



Q ASSOCIATES



Building a Smart Storage Strategy at the University of Bedfordshire

EDUCATION

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Industry

Education

The Challenge

University of Bedfordshire's storage estate was approaching end of life

The Solution

High-performance flash storage

Benefits

Single system management ▶

Improved efficiency ▶

Improved DR resilience ▶

High performance ▶



About the University of Bedfordshire

An innovative and vibrant institution with an impressive reputation for its world-leading research programmes, the University of Bedfordshire boasts more than 20,000 students from over 120 countries and around 1,000 staff based at its campuses in Luton, Bedford, Milton Keynes and Aylesbury.

With a postgraduate Business School and University Conference Centre located at its Putteridge Bury site as well as education partners in China, the Middle East, Europe and South East Asia, the university is committed to offering truly transformational opportunities through the provision of access to excellent educational experiences.

First established in 2006 following the merger between the University of Luton and De Montfort University's Bedford campus, today, the University of Bedfordshire ranks among one of the top universities in the country for graduate employment.



The Challenge

With over 60% of its existing NetApp storage estate approaching an important end of standard support milestone, the University of Bedfordshire wanted to carefully consider its next steps: take up a new premium-priced extended support agreement; initiate a partial hardware refresh; or replace the entire estate with entirely new FAS arrays.

"This was a big commercial, rather than a technology-driven, decision for us", explains Minesh Chikniwala, Deputy CIO (Operations and Services) at the University of Bedfordshire. "We were happy with NetApp and eager to leverage our existing in-house expertise with this vendor."

"While no one abandons a productive storage environment lightly, this lifecycle event represented a very real opportunity to take stock and evaluate what is ultimately best value for the university," he continues.

To help clarify its thinking, the university turned to Q Associates to review its current NAS estate and projected storage requirements, analysing which next-step option would best serve the university's needs over time.

"Q Associates are familiar with our storage and back-up environment, have unrivalled technology know-how and an impressive grasp of the commercial considerations involved," says Minesh. "Their detailed evaluation enabled us move forward with a decision to initiate a new clustered NAS infrastructure that would strengthen our environment and optimise storage utilisation."

Following an exhaustive tender process, Q Associates won the day with a phased migration plan covering the university's primary and secondary data centre sites. The implementation would include new high-performance flash storage to support an upcoming Oracle migration.

"Q Associates negotiated hard on our behalf with NetApp, securing a discount that ensured the commercial ROI figures worked. Their migration plan was designed to ensure 24/7 operations were uninterrupted and that legacy issues around DR were addressed," confirms Minesh.

The Solution

Today's educational institutions face a variety of challenges keeping up with storage needs against a backdrop of constrained budgets. Extracting maximum value out of storage investments and making capacity gains depends on finding the best way to exploit new technologies and approaches to meet the evolving needs of students and partners.

The University of Bedfordshire is no exception and making the move to solid state drives and flash-based media would enable it to minimise the risk of mechanical failures common to hard disk drives while maximising the longevity and performance of its storage investments.

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Aware that a storage system is only as fast as its weakest link, Q Associates' carefully planned approach to rationalising and reinvigorating the estate included replacing and repurposing legacy arrays while initiating new drive controllers and other system components.

"The migration was a complex event that was completed over a number of weeks. With so much of the university's mission critical infrastructure dependent on storage, Q Associates initiated a sophisticated storage failover procedure to ensure the risk of disruption was eliminated while preserving data access for users for the duration of the storage refresh project," confirms Minesh.

A key element of the migration process was ensuring seamless integration with the university's VMware environment. Getting this right would deliver a simplified and unified data management platform, impressive storage virtualisation and support rapid provisioning and backup.

"Q Associates introduced improved resilience across our DR environment that now delivers enhanced availability, protection and recovery for our operating system, applications and data. Alongside a significant reduction in the risk of unplanned downtime, we now have a more flexible disaster recovery solution that's better tailored to our needs," he continues.



The Results

The university now has a new high-availability clustered storage environment that delivers non-disruptive dynamic load balancing that can be managed as a single system. Delivering significant efficiency benefits in terms of power, space and administrative overheads, workload performance can be easily be monitored and managed by the in-house IT team.

"Aside from the enhanced scalability, resiliency and capacity we now enjoy, Q Associates helped us navigate the commercial challenges relating to our hardware lifecycle extension strategy to determine the best approach going forward," states Minesh.

"What I like about Q Associates is that, unlike other providers, they don't just disappear once you've spent the money and a project comes to an end. They delivered training to ensure our in-house teams were fully up to speed with the new storage environment, and constantly check in with myself and those members of the team at the coal face to ensure everything is working as expected."

As the university's first port of call for any support issue encountered, Minesh is keen to point out the benefits of working with a partner that has a deep understanding of the existing environment.

"Q Associates know we have a level of expertise with this environment, so we instantly bypass first line support and speak to third-level experts who are familiar with our set-up. This saves us considerable time and frustration – there's no need to run through background configuration details or deal with vendor requests to check if we've performed basic checks," he explains.

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The Results - continued

"Q Associates understand that when we call them, we don't have a run-of-the-mill issue that could be handled in-house and they've got an escalation hotline into NetApp that gets us an ultra-fast response."

"Alongside providing excellent customer care, Q Associates consistently work hard to add value to our relationship by keeping us abreast of new technology developments they identify as being of value to myself and the rest of the team," concludes Minesh.



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