

Benefits of implementing Shibboleth and joining the UK Access Management Federation for Education and Research

The federation provides the UK schools, further and higher education and research sectors with a framework for accessing online learning material using technology such as Shibboleth. This will provide institutions with a route to single sign-on to resources through the implementation of federated, devolved authentication.

Shibboleth is an authentication and authorisation infrastructure system capable of granting individual learners with secure, anywhere, anytime access to educational resources which are available online. By authenticating users at an individual level (rather than granting the same access to all pupils from one school) Shibboleth helps meet objectives outlined in the DfES e-strategy: to provide an individualised learning experience. As a consequence, Shibboleth should be adopted as an integral component in the strategic approach to the future development of ICT in education, skills and children's services.

What does implementation mean for ...

... the learner:

- The learner will need only to enter an institutional ID and password, removing the complexity of multiple IDs, passwords and authentication challenges.
- The learner can also be assured that personal information is not being disclosed unnecessarily to third parties.
- Learners will have the ability to access resources outside of the school environment, such as at home or in a public library, subject to the validity of licences.
- Managed attributes will allow appropriate content to be presented with minimal end-user intervention.

... the institution:

Staff in institutions currently have responsibility for handling both the 'people' and 'resources' requirements of access management. This has meant managing licences for resources and negotiating with resource owners, and also having the responsibility of assigning usernames and passwords to users. With the adoption of Shibboleth, institution staff – teachers, ICT managers or technicians, for example – will be freed from the burden of username/password administration.

... the resource owner:

- The assurance that only those entitled to access their services will be able to do so.
- Adopting a system that will increasingly have international take-up.
- Freedom to concentrate on their core activity of providing quality educational resources.
- Lower helpdesk costs.
- A level playing field for all content producers to provide accessible content for end-users, without having to worry about delivery through the other suppliers' mechanisms.

... the local authority/regional broadband consortium:

Identity provision at a regional level will allow for greater aggregation for purchasing content and will facilitate the secure sharing of data and content between authorities and regions.

... the education sector:

A shared infrastructure covering schools, FE and HE institutions will allow for seamless transfer between sectors, benefiting learners working in multiple environments/institutions and facilitating access to e-portfolios.