

Office of Information and Library Services

Department of Information and Communications Technology

REPORT ON IDENTITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AS AT MAY 2009

Background

In 2008, a review of problems encountered by staff and students in using the installed base of IT systems at the University of Greenwich showed that the most common problems related to forgotten/lost passwords, (especially after the summer period), remote/off-site users not being able to change their passwords, and difficulties with guest registration for use of IT systems according to the type of guest.

There is a requirement to make University of Greenwich systems secure for all users including staff and students of all types and conditions of employment/study, and especially for guests the rules are complex with many different conditions for different types of guests e.g. partner colleges staff; past staff; short courses, commercial etc. Nevertheless these rules must be interpreted and consistently applied; often though this was not the case. ILS would in some cases be asked for last minute registrations (often with minutes to enact; would not be advised when guests were no longer guests etc).

After discussion, it was decided to pursue an identity management system that would address the common issues plus lay the foundations for an integrated unified environment where access to UoG IT systems could be controlled and consistent, i.e. user identity and entitlement would be checked and passed between systems as necessary with appropriate level of access. It would enable, as far as technically possible, self service password reset for staff, students and guests and self service guest registration and account management by the sponsoring School/Office. The system would give automate account creation (Novell, Portal, WebCT) and user life cycle management for guest users. whereas before each account was separate method, often by separate teams that could give rise to delays.

Solution

All Universities have the same issues and there is no common solution to the problem; each University is unique in its range and operation of systems. As the University of Greenwich basic access mechanism was via the Novell suite of software, we partnered with the sole UK educational suppliers, Salford Software (who has provided the most IDM systems for UK Universities). A key factor was that the Novell Identity management software suite would seamlessly integrate with existing Novell products.

Each user of IT systems would be identified in a common user's database, which in phase 1 links to the existing Novell system but in the future will have direct Integration and authentication from the Student

Record and personnel systems, then link to other IT systems such as portal etc. Affiliate (or guest) authentication comes from a new ARMS database. At the same time it became evident that we could take advantage to solve another problem in that the portal access was through a single non-dedicated system (hence a single point of failure) and we could use the system to create a resilient connection. Other benefits became evident; e.g. harmonisation of historically different password policy between different UoG Schools.

Progress

Discussions and intensive computer programming work has been undertaken in partnership with Salford software and a range of typical users to design and implement a system that would take account of the historical nature of IT systems and practices at the University. This has been a complex task, and as the solution is unique there have been difficulties to overcome with delays encountered during the intensive testing phase. There were robust supplier University discussions, but following a recent review we have resolved the difficulties. There will be fine tuning of the system as we get more user feedback, but the demonstration and predicted acceptance date to the University is the end of May. Following acceptance it must be moved from test into production and deployment with full user guides and training. Production will be in June; user Training will be in July with an August go live date.

Summary

This new system will give the University

- a) Self service password reset for staff, via Novell client and Portal
- b) Self service password reset for students, via Novell client and Portal
- c) Self service registration for affiliate (was guests) users and automatic account creation
- d) Self service password reset for affiliates
- e) Enhanced security (start /stop dates for affiliate access) – it is a full user life cycle management system.
- f) Stronger password (8 characters not 6) –and more complex i.e. include different case letters, numbers and symbols
- g) Resilient Portal authentication

In addition it has laid the foundations for an identity Management Solution (single Sign on) for staff and students to the disparate range of University systems. It has also enabled a quicker way to enable authentication for another ICT project: external email provision for University students