

An innovative approach to discovery



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The University of the Arts London wanted to put user experience at the heart of its choice of a new discovery system, and **Karen Carden** and **Jess Crilly** explain why they took the unusual path of choosing two systems to provide one integrated search interface.

IN September 2015, University of the Arts London (UAL) went live with Library Search,¹ a new approach to discovery for our library users.

The solution we have adopted is unusual (and as far as we are aware, unique) in UK university libraries. But it is, we think, an effective response to the very particular environment that we have at UAL and our specific context when considering how to present our library resources to customers. Library Search brings together two separate products into (what looks like) a single interface for the user where they can search across our print and e-resources. These products are:

- Koha, an open source web-based library management system hosted and supported by PTFS Europe
- Explorit Everywhere (which we have rebranded as 'Articles Plus'), a next generation federated search tool hosted and supported by Deep Web Technologies.

The Library Search page presents these options alongside others, including subject LibGuides, Google Scholar and archive catalogues so that customers have various ways into discovering our resources.

A specialist university

UAL is Europe's largest specialist arts and design university and has around 19,000 FTE students from more than 100 countries. UAL has six constituent colleges – Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, Chelsea College of Arts, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion, and Wimbledon College of Arts – with international reputations in art, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts. Our students are mainly undergraduates, but we also have significant numbers of FE, postgraduate and research students and our libraries are well used by alumni and other visitors. We offer a service online and through six college libraries, two

learning zones and our university Archives and Special Collections Centre.

Visual literacy

Like other specialist institutions, UAL has differentiating characteristics, especially when we compare ourselves or try to benchmark against other Higher Education organisations. We are relatively large, but also specialist. The university's enquiry-led pedagogies influence the way that students use the libraries and seek information; much of our students' research is project or practice-based and often serendipitous rather than driven by reading lists. In addition our creative staff and students have a very high level of visual literacy – and there is no doubt that this influences their information-seeking behaviour.

Along with the sector UAL has invested in e-resources over recent years with rapid growth of e-books – including those purchased using patron driven acquisitions – e-journals, databases and online image collections, and rapidly increasing use of these resources. However we have a small to medium-sized e-resource collection in relation to the size of the institution, with many resources particular to the creative industries as well as more mainstream resources. We also appear to be bucking the trend in the purchasing of print materials, especially art and design books, where the number purchased and usage continues to rise year-on-year. Our library spaces are very well used, with footfall continuing to increase year-on-year.

Exploring the options

Prior to this procurement exercise, we completed an internal review of our existing provision and an environmental scan. Part of this review was to establish what really differentiated UAL, and how this would impact on our choice of discovery tools.

We reviewed the products in use at the time (the Voyager LMS from ExLibris, and

Exploring the options UAL internal document.

Unique to UAL: specialist, but relatively large: specialist but not completely specialist; the atypical nature of our e-resource collection

Common to art and design institutions: mixed landscape of print and e-resources; increased value of the catalogue

Common to the sector: increased expectations; library competing as a supplier of information; need for efficiency

the Summon discovery tool from Serials Solutions) – as well as the internal and external drivers for change. These included our evolving service model, the development of Library Management platform products and hosted multi-tenanted SaaS systems, customer expectations, our own vulnerabilities (such as reliance on IT support and individual staff skill-sets) and a desire to put the customer experience at the centre of the change.

Our goals

Our LMS had served us well but had become highly customised and was hosted internally. We wanted to move away from clients towards a hosted, web-based system and to present a fresh view of our collections through an attractive and intuitive interface as well as offer improved functionality and services. Outside the customer facing elements of the system, we also wanted to improve internal workflows where possible, and worked with ProcessFix on some elements of our leaver's process. From this we got some improvement in current processes, but the real value was in library staff working together with process improvement in mind – as this was excellent preparation for a new system.

The power of two

We had some concerns about the fit of our collections with web scale discovery tools generally (in particular the quality of pre-harvested metadata and technical problems getting our users reliably to full text). After a great deal of research, discussion and testing we opted for an unusual – especially in the UK – next generation federated search tool. Like most libraries in the sector we had experienced first generation federated search, but found that this was quite a different experience. This choice changed the nature of our procurement: the decision was taken to tender for an evolutionary LMS only, without an integrated

discovery layer, one of the requirements being that the two systems would work together in a single interface from the user's point of view.

