetable & Lesson Management
Communication
Nova-T
Asset Management
Exams
Mint Class
S.E.N
Room Booking System
IT Asset Manager
EDUKey
Sims InTouch
Call Parents
GroupCall Messenger
GroupCall Emerge
Mint Cal
Parentmail
Sims Parent App Lite
School Comms
PS Connect
SLG

We had various levels of expertise across the academies. Trying to get all those functions into one, single, central place gives leverage as a central organisation to manage and strategize the use of those functions in ways which accrue more benefits.

The centralised data management at the Trust was not as strong as we felt it could be. Moving to a single MIS and appointing the right people in the central office (critically, an experienced and capable National MIS Manager) to head-up and standardise certain types of data to link into delivering MAT-wide strategy and vision was really important.

Support was a big problem with the old MIS. The responsiveness of the previous supplier, when individual schools required support, was not what we needed. The quality of support we now get [from Bromcom] is significantly better: response times are much quicker and the quality of the support is better.

In terms of the response times: users log a ticket through a system agreed with Bromcom. Someone will get onto the phone to you, probably that morning, take you through the issue, resolve it, and move on. We have a ticket reference, and if we need to escalate the issue because the academy's still struggling, we have a reference. We have a direct line to colleagues at Bromcom for escalation where required.

Equally, some of the updates from the old MIS used to cause considerable disruption, and we have generally not had a similar experience with Bromcom. We know when the updates are taking place, we communicate that to our academies, they manage their use of the MIS and any data inputs around those updates so they're aware of them.

The local expertise with the previous MIS was variable, but we were very dependent on local expertise in data management in academies. Clearly, when moving to a new MIS, training is critical in terms of getting people on board with the new system. We have also now recruited an MIS manager who is based in our central office. She supports schools in a variety of ways

and will start to take on responsibility for some of the functions that academies have traditionally managed themselves.

This role allows us to set strategy and direction at the Trust, through the MIS Manager down to the schools, and it also allows that MIS Manager to take on some of the roles that academies currently deliver around significant areas of risk, such as compliance.

We felt the previous product was overly complicated and there was confused organisation of data fields. Bromcom offers usability and accessibility. Training to get people on board with it is critical and you have to accept there is going to be a time period post-migration to get people 100% up to speed. We were able to get our data leads in school and those with responsibilities around critical areas such as assessment and attendance trained quickly: they were the audience for the start-up training and further specialist training was offered to a range of colleagues on areas such as Exams, Behaviour, Timetable, MCAS etc.

We also had a dependence on costly third-party solutions. Effectively, by moving to Bromcom, we are going to save schools quite a lot of money.

Each academy really controlled their own requirements about how data should be administered. Thinking about the responsibilities that a MAT have around attendance data and assessment data and statutory returns, you want to be able to exert some positive control and influence over that. We felt that we could not do that within the solution that we had previously.

We had Groupcall acting as an aggregator of the data from each academy and PowerBI provided a window on the data from our national office. In terms of where we are now, it is very different. Being cloud based, we now have a single MIS system that's accessed by all, with some delegated control, but we can manage that delegation in the ways that we feel are going to be beneficial to us and to schools. We have a single system that allows uniform implementation across all academies. This is critical, because as we did the configuration pre-migration, we could define how we wanted to configure certain parts of the system and give that considered thought based on the experience of using the old system.

Thirdly, some third-party applications we needed to retain to perform some tasks, but we defined those nationally. We have retained CPOMS, for example, but various assessment trackers and payment systems and various other things, we are encouraging academies to cease those contracts and move to the functionality in Bromcom. Finally, some academies still use other systems for collection and processing of data that we are not particularly bothered about nationally.

We did not feel that the previous solution, the relationship and points above gave us much advantage around the MIS as a utility to serve the purposes of improving standards and school performance. We could not see how we could drive any of that forwards. However, with the move to Bromcom, we feel that, both for the Trust and academies the value that we accrue from the new system is significantly better and still has much potential to improve even more.

What are the opportunities that we have understood and started to recognise?

We wanted more synergy throughout the Trust, and we want to develop consistent practice. We have already set up working groups in certain really key areas like assessment, behaviour and SEND. The way we are doing that is we are convening lead practitioners from schools and we are involving a Bromcom consultant.

The national education team, working closely with myself, roll that out to the schools and they start to activate those new reports and functions and activities. This is proving a really positive process. There are members of our national education team now who never previously considered what a MIS could do in terms of adding value but who are now excited about it.

I wanted to see the MIS starting to have an impact on the educational progress and standards within the Trust and our schools. Driving standards and change through working groups that focus on how the product can add value in particular areas has been a really, really good step forwards and something I'd highly recommend as a management methodology once you migrate to the new system.

There are also new opportunities, now, to really understand our data. We can define standard sets of data coming through, standard reports through the system, and we can interrogate those in ways that we need to rather than getting a whole ton of diverse sets of data that have all been collected in different ways by different colleagues in different schools.

Streamlining workload, we are now going to place responsibility for data compliance onto our new MIS manager. It allows us to have that central, full-time resource to support schools with the developments that they want to see happen, and also to firefight the issues as they come our way. One thing I would say in terms of lessons learned, having the right capacity in the central office of any Trust nationally, is really critical.

The collaboration and sharing of best practice is a benefit. If you have a standardised system being used by academies in the same way for the same reasons, you can start to share tips and tricks of how to achieve things much more easily.

Why did Bromcom win the procurement?

A lot of the reasons are covered above. One or two things I would pick out are the anywhere, anytime access of a cloud based system.

