

EISA

Learning and Development

Online Library and Portal Integration Report

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Online Library and Portal Integration Report

Recommendations and Considerations

1. Background

The University of London External System Portal was launched in October 2008 to all new and continuing students studying on the undergraduate Laws and EMFSS programmes. The aim of the Portal was to provide a single access point to an expanding list of External System online services, offering personalisation of information and Single Sign-On (SSO) to resources where appropriate.

The online resources currently accessible through the Portal include the Moodle VLE, general resources and web links, access to student email and access to the Online Library website, although this list is expected to grow significantly in the future.

The Online Library website and the Portal are currently only integrated in a very simple manner¹. The website is simply embedded as an inline frame (iFrame) within a Portal page. Some minimal degree of personalisation is provided however, so that, a Laws student will automatically land on the Laws gateway page of the Online Library website and an EMFSS student will automatically land on the EMFSS gateway page. Other than that, the whole of the Online Library website acts exactly as it would if accessed outside of the Portal. A simple visual representation of the current situation for a Laws student can be seen in Appendix 1.

It was recognised very early on in the development of the Portal project that this level and type of integration was not satisfactory, mainly due to the fact that it failed to provide any significant advantage over accessing the website directly (for example, a simple link could have been provided to the correct gateway pages for Laws and EMFSS students).

In late October 2008 it was decided to conduct a review of the Online Library and Portal integration and produce a brief report outlining some recommendations and considerations on how greater integration and interoperability between the two systems could be achieved. A small team of staff from EISA Learning and Development and ULRIS were tasked with looking at this issue and following represents a list of recommendations and further considerations to more closely and successfully integrate the Online Library and Portal.

2. Integration and Personalisation

One of the primary roles of a portal system is to present information to a user based on what they are allowed to see and do. For instance, a Laws student logging into the Portal would expect to see all resources that are relevant to their studies (i.e. Laws) with the option to 'see more' if required.

To achieve this, it is recommended that the fully embedded library website is not displayed wholly in the Portal but replaced with smaller 'summary' displays of information for the user. For example, the available database resources for a student could be displayed in the Portal (via a Portlet) through such means as RSS feeds². The information could be made available directly on the Portal homepage as well as within the Online Library tab. The databases

¹ This report does not discuss the Shibboleth authentication system which is currently used by the Online Library and provided as part of the Portal project.

² Other methods are possible and available in the Portal (such as web-clipping) but these are more complicated. Additionally, the advantage of making resources available through RSS feeds is that they can be re-used by other applications.

displayed would act exactly as they do in the existing website (i.e. open the links as web pages in a new window) but the user would not need to navigate the Online Library website unless desired.

The additional advantage to this method is that the RSS feeds could also be embedded in other applications (such as Moodle) or made available to a users own chosen feed aggregator of choice.

As well as the databases, other information from the Online Library website should also be easily accessible from the Portal (for example, general and free resources and help). Whether this is via RSS feeds or another method is discussed later in this report.

In addition, the use of such methods of RSS allows the Portal to fulfil one of its primary roles of being an aggregator, rather than an owner or creator of content.

A visual example of how the revised Online Library website and portal integration could look can be seen in Appendix 2 (**please note**: this is shown as an example only).

Recommendation 1

Remove the fully embedded Online Library website from the Portal and replace with 'summary' information. This information could include available databases, list of available resources (general and subject specific), recommended sites and most popular sites. All the information displayed to the student would be tailored for their field of study, but, at all times, the option to visit and navigate the main Online Library website will remain.

Recommendation 2

Where possible, information from the Online Library should be accessible in the Portal via such mechanisms as RSS feeds to avoid duplication and to make the information re-usable through other systems if required

The future of the existing Online Library website was discussed and it was agreed that the site should continue to exist in its current form for the foreseeable future as it still provided a very useful resource for prospective students. Additionally, to migrate the site completely into the Portal (for example, using the Portal Web Content Management system) would require extensive and expensive investment for little tangible gains.

Recommendation 3

To keep the existing Online Library website as a separate application and look to integrate the site with the Portal through other methods rather than migrate the site to use Portal technologies.

3. Categorisation

Currently the library only categorises information at three primary levels. These are:

- Resources available to a particular Study Programme (e.g. UG Laws, EMFSS)
- Resources available to a particular discipline (e.g. Arts & Humanities, Business and Economics)
- Resources that are available to all students

In order to provide greater personalisation within the Portal (and also the Online Library website) more granular categorisation of resources should be considered. For example, resources available to a particular study unit or subject (e.g. Criminal Law, Investment Management). An additional advantage of this approach would be that it easier to integrate these resources with specific courses in Moodle (or other VLEs).

It is recognised that, due to the multi-disciplinary nature of many of the resources available from third-party suppliers that this approach may not always be possible.

