



SUCCESS STORY
Education



DUNDEE & ANGUS COLLEGE | PROBLEM SOLVED

Dundee and Angus College turns to SolidFire to overcome costly legacy storage problems, reduce recurring capital costs and create a powerful, easy-to-manage single pool of storage.

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF CONSOLIDATION WHILE SUPPORTING EDUCATION

Dundee and Angus College helps students thrive with a data-centric approach to enhancing flexible working while overcoming costly legacy storage and creating a powerful, easy-to-manage single pool of storage.

VDI serves
1000
concurrent users

SolidFire
up and running in
25 mins

SOLIDFIRE REDUCES COSTS AND IMPROVES EFFICIENCY

Dundee and Angus College is one of the largest further education and higher education colleges in Scotland,

with a data-driven focus – set on transforming learning through the exploration of new, cost-effective data management infrastructures. With approximately 4,000 full time students at its Abroath and Dundee

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“Legacy upgrades are costly and often you feel like you’re being held over a barrel. But with SolidFire we buy a storage capacity license and the physical hardware that sits underneath. In the long term the return on investment is much more cost effective and it cuts out recurring capital expenditure.”

Kris Getchell

Head of ICT Services, Dundee and Angus College

campuses and 10,000 distance learners, a robust, scalable and powerful platform is essential.

In 2013 Dundee College and Angus College merged to create Dundee and Angus College. It has three campuses, one in Arbroath and two in the city of Dundee; the Kingsway Campus and the £48million Gardyne Road Campus.

The college offers courses for a wide variety of learners including vocational training and further and higher education programmes leading to nationally and internationally recognised qualifications. It also works closely with the region’s universities and schools.

The college has a number of centres of excellence including an Enterprise Centre, the Gardyne Theatre and The Space, a purpose-built venue for performance arts, which is the home of the Scottish School of Contemporary Dance.

CHALLENGE

Transforming complex costly legacy storage

When Dundee College and Angus College merged to create the present day organisation the college wanted to use the opportunity to

transform its IT infrastructure with a data-centric approach.

One of the first steps it took was to explore the opportunity presented by virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), introducing the technology to serve approximately 1,000 concurrent users. Kris Getchell, Head of ICT Services, Dundee and Angus College, explained: “This move to VDI went very well. It allowed us to move from legacy hardware to a more flexible desktop computing model.

“We then wanted to collapse our storage down into a single pool. The legacy infrastructure had different tiers of storage and different storage characteristics, which was quite limiting. At the same time we wanted to move away from the need for costly forklift upgrades every time we wanted to scale up.”

Unifying siloes and exploring new applications

The college began looking at alternatives such as software defined storage but this was considered too complex with expensive licensing costs. Its IT partner, Cutter Group, which had helped the college with VDI, suggested considering NetApp’s SolidFire fully automated, all-flash array storage.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- SolidFire cuts out expensive recurring capital costs
- Modern, future-proofed storage platform
- Improves learning outcomes by enabling greater flexibility

“We explored its functionality, pulled discs in and out, ran single threaded and multi-threaded applications, ran workloads to hit Quality of Service thresholds and really did everything we could to make it fall over. The SolidFire platform took everything in its stride.”

Kris Getchell

Head of ICT Services, Dundee and Angus College

“We considered SolidFire to be a big boy’s toy, storage that is used by large service providers and we certainly didn’t have big budgets to accommodate this. But Cutter arranged some technical briefings and we began to see that actually it was a platform we could use,” added Kris Getchell.

A proof of concept was set up and in Kris Getchell’s words. “We were blown away by the simplicity of SolidFire, we were up and running within 25 minutes and within 2 hours had everything running on it.”

However, the college was keen to test the storage platform and did everything it could to make it fall over. Kris Getchell said: “We explored its functionality, pulled discs in and out, ran single threaded and multi-threaded applications, ran workloads to hit Quality of Service thresholds and really did everything we could to make it fall over. The SolidFire platform took everything in its stride.”

Following this robust and rigorous testing the college decided to consolidate its legacy hardware onto a 14 node SolidFire all-flash platform.

BENEFITS

Innovating for improved learning outcomes

The SolidFire platform has enabled the college to introduce greater flexibility for students and staff. For instance students on its networking and system administration courses are expected to build and manage virtual machines, create Active Directory environments and manage virtual networks.

“With SolidFire we have been able to create pools of storage for different teams and there is no impact on the wider computing environment. Students and teachers can now access the virtual environment from their homes which they couldn’t do before. This means they have greater flexibility to work on their tasks which in turn improves the overall learning outcomes,” said Kris Getchell.

Cutting out recurring capital costs

One of the striking differences for Dundee and Angus College was the cost savings of the SolidFire platform when compared to other

storage options – the organisation has maximised the value of its data through digital transformation. With its legacy storage platform the college had to refresh and buy new hardware between every 3 and 5 years. In short, SolidFire met the college’s business case which required that it shouldn’t have to make a further significant capital investment in storage in five or six years.

Kris Getchell said: “Legacy upgrades are costly and often you feel like you’re being held over a barrel. But with SolidFire we buy a storage capacity license and the physical hardware that sits underneath. This means that when we replace the hardware as it ages we don’t need to buy a new license for the storage. In the long term, the return on investment is much more cost effective and it cuts out recurring capital expenditure.”

Modern, flexible, future proofed architecture

As well as budget and capital considerations Dundee and Angus College wanted a next generation storage platform that broke the cycle of having to rebuy equipment.

“The SolidFire architecture is such that we can scale it upwards if required by buying small units without having to replace the entire infrastructure. This is a big benefit and means that we now have a modern and flexible storage platform that is future-proofed, easy to manage and has predictable costs” added Kris Getchell.

Value of Partnership

Cutter works closely with Dundee and Angus College in developing and implementing a VDI solution. As a result it was a natural step for the college to turn to Cutter again when exploring storage platform options.

Kris Getchell explained: “Cutter has leading edge expertise in delivering IT infrastructures that are characterised by optimised performance.

This was already evident in the VDI infrastructure and it became even more markedly apparent with their expertise about the SolidFire platform. Cutter opened our eyes to the possibilities and helped set us on the road to cost-effective, storage modernisation. This partner expertise is invaluable.”

Simplicity

From Kris Getchell’s perspective one of the further big benefits is the simplicity of the SolidFire platform: “The legacy platform was complex with different tiers of storage supporting different needs such as file storage, databases and corporate applications. With SolidFire we’ve brought it all together on a single platform and removed the siloes making everything so much simpler, efficient and easy-to-manage.”

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NETAPP PRODUCTS

SolidFire all-flash platform

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