

## Playing for Success Netherlands

Popular children's learning scheme Playing for Success Netherlands is improving staff communication with Office 365. Irene de Kort speaks to Rebecca Lambert about the benefits her organisation is achieving with the new technology

Playing for Success Netherlands is an innovative learning scheme that helps underachieving students build their confidence, motivation and self-esteem, and improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills by taking part in fun activities based in stimulating environments such as football grounds. For the last 18 months, the organisation has been working with IT company QNH to improve its IT infrastructure. Today, Playing for Success is taking advantage of Microsoft Office 365, including Lync and SharePoint Online, as well as SkyDrive Pro, to improve organisation-wide productivity and communication. Rebecca Lambert catches up with senior advisor and project manager Irene de Kort to find out how the technology is making a difference.

### Tell me more about Playing for Success.

Set up by Dutch education consultancy KPC Groep, Playing for Success Netherlands is a nationwide initiative designed to help children improve their literacy, numeracy and IT skills. Like the established Playing for Success scheme that has been running in the UK since 1997, it targets underachieving children from the age of nine years and up and runs study support sessions at sporting venues and other exciting and stimulating environments for young people to learn. With access to the sporting stars and facilities around them, students are encouraged to participate in fun activities that not only aim to boost their core skills but also build their confidence and self-esteem.



### Before you started working with QNH, what challenges did the organisation face?

The old IT system we were using to manage our website and communicate with each other was causing us too many problems. It was difficult to use and it was also costing the organisation a lot of money. Nobody wanted to work with it!

### How did QNH get involved?

We were actually approached by an employee of QNH. He had worked as a volunteer in the UK Playing for Success scheme and saw the massive difference it was having on so many children's lives. He said it was the best experience he'd ever had. When he found out we were running this scheme in the Netherlands, he wanted to help. So he came to us and asked how QNH could get involved. We've now been working with them for about 18 months and they've helped us to completely transform our operations. They've helped to restore our trust in IT!

### What technologies did QNH implement?

QNH said they could help us simplify our IT and that's exactly what they've done. They recommended that we use Microsoft Office 365 to run both our national and local websites and, as part of the package, we're now also using Exchange Online, Lync Online and SharePoint Online to improve organisation-wide communication and collaboration. Because all these tools are available via the cloud, we can work and communicate with each other from wherever we are. What's more is that because we're an education organisation, we're entitled to take advantage of the Office 365 Education plan, which is saving us loads of money.

### How are you and your colleagues benefiting from this new technology?

I'm finding Lync particularly useful. It's great being able to set up video conference calls and so easily communicate with colleagues in other locations. We're all saying what a difference Lync has made to organisation-wide



communication. We're also able to collaborate better. We can share documents and work on them together, even if we're in different offices. Everybody is able to work more productively.

Although many of us had some initial training, in general we're finding all the tools are easy to work with. This is particularly important as we have a lot of volunteers and we need to get them up and running as quickly as possible.

Before Office 365 we found using IT such a headache. Everyone was so frustrated. But now we finally have IT that we can rely on. It's making such a difference.

### How many people in your organisation rely on Office 365 today?

All 20 Playing for Success centres across the Netherlands are using the technology today. Every person involved has an Office 365 Education A2 account, which gives them free access to the core tools they need, such as Office, e-mail and web conferencing. Some of us have paid-for A3 accounts, which give us

access to some advanced functionality. Many are also taking advantage of SkyDrive Pro, which is great for people that work remotely.

### What's next?

We want to do is give all of our students access to Office 365 too. QNH is currently advising us on how we will do this and we're carrying out a few trials. If all goes well we will soon be able to give all of our students an account – that will be more than 3,000 children using Office 365 a year. QNH is also developing an administration system on Office 365 for us too.

Looking ahead, we want to continue adding many more venues to our programme so that we can reach as many students as possible. We currently have 16 Playing for Success centres suitable for children aged 9-14 and four locations for students aged 15 years and over. We're also in talks about expanding the scheme in other countries. Belgium, for example, already has six Playing for Success centres and growing.



### Partner spotlight: QNH

"QNH helps public agencies achieve their ambitions with innovative solutions based on the Microsoft platform," says Bjorn Schmitz, Microsoft sales specialist and partner manager at QNH. "Our public sector solutions stimulate collaboration and communication within and beyond the borders of organisations. For the education space we provide a range of IT services and solutions including Office 365, helping to put the student and teacher at the centre of the learning experience."

"We link people, processes and IT," adds Lars Schmitz, QNH's business unit manager of application development. "Our objective is to ensure that people have access to the right information at the right time, from any location."