

Scaling Accessibility

Broadening Digital Libraries to
Enhance the Student Experience



Perlego



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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University of Leeds

The University of Leeds is one of the largest universities in the UK, with total student numbers around 36,000. Part of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities, it is renowned globally for the quality of its research and teaching.

[Discover more at www.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.leeds.ac.uk)

Perlego

Perlego is a digital learning platform that improves the learning experience for students and empowers educators with unlimited access to over 1.5 million academic books from 9,000+ publishers.

[Learn more at www.perlego.com/institutions](http://www.perlego.com/institutions)

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Introduction

When considering how to further strengthen digital provision for its diverse student body, the University of Leeds saw an opportunity in partnering with Perlego's smart online library.

With a digital-first approach and a strong commitment to inclusive learning, Leeds identified how Perlego could meaningfully enhance access to essential texts: particularly for distance learners and students with diverse learning styles. With strategic implementation, Leeds saw that Perlego offered a way to complement and further elevate their library ecosystem.

18 months after the initial launch, this case study examines:

- The University of Leeds' vision for Perlego
- How the University of Leeds successfully implemented Perlego at scale
- The impact of broadening access to digital resources on student reading behaviour.

Why the University of Leeds Partnered with Perlego

All quotes: Elly Cope, Head of Access & Acquisitions, University of Leeds

1 Unlocking broader access to essential content

"I wasn't intending to partner with Perlego. I was going to get the free coffee from the sales rep, and go, 'thank you very much for your time, but no, thank you'. But in the course of the conversation, I was impressed with the range of the content and the number of publishers that were available on the platform."

There was coverage of reading list citations that either we hadn't previously been able to get at all in any format, or that we had in print but not as an ebook. We've got an electronic-first preference, particularly around supporting distance learners and different learning styles: that's our ambition. We couldn't get 60% of those citations on reading lists any other way before they were available on Perlego, which is huge."



The biggest element was the accessibility features. When I saw those in action, I thought, 'oh, this is genuinely different'.

2 Inclusion and accessibility built in: not bolted on

Expanding their digital collection was important to the University of Leeds, but front and centre in their decision-making process was the aim of creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment for all students.

"The biggest element was the accessibility features. When I saw those in action, I thought, 'oh, this is genuinely different'.

Perlego's accessibility features reduce barriers for everyone to access and read the content. Read Aloud [text-to-speech tool] is brilliant. It's not robotic and has proper inflection and recognition of punctuation.

With all that in mind, I thought this is really promising. It could offer something for our users that we can't offer at the moment. So that was why we decided: let's go for it."

3 Enhancing, not replacing, a strong library

University of Leeds were looking for an extra tool in the box to complement existing services – supplementing, not replacing an already strong library.

Elly added: "It's not our only content solution, and we have a range on offer. What Perlego offers is expanding access through your digital library. It's a fantastic, accessible product and we love having it as part of the whole collection."

Meeting students' learning expectations in a digital age

The rise of new technologies is leading to rapidly changing student learning behaviours. A "Netflix-style experience for education" was reported as an increasing expectation during a recent Times Higher Education and Perlego Roundtable for UK HE senior leaders.

Students expect easy, on-demand access to course materials that meet them where they are. Perlego's inclusive features, such as Read Aloud text-to-speech, have been co-designed alongside institutions, librarians and learners to meet these needs.



Read Aloud is definitely my favourite Perlego feature. You don't tend to get academic books in audio form, which is a huge benefit. I use it to study when I'm walking or cooking. It's a way to add a lot more reading to my life — a great accessible resource you can't really find anywhere else.

Aman, English student, University of Leeds



Implementing Perlego: delivering digital transformation effectively at scale

As one of the UK's leading universities, Leeds brought not only ambition but the complexity of delivering digital learning resources at scale with institution-wide access.

This collaboration set out to meet students where they are: providing instant, inclusive access to essential texts through the systems and platforms they're already familiar with, while ensuring a smooth administrator experience, including integration across established library infrastructure.

