

College group consolidates eight hybrid IT environments.

Quest®

NCG successfully consolidated 8 hybrid AD environments with nearly 3,000 users in just over 12 months using Quest migration solutions.

NCG

Country: **United Kingdom**

Employees: **2,500 staff and over 25,000 learners**

Industry: **Education**

Website: www.ncgrp.co.uk

Mergers and acquisitions are a powerful opportunity for companies and non-profits alike to enjoy economies of scale, increased market share, access to talent and more. But reaping those benefits depends a good deal on actually unifying the separate entities in the M&A — especially their IT environments. For the comprehensive migration solutions it needed to truly unite its seven member colleges and professional services teams, NCG turned to Quest.

NCG is one of the UK's leading college groups, with 2,500 staff members who support over 25,000 learners and thousands of businesses every year. The organization has seven colleges across the UK that offer a wide variety of courses, from foundational level to Masters degrees. NCG's mission is to "enable social mobility and economic prosperity through exceptional education."

About this case study

To better serve both students and staff, NCG needed to consolidate its eight separate hybrid Active Directory environments.

Solution

With Quest migration and auditing solutions, NCG's IT team completed the project in just over 12 months, successfully migrating nearly 3,000 users, thousands of devices, and a variety of Office 365 workloads, including Exchange, OneDrive, SharePoint and Teams.

Benefits

- Enabled consolidation of eight hybrid AD environments with nearly 3,000 users in just over 12 months
- Ensured easy migration management and control, even with IT teams working from home
- Provided auditing and rollback for effective domain setup and troubleshooting of user lockouts
- Delivered a unified IT environment that reduces IT overhead while enabling better support of students and staff

Solutions at a glance

- [Microsoft Platform Management](#)

Our IT team was able to consolidate eight hybrid AD environments with nearly 3,000 users in just over 12 months, thanks to the professional tools from Quest.

Adam Sloanes, Microsoft 365 and Cloud Specialist, NCG

Disparate IT environments add overhead and limit opportunities.

As NCG acquired and merged with colleges over the years, its IT environment grew increasingly complex, and the IT team struggled to keep up. “We had a lot of different domains and a lot of different forests, which made things particularly tricky to manage,” recalls Adam Sloanes, Microsoft 365 and cloud specialist at NCG. “One college would have one way of doing things whilst another would be doing things a different way, which meant that you were doing twice the work. And when you multiply that by all the different colleges in the group, it became quite difficult. For example, trying to juggle all the different Office 365 tenancies and manage them all separately was very time consuming.”

In addition, the IT team had to invest a great deal more time in training and education. “Our constituent colleges often had their own preferred student record systems, finance systems, HR systems and so on,” Sloanes adds. “Therefore, in each area, the IT team

had to master seven different systems, as opposed to one collective system that everybody was using.”

Because the IT team was having to spend so much time on these tasks, they had less time to spend on their primary mission of supporting staff and students. “We have quite a lean team, which has its advantages because it’s very efficient and you don’t need to go through lots of different layers of support staff to get what you need,” notes Sloanes. “But at the same time, it can mean that duplicate work can have a real impact on how quickly we can turn things over. For instance, if we weren’t familiar with the way a process or a system worked at one of the colleges, it would take longer for us to figure it out.”

IT consolidation offers a wealth of benefits.

NCG realized that by addressing the root of the issue and unifying their disparate IT environments, they could achieve multiple goals simultaneously. “We knew that system rationalization would make it easier for the IT team to learn, manage and maintain the IT environment,” Sloanes says. “Plus, it would enable us to give everyone the same experience, regardless of which college they worked at or attended.”

This strategy was reinforced by consultations with Microsoft. “We talked with Microsoft early in the process, and they said, ‘The first thing you need to do is move everybody into one tenancy because you’re always going to be up against obstacles if you don’t do that,’” recalls Sloanes. “In general, with Office 365, collaboration is a lot better when you’ve got just one tenant.”

Advanced migration tools beat manual methods, hands down.

The IT team at NCG researched their migration options. “We looked at one vendor that proposed using free Microsoft tools to do the migration,” Sloanes says. “That would have allowed us to migrate at a cheaper upfront cost — but it would have taken a huge amount of effort. If you had only 50 users and 50 computers to move, you could probably get away with it with enough time and PowerShell scripts. But at the level of our migration, which involved thousands

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Software

- [On Demand Migration](#)
- [Migration Manager for Active Directory](#)
- [Change Auditor for Active Directory](#)

of users and machines, it would have been very, very difficult to perform the migration with native tools.”

