Trust and identity team offers cost-effective solution to issues with federated access.

Seamless access to library resources is vital for learning – but the technology behind federated access can be complex. Here’s how our trust and identity team helped Activate Learning replace a legacy identity provider (IdP), and provide cost-effective ongoing support.

Challenge: cost and disruption as identity software reaches end of life.

For education group Activate Learning, which runs a series of FE/HE colleges in south-east England, it’s vital to provide seamless library access to online resources for its students – as it aims to empower them as they learn.

In IT terms, this means the education provider is often required to authenticate users via a federated access system, using the UK Access Management Federation.

But to get this done, Activate Learning was having two challenges. First, it had a local server running an end-of-life solution which was no longer supported, which they were still paying an ongoing subscription fee for.

Second, its IT team mainly uses Microsoft – but running a SAML-based identity provider (IdP) is not only Linux-based, but complex at that. Problems meant the IT team would have to take the server out of service to try to fix it – but without success.

“There was no way we were going to resolve it ourselves,” says Andrew Knight, group application and infrastructure manager at the group.

“We had a look at it, but this is one of those things you almost need to be a rocket scientist to understand.”

So, it needed a solution that was cost-effective and reduced disruption and complexity.

Solution: Jisc’s trust and identity consultancy team.

Activate Learning recognised that they needed Jisc – because, as Andrew explains, Jisc run the UK Access Management Federation and “know the system inside out”. So they were put in touch with the trust and identity consultancy team.
“The team stepped in and said: ‘We know exactly what we’re going to do with this.’ It had been a bit of a mess, but they connected everything and made it work. With their help, we built a cloud-based server for it – which they look after for us, because it’s a Linux box.”

On an ongoing basis, Jisc provides trust and identity consultancy to handle any updates and issues – for a cost-effective annual fee.

**Benefits: less disruption and a cost-effective service.**

For Activate Learning’s IT team, there’s no more time wasted trying to configure federated access technology themselves.

“The Jisc consultancy team handle the updates, and we don’t have to worry about a thing,” Andrew explains. “If we require a new connection to a resource provider, we call the trust and identity consultancy team and they go ahead and set it up.”

As part of the service, Jisc offer quarterly meetings. “They last about 10 minutes,” says Andrew. “They might tell us they’ve applied an update, and we’ll say: ‘That’s great – we didn’t notice.’ There’s no disruption at all.”

And overall, the service for Activate Learning is cost-effective. “We normally get to the end of the year without using all the hours, but it is what it is – if there’s a major disaster, they’ll fix it, so there’s a kind of insurance there.”

Overall, Andrew is glad he turned to the Jisc’s trust and identity consultants – saying they were the right team for the job in this case.

“They were the right people at the right time, at the right cost,” Andrew says. “We recommend the trust and identity consultancy team.”

To find out how Jisc can support your organisation please contact your relationship manager or call Jisc directly on: 0300 300 2212