



University of Essex implements a two-pronged strategy to encourage academic adoption of online reading lists

“We had some great advice from Talis, and other universities on how to maximise adoption... Students are spreading the word virally amongst their peers that ‘the system is amazing’ so of course there’s a lot of anticipation that it’s going to achieve its aims in improving student satisfaction levels.”

- Clare French, University of Essex

Background

Last year, the University of Essex implemented Talis Aspire Reading Lists (TARL). With the implementation completed quickly in just a few weeks, focus then switched to deriving maximum ROI by encouraging adoption across the whole university.

Situation

Before implementation of TARL, the university library didn’t receive many reading lists from academics, which made coordinating library acquisitions inefficient. With no established practices or list formats in place, adoption strategies for the new system had to be defined from the ground up.

“We knew that we could not just implement a new reading lists system and expect people to use it,” says Alex O’Neil, Learning Technologies representative on the project team. “We had to affect a fundamental changes in mind-set amongst the academics and get their commitment to using TARL.”

Clare French, Sub-librarian at the university adds, “There was no real buy in from academics around centralised reading lists before we implemented Talis Aspire Reading Lists. The lists that were submitted were inconsistent and we needed to improve this. We wanted to make the process of creating and managing reading lists clear and delivered in a consistent manner. This would also give us the information we needed to inform our library resource acquisitions process.”

Approach

Generating academic buy-in was pivotal to the adoption of TARL across the university. For this

reason, a representative cohort was invited to join the initial project team to gain early acceptance.

“It was especially important for us to involve the academics in the project from the outset. We wanted them to feel part of the process and to see the numerous benefits that reading lists would bring,” comments Clare.

There was also strong student representation on the project group. Not only did this group provide a student perspective to keep student experience at the core of the project, it also helped promote TARL through word-of-mouth and advocacy.

A two-pronged strategy for successful adoption

1. **Pre-population:** One of the core strategies of the project team to encourage adoption was to populate the system with existing lists. This provided a ‘head start’ for embedding reading lists and making it business as usual without asking the academics to do a lot of upfront work themselves. However, it was no small undertaking with 1,600 course modules, each with its own (often very long) reading list. The library staff completed the majority of this work over the first five months following implementation.
2. **Training and support:** Library services provided training for each department, as well as one-to-one sessions for academics, to ensure there were no barriers to adoption. This approach helped them achieve greater levels of buy in from the academics around the whole process and the changes they needed to embrace.

Whilst pre-population of lists provided a quick win in demonstrating the benefits of reading lists to academics, it was not sustainable in the long-term for the library team to continue to maintain lists. The second element of the two-pronged adoption strategy was therefore to make academics self-sufficient through a programme of training and support, ensuring scalability and long term project success.

Promotion of Reading Lists

Reading lists were promoted across the whole university community and the team set out to talk about TARL at every opportunity:

- They gave updates to the education committee to ensure that members of the senior management team at the university were kept informed and therefore able to provide top down support for the adoption plan.
- They also organised meetings with key members of each department to provide progress reports. This helped to keep interest high and maintain project momentum. These interactions often led to presentations and demonstrations to the whole department, where the wider benefits of reading lists were reinforced and help could be offered.
- In addition, project updates were posted in the university newsletter to raise awareness of TARL to students as well as the faculty staff.

“There was no mandate in place to say that it must be used – we just tried to take them along with the benefits of the system. In effect we put the decision into their hands and, department by department, they committed to it,” explains Clare.

The support team at Talis provided pointers for successful adoption and shared contacts at other universities with first-hand experience of running similar adoption strategies. “We had some great advice from Talis, and other universities who had been through this process, on how to maximise adoption, which really helped us get clarity on our core strategies.” says Clare.

Results

The University of Essex Library Services team has made significant progress towards achieving their adoption objectives through a well-led project and clearly defined strategic direction.

The two-pronged approach of prepopulating lists as well as providing training and support for academics – with a view to early self-sufficiency in using the system – has proved to be a fast and sustainable way to encourage adoption.

“We’re already getting great feedback from the students who have been involved in the project from the start. They are spreading the word amongst their peers that ‘the system is amazing’ so of course there’s a lot of anticipation that it’s going to achieve its aims in improving student satisfaction levels,” Clare French University of Essex

“Pre-population of reading lists was a big commitment for us but it gave us a huge advantage in selling the benefits of the system to academics, without expecting them to shoulder the workload. It took the pressure off them, allowed us to train and support them, and give them time to get used to the system,” says Clare. “However there is an interdependency at play here – both tactics are needed to ensure success,” she adds.

Promotional efforts are also paying dividends, as key groups within the university committee feel they are firmly in the communications loop. “We’re already getting great feedback from the students who have been involved in the project from the start. They are spreading the word amongst their peers that ‘the system is amazing’ so of course there’s a lot of anticipation that it’s going to achieve its aims in improving student satisfaction levels,” concludes Clare.

Find Out More

[talis.com](https://www.talis.com)

info@talis.com

[@talis](https://www.talis.com)