

CASE STUDY

The City Academy Bristol creates a secure and efficient network

When it opened in September 2003, The City Academy in Bristol became the first college of its kind in the South West. Part of the National Academies Programme, the specialist sports college is sponsored by Bristol City Football Club and the University of the West of England, and offers free education of the highest standard in a well equipped state-of-the-art environment.

Currently the academy has 1200 pupils supported by an educational staff of 250, all of which have access to a Microsoft-based network that hosts around 250 educational applications in a managed learning environment.

Two of the applications have been developed by Tools4ever. The User Management Resource Administrator (UMRA) allows the academy's IT support staff to effectively manage the pupil and staff Active Directory and Exchange Accounts, and the Self Service Reset Password Manager (SSRPM) allows all network users to reset their own passwords.

The academy's IT manager, Matthew Causon, believes both applications have greatly improved the productivity of the three helpdesk personnel, allowing them to provide a higher level of service in a more secure environment.

Previous to the installation of SSRPM, a pupil forgetting their password meant an email had to be sent to the helpdesk by the teacher, with no specific guarantee of the password being immediately reset. And passwords, which were set as a pupil's date of birth, failed to provide a level of security that assured users their confidential data was secure.

Now by subscribing to the SSRPM service, pupils must answer a series of pre-defined challenge questions before they are allowed to reset their own passwords in accordance with the academy's password naming convention. Although passwords have to be changed on a regular basis, SSRPM allows anyone to reset their own password if they believe their account is threatened or, more simply, if they've just forgotten it. For added security the teaching staff set and answer two extra questions of their own choice.

Matthew Causon believes that although the application's roll out resulted in some additional support calls, the academy is now reaping the benefits with helpdesk personnel able to concentrate on delivering an improved level of service.

In common with most educational establishments, the academy has to set up a large number of new network accounts in time for each academic year. Every student and member of staff needs a user name, a password and an email address in addition to a home area and access to network applications and services. As pupils progress from year to year, the applications and services they require change, meaning an increase in the workload of IT support staff.

Also in common with other schools and colleges, the academy uses a student information system, in this case CMIS. This effectively means that most of the information required to populate the Active Directory accounts already exists.

One of the greatest perceived benefits of the academy's purchase of UMRA is the product's ability to extract student and staff personnel information from the CMIS and automatically create, update or delete Active Directory accounts. Combined with UMRA's ability to create names, passwords and email addresses in line with corporate naming conventions, Matthew says, "Having all our Active Directory accounts automatically updated each midnight gives me the confidence that our network accounts are always up-to-date with correct information. Not having to distribute domain administration rights to control user accounts ensures that we now run a very secure network."

Before using UMRA, setting up new staff accounts on the network was a time consuming activity. Once their details had been input into CMIS, the relevant personnel information was emailed to technical support so that a network account could be created. Then only when the support team had created the account, could the user name and email address be given to administration for insertion into the relevant CMIS fields.

UMRA automates this entire process and frees up network support and helpdesk personnel to provide a better level of service and faster response to more complex user issues.

"UMRA and SSRPM are fantastic tools for network administrators. I wouldn't be without them now," says Matthew Causon.