

Case Study: University of Ulster

The Current Service

The University of Ulster has provided an extensive print and copy service to its staff and student communities for several years. It offers a centrally-managed print and copy service to students, based on a disposable “magnetic strip” card purchased through dispensing units. Staff self-service facilities are available, again, for print and copy with the charging mechanism established using a billing system that electronically interrogates the multi-function devices.

The University has four campuses, three of which have a reprographics unit offering a comprehensive range of centralised high volume print and copy services. On the fourth campus a baseline reprographics service is provided, with the opportunity for specialist requests to be directed to one of the specialist units. The focus of this case study is the provision of print services to students, though there is recognition of the need to address output management as a whole. The University has already established the infrastructure to facilitate, for example, integrated charging features for student print and copy services as well as electronic submission of work requests.

The University strives for consistency of service delivery across its four campuses. Hardware refreshes are managed as an integral element of service quality and campus-based demand profiles assist in the planning of hardware provisioning. The separation of the campuses makes it possible to pilot new services without impacting on operational services elsewhere. For example, new models of printers and changes to the charging mechanisms can be carefully managed through focussing change on a specific campus. The student print service cannot be accessed remotely; that is from off-campus, however the University are investigating how to introduce access for wireless laptop use.

Student print services are provided within centrally-managed IT labs, learning resource centres, libraries and within Faculty-owned IT areas whenever the central services is sought. The charging model seeks a full payback on hardware and consumables investment on a four-year basis. Surplus revenue is used to develop the service and the current charge for

an A4 black and white print is 5p per page; an inkjet colour services costs 50p per A4 page.

The service is principally centred around black and white A4 printing, however colour services are available in areas with high demand.

The University uses a card system for charges (currently ICS).

Scanning services are being considered as the University moves towards use of multi-function devices, which have already been introduced to the staff self-service facility.

The Journey to the Current Service

The University has progressively moved towards common service provision across all campuses and has established its student print provision as a centrally managed service. There are successes in moving provision from the faculties into the centrally managed service, however several academic areas continue to operate independent facilities.

In earlier generations of the service, typically five years ago or longer, the University experienced operational problems due to the charging mechanism having to be physically interfaced to the circuitry of the printers. The issue was particularly challenging for colour services, however advances in technology have overcome this problem increasing user satisfaction.

University reorganisation brought the central reprographics unit into the same administrative unit as IT services, this restructuring presents opportunity for synergies and moves towards strategic placement of multi-function devices (MFDs). Leasing of MFDs is considered economically viable in locations where throughput exceeds a pre-determined monthly threshold. The University’s Reprographics Manager has adopted a National Framework Agreement for the provision of the MFD services, now deployed for staff use.

The ICS card now being used to provide a common charging mechanism for laser printing and copying

undertaken by staff and the student services will migrate to the same technology. The opportunity was also available for IT and Reprographic Services to future proof the control system by including MIFARE capabilities. The University has started a pilot for student MIFARE smartcards (I.D., access control, payments, etc.) and print and copy services will be available immediately on the new platform.

Positive Messages from this Case Study

The student service is well established, with a high level of penetration in centrally managed IT spaces. The integration of high volume print and copy services, for staff, has created synergies and resulted in more cost-effective services. Availing of a National Agreement for leasing of hardware, for staff services, has been extremely beneficial, as has the experience in the use of a multi-function rechargeable card, whose use will extend to replace the present “magnetic strip” technology used by students.

The opportunity exists to extend the use of the multi-function card and a successful pilot project has demonstrated its applicability to access control.

By adopting a central approach, equipment can be replaced when needed, supply and demand can be better managed with increased demand addressed by increased capacity where needed.

The consistent interface to the student service is helpful especially in a multi-campus setting where staff resources to develop and maintain services must be carefully managed.

The benefits of a successful central service create a sense that centralisation can be “good” and not all “bad”.

Some Issues

The current “magnetic card” charge mechanism is expensive as well as environmentally unfriendly. Each card provides to 30 A4 copies before disposal and its unit cost is the most significant element of the current “per page” rate.

A move to a multi-purpose rechargeable card will significantly reduce the per page rate as well as facilitating its use for other services and providing a more convenient solution to the student.

Pre-planning of future services, e.g. MIFARE have allowed the print and copy services to conform to corporate vision. This key service will be able to migrate to new control cards when required without additional workloads.

Faculty-based services are incompatible with centrally managed services, hence may be inconvenient for students who have a need to use both services. Ongoing discussions with faculties are useful as some are now adopting the centrally managed solution.

Acknowledgement

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Mark Millar, the University’s Reprographics Manager, has played a lead role in the deployment of the current staff service as well as in introducing the multi-function card and associated recharging services.