



Australian Government Digital Transformation Agency deploys PROTECTED classified Office 365 services

DTA deploys PROTECTED Office 365

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The Hon. Michael Keenan, MP, [announced overnight](#) that the Australian Government's [Digital Transformation Agency](#) has taken the lead in becoming the first to deploy Office 365 for PROTECTED email and collaboration workloads. Seizing on the PROTECTED certification of Office 365, DTA has created a proof-point for their own [Secure Cloud Strategy](#), and a model for others in Australian Government to follow.

DTA is now into their second deployment phase of piloting Office 365 for PROTECTED services ahead of an agency-wide roll out later this year, that the minister described as shifting the agencies "day-to-day activities" to the PROTECTED platform. This will be performed with a configuration developed and deployed for DTA that was created in a collaboration with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Australian Microsoft partner [Delivery Quality Assurance](#).

Delivery QA's CTO and Director of Federal Services, [Jean-Pierre Simonis](#), says Office 365 will cater to "every single person in the organisation operating through the same corporate network, whether working on Unclassified or PROTECTED data, without sacrificing any functionality."

What does this mean for others in Australian Government that are considering a similar move?

How does this align with ASD's Information Security Manual and DTA's own Secure Cloud Strategy?

If you've followed my writing to date, you'll have seen articles on how Office 365 can address the [ASD Essential Eight](#), the [2017 ISM Updates](#), and the DTA [Secure Cloud Strategy](#) (which provides a lot of the context for what DTA are doing here).

However, in this article I'll explain the accreditation process that makes this possible, and discuss how other agencies could follow DTA's lead and adopt a similar approach.

Assessment, Certification, Accreditation, and adoption of Office 365



Let's put this into the context of the cloud services certification process. The process is detailed in the handy Australian Cyber Security Centre guide titled [Anatomy of a Cloud Certification](#). This is a useful reference when seeking to understand the IRAP assessment process, the ASD certification phase, and the obligation on agencies to perform accreditation.



Assessment

An IRAP Assessment is undertaken by the Cloud Service Provider engaging a specially trained security professional known as an IRAP Assessor. The IRAP Assessor evaluates the security controls of a service, including for their effectiveness against the Australian Government Information Security Manual (ISM).

Microsoft completed the IRAP Assessment process for taking Office 365 to PROTECED certification in March, 2017. The results of which are available to download from the [Microsoft Service Trust Portal](#).



Certification

The IRAP Assessment is submitted to ASD for review. Clarifications and changes to the services may be requested to assist in sufficiently addressing risk, and to ensure the service is fit-for-purpose. Residual risks may be identified and documented.

*"The duration to achieving ASD Certification is highly variable, and in some cases may never be achieved if the service cannot meet the minimum required standards for protecting government information." -
Anatomy of a Cloud Certification.*

As you can see, just getting an IRAP Assessment completed doesn't guarantee certification, or provide any expectation of how long it could take.

From IRAP Assessment to PROTECTED Certification of Office 365 took about 12 months.

Once ASD are satisfied the service is appropriate for the given classification level they will issue a certification and list the service on the [ASD Certified Cloud Services List](#) (CCSL).

Office 365 has been listed on the CCSL at PROTECTED since April 2018.



Accreditation

Once a service is certified on the CCSL, an agency reviews the available material, considers residual security risks, and then formally recognises and accepts those risks before taking up the service.

In the four months since Office 365 achieved certification, working with other agencies, Microsoft, and partners, DTA have reviewed the certification, tested the service, and adopted a position of accreditation of Office 365 for PROTECTED security classified workloads. This is a textbook implementation of the process of accreditation. It's not only appropriate within the certification and accreditation framework laid out by ASD, but it's also directly aligned with DTA's own [Secure Cloud Strategy](#).

The fact that this was all performed within 4 months, and created a repeatable pattern for others to follow, is a credit to the diligence and efforts of all involved. Whatever they are doing over at DTA, it's working!

PROTECTED Office 365 and the DTA Secure Cloud Strategy

Without going over too much [old ground](#), it's fair to say that this initiative by DTA to take up Office 365 is the embodiment of the cloud strategy they already promote to government. DTA has chosen to be a role model for other government agencies by living the principles it established in the Secure Cloud Strategy.

Principle 1: Make risk-based decisions when applying cloud security

Principle 2: Design services for the cloud

Principle 3: Use public cloud services as the default

Principle 4: Use as much of the cloud as possible

Principle 5: Avoid customisation and use services 'as they come'

Principle 6: Take full advantage of cloud automation practices

Principle 7: Monitor the health and usage of cloud services in real time

These principles lay the foundation for DTAs work to onboard Office 365 services at PROTECTED security classification. And their subsequent work to stand up Office 365 services now serves as the prototype for other agencies to replicate.

What next?

I'd encourage other government agencies to reach out to DTA and leverage what they have done. Reach out to Microsoft directly also, either to me personally or via your Microsoft account team contact, and we can share more information on the configuration patterns that we are already sharing with other Australian Government customers.

Keep an eye for my next two-part article series that dissects the certification of Office 365, and lays out all of the Microsoft recommended configuration guidance!