



Durham University

A lesson in collaboration – how Durham University and Proact delivered a more intelligent way to store data

Summary

Challenge

The university's previous storage solution was expensive to expand, complicated to manage and was reaching the end of its support life. The university replaced this storage infrastructure with another platform. Unfortunately, this failed to deliver on key requirements so the university sought an alternative.

Solution

Developed by working closely with the Durham IT team, Proact developed a solution that's powered by NetApp and Pure Storage technology. This architecture was designed in-line with Proact's Storage as a Service model. The university's data is split into different tiers, features deduplication and compression, and is maintained 24/7 by Proact's Service Management team.

Faced with an ageing storage infrastructure, Durham University searched for and found a more cost-effective option. When this failed to deliver the required results, Proact worked with the university to develop a storage solution that enables Durham to store its data in a more intelligent way, to meet both its performance and its cost targets.

Durham University used to use a highly resilient, multi-purpose platform to house everything from student coursework and email systems, to virtual machines and research data.

It synchronously replicated all data, providing two independent copies, and could allow site failover in the event of the loss of one of the data centres.

Data was also protected long-term, thanks to another system in a separate location.

Although this solution was resilient and offered the university flexibility by providing storage for a range of different types of data, it was expensive to expand, complicated to manage and was reaching the end of its support life.

The university went to tender for a replacement and awarded the contract to a much more cost-effective solution which offered a 'SAN-like' experience. Unfortunately, the technology was unable to deliver on Durham's core requirements so the university was unable to move away from the now ageing storage solution. The university took the difficult decision to cut its losses and go back to the market again to find a replacement.

Benefits

- Durham can choose storage location & cost, based on resilience/performance/protection requirements
- Capacity savings of up to 5x
- Reduction in most expensive storage
- Departments can be charged for what they use
- Team can focus on apps and end users, instead of maintenance

About Proact

Proact is Europe's leading specialist in data and information management with focus on cloud services and data centre solutions. We help our customers to store, connect, protect, secure and drive value through their data whilst increasing agility, productivity and efficiency.

We've completed thousands of successful projects around the world, have more than 4,000 customers and currently manage hundreds of petabytes of information in the cloud. We employ over 1,000 people in 15 countries across Europe and North America.

Founded in 1994, our parent company, Proact IT Group AB (publ), was listed on Nasdaq Stockholm in 1999 (under the symbol PACT).

Durham and Proact

The university had been a long-standing Proact customer. We had provided the original storage solution and continued to offer support and break/fix services that extended the storage infrastructure's usable life.

Despite having not worked with the university in recent times, our technical and account teams had kept in touch with the Durham team, discussing the challenges they were experiencing and offering help and support where we could.

When the university decided to re-tender, Proact invited Durham along to an Executive Briefing. In this, we gave our view of the different options available, the key unique selling points of each one and helped shape Durham's core business requirements from the various departments and their data sets.

During this exercise, it became clear that while the university wanted to have the storage locally on site, they also wanted a flexible charging model and wanted to consume it as they would cloud storage.

It was also apparent that only a small sub-set of the data required synchronous replication and that other data sets had varying protection and performance needs.

Our solution

The Proact and Durham teams jointly developed a solution that went through several iterations based around our on-premises Storage as a Service model.

We chose the most appropriate storage solutions for each tier of data, ensuring they were matched to the performance, resilience, data and protection requirements.

Based on this, each tier was given a cost per GB of capacity, allowing the university to choose 1. Where the current and future data would be best-placed and 2. The cost associated with it.

The service is powered by Pure Storage and NetApp technologies and is maintained with Proact's Service Management, to provide a cloud-like consumption model.

Pure Storage was able to provide a cost-effective, performant, synchronously-replicated tier for the university's critical data. This also provided the flexibility to choose not to replicate data that needed the performance, but not the resilience, that synchronous replication provides – and save money doing so.

Further cost savings were made possible by inline deduplication and compression. This ensured the mainly-virtual machine data consumed as little physical capacity as possible, costing about a fifth of the previous solution.

The remainder of the bulk of the storage was placed on a new NetApp storage solution, providing a multi-protocol, flexible storage tier. Data will be stored on drives that offer different performance and capacity, based on its replication and retention requirements, resulting in a flexible charging model.

This allows the IT team to charge different departments based on what tier they need. By being able to make departments aware of the cost of the capacity, performance and resilience they're asking for, it's hoped they'll be able to reduce the growth in the more expensive tiers, reducing the cost of the service over its lifespan further still.

Proact's Service Management brings yet further benefits. It provides a cloud-like consumption model without requiring a team of Durham storage admins. This means that the IT team can focus on delivering applications and improving user experience, rather than dedicating all its efforts to day-to-day maintenance.

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