

University of the West of England

Oxford Computer Group's POC demonstrates the added value of Microsoft Intelligent Application Gateway to The University of the West of England

Customer Profile:

The University of the West of England (UWE) is one of Britain's most popular universities. It has more than 30,000 students and employs at least 3,000 staff.

Business Problem:

UWE was experiencing limitations with its current remote access platform. It wanted to test the functionality of Microsoft's Intelligent Application Gateway to discover whether the new product would offer an improved secure remote access service to users and administrators.

Solution:

A Proof of Concept based on Microsoft Intelligent Application Gateway.

Benefits:

- Improved administration
- Improved security
- Enhanced user experience
- Notable cost savings
- Extensible solution

Client Background

Operating from four campuses in and around Bristol, The University of the West of England (UWE) is the largest provider of higher education in the South West. Students come to the university from all parts of the UK, as well as a significant and growing number of international students from over 50 countries worldwide.

UWE was founded in 1595. Today the university enjoys a well deserved reputation for excellence in learning and teaching. It was ranked fifth in England out of 83 Higher Education institutions in the latest Teaching Quality Assessment league table published in the Times Higher Educational Supplement.

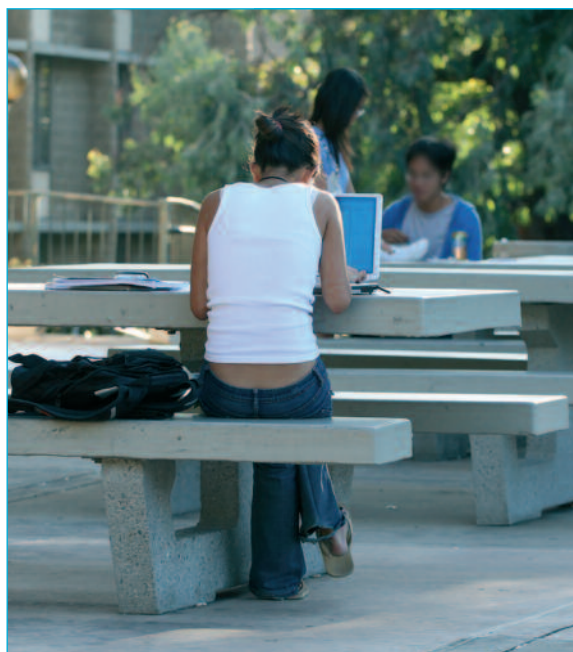
The Business Problem

Like all higher education institutions UWE is competing in a pressurized global market. The university has an excellent and well deserved reputation for the quality of its teaching approach and its pre-eminence in the field of knowledge exchange. Like all universities, UWE is constantly looking for innovative ways to improve its offering and enhance its student experience.

In 2004 the university introduced its first SSL VPN (secure socket layer virtual private network) security platform to serve its remote access needs. With the university's learning experience increasingly including elements away from a classroom environment and remote access becoming increasingly important to staff and students, the IT department wanted to provide a secure solution that would offer its users the flexibility to access university applications from remote devices and locations.

The university was aware that since implementing its current SSL VPN, the market had progressed and more sophisticated solutions were available. Oxford Computer Group (OCG) has worked with UWE on a number of projects and is a valued and trusted partner. OCG was aware that UWE was experiencing challenges with its current access gateway and introduced it to the advanced functionality of Microsoft's Intelligent Application Gateway (IAG).

Alistair Sandford, Senior Project Manager UWE says, *"Our current gateway has a number of limitations. We are experiencing specific problems providing remote access to the increasing numbers of students with Apple Macs. Similarly, some students use open source operating systems which aren't directly compatible. Our current system has different rules for different platforms and this requires excessive administration. At the same time, when users struggle to gain remote access this has a direct impact on our IT helpdesk. The system is becoming increasingly hard to support and we were very interested in the opportunity to test the Microsoft product."*



The Solution

To demonstrate the potential benefits and operational value of IAG, OCG conducted a Proof of Concept (POC). A POC enables a client to test new technology in their own environment. It offers an ideal opportunity to fully understand the features and functionality of the technology and to explore its value before committing to any significant investment.

Neil Coughlan, Managing Director, OCG commented, *“We’re conducting an increasing number of POCs. They provide the opportunity to ‘try before you buy’ which offers significant advantages. New clients can experience working with us and test the technology at the same time. A POC can also help identify any requirements that need to be fulfilled before a solution is fully deployed. This can save a great deal of time and money and help focus the implementation.”*

UWE’s POC was delivered in 3 days, after which UWE was given a further 30 days to fully test and explore the IAG platform. OCG is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and widely recognized within the Microsoft community as experts in the field of identity and access management. Its consultants worked with UWE’s IT team to set up the test environment and demonstrate the traits of IAG that would overcome the challenges they were experiencing with their current gateway.

