



University
of Exeter

Ranking Configuration: an iterative approach to surfacing better results

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Library
Search

Search anything

Library Search

Welcome to the new Library

Sign-in to your account to:

- Request and renew items
- Pin results to My Favourites
- Set up saved search alerts
- Export citations



Agenda

- Context
 - University of Exeter
 - University of Exeter Library
- Stage 1 – January 2024
 - Why make changes?
 - Checking the Knowledge Centre
 - Gathering evidence
 - Testing in Sandbox
- Stage 2 – March 2024
 - Presenting findings to Liaison team
 - Primo Analytics – user behaviour
 - Go live with ranking changes so far
- Stage 3 – Academic year 24/25



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Context

Institutional Context
The Library





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Institutional Context

- 30,000 students from over 150 countries
- 7,400 staff from over 100 countries
- Russell Group member
- 169th in QS World University Rankings 2025
- Partnership with Falmouth University



Cornwall
Penryn
Penryn Campus
Truro
Knowledge Spa

Devon
Exeter
Streatham Campus
St Luke's Campus
RILD Building (Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital)
CSRC (Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital)



2023/24



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The Library

- We went live with Ex Libris products in July 2023 ([and we told you all about it!](#))
 - Alma
 - Primo VE
 - Deep Search
 - Integrated collections - Devon and Exeter Institute, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Special Collections
 - Rialto
 - Rapido
- Previous systems out of date
- Big digital knowledge leap for the team
- Error log tracking staff queries and system issues for first few months after go-live



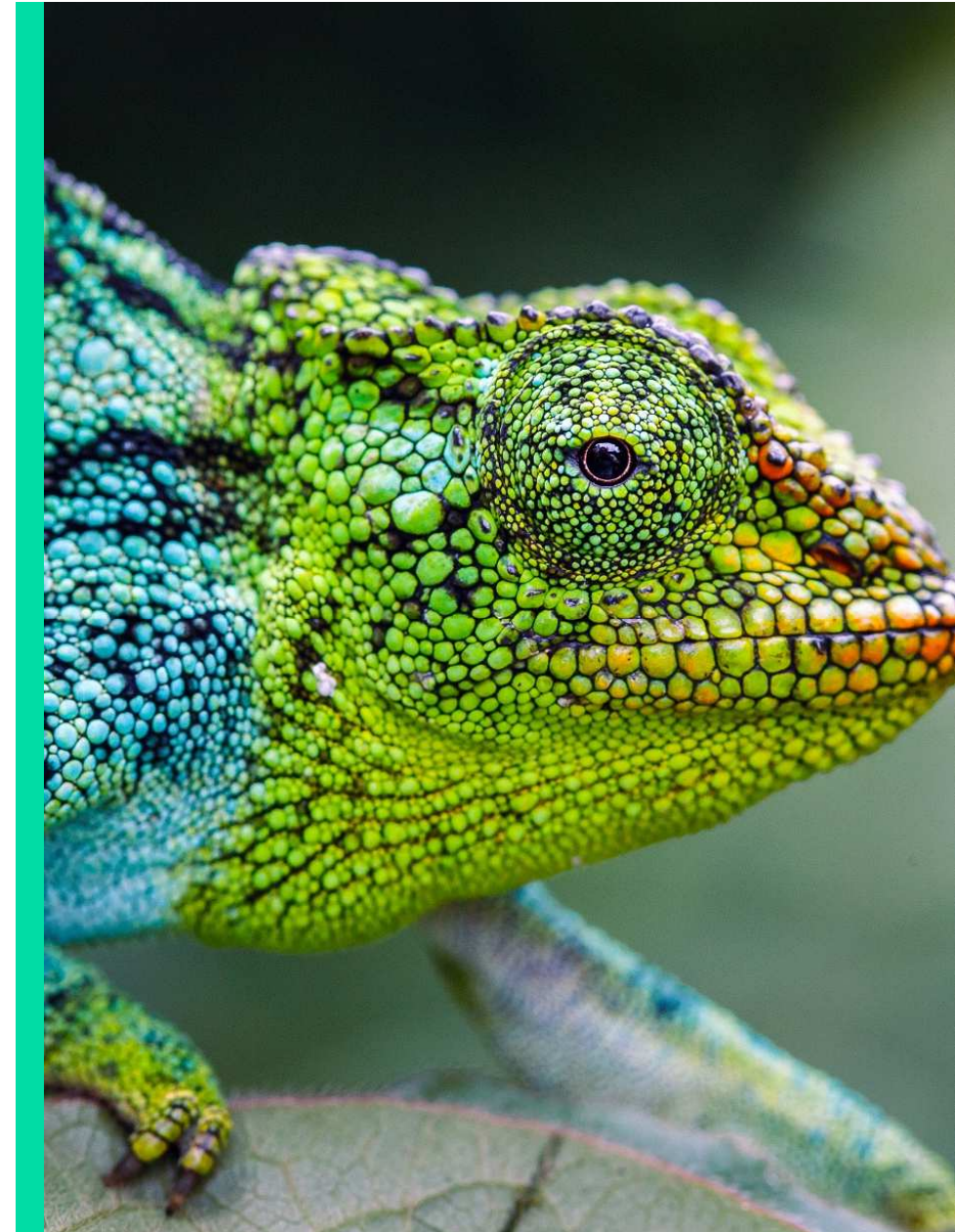
Stage 1

Why make changes?
Checking the Knowledge Center
Gathering evidence
Testing in Sandbox



Why make changes?

- Error log flagged that Library staff were struggling to find books we owned
 - Search terms used – simple title plus author surname – a common search method
 - Target item often not even on first page
- Previous system buried books under book reviews
 - This seemed different – articles and book chapters mainly crowding out the target item
- Problems
 - Increase in staff time spent on interlending requests for items we own
 - Awkward interactions on the front desk and liaison 1:1s when our shiny new system isn't surfacing our content!





Checking the Knowledge Center

- [Ranking configuration](#) is a delicate balancing act requiring **a lot of careful testing in the Sandbox!**
- Configuring aspects of the ranking algorithm
 - Fields Boosting
 - Date Boosting – maximum of 5 date/date range rows
 - Resource Type Boosting
- Non-Fields boosts have more impact and can significantly change results
- Positive boost
 - Value from 1.0 to 1000000
- Negative boost
 - Value from 0.0 to 1.0
- CDI results not effected by ranking configuration

Ranking Configuration

Fields Boosting

1 - 7 of 7

Field	Name	Boosting Factor
1. title	Title	3.5
2. creator	Creator	3.0
3. sub	Subject	2.5
4. toc	TOC	1.5
5. isbn	ISBN	1.0
6. lang	Language	1.0
7. addtitle	Additional title	0.01

Date Boosting

Resource Type Boosting



Gathering evidence

- We added a spreadsheet to the error log for staff to add as many examples as possible
 - Search terms used, date and format of target
- The ranking was not always the problem!
 - Metadata tidying e.g. 776 related titles
 - Staff unused to 'multiple versions' results
- Is it Primo or is it Rapido?
- Going live with all systems at once made it harder to figure out where the problem was coming from
- Balancing act between surfacing content we own, and maximising Rapido opportunities

Results are from not signed in, testing done on Firefox

Green means sandbox results are

Search terms	Date (of target)	Print/E-(target)
Developing skills for business leadership	2023	E-
Developing skills for business leadership watson	2023	E-
How to write better essays	2023	E-
How to write better essays Greetham	2023	E-
of probability	1950	Print
Foundations of the theory of probability Kolmogorov	1950	Print
DSM-5/DSM-5/DSM5	2013	Print
China's Belt and Road Initiative	2020	E-
Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Eastern		

Testing in Sandbox

- Playing in the Sandbox
 - Trying out different boost factors to see the impact on results
 - E.g. Resource type – Books. Boosting by 10 had the unwanted results of burying relevant articles
- A more organised approach
 - Checking every example after every change
 - Making notes on how the results responded to each change
- Incremental date boosting over past 5 years
- Remember the Sandbox is not based on current Alma data
 - Time spent trying to surface a result which didn't exist in the Sandbox yet – woops!

	Sandbox 28/2/24	Notes
	2nd	use 776 field to relate editions
	2nd	as above
	1st	
	1st	The 2018 book chapters are Keen to be surfaced
	1st	
	Buried	I had the print showing 1st on the sandbox but lost it now
		Resource recommender comes up now with direct link to text
	5th	5th for good reason, there are other more recent e-books with this phrase in the title



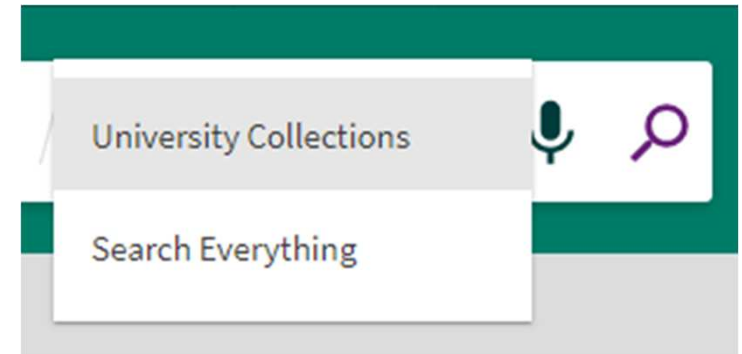
Stage 2

Sharing findings with colleagues
Using Primo Analytics
Going live with changes so far



Working with Liaison

- Liaison team were first to notice and raise the lack of surfacing of books
- We expected the baseline of the new system to be noticeably better
- Having 'Everything' rather than Books and more, Articles and more
- Having Rapido go live at the same time
- Showing our data so far
- Confusion around "multiple versions"



Primo Analytics

- When we first migrated we didn't have usage examples
 - Our previous search interface did not have analytics
- After a few months we could see in Primo:
 - How our users were searching
 - Popular titles we could test with
 - User behaviour – in numbers!

Search String	Searches	Results
statista	155	66,036
practice design for ppp english teaching	97	12
structural dynamics	94	475,642
malcolm shaw international law	93	8,365
harvard business review	91	59,598
web of science	91	47,853,864
past papers	86	379,528
the scope of genocide	65	36,738



Going Live

- March 2024
- Recreated Sandbox ranking configuration in live Alma
- Title, Creator and Full Text
- Date Boosting
- Resource Type

Fields Boosting		
1 - 8 of 8		
Field	Name	Boosting Factor
1 title	Title	10
2 creator	Creator	5
3 sub	Subject	2.5
4 toc	TOC	1.5
5 isbn	ISBN	1.0
6 lang	Language	1.0
7 addtitle	Additional title	1
8 ftext	Full Text	0.01

Date Boosting	
1 - 5 of 5	
Field	Boosting Factor
1 2024	10
2 2023	9
3 2022	8
4 2021	7
5 2020	6

Resource Type Boosting		
1 - 3 of 3		
Field	Name	Boosting Factor
1 books	Books	5
2 journals	Journals	5
3 reviews	Reviews	0.00001



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Stage 3

Further improvements
Next steps



Stage 3...

- Refined Date boosting
 - change each row from an individual year to a range so it doesn't need updating so often
- Further testing
- Further changes
- Integrations
- Boosting e.g. BDCM





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Thank you for listening.

Any questions?

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