

Newcastle University: Social-to-SAML Gateway

The business pain point

Newcastle University is one of the 24 members of the Russell Group of United Kingdom universities. These schools are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience, and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.

To do this, Newcastle University fosters collaboration among researchers with a Virtual Research Environment supporting approximately 67 different research groups.

The challenge for Newcastle is a significant number of project collaborators are not directly associated with the institution. When Newcastle decided to login options for its Virtual Research Environment, they had three main goals:

- Make on-boarding external researchers easy
- Deploy improved login options without requiring additional staff or resources
- Provide an access solution that would scale as new research groups were formed

How did Cirrus Identity help?

Newcastle University subscribed to the Cirrus Identity Social-to-SAML Gateway because:

Staff were able to easily integrate Cirrus' SAML based solutions with their existing federated web Single Sign-on environment. Newcastle has a history of using federated access management going back to 2006. Newcastle staff already supported federation with other universities in the UK Federation, as well as a Grouper based identity management environment. Cirrus Identity's solution allowed expansion to social login for guests without requiring any modification to the existing identity management environment.

The Cirrus Gateway provided a scalable solution. The solution leverages identities available from a number of social identity providers (Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, and others). By allowing collaborators to use an existing social identity, the significant administrative challenge of providing local guest IDs was eliminated.

HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT CIRRUS' SERVICES

“...subscribing to a social-to-SAML gateway is a good solution.”

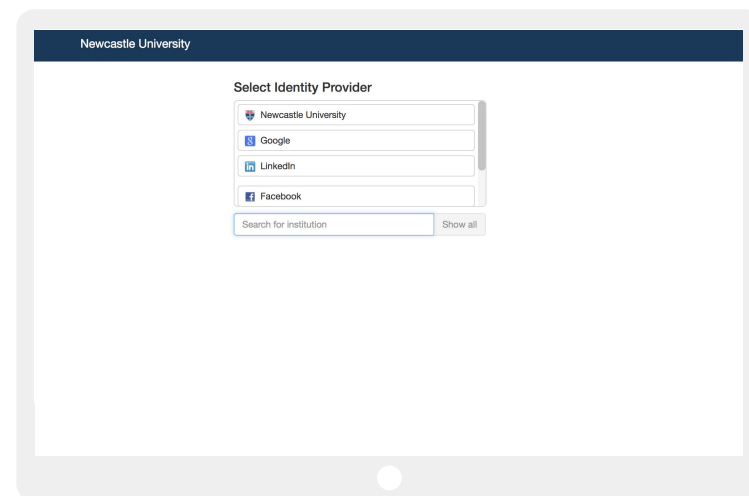
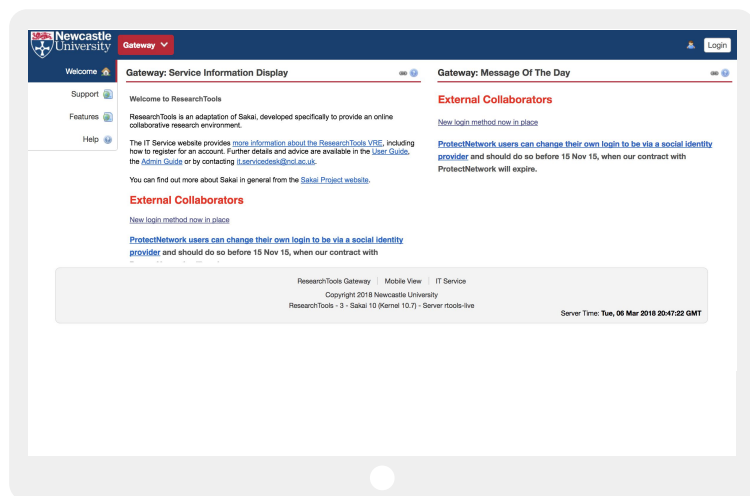
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Cirrus solutions pricing model saved money in per-user expense and ongoing operating support. The previous solution used a per user based charge model that escalated without warning. This became cost-prohibitive for Newcastle. Newcastle also did not have a good mechanism to determine when identities were no longer needed, further compounding operating expenses. The flat fee subscription model for Cirrus Identity solutions removed these issues.

For Newcastle University, the Cirrus Identity Social-to-SAML Gateway integrated easily with the existing Virtual Research Environment without adding staff or resources, it is scalable, and most importantly it is affordable as growth takes place. These factors lead Newcastle University to choose Cirrus Identity as the best solution during their Virtual Research Environment upgrade.

What do users see?

The user experience changed little for collaborators. When the gateway was integrated with Newcastle's Virtual Research Environment, collaborators were presented with additional options for social identity providers (Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn) alongside the traditional enterprise identity providers that existed before.



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Integration highlights

The Virtual Research Environment at Newcastle is Sakai-based and has been in operation since 2007. Each research group has a dedicated site with distributed administration to support collaboration. Access to the research environment is controlled using Newcastle's SAML based identity environment. Integration was as easy as configuring the gateway to be another SAML identity provider for the Sakai environment. During the implementation, Newcastle chose to allow logins from Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Site owners then grant access based on these social identities to authorize access to the different research groups.

HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT CIRRUS' SERVICES

“We could have provided external collaborators with local guest identities but that would be an administrative nightmare and is certainly not scalable.”