One member of the IT team had used Quest migration tools in the past and highly recommended them. After thorough research and testing, NCG chose to invest in three Quest solutions:

- **On Demand Migration** empowers you to simply and securely consolidate and migrate Office 365 tenants running workloads like Exchange, OneDrive, SharePoint and Teams. An intuitive dashboard gives you complete visibility into your migration project so you can track progress in real time and ensure seamless coexistence during the migration. Plus, On Demand Migration integrates smoothly with other Quest Active Directory consolidation tools.
- **Migration Manager for Active Directory** is a comprehensive migration tool that helps you migrate your Active Directory with no downtime, no data loss and no stress. It provides coexistence capabilities, streamlined project management and business-critical support to help you deliver zero-impact AD migrations. Your end users maintain secure access to workstations, resources and email throughout the entire migration process.
- **Change Auditor for Active Directory** helps you ensure the security, compliance and control of your hybrid AD environment. You can track, audit, report and alert on all key configuration changes in real time from a single console — without the overhead of turning on native auditing. Moreover, you can proactively protect critical objects from being changed in the first place.

A quick and successful consolidation enables better user support.

Using the Quest solutions, NCG was able to successfully consolidate eight separate IT environments into one, in just over one year — during a global pandemic. In all, the team migrated just shy of 3,000 users. To complete the job quickly with the resources available, they chose to migrate only staff members. For the 25,000 students, the team just recreated their

“Frankly, we were surprised that On Demand supported Teams migrations because the platform is so new, but it worked tremendously well. We were able to easily migrate all our teams, along with all their files, posts and groups.”

Adam Sloanes, Microsoft 365 and Cloud Specialist, NCG

accounts in the new environment instead, providing lots of guidance to help them adapt to the change.

The team began by migrating NCG’s professional services, which included about 150 to 200 users. Then, they planned to migrate each of the colleges, one at a time. “We learnt a lot of lessons from the initial migration,” recalls Sloanes. “One was that I couldn’t do it all on my own. I tried to do the entire migration alone — I was migrating users and computers, and running around the building trying to make sure everybody was alright. And that project involved only a small portion of the staff; we knew we had much bigger migrations coming up.”

This lesson became even more valuable when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and NCG switched to remote learning, which brought a new urgency to the consolidation project. “Staff had to do online classes with students, but different colleges had different Office 365 tenancies,” explains Sloanes. “As a result, one college might be able to hold a particular class because their rules are set up in one way, but another college wouldn’t be able to. To ensure everyone had equal opportunities, we wanted to complete the consolidation as quickly as possible. We got a lot more of the staff involved, which worked really well because people picked up specialties. Some staff focused on migrating computers; I was migrating

users and mailboxes and OneDrive; and other staff were good at communicating what was going to happen to the staff. So, it was a real team effort.”

The IT team began systematically migrating the colleges. “We did each college in their own bubble; we’d migrate their on-premises Active Directory and then their tenancy,” Sloanes says. “It was quite interesting because some colleges were on the same domain or the same forest, so we had to revisit some domains or forests a few times to move users over. But in some cases, users were in the same domain but different tenants. It was a real mixed bag, so we kept it simple by doing each college as a single project. We found the Quest migration solutions quite intuitive and easy to use. In all, between March and December, we successfully consolidated five colleges. After a short gap, we migrated the final two colleges, bringing our total to nearly 3,000 users in less than 12 months of work.”

Easy migration of AD accounts, email, OneDrive, SharePoint and Teams

The migrations differed somewhat, depending on the workloads that the college was using. The projects always involved migrating Active Directory accounts, email and OneDrive, and for most of the colleges, SharePoint was migrated as well.

The biggest variable by far was Microsoft Teams. “At the beginning of the pandemic, we were hardly using Teams — then, all of a sudden, usage exploded, as it did for so many organizations,” notes Sloanes. “More and more of our colleges began using Teams to teach and keep in touch with students remotely. Towards the end of the consolidation effort, there were colleges with Teams sites that were essential. Frankly, we were surprised that On Demand supported Teams migrations because the platform is so new, but it worked tremendously well. We were able to easily migrate all our teams, along with all their files, posts and groups. We chose not to bring over any private chats because of the sheer volume of data that would have involved.”

Even though the IT teams were largely working from home and pandemic restrictions were in place,

the migrations proceeded smoothly. “I did all of my migration work from my office at home,” Sloanes explains. “However, there were teams on site doing the very important work of migrating physical computers. To make sure we had proper social distancing, we booked appointments so staff could drop off their devices and then pick them up after we had migrated them. I couldn’t even tell you how many devices we had to migrate but it was thousands — we had to dish out many more portable devices because people were working and learning remotely. The teams doing that work were an invaluable part of the consolidation effort.”

