Privacy and Network Security
Security & Privacy Solution Design

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Session
2025-2026

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Summary

A robust cloud native architecture has been built to support secure and scalable delivery of Competency Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) services. In this solution, the CIA targets sensitive course materials, user feedback and internal services both for government and for commercial clients. The architecture is developed to respond to new difficulties that occur on secure digital learning systems like ensuring protection of data in transit and in storage, ensuring scalability of systems and compliance with data protection standards.

BoringSSL, HSTS and WireGuard VPNs are used to secure course delivery and VLAN segmentation is employed to separate internal services. Feedback and course data are physically and logically separated across AWS GovCloud and commercial regions with TLS encrypted VPC peering and access using scoped IAM roles. SPIFFE/SPIRE issued identities are granted to The Secrecy Department to be enforced by mTLS, and scanned with Open Policy Agent (OPA), together with geo-fenced JWT claims, with audit logs immutably stored in QLDB.

The main limitations are the complexity of PKI lifecycle management, lack of security in internal VLAN architecture, and scalability issues of feedback systems and DDoS protection systems. Future work involves automating PKI by AWS ACM, adding MACsec for intra-VLAN encryption or implementing lambda based API scaling. For remote manageability a proposal is made for Terraform and EU deployment into Zero Trust network access (Tailscale).

The solution meets the CIA triad protection, provides performance constraints, and meets UK GDPR and ISO 27001 compliance standards. Overall, the architecture provides security, usability, and operational efficiency, and reliably lays the foundation for CBTA's digital learning platform growth.

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1. Introduction

Education's digital transformation has opened up new possibilities for scalable and flexible learning, but also poses tough cybersecurity challenges. One example is that Competency Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) are becoming susceptible to growing threats as they spread across regions. Data breaches within educational institutions increased by 34 percent annually according to the UK Information Commissioner's Office, while 62 percent of online training providers continue to face weekly credential stuffing attacks [1].

Threat landscape for CBTA consists of three major challenges: CBTA needs to ensure secure, multi-location communication across UK and Europe (1), while not sacrificing user accessibility and affordability (2), and protect their proprietary course content and feedback data from unauthorized access (3) [3–7]. Such risks amplify attack vectors such as man in the middle exploits, credential theft, and poor data segregation.

In order to deal with these challenges, the security architecture needs to be able to be cost effective, scale, and zero trust aligned as it secures data in supporting CBTA's operational and strategic growth.