1 Integrating Perlego to supercharge library discovery

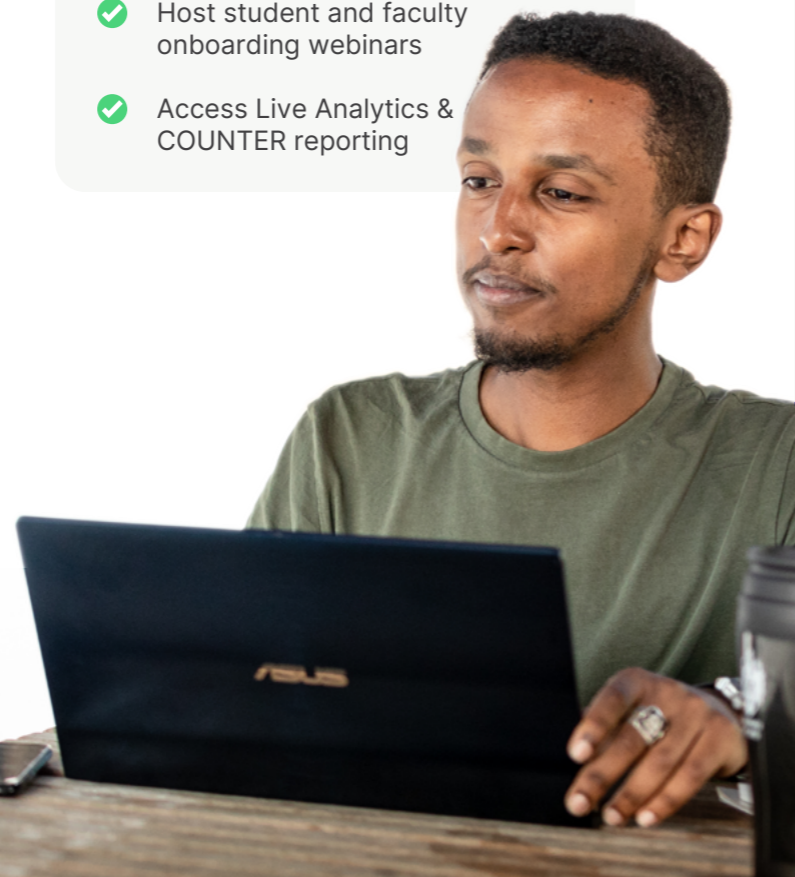
Perlego's integration with existing campus systems was essential, as it helped increase discovery of content, enabling students, faculty and library staff to get maximum value from the platform. By adapting to students' needs, the library team uncovered effective ways to drive reading on the platform, with Perlego titles linked over 5,000 times as citations on active reading lists.

"It was very organic in terms of getting users to sign up through the library, because we were linking to content on Perlego from reading lists straight away, and we had all of the MARC records available in the catalogue. Users were finding the platform through their normal search routes as part of their studies."

Isabel Archer, Access & Acquisitions Manager: Acquisitions & Reading Lists at University of Leeds

Best practice for implementing Perlego

- ✓ Set up Single Sign-On (SSO)
- ✓ Integrate with Library Management Systems (LMS)
- ✓ Surface Perlego titles in Library search for optimal discovery
- ✓ Host student and faculty onboarding webinars
- ✓ Access Live Analytics & COUNTER reporting



2 Building an effective digital partnership for implementation

Collaboration was key to delivering a successful digital initiative at this scale, with adaptability, flexibility and knowledge sharing essential during an ambitious roll-out. Here, a member of the university library team and Perlego's product team share their experience of working closely together to deliver a complex technical integration process:

"Our work with Perlego has focused on ensuring that content available on the platform is fully discoverable within our Library's discovery service. We have collaborated closely with Joe and the Perlego technical team to refine MARC record import and workflows for both new and withdrawn content.

This has included work on the initial import set-up with our Library Management System, streamlining access with Single Sign-On authentication to discussions on MARC record enhancements and product development. Throughout, Perlego have been consistently responsive to feedback and queries and have shown commitment to addressing our needs."

