



## Customer Spotlight



The University of Manchester

## Supporting strategy through engagement: AppsAnywhere at The University of Manchester

As one of the world's top universities, The University of Manchester is no stranger to complexity, especially when it comes to delivering consistent and high-quality digital experiences to a large and diverse community.

So, when the university set out to modernise how its 44,000 students and 12,000 staff access software, it wasn't just about replacing an old system. It was about aligning with its strategic goals: greater flexibility, better student experience, and smarter, more sustainable operations.





At the heart of this effort was the implementation of AppsAnywhere, a software delivery platform that's now playing a key role in supporting the university's flexible learning strategy and wider institutional priorities set out by its new leadership.

## Setting the strategic context

Manchester's "Our Future" vision sets out a clear ambition: to make the university more agile, inclusive, and globally relevant. In setting that vision, the university's Vice-Chancellor made clear that delivering a world-class education means being able to meet high expectations, not only academically, but in the digital experience as well. That includes simplifying access to tools and resources, wherever students are learning from. This means offering students and staff more choice in how, when and where learning happens.

This is where AppsAnywhere fits in. It gives students access to the software they need from any managed device on campus – and eventually, from their own laptops – without needing to rely on fixed labs or complicated workarounds.



## Why the change?

Before AppsAnywhere, delivering software at Manchester involved a lot of manual work. Different courses needed different apps in different labs, and IT teams had to build complex machine images that were time-consuming to manage and hard to keep consistent.

**"We knew we needed a better way," shared Jenny Robinson, the Project Manager in charge of this digital transformation, in a presentation at the AppsAnywhere SUMMIT. "Our labs were over-subscribed, we had reliability issues with hardware and software. We wanted to offer more flexibility but didn't have the right tools."**

But rather than leading with the technology, the university's IT Services focused on a clear, stakeholder-led change management process, one that was solving real problems for academics and students, reflected institutional strategy and a growing emphasis on flexibility in teaching and learning.

This was not a "big bang" transformation. Instead, it was a methodical, people-focused implementation, grounded in the university's long-term goals and informed by student and staff feedback throughout.

**"In FSE (Faculty of Science and Engineering), colleagues were booking twice as many cluster spaces as needed, thinking that half of them would not be working, so my timetable was a nightmare. Now we're at 98%, people book what they need, and I've not had a single complaint from an academic around clusters. That's unheard of territory for me. And the student experience, which is what I live for, not a single complaint about availability of clusters, going in, finding things are broken... that's gone completely" commented Peter Green, Interim Vice President and Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering.**







## Building foundations first

Rather than rushing implementation, the IT team prioritised stabilising infrastructure. This involved addressing underperformance in clusters and simplifying the software estate before introducing a new system. The AppsAnywhere project was viewed as a strategic opportunity not only to modernise software access, but also to reset relationships with staff through clearer communication and shared goals.

Early engagement included:

- Demonstrations for staff and students
- Input from academic departments
- Conversations with peer institutions, such as Reading and Middlesex universities, who had already adopted AppsAnywhere years ago

This preparatory work laid the groundwork for a more informed and accepted rollout.

Another key reason for the success of the rollout was the early engagement with academics. They were key in identifying the key issues, stayed involved throughout the planning, procurement and testing stages. This roll out was framed not just as an IT change, but as a way to support teaching.

**“Rather than saying, ‘Here’s the new system,’ we asked, ‘How can this make your life easier?’” explained Michelle Clayton, Endpoint Systems Manager. “That made a big difference in how it was received.”**

For students, the new system meant they no longer had to worry about finding the right lab to access their course software. With over 5,000 app launches in the first few weeks and more than 800 active users, the early data showed strong uptake and clear interest.

## Soft launch, strong uptake

The university opted for a soft launch in September 2024, initially enabling AppsAnywhere on PC clusters only. This allowed the team to monitor uptake without risking disruption to core teaching.

In the first three months:

- Over 14,800 app launches were recorded
- More than 2,700 unique users accessed the platform
- Student awareness was already high, with 77% of those surveyed aware of AppsAnywhere and 60% having used it

The rollout continued to gain traction, reaching 28,000 launches and 4,150 users by month seven. Usage fluctuated by academic calendar, but patterns were consistent with expectations.

## Engagement by design

The university made a deliberate effort to ensure that change was communicated, supported, and reinforced, particularly among academic staff.

Staff engagement included:

- Department meetings
- Email newsletters
- Start-of-year communications
- A course template to help academics guide students in using the platform

This mattered. Internal analysis showed a clear link between academic engagement and student adoption. In one case, when an academic embedded AppsAnywhere guidance into course materials and actively encouraged use, 100% of their students used the platform. In contrast, only 38% used it where no such support was offered.





## Student engagement

To gather direct feedback from students, the team ran “Engage-o-Rama” sessions, complete with chocolate and mince pies. Over six hours of engagement across three days yielded 288 student responses, most of which confirmed the value of having a central, consistent access point for applications.

Student engagement continued across the year, with Roadshows across 5 days, 4 buildings and more than 100 staff and students engaged.

## Lessons learned

After the first year, the team outlined several practical insights:

- **Avoid the “big bang” approach:** A phased rollout helped control risk and allowed time for user feedback.
- **Stay visible on campus:** Online communication wasn’t enough, face-to-face engagement with students and staff was critical.
- **Find a vocal champion:** Having a project sponsor that was vocal, well connected and passionate about this work was invaluable.
- **Embed change in practice:** Having AppsAnywhere on the homepage and making small tweaks to the user experience helped drive adoption.
- **Highlight the full benefits for students and academics:** It’s important to highlight the impact on academics’ everyday lives, as well as how many of their current issues will be addressed: AppsAnywhere will be key in informing decisions around timetabling, licensing, use of space.
- **Keep engagement going:** Rollout is not the end of the journey; ongoing support and reminders are essential, especially across academic years.

**“Kudos to our fantastic Change team, and our brilliant partners at AppsAnywhere.**

**This has been a brilliant piece of work from our Professional Services teams - bringing together change, IT, and student engagement to deliver something that truly adds value. The AppsAnywhere platform is already proving to be a great service for our students and faculty, making access to software easier, more consistent, and more user-friendly.”**

**PJ Hemmaway, Chief Information Officer at The University of Manchester**





## Looking ahead

The first phase – cluster access – was designed as a foundation for further flexibility. Future stages will explore extending access to personal devices and enhancing analytics to support software planning and academic decision-making.

By embedding AppsAnywhere within the broader goals of the Flexible Learning Strategy, the University of Manchester has ensured that this technical project contributes directly to student experience, operational efficiency, and teaching resilience.

More importantly, it has demonstrated that successful digital change doesn't come from just launching platforms, it comes from working with people to understand what they need and making change sustainable over time. The close-knit collaboration between AppsAnywhere and Manchester teams led to outstanding outcomes: *"I've never known to deliver anything at scale in the IT space and hear virtually nothing go wrong."* commented Peter Green about AppsAnywhere.

Find out more at:  
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AppsAnywhere is a global software delivery provider that revolutionised how students and higher education faculty and staff access applications on campus computers or on personal devices. Since 2009, AppsAnywhere has been at the forefront of app management innovation, providing equitable, consistent and seamless digital experiences for more than 3 million students, in 300 institutions, across 22 countries.

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