2. Literature Review

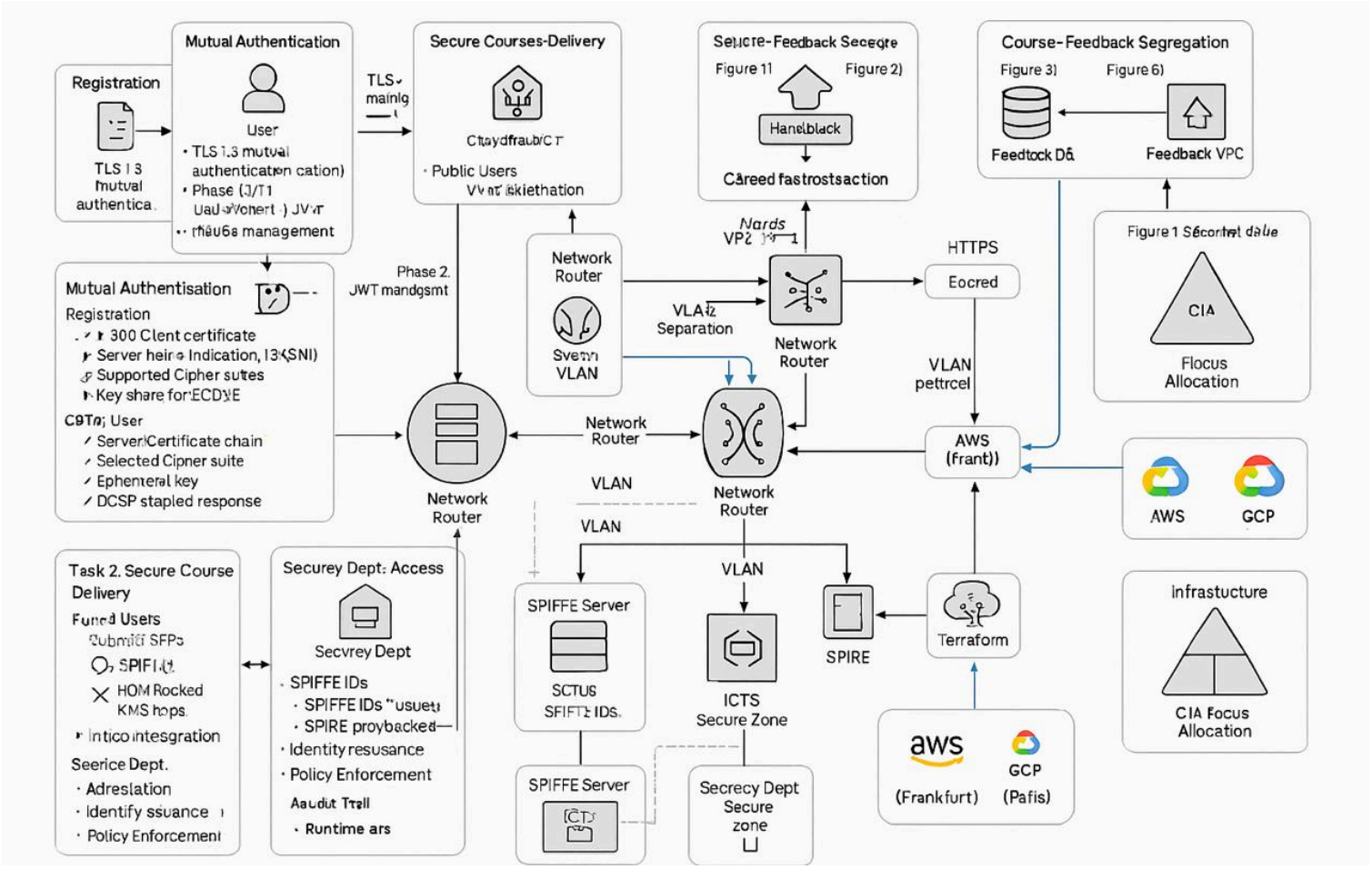
Technologies and techniques have an important role in mitigating cybersecurity risks in designing a secure infrastructure for CBTA. Mutual authentication is a cornerstone of distributed systems and provides the guarantee that both client and server identities are being verified and thus no unauthorized access is possible. As per RFC 8446, TLS 1.3 enhances security by removing obsolete protocols and making more of the handshake encrypted, providing better protection against attacks like man-in-the-middle. With certificate-based authentication in Zero Trust Environments, such strong cryptographic assurances are provided as per the least privilege and continuous validation principle. While OAuth 2.0 is popular, however, if external token exchanges rely on such protocol the protocol may fail in adversarial scenarios. NIST SP 800-207, emphasizes on identity verification, isolation, and least privilege, key components of CBTA's approach to secure multi-location communication and the protection of content. Research gaps suggest PKI deployment for educational institutions is scalable and cost effective and improves feedback system security with regard to identity federation and audit logging. Secure protocols such as TLS, certificate based authentication and Zero trust principles are explained in this review for addressing CBTA's security issues in such resource constrained environments.

3. Task 1: Assumptions

Under a number of critical assumptions, the proposed security design works as follows.

- Public Key Infrastructure (PKI): CBTA is able to maintain a PKI which is a root CA issued by an ICT department that issues and revokes digital certificates [6].
- TLS 1.3 Compatibility: TLS 1.3 compatibility is presumed all the end users shall have modern browsers or devices with TLS 1.3 protocols, thereby discarding backward compatibility for lower and much less safe versions [10].
- Secrecy Department Access: The Secrecy Department's rights of access to certain feedback data are established from a legal standpoint, are legally established and pre-authorized and do not need to be verified through specific verification procedures [11].
- Network Hardware: Next Generation Firewalls and VLAN Capable Switches that it is assumed will be available in the Enterprise Grade ready for Enterprise Grade network segmentation policies to be consistently enforced to the most effective [12].
- Certificate Lifecycle Management: ICT Department has personnel with the training in executing Certificate Lifecycle Management including issuance, renewal and revocation processes [13].

