



How the University of Surrey is Using Varonis to Improve Its Incident Response Procedures

CASE STUDY



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SAM WONG,

HEAD OF IT SECURITY, UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

The University of Surrey is a top public research university located in Guildford, Surrey, UK. The university's consistently outstanding teaching, learning, and outcomes for its students, have earned it a TEF Gold rating—the highest quality in the UK.

HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring GDPR compliance
- Protecting sensitive data including research, financial records, and staff and student information
- Eliminating stale and duplicate data before it becomes a problem

SOLUTION

The most robust data security platform:

- **Data Classification Engine** to identify stale data
- **DatAdvantage** for protection & easy forensics in the event of a breach
- Integration with Windows and SharePoint
- Reliable scaling with even the largest IT environments
- Responsive Support
- Room to expand security in the future with the help of **DatAnswers** & **DataPrivilege**

RESULTS

- More robust top-level security & data breach incident procedures
- Increased confidence from senior staff when it comes to cybersecurity
- Identification of stale data allowing for reduced storage costs

Challenges

Protecting sensitive data & staying ahead of GDPR compliance regulations

In 2018, the US government charged nine people with attempting to steal more than \$3 billion in intellectual property from over 300 universities in 22 countries.

According to Sam Wong, Head of IT Security at the University of Surrey, cyberattacks targeting universities are nothing new.



“Universities hold very sensitive data. There’s staff data, employee data and financial data, of course. Most universities are also doing research for clients or for the good of the wider academic community. The technology used is usually bleeding edge, and the data held overlaps with what a corporation might hold in terms of the various sectors it covers,” he says.

Even the University of Surrey had been targeted in the past. So, Sam knew how important it was to put systems in place that would protect their data and ensure GDPR compliance.



“With the incoming GDPR laws, we didn’t have sufficient technologies in-house to be able to detect and react to a breach in a way that would have been compliant,” he says.

He also needed a system that would alert him to potential problems that his team could proactively solve before they became issues.



“We knew we had a lot of stale data and duplicate files, but we didn’t know the extent of the issues,” Sam explains. “We wanted a system that would highlight issues we needed to look into.”



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Solution

A data security platform integrated with SharePoint

Sam did his due diligence when it came to selecting the perfect data security platform for the University of Surrey.



“We did a number of proof of concepts with other companies, but either they couldn’t satisfy our needs or they were too expensive,” he says.

In the end, Varonis was the perfect fit. Sam was impressed by the incredibly robust system and its ability to detect and eliminate potential threats, and by the level of support he received.



“Varonis is second-to-none when it comes to their professionalism, knowledge and reassurance. They helped us understand their product suite, how it would help us stay ahead of GDPR regulations, and how we could use it to meet our business goals,” he says.

“They’re always supportive, willing to offer good advice, and able to teach us how to get the most out of their product.”

Varonis now helps the University of Surrey protect over 2,500 employees with products for Windows and SharePoint, such as **DatAdvantage** and the **Data Classification Engine**.

The platform has already helped Sam and the university as a whole in a number of ways, including:

1. Increased visibility around file access and permissions



“The most important thing is visibility. Varonis allows us to see who has permissions to each folder and where we’re most vulnerable. We didn’t have that visibility before,” Sam explains.

2. Demonstrable proof that the university is doing everything in its power to protect sensitive information



“Varonis also allows us to demonstrate that, yes, our data is secure with top level security controls that go down several levels,” he says.

3. A clear forensic trail to follow in the event of a data breach



“In the event of a data breach, we can see a clear report of who is accessing each folder, what happened to the data, and when it was lost, and we can start following the breadcrumbs. Without Varonis, we wouldn’t have those breadcrumbs in the first place,” he says.

4. Identification of stale data and duplicate files



“We’ve also been able to identify stale data and duplicate files. Varonis highlights potential problems as part of a wider data security and data management program,” he says.

The platform also seamlessly integrated with SharePoint, the web-based collaborative platform they already relied on, which opens up new possibilities for data management in the future.



“At the moment, we use Varonis to identify and report on potential problems. What we want to do next is identify, report, and respond. Varonis has helped us create a roadmap for how we will manage our unstructured data as we move more and more stuff onto SharePoint,” Sam adds.



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Results

More security & improved incident response procedures

It's been less than a year since the University of Surrey adopted Varonis, but Sam and his team are already feeling the effects.



“We are more secure in terms of investigation and forensics,” Sam explains. “Previously, if we’d had a breach, it would have been hard to figure out the extent of the damage. With Varonis, we have a central repository we can look at to understand what’s happened and what to do about it.”

Sam’s been able to use Varonis to develop robust incident response procedures, which in turn has enabled him to prove the value of their countermeasures to senior leaders at the University of Surrey.



“Varonis has helped us develop more thorough data breach incident response procedures. So we’ve both reduced the risk of data breaches and we’re better prepared for the worst-case scenario,” he says. “Being able to highlight the steps we’re taking has allowed us to get more buy-in from senior management.”

The university now has the systems that it needs to protect sensitive data and remain GDPR compliant. Now, Sam is looking to the future—and considering how he can continue using Varonis to proactively reduce the risk of threats and eliminate redundancies.



“When it comes to data management, Varonis has already helped us improve our processes by about 20%. The next step is using that information—the stale and duplicate data they’ve identified—to clean up our files to reduce storage costs,” he says.

Sam is confident that Varonis is the best fit for the University of Surrey—and that it will continue to protect their data for years to come.



“If you value your data, it’s well worth getting Varonis,” he says.



“Varonis has helped us develop more thorough data breach incident response procedures [and] get more buy-in from senior management.”



Protect your data first, not last.

Reduce risk, prevent data breaches and achieve regulatory compliance with the help of Varonis.

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