Roaming and security: what eduroam means to two colleges in Kent

These two further education (FE) colleges are in the same county, but make the most of eduroam in different ways. Here’s what their IT directors make of what eduroam can do

In east Kent, eduroam improves multi-site roaming
Formed in 2018 from the merger between East Kent College and Canterbury College, EKC Group is a multi-site FE college group with some 12,000 students who learn at one of its family of five colleges, or five additional satellite sites.

Barry Boden, director of technology at the group, saw a clear benefit to a wireless roaming solution which was not only auditable, but would also allow staff and students to connect seamlessly, whichever site they were at.

"Before the merger, Canterbury College had eduroam, but East Kent didn’t," explains Barry. “So we evaluated it – and compared to creating a network access control system ourselves, which would be limited to our own sites, it made sense to go with eduroam because it’s an international roaming standard.

This means that staff and students can use eduroam to connect seamlessly to eduroam-enabled sites not only in the UK, but also in 101 territories abroad.

In practice, the main benefit is cross-college roaming in east Kent. For example, putting eduroam in place in advance of the merger meant that staff at the former East Kent College could roam wirelessly even as the merger was in progress, using eduroam’s seamless ‘single sign-on’ functionality.

For EKC Group students, meanwhile, eduroam widens the scope of places they can connect – especially as eduroam is also available at public-sector sites across Kent such as libraries. "We’re trying to encourage users to feel confident using their own devices to learn outside the classroom," says Barry.

“And of course, now we’re on it, we want as many other institutions as possible to have eduroam – so that staff can work at those locations without issues as well.”

At MidKent College, eduroam improves security compliance
For MidKent College, which has about 4,500 students, the initial benefit of eduroam has been to improve the security of the college’s ‘bring your own device’ (BYOD) network – primarily for reasons of compliance.

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Paul Hogben, director of ICT, EKC Group
"It’s an Ofsted requirement to be able to effectively protect and monitor traffic on the network," says Paul Hogben, director of ICT at the college. Before eduroam, the college had a non-authenticated BYOD environment, and anyone with a Wi-Fi-enabled device could connect.

Because MidKent College already had Jisc membership and a Janet Network connection, using Jisc’s eduroam service to address the issue was a "no-brainer", says Paul.

"Spinning up eduroam in-house wouldn’t have been a problem, but we paid for a small amount of consultancy – so Jisc could work with us on how we were going to make most effective use of it.

"We have two sites, and Jisc helped us configure the network in a way that uses resources efficiently, but still with the redundancy we need.

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The end result was a wireless BYOD infrastructure that gives the college "identifiable oversight" when someone with a college account connects using a BYOD device – and which also ties in with next-generation firewalls and URL filtering.

"We can now understand the data footprint of people who connect within the college,” says Paul. “This is helpful with safeguarding and Prevent duties, so we can ensure correct policies and procedures are in place, and carry out a formal investigation if we need to.”

MidKent College has also seen efficiency benefits from eduroam, including the ability to host events for other Kent colleges without having to provide an additional guest network.

"If delegates already use eduroam at their home organisations, we can say with some confidence that they will be able to ‘just connect’ to our eduroam network."

In addition to seamless connectivity, the improved security of eduroam also helps with Cyber Essentials certification.

"We wouldn’t have been able to get that if we had an open-access network," adds Paul. “But because we put that time in and worked with Jisc, we’re on our way to a much higher level of security compliance.”

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To find out more about Jisc’s eduroam, please:

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