

University of Liverpool

Empowering students
through a wider world
of resources



By providing access to shared resources as an extension of the regular library collection with Rapido, the University of Liverpool libraries are putting timely access to a richer array of resources at their students' fingertips.

“We saw that for the user, Rapido was aesthetically appealing, sends clear messages, and makes the whole process visible and transparent.”

Dr Rachel Schulkins, University of Liverpool



About the University of Liverpool:

Founded in 1881 as the original 'red brick', the University of Liverpool is one of the UK's leading research-intensive higher education institutions. Consistently ranked in the top 200 universities worldwide, the school is a member of the prestigious Russell Group of the UK's leading research universities, and has a global reach and influence that reflects its academic heritage as one of the country's largest civic institutions.

The University of Liverpool has two main libraries. The Sydney Jones Library holds the arts, humanities, law, music, archaeology, and social and environmental sciences collections. The Harold Cohen Library holds the science, engineering, medical, dental, and veterinary sciences collections. There is also a departmental library at the Leahurst Campus devoted to veterinary science. In all, the vast collections include over 3 million items. Notably, Special Collections and Archives is the home for Europe's largest cataloged collection of science fiction material, including the Science Fiction Foundation Archive and the papers and manuscripts of some of the most important writers in the genre.



131% increase in submissions for interlibrary loans (ILL) from the previous year



Halved the annual average cost per fulfilled interlibrary loan request



24h turnaround time for digital content

A user-centric approach to resource sharing

At the University of Liverpool libraries, looking for ways to better serve their constituents is a constant effort, and also a balancing act. As Dr Rachel Schulkins, Content Services Lead, explains, “We try to serve our users the best way we can, but at the same time make sure that our staff can sustain the increase in workload that new services can potentially bring. We are very lean on the ground and the more we can benefit from system automation, the better it is for us. When we come across exciting opportunities that will improve on what we do, we consider user experience and also the impact it will have on staff and staff time.”

That was the approach the library took when they realized their system for accessing and sharing resources with other libraries was falling short. “It wasn't clear to the users how to expand their searches beyond our institutional holdings to get better results,” she reports. “Users didn't understand the route they needed to take to submit an Inter-Library loan or a purchase request, or even what happened to that request, once submitted.”

Search for an intuitive solution

The user experience shortcoming was the key driver that led the library to look into the Rapido borrowing solution from Ex Libris, a part of Clarivate. As Dr Schulkins relates, “We saw that for the

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user, Rapido was aesthetically appealing, sends clear messages, and makes the whole process visible and transparent.” Another key driver was “that it helped enhance our services. We strive to ensure that our users’ needs are met in a timely manner and that we are able to support them even when the requested material is niche or difficult to source. Using Rapido for resource sharing strengthens our services and ability to deliver for our users.”

However, there was awareness that increased visibility and transparency had the potential to spike demand for the resource-sharing service, so the library did its due diligence. “We had internal and external conversations about the product as well as modeled costs and benefits to ensure the cost efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the system,” shares Dr Schulkins. “We talked to our Australian colleagues, and reached out to our U.S.-based colleagues as well. We gathered quite an insight into what motivated them to adopt Rapido and the reasons behind it. Though we are on different continents, there was a significant amount of overlap in what all of us were trying to achieve with this.”



A familiar environment for students

At the For the students, using Rapido for accessing shared resources felt like using the library’s regular collection. “The move to Rapido was extremely positive for them,” Dr Schulkins declares. “We’ve seen higher engagement in submissions, and can see the better user experience in those figures.” While the library has been using Rapido for only six months, sharing requests have doubled. “It’s quite a significant increase,” she states. “We’re only halfway through the year, but we’ve already reached the same number of requests that we covered all of last year.”

“Staff savings are also significant,” she continues. Before Rapido, some of the difficult requests could take 15 to 20 minutes to build the string to identify availability. But now, she reports, “We are able to manage what comes our way, and have successfully met the goals that we’ve set for ourselves. Our ability to operate on that level, to be fast and efficient, and maintain those turnaround times with these increased levels of activity speaks volumes to how much Rapido delivers for us.”

A clearer picture of costs and impact

Another element of Rapido that the library uses to great advantage is the metrics. “We’ve built reports to identify the number of requests that we get, and we also look at turnaround times and costs,” explains Dr Schulkins. “Those are things that we haven’t recorded successfully in the past. We’re trying to get a clear picture of the overall cost of the interlibrary loans—not just our systems, but also the transactional element that we still have in place. We’re definitely getting better figures for that now, and will be able to assess the impact of having Rapido.” As far as direct cost savings, Dr Schulkins isn’t ready to tie any savings directly to Rapido just yet, but reports that adopting RapidILL cut their annual costs for interlibrary loans in half, mostly costs for sourcing digital copies. “I think it will take time for us to fully benefit from having the physical element built into Rapido,” she reveals, “but I do see that happening—maybe not in the first year, but definitely in the second and third year as more and more partners join the Rapido UK pod. The more we tap into that and build our ISO partnerships, we will definitely see more of those efficiencies come into play.”

Harnessing the power of collaboration

How does resource sharing fit in the bigger picture for modern libraries? As Dr Schulkins shares, “Here in the UK, we put a lot of value in resource sharing as part of community building, and we also believe that resource sharing has an element to play in leveraging our collections in order to make sure that our budgetary future is sustainable. I think it is quite important to support the collective effort in the higher education sector to support other institutions as well as be supported by them, and build on that partnership and community effort.

“At the institutional level, resource sharing plays a significant part and has grown over the last few years, especially since we’ve joined RapidILL, and hopefully even more now that we have Rapido. It will obviously empower students to access content that we don’t have but also for the library, identify gaps and assist in our collection development. It also helps with managing budgets by identifying areas where financial investments are more suitable than others.”

From collection to collective

What else is on the horizon? “At the moment, our initial approach is to try and source an item first, and then consider inter-lending as a second option,” states Dr Schulkins. “Can we flip that? Resource sharing as the first option, and then evaluate our collections and then make much more evidence-based decisions about the resources that our users need? Beyond that, what are the further possibilities that we have yet to untap? I think resource sharing is built on community and community spirit, and there are a lot of possibilities. Maybe there’s room for collective collections across universities. Having a system like Rapido in place will simplify that concept, automate a lot of it, and make those conversations possible.”



About Ex Libris, Part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our [website](#) and join us on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).