Campus-wide coverage, Grade-A visibility: UWE Bristol's MDR advantage

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) is committed to excellence in education, innovation, and research. Its mission focuses on solving future global challenges through outstanding learning, world-leading research, and a culture of enterprise.

The university's core values include being ambitious, collaborative, inclusive, innovative, and enterprising. In line with its mission, UWE Bristol emphasises inclusivity and opportunity for all students, staff, and the wider community, recognising the key role education plays in transforming society.

CUSTOMER-AT-A-GLANCE

UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

University of the West of England (UWE Bristol)

Industry
Higher education

Sophos Customer
Since 2023

Number of Users
38,000 students and 4,500 staff

Sophos Solutions
Sophos Managed Detection and Response (MDR)
TAM Services (Sophos Technical Account Managers)

"Before Sophos MDR, we were reactive and had limited visibility. Now, we have 24/7 monitoring, can respond to threats quickly, and have significantly reduced our cyber risk."

Dom Leung, the Head of Cybersecurity for UWE Bristol

With over 38,000 students and 4,500 staff, the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) is one of the UK's largest and most digitally advanced universities. Managing a sprawling and dynamic IT environment across multiple campuses, UWE Bristol handles vast amounts of sensitive data, from student records to research assets.

In 2023, UWE Bristol transitioned a previous antivirus vendor to Sophos Managed Detection and Response (MDR) to ensure around-the-clock cybersecurity protection, streamline incident response, and reduce the pressure on its internal IT security team.

Business challenges

As the cyber threat landscape evolved, UWE Bristol's internal cyber team faced mounting challenges:

- **Limited visibility and manual burden:** The university initially relied on basic security tools, making it difficult to gain a full view of threats across the network. Incident response was reactive, consuming valuable team time.
- **Resource constraints:** Running a full in-house security operations centre (SOC) or managing a complex SIEM was not viable, both in terms of staffing and budget.
- **High alert volume:** Teams were overwhelmed with low-priority alerts, making it harder to identify real threats in time.
- **Need for 24/7 coverage:** With learning and research happening around the clock, security needed to keep up, but it wasn't feasible for the internal team to monitor systems 24/7.
- **Compliance and risk exposure:** As a public institution, UWE Bristol needed to demonstrate strong governance over data protection and cyber resilience.

"We can now quantify our strategic cyber risk and we've demonstrated a reduction in our risk profile."

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How Sophos solutions helped solve these challenges

In 2023, UWE Bristol adopted Sophos MDR, covering over 10,000 devices across its network. Cybersecurity team members from the university said there were several reasons why they chose to go with an MDR service over trying to solve these problems in-house:

- **24/7 managed threat hunting and response:** The Sophos team monitors, detects, and responds to threats day and night, ensuring coverage even during weekends, holidays, and term breaks.
- **Integration with the university's ecosystem:** Sophos MDR integrates seamlessly with the university's existing tech stack, enhancing visibility and simplifying operations.
- **Daily alert triage:** Sophos MDR filters out noise, delivering only validated, high priority incidents to UWE Bristol's cyber security team.
- **Real-time response and containment:** Where needed, Sophos analysts take immediate action to neutralise threats, including isolating machines and terminating malicious processes.
- **Expert-led support and guidance:** Sophos provided clear onboarding, proactive engagement, and continued support that the team described as responsive and trusted.

Since welcoming Sophos MDR as a strategic partner, the University of the West of England has witnessed a remarkable evolution in its cybersecurity operations.

What once felt like a constant scramble to chase alerts and firefight incidents has become a measured, intelligence-driven process that aligns seamlessly with the university's academic and research mission.

From the very first day, Sophos MDR's advanced analytics and threat hunting capabilities have sharpened UWE Bristol's visibility into its digital environment. The relentless tide of daily alerts is now distilled into a manageable flow, with only the most critical threats flagged for immediate investigation.

This means the cyber team spends less time sifting through false positives and more time implementing long-term risk reduction strategies.

UWE Bristol can now quantify its cybersecurity posture in tangible terms, according to their IT leaders.

“We can now quantify our strategic cyber risk and we’ve demonstrated a reduction in our risk profile,” Leung says.

That ability to put hard numbers around risk wasn’t possible before — and it’s reshaped how the university’s leadership views the value of security investments.

Sophos MDR also offers an efficiency that dwarfs the cost of building a similar in-house operation.

Expert-led detection and response come without the overhead of recruiting, training, and retaining specialized SOC analysts. For UWE Bristol, this translates into clear savings that can be reinvested into other high-impact security initiatives.

Peace of mind is no longer restricted to business hours

With 24/7 monitoring and response, UWE Bristol’s systems are protected around the clock, even when the internal team is offline, bolstering confidence across the IT leadership and university leaders.

And it’s not just about watching dashboards — UWE Bristol consistently praises the Sophos team for its responsiveness and professionalism during onboarding and beyond, highlighting support as a key differentiator.

On the compliance front, Sophos MDR has unlocked streamlined audit trails and root-cause reporting for every incident. UWE Bristol can now demonstrate robust governance against evolving regulatory demands, ensuring that research data, student records, and operational systems remain in line with best-practice frameworks.

“We’re definitely seeing return on investment, and our confidence is building more and more,” Leung says.

- In a landscape where cyber threats evolve daily, this partnership gives UWE Bristol the tools, expertise, and unwavering coverage required to stay two steps ahead. By reducing internal workloads, improving risk posture, and delivering rapid response, Sophos MDR has become a trusted ally for the university in protecting their digital ecosystem.

To learn more about Sophos Solutions, visit Sophos.com

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