

Coleg Gwent Strengthens Security with Proactive Protection

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Coleg Gwent is one of Wales' largest further education colleges, serving learners across Southeast Wales through a network of campuses and specialist sites.

The college delivers a broad mix of academic, vocational and higher education programmes and supports a large, diverse community of staff and learners. Operating at

scale across multiple locations, Coleg Gwent relies on a secure, resilient IT environment to enable teaching, learning and day to day operations.

Key Facts

1 One of the largest further education colleges in Wales

2 Operates across multiple campuses and specialist sites

3 Supports thousands of staff, learners and managed endpoints

The Challenge

As a large further education institution, Coleg Gwent manages a complex and extensive IT estate, including thousands of endpoints, servers and mobile devices spread across several campuses. Over time, the scale of the organisation and the evolving threat landscape naturally increased the importance of security within the college's IT strategy.

As Evan Smith, Head of Infrastructure and Security explained, "being a further education college, and such a large one at that - there was a constantly increasing requirement to improve security." Historically, the priority had been on enabling access and ensuring continuity of service for users, but security was becoming an increasingly strategic consideration.

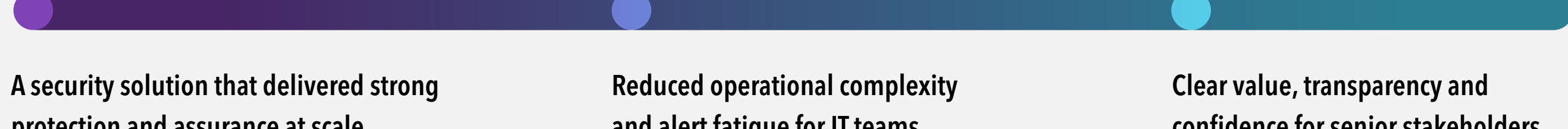
This shift was accelerated by a small number of isolated incidents, all of which were contained and resolved quickly. While these incidents did not cause major disruption, they acted as a catalyst for wider reflection. "While we were able to respond, that prompted us to say, look, we need something more advanced," Evan said. The focus moved from reactive defence, towards proactively strengthening overall assurance and resilience.

At the same time, Coleg Gwent was approaching a natural transition point with its existing security arrangements. Evan explained, "While we were having success with our previous solution, it's always prudent to go out and test the market to see if you can improve."

Adding further complexity, changes to the licensing model of the college's existing endpoint protection platform meant that the version in use would no longer be renewed. The available alternatives either reduced capability or significantly increased cost significantly. "The licence we were using was no longer going to be renewed," Evan said. "The options either didn't give us enough or didn't make sense for what we were trying to achieve."

Coleg Gwent therefore faced a multi dimensional challenge. The college needed to modernise its approach to endpoint security and monitoring, simplify operations, and improve confidence and assurance, all while ensuring that any investment delivered clear value and aligned with the realities of a publicly funded education environment.

Critical Success Factors



A security solution that delivered strong protection and assurance at scale

Reduced operational complexity and alert fatigue for IT teams

Clear value, transparency and confidence for senior stakeholders

The Solution

To support Coleg Gwent through the tender process, Softcat Account Manager, Ben Smith worked closely with Evan and his team to understand the environment, priorities and constraints.

Rather than leading with a single technology, Softcat focused on outcomes, helping the college assess which approaches would genuinely add value.

As Evan explained, "we spoke to quite a few partners," including existing suppliers and sector bodies. The tender process attracted a range of responses, many based on established enterprise security platforms and managed services. While several proposals demonstrated strong technical capability, closer scrutiny revealed challenges around complexity, licensing clarity and overall value. "Some of the solutions looked very good," Evan said, "but when we asked for clarification, it turned out there were additional licences needed that weren't included in the original price." This made it difficult to assess true cost and value, particularly in an environment where transparency and predictability were essential.

Softcat helped Coleg Gwent navigate these trade offs by aligning the tender responses against the college's stated requirements. The emphasis was on proactive protection, reduced noise, and assurance that incidents would be handled effectively without creating unnecessary workload for internal teams.

The resulting solution combined Heimdal's managed extended detection and response platform with penetration testing services from Pen Test People.

Together, this delivered layered endpoint protection, continuous monitoring and structured assurance, without unnecessary complexity.

Although timelines meant there was limited opportunity for a formal proof of concept, the implementation progressed quickly and smoothly. "Once we had the initial meeting and set up the portal, it was incredibly easy to deploy," Evan said. Agents were rolled out across servers and endpoints, managed centrally through a single interface.

Importantly, the solution integrated cleanly with the college's existing environment during transition. "It went on, stayed on, and stayed connected providing lots of data," Evan noted. "We had a fair amount of control over the way it worked from the portal and also on the device itself." This minimised disruption and reduced the need for ongoing manual intervention.

Alongside endpoint protection, Pen Test People provided structured penetration testing and vulnerability insight. This ensured the college retained independent assurance, supported by clear reporting and an accessible customer portal. "We've got a great portal now where we can see all the tests," Evan explained. "We get live updates as well, rather than waiting for reports weeks later."

Solution Highlights



Managed XDR providing proactive, 24 hour endpoint protection

Centralised visibility and simplified security management

Integrated penetration testing and vulnerability reporting

The Benefits

For Coleg Gwent, the most significant benefit was increased confidence and assurance. The new solution delivered oversight, reducing uncertainty and improving response. "The first big benefit for us was knowing there was 24 hour cover and it was proactive," Evan said.

Unlike previous arrangements, alerts were prioritised and contextualised. "It was, we've stopped this, but you might want to check it," Evan explained. "Rather than, you need to stop this right now." This shift dramatically reduced alert fatigue and allowed the IT team to focus on strategic and operational improvements rather than constant firefighting.

Operational reliability also stood out. "It just keeps working," Evan said. "The agents work as intended. You don't have to keep reinstalling stuff." For a multi site organisation with limited IT resources, this consistency was critical.

The impact on staff wellbeing was tangible. "Last Christmas was the first Christmas where it was less stressful," Evan reflected. "We were still in it, but we knew Heimdal was looking after us." That reassurance reduced pressure on the team while maintaining high levels of service.

Penetration testing outcomes also improved. While the model was more structured than before, the quality and usability of insight increased. "The reports back have been really, really good," Evan said. "There's been no degradation in that service at all." Enhanced visibility and live updates supported faster decision making and clearer prioritisation.

Overall, the solution delivered strong returns by aligning protection, usability and assurance. "You can't do everything," Evan concluded. "All you need to do is invest sensibly, in the stuff that gives you the best return. And that's what we got."

Benefits at a Glance



Reduced alert fatigue and operational overhead

Improved confidence through proactive, 24 hour protection

Clearer insight and assurance across security activities

Why Softcat

For Coleg Gwent, Softcat's value extended beyond the technology itself to the strength of the ongoing relationship and day to day service. Ben played a key role in maintaining continuity throughout the tender, transition and ongoing delivery, acting as a consistent point of contact who understood both the technical environment and the pressures of working within further education.

"Ben knows us, he knows how we work, and he understands the constraints we're under," Evan explained. That familiarity meant conversations were pragmatic and grounded, with clear communication and realistic expectations at every stage. The relationship was characterised by responsiveness and trust rather than transactional delivery. "If there's an issue or a question, we can pick up the phone and get a straight answer," Evan said. Picked up with Softcat's ability to approach multiple vendors and services effectively, this approach gave the college confidence that it was being supported by a partner invested in long term outcomes. As Evan summarised, "It's not just about buying something and being left to our own devices. We know Softcat and Ben are there to support when we need them."