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Encouraging Reading List Engagement: A Roundtable Discussion

Practice and progress from the UCB Library Reading List Project

Brittany Moster Bergonzi, Academic Librarian – b.moster@ucb.ac.uk

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Tell your table... (2 mins)

- Your role
- One thing you're most looking forward to from the Mercian Conference today
- Your experiences with reading lists

Show of hands...

- Who has a role that requires interaction with reading lists or with staff about reading lists?
- On a scale from 1-5 (with 5 being very positive), how do you rate your experiences promoting reading lists at your institution?

Session Outline

- The UCB Reading List Project 2026 [20 mins]
  - Background, methods and results (so far)
- Discussion questions (with table group) [20 mins]
- Opportunity to feed back to larger group [10 mins]
- Closing remarks [5 mins]
  - Are things changing at UCB?

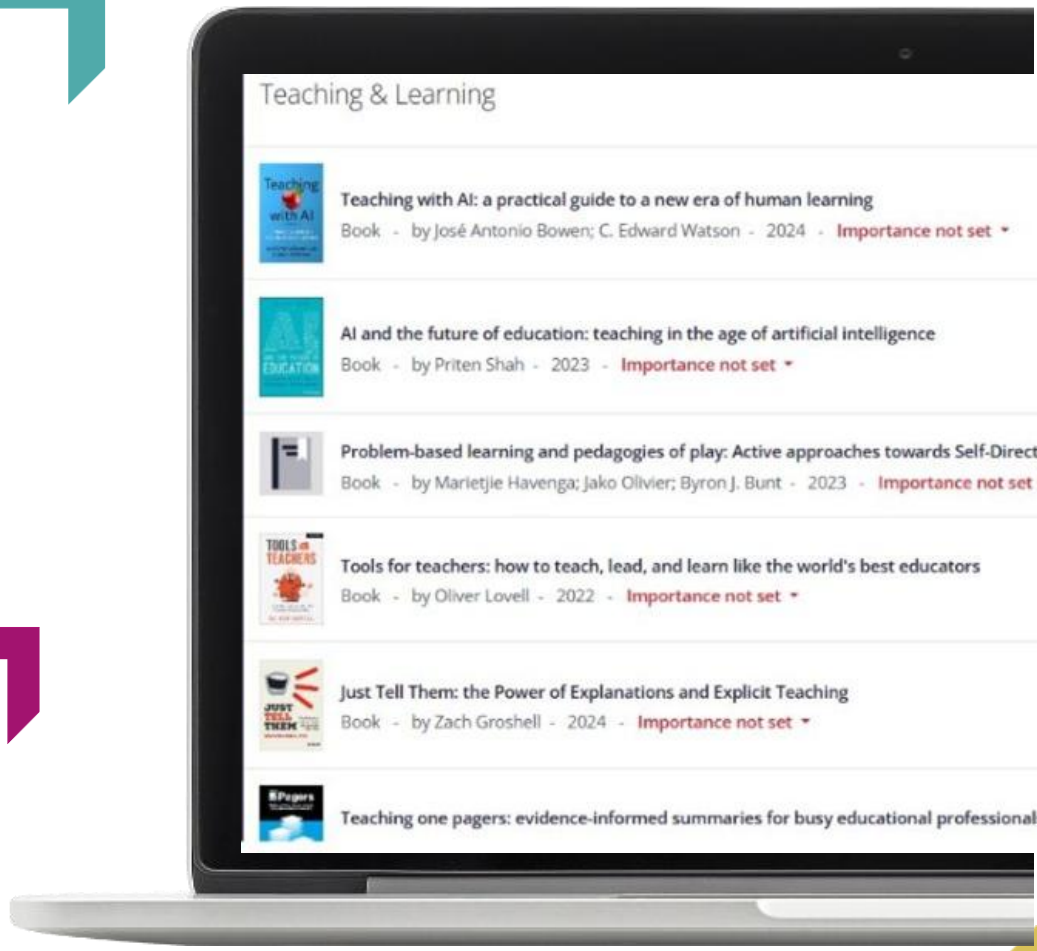
Reading Lists at UCB

- Use Talis Aspire
- Every module should have a corresponding reading list linked in Canvas
- Historically, the library has supported by:
  - Creating new lists
  - Adding items to lists
  - Completing reviews
  - Providing training for staff using Talis (technical, not pedagogical)