Recommendation 4

Consider providing more granular levels of categorisation for resources in the Online Library to provide greater personalisation at the Portal level, as well as greater integration with Moodle and other VLEs

In addition to a more granular system of categorisation, it may also be useful to consider the feasibility of providing lists of resources, including articles and journals from third-party suppliers, which can be directly linked to from both the Portal and from other system (e.g. Moodle). The advantage to this would be to allow course developers to embed the links directly into the relevant sections of online course materials thus more closely integrating the subject guides with associated library resources. This would require a further degree of categorisation than study unit level. Additionally, due to the various, complicated methods of authentication required by Shibboleth, this method would be best suited to those suppliers who allow WAYF-less URLs.³

It is recommended that this information is not necessarily exposed directly to users, but is made available for course developers only. It is also recommended that this approach is only applied to an agreed set of key or commonly used resources.

Recommendation 5

To consider a further level of categorisation (at topic level) to provide a list of URLs for key or commonly used resources that can be linked to directly from the Portal or other systems and which can be embedded directly into online course materials (as links) to ensure greater integration between subject guides and associated library resources.

4. Guides and Help

Although the Online Library website does already contain user guides, it was considered that these would need to be modified and improved with regard to using the Online Library when accessing from the Portal. Additionally, it was also recommended that the guides for using the library through the existing website could be improved by enhancing information for students trying to access resources through Shibboleth

Because of the complicated nature of some of the functionality of the Online Library website and the Portal, it was considered that the user guides could be improved by the use of screen capture tools as well as the more traditional static files. It was also noted that such an approach would also be beneficial in producing user guides for other applications (e.g. Moodle

³ WAYF-less URLs remove the need for a user to specify which organisation they are coming from before they try to access an online resource (i.e. Where Are You From). This can be a complicated process. WAYF-less URLs embed this information directly into the URL.

and the Portal). As such, it is recommended that a number of licences are procured for screen capture software.

Recommendation 6

To use screen capture tools to produce videos to enhance the existing Online Library user guides and well as user guides for other applications. Licences for the software will need to be purchased. It is currently recommended that two licences are procured for Online Library staff, two licences for EISA staff and two licences for Laws Consortium staff. It is recommended that Adobe Captivate is used, as EISA already use and have experience of the Adobe suite of products.

5. Useful links and resources

Although there was no direct criticism of the links and resources provided in the Online Library website some concern was raised about the proliferation of 'useful links and resources' that now exist across multiple applications in EISA. For example, there are useful links on the Online Library website, in Moodle and on the External System website (as well as other sites). Because of this, it is often confusing for students to know where to go to find which resources. It was hoped and expected that the Portal would go a long way to solving this issue by providing a single, unified interface to all links and resources.

However, in order to achieve a unified approach, some further consideration will need to be given to the information architecture used by existing EISA applications, including the Online Library website, and how links in these sites could be easily extracted for re-use elsewhere (e.g. as RSS feeds). In the meantime, it may be simpler to either redevelop a list of these links manually in the Portal or use the web-clipping functionality of the Portal to bring these links from the Online Library website into the Portal⁴. However, careful planning will be required to make sure that these set of links or constantly synchronised.

Recommendation 7

To reproduce all of the useful links and resources in the Online Library website so that they can be re-used in the Portal. This will be a manual approach in the first instance. All of the links will point to existing pages in the Online Library website. Careful consideration will need to be given so that all links are fully synchronised at all times (i.e. if a link is updated in the Online Library website then it will need to also be updated in the Portal)

Recommendation 8

To consider the information architecture for all future and existing useful links and information across all EISA Information Systems so that this information can be re-used across other applications or accessed through a single, unified interface. Although this is a wider issue than just the Online Library website, this will be impacted in the future as an existing provider of information.

⁴ RSS is best suited to content that is frequently updated. If it is established that the useful links and resources section of the Online Library website do not change regularly, then the alternative approach may become a longer-term solution.

6. Feedback

In order to continue to improve both Online Library and Portal services to External System students, it is necessary to continue to collect and review all forms of feedback from students on these (and other) systems⁵. As such, it is recommended that all Portal pages provide a feedback form for students. The exact format of the feedback forms is as yet undecided but could consist of both targeted questions (such as 'Was this information of use to you?', 'Did you find what you were looking for?'), as well as more open ended questions (such as 'What other features would you like to see in this site', 'Are there any other resources that you would like to suggest that we include in this site'). It is hoped that the forms could be both targeted at specific audiences (e.g. at Laws students) as well as at a specific services (e.g. questions relevant to the Online Library would only appear on the Online Library section of the Portal).

This information could then be used to assess future development requirements.

Recommendation 9

To include a feedback form on all pages of the Portal to allow students to comment on existing functionality and to suggest new features for development. The exact format of the form is as yet undecided but could include both closed and open-ended question types.

7. Timelines and Resources

The timelines and resource requirements will be considered further once the recommendations have been considered and approved by other. After this, the definitive list of requirements can be developed. However, it is anticipated that all of the work can be handled internally. It is also recommended that the modifications should be made at the start of the next academic year so as to minimise the disruption to users. However, changes can be made earlier if required.

8. Related Issues

The following list represents a number of other issues that arose during the discussions on the Online Library and Portal integration, but are not directly related to this project. These issues will need to be considered elsewhere and are noted here for information only.

