



Customer Spotlight



Why Coventry University Came Back to AppsAnywhere After Two Years of VDI

As an institution that helped pioneer BYOD in the UK, Coventry University was an early adopter of AppsAnywhere. Having run their software delivery on this platform for over 10 years, the university moved to VDI, only to return to AppsAnywhere two years later. We spoke to Coventry University Group CTO Steve Rogers and IT Platform experts Dean Shaw and Rebecca Carrick about the institution’s journey.

Snapshot

Institution: Coventry University Group

Total Students: 45,000

Staff: 7,400

Devices Managed: 11,000

Applications Managed: 300

Customer Since: 2012 AppsAnywhere;
2025 LabStats

When innovation is the status quo

AppsAnywhere had been running at Coventry since 2012, long enough that it became an integral part of the infrastructure, the kind of system nobody in IT had to actively think about because it simply worked in the background for both students and staff. That reliability mattered most during the pandemic, when remote access to teaching software became the entire delivery mechanism for a university that could no longer rely on physical labs.

As Dean Shaw, who has worked across Coventry's platform rollouts, put it, the irony of that period was hard to miss: “During lockdown it was a very positive product, people were basically saying thank God we’ve got AppsAnywhere, since students couldn’t come to campus and had no other means to access the majority of their software.”

Following the pandemic, changes to student induction and staff engagement meant awareness of the platform and how it was intended to be used became less consistent across the institution. As a result, some support requests were recorded against AppsAnywhere even when the underlying cause related to local processes, application-specific issues or user familiarity rather than the platform itself.

At the same time, the institution was developing a broader strategy to tackle digital poverty and extend access to Windows applications across a wider range of student-owned devices. This included improving the experience for Mac and Chromebook users beyond what its existing AppsAnywhere deployment and service model provided at that point. New funding for cloud services created an opportunity to review its overall approach to software delivery, leading the institution to explore VDI as part of that strategy. AppsAnywhere has since expanded its cross- platform delivery capabilities through Cloud Delivery.



The VDI chapter – the grass isn’t always greener

The Citrix VDI rollout struggled from the outset, and it was live for only one calendar year. Used to the AppsAnywhere way of packaging software, the flexibility of delivery methods and the seamless user experience, many staff and students were resistant to change. They didn’t understand the need to remove AppsAnywhere to accommodate a few different devices, when VDI was mostly used for Windows after all.

Users had now gone from one access path to multiple: a virtual desktop experience, remote desktop access and individual apps delivered via a portal, which created a lot of work for the IT team. And updates could only be shipped during weekend maintenance windows.

Dean Shaw shares the resourcing toll: “It was pretty intense for us, dealing with the technical side alongside educating the service desk on monitoring and ending sessions, on top of managing colleagues who just couldn’t get over the fact that we were getting rid of AppsAnywhere.”

Beneath the resistance was some technical friction too, from OneDrive compatibility problems, and file size limits to multi-factor authentication and TimeSync issues. The costs of scaling VDI kept climbing, right at the time when the sector’s budgets were being cut.



Back to AppsAnywhere – the SaaS experience

By 2025, with VDI live for barely a year, Coventry moved back to AppsAnywhere. But they returned to a product that was materially different from the one it had left, now fully cloud hosted, with a managed cloud solution. The product improvements made the comeback smoother, with the team commenting on how much slicker it was, easier to navigate, with live updates and more pre-packaged applications. The analytics function and customer service had also improved, and the whole set up was much closer aligned with Coventry's new operating model.

The SaaS architecture removed the OS compatibility concerns that had driven the original move to Citrix VDI. Thanks to the previous infrastructure still in place, the pre-packaged applications and automated licensing, the new infrastructure was live in less than 24 hours. This is lightning speed compared to the 12+ months of VDI implementation, a result that took everyone by surprise.

