

Calm waters or choppy seas? A survey of students' views of using NELSON, Northampton's resource discovery tool

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Abstract

Access to a wide range of online resources from the Library is a core part of the Library's offering to all its users. In terms of volume, the library now offers access to over 54,000 subscribed and 'free' journals alone, all available to students via its resource discovery tool (RDT) called NELSON (Northampton Electronic Library Search ONline). The RDT is a piece of commercial software (hosted off-campus) which manages all available resources (including books and e-books, repository material, etc.) and the associated technical processes to facilitate access to these resources. NELSON was implemented in September 2012 and replaced a 'federated' search tool (Metalib). Like many RDTs NELSON offers a simple 'Google-like' search box normally guaranteeing students instant access to large numbers of highly relevant academic documents. This research project was created to assess the experience of students who are searching online, and specifically to elicit feedback about their use of the relatively recently introduced RDT - NELSON.

Successful student searching within a RDT environment is dependent on a range of factors, including the functionality of the software and the information 'skills' the students bring to the search process. The current RDT was in part chosen because it allows the Library Systems Team to adjust some of the 'search functionality' of the software. Specific feedback is being sought that will facilitate changes in this search functionality towards more satisfactory results for users. This overall aim will be addressed through the use of a short online survey aimed at current student users of online resources (and NELSON). The survey form (Bristol Online Surveys software) addresses the current use of resources by students, the use (or non-use) of NELSON and seeks further feedback about the search experience. The results will be a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data. An analysis of this data should enable Library Systems staff to make adjustments to the software and thereby improve the student search experience. The data may also prove useful for Academic Liaison Library staff as it will illuminate current student search practice within the realm of Library online resources and beyond.