

University of the West of England, a leading UK academic institution uses a Pure Storage FlashArray//M20 to supercharge the databases that underpin its core business systems. With Pure Storage, the University has a storage solution that sets it up for long term success in a highly competitive sector.

**BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION**

Moving its high performance databases to Pure Storage has given the University of the West of England the ability to manage the growing demands of managing interactions with prospective, current and alumni students in order to compete more effectively in the highly competitive tertiary education sector.

GEO

United Kingdom

INDUSTRY

Education

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Marcus Falla,
Infrastructure Service
Operations Manager

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND GRADUATES FROM SPINNING DISKS TO ALL-FLASH

The University of the West of England (UWE) is a leading academic institution located near the city of Bristol, United Kingdom. The university has more than 27,000 students and 3,500 members of staff, spread across three main campuses.

Like any higher education institution, a great deal of focus is placed on attracting and enrolling the next cohort of students, as well as maintaining relations with current students and alumni. Managing the vast reams of data involved in these interactions places significant demands on academic institutions. Having a robust system in place for managing these records is a business necessity.

At UWE, the responsibility for managing these demands lies with the University’s IT Service Operations function, with Marcus Falla, Infrastructure Service Operations Manager, and Nicholas Eaton, Senior Storage Engineer, responsible for the management of the University’s storage requirement.

In 2016, faced with a storage infrastructure approaching the end of its life cycle and due for replacement, they made the decision to use a Pure Storage FlashArray//M20 to support its high performance database applications, including its critical Student Record System, for faster, more responsive performance.

The University’s existing storage infrastructure was based on spinning disks, which were largely failing to keep up with the demands, as requirements had increased substantially over the previous two to three years.

UWE’s team was finding its storage infrastructure a serious limitation, and slow response times were hindering their capabilities and longer term planning. Among the areas of frustration were overnight batch jobs backups and integrity checks, which were resource intensive and time consuming.

“Traditional storage simply wasn’t suited to our current requirements and this was taking up a lot of our time,” Marcus said.

The University was also moving towards greater virtualisation with VMware, and wanted to split out the high-performance database storage from the virtualised servers.

COMPANY:

University of the West of England
www.uwe.ac.uk

USE CASE:

- Databases: Microsoft® SQL Server® and Ingres databases

CHALLENGES:

- The storage infrastructure was approaching the end of its life cycle.
- The University struggled to cope with growing database demands.

IT TRANSFORMATION:

- Noticeable improvements in processing speed occurred instantly.
- The University achieved data reduction of up to 40% following migration.

“The last thing we wanted to do was get this new solution then fill it up and run out of space. Following the migration, we found that we’re now at 40% of the storage space so the data reduction has been very impressive.”

Marcus Falla,
 Infrastructure Service
 Operations Manager

STUDYING THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR THE STUDENT APPLICATION RUSH

To gain an advantage in the highly-competitive tertiary education sector, the team made the decision to tender for an all-flash solution.

“The solution we had needed to be replaced before the end of 2016, so this gave us a strict deadline for finding a solution that fits our needs. Our database team were telling us ‘we want fast data processing and we want simplicity’. We knew that we’d need an all-flash solution to gain these capabilities,” he added.

The tender process began in mid-2016. UWE wanted to meet with all the leading providers in the flash market directly, to understand what specifically they could offer to enhance their operations. Speed was a given, so the core criteria UWE had in mind placed greater value on simplicity and affordability.

“We received presentations from a range of providers so we could consider all the possibilities,” Marcus said. “It was important for us to meet the vendors to understand their features and solutions. We had our database requirements at the forefront of the discussions.”

Before meeting with Pure Storage, UWE was well aware of the company’s standing, having seen its position as a leader on the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Solid-State Arrays. Investigating the features of the Pure proposal, they were attracted to the supportability and intuitiveness of the solution.

PURE CHOSEN FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE, MANAGEMENT SIMPLICITY

“We knew that Pure Storage was an all-flash vendor, so they weren’t going to try to install a hybrid solution,” said Marcus. “The administration seemed so simple, we were clear on exactly what would be involved.

“Most impressively, while the other vendors proudly showed off the extensive training on offer to use their equipment, Pure Storage told us upfront that the technology needed minimal training — it’s so easy to use that our team could start operating it without extensive tutorials. Adopting a simple solution that the team could adopt quickly was a really attractive proposition for us.”

Installation took place in one day. The migration required no downtime, and was in place ahead of the Christmas holidays. The Pure Storage array was installed alongside the University’s existing data centre infrastructure.

“We didn’t want any downtime, so we ran both in parallel during the migration,” said Marcus. “The transition process was so simple, and most importantly didn’t impact the University’s work.”

UWE’s SQL and Ingres databases are now all run on Pure Storage.

ACCELERATING KEY APPLICATIONS

In the short time since installation, Marcus and Nicholas are already beginning to see the range of benefits running Pure Storage offers.

“One thing we weren’t certain about was how much data reduction we’d get, so we sized it up conservatively. The last thing we wanted to do was get this new solution then fill it up and run out of space. Following the migration, we found that we’re now at 40% of the storage space so the data reduction has been very impressive.

“The Pure Storage array is a backend system, and the systems it’s supporting are business systems. Its reliability and manageability have been the greatest benefits. Our database administrators have really noticed the difference, especially being able to process the overnight jobs without disrupting processes.”

SEAMLESS UPGRADES, LONG-TERM COST STABILITY

For the IT team, one of the key benefits was the Pure Evergreen™ Storage model. This gives UWE greater value on its investment with periodic upgrades to the latest technology and means they’ll never have to deal with costly and risky forklift upgrades again. The team can therefore plan ahead knowing their technology is always the latest system, enabling a roadmap for improvements and planning.

“We used to have to factor in ongoing maintenance in our cost projections, but this has pretty much gone now,” said Marcus. “This creates a significant cost saving for the University. It also contributes to reducing the institution’s environmental footprint in the data centre, which is something we really value.

“We’ll be doing comparison costs and looking at energy saving in the near future. This is when we expect to start seeing these benefits in concrete terms.”

The team also values the Pure Storage personnel and their supportive approach. “The Pure support team have been really helpful. They’re not pushy salespeople like some of the other providers. They have a solution that does exactly what they say it does,” said Marcus.

“Overall, we’ve found the new system seamless and straightforward. It’s simplified our database administration — it takes up very little of our time to run — and gives us peace of mind knowing we’re getting the latest features and updates to set us up for long term success.”

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