



The Rowan Learning Trust turned to Virtue Technologies when they required a service that could scale to meet the needs of their growing trust.

## Background

The Rowan Learning Trust (RLT) was established as a multi-academy trust in 2012 and brings schools and communities together through development on their journey to become outstanding. Currently the RLT family comprises four schools: two high schools, one primary school and an all-through alternative provision academy. One of these schools is Hawley Hall High School, an 11-16 mixed comprehensive of around 900 students and 110 staff situated to the west of Wigan. Virtue Technologies' relationship with the RLT originally started with Hawley Hall, as we have been working with the school for around 10 years. The school started with quite a small scale service support and over the years it's grown with the school, and more recently with the trust.

## The Challenge

The trust initially had a local authority internet connection which John Robinson, Information Systems Manager at RLT, describes as "patchy to say the least". John says "Because we are a multi-academy trust, we've got several schools now and are looking to grow in the future, we like the idea of a common network with other schools, and being able to share resources. We were interested in how Virtue's service could scale to meet our needs".

## The Solution

Virtue Technologies' Private Wide Area Network (PWAN) turns internet connections into true private

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**John Robinson, Information Systems Manager, The Rowan Learning Trust**

circuits without the use of complicated VPNs. We do this by building a dedicated private core network for a school, the whole network is then protected by a dedicated firewall which we customise to each school's specific requirements. A PWAN provides a collection of schools such as a secondary, and its associated feeder primary schools, with a private network with absolute security and without the need for VPN tunnels. As our PWAN has been designed to work across all of their connectivity solutions, we're able to connect a primary school with a high speed EoFTTC to a secondary school with a leased line.

The RLT moved to our PWAN solution and John says "Since we moved to the PWAN, we've had virtually no downtime at all, in any of the schools, it's very reliable". We asked John what benefits have the internet and PWAN brought to Hawley Hall as an individual school, and also as a multi-academy trust and he said "it's mainly about having a reliable internet connection that is fast enough to do the job. We've many mobile devices now, the internet is obviously vast, more so now than it was 10 years ago. For an individual school it's important to have that stability. I think as a MAT it's about how the schools can make efficiency savings by being joined

up. From an IT perspective, being able to have a single IT team manage everything, the PWAN helps with that, but also what we are starting to explore is the teaching and learning aspects of it, and how people working across schools can share resources more effectively".

John also discusses the challenges faced in delivering and managing the IT services across multiple sites, the main one being consistency, and making sure everyone is on the same page. The RLT have tried to develop common perspective structure templates on how they manage things, so when someone at one school goes into another school, they will know exactly how things are set up and they can work as effectively on every site. John says "it's been quite challenging because everyone has their own way of doing things, every Network Manger does things slightly different, so it's been quite tricky to try and pull all that together".



When John was asked what makes Virtue Technologies stand out to him, he talked about the level of service he receives, "the guys on the help desk are always willing to help and go the extra mile, Virtue has always been a step above in terms of that". In reference to other support companies that John has dealt with, he states, "you pay your money, someone comes in every now and then and has a bit of a check, but with Virtue it's a partnership, and we can bounce ideas off people and its genuine advice that we get from the guys. When we've taken on other schools and looked at the support that they've had and what we've had - Virtue is always a level above in terms of customer service." Discussing this partnership further John continues to say, "because it is more of a partnership, I know I can ring Phil Lawson, Virtue Technologies Managing Director, and talk things through with him, without feeling like we are going to get a sales pitch. It's just genuine advice. I think

because Virtue are so big in education, they share that philosophy with us that it's for the students and it's all about the ethos of the school, even though Virtue is a business. They actually understand what goes on in schools, it's not all about a computer on a desk, it's about the experience for the students so I think we share that with Virtue."

Simon Steele, Virtue's Technical Director, holds termly meetings with John to help the trust focus and plan their development priorities. John says "keeping Virtue involved in our trust-wide ICT strategy allows us to work more effectively together to build robust and scalable solutions." When asked if he feels like he's got value for money John said "I definitely think so. I know broadband prices fluctuate massively, and we went into a 3-year contract so we had that security - Virtue are definitely competitive with their pricing."

## Future Plans

The RLT plan to grow and expand and add more schools, so obviously they will be looking at adding internet services to them, but also more about how they can make collective savings as a trust. They are currently looking at having a single internet filter for all of their sites and again, the PWAN allows them to do that. They'll be able to have a single virtual internet filter that will scale indefinitely to meet their growing number of users. When asked what the single most important thing to him is in terms of IT delivery, John said "it's got to be how it impacts teaching and learning in schools, because that's the reason we are all here at the end of the day. As Virtue provide the IT support with everything from the internet services to the servers support, we can focus on the classroom. The less we have to worry about the support and maintenance, the more we can focus on the development of IT systems to support our students."



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