- There is currently significant confusion from students over the relationship between Shibboleth, Athens and the Portal. However, it is expected that, by the start of the next academic year, access to *all* databases will be by Shibboleth only so it is hoped that this confusion will be reduced in future year.
- There are some issues relating to the Online Library website navigation (for example, the Legal Research Skills link 'disappears' in certain circumstances). These issues will need to be considered by members of the Online Library and EISA web teams.
- The question was raised as to whether more advanced guides were required (for example advanced search/research skills for Postgraduate Laws). This issue will need to be considered by Online Library staff and the relevant programme teams.

⁵ It is noted here that a survey of Laws Students has been completed by the Online Librarian and is waiting to be reviewed before being published. It is expected that this paper may provide some useful feedback from students.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1

The image below shows the current implementation of the Online Library website in the Portal. At present, the whole website is simply embedded in the Portal via an iFrame, requiring the student to search the website to find relevant information. In its present form, it offers little advantage over a direct link to the site.

The screenshot displays the 'The Online Library' website interface. At the top, the University of London External System logo is on the left, and the text 'Welcome Test Student Law Award 1!' with a 'Log Out' link is on the right. A navigation bar includes 'Home', 'General Resources', 'Study', 'Online Library', and 'Email'. Below this, a 'Laws' tab is selected. The main content area features the 'ULRLS' logo and the title 'The Online Library' with a 'Zoom' link. A breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Resources > Subjects > Resource Gateway'. The central heading is 'Laws Gateway', followed by a welcome message: 'Welcome to the Laws Gateway. In this part of the Online Library you can find resources and guides focused on law. Click [here](#) to download a quick guide to using this gateway.' A blue box contains 'TIPS' for accessing databases. To the left is a vertical menu with links: 'About Us', 'Services', 'Resources', 'Help', 'Information Skills', and 'Other Libraries'. To the right are sections for 'Notice' (regarding the Enquiry Service closure), 'Site Search' (with a search box and 'Go' button), 'Site Map', 'Journal Finder' (with a search box and 'Go' button), and 'FAQs' (with a link to reset an Athens password). At the bottom, there are two columns of links: 'Resources' (Databases, LLB Intermediate Subjects, Law and official publications, Reference Tools, Student Portal) and 'How Do I?' (Access Law Resources, Search law Databases, Find Case Reports, Find Law Journals and Articles). A 'Need Help?' section includes links for 'Contact us', 'FAQs', and 'Legal Research Skills'.

Appendix 2

The image below represents an example of how the Online Library/Portal integration could look in the future to a student on the EMFSS Programme. The student is presented with summary information of relevant information (databases) which would then link directly to the Online Library website (by opening a new window). All of the content is 'owned' by the Online Library website but a personalised view is presented to the student in the Portal.

The screenshot displays the University of London External System Online Library Portal. The header includes the University of London logo and the text 'UNIVERSITY OF LONDON External System' on the left, and 'Welcome Jonathan Thomas' with a 'Log Out' link on the right. A navigation menu below the header contains 'Home', 'General Resources', 'Study', 'Online Library' (highlighted), and 'Email'.

The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains three panels: 'Help', 'Useful Links', and 'Feedback'. The 'Help' panel lists:

- **Help**
 - o Using Databases
 - o Information about your course
 - o Technical Help
 - o Online Library Tour
 - o FAQs

 The 'Useful Links' panel lists:

- **Services**
- **Resources**
 - o For your course
 - o Databases
 - o Journal Finder
 - o Free Resources
- **Information Skills**
 - o Effective Database Searching
 - o Advanced Search Techniques
 - o Searching the Internet
- **Legal Research Skills**
- **Other Libraries**

 The 'Feedback' panel contains the text: 'Some mechanism for providing feedback here....' and 'Exact functionality to be decided.'

The right column is titled 'EMFSS Databases' and lists several database options with brief descriptions:

- ABI/Inform** | | [quick start guide \(PDF, 168k\)](#)
ABI/INFORM is a database covering business, management, economics and a wide range of related fields.
- Academic Search Complete** | | [quick start guide \(PDF, 0k\)](#) | [Login Guide](#)
Updated daily, Academic Search Complete is a multi-disciplinary database with full text coverage of almost 4,700 scholarly publications, including full text coverage of over 3,600 peer-reviewed journals dating as far back as 1975.
- [Adept Scientific - Adept4Education](#) |
EndNote and Reference Manager(Bibliographic Software)
Bibliographic software enables you to record and store references to books or journal articles - with additional options such as the facility to generate bibliographies.
- Business Search Premier** | | [quick start guide \(PDF, 0k\)](#) | [Login Guide](#)
Full text coverage of nearly 7,600 business publications, including full text coverage of over 1,100 peer-reviewed, scholarly journals.
- Cambridge Journals Online** | | [quick start guide \(PDF, 208k\)](#)
Cambridge University Press publishes a prestigious list of scholarly journals, ranging across the humanities, social sciences and STM disciplines, made available electronically through the Cambridge Journals online service.
- Casetrack** | | [quick start guide \(PDF, 129k\)](#)
Full text database of court judgements. NB This database does not contain case reports (not published by the Justice system), but may have the court judgement (published by the Justice system) relating to a given case report.