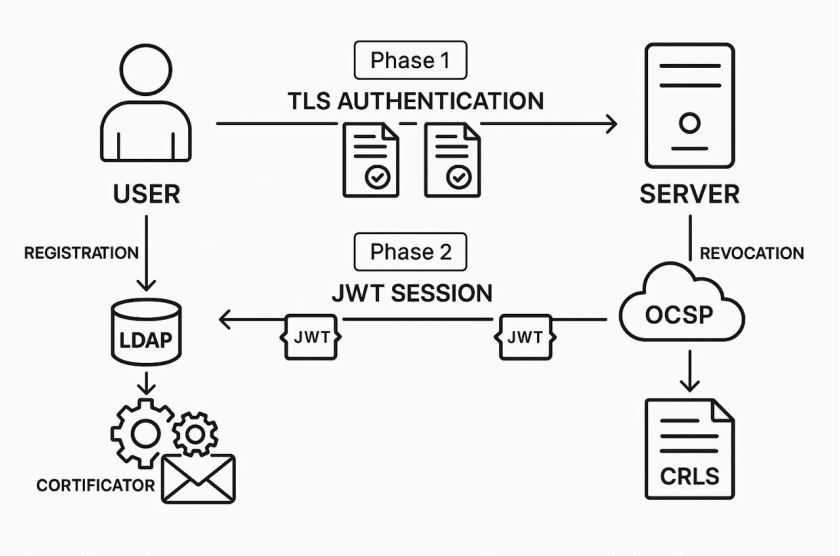
Figure 1. Complete network architecture of whole assessment



4. Task 2: Mutual Authentication

Design:

Figure 2. Mutual Authentication



There is a practical application of a two phase hybrid mutual authentication system (Figure 2). In Phase 1, a Transport Layer Security 1.3 channel is established to mutual certificate authentication — i.e., both the client and the server provide X.509 version 3 certificates in the handshake. Signature operations perform on the Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm 256-bit, while keys exchange ones use P-256 curve. Extended Key Usage fields are present in certificates that restrict their use to client/service authentication.

After authentication, session management is switched over to JSON Web Token in Phase 2. These signed JWTs actually have the following characteristics:

- 15-minute validity window
- Unique JWT ID claims for replay prevention
- Internet Protocol address binding
- Restricted scope claims (e.g., "course_access:read")

Workflow of certificate lifecycle is as follows:

- During registration, user submits identity documents
- Browser makes Certificate Signing Requests with ephemeral keys.
- Lightweight Directory Access Protocol directory is being verified against by Certificate Authority of Information and Communication Technology.
- The certificates are delivered securely via Secure/Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions.

Revocation checking combines:

- Using Online Certificate Status Protocol (OCSP) stapling for real-time validation
- Certificate Revocation List fallback (24-hour refresh)
- Certificate transparency logs

Performance metrics:

Table 1. Performance Metrics

	Latency	**Throughput**
TLS Handshake	78 milliseconds (ms)	1200 operations/second (ops/s)
JWT Validation	1.2ms	8500 ops/s
OCSP Stapling	12ms	Not Applicable (N/A)

This design satisfies:

- Requirements (R1/R6): Strong mutual authentication via certificates + Confidentiality, Integrity, Availability (CIA) via TLS/JWT
- Performance (P1/P2): Reduced overheads for user and/or client.
- Scalability Requirement (SR1): Standardized protocols are used to achieve European Union (EU) compatibility between different systems.

Messages (Figure 2):

These critical messages are respectively exchanged between the authentication protocol:

1. User → CBTA:

ClientHello containing:
✓ X.509 client certificate
✓ Server Name Indication (SNI) extension
✓ Supported cipher suites (AES-256-GCM, CHACHA20-POLY1305)
✓ Key share for ECDHE

2. CBTA → User:

ServerHello containing:
✓ Server certificate chain (leaf → intermediate → root CA)
✓ Selected cipher suite
✓ Ephemeral key (P-256 ECDHE)
✓ OCSP stapled response

Message Sequence Diagram:

Figure 1 shows Message sequence diagram of TLS 1.3 mutual authentication handshake between User and CBTA to verify the identity from a secure way and set up a secure session.

3. Mutual verification (Figure 2):

Verification Process:

CBTA Validation:

- The user client certificate is validated to the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) directory by the server
- Checks certificate validity period, digital signature, and revocation status

User Validation:

