# A brief guide to running AIMS in the Cloud

Can we move AIMS to the cloud?

In short, the answer is yes! How this is done depends on your end goal and other factors. If your organisation is looking to retire an existing server on site, or simply update to modern cloud applications such as Office 365 whilst continuing to use AIMS, this document provides guidance to get started.
IT assistance will be required to implement the preferred solution according to individual requirements.

In its simplest form, AIMS runs on a 'Remote Desktop' system hosted in Microsoft Azure (the Microsoft Public Cloud). Although the software itself is not web-enabled, users can connect to this system using any device from the office, home or other internet-connected location. In this scenario, AIMS is isolated from other applications used by your organization. The diagram below shows the most common options to consider when moving AIMS to the cloud.
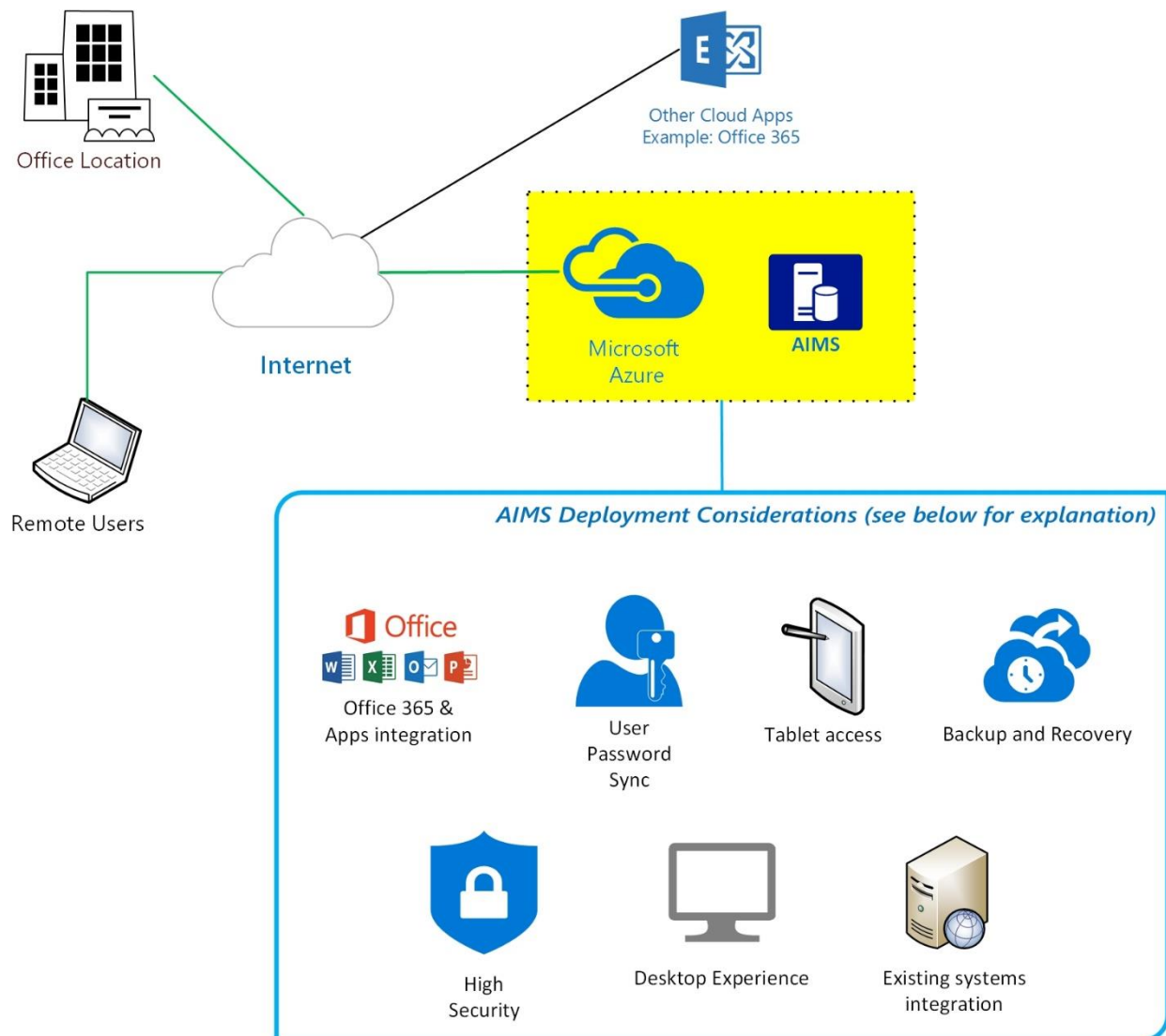
Considerations for AIMS Cloud Deployment