IAG is a remote access gateway that uses a combination of SSL VPN, a Web application firewall and endpoint security management. It enables administrators to enforce compliance with application and information usage guidelines through customized remote access policy based on device, user, application or other business criteria. As a result, mobile and remote workers enjoy easy, flexible and secure access from a broad range of devices and locations.

Alistair Sandford says, *“We’d been aware of Microsoft IAG, but we were not fully aware of its capabilities. The POC enabled us to physically test the platform. It provided a very real experience that you just don’t get by simply reading the product’s marketing collateral.”*

Over the course of the trial, UWE’s IT administrators were able to investigate the opportunities that IAG’s advanced functionality provides. OCG’s consultants were on hand to offer advice and guidance, and to resolve their customization queries.

Darren Bonehill, Senior Consultant, OCG commented, *“OCG is in a unique position - not only are we one of only a few practices in the UK that fully understand IAG, but we’re experts in identity management. This enables us to maximize the potential of IAG whilst being aware of the identity impacts. We can therefore combine the advantages of access control and identity management to meet the client’s needs.”*

Alistair Sandford added, *“OCG is a trusted partner and we enjoy an excellent working relationship with them. As always they conducted themselves with professionalism and openness and made the POC a very painless experience. Their ability to understand our challenges, combined with their understanding of the product, their holistic view of the identity and access arena and their integration expertise guaranteed our ability to optimize the opportunity to test IAG to its full potential.”*

The Benefits

Improved administration

The POC provided UWE’s administrators with ample opportunity to test IAG’s functionality. The technical staff were soon testing other applications through the IAG appliance that were not part of the original POC scope. This proved its extensive functionality and ease of use, as well as the potential for expanding UWE’s remote access capabilities for staff and students.

Alistair Sandford says, *“The team looking after our current system immediately saw the benefits of IAG. The ease of use gave them new ideas for enhancing our remote access infrastructure with functionality that is not possible with our current system. To me that speaks volumes. IAG is very intuitive. It really does make life very easy.”*





Improved security

IAG enables UWE's administrators to enforce compliance with its application and information usage guidelines through a customized remote access policy based on device, user, application or other criteria as specified by UWE.

Not only does IAG keep malicious traffic out, it also keeps sensitive information in. Its Attachment Wiper functionality mitigates the risk of information leakage. It ensures that any documents left behind on unmanaged machines are scrubbed during session termination or timeout. UWE can therefore be confident that its files and data remain secure at all times. It also enables UWE's administrators to set policies to ensure that sensitive documents and attachments are not shared with environments that cannot be trusted to scrub correctly.

Enhanced user experience

IAG provides a seamless and flexible user experience. Its built-in portal and functionality can be easily integrated into enterprise solutions such as SharePoint, SAP and Websphere. This enables it to detect which platform a user is on and automatically install correctly.

Should errors occur at any time, IAG enables administrators to customize error messages. For example, should a device fail to meet UWE's end-point policy check, the error message can be configured to specify what the problem is and can even include a link to UWE's preferred anti-virus software. This makes life significantly easier for the user and reduces calls to UWE's helpdesk.

Alistair Sandford says, *"UWE increasingly wants to provide services to people studying from home. It's part of the move towards lifelong learning which is becoming increasingly important within the education sector. As we move away from chalk and talk to distance learning and working remotely, providing secure access to services and applications is going to become more and more important. IAG will certainly enable us to achieve this and it will make life easier for users and administrators alike."*

Extensible solution

Because IAG has an extensible policy engine it enables the client to create and deploy new, self-made policies using their own coding and script languages. It therefore delivers a highly scalable and versatile solution that can be customized to meet UWE's needs in the future.

UWE – Future Proofing Remote Access

Alistair Sandford, UWE concludes, *"We were very impressed with the IAG platform and feel confident that it will provide a remote access solution that will meet our current and future business needs. With their knowledge of the technology and expertise in the identity and access arena, OCG is certainly an ideal partner to assist with the planned deployment. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend them."*



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About Oxford Computer Group

Oxford Computer Group (OCG) is an IT service company that specializes in identity and access management. With worldwide operations OCG has an enviable repository of expertise, solution components and training courses. OCG has deployed 400+ enterprise-wide identity and access solutions and our instructors have trained over 4000 people on Microsoft IDA technologies. We understand identity and access management – benefit from our experience and capability.

Worldwide operations in North America, United Kingdom, Germany and BeNeLux.