Accessibility

UAL has a high proportion of students who declare dyslexia or another specific learning difficulty – 11 per cent, compared to an average of five per cent across all UK higher education. UAL also has a high percentage of students from other EU countries (12 per cent) of international students from outside the EU (33 per cent)² and an actively inclusive approach which benefits all of our service users. Thus the accessibility of all systems and services we provide is a high priority.

As well as an accessible system, we wanted a highly usable one with good design throughout, and the ability to truly influence that design through an ongoing and responsive dialogue with our customers. We wanted the interface to reflect the institution's art and design context and the existing digital landscape at UAL, and to be fully mobile. We needed good design to run through *all* of the pages of the new catalogue, not just the front page and colours. One feature that Explorit Everywhere already offered was the option of an additional visual results set, which we felt supported the information seeking behaviours of our community.

Student wishlist

In order to put the user experience at the heart of our procurement, we actively engaged with students throughout the process. We supplemented feedback from surveys (National Student Survey, LibQUAL+® Lite survey) with direct engagement in various ways including spot voting and a comments survey on our current catalogue in all six UAL libraries over a two week period, with 637 respondents. We asked students which features they used, and asked for comments and suggestions about what they

would like to see. By far the most requested was a preference for clear, uncluttered, attractive design but they also requested a dyslexic-friendly interface and informative search results. From all of this pre-procurement feedback we were able to start building a student 'wish list' for the new interface which we could use to set against the requirements in our specification and take forward into the procurement, implementation and evaluation process as it progressed. We also had a student union representative on our Project Board.

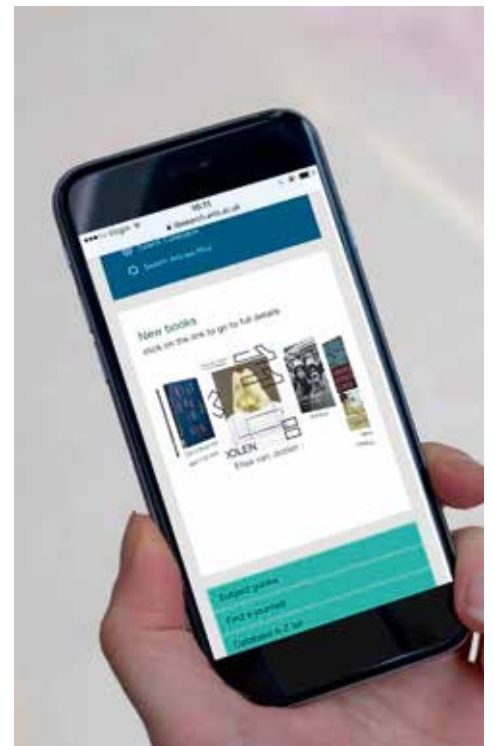
Given the complexity of the market place, we chose to procure via the OJEU Competitive Dialogue procedure where evaluation is conducted in stages on paper and through demonstrations of functionality against a detailed brief. This method enabled refinement of the final invitation to tender (ITT) for the shortlisted providers to respond to. Our ITT evolved from our initial requirements, and most importantly we were able to include additional requirements at that final specifying stage, informed by the process itself. This helped us to reach a decision against criteria in a variety of system areas, but in particular the customer facing elements.

