eResearch Australasia

Nick Tate: Overview, history and the Australian Access Federation (AAF)

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Abstract

Sharing data, systems and research infrastructure, in a secure way, between different Australian Research Organisations, such as universities and research agencies presents a difficult problem, both technically and from a policy perspective. There is a lack of technical methods and little or no policy framework to support sharing between organisations, even once technical challenges are overcome.

This lack of a framework means that most data and systems arising from Australian research are not easily able to be shared, leading to poor returns on investment from research funding and very limited opportunities for collaboration between researchers.

The collaborative nature of e-Research and much of the activity that is envisaged under NCRIS will be significantly dependent on the ability to share data, systems and research infrastructure between research organisations both within Australia and internationally. Solving this problem is, therefore, essential to enable the objectives of NCRIS and e-Research.

Technical advances provide a new solution to secure sharing of data and systems using a "Trust Federation". A Trust Federation is a combination of policies and technologies that allows individuals across many different organisations to securely share and analyse data within a trusted environment.

Recently, the Australian Government provided funding of approximately $4.8m for a project to develop a Trust Federation for the Australian Higher Education and Research sector, to be called the Australian Access Federation (AAF), with the aim of facilitating trusted electronic communications and collaboration between higher education and research institutions both locally and internationally.

It is being lead by the University of Queensland with Macquarie University and AusCERT as partners. The federation will support a range of services, including authentication, and builds substantially on the work undertaken by two existing DEST funded projects. These are the e-Security Framework project, based at the University of Queensland and the MAMS (Meta Access Management System project), based at Macquarie University.

This presentation will provide an overview of the Trust Federation concept and background history of the Australian Access Federation (AAF) and will discuss the approach to be taken in establishing this federation.

About the speaker

Nick is both Director of Information Technology Services at The University of Queensland and the Director of Australia's National CERT, AusCERT (The Australian Computer Emergency Response Team), which is based at the University.

He is also a Director of Higher Ed Systems Pty Ltd, a Director of AARNet Pty Ltd, Chair of the Queensland Regional Network Organisation (QRNO), President of the Academic Board of the International Systems Security Professional Certification Scheme (ISSPCS), Chairman of the Australian Computer Society (ACS) in Queensland and a member of the executive and former Chair of the Council of Australian University Directors of IT (CAUDIT).

Nick was the project lead/chief investigator of the Grangenet and DCITA funded CAUDIT PKI project, and currently leads the DEST funded MAPS (Middleware Action Plan and Strategy), eSecurity framework and Australian Access Federation (AAF) projects.

Prior to joining the university, Nick worked as an IT professional in Investment Banking for 20 years, the first 18 of which were spent in London before emigrating to Australia in 1997, where he became Technology Services Director at Macquarie Bank, based in Sydney. During his time in London, he worked with the United Bank of Kuwait for over 10 years and was Head of IT during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the first Gulf war when there was a run on the bank and many strange requests from Baghdad! He has also worked in the defence industry as a Weapons Systems Engineer developing anti-missile missile systems for Royal Navy Warships.

Nick holds a Bachelor's degree in Physics from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland and a Master's degree in Computer Science and is also a Chartered Engineer, a Chartered IT Professional, a Fellow of the Australian Computer Society and a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. He has over 32 years experience in IT, with more than a decade at CIO level.

In addition to his work in IT, Nick was awarded a Royal Naval Flying Scholarship whilst at school, was a pilot in the University Air Squadron/Royal Air force Volunteer Reserve, whilst at University and was a Borough Councillor (British equivalent of a City Councillor) for five years in the 1980s. Whilst he was a councillor, he chaired the health and highways committees for the council.