

# Digital transformation across South Africa's CET colleges

## Microsoft financial and modern workplace solutions

Community Education and Training (CET) colleges are leading the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) in South Africa's education sector. During the first major phase of these colleges' digital transformation, Microsoft financial and modern workplace solutions were implemented by SIS Global.

### The future of education

Following recent changes in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), nine new CET colleges were formed, with one in each South African province. These CETs currently support 250,000 students and the government is committed to increasing the intake to 1 million students by 2030.

CETs are a new type of learning facility for people who don't qualify for admission to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and universities. It's all about inclusivity: helping everybody to gain access to further education with a view to either improving employability or progressing to TVET-level study.

### The challenge

In 2018, CETs had no financial systems whatsoever. But the colleges are government funded and to receive this funding, the CET head office urgently needed efficient procurement and finance systems in place. It was vital that they could provide full transparency, accountability and reporting on how government funding was spent.

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) was appointed to manage the funding process from the government with a fully auditable trail. SAICA was also tasked with managing the tender process for sourcing, supplying and implementing a finance and procurement solution to:

- Manage budgets, funding and spend allocation
- Ensure compliance
- Increase visibility across all colleges
- Deliver integrated reporting
- Scale to meet future requirements of CETs

### Winning the tender

SAICA initially approached a wide range of suppliers, including SIS Global. Keeping costs to a minimum was a major influencing factor. With that in mind, SAICA distilled the list of suppliers down into two main candidates. SIS Global proposed a Microsoft Business Central Dynamics solution while a competing partner proposed a Sage 200 system.

SIS Global was awarded the tender. Microsoft's cloud-based solution was chosen because it fulfilled the colleges' requirements for modernisation in the digital era, whereas the Sage system was a traditional solution that would be hosted onsite.

SIS Global is a Gold Certified ERP Partner and Microsoft Co-sell Education Partner. In our response, we demonstrated technology and industry expertise along with a deep understanding of SAICA's digital transformation requirements. We also took the client to a customer site to demonstrate how their solution would work.

### Business Central

The win dramatically boosted Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central's profile. After all, this was the first ever fully cloud-based ERP implementation with integrated financial management in the South African public higher education sector. It's currently a comprehensive procurement and financial solution. Over time, there are plans for the solution to be extended to incorporate the CET colleges' HR solution. In terms of scope, there are 200 Business Central users.

“We had a very tight budget and an even tighter timeframe for such a large-scale project. Fortunately, SIS Global delivered on both counts. In just five months, the system was ready to go. This is the first project of its kind and sets the benchmark in South Africa’s public education sector.”  
Graeme Victor, ICT Consultant for Special Projects, SAICA

As part of the CET modernisation programme, a procurement budget module was bolted on to the Business Central system. This ensures everything that is procured by any given CET always stays within budget. In addition, SAICA have set up an entire accounting department for the CETs.

#### **Modern workplace**

One of the key advantages of the Microsoft Business Central solution was its ability to integrate with Microsoft 365. The CETs are distributed across nine different regions, so it’s important that their workplace systems are fully integrated so staff at all sites can quickly and easily communicate and collaborate with each other at any time.

SIS Global’s roll out of Microsoft 365 has enabled the CETs to build a modern workplace with a consistent platform across all colleges. This empowers all distributed college employees to effectively work together and improve productivity via collaboration in a secure way.

The distributed colleges now have the right digital tools and workplace productivity apps – such as Microsoft Teams and Office 365 – to connect and support employees, wherever they are. With these powerful tools, the college workforces become significantly more productive with improved engagement and collaboration, especially amongst distributed teams. In terms of scope, there are currently 200 Office 365 users.

#### **The benefits**

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central allows CET colleges to establish a fully-integrated financial management system that supports all governance functions. The government now has full accountability of the funding they are giving to the colleges.

Therefore, a key benefit is that the colleges now have the right system in place, enabling the government to release funds to them. Our solution provides a credible, scalable and future-proof financial information system that is secure, transparent and highly efficient.

In addition, the system, which is powered by Azure cloud computing, is dramatically improving efficiencies for the CET colleges, especially in terms of administration and maintenance tasks. As a direct result, administrative costs are being driven down, while the management of CET colleges’ resources and data is greatly improved.

“Previously, all accounting for the CETs was outsourced to the Department of Education. There were no accounting records on-site and no financial systems whatsoever. This project began in January 2019 and by the end of September that year, we’d successfully produced the first set of financial reports for all nine colleges. That’s a huge achievement!”  
Graeme Victor, ICT Consultant for Special Projects, SAICA

“We are extremely proud to have successfully rolled out this Modern Workplace solution in such a short period of time which is delivering immense benefits already to the CET Colleges in South Africa!”  
Ian Bayley , Executive Head: Education , SIS Global