



## **Managing expectations: an online resource to support health sciences students with their dissertation**

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### ***Presentation abstract***

This presentation shared how, in autumn 2024, we introduced a literature searching online guide, designed specifically to support health sciences students who are working on their dissertation. Prior to this, each year we were experiencing significant, and recently almost unmanageable, demand for one-to-one appointments from health sciences students as they embarked on their dissertation and the guide was created to provide students with an alternative source of support. The guide was designed with the diverse needs of health sciences students in mind, and approaches to meeting those needs were inspired by UDL Guidelines (CAST, 2024). For example, content in the resource is represented through text, diagrams, and video demonstrations, providing options for how students engage with the material. In addition, the resource is clearly structured, and concepts are scaffolded to support sustained effort and persistence in working towards goals. The language in the resource is intended to be clear, and any specialised vocabulary is explained.

In this presentation, we explored how the resource has not only helped to reduce demand for appointments but has revolutionised the nature of interactions between students and the Learning Development team. The resource has been used as a framework for embedded workshops, appointments, and bespoke drop-in sessions where the focus has been on learning to use the resource, rather than learning the concepts explained within the resource. This approach empowers students to direct their own learning and builds their confidence as independent learners. The approach also reduces pressure for learning to be completed within the space and time limitations of the workshop or appointment.

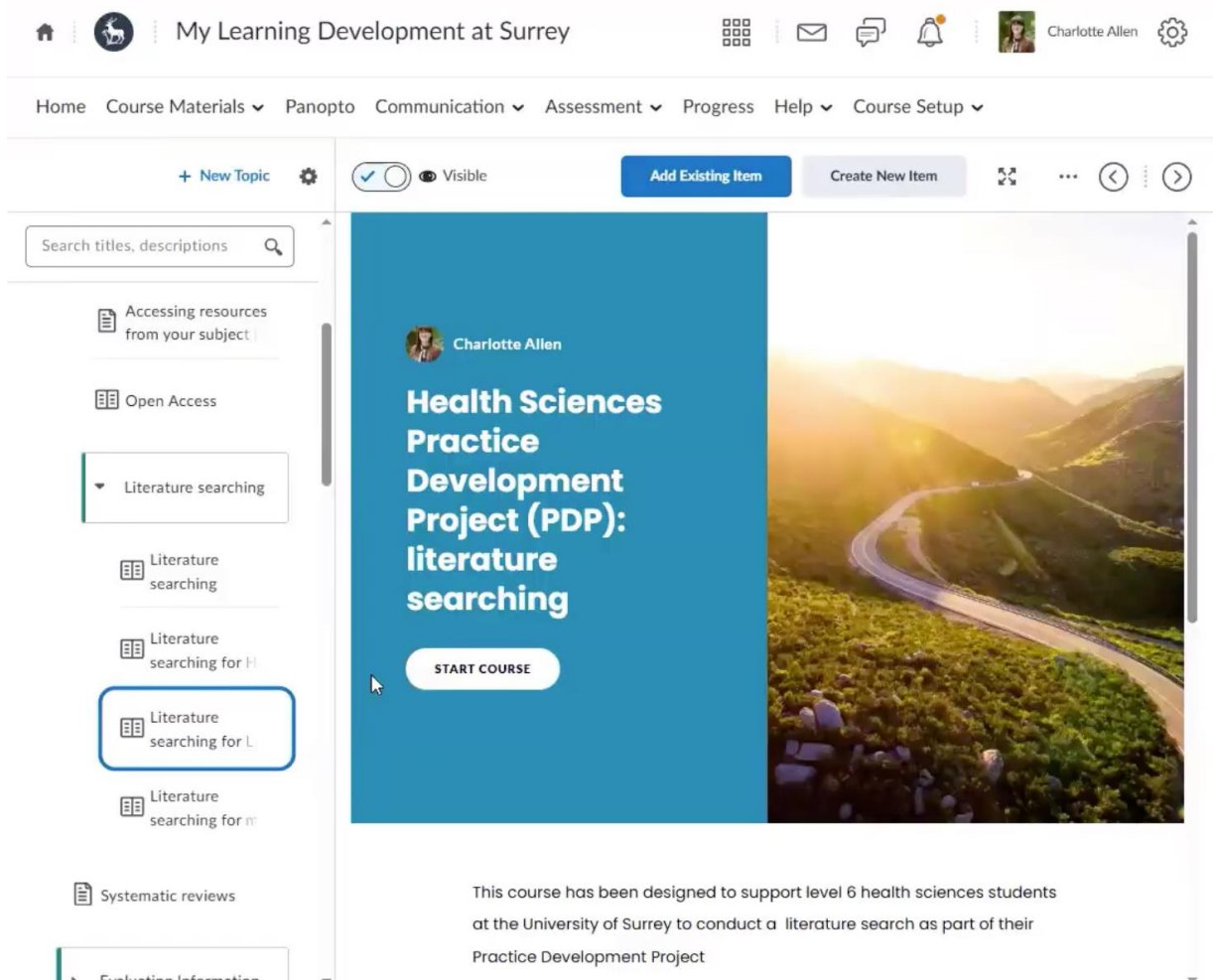
So far, the resource has, anecdotally, been found to be effective in providing accessible, scaffolded and structured guidance for students with a diverse range of learning needs, although we look forward to further developing the resource based on more formal feedback from students and colleagues.

