In The Cloud

Cloud computing has transformed the delivery of web based services across the education sector and it has the potential to improve the quality of education services for all students. It is set to fundamentally change how every school, college and university will manage their technology and their ICT service delivery models. Improvements in cloud based services are enabling educational establishments to offer a richer and broader range of web based services to their students. The cloud based platforms that enable students to access day-to-day applications will change the business model for many education institutions and will throw into question how they finance and manage their ICT services and more importantly how they perceive the role, function, and purpose of their ICT paradigms. Overall trends show that schools, colleges and universities are gradually moving away from managing and hosting their own stand-alone services. To that end, we will see a growing momentum towards cloud based services that will enable an overall improvement in the way students access web based services.

Schools, colleges and universities have some way to go before they can begin to leverage their resources to enable wider and more equitable access to online services and resources. Nevertheless, the growing popularity of cloud based services will gradually eliminate the current divisions that exist between educational institutions and the students that they serve. Furthermore, it provides for an affordable and scalable model and it provides some financial relief for those schools, colleges and universities who face constraints on their education budgets.

The range and breadth of cloud based services for the education sector continues to grow and improve. Companies who offer cloud based services to the education sector typically include the following services within their portfolios; infrastructure as a service, platform as a service and software as a service. These services have been designed to be delivered over the web and educational institutions will need to ensure that they have the required bandwidth to enable them to provide these new and emerging services.

The lack of awareness of cloud based services, the inertia of education institutions to move away from traditional capital funding and expenditure models, reservations about moving core services to remotely held data centres, the reliance on a single web channel to deliver education services, structural weaknesses in national broadband networks and the difficulties associated with moving from one cloud based provider to another are all factors that constitute major barriers that prevent schools, colleges and universities from connecting to cloud based services.

Cloud Based Services

Companies that provide cloud computing offer three service strands:

Infrastructure as a Service
Enables access to physical or virtual servers and storage space in remote data centres.

Platform as a Service
Provides the infrastructure needed to run applications over the internet.

Software as a Service
Enables the delivery of applications over the internet.

These service strands enable schools, colleges and universities to move towards a web based service model.

We are at a crossroads. In the UK, schools have typically relied on outside agencies or intermediaries such as regional broadband consortiums to add value to their broadband service contracts. The growing affordability of 1Gbps high speed broadband services and the advent of cloud based solutions have enabled schools to step away from their traditional partners.

The rise of cloud computing means that individual schools, colleges and universities need to ready themselves for major structural changes in the way they manage their ICT estates and service portfolios. The education sector is in a period of rapid technological change that will bring about a new ICT service paradigm. The new paradigm will enable staff and students to access services across multiple platforms and that platform will be notably mobile. If the education sector is able to   embrace the power of cloud computing we will come closer to realising ubiquitous learning through the web.

For Further Information
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