An exemplar approach to differentiating Transnational Education (TNE) students and staff in response to commonplace publisher licence restrictions

A case study detailing a workshop with the University of Reading

As part of the Jisc TNE Licensing Pilot, a workshop session was held at the University of Reading which focussed on managing access to library content in relation to students (and the staff that support them), who are studying for awards of a UK University, but doing so in a TNE context.

In the TNE context, library content licenses do not always permit libraries to deliver their licensed content to TNE students. Such restrictions may not apply to the more traditional university student, or, staff member, and they may also vary, depending on the nature of TNE provision scenario that the university is engaged in.

The workshop session sought to establish whether it was possible for a university to consistently identify TNE users in such a way, that pieces of information relating to them, and their TNE context, could be used to underpin a differentiating approach to authenticating them as they try to access library content, and, therefore, provide a way to provide a more 'granular' approach to managing access to library content in such circumstances.

Those present at the session included University of Reading staff with expertise relating to student records, international partnerships, identity management & authentication, directory arrangements, and library content. Also present were the Principle Technical Specialist from the UK Access Management Federation, and the TNE Licensing Manager from Jisc Collections.

The session explored the current situation at the University of Reading, including the systems involved, and developed an understanding of the appetite for - and the likely impact of - making changes that would enable differentiation of their TNE provision scenarios, along the lines of a Jisc-conceived exemplar approach in support of an attribute-driven, authentication solution.

Based on typical issues or licence exceptions known to Jisc, or, those raised with Jisc by its members throughout the TNE Licensing Pilot, these attributes would form the technical expression of some key and consistent ‘facts’ about TNE library content users that would be necessary to share with publishers, to allow them to make proactive authorisation decisions aligned with their licence restrictions.
The facts about the users that form the Jisc-conceived exemplar approach would be as follows, and are based on the assumption that a publisher may wish to take a view on such types of user related information should it be presented to them at the point of log-in to content:

- The provision scenario (campus or collaborative educator name)
- The country where the provision scenario is located
- The HESA AOR Code the individual is associated with
- Whether the individual is a student or a member of staff

University of Reading staff concluded that these facts could be identified in various systems and data sources, and could therefore, potentially, be used to drive a differentiating, attribute-driven authentication process. This was either true already, or, would require an enrichment activity prior to this being the case, although this wasn’t felt to be particularly difficult to do where enrichment would be needed. It was also noted that some facts could be inferred and built on the presence of others. The only issue highlighted by University of Reading was around staff identification, where mixed consistency of identification may result due to local practices when capturing them on local systems.

Some further points to note about the context at the University of Reading would be that:

- The university is a SITS customer – as is the case for many institutions
- The university is an ADFS user – as is the case for many institutions
- The university is an OpenAthens customer – as is the case for many institutions
- There was a project already underway at the university thinking about their data and looking at enriching and improving it
- Those in the room from the university all knew and worked together in some capacity already

It should also be noted that University of Reading staff also felt that any enrichments that would be needed to utilise the exemplar approach would not only fit with the plan to be able to better manage access to library content in a TNE context, but they would also form a useful basis for enhanced reporting of management information at a local level.

In conclusion, the workshop provided evidence that an institution could, with the right level of information to draw in from local systems, share the differentiating exemplar facts, and therefore be well placed to disclose differentiating information regarding TNE Students at the point of TNE users authenticating to gain access to library licensed content. In doing this, it would therefore also become possible for publishers to act on the differentiating exemplar facts, in order to make pro-active authorisation decisions, aligned with their content licence restrictions in response to UK University TNE activities.