



Thumbs Up for Shibboleth!

Leicestershire Library Services For Education and JISC Collections for Schools

Leicestershire Library Services for Education (LSE) supports a number of secondary schools across Leicestershire LA, Leicester City LA and Rutland LA. In March 2010 LSE bought subscriptions to a number of on-line resources via JISC Collections for Schools (JCS). Established with funding from Becta, JISC Collections for Schools is a not-for-profit initiative which enables schools across the UK to access a range of high quality online subscription resources at discounts of up to 80%. LSE has subscribed to three of the resources: Credo Reference (collection of 400+ titles), Science Reference Center™, History Study Centre, and purchased a perpetual licence to the Guardian and Observer Digital Archive.

The problem that then faced LSE was how to make these on-line resources available to the schools who subscribed to their service but not to schools who did not subscribe. The answer provided by the suppliers was either a user name and password or via a unique ip address for each member school. The problem with the former is that the login credential would have to be given to every student and member of staff in the subscribing school. The problem with the latter is that as the subscribing schools receive broadband from embc, the East Midlands regional broadband consortium, this would not be possible. Embc uses a private range of ip addresses which are hidden from the internet behind security firewalls as part of the overall safeguarding employed to protect the users within schools.

Shortcut links could be established on school intranets which then with the given password could access the resources. Some suppliers were willing to provide a web address which did not require a login code, knowing that LSE had bought a subscription to their resource, which as long as it was put on a secure intranet or password protected area of a website could be put access the resource. However, all of these methods required the use of an additional login and also meant that for the greater part of the time they could only be used from within the school building, whereas, of course, students would benefit greatly if access could be had from home.

LSE approached the Leicestershire CYPS ICT Consultants, namely Simon Goodall. Simon was quickly able to deduce that the solution to the problem clearly lay in a Shibboleth style login. The Shibboleth system is a standards based, open source software package for web single sign-on across or within organizational boundaries. Embc was already a Shibboleth compliant regional identity provider in that a user logging onto the embc Learning Platform could have their essential educational credentials passed to a third party supplier without actually revealing their personal information.

Embc is able to pass on whether the user is a member of staff or a student and from which DfE recognised institution they come from.

Simon approached all of the suppliers individually for a Shibboleth login mechanism. All but the Guardian were able to provide a Wayless url¹ which accessed their Shibboleth authentication service. This service interrogates embc for the credentials of the user and providing that the user's school's DfE number matches one of LSE's subscribing schools, the user is authenticated and given access to the resources.

Simon was able to use the Leicestershire iteration of the embc Learning Platform to provide icons and links to each of the respective suppliers. A user simply has to log into the embc Learning Platform and click the shortcut provided in their My Site home area to access the resource. There are no additional passwords to remember and a fantastic added advantage to the system is that staff and students can access the resources from home as well as in school.

As the Leicester City subscribing schools and also those in Rutland also use embc as their broadband supplier the solution has the advantage of being used regionally rather than just within Leicestershire LA. Should additional schools subscribe to LSE then their DfE number can be passed to the suppliers and be added to their list of known schools. Schools not subscribing to LSE still see the JCS supplier icons but when they click the icons receive a friendly message about needing a subscription. Leicestershire's schools also see icons for other subscription services with a Shibboleth login such as the Education Image Gallery and Channel 4 Clipbank.

Having seen the ease by which other suppliers were able to supply a Shibboleth authentication the Guardian and Observer Digital Archive is now in the process of implementing its own which is expected to be available in summer 2010.

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JISC Collections for Schools

For more information about the online resources available through JISC Collections for Schools go to www.jcs.nen.gov.uk or contact Joyce Martin (joyce@jisccollectionsforschools.org.uk).

¹ A WAYFless URL enables a user who is already logged in to their Identity Provider's (IdP) services to access the Publishers content pointed to by the WAYFless URL without either having to re-authenticate or identify the IdP through the UKAMF WAYF.

