Rationale for Skills Team online content delivery

Rationale for moving Skills Team self-help content into LibApps

Issues with Canvas

While there has been positive feedback for the content of our online self-help guides, hosted in Canvas, this platform has four major drawbacks:

1) Content stored in Canvas is siloed into 'courses' with a fixed navigation. This makes it difficult for students to move between guides or return to their start point. The latter is particularly difficult as Canvas employs redirects, meaning that the user needs to click/tap the back button twice. This is both annoying and an accessibility issue.

   There is also a limit to the amount of content that can be included in a guide before it becomes unnavigable. As a result, there are an unmanageable number of guides storing our content. Administration of these guides is limited to two individuals within the library and permissions are cumbersome to manage.

2) Canvas does not support searching across its courses. This is a common criticism from both students and academics (and Skills Team members themselves). The fact that this is now a primary route of navigation makes our content unacceptably difficult to access.

   In Canvas we have been able to publish all courses open-access. While this allows indexing by search engines, Canvas is not ultimately designed as a CMS and so does not support search-engine optimisation.

3) Both literature and the University Library's own access statistics demonstrate a growing tendency to access online content via mobile devices (smart phones, tablets and other internet enabled devices). The most fundamental flaw of Canvas in this respect is that its Pages tool does not support responsive design. It is therefore impossible to design content that works as effectively on both PC and mobile devices. While Canvas supports an app, only enrolled and favourited courses can be accessed through it.

4) As a VLE (and not a CMS), Canvas is primarily oriented to logged-in students. It is therefore impossible to extract any form of access statistic on our content. Consequently, the Skills Team has no access statistics that demonstrate:
   - Whether resources are accessed
   - Which resources are popular
   - Who is accessing resources
   - When resources are accessed
   - What devices are being used to access resources
   - Whether marketing activity affects resource use

   On a strategic level, the Skills Team are therefore unable to prioritise resource development or measure engagement/success.

In recognition of these issues, the Library Planning Statement established an objective with a year 2 milestone to create "a fully navigable and searchable online presence that enables learners to personalize their experience. Supports different learning preferences/needs via multiple formats".

Evaluation of alternatives to Canvas

The Skills Team identified two available alternatives to Canvas: Contensis and LibApps. Their relative pros and cons are given in the table below:

	Contensis	LibApps
Pros	• Fully responsive design. • Maintains visual identity with the main Library website. • Ensures a consistent visual appearance across all pages. • Marketing confirm certain areas of Contensis can be made searchable. • No financial cost as provided by the University.	• Fully customisable responsive design. • Group styling options can be used to create a consistent visual appearance across guides. • Supports searching by system, group or guide. • Entire Skills Team has access to and experience editing guides in LibApps. • Any member of the team can embed widgets throughout the LibApps suite • Full control access to CSS, header and footer HTML and page structure HTML, allowing full visual and structural customisation within the BootStrap framework. • The Library has sole control over visual appearance and have the ability to instigate fixes. • SpringShare provide a high level of support and a rapid turnaround for solutions/fixes. • The visual editing interface is relatively easy to use. • No financial cost as the Library already subscribes to LibApps. • LibApps is used for workshop and appointment booking bringing efficiencies in working in the same system. • LibApps brings greater alignment between Skills and Library resources, allowing Skills content to be easily repurposed. • LibApps allows content to be reused at the block or page level. • LibApps allows LTI functionality for embedding in Canvas or any VLE.
Cons	• Only two people in the team have access and expertise to edit pages. • Only one person in the Library has access to develop includes (in order to embed widgets and other unsupported rich media). • Inability to create any visual element not already developed (buttons, boxes etc) in an accessible way. • The entire website would be subject to template changes by Marketing. This could render parts of the site inoperable and outside our control to fix. • The editing interface is not user-friendly. • If the University decide to switch CMS at a strategic level we would have no part in the decision or control over the timeline.	• Group templates can be overwritten on a page-by-page basis. • Updates by SpringShare can affect functionality. • WYSIWYG editor can override custom HTML. • Increases the Library's dependency on the LibApps suite (and the cost of moving to another system).

On the basis of this breakdown, the team decided that LibApps was the best option. The self-help, open-access online Skills Guides will therefore be moved into this platform.