

Case study.



The National Extension College

The National Extension College [NEC], an educational charity which celebrates its 50th anniversary, provides distance learning courses to thousands of students who have been unable to access education. The courses are aimed at second chance learners who need national or vocational qualifications to progress to higher education or to change career. Among those studying on NEC courses are people in the armed forces, disabled people, prisoners, home educators and those in work who want to study at the same time. IT needs to be at the heart of the business and it is vital to ensure that the administrative infrastructure and the learning platform give the students the best quality environment for their learning.

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And this is where Boldfield come in...

Boldfield Computing provide NEC's IT support and have installed a new finance system (Sage 200), developed bespoke Sage software and supplied new hardware including new servers.

"My role as Head of Operations and Technology is to keep the College's IT systems and infrastructure operating smoothly whilst introducing new systems to support our students and tutors. We have made the decision to change over to more cloud-based solutions to ensure NEC is able to maintain business continuity when we we relocate our offices.

Before I arrived in post, Boldfield Computing were doing an excellent job supporting a complex network with around 20 in-house servers. Boldfield's support was critical to helping NEC rationalise as we started our migration to cloud services. We have a number of business-critical systems on old servers that could not easily be replaced and had to be relocated to our new building without disruption - or worse - a lot was at stake.

Hardware rationalisation

The hardware rationalisation and move was a positive experience - it has gone much better than expected. I've been through many systems changes in other companies and Boldfield's services compare very favourably with ones I've experienced before. Ian Macfarlane at Boldfield is typical of all of the Boldfield team - they won't leave until the job is done. They really do go the extra mile.

It feels like a partnership - they understand my strategy, they are not just service providers. Boldfield are very open and I like that. It means I know where we stand and we can tackle issues together. They are also very flexible commercially, NEC is a charity and we have to get the best value from every pound we spend, Boldfield are sensitive to our financial pressures and have been helpful in making financial arrangements that suits both parties.

Sage 200 Online

It is a testament to Boldfield's professionalism and my confidence in them that we were able to make the decision to go with Sage 200 online. It's a very new product so it was a bit risky as we only had a couple of months to switch to live financial transactions. The process was rather painful, some frustrations are inevitable when you are tackling something of this scale and at speed, yet Boldfield have dealt with it. They clearly have influence with Sage themselves as they organised fixes and upgrades to the software. Sage even halted their roll-out until a problem with our year end was fixed. It is to the credit of the joint Boldfield and NEC team that our customers and suppliers weren't adversely affected at all.

I came to NEC to a major challenge of transforming our systems and dealing with an ageing infrastructure. Boldfield have helped us to reduce the risk involved so that I feel more confident in achieving our plans and I'm free to think in an expansive way. We can look forward to NEC providing students and tutors with a more modern and compelling learning experience in the near future. Our change process is well underway and I have the Boldfield safety net. They are a very responsible and skilled group of people."

Paul Cooper - Head of operations and technology
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