

INVERNESS COLLEGE CASE STUDY



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Inverness College achieves FAST Audit Certification

The FAST Programme helps the college improve network security and services for staff and students.

Inverness College opened its first campus in 1960 and now has a total of four campuses.

These include a management centre and specialist School of Forestry, a further education centre, a specialist aquaculture, fisheries management and research facility, and another further education centre area situated on the Isle of Skye.

Like other educational establishments, the continuous turnover of students causes many problems for the IT department. Monitoring use of IT with over 6,000 students, eight servers and 1,270 PCs, is a huge task. Even if the IT staff closely liaise with the human resources department, it is still likely to fail to prevent the many security and legal risks that arise from each individual student's use of software, email and the Internet.

Prevention is better than cure

Unlike a business, Inverness College had to look at ways of preventing any abuse of the IT system rather than trying to enforce various disciplinary procedures over several thousand students. Through a concentrated effort over two years, driven by network administrator Andrew Fenn-Rogers, Inverness College achieved FAST Audit Certification with the appropriate IT policies and procedures in place.

“Our first major problem was to try and find some way to ensure every student was aware of the regulations in place surrounding the use of all software and computer facilities. With so many students using the various PCs both on and offsite, the IT team was facing the impossible task of ensuring that every piece of software downloaded onto each workstation was necessary and suitably licensed, as well as guaranteeing students didn't download any further software.

When I joined the college the IT team had begun working towards FAST Audit Certification. However as always, other issues interfered and its priority slipped. It was agreed that I was to concentrate on this area and to ensure the college became FAST certified as soon as possible.”

First steps on the road to compliance

Andrew began by attending two of the training courses that are regularly organised by FAST. The courses enable all types of organisations to understand what FAST is about and why IT compliance is so important, and allows people to discuss any issues or problems they may face with the experts.

“It was invaluable for me to be able to speak to someone who understood the different issues that we faced as an educational institution. FAST guided me through the four-step process - helping me to write suitable policies and procedures, organise a full audit, reconcile each licence and piece of software and then highlighting ways to sustain the future management of IT within the college.”

“FAST is always at the end of the phone or email and any issues that arise can be flagged immediately.”

Inverness College reviewed its existing policies and procedures to ensure that both staff and students were aware of what they were entitled to use on a standard PC. Any further software that was needed was to be authorised by both the relevant lecturer and a member of the IT team. Additional policies were introduced concerning email and the use of the Internet, including a restriction on file allocation to just 3MB so no-one could download anything of consequence.

“We based our policies and procedures on the standard versions that FAST supplied to us. We adapted them to our particular needs and then consulted FAST to help shape them to their present form,” Andrew added.

Any student that drops out or finishes their course automatically has their account disabled. At the end of each year, all files and accounts are completely deleted. Students continuing a course have to re-enrol to re-enable any IT access for each following year of study.

Keeping track and finding evidence

Once all the policies and procedures were in place, the next stage to complete was a full audit of all software assets to find out exactly what was already installed on each PC. The audit is still maintained and produces several reports a month. A database notes the software packages installed on each machine and holds details of the associated licences.

Compiling proof and reconciling all software licences within the college was a huge challenge. "Software had obviously been purchased over a number of years and reconciling licences with each package took a lot of time. If we found there was no proof of a licence then I would delete it or purchase one accordingly. It was an essential practice and we were discounted money on some of the various purchases we had to make when the vendors realised we were an educational establishment."

The processes have highlighted the legalities of licensing to the IT team and the consequences of non-compliance. Andrew commented, "I now question every single licence agreement that I receive whereas previously I would have just accepted it as it stood as they appear so ambiguous. My awareness of the various pitfalls of software compliance has been raised significantly."

The ongoing consultation over the years between Inverness College and FAST highlighted another area of confusion surrounding hardware under repair or awaiting disposal. The college now licenses all intact hardware no matter what the condition, in accordance with the certification standards.

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Going for gold

The final measures were then put in place to ensure that the college could comfortably perform the ongoing management processes necessary to continue certification into the future.

Andrew concluded, "It's difficult to financially quantify the value of achieving gold certification for us but it has proved invaluable in guaranteeing us total peace of mind. FAST is always at the end of the phone or email and any issues that arise can be flagged immediately."

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For more information please call **0844 815 5742**, email **contactus@fast-compliance.co.uk** or visit **www.fast-compliance.co.uk**

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