**Keywords:** online resource; literature searching; health sciences.

### The resource

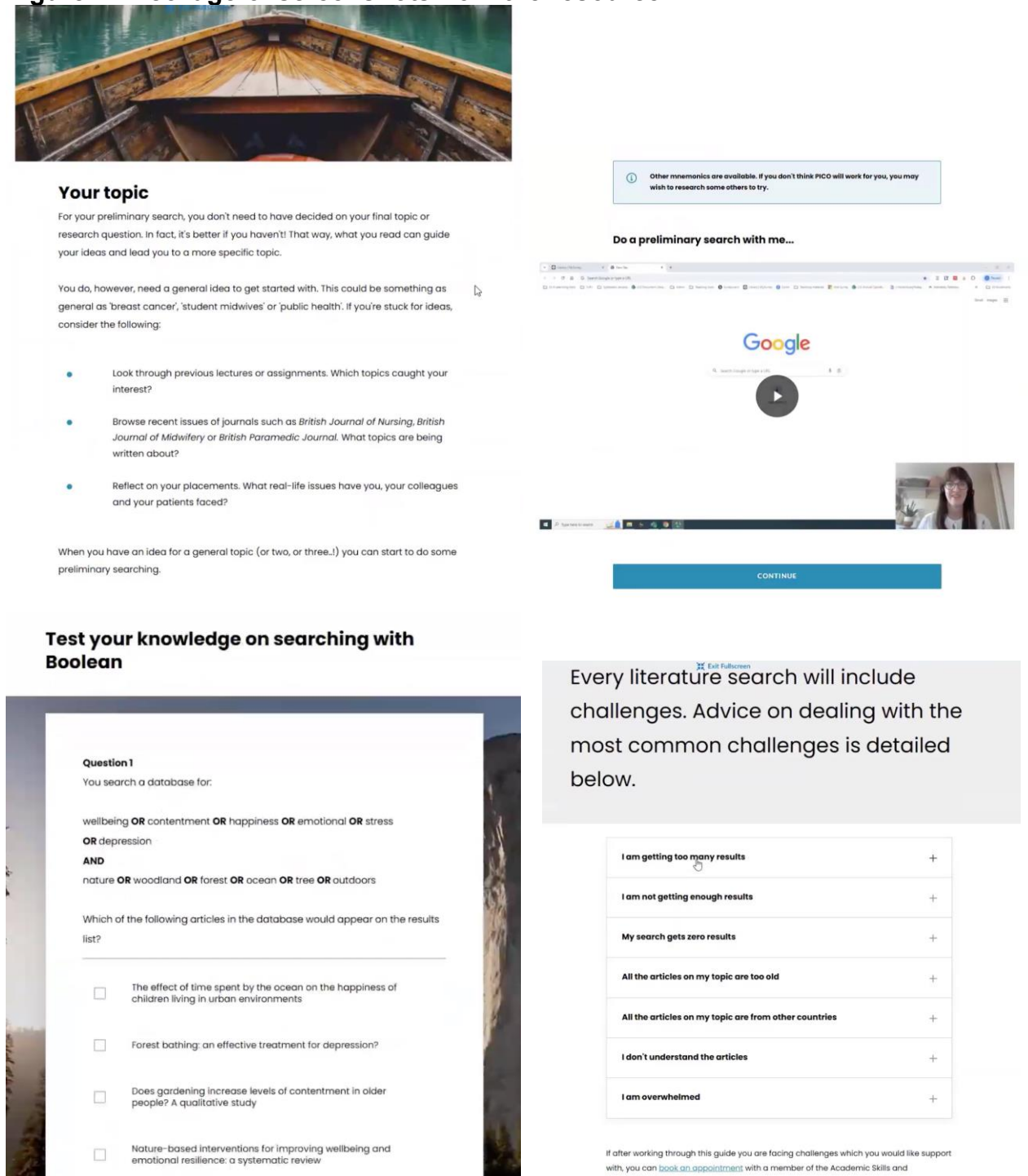
As part of the presentation, the newly developed guidance was demonstrated. Focused on supporting level six dissertation students, the guide was developed using Articulate Rise and embedded within Desire 2 Learn, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Surrey.

