Case study: Dual-sector university-college group embrace eduroam for wi-fi access

What was the challenge?
The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) was formed in 2010 through the merger of the University of Wales Lampeter and Trinity University College Carmarthen. In 2013, Swansea Metropolitan University became part of UWTSD.

The UWTSD Group includes Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion as part of a dual sector group structure comprising further education colleges and the university. The UWTSD Group has over 25,000 learners across 17 campuses in rural and city locations.

Each of the individual institutions had their own wireless internet arrangements before the merger. There were several key challenges associated with retaining their current wireless systems:

» Managing the various students’ devices and visitors was becoming an onerous task and created security concerns. They could also foresee even further usage as a result of the merger as well as the increasing number of mobile devices amongst staff and students

» The number of users and devices utilising wireless had massively increased; at one institution in the group Coleg Sir Gâr, for example, had 285 unique users in 2013, with 42 roaming and 20 visitors; the whole institution now has over 1200 unique users

» There were multiple solutions across the group for wi-fi access including eduroam

How did we solve it?
Following the merger, UWTSD chose eduroam as the preferred Wi-Fi access solution. All campuses have now deployed eduroam, provided by Jisc. Other wi-fi access solutions have been phased out in favour of eduroam. From the group sites across south west Wales, students and staff could now use eduroam, as well as at sites of nearby universities and colleges.
What were the benefits to teaching, learning and assessment?

Firstly, students and staff benefit from a single log-in as they move between campuses, which means they use a single username and password for wi-fi access and seamlessly gain access from other eduroam enabled locations. eduroam works whether they’re using a mobile, laptop or other device, and it gives them access not just to the internet but also the teaching and learning resources they need, all with a secure connection.

Even when international students arrive with their own accounts authenticated by their home institution, they can get straight on to the Wi-Fi network and start communicating with home straight away. Deploying eduroam also means that when students and staff from UWTSD visit other institutions around the UK and the world, they get all the same benefits of seamless access for teaching, learning and research.

What were the benefits to business efficiency, and other savings?

eduroam was the obvious choice because UWTSD group could continue to offer a single solution across multiple infrastructures and sites. They could improve their user experience by broadcasting fewer wireless networks, which also improved the performance of the wi-fi infrastructure. Deployment of eduroam has made the behind-the-scenes IT processes at UWTSD much simpler, saving staff time and money. It makes it much easier for the institutions in the group to support their users. They are able to offer better simpler instructions, for instance, about how to join eduroam, as well as using Jisc’s online resources. It also provides benefits in dealing with inappropriate internet usage and security incidents; if the UWTSD need to trace a specific action then they can easily hone in on the specific user, which leads to a quicker response and full accountability for users’ internet usage.

For the colleges in the group, they can also provide different levels of access to differently aged students at quite a granular level, without having to re-engineer the whole network. By using open source vendor agnostic software for management and by re-using the existing wi-fi infrastructure to provide the eduroam service, UWTSD have avoided additional costs.

How did Jisc add value to this work?

Jisc provide eduroam in the UK and ensure that organisations are kept abreast of recent developments. UWTSD group have received training, advise, guidance and consultancy from Jisc enabling them to successfully deploy and manage eduroam.

People expect Wi-Fi everywhere so Jisc’s service means that UWTSD can now respond to what their students and staff are demanding. Having the option to utilise Jisc’s back-end support for eduroam from Jisc allows UWTSD to concentrate on providing an excellent student experience.