

## Outsourcing Email and Data Storage Implications and opportunities

Briefing Paper

December 2008

This briefing paper was produced in association with the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) and Universities UK



**The provision of e-mail and data storage to students and staff within further (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions has long been a core part of an institution's IT strategy.**

In 2007, following success in the US, both Microsoft and Google started actively courting the HE sector to provide outsourcing of systems and free services such as Hotmail (now Windows Live) or Google Mail. These free services often have a variety of features and capacity that institutional services cannot hope to easily match. As a result, many students and staff are voting with their feet, ignoring their institutionally provided e-mail address and using these services.

Many institutions feel that they cannot provide an equivalent service themselves but what are the implications of outsourcing them?

Many institutions believe that they can't compete and are either outsourcing e-mail already or in the process of developing and implementing an outsourced solution.

Other institutions have investigated the potential of outsourcing but for various institutional reasons they have decided not to outsource.

There are some key issues that an institution needs to consider if they intend to outsource e-mail and data storage.

### Student Experience

Many of the free services provide much more for the user than institutions are currently able to provide resulting in a further enhanced and enriched experience.

### Student and Staff Emails

#### Costs

These services are provided to students for free and the institution generally only needs to consider setup and support costs. However institutions should think carefully about the hidden costs such as service down time that is out of their hands and ensuring that legal issues are covered in setup.

#### Beta services

One common theme across many Web 2.0 services is that the services are in what is referred to as 'perpetual beta'. What this means is that the service will not (and has not been designed to) leave the development stage.

Many of the institutions who have outsourced their e-mail services were confident in the provision of the service despite the beta status, though others have experienced problems supporting their users through frequent changes to functionality, user interfaces and availability.

### Legal and Accountability Issues

#### Contractual

When using a 'free' service, such as third party email, institutions should consider the contract they have with the third party to ensure continuity of service, legal obligations and privacy. The contract should also cover service issues such as provision of user information, security (eg anti-spam

#### Disclaimer

This paper is for information only. No particular proprietary product or service is recommended. Reference to named products and services is for illustration only. Other products and services exist. Every institution's circumstances are different and specific advice and guidance should be sought before implementing any project.

## What is outsourcing e-mail and data storage?

Outsourcing e-mail to a free service results in the institution no longer providing or hosting an e-mail service.

Depending on the service chosen and how it is configured, an outsourced service may allow students to:

- have an e-mail account with an .ac.uk address
- retain that e-mail account beyond graduation (sometimes referred to as 'e-mail for life')
- be allocated storage for e-mail and files which is measured in GB rather than MB

- be able to access calendaring services
- work through collaborative tools with other students with these services accessible through a web interface, a mobile interface or through a traditional software office based application

Some services, such as those provided by Google, also provide access to online office applications, blogging services and photo hosting within a single account.

These services are provided to the students for free and the institution generally only needs to consider setup and support costs.



and anti-virus) measures, advertisements, the ability to suspend problem accounts, to obtain logs of mail delivery or use, and to resolve any blacklisting of mail domains or servers. An institution also needs to consider lock-in, both explicit and implicit, for example, whether there is any provision to transfer stored information to another provider and the period of notice required by either party.

### Privacy and confidentiality

For many institutions a critical question to resolve is whether they are going to outsource all their email or just email for students. If an institution is considering outsourcing staff e-mail there may be additional privacy and confidentiality issues (eg under the Data Protection Act 1998) and information management duties (eg under the Freedom of Information Act 2000). Email and data storage services such as Google, Windows Live and others rely on using servers across the world to ensure resilience and robustness. However these third party providers may not be able to guarantee that the data would be held on UK or EU servers and will not become subject to a foreign country's jurisdiction. Under the Data Protection Act, if personal data is being moved outside the European Economic Area then

additional provisions must be included in the contract. It may also prove necessary to inform every user 'affected by the change of what is being proposed. Institutions also need to consider whether outsourced storage is compatible with their records management requirements.

### Liability

Institutions should also ensure that safeguards are in place to reduce or eliminate the institution's liability from possible misuse of the email by a student.

### Procurement

All institutions have procurement processes which need to be followed and adhered to. These processes are often geared towards the procurement of a service for which the institution will pay, leading to a need to rethink established processes when faced with procuring a 'free' service.

## Technical Integration

Institutions will need to decide if they want to integrate outsourced services fully with other institutional systems, or keep them separate. This will depend on the level of integration already in place, the skill levels of staff required to undertake the work and the extent to which the organisation is prepared to give the outsourced provider access to its internal systems.

## Further Information

JISC and UCISA have prepared a number of case studies from UK institutions to explore outsourcing issues further and in greater depth. These are now available at: [www.ucisa.ac.uk/members/activities/outsource](http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/members/activities/outsource)

O'Reilly, Tim, 2005. What Is Web 2.0: 4. End of the Software Release Cycle  
[www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html](http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html)

JISC Legal carry useful information about the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act in relation to Web 2.0  
[www.jisclegal.ac.uk/Web2](http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/Web2)