CASE STUDY
EDUCATION SECTOR
THE UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

The University of Lincoln is one of the UK's most progressive and ambitious higher education institutions, having enjoyed a meteoric rise in recent years which now sees them ranking in the top 50. Its ICT Infrastructure team, led by Ian Marshall, has played a key role in underpinning Lincoln's success, delivering and supporting systems that serve a student and staff population of nearly 14,000.

CHALLENGES

In early 2011, Ian and his team conducted one of their periodic reviews of the University's existing back-up solution. There were growing concerns about the viability of the traditional auto-loading, tape-based library system, including:
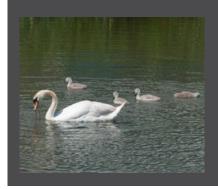
- The protracted back-up window, with back-ups continuing through the night and into the next day, impacting on system performance and the user experience

- The regular failure of back-up routines, causing further disruption and IT intervention

- The degrading of magnetic media, with the potential to compromise data recovery

- The security of physical tapes during transport and storage

- The unacceptable time and resource required just to restore a single file

- The disproportionate amount of admin time taken to look after one system

- Tape's inability to scale sufficiently to cope with the exponential growth in data

- The on-going risks associated with a freight railway line bisecting the campus, prejudicing the safety of tapes (and systems) held within the two university data centres

However, the tipping point was the realisation that the existing system could no longer meet the data and system recovery objectives laid down by the University.

REALISING THE BENEFITS

Redcentric had an excellent reputation and proven track record within the education sector; their infrastructure was already Janet-connected; they were the only supplier with the framework to enable the rapid service provisioning we needed.

Ian Marshall
Deputy Director of ICT Services

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

Ian Marshall explains: "We were working with a Recovery Point Objective (RPO) of one day, and a Recovery Time Objective (RTO) of three days – and tape would have had us falling short on both. It was time to look at alternatives and find a long-term solution that could grow with us, lighten the administrative load, deliver consistently day in, day out, and enable us to meet our RPO and RTO targets."

HOW REDCENTRIC HELPED

The online back-up solution from Redcentric emerged as an immediate front-runner.

"As a managed service provider, Redcentric had an excellent reputation and proven track record within the education sector; their infrastructure was already Janet-connected; they were the only supplier with the framework to enable the rapid service provisioning we needed; and they could offer us a 24/7 support operation onto which we could offload all our management, administrative and trouble-shooting workload. In terms of our requirements and their offering, it couldn't have been a better fit."

Redcentric and Ian's team conducted a comprehensive archiving exercise to cull some of the 6TB data estate, moving archived data onto cheaper tertiary storage, then set up online backup capability for the University's mission critical systems, including MS Exchange, primary file servers and key software including finance, HR and student management applications.

As a related project, Redcentric also configured cold stand-by servers to sit within its own Harrogate data centre; these could be fired up with all of the University's core applications and data in the event of a major incident wiping out operational capability on campus

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Ian Marshall believes the switch to a managed online back-up service has brought significant benefits. "It's one solution that's ticked all the boxes and has allowed us to achieve a significant service improvement; it is certainly much better value for money than our previous solution. It has given us certainty, control and confidence – and is a perfect platform for the wider Cloud engagement we're now planning for."

Improved back-up performance
Backup windows have been dramatically reduced by over 50%, with routines comfortably completing in 10 hours compared to previous maximums of 24 hours.

Increased compliance
There is now the proven ability to meet RPO and RTO times and maintain required service levels to the University user base.

Greater security and peace of mind
Data backups combined with a cold standby server have provided the University with a 'ready to go' response in the event of a disaster, as well as day-to-day reassurance over data integrity and availability.

Heightened reliability and usability
Data is backed up across multiple data centres with any backup failures identified and rerun instantly without any intervention required by the University team. File restores can be done in a matter of seconds and minutes as opposed to the hours and days previously experienced. Additionally, restores can be serviced directly by non-specialist staff giving a far improved and responsive user experience.

Increased cost-efficiency and team
utilisation The automation and proactive monitoring of the system has streamlined the whole process, stripping out cost, lifting a heavy burden and giving back approximately 50% of one team member's time to spend on more added-value IT projects.

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> Ian Marshall
> Deputy Director of ICT Services

TECHNICAL INFO

Hosting Services
• 20+ Virtual Servers

Data Management
• Managed Archiving Service
• Managed Backup Service