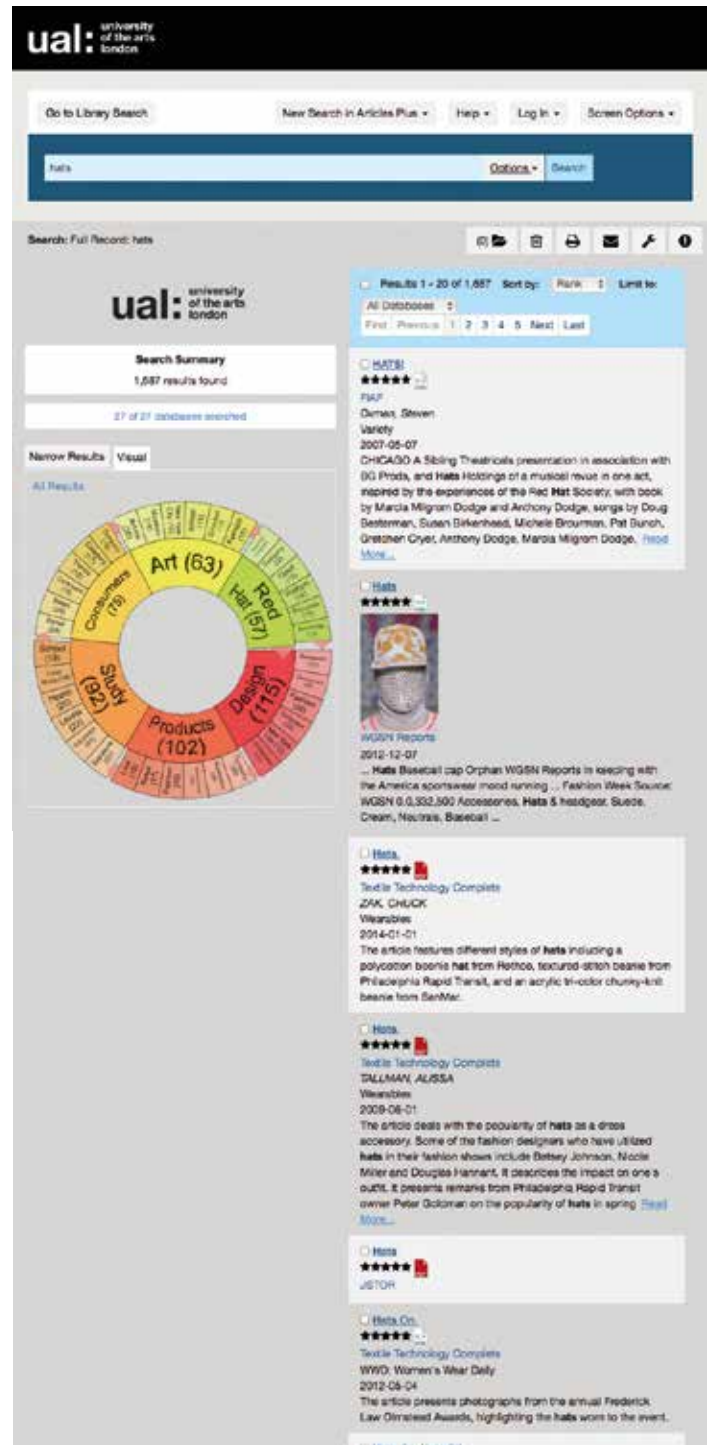
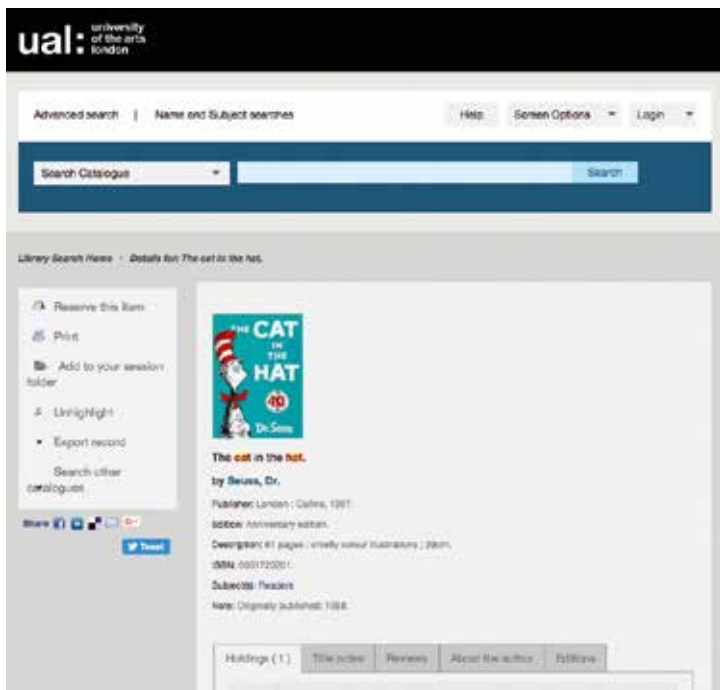
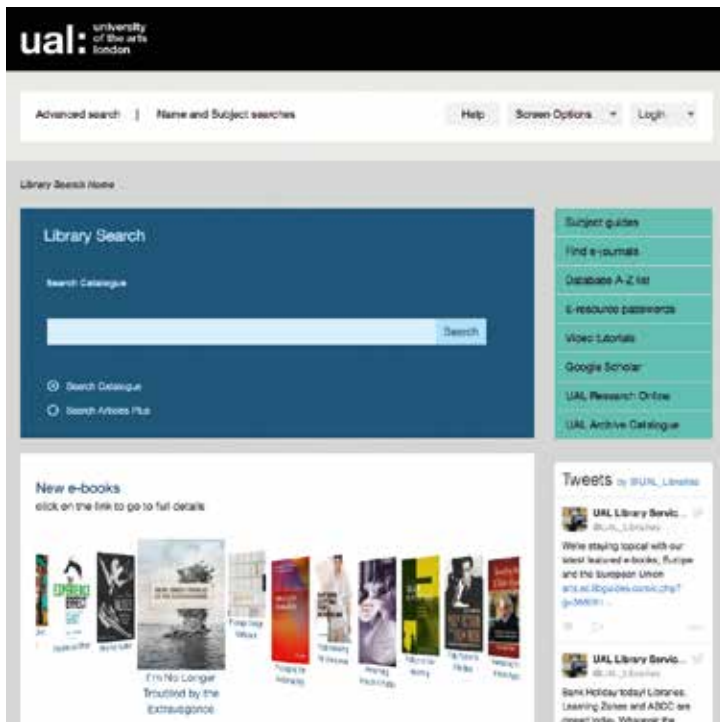
Implementation and beyond