**Figure 1. Health sciences practice development project: literature searching.**



The guide focused on multimodal learning, ensuring all information was communicated with multiple means of representation with the use of videos, written guidance and quizzes to test knowledge (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. A collage of screenshots from the resource.**



From top left to bottom right: (1) textual guidance, (2) video instructions with voiceover, (3) interactive quizzes with feedback, and (4) interactive accordions.

## ***Community response***

This was a well-attended session of around 18 delegates, many of whom were actively engaged in the chat. The question of a dedicated dissertation resource for a specific group of students – in this case, health sciences with a significant proportion of mature learners – was clearly one that resonated, particularly in the way that it helped to reduce demands for individual tutorials and the student complaints when that demand inevitably exceeded capacity. I suspect that this session has inspired others to think about how they might translate these ideas to their own settings, hoping they might also see increased understanding in their students – as Charlotte did – of the benefits of active involvement in their own learning.

The community appreciated the use of evidence to identify a target group of learners, and the production of a resource to better meet their needs, increasing independent learning and reducing the demand on their Learning Development Team. This is a good example of a targeted response to a Learning Development challenge. From experiences within my own institution, I can easily see the value in this approach, and suspect we would benefit from a similar resource targeted at the same group!

## **Session Q&A**

The following questions were presented and covered as part of the session:

### **Do you develop your own resources?**

Yes, we do. Over a long time, we have a strong focus on developing resources in our team. We have a vast selection now, all focused on generic resources. Now we have covered most areas of the skills, we have started to develop specific resources where we get strong demand from an assessment or specific cohort.

### **In terms of evaluating the resource, can you also get data from Articulate Rise?**

With Articulate Rise, you create the resource, then export it from Articulate Rise and embed it within the VLE. However, we could get some usage data within the VLE - but I cannot do that myself directly. This is a useful prompt to follow up!

**Are your students permitted to use AI-assisted literature search for this assignment, and is there any guidance on the use of AI (or ban on) these types of tools?**

