

Access Control for a 21st Century University Campus

Introduction

The University of Northampton built Waterside Campus, which includes a full range of cutting-edge learning environments. Each year it houses around 15,000 students, members of staff, contractors and visitors. Site security is one of its selling points. ID Card Centre provided the expertise to maximise the university's existing systems by seamlessly linking them to the enrolment and access control systems for the new campus.



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If you think we can assist you with student enrolment, please get in touch.

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Customer benefits at a glance:

- In-depth product knowledge of practical access control systems
- On-call support during critical periods
- Reduced capex by integrating the existing student ID card system with the new access control solution
- Rolled out access control measures without significantly increasing administration levels
- Provided a slick, efficient user experience
- Built a solution that encoded smartcards as they were printed, merging two processes into one
- Futureproofed investment that could last for 10-15 years with firmware and software updates
- Accommodated last-minute requirements



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The Challenge

Six months before moving to the almost completed, purpose-built campus, Becky Bradshaw, Director of Campus Services, and Andrew Taylor, Digital Services Manager of the University of Northampton, were tasked with rolling out security measures.

The previous campus was open to the public and carrying ID was not compulsory. The university was moving everything to the new purpose-built Waterside Campus, where:

- Everyone would carry a smartcard, which would replace student ID cards
- These multi-functional cards would replace keys or fobs and would automate access to the university's resources as part of a phased improvement plan
- The ID cards were part of a real-time flexible system, so access to anything could be instantly stopped or granted
- The new processes arising from moving from an open-access site to a secure environment needed to be largely automated

- Staff would administer access control for the first time, so ease and speed of use were vital
- Uninterrupted data flow from the student Management Information System (MIS) and the smartcard-issuing solution was essential.

The university needed an end-to-end card management printing, encoding and activation solution. There was also an on-site hotel, run by a third party. This hotel also needed a smartcard-based booking and charging system that was part of Waterside Campus's access control system and complied with the University of Northampton's data security policy.

Some of the new buildings had already been completed, so access control had to be retrofitted without cluttering the slick interior design.

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The Solution

Salto access control was recommended by the main building contractor and a security consultant. Its closed protocols, which reinforce its security, also meant that the university needed external technical expertise to ensure data would flow between the university's student MIS and the new Salto solution.

"The decision to engage ID Card Centre was based on the trusted relationship we already had with them from previous projects," commented Becky.

"Working with ID Card Centre has always been easy. They're helpful, knowledgeable and always ready to answer questions. Everyone we deal with there is brilliant."

"There have been times when we've needed help out of hours and their support has always been available. Ben at ID Card Centre is very attentive, and we felt like a valued customer right from the start," added Andrew.



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In practice, card printing, encoding and activation had to be simultaneous and the data on each card had to automatically populate the Salto system. This would provide users with the slickest and most efficient experience.

With Ben's guidance and technical skills, the university's existing system was adapted, rather than building a new system from scratch. Some extra Salto licences were added, along with a connector, so that data could flow into Salto from multiple sources. Salto was programmed to generate a security role and profile for each person, and each ID card was encoded with permissions at the time of printing. In many other organisations encoding is a separate process so this efficiency:

- 1) Halved the potential admin burden of card production
- 2) Ensured the cards were instantly activated when they were issued rather than subsequent activation via an online reader.

"The innovative Salto solution uses the cards to transport data around the readers so you can update permissions for somebody else's card at a reader rather than having to update individual door controllers. An authorised member of staff can also control and monitor smartcard printing across the entire campus," Ben explained.

The technology that Ben integrated into the wider solution included:

- A Salto bridge
- Magicard Rio Pro 360 printers with custom HoloKote® features
- NXP MIFARE® DESFire®
- CardExchange upgrades to the latest version
- Custom programming to the cards

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The Result

ID Card Centre had a tight schedule in which to complete the work; however, the first day of enrolments ran smoothly.

Staff were delighted that the new access control measures didn't lead to a lot of extra work during student enrolment. Although the system was new, user interfaces for staff were based on the enrolment screens they had previously used so little training was required.

“Some staff have hardly noticed that we've changed the student enrolment process to incorporate access control measures. The new system is easy to use – anyone can do it.

“Like all universities and colleges, we have to operate on a tight budget. After going live I'm delighted to confirm that the Salto access control and our smartcard production system have turned out to be cost-neutral,” commented Andrew.

Permissions can be adjusted in real time using authorised staff cards, Salto's interfaces, or the student MIS or card printers. Cards can be cancelled and reissued within seconds.



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“The system is reliable and works very well. I will re-engage ID Card Centre to take full advantage of the technology and adopt some more of its smartcard capabilities. The opportunities are immense.

“I always want solutions with scope for later developments. What’s the point of putting something in place if its capabilities remain static and can’t be improved?” Andrew concluded.

Everyone who visits the campus is issued with a card. Students receive theirs at enrolment and it automatically deactivates at the end of their course. Staff have open-ended cards, and temporary staff, contractors and visitors have cards that are set to work only within certain periods.

If a student has not paid their fees, or for a resource, a sanction is automatically enforced on their card – so, for example, they might lose access to the library or, if it’s something more serious, their card might not be reissued until the debt is cleared. Manual tweaks are straightforward, so increasing the active period of a smartcard to accommodate a student with an extended deadline for a dissertation, for example, is easy.



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The University of Northampton's Waterside Campus has exemplary security, providing reassurance that everyone on-site is accounted for. Today this is an important selling point.

Please contact ID Card Centre for more information or to discuss your requirements in more detail and see how we can help you.

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