

## University Streamlines Course Offerings with Online Meetings

Buckinghamshire New University uses web meeting applications to maximize resources and reduce carbon emissions.

### Executive Summary

**Customer Name:**

Buckinghamshire New University

**Industry:**

Education

**Location:**

Buckinghamshire, England

**Number of Employees:**

872

**Challenge:**

- Deliver improved learning experience to new campus without increasing resources
- Reduce reliance on services traditionally delivered on campus without sacrificing educational quality

**Solution:**

- Provide comprehensive, reliable, secure suite of real-time web collaboration services
- Scale to meet demand both for web-based staff meetings and large-scale online seminars
- Integrate web meeting applications with existing communications infrastructure

**Results:**

- Offer students greater convenience in attending and reviewing lectures
- Enable employees from different campuses to meet online quickly and easily
- Reduce university's dependence on travel, minimising its carbon footprint

### Challenge

Buckinghamshire New University is the only publicly funded higher education institution in Buckinghamshire, England. The university has about 6000 full-time students and over 300 academic employees, with around 500 professional service employees.

In 2008, the university underwent significant changes, transforming its physical base from three campuses to one major campus and a new separate campus. This new campus would only provide lectures for a maximum of approximately 80 students at a time, so the university needed to rethink its method of lecture delivery. The university also wanted to help ensure that everyone at the new campus would be able to communicate easily with colleagues on the main campus, thus reducing the need for travel.

"The logistics of holding traditional face-to-face lectures can be extremely challenging," says Steve Hoole, system developer at Buckinghamshire New University. "We wanted to see if it would be possible to replace physical lectures with an online alternative. That's when we started looking at Cisco WebEx."

### Solution

Buckinghamshire New University considered several online meeting tools, including Adobe Acrobat Connect. But only Cisco WebEx Enterprise Edition™ offered a comprehensive, reliable, secure suite of real-time web collaboration services that the university could use for web-based staff meetings and large-scale online seminars. "With WebEx, we could scale our online classrooms to accommodate 10 students or 200," says Hoole. "We simply didn't have that kind of flexibility before."

A major factor in the decision was the university's preexisting relationship with Cisco. Cisco® technology helps Buckinghamshire New University students and staff communicate with voice, data, and video across a secure, unified network. "Our communications infrastructure is from Cisco, so it made sense to integrate our web conferencing system with our existing tools," says Hoole. "As a result, we're able to rely on a single technology provider for a whole range of communication and collaboration activities."

## Results

Cisco WebEx technology helps Buckinghamshire New University maximize its resources. Students still get face-to-face time with teachers during seminars, but are able to attend online lectures at their convenience. Meanwhile, academics can dedicate more time to guiding students in small-group environments. “We’ve found that using interactive, online delivery really improves the learning experience for students,” says Hoole. “The online environment presents fewer distractions and lends itself to a more streamlined presentation of content. Both students and faculty have greater flexibility without compromising the quality of the university’s educational offerings. We’ve had very positive feedback from both sides.”

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— Steve Hoole, system developer, Buckinghamshire New University

Recorded lectures serve as an excellent revision aid, because students can repeat relevant sections again and again to maximize learning. From the lecturer’s perspective, the new system encourages teachers to offer lectures in manageable chunks, knowing that students may struggle to concentrate on a computer screen for long periods of time. Teachers can also annotate students’ essays online and provide detailed commentary more efficiently than before.

By using WebEx applications to hold internal meetings between campuses, Buckinghamshire New University can reduce its carbon footprint. “We have a green travel plan in place to encourage staff and students to consider the environmental implications of their travel,” says Hoole. “WebEx fits nicely into our green initiative, because it gives everyone the ability to work from home without missing out on vital meetings.”

The university’s staff continues to find new and innovative ways to deploy WebEx technology. For instance, the admissions committee even allows prospective students to be interviewed online rather than in person. “Students often have to travel a long way for their university interviews, and sometimes that isn’t very practical,” says Hoole. “For example, we have the opportunity to interview students via WebEx, saving them significant time and money.”

The university is committed to a positive student experience, and the adoption of innovative technology like WebEx will enhance teaching and learning. “We are always striving to find ways to improve the learning experience,” says Derek Godfrey, deputy vice chancellor at Buckinghamshire New University. “We’re always looking for innovative ways to give our students the best education possible.”

### Next Steps

Considering Buckinghamshire New University's success with WebEx applications, it's no surprise that the university plans to expand its use of online meeting technology. "We consider this to be a long-term investment," says Hoole. "Now that so many employees and students have seen the benefits of this technology, they're going to help us discover more and more ways to make the most of it."

### For More Information

To find out more about Cisco WebEx, go to <http://www.cisco.com/web/products/webex/index.html>.

### Product List

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