Novosco™

Queen's University Belfast expand exchange infrastructure for students to the Office 365 private cloud.

The customer

Queen's University Belfast (QUB) is a public research university with around 25,000 students and is a member of the prestigious Russell Group of leading research intensive universities. The institution also has two associated university colleges and is ranked in the top 200 universities globally.

The challenge

QUB recognised that it wasn't able to provide the storage capacity within its email service to meet the demands of its students. Students therefore supplemented their email by use of other third party solutions. This interfered with the overall communications between students and the organisation and resulted in security concerns.

QUB offered 50MB of storage per account, which was insufficient for the demands of its students. It needed to offer:

- Exceptionally large mailbox limits
- Simple configuration for mobile devices
- Maximum accessibility
- An 'account-for-life'

The University faced exponential growth on its Exchange servers with a yearly increase of some 6,000 users. The IT department faced the continual challenge of keeping up with resource requirements. QUB required a solution that was simple in its scalability and wasn't prone to overwhelming the infrastructure when faced with a rapid and heavy load increase.

Overview

Challenges
- Providing a modern, fit-for-purpose email solution
- Reduce strain on IT dept.
- Ensure scalability

Solution
- Microsoft Office 365
- Microsoft Threat Management Gateway
- Kemp Load Balancers

Results
- Increased mailbox capacity
- Single email domain for the life of the user
- Remove strain on IT dept. when scaling up
- Reduced load on physical infrastructure
- Ease of use across devices and platforms

Benefits
- Significantly reduced expenditure on hardware
- Permanently open means of communication with alumni
- Reduction of user need for shadow IT
- Enhanced security and protection of University proprietary IP
- Simplified future expansion

The solution

Providing QUB's Exchange users with an increased mailbox was the first priority in this planned cloud migration. Alongside the need for capacity-on-demand, this made Microsoft Office 365 the best-fit solution.

As the vast majority of QUB domain users are students, migrating these accounts to the Cloud removes a significant drain on the resources and time of the organisation's IT department. Bringing in Novosco further ensures that the configuration and migration is handled expertly, efficiently, and without placing unnecessary additional demands on the internal IT staff.

QUB was an early adopter of Office 365. Having Novosco engineers architect a site-specific solution within the platform allowed for the initial challenges to be met and the migration to be carried out seamlessly, and without disrupting the University systems at large. This was a large and complex hybrid messaging environment incorporating Exchange 2007, Exchange 2010 and Exchange Online (Office 365).

QUB required a universal login/logout landing page, regardless of final mailbox destination. This was facilitated by custom-portal development, incorporating authentication redirection and logout redirection. The Office 365 custom-configured solution allows users to keep the same email address and domain 'for life'.

Business results & benefits

When it comes to a new student intake, the IT department no longer has to bolster its physical infrastructure with extra hardware. Microsoft Office 365 handles the bulk of the capacity provision for QUB, and what was once a costly and technical procedure is now an administrative one. Much of QUB's network was already based on the Microsoft stack. The Office 365 cloud solution therefore fits perfectly into the University's overall IT strategy and staff are familiar with it from a maintenance perspective.

There was previously a constant burden on the IT department. The use of shadow IT brought into question the security of the data and resulted in potentially valuable QUB IP being sent through untrusted third party systems. The deployed Office 365 solution has helped avoid such problems.

"Throughout my 11 years in Queen's University, the Novosco team have been an integral part of the IT Systems and Services Division here at Queen's. They play a critical role in many projects, often from their initial concept, through design and deployment and then, critically, throughout the operational support phase. Their core values of Excellence, Fun, Respect, and Teamwork really do come to the fore in all our interactions, at all levels and roles. They truly are seen as an extended part of my team."

Jim Cunningham, Assistant Director (Information Services), Queen's University Belfast