

Strategic Infrastructure Review (data centre, networking and desktop delivery)

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Leeds Beckett University has campuses in the city centre and Headingley, offering higher education to over 26,000 students.

Case study

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Scope of work

The university team had reached a stage that, due to the organisation's success and continued growth, systems and resources had not scaled at the same rate, and were now being managed rather than strategically developed to support the business's ambitions.

After being successful at tender stage, we were brought in by the university to conduct a strategic infrastructure review across business services, cyber security and data centre, networking and desktop delivery.

Here we talk about the latter, which was conducted in two phases.

Phase one – as is challenges

Understanding that the systems and processes were very personal, we knew that conducting an impersonal audit was not going to deliver the results we needed. As such, we conducted a series of workshops with key team members over the space of 4-6 weeks.

These virtual workshops not only allowed us to understand the operational processes used, and challenges faced, by the end users, but also for them to understand our role and involvement that will ultimately save them time.

During this phase we understood the technologies and processes that had been adopted but dismissed, and whether this was due to lack of user training, misaligning of strategic implementation, or simply due to being unsuitable.

Through these personal Q&A sessions, we were able to ask pertinent questions and gain qualitative information on what does and doesn't work for each department, what is liked and disliked, what had been disregarded, and the main obstacles faced.

Above everything, this approach gave us the most important element of all – the opportunity to build relationships with the end users and gaining the all-important status of a truly trusted advisor.

Phase two – how to overcome them

We'd looked at everything, found out what works and what doesn't, brought our HE experience into the mix, now it was time to see how the IT department could strategically progress and build a plan to do so.

What is urgent? What are quick wins? What are the short-, medium- and long-term needs? How much would it all cost?

Before presenting to the senior executive level, we knew that maintaining the relationships we had built was key so we ensured the end-users had sight of our findings and the opportunity to comment and understand the reasons behind our recommendations. We were challenged – and quite rightly – but this gave us the chance to ensure we had buy-in and understanding from the people who would ultimately benefit from the recommended changes.

Outcomes

Following a presentation across each of the areas worked on, we were able to provide a roadmap of next steps and priorities to the team at Leeds Beckett.

This involved supporting the team in writing tender requirements to enable them to engage the right businesses for the right needs.

We continue to be a support system for the team at the university, managing some elements of need as well as in an advisory capacity.

What the client said

“The benefits of engaging an external partner to lead the review were to provide objectivity and to leverage experience garnered from their wider experience.

“Having worked successfully with Waterstons in support of a number of key programmes over the years, and understanding their depth of knowledge and collaborative approach, we were confident that they were the best choice for us.

“The team brought the challenge we needed and their flexible, yet driven, approach meant the complex review was delivered within budget, in agreed timescales and met all of our expectations.

“The review was a huge success and has led to a multi-year investment programme which will result in our core infrastructure and processes being much better aligned to our university’s strategic desire to enhance our students’ learning experience and research outcomes.”

Nigel Buckland, interim director of IT services, Leeds Beckett University

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