



Accelerating Digital Transformation at the University of Sussex

Published

The University of Sussex is a renowned research-intensive institution located in Brighton, UK. Since its founding in the 1960s, it has built a strong reputation for academic excellence, progressive values, and a commitment to innovation.

The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and is home to a diverse student population and vibrant academic community. With a focus on sustainability, digital transformation, and

enhancing the student experience, Sussex continues to evolve its infrastructure to meet the demands of modern education.

Key Facts

1

Over 60 years of academic excellence and innovation in higher education.

2

Home to more than 18,000 students and 3,000 staff across a diverse and inclusive campus.

3

Committed to digital transformation and sustainability as part of its strategic vision.

The Challenge

The University of Sussex found itself at a crossroads. The IT estate had reached full capacity, and the infrastructure was beginning to show its age. Performance was lagging and the teams were increasingly forced into reactive firefighting. Legacy systems created single points of failure and the university's ability to scale or innovate was being held back.

"We were at capacity and had nowhere to go," said Seb Harrington, Assistant Director for Infrastructure and Cloud. "We started deploying VMs in Azure just to cover the cracks."

The situation was compounded by changes to their previous solution. Licensing costs were set to rise sharply, and education discounts were being removed. For Sussex

this wasn't just a technical challenge, it was a financial one too.

"We received quotes showing an over 100% annual increase in licensing costs," explained Chris Mitchell, Senior Project Manager. "We had to act fast."

Alongside underperforming hardware and a lack of resilience, the backup systems were outdated and no longer fit for purpose. As Chris put it, "The majority of engineering activity was basically plugging and fixing fires."

It was clear that a complete rethink was needed. Sussex had to modernise its infrastructure, reduce costs, and create a platform that could support future growth.

Critical Success Factors

A cost-effective replacement for existing infrastructure.

Rapid implementation to meet tight renewal deadlines.

Scalable, high-performance platform to support future growth.

The Solution

Softcat assisted the University in developing a clear plan. The proposed solution centred around Nutanix technology, offering a modern and scalable alternative.

The engagement began with strategic discussions and service reviews, including input from former Assistant Director Iain McCracken, whose prior experience with Nutanix helped shape the direction.

"We'd had our eye on Nutanix for a while," said Seb. "We were looking to move our finance system across because performance of the previous solution was becoming a persistent issue. When the licensing changes of our previous solution came in, we took the opportunity to migrate away and fix the platform."

Softcat worked closely with Nutanix and the university to scope the solution, producing high and low-level designs to build confidence in the proposal.

"Alex (Softcat) came in at the end of November, completed the LLD quickly, got architecture approval and did the

install the following week," said Chris. "The whole thing was done before Christmas in three weeks."

Softcat assembled a dedicated team, including project manager Kamran Ahmed and professional services consultant Alex Bouraoui. Their responsiveness, flexibility and expertise were foundational to moving at pace.

"Alex was a major player in our success," Chris added. "There's no way we could have moved at the kind of speed or confidence required without him."

Softcat also supported the university with governance and vendor engagement, providing technical assurance throughout the process. The team's ability to adapt and work at pace was instrumental.

Solution Highlights

Nutanix infrastructure replacing existing solution.

Professional services and project management from Softcat.