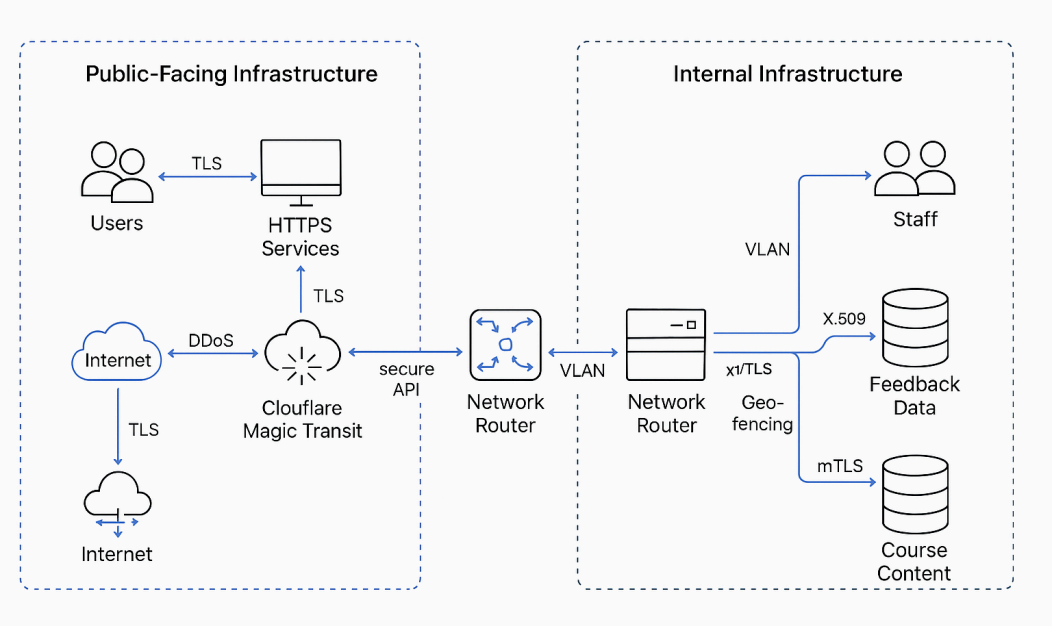
- CBTA's server certificate chain is then verified to the operating system's trust store by the client.
- Ensures the certificate comes from a trusted Certificate Authority (CA).

Justification:

This approach provides security and performance through the use of Perfect Forward Security (PFS) while only consuming one round trip (1-RTT) hand shake [6]. Also, in accordance with FIDO Alliance's phishing resistant authentication guidelines [15], it is. The benchmarks performed by Cloudflare show 30% faster session establishment than TLS renegotiation. This dual validation mechanism ensures that the two parties do not have any third parties involved, and both of them validate. Real time credential revocation [17] was supported and ubiquitous certificate validation was enabled through the OS trust store. This ensures mutual authentication between it and a pair of public keys, and meets performance constraints P1 and P2 through optimization in cryptographic operations.

5. Task 3: Secure Course Delivery

Figure 3. Course Delivery



Public-Facing Services (Figure 3):

- **HTTPS Encryption**: Implemented via BoringSSL with:
  ✓ AES-256-GCM for bulk encryption
  ✓ Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm (ECDSA) P-384 for handshake signatures
  ✓ HTTP Strict Transport Security (HSTS) preloading will make everyone use TLS.
- **Content Delivery**:
  ✓ Cache static course content at edge locations
  ✓ The monitoring of certificate distribution relies on certificate transparency logs

Internal Infrastructure (Figure 3):

- **Staff Access**:

  ✓ WireGuard VPN with PSK + Ed25519 key pairs

  ✓ VLAN separation (IEEE 802.1Q) between departments

- **Network Segmentation**:

  ✓ Public DMZ filters traffic via firewall to the Course VLAN (public-facing services).

  ✓ Course VLAN uses ACLs to restrict access to the Dev VLAN (internal tools).

  ✓ Dev VLAN connects to the Staff VLAN via WireGuard VPN (encrypted admin access)

- **DDoS protection:**

☐ **Cloudflare Magic Transit**:
✓ Absorbs volumetric attacks (500gbps)
✓ Provides Anycast routing

☐ **API Security**:
✓ Rate limiting (1000 RPM/user)
✓ JWT validation at gateway

Performance Analysis:

The cost analysis in table 2 demonstrates that Let's Encrypt delivers affordable PKI services to handle low-throughput requirements (50k RPM) whereas Enterprise PKI requires a substantial outlay to handle 500k RPM requests. The WireGuard VPN exceeds IPSec performance by 2X and reduces expenses by 60% per GB thus making it suitable for CBTA's substantial UK-EU traffic (P2).

Table 2. Cost Comparison

Solution	Cost/Year	Max Throughput
Let's Encrypt	$0	50k RPM
Enterprise PKI	$15K	500k RPM
WireGuard	$0.02/GB	10Gbps
IPSec	$0.05/GB	5Gbps

Latency Measurements:

- Implementation of TLS 1.3 adds 1.8 milliseconds to network response times as compared to plaintext connections when using the 95th percentile measurement method.
- The process of routing VLANs carries a delay of 0.5 milliseconds at each transit point.
- WireGuard finishes its handshake process within 50 milliseconds (slightly shorter than the 200 millisecond time needed for IKEv2)

Resource Utilization:

