"A new normal for what it is to study"
HOGENT's digital transformation with Academic Software

With 17,500 students and 2000 staff, HOGENT is the largest university of applied sciences and arts in Belgium. As part of its continued commitment to the highest quality of education and research, HOGENT wanted a new approach to ICT that gave staff, students and researchers flexible and "future proof" opportunities to develop digital skills they would take into their future careers.

The challenge

Bart De Rouck
head of HOGENT's ICT

HOGENT wanted to find ways to support greater use of digital tools in learning and teaching, and it wanted to reorientate away from on-campus computer labs, to supporting user-owned devices and cloud-based digital tools so staff and students had greater flexibility in learning and teaching, and could work in ways that would enhance their overall digital expertise.

Bart De Rouck, head of HOGENT's ICT explains:
"We wanted to transform the mindset, to raise the level of digital skills for all our people ... to move away from the idea of ICT being a help-desk with ten people picking up the phone every minute, to encouraging digital transformation for everyone at the university – lecturers, staff, students. We built e-learning courses about digital skills, and started running workshops, and really inspiring people about what you can do with digitalisation. We wanted to educate our students not only in their subject areas, but also in digital skills, so they know how to install things

themselves, how to manage security on their laptops. We wanted to build a new level of normal of what it means to study.**"**

HOGENT wanted lecturers to know that they had the freedom to be creative in incorporating digital resources in their teaching, including niche software being used in the industries related to their subjects. And lecturers needed to have confidence that the tools they wanted to use would work when they needed them, and be accessible to all their students.
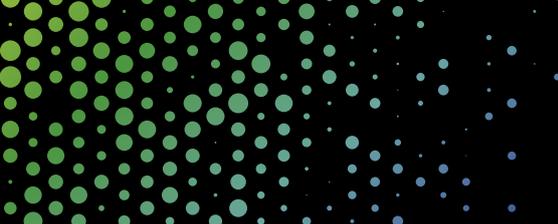
The solution

It was the challenge of managing deployment and licensing on all the devices of students and staff, and for all the niche software, that made HOGENT recognise that they needed to work with a partner. The partner would help them build a platform to manage the licensing, and make sure software and web applications could be deployed easily on everyone's devices.

Bart De Rouck:
"We wanted to find a partner who could come and support us with the search for all the software we needed, and arrange the licences and so on. We were looking for a partner who had the knowledge of how to deploy modern software in the context of higher education, which is something very specific. They needed to have the knowledge of hundreds of software titles and build the platform. I believed in Academic Software's vision, the mindset they had. They came to it with a fresh approach, from the first day we started working together."

The Academic Software platform

Academic Software's specialist educational focus enabled it to grasp the challenges of digitalisation at a university such as HOGENT.

"The competitors were companies that focused on virtual deployment of software, but they just had a technical focus, and no knowledge of the specific context of education. Academic Software was solely focused on deploying software in education, and with that in mind, there were no competitors."

As Bart De Rouck noted, digitalisation in higher educational settings has distinct characteristics that make it different to other contexts:

"First, we have a lot of users – almost 20,000 users. And licensing needs to work differently. In business, your users are mostly fixed and it is usual for an employee to use a licence for a long time. In education, some students just want to have access to software for five weeks and that's it. Second, increasingly the expectation of lecturers and students is that use of software or apps should be seamless, available wherever they are, on all of their devices. Academic Software offered a one-stop shop ... the only provider of a holistic solution to support students with software installations, with software virtualised, and software in virtual PC labs on their own laptops, and cloud applications. And third, they want to be able to get help whenever they need it. So the Academic Software helpdesk was absolutely, absolutely important. There's simple information on every software title – technical information in a human language."

One of the most important advantages of the platform for HOGENT was the support that Academic Software could offer to staff and students who were going to be working with their own devices. Academic Software's multilingual helpdesk was able to guide users through access to every software title, learning platform and web application – by email, chat or phone. The helpdesk could even take over the user's screen to solve any problems, and would be available outside of term time as well.
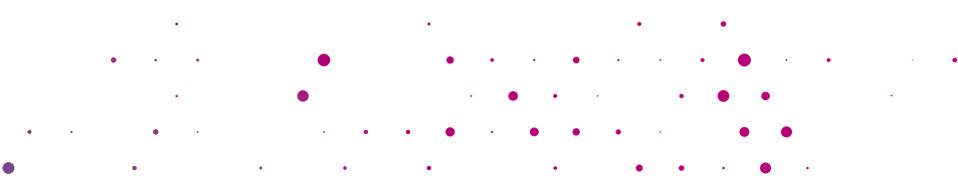
Results

HOGENT believes that the Academic Software platform has been instrumental in helping them achieve their goals for digitalisation in higher education.

