

# Further education college bounces back from serious ransomware breach with cloud backup.



Exam results day is about as busy as it gets for a college IT department. In the UK, the main dates tend to fall in August, when nervous students await their fate. However, for Myerscough College Director of IT, Ian Brown, a different fate was awaiting when he turned up for work on 20th August 2020, the day when GCSE results were made public in England and Wales.

“A massive cyber-attack had hit us overnight. Of all the infrastructure available to us in the IT team we had one working laptop: no servers, no domain controllers, nothing. It had all been corrupted by the PYSAs ransomware gang,” he explains. “Obviously the first reaction is one of total shock and disbelief.”

Fortunately, Ian had the foresight a year previously to invest in Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup. Within days the college had recovered most of its key infrastructure to the point where it could begin to support staff and students once again without having to engage with the threat actors or paying any ransom.

## Ransomware everywhere

Myerscough College was not alone. But it was unusually well-prepared for the digital onslaught. Just a few days earlier, a ransomware attack on a large college group in nearby Yorkshire had taken five schools offline. The following month, two universities in the city of Newcastle were also hit. Ian reckons the victim count in the north-west alone ran into double digits.

The education sector remains a popular target for digital extortionists. Over two-fifths (44%) of organizations were hit in 2020, with incidents costing on average \$3m each, according

## Profile

- Myerscough College is a further education college in the north-west of England offering academic courses for students aged 14+.
- It was founded in 1894 as the Lancashire County Institute of Agriculture and maintains a focus on land-based, science, engineering and sports education.

## Challenges

- Surging volumes of phishing emails
- Mounting risk of ransomware-related disruption

## Solution

- Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup
- Barracuda Sentinel
- Barracuda Forensics and Incident Response

## Results

- Saved teaching resources and streamlined recovery following ransomware breach
- Eliminated 99% of phishing emails

to [one report](#). Schools, colleges and universities often have scant resources to splash on cybersecurity and disaster recovery. Yet they also store a wealth of lucrative personal and financial information. The advent of the pandemic and remote teaching has also exposed educational institutions to the risk of ransomware outages. In the minds of threat actors, this means they'll be more likely to pay up.

### Up and running

Like many organizations, Myerscough College had been on a journey to improved security and resilience before it was hit. An early adopter of cloud, most of the group's 6,000 staff and students were migrated to Microsoft 365 by 2019. But Ian was rightly concerned that the native backup and email security functionality offered by Microsoft was not sufficient for the school's requirements. A spate of phishing attacks on inboxes provided a timely reminder of the need to add third-party capabilities from a trusted provider. Having been impressed by Barracuda Networks in the past, it was the first choice for Ian.

In the end he chose [Barracuda Sentinel](#) for AI-based inbox protection. This zero-administration tool works silently in the background, intelligently blocking malicious emails and finding threats that gateways can't see—to provide real-time protection against BEC, account takeover and more. Also purchased was [Barracuda Forensics and Incident Response](#)—which is designed to intelligently automate processes in order to slash the time between detection and remediation. Finally, he chose [Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup](#) for simple-to-use cloud native backup. "All three were deployed seamlessly and the college was up and running in just days," says Ian.

### A life saver

Few organizations get to check the capabilities of their new backup product so comprehensively "in the wild," but that's how things ended up playing out for Ian and his team. Fortunately, Barracuda was up to the job.

"It really came into its own because we had a lot of corrupted file servers and storage media. We were able to go back with point-in-time recovery and bring back all of that precious data belonging to my academic colleagues," Ian explains.

"We restored data to the day before the attack. There was a huge sense of relief that we were able to do so. Teachers had invested a lot in preparing materials that were held electronically. The fact we had a backup available in the cloud was more than invaluable—it was a lifesaver," remarks Ian.

Aside from passing muster when the college needed it most, Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup has also been praised by Ian's team for helping the institution fulfil its legal responsibilities by supporting data access requests. As for the email security tools, Ian reckons Sentinel has blocked 99% of phishing attacks, whilst the incident response capabilities have saved his small IT team time and effort in responding to threats.

"The introduction of Sentinel and Forensics and Incident Response killed phishing pretty much stone dead," he explains. "The ability Barracuda has to detect phishing attacks, and for those that do get through to remediate, is excellent. It really has helped us enormously."

Ian has spent much of the intervening period enhancing the resilience of the college's IT infrastructure, including a roll-out of multi-factor authentication to mitigate the kind of brute force attack which led to the ransomware breach. Barracuda stands ready to help the organization in any way it can.

Learn more about  
**Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup,**  
**Barracuda Sentinel and**  
**Barracuda Forensics and Incident Response**

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