Alison Hazelaar, Access & Acquisitions Manager: Metadata and Discovery, University of Leeds

"It's been fantastic collaborating with the University of Leeds team. They bring exceptional expertise and ambition. We love working closely with libraries to ensure Perlego evolves in line with student, faculty, and library needs, and Leeds has been an outstanding partner. Together, we've tested new features, strengthened our metadata standards, and refined key processes. Working with Alison to enhance our MARC record formatting and discovery delivery has been a particular highlight.

Their focus on delivering an exceptional student experience aligns perfectly with Perlego's user-centred approach. I'm excited to continue improving Perlego in partnership with the Leeds team."

Joe Flagg, Product Lead at Perlego

Grounded in close collaboration, the implementation ranged from shared data insights, to an on-campus presence with Freshers Fairs, and LMS/ SSO integration, ensuring that thousands of students could access the catalogue of 1.5million+ books at their fingertips from day one.

5,000

Number of times Perlego titles have been linked as citations on active reading lists

Powering Reading Engagement through Publisher Collaboration

Securing strong publisher participation was a crucial pillar of University of Leeds and Perlego's flagship partnership. Delivering digital transformation at scale required not only seamless integration but deep collaboration with publishers to ensure students had access to the right titles across high-demand reading lists.

By working closely with both the University Library and publishing partners, Perlego helped build confidence around this digital model; expanding title coverage, increasing visibility of key texts, and driving measurable growth in student reading engagement. The result is a partnership that demonstrates how shared purpose, transparent data, and openness to innovation can create value for students, institutions, and publishers alike.



We've strengthened our partnership with the University of Leeds and have seen greater coverage of Wiley titles across their reading lists. We're delighted by the successful results and the positive impact on student reading engagement with our titles.



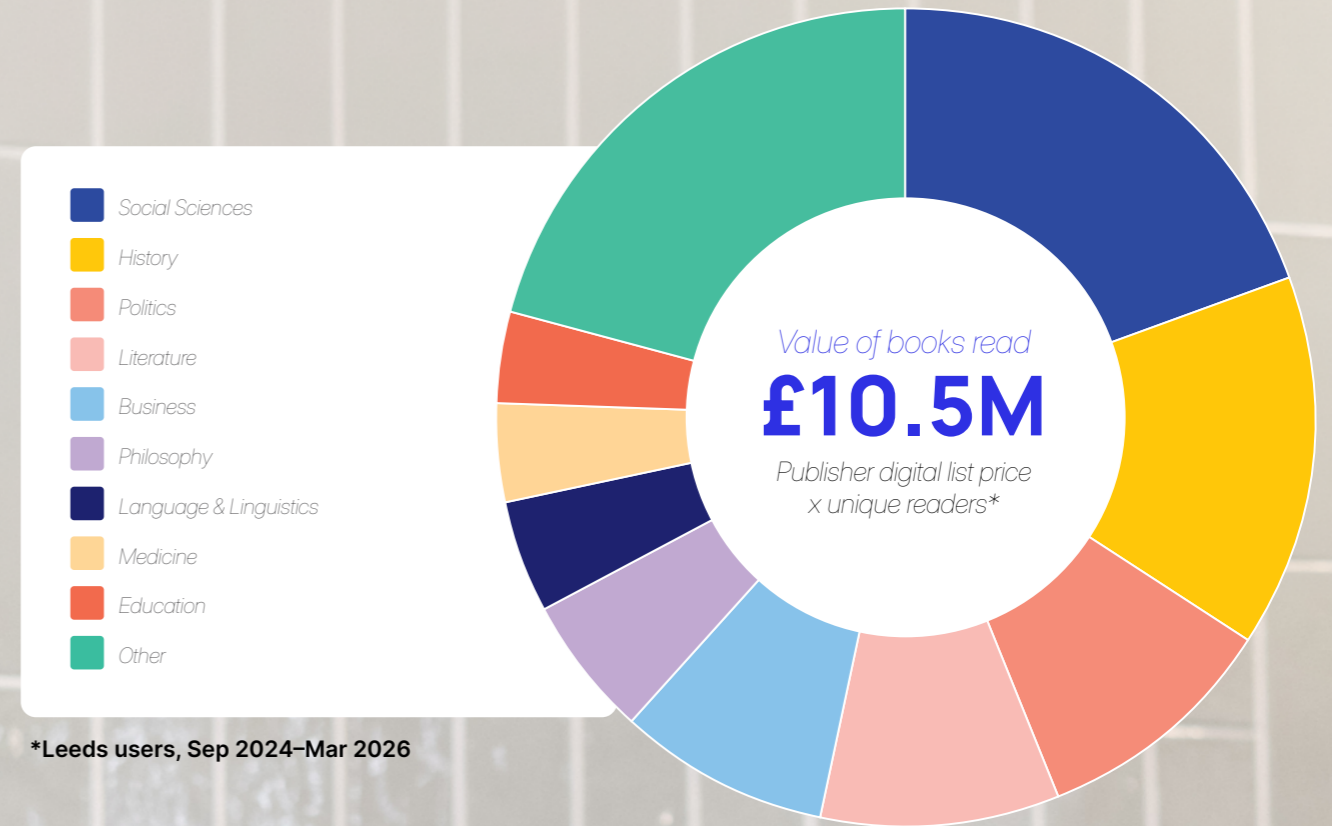
James Fletcher, Senior Director, EMEA Education Sales, Wiley