1. Office 365 & Apps Integration
   For AIMS functionality such as emails or mail merge using Microsoft Word, each user will need a license for Microsoft Office software. This could be available through your existing License Agreement or Office 365 subscription. You can then use the full desktop versions of software such as Outlook, Word and Excel to connect with your Office 365 account and other cloud solutions such as Box. See 'Desktop Experience' below for more details.

   AIMS can make use of local or mapped drives, for example for mail merge templates – meaning that your files could be stored on the remote desktop server or in a cloud solution that enables mapped drive connections such as Azure Files (see point 3 Example 1 below).
   If your company document storage has already been migrated to OneDrive, SharePoint, Box or similar then consideration must be given to how AIMS will access the required documents; it cannot communicate natively with these cloud platforms.

2. Desktop Experience
   A full 'desktop experience' enables a singular working environment; all work-related applications for the organisation run within the remote desktop system.
   Taking this route introduces two major advantages:
   1. Reduce future spend on end-user equipment (performance & specification less important).
   2. Flexibility for users to work from any device (PC/Mac/tablet).

3. Integration with existing systems
   Moving AIMS to the cloud environment may call for a review of other systems in use, whether or not they will be affected and how best to continue using them. It may be possible to migrate these systems also to Azure.

   Example 1: A file server containing shared folders
   Typically one of the more straightforward workloads to move to Azure; the existing file/folder structure can be replicated using the 'Azure Files' service and accessed in the same way either from the remote desktop server in Azure, or directly from end user computers over the internet.
   Initial & ongoing costs: likely low – depends on complexity and total amount of data involved.

   Example 2: SQL database
   There are two solutions for SQL databases in Azure – 'PaaS' and 'IaaS' – use this document as a guide to determine the best fit for your company:
   https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/azure/sql-database/sql-database-paas-vs-sql-server-iaas
   Costs: likely to be high – depending on database size and how it needs to be maintained.

4. User Password Sync
   'Another system, another password to remember' doesn't have to apply here; it is possible to synchronize user accounts and passwords with your existing Active Directory infrastructure or Office 365 tenant using Azure AD Sync.

5. Tablet access
   Running AIMS in the cloud enables tablets or mobile devices to access the software, benefiting from the touch element for ease of navigation. This is ideally suited to scenarios where the end user only needs to run the AIMS client for looking up or inputting information. Although possible, functionality such as mail merge for tablet use would introduce additional complexity

to the setup and support, so it's worth considering expectations carefully – a trial is recommended to visualize how this would best work for your users.

6. Backup and Recovery
   Microsoft Azure provides a 99.9% availability guarantee, but in the case of something being accidentally deleted then rolling back is vital. Data can be replicated to another datacentre for maximum redundancy, and copies retained for up to 10 years.

7. Data security
   For organisations with specific requirements, security measures such as storage and connection encryption are available.

How much will this cost?