Between January and September 2015 we worked with our new supplier to migrate our data (including some historical circulation and fines/fees data) from the Voyager LMS to Koha, and at the same time worked with PTFs and their nominated web designer to completely re-design the Koha customer interface, continuing to liaise with students on the design.

Because we needed to present the two systems in one interface, there was work to

Library Search on mobile.





The response to the new interface has been very positive, but we also have design suggestions that we can take to our suppliers.

do with our discovery tool supplier Deep Web Technologies, both in partnership with us and with PTFS in an attempt to produce as seamless an experience for customers as we could. This is still a work in progress but DWT and PTFS have formed a real working partnership through this process.

Our experience so far of working with open source software has been positive, although as we are working with an established support company, it is not necessarily that dissimilar to working with a proprietary system supplier.

There has been a learning curve for UAL and PTFS, as this is the first time they have completely re-designed the interface for a customer. We are continuing to refine workflows and embed the changes, and have an element of refresh for our interface in our

contract with PTFS, which means that we can respond to further student and staff engagement. We repeated the spot voting exercise and also ran two focus groups in March 2016. The response to the new interface has been very positive generally, but we also have design suggestions that we can take to our suppliers for further development and we are committed to a continuous review process to ensure that the interface really reflects what users want.

In addition to an improved interface, we have been able to meet customer expectations by delivering improved functionality with the opportunity to introduce new services starting with inter-site reservations.

A good solution for UAL

There are opportunity costs to every deci-

sion, and library management platforms clearly offer benefits, which we will continue to monitor as these products mature; but for now this unusual combination of products is a good solution for UAL, and is based on a deeper reflection of our differentiating characteristics in terms of resources, user expectations and behaviours. Effective partnership working was vital to the success of the project, and this operated at many levels; between ourselves and our suppliers, with stakeholders and colleagues across the university, and within the project team. **[U]**

References

1 UAL Library Search <https://libsearch.arts.ac.uk/>

2 HESA stats: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/free-statistics> latest info available is for 2013/14 compared to UAL stats for 2014/15.