



Driven by its mission that 'All will succeed' ESSA Foundation Academies Trust (EFAT) set up and runs two academy schools in Bolton.

#### THE CLIENT



Both ESSA Primary and the secondary ESSA Academy schools are rated Good by Ofsted, with early years provision cited as Outstanding.

The Trust employs 200 staff and serves over 1,400 pupils.



# Business Needs

Having become a multi-academy trust in 2014, EFAT inherited a standalone Avaya telephone system at its primary school whilst the Academy also hosted an existing Avaya platform.

These were proving unwieldy, inflexible, and costly.

"The sites themselves are located 100 metres apart but you'd have thought one was on Mars because there was no telephone communications between them," explains the Trust's IT Manager, Liam Owen.

"The services were just too restrictive; they didn't offer us anything in terms of collaboration."



"Avoira's unified communications (UC) engineer was absolutely exceptional. If we had any issues, he ironed them out within seconds. I really can't fault Avoira for the implementation and the support they provide to ESSA."

Liam Owen, IT Manager, ESSA Foundation Academies Trust



Tweaking existing technology was not an option. "We looked at the cost of what we had and the growth allowance for each Avaya device and found there was little scope."

Liam also noted that staff were restricted by being tethered to desk phones.

He was keen to enable and empower them to be able to make calls wherever and whenever they were.

Minimising costs was also a key priority.



# The Solution

Liam looked at various possibilities, including a hosted Private Branch eXchange (PBX), an on-site server, and Microsoft Teams calling plans, each rejected based on cost.

Having also researched via the specialist EduGeek website, he plumped for Microsoft Teams' Direct Routing. This cloud-hosted, low-cost subscription UC service enables calls to be made and received over any Teams enabled device using existing Direct-Dial-In (DDIs).

"We'd been thinking about how we could bring the Trust together on one system, improve experiences internally and for parents, as well as save money. The Microsoft Teams Direct Routing solution did all three," he reports.



Poly Black wire 3320 Binaural wired headset

## There was another reason Liam was swayed by Teams.

"Because of Covid, the staff, students, everyone on the planet has adapted their working life around Teams. We saw we could tap into a system that we're all familiar with."

The solution was completed by specification of two pieces of high specifications Teams-certified kit. Yealink's MP54 handsets for school reception desks and Poly corded binaural headsets for all other staff.

For consultancy advice, provision, implementation and support, he turned to Avoira, a longstanding and trusted supplier which had supported the Academy with everything from the previous award-winning Avaya solution, through to two-way radios.

Avoira also have extensive experience in implementing Direct Routing solutions, not least in the education sector where satisfied clients include Farnborough College of Technology and Wrexham Glyndŵr University.



Yealink MP54





# The Benefits

**Microsoft Teams Direct Routing ticks all ESSA's boxes. It's lower cost than the previous solution and delivers enhanced flexibility, functionality and productivity.**

Transition from the old to new solution was more "super smooth" notes Liam. "This was the part we were most concerned about, but Avaira communicated every step along the way. Avaira's UC engineer was absolutely exceptional. If we had any issues, he ironed them out within seconds.

"I really can't fault Avaira for the implementation and the support they provide to ESSA"

User feedback has also been very positive with staff "massively enjoying" the greater flexibility, with non-teaching tasks such as timetabling now able to be undertaken at home.

Anywhere-anytime calling also delivers other practical benefits. "We can have seven staff sharing an office. Previously if a teacher needed to have a confidential conversation with a parent, six would have to leave. Now they can just go and find an empty room and call from their laptop."



**"Direct Routing has really brought things together. It's made us so much more flexible."**

Liam Owen, IT Manager,  
ESSA Foundation Academies Trust

**Liam cites productivity as a key benefit, with Teams multi-function capabilities coupled with hands-free calling fostering multi-tasking. "The other day I was on a call and also boxed off seven emails. Staff are raving about it; they love how you can just crack on!"**

He adds that Direct Routing also allows staff to be more invested, having previously simply had a phone, tethered to a desk, from which they could just make and receive calls.

"They can do things like get a personal voicemail, at home, and change their greeting. They have ownership over their own system."

Having benefited from Avaira's exceptional expertise the Trust is now benefiting from a low cost, high function integrated solution.

"Direct Routing has really brought things together. It's made us so much more flexible."