Microsoft is currently offering $5000 annual Azure credit for qualifying non-profits, which is a significant contribution towards the cloud infrastructure costs, and in some cases, will cover the entire solution. Verify eligibility here: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/philanthropies/product-donations/eligibility

In the UK, this credit can be obtained via Technology Trust / tt-exchange:
https://support.tt-exchange.org/hc/en-gb/articles/211944009-Azure-for-Non-profits

Before completing the application process, please read the guidance carefully – if you have an existing Office 365 tenant and wish to use the same login credentials for managing your Azure Sponsorship subscription (recommended in most cases) then please sign up using a 'work or school' account – don't use a personal or company 'Microsoft account' unless you have a good reason to keep the Azure subscription separate.

Additional costs to consider would involve Remote Desktop Licensing, Microsoft Office licensing, IT consultancy, implementation and support.

Where will our data be physically located?

At the time of writing, Microsoft Azure Sponsorship subscriptions offer a limited choice of datacentres, the nearest one for UK customers is West Europe (Amsterdam).
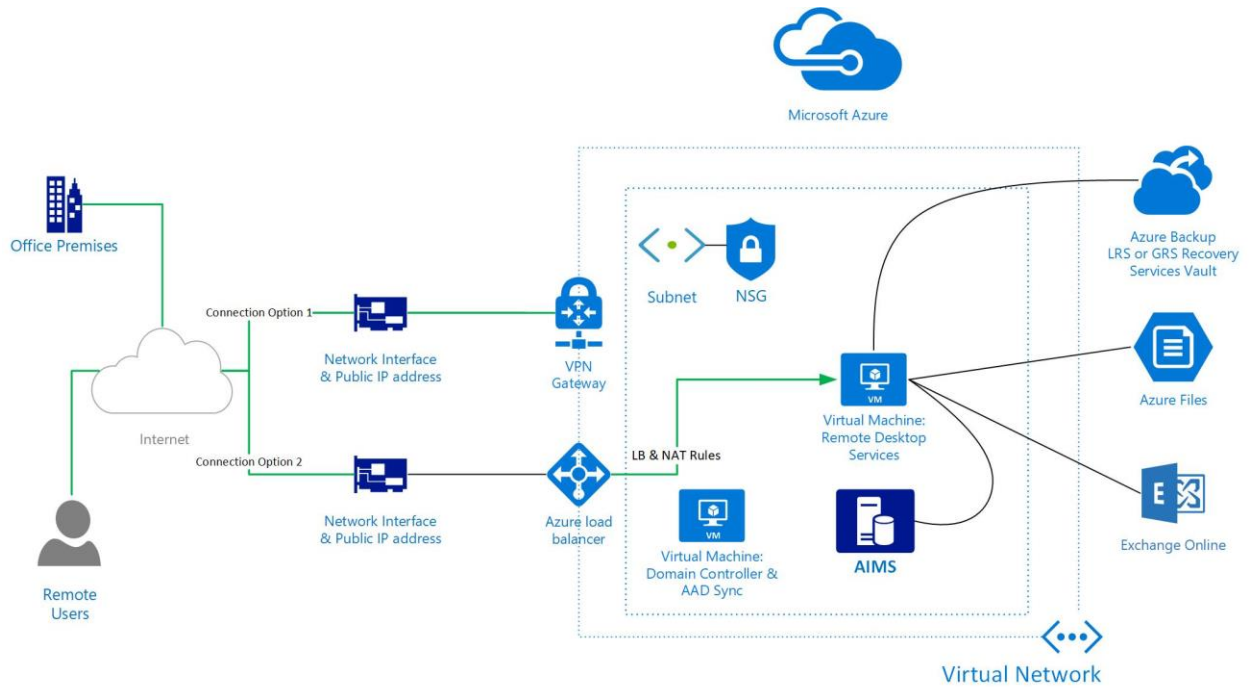
Next step:

Contact a trusted Microsoft Cloud Partner for guidance, using this document as a starting point.

Blue Planet IT is a Microsoft Cloud Partner based in Oxfordshire, specializing in cloud solutions for charities, schools and corporate sector clients.   www.blueplanet-it.co.uk

For more information:
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For IT Pros: How the Microsoft Azure solution might look: