Integrating library services in the university environment II
Panel discussion

I have been asked to say a few words about some integration work carried out and planned at the University of York. I have to acknowledge the help of a colleague, Martin Wilkinson, who has provided much of this information, as he has been much more directly involved in this project than I have.

In conjunction with the University's phased roll-out of its Blackboard VLE the Library chose to use Discover reading list software. Discover was previously known as Sentient Discover, before recently being acquired by LearnBuild. At present Discover is available only to academics who run courses in the VLE, and there are no plans to extend it to courses running outside the VLE. The VLE is managed by an e-Learning Team that is separate from the Library but housed in our building and is closely involved with Library staff. The Library also has a joint post with the University Computing Service, specifically for integration work, and this person has been involved in this too. There is thus a large amount of integration on a management and people level.

We think we are the only ALEPH site at least in the UK using Discover and embedding it into Blackboard to the extent that we do. I thought it might be useful briefly to describe our use of it so far. With Discover the data is stored on the supplier's own server and not on a local server. The first Discover lists were available to students in January 2006. A building block produced by the Discover supplier links Blackboard to our Discover lists. This adds correct module information to the lists from data derived from the University's student records database. Students see their reading lists via the VLE from a 'Resource List' button on the left-hand navigation area of the VLE and this displays only the lists relevant to the VLE courses on which they are enrolled.

Discover lists are produced and updated by academics. After the pilot phase of the VLE roll-out our intention is to be able to rely solely on the Discover reading list for a course. Reports generated by Discover will alert Library staff to newly-created or updated lists and therefore academics will not have to send us paper or other electronic notification of their lists. All notification will be done automatically. We have not experienced any problems with the operation of the building block though we have discussed with the suppliers of Discover a number of issues regarding bugs and functionality within Discover itself. User feedback from academics and students has been generally positive. Overall we are satisfied with the integration of Discover with Blackboard and are continuing to roll out Discover in parallel with Blackboard.

We are currently investigating the possibility of a building block to enable the integration of MetaLib with Blackboard, possibly using X-services. This is at an early stage with no existing building block being publicly available to integrate Metalib 3 or 4 with Blackboard 7 as far as we are aware. Our aim for integration is for users to be able to sign in once to Blackboard and be simultaneously authenticated into MetaLib. The user would then be presented with the list of MetaLib resources appropriate to their subject area and consequent access to their My Space within

MetaLib (eShelf etc.). We envisage that these MetaLib categories would be linked to a course code or department, but this is yet to be agreed with academics and subject librarians. As a further stage we would like single sign-on access to be extended to ALEPH. Currently we are using PDS for MetaLib, authenticating against the University's LDAP database, with users entering their University network username and password. However, since some of our Library users are not in the LDAP database, such as hospital staff and external users, we are having to use for ALEPH its own LDAP functionality at present. We are hoping that Ex Libris will amend the ALEPH PDS to allow also other IDs, as non-University members have to continue to enter their Library barcode and associated password. Next year our University Computing Service is planning to work both on Shibboleth and on an identity management system.

Currently there are only links between Discover and ALEPH. Ideally we would like to see some actual integration between the two applications, given the limitations of the Course Reserves module which does not provide the depth of functionality available in Discover. In the meantime we might investigate the possibility of linking to Discover from within ALEPH at some point, perhaps even presenting a student's Discover list after they have logged into their record in the Web OPAC. We have not yet investigated exactly how that might be achieved.

Kingsley G. Boulton, 7 September 2006