Elly Cope, the Head of Access and Acquisitions at University of Leeds, celebrated publishers' willingness to try an innovative digital approach, alongside Perlego's support with publisher buy-in, as getting the right content on the platform was a crucial reason for adoption:

"I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the publishers who took the chance on Leeds doing something different, and on working with us and Perlego. We've seen such great engagement with their titles on the platform, that hopefully they also feel that it's been a success.

Perlego were brilliant with managing the publisher relationships to ensure that we had the right content on the platform. They were such a good partner in making sure there was buy-in from publishers, who were nervous about the fact that Leeds were trying something new. Very early on, they listened to us about what we needed in order to make it a success. Perlego really wanted to understand what we needed, and were willing to work towards doing it".

Elly Cope, Head of Access & Acquisitions, University of Leeds



*Leeds users, Sep 2024–Mar 2026



The Impact: Access and Inclusion Without Limits

Eighteen months on from launch, the impact of Perlego at the University of Leeds is visible across expanded content access, high accessibility feature usage, strong reading engagement and more streamlined operations for library staff.

The platform has seen thousands of students use Perlego from September 2024 to March 2026. What began as an ambitious digital inclusion project has translated into measurable change across the institutional, library and student experience.

"Perlego's a must-have because you can get access to so many different publishers at the same time. There's lots of ways to customize your reading experience, like how large the text is, which you don't get with any other platform that's doing academic publishing online."

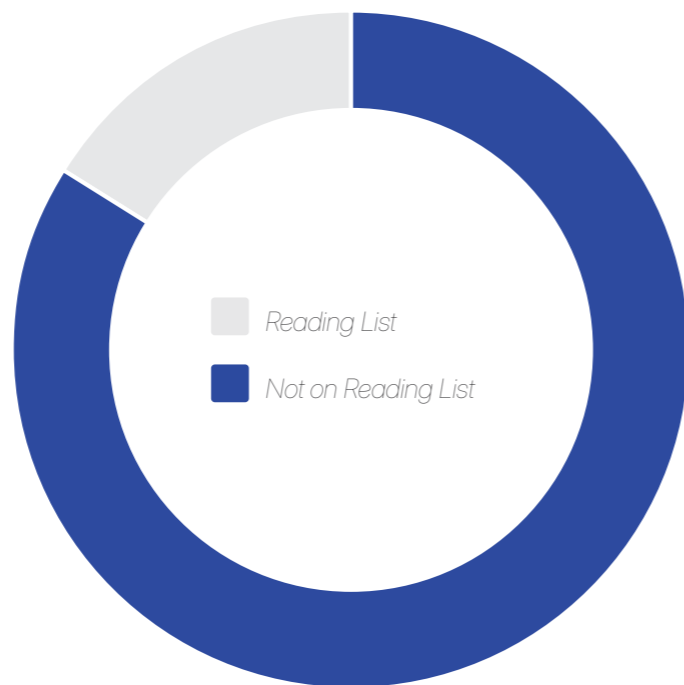
Aman, English student, University of Leeds

1 Transforming Reading List Coverage

For Leeds, one of the clearest impact areas has been the expansion of electronic reading list provision. Isabel Archer, Access & Acquisitions Manager (Acquisitions & Reading Lists), explains:

"One of the things that initially drew us to Perlego was the coverage of reading list titles that we couldn't provide electronically through other providers, and in some cases couldn't obtain in print either. Filling those gaps in our reading list provision has been really positive, and we've definitely seen an impact there."