Key Staff Engagement Problems

- Unfamiliar with Talis because they use it infrequently
- Prefer Canvas
- Reluctant to adapt inherited reading lists (confusion about who "owns" lists)
- Perception that reading lists are static docs that need to be ready for start of semester

Inspired by **Leeds Beckett Reading List Engagement Project 2025**



The UCB Reading List Project

Seeking ethos change, not just repetitive staff training

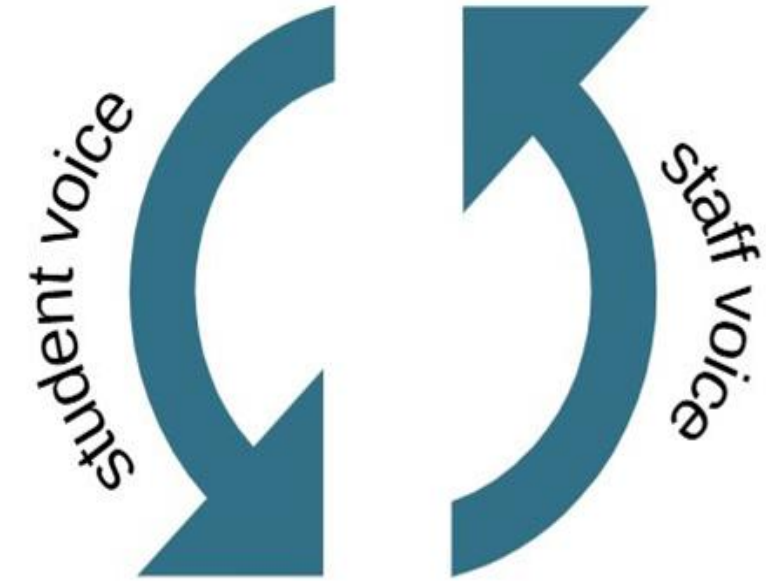
Phase 1: Student survey (Feb/Mar 26)
110 responses

Phase 2: Student focus groups & interviews (May 26)
3 participants

Phase 3: Staff survey (June/July 26)
40 responses

Phase 4: Staff interviews (Aug/Sept 26)
13 expressions of interest; ongoing

Usage data for the academic year 25/26: stats from Talis/Google Analytics and student numbers from Canvas



Student Survey/Focus Group Results

- **110 students** completed the survey
- **74% of students** use their reading lists **daily or weekly.**
- Of those who used their reading lists, **89%** said that reading lists were **helpful**
- Students say they use reading lists to **model the kinds of sources** their lecturers expect in assignments
- Students prefer reading lists with **key headings and clear annotations**
- Students want **clear instruction** about readings and **engagement tasks** to encourage reading

