

Universities Achieving Success Unlimited Access

Bournemouth University

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Creating a culture for success

Flick through any technology-related publication and the Editor’s appetite for exposing other people’s misfortune with IT projects will be apparent. The pages are filled with reports of doomed IT endeavours, leaving the reader quaking at the thought of undertaking even the most straightforward IT task. Yet the Academic Services team at Bournemouth University has embraced technological change with visionary gusto. Boasting one of the UK’s most innovative and successful IT infrastructures in higher education today, Bournemouth University proves that with careful planning, the right technology and a strong support team, the results can be hugely rewarding.

Dr. Chris Hall, Head of Academic Services, explains why he has always been keen to create a technology-friendly culture at Bournemouth University: “Whilst face-to-face teaching continues to provide the backbone of most higher education, we’re complementing this style with appropriate usage of technology, enriching the learning and teaching experience for all involved. Lecturers and students are now enjoying a new sense of academic freedom, allowing them to develop more interesting and exciting ways of learning.”

Unlocking potential

Head of Learning and Teaching at Bournemouth, Chris Shiel has played a significant role in developing an optimum, on-line learning experience: “Our Virtual Learning Environment encourages student communication and participation, whilst heightening their enjoyment in subject learning. Shy students who feel uneasy participating in

group discussions have now discovered an environment they feel more comfortable with, often contributing excellent material.”

Ms. Shiel believes the attraction in this modern form of learning is interactivity. “Bulletin boards, on-line conferencing facilities and electronic document-sharing are just some of the ways students interact with each other, all the while developing skills that will be needed for future employment. And because many conferences are hosted on-line, students have the flexibility to partake when it suits their schedules.” This is a huge benefit for part-time students who often have to combine work and family commitments with studying. Unlimited access to the Internet, lecture notes, and other electronic sources enable students to accumulate information efficiently and at their own pace, using one of over 600 open access terminals available 24 hours a day across the campus.

Bournemouth’s blueprint

Planning and sustaining a network that serves over 13,000 students and lecturers is no mean feat. Dr Hall outlines his logical approach to the project: “From the outset, we have taken care to ensure that the University’s strategic plans informed our information and technology strategies. Understanding our strategic aims revealed how the University should be supported from an Information and IT perspective.” This practical rule of thumb had provided the University with an efficient and robust IT network since the mid 90’s, but seven years later, as user demands and new developments in learning and teaching have changed, it was time to review, renew and update the infrastructure.

Case Study

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TOSHIBA

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Dr. Chris Hall, Head of Academic Services



Forming the team

Dr. Hall's team analysed the “whole life” cost of a computer over a four-year period, instead of just the acquisition cost. This long-term view accounted for maintenance, repairs, loan desktops if needed, and even the “green” disposal of old machines, giving an accurate estimate of expenditure. Academic Services then approached several suppliers with a brief to provide top quality, trustworthy technology supported by a dependable, dedicated service team – all wrapped up in a cost-effective package.

Toshiba had been supplying the University with desktops, servers and notebooks for over three years. Dr Hall explains why Toshiba products were selected for the network upgrade once again: “Robustness and reliability, as well as affordability. Also, Toshiba has an excellent reputation – an important issue for us as experiences with lesser known manufacturers were disappointing.”

The level of resource required to sustain a larger network linking nearly 3,000 desktops, several hundred notebooks and a multitude of servers is demanding. After an intensely competitive tender process, the service contract – the University's largest supplier contract – was awarded to Getech, an educational specialist and Toshiba associate.

Putting plans into action

Between Toshiba, Getech and Bournemouth, a very strong, open working relationship has formed. Mr. Gerry Kane, Education Sales Manager at Getech, comments: “We continually monitor our performance and present the findings at monthly review meetings. These forums, attended by user group representatives from each of the University's seven academic schools plus administrative staff, provide a great exchange of ideas.”

Knowledge is power

This meeting of minds also provides the group with an opportunity to probe Toshiba's

Business Development Manager, Mr. Richard Williams, about emerging technologies from an insider's point of view. “We encourage the group to consider tomorrow's needs that may be impacted from decisions made today. Sharing Toshiba's technology map with the group offers them an insight into the future face of technology from our perspective.” Mobile computing is of mounting importance to the University. Every month, approximately ten notebooks are purchased through the National Laptop Agreement. This higher education sector purchasing agreement enables UK universities to buy Toshiba notebooks at special prices and with additional benefits.

Ready to please

A crucial element of the partnership is the ‘front-line’ interface Getech has with a very diverse group of end users, ranging from midwifery students to technical engineering students. Arranging machine cascades and swapovers around hectic schedules, pre-configuring desktops to the precise needs of a lecturer for instant use, as well as responding to fault and maintenance calls within eight hours are just some of the routine tasks Getech's team of on-site engineers provide. “Understanding the complex nature of their organisation, enables both Toshiba and ourselves to deliver an unbeatable service moulded to their needs,” enthuses Mr. Kane.

The best start

Bournemouth graduates are the second most sought after in the UK, and this stems from an ethos where ‘real world’ wisdom gives these students the edge. A dynamic blend of academic, practical and ICT skills accumulated at Bournemouth is precisely what today's employers are looking for in tomorrow's professionals.

For further information on this success story and Toshiba's range of technology, please contact Toshiba on 01932 822814 or e-mail educationPCs@toshiba.co.uk

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