With the on-list versus off-list books, we're seeing how much content that isn't on reading lists is being discovered and used by students, and the variety of content they're accessing. It's been fascinating seeing that organic use of the platform and the areas people are interested in that we weren't aware of before."



- 15+** Average books opened per user
- 468,794** total books opened at University of Leeds

2 Meaningful Accessibility and Digital Inclusion

Accessibility was a core driver from the outset, and remains one of the most powerful areas of impact. Elly Cope, Head of Access and Acquisitions at the University of Leeds, says:

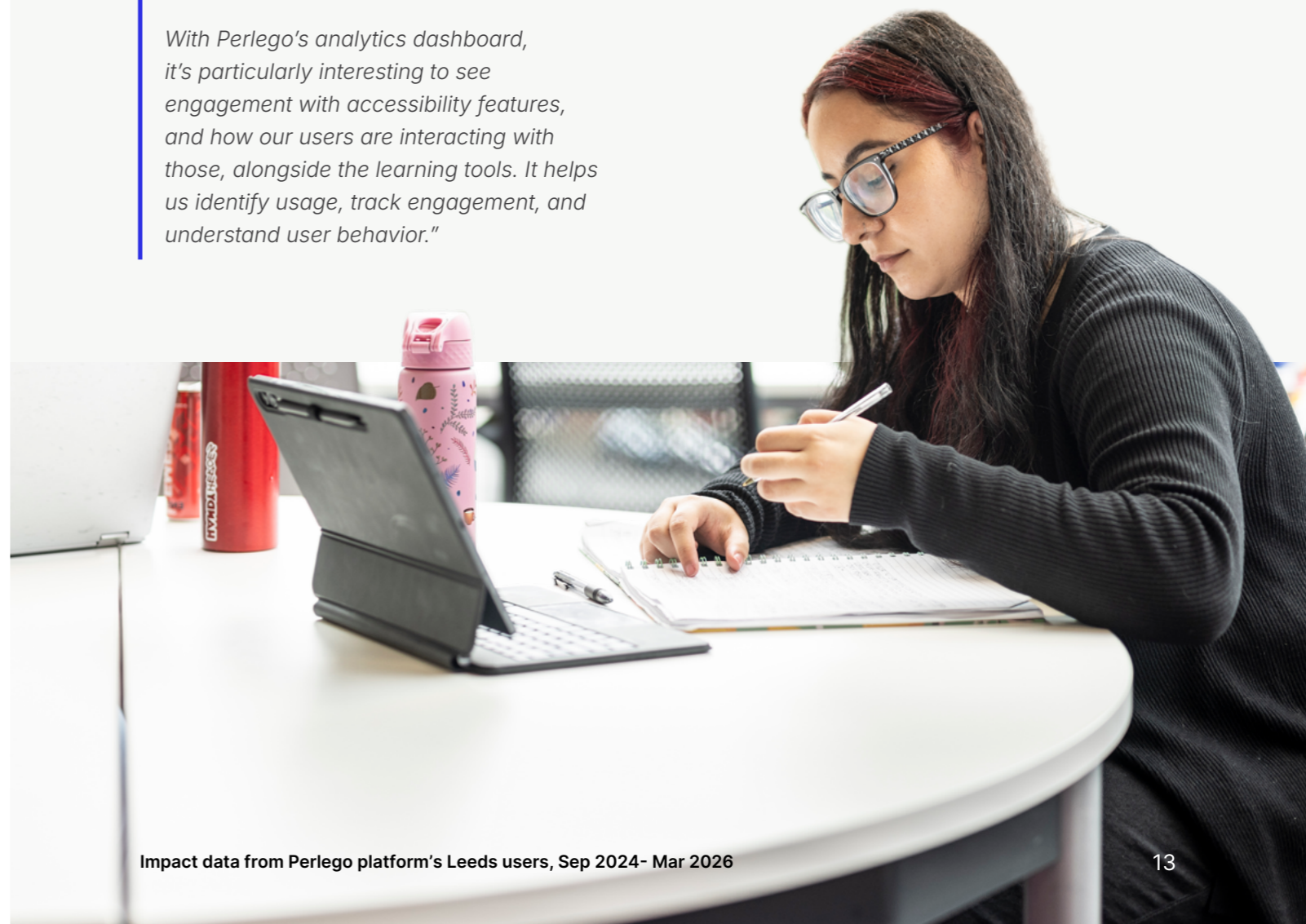
"The accessibility features, and the numbers we see on the usage of those features, really highlights how good they are, and the impact for us. Perlego's a sector-leading example we can show to other suppliers."