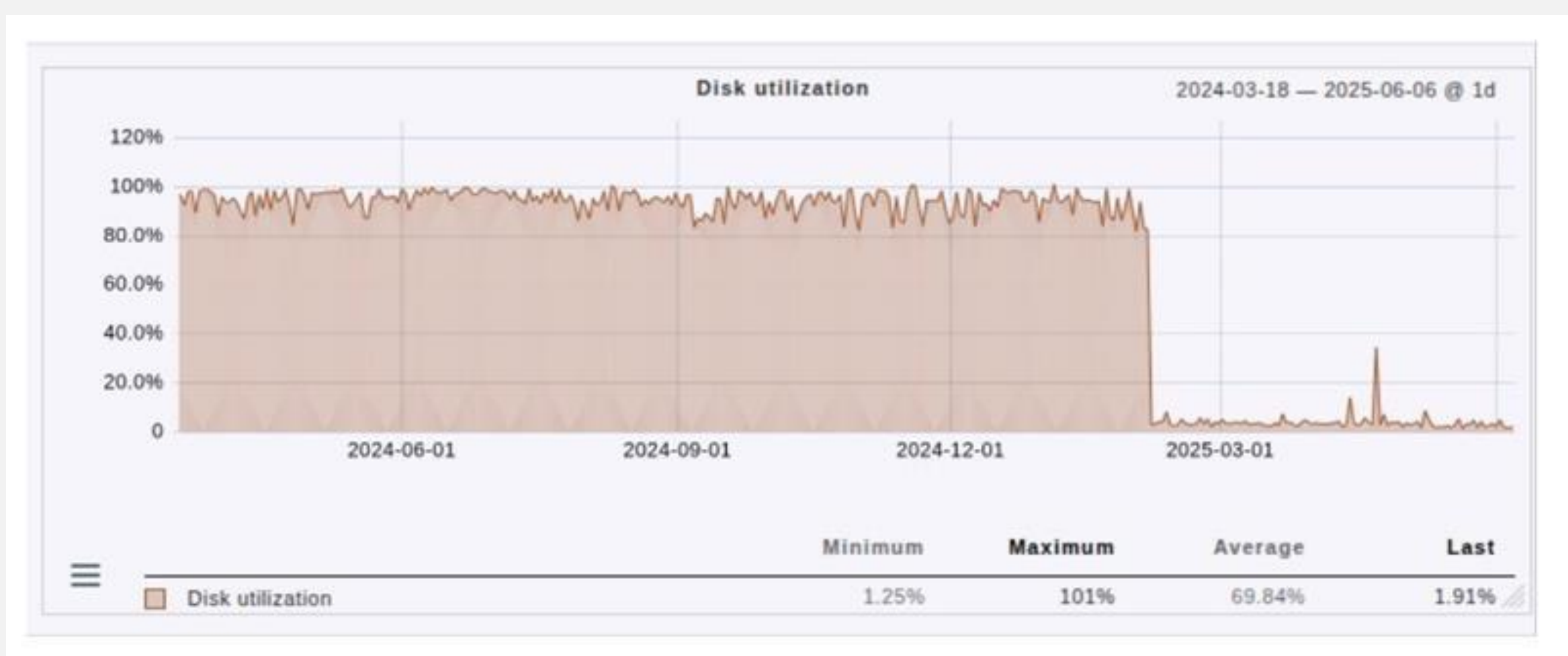
Support on vendor engagement and governance throughout.

The Benefits

The transformation delivered immediate and lasting benefits. Most notably, the university avoided annual cost increases from their previous solution's licensing. That saving alone made the project a financial success.

Performance improvements were dramatic. "There's a graph I like to present," said Seb, "showing disk utilisation dropping from 100 percent to between 1 and 2 percent post-migration. It's night and day."

Spot the Migration



Core systems like finance, which had previously struggled, now run with close to immediate page loads. "We've got capacity, speed, scalability, all the good things you want from a platform," Seb added.

From a business continuity perspective, the combination of Nutanix and Cohesity backup solutions has introduced new disaster recovery capabilities. "We've enabled a significantly improved DRBC model," said Chris. "This includes use of VM replication and alignment to the 3-2-1 disaster recovery principle."

The project also tackled long-standing technical debt. "We touched every virtual asset we own," said Seb. "It gave us a chance to clean up master data and start automating."

Students have also benefited. While the transformation focused on back-office systems, the ripple effect has reached the front line of education. "There are services students use that now run on Nutanix," Chris explained. "They're seeing faster, almost instantaneous page loads."

Chris echoed this: "We've moved from plugging holes to building a new target operating model. We can now focus on our next objectives as an organisation."

Benefits at a Glance

Annual savings compared to renewing previous solution.

270+ virtual machines migrated with zero outages.

Improved performance, scalability, and resilience.

Why softcat

Seb and Chris were clear in their praise for Softcat.

"Softcat were always there, attentive, responsive, and proactive," said Seb. "It felt like they were pushing with us not just watching from the sidelines."

"Softcat enabled us to turn around significant aspects of a complex legacy IT infrastructure and shift focus to our new operating model over a short period of time," added Chris.