"I don't think anybody was unhappy the first time round with AppsAnywhere. It was just the requirements changing, and we couldn't get everything to the desktop without being VPN-based, which is why Citrix VDI worked a bit better for a while as a gateway, but we found the limitations too quickly. The AppsAnywhere Cloud platform has radically changed how we deliver software" shared Steve Rogers, Coventry CTO.

With the cloud platform in place, students and staff on their own Mac and Chromebook devices generate what Steve Rogers called "next to no complaints" about compatibility, even though the university's 3,500 student-facing computers remain almost entirely Windows-based for the specialist software that teaching requires.

The LabStats Factor

The bigger shift at Coventry came from pairing AppsAnywhere with LabStats, adopted roughly a year after the return to AppsAnywhere. This gave the IT team hard, continuous evidence of how the estate was being used, and the insights to make better decisions.

Before LabStats, Coventry relied on an in-house tool "built by one person" to understand lab usage, which made LabStats' cloud dashboard an immediate upgrade in both reliability and reach. The first major decision it enabled was closing 13 open-access computer rooms that usage data showed were running well below capacity. Other, more in-demand spaces



such as the university's library were consolidated into better-equipped spaces and investment was there instead of spreading it thinly across ageing machines that few students ever touched.

That same data has been reshaping how faculties contend for space and hardware. Rebecca Carrick mentioned one operations manager in the engineering and computing faculty who kept being told a 60-seat room was fully booked, until LabStats showed a very different picture:

"He's discovering that the students are in the room, but they're actually using their own laptop in front of the computer, so where they're saying they need 60 computers, only 40 are actually being used, and he's taking those 20 out of the room to be repurposed."

That single pattern, repeated across faculties, has let Coventry challenge assumptions that had gone unquestioned for years: "We know machines are sitting at maybe 20% utilization, and you then have to go deeper and ask what it's actually being used for before you decide whether to keep it."

The savings compound well past the hardware itself. Fewer devices in circulation mean fewer licenses for security tooling such as CrowdStrike, which is an indirect but meaningful cost saving that had nothing to do with the original reason the university adopted LabStats.

On the software side, Coventry has used the same visibility to cut its total software catalogue from close to 1,000 packages two years ago to roughly 300 today, weighing every package against actual usage data instead of historical renewal habits to decide what earns a place on the platform going forward. The university has also begun rolling LabStats agents out to its loan laptop fleet, expecting within a month or two to have real usage evidence to weigh against the steady stream of requests to buy and issue more devices.

The team has also identified light-computing usage in specific areas, where machines could be shifted onto lower-cost platforms such as Google ChromeOS Flex, extending hardware life well beyond the fixed refresh cycle the university used to apply automatically, without any additional spend.

Leading a sustainable, evidence-driven IT function

None of this has settled into a finished state, but the team see the roadmap that treats AppsAnywhere and LabStats together, as the foundation for how Coventry’s IT function operates going forward.

Software consolidation continues, with usage data used to justify or eliminate licenses on a rolling basis. Security posture has become a parallel priority: Coventry’s team now checks the latest available release against every renewed license and pushes it forward automatically, replacing the old habit of reissuing whatever version a department had previously held, tied directly to the university’s work toward Cyber Essentials compliance.

With AI making its way into IT operations, Steve Rogers sees the institution moving fast towards identifying and learning patterns, to predicting them and anticipating future needs before they become issues. This is closely aligned with the AppsAnywhere and LabStats roadmap, with optimization insights already available to help institutions maximize device health, keep costs down and increase efficiency and sustainability.

Want to see how AppsAnywhere and LabStats could help your institution simplify software delivery, improve student access, and make better use of labs and licenses? Get in touch to explore what a joined-up approach could look like in your environment.

Find out more at:
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Find out more at:
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Coventry University’s experience is a lesson in agility and courage to undo something that wasn’t working instead of pushing on. Two years spent testing an alternative taught the university what it needed from a platform. It embraced an evidence-informed approach to managing its hardware, software and lab estate with LabStats data and made decisions that continue to reshape budget conversations, faculty negotiations, and hardware refresh cycles across every one of its six campuses.