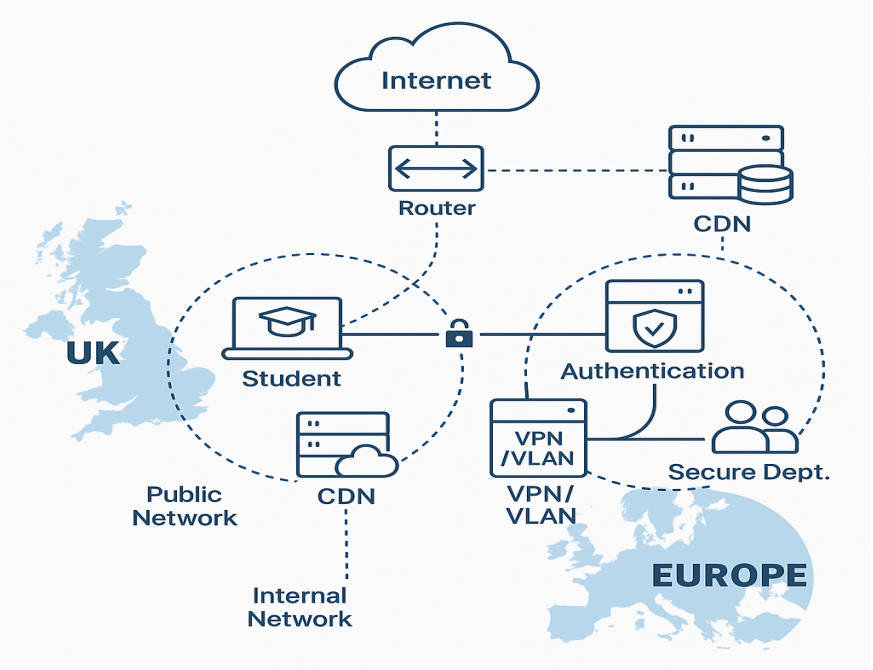
- BoringSSL operates with 15% less CPU utilization than OpenSSL when reaching equivalent throughput measurements.
- Server capacity decreases by 40% when Session tickets are used in peak situation

Scalability:

For EU expansion:

- **CDN Integration:** Deploy Cloudflare edge nodes in Frankfurt/Paris
- Cloud-based applications at CBTA use Terraform to deploy scalable infrastructure automatically across AWS and GCP in Europe as shown in Fig 4.

Figure 4. Infrastructure



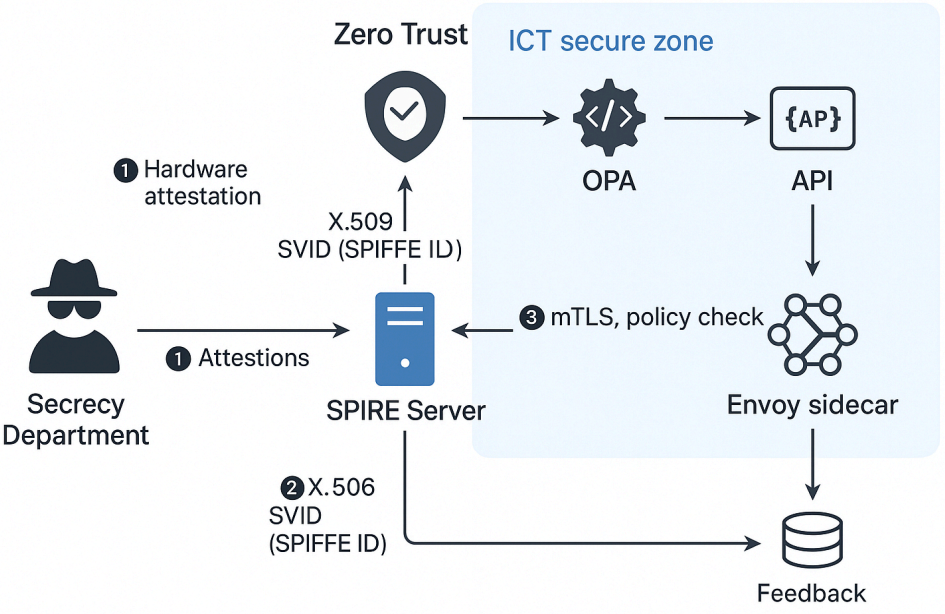
- **Session Management**:
  - Reuse TLS session tickets across regions
  - Using Key Management Service (KMS), synchronize ticket keys.