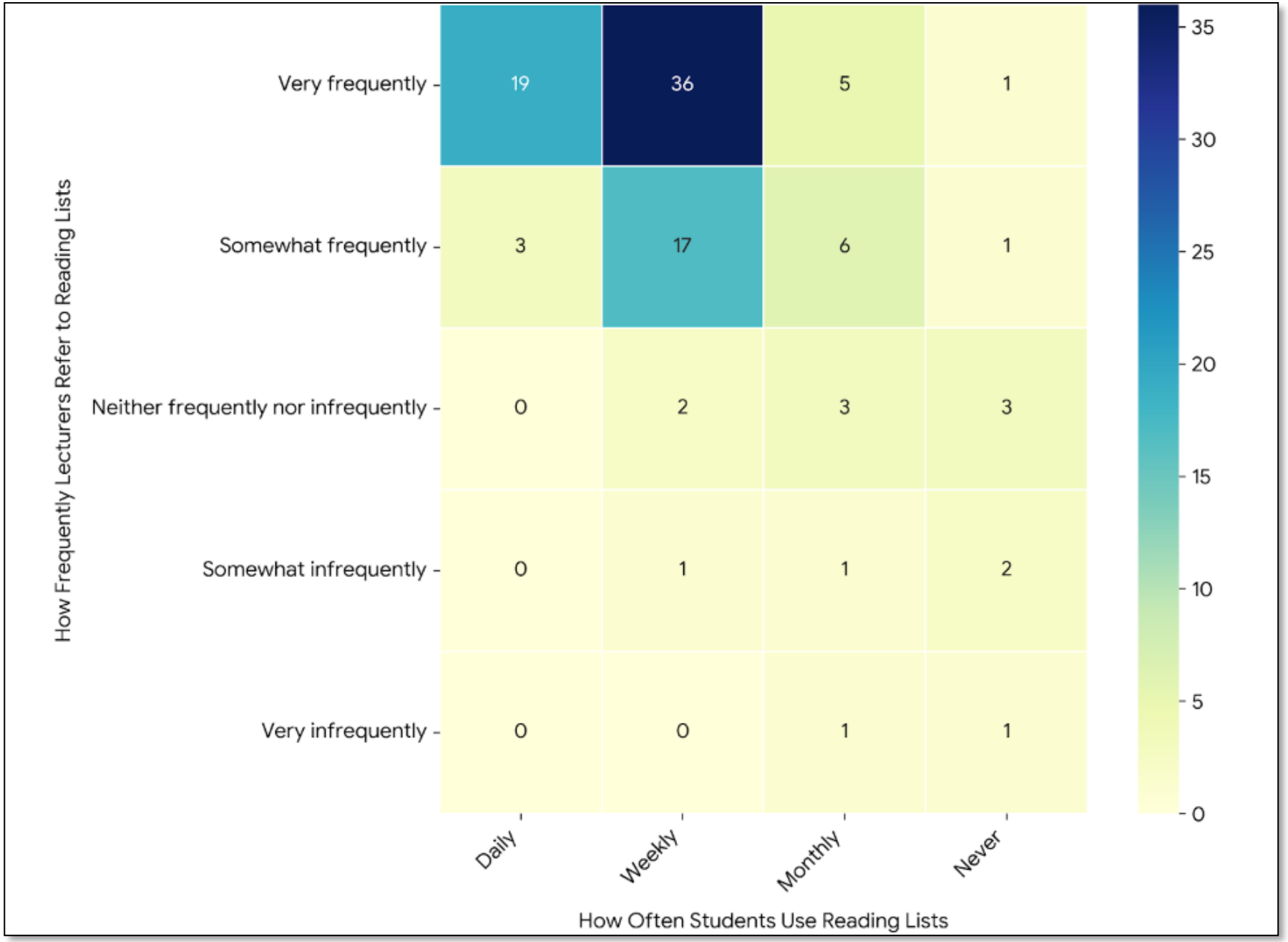
"Reading lists help me find relevant and trusted sources easily, save time, and guide my understanding of the topic" (Business & Enterprise, Level 7)

"When things are organized by topic or priority, you can jump straight to what you need […] rather than scrolling through everything" (College of Food, Level 7)

"I think giving activities for students to learn from the reading list [would be better]. Or mentioning them more during the lectures" (Health & Nutrition, Level 4)

Key Finding

Students were more likely to use reading lists when reading lists were frequently promoted by lecturers.