First, by achieving a "new normal" in university education in which the use of software, apps and web applications is fully integrated into studying and research. Second, as Bart de Rouck explains, one significant measure of success is that questions of how to deploy and access software are no longer something anyone worries about at HOGENT.

"There is no single lecturer who wants to build his or her own solution for deploying some niche software. No student is relying on illegal software because they can't access a licensed version. It's become a kind of common goods. It's there working, and everybody is happy, and no one is uncertain about how to use digital resources in their teaching and learning."

Finally, a big measure of how successful the Academic Software platform has been in simplifying the deployment and licensing of digital assets is that the ICT management team at HOGENT has been able to move on to other challenges:

"The focus now is on some other parts of the management scope. I'm happy with the solution and I just want to maintain that way of working. The budget is good. The way everything is working is good. So for me the focus is now on other things – I'd call that a success!"
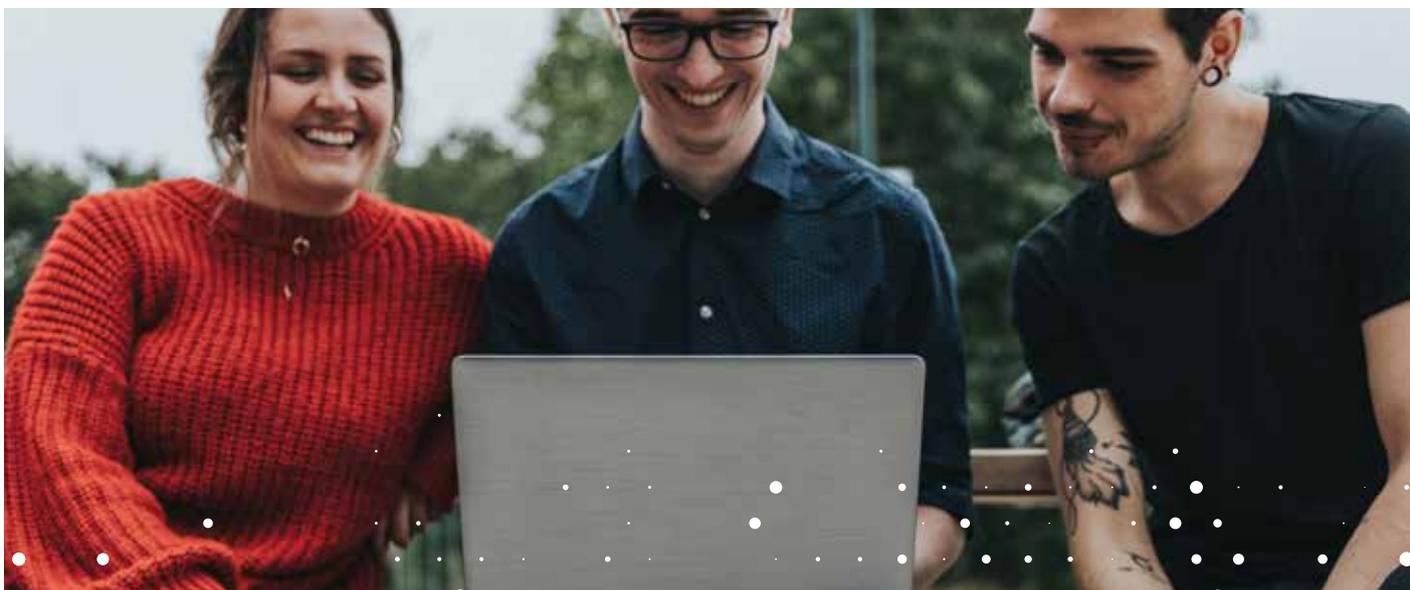
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