Integrating e-resources
within a university VLE

Bournemouth University's approach to integration of library resources has been to choose the unit of study as the focus of its virtual learning environment. **The myBU Library Team*** describes improvements in the areas of reading lists, short loans and exam papers.

E-learning has become an integral part of many students' learning experience. Over the last three years the availability of e-books and e-journals has increased dramatically, and in many higher education libraries there has been a steady movement from print to electronic materials. At Bournemouth University more than 50 per cent of the total library budget is now spent on electronic resources. In some schools within the university it is in the region of 70 per cent.

Students in different age ranges, such as the Baby Boomers (1946-64) and Net Generation (1980s onwards), have different attitudes towards using computers for learning. Eighteen-year-old students are used to continuous communication, through texting, phone calls, email, and instant access to information via the internet.[1]

Tapscott[2] identifies a generation he calls N-Geners, who are characterised by fierce independence and a thirst for investigation. N-Geners have 'high independence and autonomy, growing from their experience as initiators of communication and information handling activity'. They play an active role 'as information seekers rather than the passive role of information recipients.' Their 'unprecedented access to information also gives them the power to acquire the knowledge necessary to confront information they feel may not be correct'.

At Bournemouth, significant changes in the way that students use the library are now apparent. In 2005, the number of electronic downloads from databases, e-books and e-journals far exceeded the number of books borrowed (see Fig. 1). Statistics gathered from the Athens authentication service make it clear that many students access the resources remotely, and some rarely visit the library.

These trends, coupled with the changes within higher education over the last two or three years, have highlighted the need to review current practice, and plan for new ways of delivering access to resources and imparting the skills needed to use them. There is a need to develop competencies and transferable skills, foster independent learning, and promote employability. All of these aims are facilitated by integrating learning resources into virtual learning environments (VLEs).

In 2005 Bournemouth decided to implement a single VLE across the university and Blackboard was finally selected.

Training for academic and support staff was provided from June onwards through a series of workshops and online resources provided by Educational Development Services (EDS).

Advice from 'early adopters'
The Library VLE Group (a subgroup of the main Blackboard Implementation Group) looked for advice and support to other institutions both within the UK and internationally and to other Talis users. We wished to approach the potential of the VLE from the perspective of our learners, providing the materials where they would access them easily. We chose the unit of study as our gold standard for integration, which is the equivalent of a course in Blackboard.

An important part of the launch of Blackboard was to find a name for the system, and this coincided with a rebranding of the university in the summer of 2006. An alumnus of the university won the VLE-naming competition with the name myBU.

The first phase of the implementation, involving the roll-out of myBU to most of the university at the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year,[3] gave us an opportunity to review our library provision and identify what we could do better at the unit level. There were several problematic areas, namely the provision of reading lists, management of the Short Loan Collection and the storage of past exam papers.

Reading lists
Reading lists have been available, with limited promotion, on the university's Talis library management system for a number of years. However, impact surveys in 2006 on the use of electronic resources in two schools confirmed what library staff had suspected for some time – that many library users were not aware of their existence. The 2004-05

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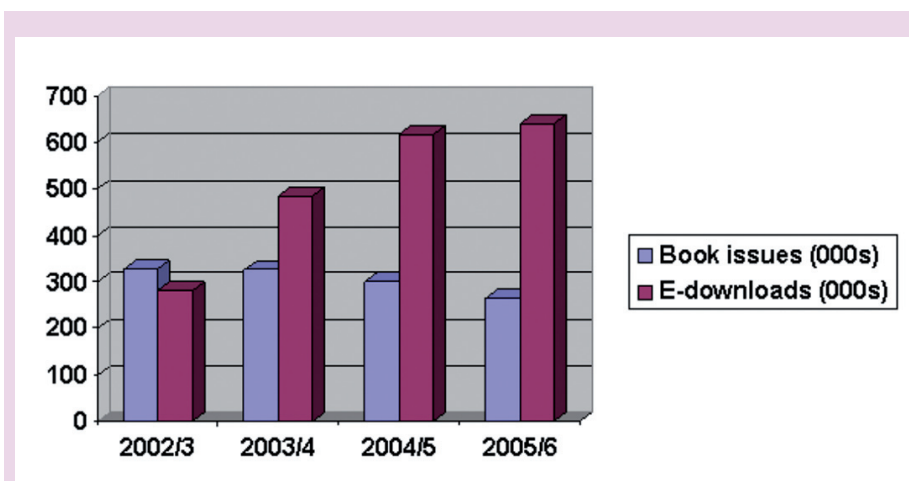

