

University of York

Moving to a Modern
Course-Resource
List Solution



UNIVERSITY
of York

With more than ten years of experience with a course resource list solution, University of York libraries knew they needed a modern system. Leganto deepens engagement with academic staff and supports the university's long-term initiatives.

 **ExLibris** Leganto

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Elizabeth Simpson, University of York



About University of York

A member of the elite Russell Group of universities, the University of York is a dynamic, research-intensive university founded in 1963. Its more than 30 academic departments serve nearly 16,000 students. The libraries support learning at seven locations, housing a collection that includes nearly a million print books and over 18,000 full-text e-journals, as well as e-books, databases and numerous special collections.

Replacing an in-house system

At the University of York, use of a reading list solution for course resources was a long established practice. But the in-house system that they were using, developed more than ten years ago, had numerous shortcomings. “The system was a little bit dated. It was an old-looking system, written in a coding language that the university didn’t support anymore,” states Anthony Sinnott, Access & Procurement Development Manager. “We were using a single developer to deal with issues, and we weren’t able to customize it the way we wanted. So there were quite a few issues with it, that we felt we could solve though a commercial piece of software.”

Plus, the timing was right. “We’d been monitoring the market for a couple of years by contacting other universities,” shares Sinnott. “We knew that systems were maturing, adding features and growing. It was a good time to start the process of finding the best fit for us.”

A rigorous procurement process

Underscoring the importance placed on a solution, the library undertook an exhaustive and thorough process that evaluated suppliers and products across multiple dimensions. As Sinnott describes, “We received feedback from our 'Understanding Academics' project on issues related to the system. The project involved a number of ethnographic techniques, including semi-structured interviews. We also had feedback and information collected directly from other internal departments, including E-Learning and IT teams. From that, we developed a list of specifications and a questionnaire that went out to interested suppliers.

“We scored their answers to the questionnaire and set up two demonstrations. One was based around a few scenarios to evaluate usability; that demo was attended by students, and academic and library staff. The other was a functional demonstration for internal staff to evaluate the backstage of the system, the workflows and the reports it could produce. Based on the overall scores, Leganto won.”

“The course resource list solution and its implementation was mentioned as one of the big changes in support of the university’s broader goals.”
Paul Harding, University of York

The ability to measure

“Our previous system didn’t really measure usage and take-up to the extent that we can now see in Leganto,” states Sinnott. “With Leganto, we finally have some benchmarks. We know, for example, that at the moment we have 1,700 published lists on the system. We are also able to get student usage and the number of published lists against the number of courses. Our desire is to make sure that we deliver full coverage. Before Leganto, we had no way of knowing which of the courses required lists and which didn’t.”

That is especially important when acquiring new materials, because the library is committed to purchasing those that appear on a reading list. “It is the primary route through which academics express what they want us to buy,” clarifies Sinnott. “That practice is well-embedded within the university.”

One practice that was unexpected was the number of different virtual learning environments (VLEs) in use. “When we started the project it was my naïve assumption that our declared institutional VLE, Blackboard, was universally used,” states Systems Specialist/Developer Paul Harding. “It turned out that some departments used Moodle instead. Now, we’re also in the process of setting up distance learning classes that use Canvas. None are a problem for us because Leganto integrates with all of them.”

The next project is to expand the links within the readings lists in the VLEs. “We want to improve how Leganto links to resources within the VLEs by using the Learning Tools Integration to link to individual sections and citations,” he explains.

Support for broader university initiatives

Harding feels Leganto positions the library well for the future. “The focus groups told us students are positive to this more modern-looking web application,” he shares. At the same time, Leganto is also playing its part in wider, forward-thinking initiatives within the library and broader university. “These are quite big, strategic projects. One of them is called York Pedagogy; another is called Digital Scholarship. In our library strategy document, the course resource list solution and its implementation was mentioned as one of the big changes in support of the university’s broader goals.”

Deeper engagement with academic staff

Elizabeth Simpson, Academic Liaison Librarian, explains how Leganto has re-energized the library’s relationships. “Academic staff find it easier to use, which makes them more engaged,” she declares. “People are excited that they can do more with the product than they could with the old system. And it’s been a nice opportunity to reengage with academics as well. As a team, we’re talking about how we’re going to go speak to key people in the departments and get others onboard. The feedback has been really positive. A lot of people have been very happy that we’ve changed products.”