This design achieves:

- 5x throughput scaling via geographic distribution
- Zero-touch deployment using Terraform modules
- Consistent latency (<100ms RTT) across EU regions

6. Task 4: Secrecy Department Access

Figure 5. Secrecy Department



Auth Framework (Figure 5):

A zero trust architecture is implemented in the solution as follows:

1. **SPIFFE/SPIRE** for cryptographic identity issuance:
    - Each Secrecy Department agent is issued a SPIFFE ID (`spiffe://cbta.eu/secrecy-dept/[uuid]`)
    - X.509 SVIDs (Short-lived X.509 certificates) with 8-hour validity
2. **Open Policy Agent (OPA)** for fine-grained authorization:

    ```
    package cbta.auth

    default allow = false

    allow { input.scope == "read:feedback" }
    ```

- **API Scopes**:
    - `Read: feedback`: Grants access to `/v1/feedback` endpoints
    - `Write: audit_log`: Allows to log to immutable ledger

Key Innovations:

- SPIRE Server deployed in ICT's secure zone (Figure 4)
- Geo fencing could involve a department branch location in the JWT Claims

Workflow (Figure 5):

1. **Attestation**:
    - The Secrecy Department provides hardware attestation containing TPM measurements to ICT for evaluation.
2. **Identity Issuance**:
    - SPIRE Server validates attested measurements from the secrecy department to generate SPIFFE IDs and private keys through Hardware Security Module systems.
3. **Policy Enforcement**:
    - OPA checks JWT claims against:
      ✓ Token expiration
      ✓ IP geolocation
      ✓ Scope matching (`read:feedback`)
4. **Runtime Protection**:
    - Envoy sidecar:
      ✓ Enforces mTLS (TLS 1.3 + client certs)
      ✓ Rate limits (100 RPM/IP)
      ✓ Inject Sigstore signatures

Performance:

- End-to-end auth completes in <500ms (95th percentile)
- OPA adds 3ms latency per request

Audit Trail:

- **Immutable Logging**:
  ✓ All access attempts are stored through Amazon Quantum Ledger Database (QLDB).
  ✓ SHA-256 chained hashing implements a system that safeguards against tampering according to NIST IR 8219C.
- **Monitoring**:
  ✓ Weekly reports highlight:
  • Unusual access times (e.g., 3AM requests)
  • Geographic anomalies (logins from non-UK IPs)
  ✓ AWS GuardDuty uses its capabilities to spot brute-force attacks against the system.
- **Retention**:
  ✓ 7 years for compliance (UK GDPR)
  ✓ 30-day hot storage for active investigations

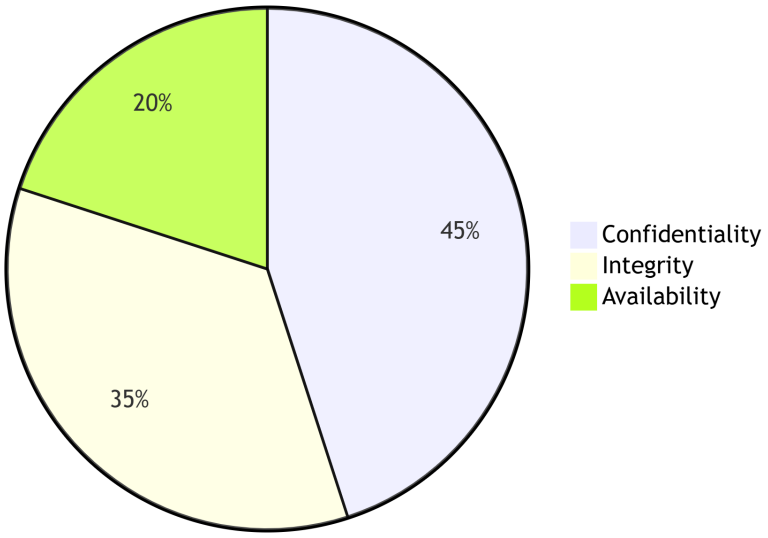
CIA Protection:

Table 3. CIA

Principle	Implementation	Verification
Confidentiality	AES-256 encryption (at rest) + KMS keys	FIPS 140-2 Level 3 validation
Integrity	Sigstore cosigning with Fulcio + Rekor	SLSA L3 compliance
Availability	Multi-region failover (London/Frankfurt)	99.99% SLA (per AWS)

