

## New SunGard Higher Education Portal Boosts Effectiveness and Improves Community Collaboration at University of Leeds

The University of Leeds is acclaimed worldwide for the quality of its teaching and research. One of the largest universities in the UK, Leeds is also the most popular among students applying for undergraduate courses. This has resulted in a vibrant and talented population of more than 30,000 students, attached to 700 different first-degree programmes and 450 postgraduate degree programmes. A further 32,000 students are enrolled on short courses with the university.

An emphasis on innovative research and investment in high-quality facilities and first-rate infrastructure means that no fewer than 35 departments are rated internationally or nationally as 'excellent'. As a result, Leeds is now among the top ten universities for research in the UK. Its broad research and skills base, alongside superb facilities, attract interest from major multinationals and small local businesses alike.

By making the use of the latest technologies and with its teaching supported by such a strong and diverse research base, the University is able to offer a wide choice of interdisciplinary degrees including unusual subject combinations such as music, electronic engineering, and Japanese with linguistics.

From the textile industries' invention of the permanent hair wave for Wella in the 1930s, to the development in the 1990s, of alarms using 'directional sound' to guide people to emergency exits, the university has always been at the forefront of innovation. With such a commitment to innovation and technology it comes as no surprise that the same vigour, enthusiasm, and pursuit of excellence has been devoted to its own infrastructure and information systems.

### Results with SunGard Higher Education Solutions:

- A seamless, web-based interface to a range of university systems and services
- A customised and personalised, web environment for staff and students
- An effective central news and information distribution tool

By 2003 the university already had a number of information systems in place for services including human resources, finance, student record keeping, timetabling, library, a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and an identity management system. However, because each system was different and often unique to the university, training was required for each, which incurred additional costs. Furthermore, navigation through the systems was time consuming for users and complex for the systems team to administer.

A desire to present a uniform view of information regardless of its location prompted the university to explore opportunities for broader integration. This in turn pointed to a need for portal implementation to provide a single point of access.

The first stage in the development of the University's portal began in the summer of 2003 with the appointment of Bo Middleton as project manager. Tasked with overseeing the project, Ms. Middleton began to explore the development of an institutional portal for the University.

University of Leeds  
Leeds, England  
Enrolment: 30,000  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk>

ECS-251 (11/06)

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Ms. Middleton commented, "We had a real 'mish mash' of different systems and our intranet relied on a set of links to resources to draw everything together. A portal would provide a seamless, web-based interface to a range of systems and services. In addition, the portal would also offer a customised, and potentially personalisable, web environment for staff and students."

The first task on Ms. Middleton's list was to ask staff and students what they wanted from a portal. Through this process it became apparent that students viewed a single point of access as uppermost on their agenda of needs. Ms. Middleton explained, "We were impressed by the high levels of enthusiasm and interest expressed by our students. It was clear that we should address their needs first. Top of their list was a desire to have all their resources accessible from one place. Ease of use and navigation followed a close second."

Ms. Middleton continued, "Having received our mandate from this stakeholder group, we then needed to convince stakeholders within the institution to buy into the concept of a student portal — and, as importantly — to provide the finance to build it."

The project subsequently entered a cost comparison and analysis phase whereby different approaches were explored. This included an examination of an open source, home-grown approach.

Ms. Middleton commented, "Conscious of the risks involved, we quickly dismissed a home-grown solution. Ongoing support was important to us and we also wanted to get up and running as quickly as possible. We knew that going out on our own could stretch our resources and lengthen delivery timescales. We therefore concluded that our best option was to select a well-established organisation to provide us with a packaged solution and the support necessary for implementation. With this in mind we began a tender process to find the best partner."

As with other institutions, Leeds has relationships with many well-known portal suppliers and a short list of five was drawn up including SunGard Higher Education. Ms. Middleton explained, "SunGard Higher Education's

Luminis product family was a straightforward choice for us because we knew it could run almost straight away, whilst also matching our needs closely. For example, we were impressed by its ability to build community groups, which we viewed as key to the user experience. It could be integrated easily with our existing Banner record keeping applications and its content management functionality would make it easy to update information. Above all its ability to integrate with our other systems proved to be the tipping point. No other supplier had placed so much emphasis on integration, but SunGard Higher Education was right on top of it. This proved to us that they really did understand the challenges that we faced in higher education."

Having selected Luminis, the project team led by Ms. Middleton set about the task of building a portal that would deliver the expectations of its stakeholders. This process began in summer 2005 and by October the installation had taken place and the team began a piloting stage which lasted for six months. During this time integration with university systems including student fees, Banner record keeping, library services, and the VLE took place. Following this, community channels were also developed.

Ms. Middleton explained, "We wanted to provide an exceptional student experience and to do this within the portal, we developed a number of channels which they could subscribe to. The development of the channels was made easy by virtue of Luminis' open source engine, which allowed us to add ready-made channels with a minimum of development. We benefited in particular from the Luminis customer community and the Luminis Developer's Network, which enabled us to use shared channels already developed by other universities as far afield as Australia."

The channels made it easy for students to personalise their view of the portal with content that was completely relevant to them. During the development phase the team produced what were to prove the most popular channels on the portal. These included 'mymodules' which allows each student to view and share information relevant to the modular elements of their courses. An email channel was also added



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which links students to their own email account and is available by default on every home page. In addition, a personal announcements channel was introduced which ensures that each student gets targeted and relevant announcements.

By the start of autumn term 2006 the new portal was ready to launch campus-wide. It immediately proved exceptionally popular. Students particularly liked the fact that they could now find everything they needed in one place. The portal was also praised for its ease of use and navigation. Effectiveness is at the heart of the university's strategy and the portal is now clearly perceived as a vital means of achieving this.

Ms. Middleton commented, "We feel that it is very important for the university to engage students as quickly as possible, because joining a large institution like Leeds can be a daunting prospect. The portal grounds students immediately, providing useful information and helping them to collaborate with their peers and staff. It also draws students into university life, whilst giving them improved access to a world-class learning environment which we hope will inspire them to develop their full potential."

The successful launch of the student portal has unlocked the opportunity for further development and boosted the momentum for change at Leeds. In particular, the university is now exploring options for further development of the portal to encompass staff, alumni, and prospective student roles. As a research-intensive university, a project is also underway to explore user requirements for a research portal and Luminis has been used to build an early prototype, which could be shared by institutions around the world. Such advances would make a significant contribution towards realising our vision of becoming one of the top 50 universities in the world."

The University of Leeds' student portal is now live at <http://myuni.leeds.ac.uk/cp/home/loginf>.