

AAF 10



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AUSTRALIAN
ACCESS FEDERATION



Origins of access for Australian universities

In 2009, the Australian higher education landscape was severely fragmented. Student admissions were at a record high as study options broadened and university IT systems struggled to keep up with the demand. As a result, universities developed systems to provide access to digital services and staff continued to spend unnecessary time entering data manually over and over again.

Individually, universities attempted to persevere with these manual processes and identity management was proving to be complicated and ineffective. Creating and distributing an individuals credentials was a lengthy process and didn't account for sessional or invited academic roles. This whole process reflected poorly on university Identity Management systems. Former QUT Information Technology Service Director and CAUDIT President at the time, Neil Thelander confirms that the increase of systems made things "harder and harder as the number of systems grew."

After positive experiences interconnecting WiFi via eduROAM, the Council of Australasian University IT Directors (CAUDIT) agreed that a centralised access federation would be a national solution to these problems. The Australian Access Federation (AAF) would authorise staff, students and researchers around Australia, enabling them to access a wide range of digital services from many organisations. With numerous researchers already collaborating in universities this idea also piqued the interest of CSIRO, Australia's largest research organisation.

After ten years connecting people with services, "the AAF has continued to be important to research collaborations," claims Mr. Thelander. Now enabling global access for Australian researchers, the AAF is considered a crucial part of the national research infrastructure system.

Advancing research collaboration alongside NCRIS

As Chair of the Australian eResearch Infrastructure Council from 2007 to 2013, and former QUT Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Technology, Information and Learning Support), Professor Tom Cochrane played a vital role in the establishment of the Australian Access Federation (AAF). With the support of QUT, CAUDIT and CSIRO a small amount of funding kickstarted the project that led to the foundation of the AAF. “The AAF was the most adventurous investment. The money compared to the others was significantly less, so it was less risky for the government, said Prof Cochrane.” With two previous attempts to setup a national federation, the third attempt had the smallest investment and objective to provide a self-sustaining federation, now known as the AAF.

Prof. Cochrane who compiled the 2014 Status Report on the NCRIS eResearch Capability, found that the AAF was the only capability operating as a self-sustaining entity compared to the six other eResearch infrastructure investments. Since the initial objective of authorising and enabling researchers to seamlessly access external digital services, the AAF has continued to enable national and international connectivity for Australia.

The AAF, as described in the NCRIS Report is a “service that now appears to provide the capability that everyone likes in an IT project – it just works.” Evolving from a scarcely funded idea to a self-sustaining part of the Australian university landscape, the AAF is a vital national eResearch service.

The AAF’s **VISION** is to lead access management for Australian education and research.

The AAF’s **MISSION** is to deliver secure federated access that connects Australian teachers, students and researchers to global online resources.

Past, present and future of the Australian Access Federation

With nearly 18 years' experience in the research and education sector, Paul Sherlock offers a unique perspective on the development of the eResearch landscape in Australia. Current CIO at the University of South Australia, former CAUDIT president and National Research Network project director, and long-standing member of the Australian Access Federation (AAF) Board, Sherlock has witnessed first-hand the emergence and evolution of identity federations both nationally and globally.

Reflecting on the last 10 years and the Australian eResearch environment, Sherlock said, "initially there wasn't a common understanding of the term eResearch so almost every time you used that word you had to explain what you were referring to". 10 years on, we have come a very long way and the eResearch Australasian conference, which is an important annual event for the research infrastructure community, draws more than 400 attendees from around the world.

Sherlock says AAF's critical role is simply to, "link researchers quickly and easily to the services they need, to get their research done." Kickstarting the AAF in 2009 and successfully developing it into a fully functioning and subscriber funded federation was a collaborative endeavor driven initially by the CIO community.

After a decade of hard work and dedication, the AAF continues to innovate to meet changing needs of its subscribers with enthusiasm and energy. Sherlock foresees that within another 10 years, the AAF will be, "widely recognised as the best access federation in the world." With the continued support of Australia's eResearch sector, the AAF is striving to make this vision a reality.

10 YEARS OF THE AAF