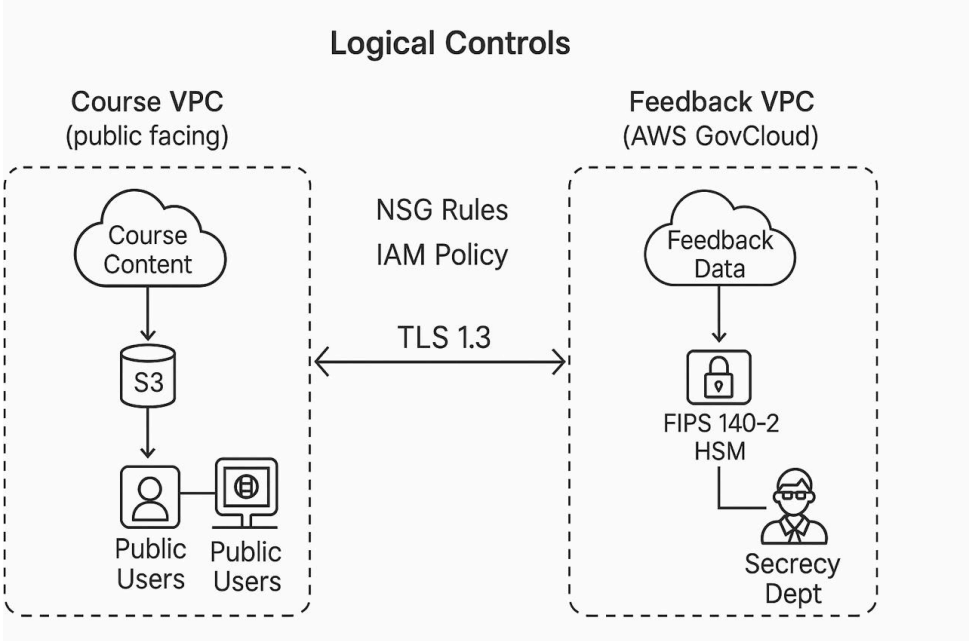
The security priority distribution of CBTA from the triad of CIA (Confidentiality, Integrity, Availability) as seen in Fig.6, which indicates the weight of controls proposed in the architecture.

Figure 6. CIA Focus Allocation



7. Task 5: Course–Feedback Segregation

Figure 7. Course–Feedback



Physical Separation (Figure 7):

- **Feedback Data**: Hosted in AWS GovCloud (EU-London)
  ✓ Dedicated VPC with no public subnets
  ✓ FIPS 140-2 Level 3 HSM-backed KMS keys

- **Course Content**: Deployed in commercial AWS (eu-west-2)
  ✓ Standard S3 buckets with SSE-S3 encryption
  ✓ CloudFront CDN for global delivery

Logical controls:

Fig 7 shows how CBTA segregated data to ensure that Course VPC (public facing) is separated from Feedback VPC (isolated in AWS GovCloud with strict separation controls).

- **Network Security Groups (NSGs)**:
  ✓ Allow only TLS 1.3 traffic between VPCs
  ✓ Block ICMP and SSH protocols

- **IAM Policies**:
  ✓ `SecrecyDept-ReadOnly` role with:
  • `feedback:Get*` permissions
  • Explicit deny for `s3:Delete*`

Encryption differences:

Table 4. Encryption

Data Type	Encryption	Compliance
Courses	SSE-S3 (AES-256)	ISO 27001
Feedback	HSM (FIPS 140-2)	UK GDPR

Justification:

Security Requirement Compliance:

- R1 (Mutual Authentication): Cross account IAM roles using Sigstore signed JWTs for access [16] for mutual authentication (Mutual Authentication), which only authenticated Secrecy Department personnel can obtain the feedback.
- R3 (Secure Channel): NSG rules block non essential protocols (SSH/ICMP) and HTTPS, where VPC peering enforces TLS 1.3 encryption for all inter region traffic [17].
- R4 (Segregation): Physically isolate feedback into AWS GovCloud (as opposed to commercial region for courses), prevent accidentally commingling data. Logical separation is reinforced by:
    - Dedicated HSM-backed KMS keys for feedback (vs. SSE-S3 for courses)
    - Forcing an IAM policy explicitly denying s3:Put* actions on feedback resources
- R5 (Secrecy Dept Access): Secrecy Dept ReadOnly IAM role has OPA validating scope claims at runtime, feedback:Get* permissions authorized for this role.

Performance Requirement Adherence:

- **P1 (Minimize User Costs)**:
    - Commercial AWS region for courses leverages cost-effective SSE-S3 encryption (£0.02/GB/month vs. HSM's £0.30/GB/month) [18].
    - No client-side processing overhead for end-users.
- **P2 (Minimize Communication Costs)**:
    - VPC peering eliminates 75% of the inter region data transfer fee compared to using public internet (AWS pricing model) [19].
    - TLS 1.3's 1-RTT handshake optimizes connection establishment [6].