Previously we had a solution called Remote Desktop. Now that we have moved to Bromcom, we are getting closer to being to drop Remote Desktop. Other benefits of a cloud-based system are in the slide below:

Moving to Bromcom from the old system was a huge change management project, as well as just changing an IT solution. That comes with a level of risk and a level of methodology and rigour that you need to apply to how you manage that really effectively. Some of these steps here were about getting people on board and getting them to accept that this new system does do things differently and does do things better.

In October of last year, we had two pathfinder academies, a primary and a secondary. We migrated their systems first deliberately just to test the waters both in terms of Bromcom migrating final datasets and also some of the technical aspects that our teams did in the background. We then had eight pilots that migrated in November of 2018.

We had a group of both Primaries and Secondaries. With those, we imposed the new Oasis configuration that we wanted to have across all of them eventually. We did not do that with the pathfinders, but we did with the privates. In January to April, we rolled out all of the remaining 41 academies. We did not do it in one lump, we staged it in groups of between about four and seven or eight.

Those were split across region and phase, so we had Bristol primaries, Midlands primaries, South East primaries and so on. I project-managed the first batch, the Bristol ones, so I could work out whether the process guide I'd written actually worked and get a feel for it. The way we set it up was that we applied our own staff within the IT directorate, who act as project managers already, or technical managers, they became project managers for those different batches of schools.

I wrote a process guide when I landed in Oasis so that, when we started to roll out the pilots onwards, everybody understood the process, everybody knew what they needed to do leading up to migration, post-migration, and so on.

Critically, we did have an abort group which we were happy to move schools into if the whole thing fell over. It did not. It worked really successfully, so we didn't have to use the abort group at all.

We had significant pressure from one or two schools in the last groups, due to flavour of principal, flavour of context, but we just applied extra support and work where required, in order to deal with those risks and help people through the process.

They were managed accordingly, and we set up a pretty standard PRINCE2 methodology to deliver that. We had work packages, people had to report to me, I could report to the board, which I sat on. We could mandate other decisions as risks and issues hit us down through to those work packages and managing the PMs on the ground.

We also had a MIS portal that we developed, which I managed. On there, we had all the training guides, we had all the start-up training calendars, registration links that Bromcom provided for us. We had all our own management resource.

Rather than me responding to loads of questions all the time, I could direct Academies to the portal, to the training page and to specialist webinars and self-help guides, constantly funnelling the traffic, towards that MIS portal, standard planning approaches, guides that enabled internal staff to do their jobs and a portal to act as an online function to provide all the support and enabling information that academies needed.

We had very close liaison and partnership with the Bromcom technical teams as we went through that staged process of migration. It worked really well but I think any of you considering doing this at scale need to understand that we did a significant amount of technical work ourselves. If you don't have similar resources to ours you would be dependent on Bromcom doing that for you and you would need to manage that accordingly.

We had checkpoint meetings on a weekly basis with Bromcom and shared agendas. We brought issues, risks, concerns so that we focussed, we discussed, we worked them through regularly throughout the process. That partnership approach worked and was not just woolly words.

Resourcing and planning...

OCL technical support
- Data cleansing
- Database uploads for each academy – test and final pre-migration
- Salamander
  - Migration of Salamander to create new network accounts and licencing
  - Salamander write back to enable SSO
  - Salamander write back of work email address
  - Lock out the ability for SSO enabled users to sign in manually
  - Manually link users to secondary & tertiary sites
- Creation & assignment of group wide permissions for academy, cluster, regional and national users
- Create 3rd party permissions for data extraction purposes e.g. CPOMS
- Create 52 new mailboxes and configure into respective Bromcom systems along with text message header
- Configure Oasis wide parental and student based consent types
- Create a shortcut and turn off popup blocker for ALL staff devices deployed using SCCM, ensuring that Bromcom opens up in the preferred Chrome browser.
- Configure MAT vision for all 52 academies
- Working with GroupCall, created a new tool to extract and decrypt linked documents in SIMS.
  - Imported linked documents into Bromcom, (some sites had in the region of 42,000 documents)
- Give relevant users access to Bromcom portal – training, support, project management

What would we do differently?

The training worked really successfully but the leadership teams in schools felt a little bit disenfranchised when we moved to Bromcom. Maybe we should have taken them through some more bespoke training but we are now focussing attention on some schools where that is an issue.

The reality is, in most academies, they need other staff to do the work anyway, but we have got a few who did feel like they understood SIMS and they could do a few things in SIMS and now they can't in Bromcom.

We have priority academies in terms of performance and standards. We maybe should have focussed on them a little bit in different ways, because we are now doing that in a retrograde fashion and giving them more support. The data housekeeping in the old MIS was not great in some regards.

Very interestingly, on attendance, we have had a few schools saying that attendance in Bromcom is a nightmare which surprised us. When we took a look we discovered lots of missing marks that were just in SIMS already and which had migrated over. It was nothing to do with the Bromcom system failing, it was to do with poorly managed data that migrated over and only really came to light in some academies when they got up and running with Bromcom.

Capability across Trusts in terms of things like timetabling: quite a few of sites used external consultants to work with Nova-T to develop their old timetables o extra support is being provided.

Issues resolution: We have learned that there are three areas to investigate for root causes when someone says they have a problem with Bromcom. It's either a local technical issue, (not enough bandwidth, the system's running slow, the wireless isn't functioning as it should, something to do with the user devices) or the users just don't know what they're doing properly because they never engaged with the training, or they need a bit more, or it's Bromcom - it's hardly ever Bromcom!