



A STORY OF COLLABORATION

Nelson College for Girls and Nayland College

A case study of how two schools, Nelson College for Girls and Nayland College, have outsourced the management of their server and worked collaboratively to buy better technology and support than they would have been able to do alone



Summary

What's this document for?

This is a case study of how two schools, Nelson College for Girls and Nayland College, have outsourced the management of their server and worked collaboratively to buy better technology and support than they would have been able to do alone. This case study is part of the Support Staff Working Group final report.

Why did the school change its approach to a support function?

With the introduction of fibre optic fast broadband an opportunity to work together more closely was identified. By pooling their purchasing power the schools were able to make their money go further, buy a more robust server and contract someone to manage the server on their behalf.

What did they do?

They purchased a shared server and contracted out the management of the server, which has allowed the ICT functions within the schools to be more focused on providing support to teaching roles and administrative functions within the schools.

What was the result?

- The schools now have a server that is reliable and will last longer, which has minimised any downtime on their network and will save them money in the long term.

- The schools' ICT functions are more focused on providing support to teaching and administration staff rather than managing equipment.
- The two schools have an ongoing relationship of collaboration.
- Also, an indirect result of the increased level of technology being available in the schools has been the need for more ICT support staff who work closely with the end users (teaching and administration staff).

What are they planning to do next?

The schools would like to see more schools sharing the server and increasing focus on ICT support staff working alongside teachers to deliver better learning outcomes.

What the support staff said

- "Our roles have become increasingly important. A teacher cannot wait for hours for support if they have a class full of students with them waiting for the technology to work."

Discussion questions

1. What impact do you think the introduction of fast broadband will have on the ICT support that you have within your school?
2. Are there opportunities for you to work collaboratively with neighbouring schools to increase your buying power in terms of hardware, software and outsourced support?

A story of collaboration

Five years ago the switch was made by a group of Nelson schools (called The Loop) to a fibre network (fast broadband). As Ruth Elmey, e-learning manager of Nelson College for Girls said, "Fast Internet was OK but the real value in establishing a fibre network was in the collaborative network it forced us into ... we had to talk to each other, make decisions together. It wasn't always easy, getting joint decisions made; we have failed on some, but we have made the most important [decisions]."

Collaboration has included the selection of a single student management system for all high schools on The Loop. This meant that the schools were able to share the initial training and support costs for the introduction of the system to their schools.

A shared server

Nayland College and Nelson College for Girls have taken this collaboration one step further. When Nayland College's server needed to be replaced the two schools started talking to each other about sharing a server—something that was made possible by fibre network and the fact that the schools were running mostly the same software.

As a result of pooling their funds, in 2008 the schools were able to purchase a server with more robust technology and increased longevity. This means that the speed and

reliability of the network is increased and the server is likely to last six years rather than the usual three years.

The two schools set up an entity, EdSerf, which owns the server and hires a contractor to manage the server. They share the expenses between them. This has meant that the IT support roles within the schools are focused on providing support to the users rather than managing the server. The principals, senior IT managers and the resource manager from Nelson College for Girls and the finance manager from Nayland College meet approximately two to three times per year to discuss any issues with the server. For these two schools the administration of EdSerf is minor but the rewards have been great.

With more technology in the classrooms and administration, the schools have had to respond with more ICT staff to support the technology. Nelson College for Girls created a user support/help desk role to provide support to the users—as one person put it, “You can’t wait for half a day for something to be sorted out if you have a class of children with you waiting for the technology to work.” This is in addition to an e-learning manager and two other technical staff. In Nayland College the ICT staff consists of a part-time manager, two front line user support positions and a technical specialist. The Nayland ICT staff hope to see their roles evolve to have more focus on working alongside the teachers ‘being in front of the screen—not behind it’.

Looking to the future the schools hope that, as other schools’ servers come up for replacement, they too would like to share the server, and the server purchased has the capacity to include more schools.



Also in an increasingly technology-based environment, Nayland College has recognised the need to ensure that there is a better information flow and understanding between ICT and teaching staff, and to that end have created a ‘bridge’ role. This role is held by a teacher, who as part of this role is part of ICT meetings once a week, to provide a teacher’s ‘voice’ at the meeting and to ‘interpret’ information for teachers from ICT. The potential for this role is seen as taking a more proactive and developmental role in ICT planning and how it can support the teaching goals of the school in the future.

Both schools see technology in schools as continuing to evolve and that you will never get to the point where you say you have completed the job. But they do feel that with the fast fibre and the shared server they have created a platform for the future.

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Nelson College for Girls

Single sex girls’ school, years 9–13 with an attached boarding school. The school also has an attached preparatory school for year 7 and 8 pupils.

Location Nelson

Decile 7

Roll Approximately 1,000 (college only)

Nayland College

Year 9–13, co-educational school

Location Nelson

Decile 6

Roll Approximately 1,300