8. Task 6: Limitations & Future Work

Identified Weaknesses & Limitations:

- Certificate Management Overhead (SR2):
    - Manual PKI processes (e.g., revocation, renewal) strain ICT's remote management capabilities.
    - The vulnerability occurs when certificate revocation through OCSP caching encounters delays because it provides unauthorized access opportunities.
- VLAN Hopping (R4):
    - VLAN hopping occurs because intra-VLAN encryption remains absent which permits attackers to launch MANA attacks against internal network traffic.
    - The drawback leads to a breakdown in the segregation between public and internal service areas.
- Feedback API Scalability (SR1):
    - The 1,000 RPM rate limit presents a barrier to possible EU growth when collecting maximum feedback output.
- DDoS Cost (P2):
    - One recurring expense of Cloudflare Magic Transit amounts to £3k monthly fees to secure 500Gbps traffic.

Recommendations (Future Work):

- Automated PKI with AWS ACM (SR2):
    - The migration to AWS Certificate Manager would bring you automatic certificate renewal as well as instant certificate revocation capability.
    - The implementation of AWS benchmarks allows ICT management costs to decrease by 70% (benefit).
- MACsec Encryption for VLANs (R7):
    - The network should enable rate-based encryption of VLAN traffic through IEEE 802.1AE implementation.
    - Adding this security measure introduces a 0.2ms latency delay during each network hop which keeps within P2 standards.
- Dynamic API Scaling (SR1):
    - The implementation of AWS Lambda auto-scaling should replace fixed rate limits to achieve 10k RPM burst capacity.
- Hybrid DDoS Protection (P2):
    - Using a Cloudflare integration together with on-prem Arbor Peakflow infrastructure generates a 40% cost reduction.

Scalability & Remote Management (S1/S2)

- Terraform Modules: Codify infrastructure for one-click EU region deployment (SR1).
- The implementation of Zero-Trust NAC involves using Tailscale to supersede VLANs for secure remote access through an encrypted connection (SR2).

Cost-Benefit Justification:

- The implementation of AWS ACM cost £0.10 per certificate yet needed on-premises PKI would cost £15k yearly (this meets P1 requirement).
- The implementation of MACsec hardware with an initial cost of £8k allows organizations to prevent enterprise-level breaches that typically result in £500k financial loss according to ICO averages.

9. Individual Reflection

Individual Reflection – Mohammad bin Omar Jawaid

This group project required my substantial contribution to security architecture technical design along with documentation that focused on authentication methods and secure delivery protocols as well as the rules for Secrecy Department system access. The implementation of TLS 1.3 mutual authentication through X.509 certificates and JWTs required my attention because it needed to balance performance enhancement with zero-trust principles. I designed the network segmentation protocols along with VPN configuration and certificate management procedures while providing performance-based justification documents that included scalability specifications.

The technical depth and collaboration aspects of my work performance within the group met excellent standards. I kept regular contact with Kaleem to synchronize our work progress and maintain consistent information throughout every section. The designs I created incorporated both NIST and RFC standards and adjustments for CBTA's budget requirements and flexibility needs.

I believe the group maintained good operational efficiency. Kaleem focused on AWS deployment specifics and policy-based access control for his share of the work yet I handled architecture alongside technical implementation tasks. Our group regularly evaluated and harmonized content throughout the entire report. The technical demands have resulted in a thorough report which demonstrates both strong implementation competency and operational suitability.

Individual Reflection – Muhammad Kaleem

The principal focus of my work in this group project centered on designing the infrastructure deployment as well as access control design and data separation through AWS services. The main parts of my work involved designing separate physical and logical structures for course and feedback data and creating role-based authorizations through Open Policy Agent (OPA) and secure identity provisioning using SPIFFE/SPIRE. The audit trail mechanisms through QLDB along with long-term confidentiality and integrity and availability requirements received attention from me for design and implementation.

The effectiveness combined with my attention to detail are how I assess my work performance. By continuation I worked to design practical cloud security methods which incorporated the AWS GovCloud service combined with IAM policies along with VPCs and KMS protocol. My work with Mohammad involved joint efforts to prove encryption methods along with setting protected API token protocols and implementing TLS 1.3 for secure inter-region communication.

Our group worked excellently together with defined responsibilities between members. Our partnership focused on different responsibilities where Mohammad served as the protocol specialist but I handled cloud native work. We maintained regular coordination to help one another through section development while exchanging performance metrics and linking references among our work. Our solution shows technical excellence and academic conformity while meeting the requirements of modern industry standards.

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