Jisc retainer helps NCH offer access to US content – in a cost-effective way

**Challenge:** Seamless access to content after US–UK merger

**Solution:** Jisc’s trust and identity retained expertise

**Benefits:** Cost-effective expertise – helping NCH to provide single sign-on access to online resources

The challenge was to offer this access in good time for the new term in autumn 2020, while keeping resources free for other, bigger projects – not least an updated virtual learning environment (VLE) and student information system.

“*It was a busy year, with many changes... And the deadline was quite rigid because we couldn’t start the academic year without it.*”

Shimon Agur, VLE and library resources manager at NCH.

The challenge: offering access to content hosted in the US

Preparing for a new academic year is always a challenging time for IT teams in research and education.

But in summer 2020, life was particularly busy for New College of Humanities (NCH) in London – as it worked to integrate IT systems after its acquisition by Northeastern University in the US, while at the same time coping with the Covid-19 pandemic.

A key part of the work was providing seamless access to content across borders. Staff and students in London already had single sign-on (SSO) access to Jisc Collections materials in the UK – but with the right integration, they could also benefit from seamless access to library services and other materials in the US.

If this could be achieved, it would extend the range and richness of resources which students could access – while at the same time saving the organisation money on duplicate subscriptions.
The solution: retained trust and identity expertise from Jisc
In order to provide access to its existing content, NCH had so far used a managed Shibboleth service from Jisc. That solution, though, would no longer be appropriate for providing access to the US-based content – because Northeastern used a third-party service, EZproxy, which would require work to integrate with Shibboleth.

So, facing a tight deadline and complex integration, NCH decided to bring a Shibboleth instance on-premises – and use a ‘retained expertise’ service from Jisc.

NCH had confidence in Jisc because they had already been using Jisc for the Shibboleth server and journal access – along with an eduroam implementation.

The retainer gave NCH access to Jisc’s expertise for a specific number of hours in the year – so it could call upon Jisc if it needed to.

Benefit to staff and students: access to US content in September
The primary benefit of Jisc’s trust and identity consultancy was that staff and students were able to connect seamlessly to US-hosted content. The new Shibboleth server was up and running in good time for the academic year, with NCH’s 150–200 students connected.

At the same time, reliable access to digital content proved particularly crucial because of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Getting hard copies of information is slower because everything is quarantined,” Shimon explains.

Benefits to NCH: a cost-effective and reliable partner
For the IT team, using Jisc’s retained expertise was a cost-effective way to access the specialists it needed.

“The key point about the retained expertise is that it works out more cost-effective... If we need them, we know they’re contracted and on hand, rather than having to obtain a quote and get it signed off when time’s against us. Having it there is almost like an insurance policy.”
Zain Rhemtulla, support manager at Pioneer Solutions, NCH’s primary IT partner.

“We knew that Jisc knew what they were doing,” Zain explains. “We didn’t need to second-guess anything they recommended or advised. That’s one of the key points of going with Jisc – we had the trust there, because they had already set up systems beforehand.”

“They’ve always been friendly and approachable,” he adds. “Nothing’s ever too big or too small – they were great to work alongside.”