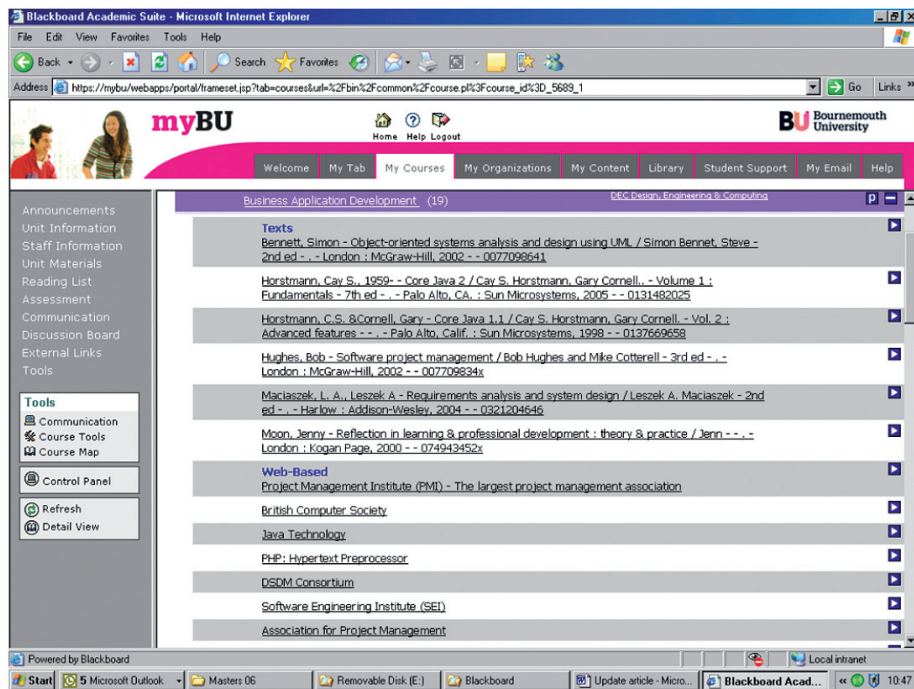Fig. 1. Graph illustrating the increase in e-downloads against the decrease in book issues.

Fig. 2. Reading lists in each course unit.

student satisfaction survey identified the availability of key texts as a problem area.

Demand for items will always outstrip supply. The library Subject Teams had been working closely with the schools to try and resolve difficulties, looking to e-resources to form part of the solution. By making reading lists that contain print, and increasingly e-resources, available at unit level it was hoped to overcome some of the previous resource limitations of print texts.

Over the course of the 2006 Summer Vacation the Reading List Team within the library added links to more than 900 reading lists within myBU.

When students enter an individual course unit in myBU there is a link on the left-hand side of the screen to the reading lists for that unit (see Fig. 2). The reading lists are fully interactive. By clicking on the link the users are taken into the library catalogue and are able to check on a particular item's availability or to link to the electronic resource.

The inclusion of the lists in myBU has raised their profile and given us a vehicle for promoting lecturers' recommended resources in both electronic and print formats. They are now just one click away from the unit.

Making reading lists so visible has provided that long-sought catalyst that would encourage academic staff to keep the lists up to date and to include more electronic resources. The process has been streamlined by providing online forms on the university

Fig. 3. Academics can amend and add reading lists.

website for academics to amend existing lists and to add new ones (see Fig. 3). These forms are linked to the Help tab in myBU. Initial feedback shows that the links in myBU and the new forms are greatly appreciated by staff and students alike.

Short Loan materials
The eReserves area of myBU has given us an opportunity to improve the management of our Short Loan Collection, consisting of printed items in high demand.

The area is located under the Library Content section of the Blackboard content management system, and provides a method for librarians to make electronic content available in myBU to which access needs to be managed or controlled. This would include scanned items and copyright-protected documents in any format. In the summer of 2006 Bournemouth obtained a CLA scanning licence. It was decided that scanning materials in the Short Loan Collection would be an ideal pilot project for using eReserves.

A folder is automatically created in the eReserves area for every course in myBU. Academics can only view folders for courses on which they are enrolled as instructors (see Fig. 4).

However, the eReserves area as a whole can only be edited by two assigned members of library staff. These librarians are able to browse for the appropriate folder using the Find Folder function, and can then upload content to this folder (see Fig. 5).

When an item has been uploaded, read-only access is automatically given to all enrolled members of that course (Fig. 6).

The academic can then provide a link to the item of content from the course area, which will allow students to view the item. This means that access to content can be restricted to members of staff and students enrolled on a specific course in myBU. All items are uploaded with a notice appended to inform staff and students of the copyright restrictions relating to the document.

Allowing only library staff to add or modify content within eReserves ensures effective management of copyright-restricted materials and other electronic resources without users needing to log in to a separate eReserves system, and helps integrate hard-copy reserves safely into an online environment. It also ensures compliance with the terms of the CLA scanning licence.

Exam papers
The final challenge was the storage of past exam papers.

