Jisc eduroam expertise means simpler internet for researchers

When the Babraham Institute’s legacy eduroam setup began to conflict with policies on user devices, it was time to bring things up to date. So the IT team called in the eduroam experts: Jisc’s trust and identity consultants.

Challenge: secure internet access for users who bring their own device
The Babraham Institute prides itself on creating an inclusive, collaborative environment for its community of researchers. So, to enable collaboration, it wanted to allow users and academic visitors to access the internet via eduroam on its site, on their own devices.

That said, for security reasons, the institute wanted to allow only internally issued devices to access internal systems. So, some years ago, it put in place a system which filtered access via a device’s unique MAC address.

That worked for a while – but recently, newer Apple and Android operating systems began to randomise the MAC address of devices, as a privacy measure. This meant that the institute needed to modernise its eduroam setup.

The solution: trust and identity consultancy from Jisc
In an effort to solve the problem, Cass Flowers, head of IT at the institute, decided to join an online support clinic for eduroam, run by Jisc. At that clinic, Jisc recommended their trust and identity consultancy team.

The team then set up a call with Cass to understand the problem. “They were knowledgeable, they understood the problem, and they inspired confidence,” she says.

Jisc’s solution was to reconfigure the system, in line with best-practice recommendations – which included directing users to the eduroam app when they wanted to set up a new connection, removing the need for the legacy solution.

Benefit to the institute: trustworthy consultancy
When Cass chose Jisc for the project, she was impressed with the helpful way they tackled it. “It was really brilliant working with them,” she says. “They communicated throughout – and got in touch afterwards to check everything was working as expected.”

The consultant was conscientious not to make changes that might have a negative impact, Cass explains.

“When they found oddities with our setup, they went away and fired up some test labs – and ‘pressed pause’ until they were confident that the changes they were making were the right ones.”
Through the whole of the work, she says, the campus lost only about five minutes of connectivity – which Cass says is “fantastic”.

Benefits to users: a simpler way to connect to eduroam
For users, meanwhile, the new setup reduces confusion. The old system required researchers to find their MAC addresses on their phones – but some did not know what a MAC address was. Instead, they can now go to the app and set things up there.

To help make life even simpler, Jisc’s dedicated consultant also involved the Babraham Institute’s user support team in the process, helping to explain the setup, so that they could be in a better place to answer user questions.

Of course, as more people return to campus after the Covid-19 pandemic, there will be more chances for researchers to make the most of the collaborative benefits which eduroam provides.

“We do collaborate a lot with other organisations who use eduroam and the Janet Network,” says Cass. “Often users will come from other organisations, and our users go to other sites. So having good, stable eduroam access allows our students and staff access wherever they are – and it’s a core service to have that connectivity.”

Lesson learned: turning to Jisc for eduroam expertise
As for the main lesson learned? Cass feels she could have turned to Jisc sooner for their consultancy expertise.

“This project was something that was in the back of my mind for a couple of years, but the mobile privacy changes pushed it to the front. Going forward, I know I can ask Jisc if I need help.”

eduroam expertise for the new academic year
As students return to campus in September, a seamless mobile connection will become a core part of the academic experience once more.

Students, researchers and staff can use eduroam to access the internet not only at your own site, but at any eduroam-enabled site.

If your eduroam setup needs updating, now’s the time to contact Jisc’s trust and identity consultants:

Contact: trustandidentity@jisc.ac.uk
or visit: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/consultancy/trust-and-identity