
Secure Access to On-line Resources

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WHY THE NEED FOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT?

With an increasing amount of online content available to learners and educators, the need for more secure and simplified access to resources has now become imperative. In response to this, the UK Access Management Federation was launched on 30 November 2006 to provide an access management solution to schools, further education, higher education and research organisations.

THE UK ACCESS MANAGEMENT FEDERATION

The UK Access Management Federation allows users to access protected online resources such as journals, books and data collections. It also permits providers of online resources to control access to their services using Shibboleth technology.

THE BENEFITS

Shibboleth allows service providers to recognise authorised users by requesting authentication from the user's home organisation. This gives organisations greater control over personal data and access to resources.

The technology allows for greater security of personal data as there is no need to release an individual's personal details. Instead the system releases a statement along the lines of 'This user is a member of staff' or 'This student is enrolled on a medical course.' This makes it easier for organisations to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Shibboleth software has already been adopted in national federations in Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, Switzerland and the United States. It can be used to control access to both local

resources (such as e-mail) and external online resources, thus reducing the number of passwords users need to remember. In the longer term, this should reduce the support burden on organisations by reducing the number of authentication systems organisations are required to support.

There are no costs to service providers or identity providers (e.g. colleges and universities) wishing to join the federation and Shibboleth can be used to gain access to controlled resources from any location using a web browser.

DEPLOYING THE TECHNOLOGY

There are two main options for educational organisations wishing to participate in the UK federation:

- 1 Deploy the Shibboleth software in house, allowing the organisation to retain strategic control and support of access management functions. This can be done using IT resources within the organisation or by making use of external consultants.
- 2 Outsource the responsibility for your organisation's identity provision, supplying data to the outsource company through a suitable contractual arrangement.

ACCESS TO EXISTING ATHENS PROTECTED RESOURCES

From July 2008, Athens will no longer be funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and will become a chargeable service. Organisations that have deployed Shibboleth and joined the federation will be able to continue to access Athens protected resources, through the federation gateway service, at no cost.

JOINING THE FEDERATION

After four months of operation, the federation had 22 identity providers and 13 service providers, with 18 applications being processed. We continue to receive a steady stream of new applications each month from both service and identity providers.

To find out more about becoming a member, please take a look at the federation's website: www.ukfederation.org.uk