



University of Aberdeen improves student study experience with any device, anywhere learning through VMware® Horizon™

INDUSTRY

Higher education

CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

Aberdeen, Scotland

WEBSITE

www.abdn.ac.uk

OBJECTIVE

The University of Aberdeen is one of the top universities in the UK and constantly strives to go up the official rankings list. It knew that the level of technology services on offer could improve the student experience, so it wanted to find a way for students to use their own devices to study at any time, in the location most convenient to them.

SOLUTION

The University of Aberdeen deployed VMware Horizon to offer staff and students a virtualized desktop solution and the ability to use any device from any location to access graphic intense applications and other learning tools.

The University of Aberdeen strives to position itself as an attractive option for the best students and academic teaching talent. With end-users more tech-savvy than ever before, the university realised improving the IT experience was crucial. As a result, The University of Aberdeen has deployed VMware Horizon to create a more flexible learning environment, with students and staff given access to all of the learning tools needed to learn or teach in the most convenient way possible – via a number of different devices and from any location – whether that be on or off campus.

Based in Aberdeen, Scotland, The University of Aberdeen is the fifth oldest university in the UK, founded in 1495. With more than 16,000 students, it has a proud history of academic excellence, ranking consistently among the top 1% of the world's universities.

The University of Aberdeen boasts one of the largest wireless campuses in Europe and continually strives to improve the satisfaction of its students – whether that's through providing the best accommodation or study facilities.

Top UK University

The University of Aberdeen is extremely proud of its heritage as one of the world's oldest and top universities and wants to ensure it carries its reputation as a great place to study into its sixth century of academia. Aberdeen is committed to maintaining its position as one of the top universities in the UK and knows that a world class student experience is a key component of achieving this.

Tech savvy students

The university was conscious that the students now enrolling have grown up more akin to technology than their predecessors, with the use of mobile phones, tablets and laptops a key factor in their everyday lives, as such, the university is committed to continuing to meet the evolving needs and expectations of the student community

“We've always strived to provide a good experience, and the feedback we got from our students was never bad, but we knew the landscape was changing when it came to technology – and we had to change with it,” adds Rowley. “Given the current generation of students has grown up able to get online and access any service or application they needed from anywhere and on any device, they come to university expecting the same access to technology here. That put a lot of responsibility in the IT team's hands – we had the power to provide the value-add the university leadership team was looking for.”

Inflexible study

The consumerisation of IT saw more and more students turning up to the university with their own tablets and mobile devices for studying.

Students said that they would love to be able to study in a more flexible manner, whether on campus grounds on their own laptop, or even just from their halls of residence. As the student experience is so crucial to the way we operate, we wanted to make sure they could meet their needs.”

“Student satisfaction is very much at the heart of everything we do – and we’re always looking for ways to improve the services we can offer our students. We know that technology is more important to students than it ever has been before, so can play a crucial role in whether or not they enjoy their time here. Thanks to VMware Horizon, our students have technology that suits their needs, with the ability to study from anywhere and via the device of their choosing. We’re already getting great feedback in our internal student surveys and expect this to carry on through to external rankings, which ultimately will help to attract more students to come here – as well as the very best academics.”

Ian Rowley, Desktop Manager, IT Services, University of Aberdeen

Another way the IT team knew it could enhance the desktop estate and meet student needs was to get rid of its old proxy servers and speed up simple apps like library book searches and enabled advanced programs such as image rendering or 3D graphics.”

The Solution

Realising it needed to create a more flexible IT environment, giving students access to university applications through any device and from any location, Aberdeen put out a carefully considered budgeted tender for a solution. After evaluating a number of responses, the University of Aberdeen opted for IT reseller Phoenix Software and VMware’s proposal for a virtual desktop infrastructure using VMware Horizon.

“With all things considered, VMware came out on top. It not only fitted in with our budget, but we felt we got more bang for our buck. It didn’t seem to be as restrictive in terms of the infrastructural back-end. Although our use of Horizon would still have a hardware tie in, as we’d still need to provide some PCs on campus, it seemed far less excessive than the hardware we would have had to purchase with some of the other solutions we looked at – and we obviously didn’t want to spend much on CapEx when it wasn’t necessary. Phoenix was also able to offer a well-priced licensing as well. We’d looked at Citrix a number of years ago and when we considered it again here, we still felt that the licensing costs were just too much.”

Once the decision had been made, Phoenix was then called on site to help deploy the solution. Starting at the end of August, the VDI solution was up and running that October.

Access from anywhere, with any device

Since VMware Horizon was deployed, both the teaching and learning experience at the University of Aberdeen has been completely transformed – with student satisfaction already on the rise as a result. Thanks to the virtual desktop solution, there’s no longer a need to route access from desktops through the outdated proxy server, which is long gone. Instead, each student and staff member has their own virtual desktop, loaded with the applications and systems

they need access to as per their course. As these desktops are separated from hardware, the end user can simply log on to their own desktop remotely with access to their own personal applications – from any device and from anywhere with internet access.

“The feedback from our latest student survey is that students love how much more flexible they can be in their learning. They can study anywhere they need to, whether that’s in their halls of residence, on campus, in a local coffee shop – or even at the pub. They don’t have to go and try and find a classroom that isn’t booked or one of the open learning spaces with PCs in them to do their work.”

Rowley is confident that the new IT infrastructure will play a key component in improving student satisfaction at the University.

Virtual learning

The University of Aberdeen refers to its new approach to IT as a ‘flipped classroom’ – with VMware Horizon, the students can do preparatory work for their lectures at their own pace, from any location.

Rowley explains: “Thanks to the virtual desktop solution, students and staff now have the flexibility to work in exactly the way that suits them best, so they can get the most from their time here. Some might want to use a high-end laptop to do research, others will have a tablet they’ll refer to to see where a particular book is in the library and then there are some that will just want to use their smartphone to catch up on course notes. We can now support all of these different methods with access to the right learning tools across all of those devices, rather than restricting them to specific end points. There’s no compromise needed now. A student doesn’t have to come all the way into campus to access a certain system on one of our PCs, they can now just log on from home.”

Impressive graphics on any device

As well as creating a more flexible study environment, the remote access to some of Aberdeen’s high-end, graphically-intensive applications has been very well received. As Rowley notes, “One of

VMWARE CASE STUDY

ORGANISATIONAL IMPACT

- Staff and students can now study or teach from anywhere on or off campus – and from any device
- Students can access graphic intense applications from mobile devices, ensuring that even design heavy disciplines can benefit from mobile working
- Student satisfaction is on the rise – with internal surveys showing students highly value the ability to work in a more flexible way

SOLUTIONS USED

- VMware Horizon

the interesting anecdotes we had was from one of the engineering lecturers – he had a lower-grade Android tablet. He was able to connect up to the VDI infrastructure, run one of the high-end engineering packages – MattLab – and effectively manipulate/render that 3D model on the screen of his 10-inch tablet. That was a real ‘wow’ moment – it was quite the achievement to have it display so well on a lower-end device – he was blown away by it.

“Thanks to VMware, we’re now in good stead to improve the student experience at the University,” concluded Rowley. “After all, if you’ve set up an environment where academics can deliver the best teaching and students have the most effective ways of learning, it not only attracts top teaching talent, it means the students are getting the most from their time here as well.”

