

## Moulton College

### Delivering dependable IT services for students and staff

For more than a decade, Cutter Group has been helping Moulton College to optimise its virtualized desktops and servers so that it can deliver dependable IT services for students and staff. Cutter was initially appointed to avert a crisis with a failing virtualized desktop installation, but soon became a trusted partner providing strategic advice, practical help and ongoing support.

### Challenges Faced

In today's further education colleges, a fast and stable IT infrastructure is absolutely fundamental for effective teaching and learning. So, when Moulton College's new virtualized desktop infrastructure (VDI) began to crash in the first week of September, just weeks after it had been installed by a large IT vendor, the situation was critical.

"The instability of the VDI disrupted the college's IT inductions, held up initial skills' assessments and prevented students from accessing the virtual learning environment at the start of the new academic year," says Giles Batchelor, Network Development and Services Manager at Moulton College. "The vendor that had installed the VDI didn't seem to be able to resolve the problem, so we needed to appoint new VDI specialists – quickly."

The college wasn't new to virtualization technology. Indeed, it had already begun to virtualize the servers in its central IT department. However, the IT team lacked the skills and experience to continually optimise this virtualized IT infrastructure and deal with complex virtualization challenges.

Cutter made all the difference by:



Optimising the performance of an unsatisfactory VDI, installed by another vendor



Providing knowledgeable and trusted advice about virtualized desktops and infrastructure



Understanding budget constraints and proposing cost-effective virtualized solutions



Delivering professional support services and responding promptly to issues

“Cutter demonstrated incredible ingenuity in finding a quick and practical solution to our problems. The team came in on Friday evening and by Monday morning we had stable, functioning desktops.”

*Giles Batchelor  
Network Development and Services Manager, Moulton College*

## Services Provided

The IT team at Moulton College turned to Cutter for help after being introduced to the company by one of its hardware suppliers. Much to everyone’s relief, Cutter managed to stabilise desktop performance very rapidly by designing and deploying a stop-gap solution based on Microsoft terminal services. “Cutter demonstrated incredible ingenuity in finding a quick and practical solution to our problems,” says Batchelor. “The team came in on Friday evening and by Monday morning we had stable, functioning desktops.”

This temporary solution stayed in place for six months, because it took the original IT vendor this length of time to finally deliver a VDI that worked satisfactorily. Unsurprisingly, the college didn’t go back to this organisation when it subsequently wanted to upgrade and expand its VDI; it approached Cutter instead.

Ever since then, Cutter has worked closely with the college, increasing the number of thin clients from 300 to 800 and extending the VDI beyond the learning resources centre to classrooms and offices at the main college campus and three satellite teaching centres twenty miles away. “Cutter almost works as a part of my IT team now,” says Batchelor. “The company has helped me to transform the VDI into what I originally wanted it to be.”

Over time, Cutter has made a series of incremental improvements in the performance of the virtualized desktops. It has also recommended and deployed a range of creative solutions to give the college more flexibility in how it publishes desktops through the VMware Horizon platform. “The skills of Cutter’s employees are always developing as new technologies emerge,” notes Batchelor. “If a new product is right for Moulton College, I know that Cutter will already have the skills to implement it.”

When Moulton College encountered a problem with its back-up systems, it asked Cutter to help, because, according to Batchelor, “Cutter always comes up with good ideas.” He adds, “We trust their advice about our virtual desktop environment, so felt very confident talking with them about disaster recovery too.”

Cost was a major concern for the college’s IT team. “I was worried about the budget for the disaster recovery project – because we didn’t really have any!” recalls Batchelor. However Cutter recommended a highly cost effective solution that involved re-using recently retired servers from the college’s production environment, extending their lifespan and saving money on server hardware.

With its understanding of the pressures of the FE sector and its specialist expertise in virtualized infrastructure, Cutter was able to design and deliver a back-up solution that was ideal for the college. It configured 100 virtualized servers on three physical servers in a second server room, geographically separate from the main IT room, and installed Veeam software to replicate critical systems. “Cutter always recommends the best combination of best-of-breed solutions that are right for the college,” Batchelor says. “You know you are getting something that will work.”

To support the college on a day-to-day basis, Cutter provides an ongoing support service, which includes remote monitoring and alerts about any potential issues. This works extremely well, allowing Moulton College’s IT team to focus instead on other IT priorities. “If a problem occurs, Cutter usually tells me what they’ve done to fix it before I even get to work,” Batchelor says.

“Cutter always recommends the best combination of best-of-breed solutions that are right for the college. You know you are getting something that will work.”

*Giles Batchelor*

*Network Development and Services Manager, Moulton College*

## Results Achieved

Over more than ten years, Cutter has helped the IT team at Moulton College to achieve:

### **A stable virtualized desktop environment**

After the nightmare of its initial VDI deployment, Moulton College now has a large, stable virtualized desktop environment that meets the high performance expectations of students and members of staff. Indeed, the IT team is so confident in the reliability of its VDI that it now uses it for an increasing number of critical management systems, including core applications for student enrolments.

### **Time savings in the IT team**

Operating optimally, the VDI is now very effective in reducing the amount of time that the IT team has to spend on desktop management and maintenance tasks. “There is no way that we could manage the number of desktops that we now have, with the same size team, if they were all on PCs,” states Batchelor. “I would have needed to grow the IT team by at least another two IT professionals, and even with this larger team, I suspect we still would have been fire-fighting.”

### **Consistent desktop performance**

All students at Moulton College benefit from access to a standard, high-performance desktop service and those who are being taught at remote centres are not disadvantaged in any way from being at a smaller site. “Moulton College aims to provide all students with the same education experience and opportunities for learning,” explains Batchelor. “The VDI enables us to ensure that every student is getting the same desktop performance and the same access to applications, whether they are on our main site or at one of our satellite centres.”

### **Faster disaster recovery**

If a major incident were to occur in the main IT room, Moulton College estimates that it would be able to get all critical systems and data back up and running in less than four hours – far quicker than the two weeks that might previously have been required. If a fire occurs, students are not going to irretrievably lose course work that has taken months to complete and needs to be submitted to external examiners. Equally, all the college’s management information systems, from finance and HR to student records, are properly backed up.

### **Reduced business risk**

The new disaster recovery systems also reduce risk for the college, as Batchelor explains. “A major IT failure would have a significant impact on the college and, depending on the time of the year, it could be very costly. If we were unable to submit a funding return, for example, it could have huge financial consequences.”

### **Peace of mind for the future**

Moulton College now has a scalable desktop environment and versatile server infrastructure that will meet its needs for many years to come, as well as an IT partner that it can rely on for inspiration and support. Summing up, Batchelor describes Cutter as “vital” to the future of the college. He says, “Cutter has become a trusted, strategic partner.”

[www.cuttergrp.com](http://www.cuttergrp.com) +44 20 8133 8180

