CoreAzure
AN ALTEN COMPANY

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Windows Virtual Desktop Services

Background

The University of Leicester is a public research university. The main campus is situated south of the city centre, adjacent to Victoria Park. The city campus location had presented challenges with regard to the impact of the recent global pandemic, and a realisation that the university needed to have an agile and performant virtual desktop solution in place to accommodate what was likely to be a mainly distance based teaching and learning model for some time to come.

With a firm focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion, where staff and students come from across the globe to study and work, it was important that the solution was inclusive and that meant being able to accommodate a range of user personas, device types, and access scenarios.

The Challenge

Like other UK universities, Leicester required a remote access solution that it could use in its response to the COVID-19 situation.

It needed a solution that would be quick to deploy but one that didn't disadvantage certain students and teachers who had become reliant upon campus labs and computer facilities when accessing curriculum-based applications. For example, how could it make its Geographic information system ArcGIS available to a group of 100 students given that it is a particularly resource heavy application requiring students to access it via high specification devices?

Timescales were tight and the university only had a window of around 5 weeks to plan, design, test, and mobilise a solution that it could make available to learners and teachers who were about to return after their summer break.

The aim was to:

- Implement a fit for purpose Windows Virtual Desktop (WVD) platform that would be capable of supporting up to 30,000 students and teachers
- Complete the initial roll-out prior to the start of the new autumn term
- Transition into service and complete the handover to the internal team

Why CoreAzure ?

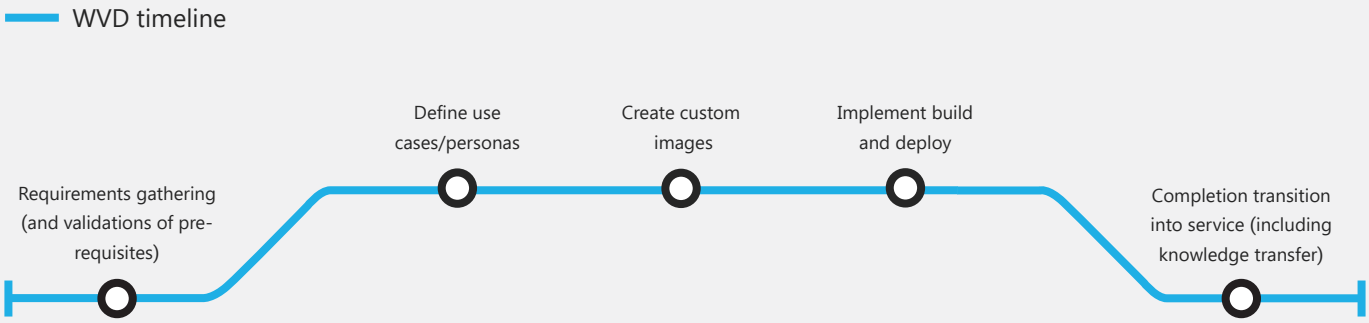
- We are an accredited Microsoft AMP partner and were eligible for financial support
- With over twenty successful WVD projects already delivered we were able to demonstrate an expert level of WVD experience
- As an Advanced Specialisms partner for WVD we were recommended by Microsoft
- The Higher Education sector has been our primary focus for a number of years - we understand the technology landscape and the workloads used to support teaching and learning activities.

> *"WVD has provided the University with an inclusive and performant remote access solution which has allowed us to move quickly and adapt to the needs of a predominantly remote based teaching and learning model"*

Solution

After clarifying the requirements, the WVD solution was selected, and an implementation plan was quickly constructed. Timescales were very tight, nevertheless the solution was built with a number of features designed to enhance supportability and ultimately the user experience. The main implementation tasks focused on:

- Defining use cases to reflect the required user personas and then rightsizing the WVD configuration accordingly
- The creation of custom images to support the user personas
- The deployment itself
- The implementation of FSLogix that would allow users to maintain their experiences across a non-persistent environment
- An implementation of the Microsoft scaling tool to minimise consumption costs
- Establishing LogAnalytics monitoring and alerting capabilities
- Completing transition into service which included full knowledge and skills transfer.



Results

12 months on, following a successful testing period which focussed particularly on the ArcGIS application, the solution was initially rolled out to a small group of staff and students to test and evaluate the platform and its ability to meet the demands of students and teachers alike.

Following a successful and rapid proof of concept, the solution was made available to groups of students with priority requirements e.g. they were ready and willing to embrace the remote teaching and learning model. Around 40 applications were then made available via the WVD platform in the first release cohort and a further 40 were subsequently deployed.

The take up amongst staff and students was rapid and with platform access being made available to some 30,000 students, staff, and researchers, the university is able to plan for and deliver a distance-based model.

In parallel with extending the roll-out, further activities to enhance the experience and extend the number of applications available are planned, including:

- Automation to update image creation
- The use of MSIX App Attach to reduce management and other overhead costs through containerisation and therefore no longer the need to re-build and deploy the hosts.

London
Saffron House
6 -10 Kirby Street
London EC1N 8TS
T: 020 7240 1121

methods
AN ALTEN COMPANY