



Success Story



Simmons & Simmons

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Simmons & Simmons is a leading international law firm with fully integrated teams working throughout offices in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The firm's strategy is designed to ensure we provide our clients with high quality advice and deliver value through new ways of working.

Firm wide, it has more than 210 partners and a total staff worldwide of around 1,500, of whom more than half are based in its 16 offices outside the UK. Our current clients comprise 40% of the Fortune Global 500 and more than half of the current FTSE 100 companies.

The firm applies considerable expertise to all business sectors but focuses on energy and infrastructure, financial institutions, life sciences, and technology, media and telecommunications (TMT). Simmons & Simmons acts regularly on the most innovative cases, deals and transactions in its chosen areas of specialism and receives recognition for the quality of its work from clients and others within these industry sectors.

Background

Simmons & Simmons has used a Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) programme to motivate staff, improve technical skills and improve efficiencies for clients and the business.

In recent years, the firm has focused on improving technical document production skills among staff. As part of this process, one of the areas looked at was the role of the secretary. The MOS programme was one of a number of initiatives designed to develop secretaries' skills further.

Before embarking on a MOS programme for London secretaries in 2008, there had been a focus on two major IT rollouts of new systems and hardware over a period of four years. No structured IT education programmes had been offered to delegates to assess their skills and IT training, at the time, did not focus on assessment and validation of skills. There was a clear need to begin to develop the firm's secretaries to meet the ever growing demands of the business.

Why Microsoft Office Specialist?

We chose to deliver a MOS programme within the firm as it has a number of well-known benefits. The overriding benefit for us was the ability it gave us to benchmark and ensure that we could measure skills to a consistent level. We were also able to promote the programme to clients as a way of showing that our documents were of a consistently high standard. It also helped us to motivate secretaries to undertake the course as they achieve a recognised qualification that belongs to them and not the firm.



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How do the employees become Microsoft certified?

We used Platinum Training Solutions to help us put the programme together. Platinum ran a pilot for a small group of secretaries and then, based on feedback, we changed the programme to suit the needs of our secretarial population. In conjunction with this, we ensured that our training team were all Microsoft Masters so they could deliver the curriculum. They were also trained to invigilate exams. A pilot group of legal secretaries was run, after which we phased the delivery of MOS over two three month programmes for the remaining secretaries in London.

The training team delivered a 1.5 hour workshop per week to each group on specific Word topics. This was supported with homework and self-study. The programme was mandatory for all secretaries in the London office.

Through Platinum we have now become an authorised testing centre, enabling us to manage the testing process more easily as staff can take exams on our premises. Staff can ask to borrow a book, take a mock exam and then a live exam after a period of self-study. The ease of this makes managing the process on-going very smooth.

How has Microsoft Office Specialist benefitted the organisation?

Initially pitched as an initiative to improve technical document production skills, the overall outcome has in reality been far more reaching. Strategically the objective was to reignite an enthusiasm for self-development, enhance engagement and teamwork across a staff population in which there had been significant change and restructuring in the past two years.

We found that the MOS programme also heightened soft skills such as confidence in personal abilities and to question instructions and requirements, as well as determination to succeed and develop the job role further. We have also found that since delivering the MOS Word 2003 Expert programme many more secretaries have chosen to study for further MOS exams.

Overall, the business impact of our adoption of the MOS programme has been significant. In addition to technical skill enhancement, feedback has indicated significantly higher levels of engagement, greater personal confidence in engaging with fee earners, and a visible step-change in individuals' determination, delivery and career development.

What's next?

Our next step is to roll out the MOS Word Expert 2003 qualification to overseas offices. The first region is the Middle East. We have trained a member of staff in the office via Webex and ensured that another member of the office was trained to invigilate, meaning they are completely self-sufficient. The plan is also to do the same with two offices in Europe. With this in mind, we are now looking at alternative learning solutions and methods of delivery and support for the MOS programme. We plan to use e-learning to make MOS a much more accessible programme for our other offices and one that is less resource heavy on the London based training team.