

# Darwen Aldridge Community Academy

Creating a new and inspiring learning environment



European Electronique injects entrepreneurial environment into Darwen Aldridge Community Academy (“DACA”)

## Background

[European Electronique](#), a leading technology company specialising in ICT solutions for education, was delighted to be chosen to create a new and inspiring learning environment for The Darwen Aldridge Community Academy, which was given the Royal seal of approval on

11 April 2011 when, in their last official engagement before getting married, it was opened by Prince William and Kate Middleton.



Social entrepreneur and founder of the [Aldridge Foundation](#), Rod Aldridge, sponsored the Academy and worked closely with the team throughout the project duration which included the design of the new building.

Rod Aldridge explains, ‘Technology plays such an important part in the development of students’ entrepreneurial skills and it was essential that all pupils had access to a reliable ICT system at all times. We selected European Electronique based on the company’s reputation in designing and implementing inspiring ICT solutions.’

The building was designed to provide students with an enhanced learning experience which incorporated a development of entrepreneurial skills. The spirit of entrepreneurship underpins all aspects of Academy life including promotion of DAKAs, the school's own currency. Aiming for high standards in all academic areas with a focus on business related subjects, future diploma lines include Business Administration and Finance, ICT, Retail, Hospitality and Sport and Leisure. European Electronique was appointed to design and implement an innovative, future proof and resilient ICT solution that reflects and supports the Academy's entrepreneurial specialism.

Along with the Meru system, European Electronique also provided the Academy with a bespoke SharePoint learning platform, seamlessly integrating a Moodle VLE and other key systems into a centralised point of access. A custom branding was applied inline with the academy's existing collateral which created an entirely bespoke auto provisioning eco-system between the Academy MIS system, Active Directory, Moodle and Sharepoint.

Other technologies delivered to the Academy included a new state of the art IP telephone system, a fully managed and integrated digital signage which facilitates awarding students' good work by displaying their achievements throughout the school. The ICT solution also incorporated network video systems which enabled students and teachers to access video content anywhere in the school on any networked device. A video conferencing system was also provided which allows students to collaborate with other students in the UK and even worldwide.

A further innovation was the replacement of the Interactive Whiteboards (IWB) with a newly launched Interactive Projector solution. With this new technology there will be no need for an IWB as the image from the projector can be displayed on any surface while still maintaining the full functionality of an IWB, improving the flexibility of the learning environment whilst significantly reducing costs.

The project included an installation of a Meru virtualised wireless system, which provides students, administrators and educators with a seamless network access via thousands of connected devices such as wireless netbooks, laptops and PC's to support mobile learning initiatives.

The project encountered a number of challenges before it could successfully open its doors to students in September 2010. Brendan Loughran, Principal of the Academy comments on some of the obstacles which needed to be tackled in a speedy manor: At a critical time in our preparations we unexpectedly suffered a severe flood in the server room causing a complete shutdown of all ICT services to the Academy. European Electronique was extremely quick to respond and offered every assistance to ensure work could be completed with the minimum of delay. They were extremely professional and offered unbiased support and assistance in determining the various and rapidly changing options, during the process of assessment by the insurance companies. Once the solution had been agreed, European Electronique, at short notice, provided all necessary resources to ensure the opening of the Academy remained unaffected. We are very pleased with the new Academy and were thrilled to open our doors to lots of excited and keen pupils."

The Darwen Creates project is a mix of eleven self contained pods which will be situated on the iconic Entrepreneurial Bridge at DACA. The pods enable young entrepreneurs to have access to free support, mentoring and advice needed when starting a new business. The project will help young people to turn their ideas in to a reality, from finding sources of funding to providing mentors and advice.



Yolanta Gill, CEO of European Electronique also comments, "To work alongside Rod Aldridge was fantastic and the newly designed Academy looks great! It is important that staff and students have access to inspiring ICT solutions as technology plays such an important part in encouraging entrepreneurial spirit. We are proud to be invited by the academy to be a founding patron of a new venture called Darwen Creates. This project aims to nurture the next generation of entrepreneurs, helping to regenerate the local area through economic growth and social improvements."