The challenge

The University's existing high throughput computing services had been in place for 10 years and it was time for a refresh. The research computing team was keen to consider future expansion requirements, as well as current needs. They wanted a way for the University and individual researchers to quickly buy extra data storage when they need it, without this taking valuable time away from their research. This could also support their funding applications by providing known costs at the start.

What happened?

The team carried out a mini-competition under SUPC's Servers, Storage and Solutions National Agreement. Discussions with suppliers before and during the process helped them to understand the University's specific requirements. This included the need to expand storage in the future. Using the framework meant that all suppliers, including the incumbent, were treated fairly and equally.

Appropriate terms and conditions have already been negotiated by SUPC with framework suppliers. UCL could therefore appoint a supplier without time-consuming and costly legal negotiations. The faster timescale for selection also worked well with the one-year funding model at UCL.

The outcome

Using the framework to appoint a supplier delivered increased storage, better performance and a quick turnaround:

Storage:

- Significantly increased storage capacity from 384 terabytes (TB) under the old system, to 1 petabyte (PB) as part of the initial installation, up to a whopping 3PB as part of the December 2019 upgrade.

Performance:

- Provided a 100-fold increase in performance from 1Gbit to 100Gbit input/output.

Time/money saved:

- Saved time using pre-agreed contract terms
- Conducted a 3-6 month mini-competition
- Achieved a 1-month turn-around for researcher kit.

- A massive expansion of data storage and a significant improvement in performance speed. This means academics and research students can carry out their work in a shorter time.
- A quicker and easier process for buying extra capacity from the contracted supplier if research requires it in the future. This improves the experience for researchers and encourages consistency across the University.
- Access to ongoing system administration and stability (provided by central IT) which researchers would not get when buying their own systems. This saves time and money for UCL research staff when problems do occur.
- Better value for money across the whole life cost of the service.

The research computing team is now using the framework to re-tender for a high performance computer and associated provider; they are repeating the process because they know it works.

We're really happy with what the framework allows us to do and that is why it is our default option for supplier selection and appointment.

OWAIN KENWAY,
UCL, HEAD OF RESEARCH COMPUTING

Meeting researchers' needs for high throughput computing: saving time and increasing capacity

For More Information
e – supc@reading.ac.uk
t – 0118 935 7081

www.supc.ac.uk

SUPC
Southern Universities
Purchasing Consortium