Comprehensive change auditing eases the migration process.

In addition to the two Quest migration solutions, the IT team at NCG also relied on Change Auditor for Active Directory. “Change Auditor was extremely

Change Auditor is a huge time saver. Previously, we used the native Windows tools to troubleshoot lockouts and other issues, but they don’t give nearly as much information. The auditing in Change Auditor is a lot richer, so it’s easy to diagnose and rectify an issue, instead of having to spend ages jumping from here to there to find out what was wrong. Even though that’s probably only one percent of what Change Auditor can do, it was a big thing for us.

Adam Sloanes, Microsoft 365 and Cloud Specialist, NCG

“Having Quest support us throughout was critical in ensuring we were able to achieve what we set out to do; we couldn’t have done it without them. Four months on from our final migration, I couldn’t be more pleased with what the team has achieved, and we are already realising the benefits of having all staff and learners in one domain.”

Hannah Marshall, Director of IT, NCG

valuable during the migrations,” says Sloanes. “In particular, it was really helpful for when we were setting up a new domain from scratch because that’s not something you do on a regular basis. It involves rewriting lots of security, computer and user policies that control access, and because everybody was moving to one domain, one incorrect policy change could cause big problems for all of our colleges at once. So, it was good to have the safety blanket of Change Auditor, which ensured we had a full log of all changes and that we could quickly roll back any modification that caused an issue. We did look at some free alternatives, but they didn’t offer the same level of detail — for example, they wouldn’t tell you who made a particular change.”

The solution also enabled the IT team to support users more effectively and efficiently. “When you move users from one domain to another, there are going to be people who forget their passwords,” Sloanes explains. “Previously, we used the native Windows tools to troubleshoot lockouts and other issues, but they don’t give nearly as much information. Change Auditor is a huge time saver. Previously, we used the native Windows tools to troubleshoot

lockouts and other issues, but they don’t give nearly as much information. The auditing in Change Auditor is a lot richer, so it’s easy to diagnose and rectify an issue, instead of having to spend ages jumping from here to there to find out what was wrong. Even though that’s probably only one percent of what Change Auditor can do, it was a big thing for us. We look forward to using more of its functionality, including compliance reporting, in the future.”

Professional migration solutions are invaluable.

Migrations are a complex undertaking, and users can be wary. But the benefits can be enormous. “When the senior leadership team says, ‘We’re going to uproot everything and start moving it around,’ it’s only natural to be skeptical,” Sloanes says. “But we’re already seeing the benefits of consolidating all of our IT environments. Now we can deliver the same level of service to staff and students no matter which college they belong to, and IT staff have to support only a single student record system, a single finance system, a single HR system and so on, so they can all jump on the same webinar or read the same knowledgebase. Our users have really started to see the benefits, and we received really good feedback and praise for delivering a successful project.”

The IT team at NCG recommends the Quest migration solutions without hesitation. “Many IT teams today have a limited amount of resources, so being able to do as much as you can with as little as possible is really important,” notes Sloanes. “On Demand Migration and Migration Manager for Active Directory provide the automation you need to complete a migration. You get a single-pane view of everything, and everything’s nicely connected together. Being able to do everything in one place makes the project a lot easier to manage and helps you quickly adapt to changing circumstances. With the Quest solutions, you don’t have to spend sleepless nights worrying; you can rely on them to do what you expect them to do. Even though we had limited migration experience, our small IT team was able to consolidate eight hybrid AD environments with nearly 3,000 users in just over 12 months, thanks to the professional tools from Quest.”

Hannah Marshall, director of IT at NCG, offered this summary of the migration: “We always knew this project would be the most disruptive and challenging project NCG would ever undertake but that the benefits far outweighed the short-term disruption. Faced with the pandemic and moving to remote working and teaching, the need to complete this project became even more pressing, so we continued the project with some of the team working entirely from home. Due to the national reach of NCG and the complexities of the multiple domains, we completed the migration in a phased approach, college by college. Having Quest support us throughout was critical in ensuring we were able to achieve what we set out to do; we couldn’t have done it without them. Four months on from our final migration, I couldn’t be more pleased with what the team have achieved, and we are already realising the benefits of having all staff and learners in one domain.”

About Quest

Quest creates software solutions that make the benefits of new technology real in an increasingly complex IT landscape. From database and systems management, to Active Directory and Office 365 management, and cyber security resilience, Quest helps customers solve their next IT challenge now. Quest Software. Where next meets now.