Leeds Trinity University
Increasing accessibility and adding value with eduroam

While Leeds Trinity University is relatively small, with one campus, 400 staff and around 3000 students, it’s definitely proof that bigger doesn’t always mean better. The university specialises in subjects including education, sports, psychology and media. Its graduates are the most employable in Leeds and Yorkshire as a whole. They’re in the top 25% of all UK universities for employability, with 94% of graduates in work or further study, according to the latest figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Matthew Collins, IT Infrastructure Specialist – Networking and Security, recently led the successful implementation of eduroam. “I’ve been here for around nine months in a role that focuses on developing our infrastructure and security services, which are the backbone of the network,” he explains. “When I joined, eduroam was already part of the university’s development plan and emerging information strategy. Working as part of the I.T. services team I was able to move it forward.”

An inconsistent experience

Partial wireless coverage and ‘hotspots’ of availability were just some of the restrictions of the service they’d had in place for the previous few years. “We had a mixed bag of wireless networks,” says Matthew. “We had three or four, some of which were obvious and some were confusing. Overall there was no consistent experience for the end user.

“We had to use different networks for different devices, and there was no way we could accommodate any visiting academics without having to set up different accounts, and this was the same for any staff going to other institutions. There was a lot of end-user involvement, when it came to getting connected, and it wasn’t as streamlined as we would have like it to be.”
A seamless solution

By moving to eduroam, the university now benefits from a seamless wireless connection across the entire campus, and other sites.

"We wanted everyone to be able to connect to the network easily," explains Matthew. "And we needed a mobile solution for students and staff when they weren’t on campus. eduroam has worked so well, alongside projects we were simultaneously running. We were looking at a new wireless solution across the whole site, so we wanted to package these things together and make it all really add value for the students."

Matthew says research was the key to the smooth – and speedy – deployment of eduroam across the university.

"The first part of the process was to really research eduroam as a ‘product’. I did this by looking at various documents on the eduroam(UK) community website and talking to other institutions, to find out their eduroam ‘story’, get an insight into how they managed their project, and how they dealt with any issues or challenges they faced."

A smooth transition

Through talking to other universities, Matthew found that, like Leeds Trinity, many already had the foundations of a solution in place.

He says: "Most had some element of an existing solution to build on, rather than starting from scratch. We used Microsoft’s NPS radius solution, so we could easily build on that and found it easy to configure for eduroam, as it was an extension of what we were already doing.

"We treated the move like any other project: we did research, had an implementation plan and ran user testing. We had the technology skills to do this in-house, as it’s really not that complicated. But I would advise anyone making the move to find another institution that uses a similar technology platform as they do, and use it as a resource. We found another local university who used a similar Microsoft infrastructure to us, and we got help from them when setting it up."
A host of benefits

The university sees eduroam as a great platform for delivering other services. “We’ve used it to add value to our students in many ways, like the use of Apple TV, for example,” says Matthew. “It’s also a good marketing tool as prospective students are interested in the connectivity they’re going to have”.

“We have plans to expand our campus, so it will allow us to provide more services, like unified communications, including video conferencing. It will also be easy to extend the network without an expensive redesign.”

Since implementation, the feedback from staff and students has been extremely positive. So, what tips would Matthew have for other institutions thinking of deploying eduroam?

“Be thorough in your testing. We tested every device we possibly could. Find out what students are using and consider all the different versions and brands. And do some marketing! We invested a lot of time in creating events around eduroam, in a way our end users would understand – we used pop-up support stands and created an Apple store like environment, where students could come and get connected. These are all things that made it such a smooth – and welcomed – transition for us.”