

# Next-generation resource list management at the University of Plymouth



University of Plymouth

Enhancing the learning experience has become a key driver across Higher Education, as competition for student admissions, retention, and related funding continues to increase. Also, at the University of Plymouth there are a significant proportion of off-campus learners, either based at partner colleges or on placement around the South West, for whom access to resources can be difficult. In recognition of these challenges, Fiona Greig, E-resources Development Manager at the University of Plymouth, led a review of their existing online reading list system, Talis List.

The University of Plymouth's adoption of Talis List had resolved problems concerning administrative maintenance, stock management and LMS integration. It included the course information for 176 modules, with about 470 active lists - a vast improvement on their original paper-based system.

However, over time the limited engagement from some academic disciplines, and the inability to measure the impact of the lists, meant a new solution was required. With this in mind, the University of Plymouth became a key development partner to replace Talis List with a next-generation resource list management tool - Talis Aspire. Detailed interviews with students and academic staff provided Talis with a new perspective on today's resource list challenges. For The University of Plymouth, the concept of 'engagement' was essential.

## Encouraging lecturer engagement

Getting lecturers on board had always been a big challenge in resource list management at The University of Plymouth. Fiona explains: "The subject librarians involved their key academic contacts, but we also went out and headhunted those departments where we knew the library had difficulty getting hold of reading lists. We faced challenging responses including 'We don't believe in using reading lists, because it takes away from independent study' and 'The whole library is my reading list'." However, following workshop sessions from the team at Plymouth, lecturers involved in the pilot understood how Talis Aspire could complement their courses.

Fiona explains: "It offers so much more than the traditional 'Here are the resources that you have to read by these weeks' approach; it can be suited quite easily to different courses and their requirements. Now, lecturers themselves write notices in their faculty newsletter, and talk about this project at faculty meetings. Completing a few lists in each of the faculties creates a cascade. I think it's going to be a huge uptake, because the system's so easy."

## Support from subject librarians

"As a librarian, I think we have a tendency to design systems for librarians by librarians, making it difficult for students to tell us exactly what they think, and what they need," says Fiona. "Actually getting the librarians to hear what the students and the academics had to say made them start to question why we were doing some things. It got



some terrific conversations going, and deepened some of the links between those lecturers and different subject librarians."

## Dynamic project environment

Challenges were experienced when working with the Ex Libris Voyager LMS, explained Fiona, because of the particular structure in which bibliographic and item records are held. 22 lists were initially transferred from Talis List and cleansed. "With Talis List, you were either a book or something else. You were either a Voyager record or something out there." Rules were inserted to differentiate books from journal articles and AV material, adding richness and metadata that was previously missing.

"As we add more e-resources and multimedia, we're going to stop calling them reading lists, and embrace the whole resource side experience. There was no data loss at all, and the improvements were measurable. It was 'thousands of percent improved' to what the students were seeing in Talis List, and in fact still see, because we run the two systems in parallel at the moment. So students can see the old and the new.

"It's been a very dynamic project environment, which has really suited us," Fiona continues, "having regular contact with the people at Talis who are so committed to this product and so excited about it themselves, has spread the enthusiasm. Our managers see huge progress on a two-week by two-week period, enabling us to see that the amount of time that's gone into this project is being paid back. I'd like to see 60%, 70%, 80% penetration of all of our modules. And you've got to remember, we're starting from a position of about 4%. The whole project has been an energising and engaging experience."

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