RHUL - Learning Environment and Library integration

Systems involved:
Moodle (VLE/LMS)
Aleph
LORLS (Loughborough Online Reading List System)
MetaLib

Description of project:
We are currently implementing the open source Moodle VLE/LMS. We will be going live with this from September. As part of the implementation we are looking at how library resources and tools can be best integrated into Moodle.

After consultation with the subject Liaison librarians, we arrived at three areas of integration that we wanted to pursue:
1) Pre-delivered 'top level' library resources. These would be available for each course in Moodle, and be a mixture of generic and context sensitive services, but would be general, and applicable to any course.
They would appear in each course by default. See below for examples of the types of resource we are supporting.

2) Tools to enable tutors to add specific library resources to their course. These tools would allow a tutor to decide to 'add a library resource', and then allow the tutor to find the resource in a library system, and click an 'add' button or something similar. We decided that in this case we would look at an integration with MetaLib, and allow the tutor to select resources at the database or e-journal level to add to their course. For the moment we aren't looking at providing the ability to add bibliographic reference level resources, which can be supported via our online reading list system.

We expect that the integration with MetaLib may make use of the X-Server.

3) Add library training materials to Moodle. These could be as learning objects, that could be embedded by tutors within their courses, or as full Moodle courses, which students could enrol on to gain information literacy skills. Which method is used would depend on the type of training being delivered. For example, 'how to search the library catalogue' might be a learning object, which could be embedded into other courses. More generic Information Literacy skills might be delivered as a full Moodle course with assessment and tracking etc.

Current Progress:
We have made substantial progress with (1), but areas (2) and (3) are still in the early stages of development.

1) We decided to use what Moodle calls 'Blocks' to add in our 'pre-delivered' resources. Blocks could be described as 'portlets' or 'channels' and can be added

to course layouts either on the right or left in columns. The usual layout for Moodle is to have the main course content in a large central column, and blocks to the left and right. A tutor can decide which blocks are displayed, and where, but there are also default settings which will be used if the tutor makes no specific changes.

We ended up creating two blocks as follows

A library resource 'block'. This currently has the following links in it:
Library Catalogue
Past Exam papers *
Online Reading List *
Information Guides
MetaLib resources *
Liaison Librarian *

The ones marked * are context sensitive - that is they take information from the Moodle course, and use this when building the link. For example, the Past Exam Papers links directly to exam papers for the course you are viewing in Moodle at the time. The context sensitive links rely on the system you are linking to having an appropriate 'link to' syntax.

As well as displaying or hiding the whole block, tutors have the option to change which of the links appear here, but cannot add completely new links - only Moodle administrators can do that.

Secondly we have also created a library search 'block' - this provides a dropdown list of search options of either the library catalogue, or each of our Metalib quicksets - the user enters a search term, picks the search engine, and then do the search - pop's up a new window with search results.

The library resource block was based on a block developed at Northampton, but we have enhanced it with the context sensitive linking.
New links can be added to the block at any time via the web block admin interface, and will automatically appear for all courses. These links can include the context variables drawn from the Moodle system (including course and user information) where appropriate.

This block could be implemented by any other Moodle installation (1.5 and above)

The library search block was also based on some existing work, once again developed. New search options can be added via the block admin interface. Once again, this block could be implemented by any other Moodle installation (1.5 and above)

2) We are at the very early stages of investigating this functionality.
We are currently looking at creating a new 'Resource' type that would be a 'library' resource. Once this has been demonstrated, we will then need to look at how we build the necessary functionality in MetaLib to provide an easily browsable list of resources, which the tutor can then pick to include in their course.

3) We have not yet put any library training material into Moodle, but we are currently looking at creating a basic course which will be used for teaching basic library and information retrieval skills. This will be part of our 'ITS' (Information Technology Skills) programme, and will be marked.