

Title: Removal of “UEA” wireless SSID – *discussion paper for IT Forum*
21/05/12
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Date: 02/05/2012
Circulation: *IT Forum, 21 May 2012*
Agenda: ISC11A003 – B5(2)
Version: Draft v0.1
Status: Open

Issue

The university has perpetuated a long-standing insecure wireless Service-Set Identifier (SSID) in the name of “UEA”. This was the basic and default means of configuring and announcing a wireless network around a decade ago when the university’s wireless service comprised 10 transmitters spread across the campus. Today this wireless SSID offers a number of security concerns including unauthenticated access and overhearing conversations between peers.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the “UEA” SSID service be withdrawn over the summer of 2012.

Resource Implications

Removing this service will require the removal of some configuration settings. There will be a considerable community education programme regarding alternative SSIDs both before, and after, the changeover.

Equality and Diversity

This policy has no impact on groups with protected characteristics – especially given that the replacement services have been in place for some time.

Timing of decisions

It is felt that the withdrawal of the service over the summer would allow for existing students to complete their studies without impact, and incoming students would be presented with the new solution with no knowledge of the changes. It is only staff and returning/research students who would be aware of the changes.

Further Information

Enquiries about the content of the paper should be addressed to Pete Andrews, Head of Networking (p.andrews@uea.ac.uk).

Background

The set up of the “UEA” SSID stems from the first installations of wireless on campus around a decade ago. The configuration does not require any username or password to connect and has to allocate a network address to each and every device that wishes to join – regardless of its eligibility. For this reason these types of network are typically referred to as “open” networks and are strongly discouraged by the networking industry.

In 2005 new wireless equipment began rolling out across campus which was not only capable of delivering these open network services, but also secure wireless services via the same transmitters. Technically our transmitters can advertise dozens of different network names – each with their own security settings.

With an open network – a student can eavesdrop on a fellow student dialogue if they have the relevant software installed, and given that popular sites such as Facebook and Yahoo! Email do not encrypt their traffic – student data and identities could be compromised.

Before an incident occurs – it is felt prudent to remove the insecure wireless service, “UEA”, from the campus configuration and promote the use of existing secure services instead.

The cessation of the “UEA” SSID is in the networking team vision for service development.

Discussion

FAQ

What SSIDs are available on campus – and what are they for?

A complete list of wireless network names are available on-line together with their target audience at: <http://www.uea.ac.uk/is/wireless#networks>

What SSID will you be recommending to students and staff?

We'll be recommending the use of the “eduroam” SSID – this uses the latest encryption and authentication protocols, so a connection isn't possible without providing a valid username and password combination. It has the added value of being an international service/programme which means that they will be able to take their device to another partner institution and get on-line without making any changes to their computer or hand-held device or requesting a visitor account from the site they're visiting. A list of UK sites which have, or are working towards, “eduroam” status is on-line at: <https://support.roaming.ja.net/?q=general>

Will you be renaming “eduroam” to something UEA specific?

No, the goal of eduroam is to make access to the Internet and on-line resources as seamless as possible for the academic population. Renaming “eduroam” would put in place artificial barriers to undergraduates using HEIs near their home towns during the vacations, researchers getting on-line when attending conferences etc.

How will people know what network to connect to and what steps they need to undertake to connect?

We will be developing the “eduroam-setup” wireless network that provides access to a single web page of information about getting various types of equipment connected. We are also considering renaming the network to something more UEA centric, such as “UEA-eduroam-setup” as a hint to new and returning users. This will be in parallel with a communications' programme of community awareness.

What communications are you planning?

We will be discussing the detail with various parties but there are obvious opportunities to include articles into Broadview, on the portal/Email distribution and on posters around the IT areas.

What will be the option for devices that aren't as new as your network – will some people be left without a connection?

We hope to bring as many devices as possible across onto the secure wireless network names – but recognise that some devices simply won't be able to do it. We will be introducing a hidden (not advertised) wireless name for these devices and putting in place a registration process for them.