“Jisc - it just works. It’s there for us. You haven’t got to think about it. You know it’s going to be reliable.”

Tim Blake
Head of IT, Strode College

Strode College’s Jisc subscription for 2018/19 will be £5,926 plus VAT, 87% of which (£5,144) covers connection to the high-speed Janet Network and cyber security.

In a study by an independent consultant, the cost of these key services would rise by more than 200% if Strode chose one of the two alternative suppliers considered for comparison. In both cases the service would offer less and be poorer value.
We need technology and connectivity to do that. Even in the eight or so years I’ve been here I’ve seen how technology has transformed teaching and learning. The idea that a lecturer could come in and run a class without using technology, without accessing resources from the web, whether it’s video or research material – it’s unthinkable. It would cause chaos very quickly. The connectivity can’t fail. If it fails, we fail.

I trust Jisc absolutely. Working with a not for profit organisation that is built on the ethos of education, focused on research and education delivery, you just have absolute faith in their ability to do the right thing. Reliability is absolutely vital. With Jisc we simply don’t have the problems you hear of with commercial providers, whether data loss, connectivity issues or takeovers. There has just been constant, reliable good service.

We know that there are cyber security risks - every day of the week there is something new out there – but we also know that when there are issues, Jisc and its technologists are on the case really quickly, protecting us and other institutions. I don’t think anybody could improve on that. Jisc understands education and the threats that can come within education. That’s a special area. You can go to a commercial provider and they’ll probably say that we’re no different to a commercial company but, actually, we are.

That means that community is so important. Because in FE we’re not competitors. We’re all out there trying to do the same type of work with different customers because we’re in different regions. We need to share our knowledge and experiences. Why reinvent the wheel?

FE is also different to HE and in some ways FE is more challenging technology-wise because we have a lot more in the way of duty of care. We do more filtering – what an 18 year old can see on the internet is different to what we can allow a 16 or 17 year old to access. Monitoring and managing firewalls effectively is critical to us surviving. The challenges are huge, with much, much less in the way of resources.

I’m Tim Blake, head of IT at Strode College. We’re an FE college in rural Somerset and we cover the entire range of education with our learners, from A levels, vocational and university courses to apprenticeships and adult education.