Isabel also highlighted the benefits of an inclusive student experience within the platform:

"The centrality of accessibility features on Perlego is key. When someone's within a book, they're clear where the features are, and seeing the usage of those has been really positive."

With Perlego's analytics dashboard, it's particularly interesting to see engagement with accessibility features, and how our users are interacting with those, alongside the learning tools. It helps us identify usage, track engagement, and understand user behavior."

- 34,676** Read Aloud uses
- 520,273** Text highlights
- 2,171** Font Dyslexic uses
- 816,510** AI-powered Smart Searches
- 9,404** Text size changes



3 Operational Resilience and Zero turnaways

One of the most striking outcomes has been the elimination of turnaways [when access is denied to an e-resource because the maximum licences are used] during peak demand, which reduces barriers for both library staff and students.

Managing turnaways was a key work-in-progress for the library team at Leeds, a challenge that partly came about due to excellent engagement with reading lists. Adopting Perlego's online library made a strategic impact on this.

"To have an exam season with zero turnaways for revising students is like a sports person's gold medal season," says Elly. "With Perlego, once you're in, you're in. There's no concurrency and there's nothing to worry about. It went from being a period of a lot of stress for the team, and constantly being on the alert, to just being able to focus on preparing for semester two, and doing the proactive rather than the reactive. Perlego definitely helped with that."

"With Perlego, once you're in, you're in. There's no concurrency and there's nothing to worry about."

