

Managed ICT Services project

Briefing notes for centrally hosted schools

Why are the ICT Service doing this?

ICT systems in general, and complex software like SIMS in particular, are becoming increasingly difficult for schools to manage themselves. At the same time an increasing number of school staff are being asked to engage with schools' MIS, increasing the difficulty of managing systems, for example, upgrading 20 machines instead of 4 or 5. There are also demands to share information more widely.

There are therefore considerable benefits to moving to a "managed services" model (as envisaged by the government's BSF programme).

Why is this happening now?

The technology to manage this effectively and efficiently has only relatively recently become available, enabling systems to be managed centrally without disproportionate up-front costs.

What are the benefits?

There are a number of potential benefits. Some are direct cost savings, for example equipment can be used for longer before becoming obsolete. There are many more indirect savings in terms of the manageability of school systems (no need to check backups of MIS, upgrades taken care of) and school staff can focus on how software and systems are being used rather than sorting out operational problems. It's also possible to make systems available in the classroom with minimum effort in terms of checking equipment is up to the job or installing software. Even though the production version of the managed service will have a price tag, it's likely that there will be little or no net additional expenditure as schools will not need to upgrade equipment so regularly or pay for installation of software.

Remote Access

This is included with the system and 2 security "key fobs" are provided with the core service. These are assigned to individuals and can not be shared within the school. Schools may purchase additional fobs and there is a form on the Central Hosting portal for that purpose.

Your questions answered

Will staff need training?

Very little, except to understand how the system works. Access to all systems being hosted will be via a web browser. Once the web-based "desktop" is running, the system looks almost exactly the same as that currently used in the school. There will be some "cosmetic" changes (desktop background, for example). This will help schools to identify the new environment and the ICT Service to provide support. Obviously if staff are new to applications such as SIMS, they will need training.

How will backups and upgrades be managed?

Both will be managed by the ICT Service.

Will SIMS be uninstalled?

Yes. This will free up space on the server/master PC and workstations

What happens if the school network breaks down?

You would lose access to your systems, the same as now.

Is the service guaranteed?

Schools will be depending on this system so we aim to have as little disruption as possible. However this is a new system and there will be teething problems. We will always aim to carry out maintenance including upgrades “out of hours” i.e. usually at weekends and during school holidays. The service is normally available out of schools hours, evenings and weekends.

What happens if there's a problem with CCN?

This would depend on where the CCN fault lay. If the fault lies in the external connection from CCN to the internet, you will be able to carry on working in school as normal. However, if the fault lies in the circuit to your school, you would lose access to the centrally hosted systems (i.e. all admin functions). In order that you can still access pupil records in an emergency, you should run a scheduled report that will create a name and address and contact details list on your local systems on a daily basis and transfer this to a local drive.

What software will be hosted remotely?

We can host SIMS, FMS, Dinner Money, Word, Excel and email (Outlook). For other applications please see the list on the portal. We may add other suitable applications on request from schools.

Where will documents (Word documents and Excel spreadsheets) be stored?

All documents (office word processing, spreadsheets, etc.) can be stored on the central system. There will be facilities to transfer files locally. The facility to see files on your computer's C: drive and USB memory sticks is possible. Your school's network drives are also accessible when you are in school, but not remotely.

Will I be able to run SIMS on any PC in the school?

Yes, no matter how old or where located, provided it can run a suitable web browser (e.g. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox). This is one of the principal benefits of the solution. All you need is a broadband network connection and a web browser.

What software will need to be installed?

When you first use the managed service, two small applications are installed on your computer from your web browser. After that, none – the only software you'll need is a web browser.

Will SIMS and files be accessible from home?

Yes, if they have been transferred to the central hosting service. Note that a remote access key fob is needed.

Can I use this with Apple computers?

Yes, we support use of Centrally Hosted MIS from Mac computers but only using the remote access system (even within school). There is an icon within SSL Explorer named "Centrally Hosted MIS (Mac Users)". However there are two restrictions: Printing from Apple computers is not possible, nor is access to local drives.

Some of our students go to other schools regularly. Can their records be accessed?

Yes. You would need to say who they were and request access on their behalf. We would then set up IDs and passwords for them. The staff based at other schools could then access records on your system, subject to the permissions you set up in SIMS.

Is this only for schools with a fileserver?

No. There is not technical reason why a school with a master/slave setup should not be able to participate. In fact, schools with a master computer stand to benefit from the increased security offered by the managed service.

Will remote access work on a dial-up connection?

The best answer is no. We have not tested this over a dial-up connection, but dial-up is very likely to be too slow to allow the application to run at an acceptable speed.

Can I still use a memory stick?

Yes. The managed service will allow you to plug in a memory stick and access the files on it.

Can Dinner Money be run on more than one computer?

Yes, with the proviso that it can only be used by one person at a time. You no longer have to be sitting at the "Dinner Money" computer.

Will my normal printers still work?

Yes. The managed service will detect printers attached to your computer, both within school and at home.

Will I need to buy Microsoft Office?

Under the licensing agreement we have with Microsoft, the central hosting licence is "shared" with the school. This means the school must hold enough licences for Microsoft Office 2003 to cover the central hosting users.