Traditionally these had been stored in printed format within the Short Loan section of the library. However, the system was cumbersome and time-consuming to maintain. It was also open to abuse through theft and vandalism.

Electronic versions of exam papers for the past three years are now stored on the university Staff Portal. Academic staff can then link to relevant units within myBU. There is also a link to the exam papers on the library web page and, when all schools are using myBU next academic year, the papers will be integrated within the Content Management area of myBU.
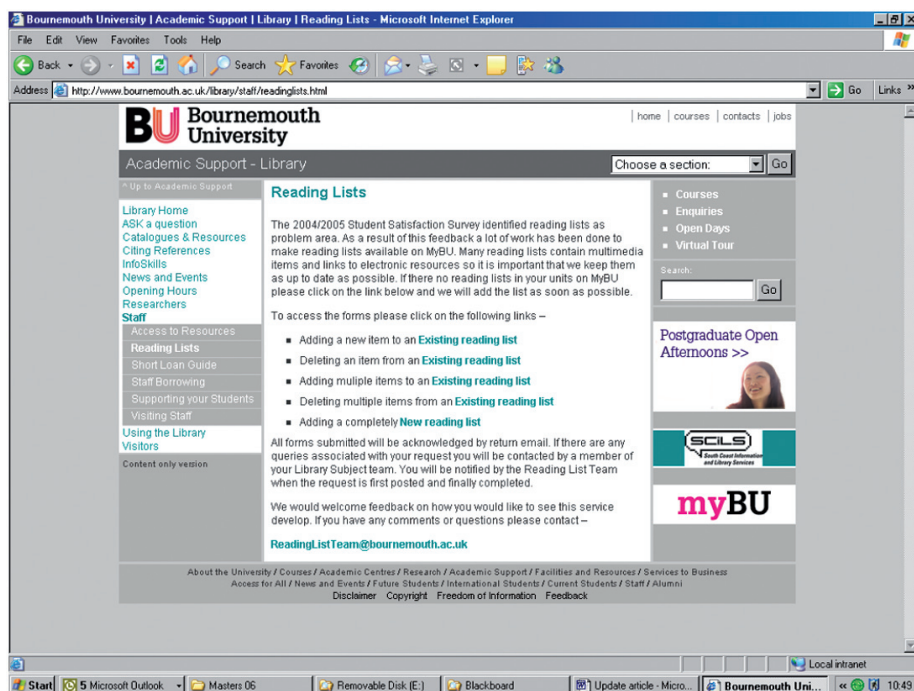
Relationships with academic staff

The Subject Librarians at Bournemouth have a long tradition of working very closely with the academic staff in their schools. A senior professional librarian is assigned to each school to manage the relationship, and they are supported by a team of librarians and para-professional staff. The library is represented on programme team meetings and school committee meetings, and the staff have also forged strong informal links. Implementing myBU has provided a number of exciting possibilities for developing our services and to build on the existing close links. The work on reading lists, the Short Loan Collection and exam papers would not have been possible without this long tradition of collaboration. The work on myBU also required new working practices, and their development is being co-ordinated by one of the senior Subject Librarians.

Phase two, with myBU being extended to staff and students in the remaining two schools, will give us further opportunities for development. In tackling the reading lists and short loans we identified areas we wanted to improve and this has started to improve access to all our resources.

Some schools within the university have begun purchasing course cartridges (pre-packaged content to accompany textbooks). Course cartridges (interactive materials such as multimedia items, links to additional information and online tests) can be fully integrated into myBU.

We will also continue linking to scanned material held in the eReserves collection. We will be expanding the use of the CLA scanning licence to include book chapters, with the expectation of further easing the pressure on the Short Loan Collection while extending access to key materials for all students at the unit level.

In the future the updating process for reading lists may be devolved to staff within the schools. Exam papers will soon be available in the myBU Content area in the same way as the eReserves.

Our approach to integration of library resources at the unit level would appear to be innovative within the HE sector and has been well received by the university. It has given us a tremendous public relations boost at a time of significant internal change.

There is a Library tab on myBU which is linked directly to the library web page. Students use this to access the databases, e-books and e-journals not included in their reading lists. During phase two we expect to develop a set of modules within myBU to enhance access to the library resources. MyBU has a complex permissions system which allows it to identify students down to unit level. We can use this aspect of myBU to tailor the system more closely to a particular student's needs, rather than the generic approach allowed by the web page.

