

# Oldham Council Learns Quest has the Answer for Efficient and Secure AD Management

Oldham Council's IT department is run by Unity Partnership, which is a union of the council, a private sector partner, Mouchel and its IT partner, Agilisys. Unity Partnership turned to Quest for help with the management of its centralised Active Directory (AD) environment, implemented at the borough's 115 schools that serve about 40,000 pupils and 2,000 teachers. The effort was part of a government pilot project to improve IT in education on a national scale.

## The Challenge

In 2008, as part of the UK government's mission to bridge the digital divide, Oldham Council ran a very successful Computers for Pupils programme, providing 1,367 disadvantaged pupils with laptops and Internet access at home. The laptops were specified to be suitable for safe pupil use with Internet access tightly controlled via the council's gateway.

Building on the success of the Computers for Pupils programme, the government announced its commitment to support the Home Access programme which grants funding to eligible low-income families to purchase a computer and Internet package to support learning at home. Becta, the government agency for technology in learning, selected Oldham as one of two local authorities that were asked to pilot the programme before it would be rolled out across England.

In addition to the Home Access pilot, Oldham Council was also asked by Becta to consider what would be needed to improve out-of-school access to educational resources by enhancing the IT infrastructure. This included a centrally-managed AD environment to facilitate simple and secure system access to the whole schools' network. Becta accepted the council's bid in January 2009, leaving only 2½ months for Unity Partnership to deliver the new environment.

The council recognised that each school needed some responsibility for running its own AD domain for the sake of flexibility. For instance, if pupils needed to reset their passwords, it would diminish learning time to have them or their teachers call a help desk and wait for response and support. But if schools had to manage their own AD environments, the duties would naturally fall to the teachers, pulling them away from their educational tasks. "Teachers have enough to cope with, and their focus should be on education," explained David Honeywell, programme manager, Unity Partnership. "Our aim with AD management was to ensure that we didn't take pupils or teachers away from the learning environment."

The council needed a solution to provide secure AD management for the 42,000 users, with the right balance between independence and support for the individual schools. Plus, with such a tight timeframe, implementation had to be swift.

## The Quest Solution

Because it had researched similar tools for managing the corporate domain, Unity Partnership was familiar with Quest Software. It determined that the company's ActiveRoles Server product was the right solution to provide teachers with AD management rights appropriate for their needs.

ActiveRoles Server provides strictly enforced role-based security, automated group management and change approval, as well as Web-based administration and self-service capabilities.

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- David Honeywell  
programme manager  
Unity Partnership (for Oldham Council)

## OVERVIEW



**Oldham  
Council**

### Headquarters

Oldham, England

### Services

Local Government

### Critical Needs

Secure, efficient role-based Active Directory (AD) management delivered within a tight timeframe

### Solution

Quest® ActiveRoles® Server

### Results

- Delivered role-based AD management of 42,000 user accounts within a short timeframe
- Streamlined the administration of access rights
- Facilitated compliance with Local Education Authority's secure domain administration policy
- Reduced calls to IT department help desk for password resets
- Delivered administrative time savings

## CASE STUDY

For example, it allows delegation of rights to allow for password resets, and enables temporary user access, to allow for access to student records in case of teacher absence. In addition, ActiveRoles Server helps manage, automatically provision, re-provision and, more importantly, de-provision users quickly, efficiently and securely in Active Directory.

Installation of ActiveRoles Server was indeed swift—about four days, including knowledge transfer. This helped to ensure that Unity's IT department could implement the AD environment centrally and to every school in the borough within the required 75-day period.

Unity Partnership was impressed also with Quest's Professional Services Organisation (PSO). "The PSO team members were outstanding," commented Honeywell. "They totally understood the rationale behind what we were trying to achieve, and their technical expertise was very sound."

### The Bottom Line

ActiveRoles Server has enabled the council to centrally manage its AD environment with efficiency, while delivering to the schools the right balance of autonomy and support. "ActiveRoles Server gives teachers and technicians the permission rights that make sense for their obligations," explained Honeywell. "For instance, teachers can quickly reset passwords if required, and some have the ability to create and split groups for improving group learning. For schools that have dedicated and skilled technicians on site, we've been able to grant them additional access rights."

The Quest solution has also facilitated compliance with the local authority's requirements for secure domain administration. "ActiveRoles Server enables all on-site technicians to securely manage their own organisational units (OUs), allowing them to create accounts in accordance with the LA's policy," said Honeywell. "Delegating AD rights in this way without the Quest solution would have made our environment prone to human error, open to abuse and therefore a risk to security. Plus, if a technician attempts an unauthorised action, like deleting a user OU, an alert is issued, which can be acted upon as necessary."

Additionally, ActiveRoles Server has dramatically reduced the number of support calls to the Unity Partnership's Service Desk, due to the product's streamlined approach to the delegation of AD rights. "Over time we expect further time-savings to be realised in a number of areas, including administration," said Honeywell.

The Unity Partnership's personnel recognise that they could not have delivered their AD implementation without the use of the Quest solution. "Without ActiveRoles Server, this approach would have been impossible," noted Honeywell. "The time pressure we were under meant that a bespoke system was a non-starter. In any case, why re-invent the wheel when Quest has already created a perfectly good one? The security aspect alone -- of delegating AD rights -- has saved the council at least two weeks of work."

By 2010, the council plans to extend access further, to allow access to pupils' parents for monitoring pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievements.

### About Unity Partnership

Unity Partnership is a joint venture company between Mouchel and Oldham Council, with Agilisys as the ICT partner. Established in May 2007 and employing over 400 staff, Unity delivers Property, Highways, ICT and Customer and Exchequer services. Its aim is to transform essential public services and regenerate Oldham's environment.

### About Agilisys

Agilisys is the UK's most innovative IT services and outsourcing provider, helping its clients transform their business. Working for both the public and private sector, Agilisys has earned a strong reputation and holds deep domain expertise within local government, travel and tourism, retail financial services and healthcare. Clients are supported through a network of offices and centres of excellence throughout the UK, employing over 1,200 people. [www.agilisys.co.uk](http://www.agilisys.co.uk)

### About Oldham Council

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council provides a wide range of services for the people of the borough and manages an annual budget totalling about £500 million.

### About Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. Learn more at [www.becta.org.uk](http://www.becta.org.uk).

### About Quest Software, Inc.

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