4 Deeper Student Engagement and Discovery

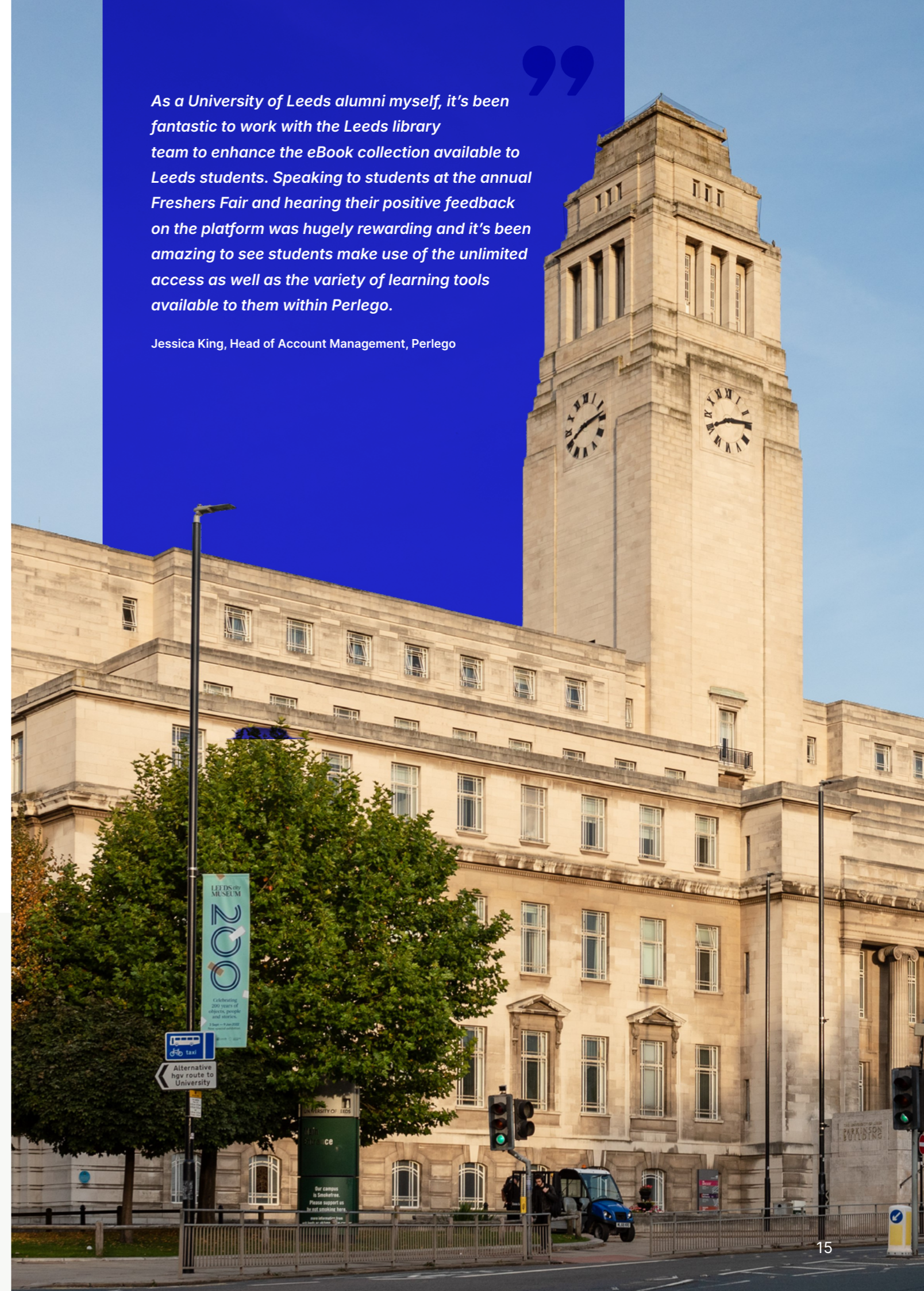
University of Leeds Libraries have seen meaningful shifts in how students engage with digital content since Perlego's launch, supported by the platform's reading data.

Isabel observes, "We've seen high usage and engagement, and discovery both through the reading list, and people exploring and finding other content. We've also started looking at leisure reading, and content being accessed beyond the academic curriculum, in terms of what titles are being interacted with in fiction. That's been really interesting."

Elly shares how the engagement was substantially higher than the team expected. "One of the unexpected consequences of implementing Perlego is it's such a popular platform, which defied all our modelling! We've got great stats around engagement. It's not just students thinking 'we'll dive into the ebook to check a reference.' They're spending longer in the books they get too, longer in the platform, and are discovering more books."

"On average, students use more books on Perlego than on any other comparator platform. It's very good in terms of boosting engagement and giving opportunities to discover that broader content. Another bonus."

From strengthened reading list coverage and genuine accessibility, to zero turnaways and deeper engagement, the impact of Perlego at the University of Leeds demonstrates what large-scale digital inclusion can achieve: broader access, richer discovery, and a more resilient, student-centred library experience.



As a University of Leeds alumni myself, it's been fantastic to work with the Leeds library team to enhance the eBook collection available to Leeds students. Speaking to students at the annual Freshers Fair and hearing their positive feedback on the platform was hugely rewarding and it's been amazing to see students make use of the unlimited access as well as the variety of learning tools available to them within Perlego.

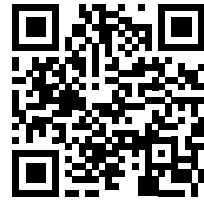
Jessica King, Head of Account Management, Perlego

Your smart library on-demand

Perlego is a digital learning platform that improves the learning experience for students and empowers educators with unlimited access to over 1.5 million academic and professional books from leading publishers.

Let's talk!

Get in touch to discuss how we can support student success at your institution.



Perlego

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