Information literacy

The final area is perhaps the most exciting. MyBU currently gives access to flexible, student-centred resources and enables students to access course materials anywhere, any time. It also offers e-assessment to develop
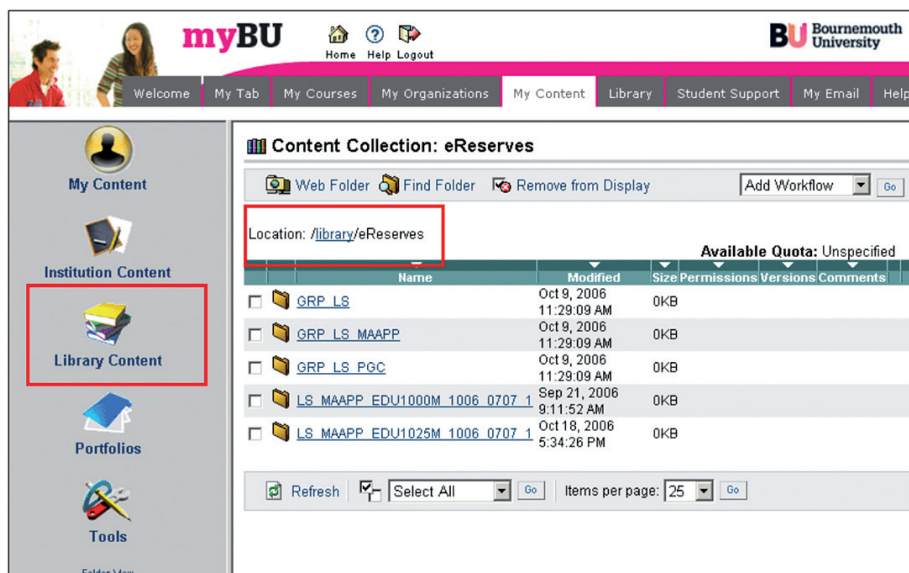

Fig. 4. The eReserves area improves management of Short Loans.

independent learning and encourages students to communicate and work collaboratively. We need to start exploiting these attributes and tie them in with the information skills sessions already being delivered by the library Subject Teams and materials already available on the library web page. Students are given information skills sessions at different times throughout their course. MyBU could add an extra dimension to the sessions. The interactive aspects of myBU, such as discussion boards and tests, offer potential for enhancing communication with and between students. The next 12 months will see the Subject Teams continue to work closely with their academic colleagues to enhance the student experience. ✪

References

1 D. Oblinger. 'Boomers, Gen-Xers and Millennials: understanding the new students.' *Educause Review*, July/August, 2003.

2 P. Tapscott. *Growing up Digital: the rise of the Net Generation.* McGraw Hill, 1998.

3 The schools/departments in the first phase were: Design, Computing & Engineering; the Institute of Health & Community Studies; Conservation Sciences; Services Management; the Graduate School; and Partnerships, Access & Community Engagement.

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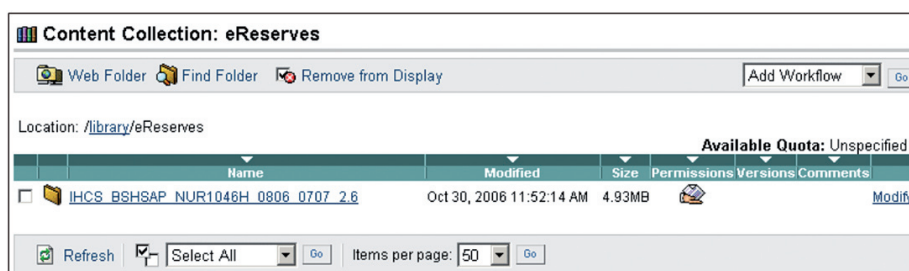
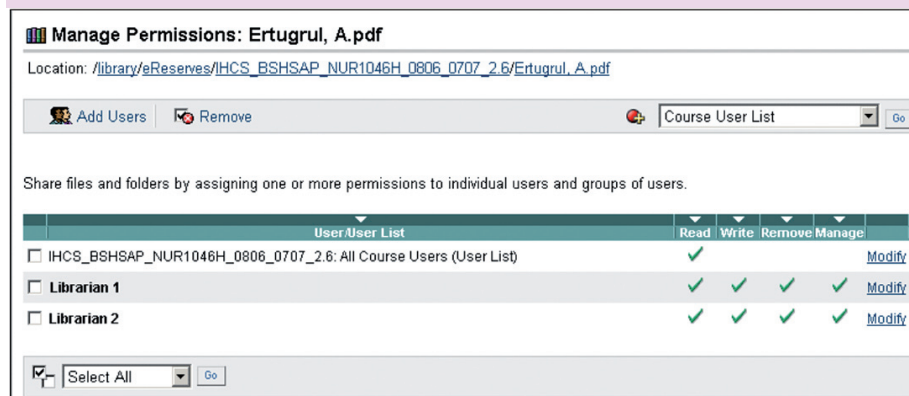Fig. 5. Only two library staff members can upload eReserves content.

Fig. 6. Read-only access is given to all course members.