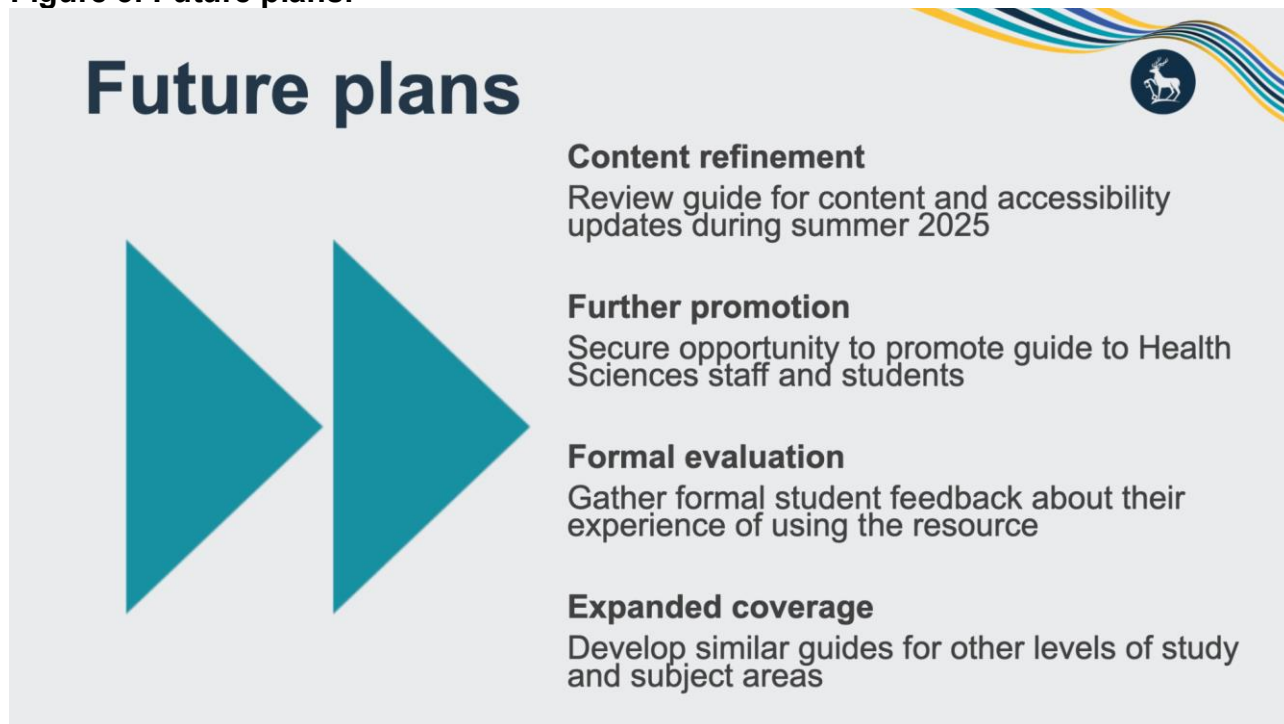
I have not mentioned AI in the guide, but that is probably an update I might need to think about. Health sciences have been proactive and have developed for their students a guide on the acceptable use of AI. They do not mention literature searching, but it is covered in the spirit of the guide. I would really need to speak with the department to see what they would be on board with. The other factor that comes to mind is that our health sciences students are unlikely to be early adopters of literature searching AI software. I would not want to overwhelm them with more things to learn.

**Next steps and additional questions**

So far, the resource has largely been evaluated with anecdotal evidence, although there were some interesting reflections on how the resource could be used as part of workshops and appointments, extending learning beyond these formal interactions. The guide has now been embedded across the breadth of health sciences, including paramedic sciences, midwifery and nursing. Importantly, there is a reduction of appointments and drop-ins of 14% from 2023-24 to 2024-25. Learning Development colleagues now also feel more confident in delivering support to health sciences.

The community shared hopes that the team would more formally consider how they might evidence the impact of this work. This was a powerful intervention that sits at the intersection of learning development and learning design, and does much to showcase our pedagogic knowledge and expertise. How much more vital, then, to be able to demonstrate our impact and therefore our value in ways that are recognised beyond our field?

The presentation also identified a series of future plans (Figure 3), including the development of the content and potential applications in other subject areas.

**Figure 3. Future plans.**

### ***Author's reflection***

Thank you for your insightful reflection on this session. Preparing and delivering the session sharpened my focus on what the essence of the literature searching guide was and how it has impacted our students and the Learning Development Team. I feel re-energised and ready to plan a formal evaluation and dissemination of the impact of the online resource.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Carina Buckley from Southampton Solent University and Lee Fallin from the University of Hull.

The community response was edited by Lee Fallin from the University of Hull and Nikita-Marie Bridgeman from Sheffield Hallam University, who captured the key themes of the community discussion.

## **References**

CAST (2024) *The UDL Guidelines*. Available at: <https://udlguidelines.cast.org> (Accessed: 20 December 2024).

## **Author details**

Charlotte Allen is a Learning Development Librarian at the University of Surrey, specialising in librarianship and information literacy in health and medical fields. She supports undergraduate and postgraduate students in developing the skills needed to navigate health and medical information. Passionate about improving information literacy skills, Charlotte collaborates with students and academic staff to enhance learning and evidence-based practice.

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