Staff Survey Results

- **40 lecturers** completed the survey
- **95%** said reading lists are "very" or "somewhat" valuable to the student learning experience
- **73%** said they refer to their reading lists frequently during teaching. **8%** said they rarely or never do.
- **58%** said they updated their reading lists once or a few times per semester. **10%** said they never update their lists.
- **8%** said Talis was not a useful teaching tool

> Mixed results, largely (we believe) due to lack of familiarity with Talis functions and time constraints.

"It's intuitive and the library staff/academic librarians are amazing at feeding into it, supporting improvements when asked."

"[I] like that Talis Aspire provides a structured and centralised way to organise and share reading materials with students."

"The interface, the options to say essential or recommended, the analytics, the fact that my librarian can check and help me find something for Talis too."

"The Talis software is difficult to use."

"I think it's an antiquated system. Clunky, time consuming and not necessarily inclusive in design."

"In some cases, managing materials across multiple platforms can lead to duplication of effort."

Data Analysis – The Checklist Task

- Random selection of 100 reading lists for live modules across Semesters 1 and/or 2
- SLAs performed checklist task for range of categories:
  - Types of headings
  - Annotations
  - Variety of sources
- Averages found by dividing active users for each list by the number of students enrolled on that module
- Numbers are indicative, not exact – but still powerful

	Average	Lists with weekly and/or thematic headings	Lists without weekly and/or thematic headings	Lists with reading guidance (Notes for Students)	Lists with no reading guidance	Lists with variety of sources	Lists with only books
Engagement (% of students enrolled per module)	**62.5%**	65%	56%	71%	58%	64%	60%

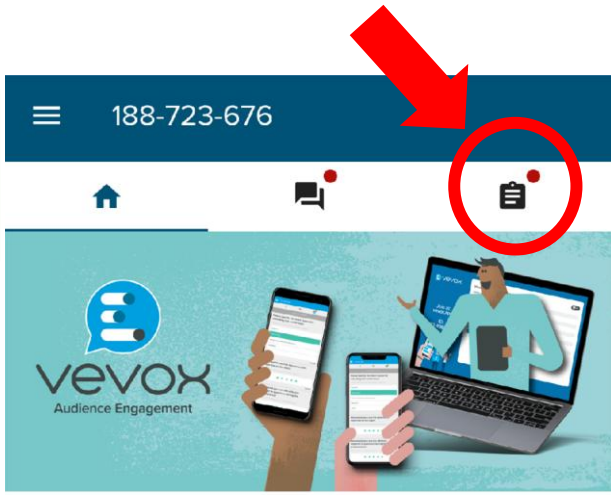
Project Findings So Far

1. Students use their reading lists and want them to be relevant
2. There are specific features of reading lists that, when used effectively, encourage student engagement
3. Staff promotion drives student engagement with reading lists

Action Plan

- **Internal report** to circulate to department heads, deans and teaching staff
- **Best practice sessions** for staff and **best practice guide** available on library website
- **Reading List Champions/Mentors** within departments to encourage staff peer support and conversation
- **Attend departmental meetings** and **management meetings** to share data from the project

1. Share any thoughts and/or recommendations about the UCB Library's action plan – what does it really take to shift embedded practice and encourage actionable change?
2. What place does data have in encouraging changes in practice, especially around reading lists?
3. In your experience, do different departments engage with reading lists differently? What are some benefits and/or challenges of that?
4. What is one assumption we as library staff hold about reading lists that might need challenging?
5. Think about the Mercian '26 theme: "I can't do any more with any less!" How can the library react sensitively to lecturers who see reading lists as just another task? Any best practice examples?
6. Make a plan! What is one step you/your team could take that might improve reading list engagement this year?



Reading List Engagement - Mercian 26

So...is it working?

So far, we've seen:

- Increased staff contact with the library about purchasing resources and creating/editing reading lists
- More invitations to planning and team meetings within departments, allowing us to provide bespoke sessions to encourage more reading list use from staff
- Reading lists that follow best practice recommendations – more organised, more relevant sources, more written guidance for students