



Koha LMS and PTFS Europe support at NHS Trust libraries Emma Gibbs, Resources Librarian, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

Open source software: user experience of Koha LMS and PTFS Europe hosting and support services

Launched in 2000, the Koha library management system has become widely used in the UK over the last ten years. The significant difference between Koha and other systems is that it is truly “open source.” A worldwide community of developers maintains Koha, and it is available for anyone to download and install for free. Over 2019/20 PTFS Europe’s Development Manager has been working as Release Manager in the community, overseeing each of the two main annual releases. PTFS Europe, like similar Koha support companies around the world, can help its clients with the local implementation of the software and will manage hosting and support going forward.

Worcestershire Health Libraries and Herefordshire Clinical Library Service

Worcestershire Health Libraries cover the entire Worcestershire health community and consists of four modern libraries. Similarly, the Hereford library provides information services to all NHS staff in Herefordshire. The library team consists of twelve information professionals and paraprofessionals dedicated to providing a responsive evidence-based information service to the healthcare community. Only the best available evidence will do where patient health care is concerned, and they are here to ensure that all local healthcare staff and teams can access the best evidence when and it is needed.

Why did we need to migrate to a new system?

Koha LMS replaced our previous system nine years ago and went live in September 2011. It currently supports over 5,000 borrowers and has a catalogue of about 13,500 titles.

There were several reasons for changing LMS, and cost was a major one. Koha hosted and supported by PTFS Europe, more than halved the per annum costs compared to the previous system. We also avoided the cost and upkeep of an in-house server because PTFS Europe hosts and supports Koha.

Moving to a SaaS solution was welcomed by our IT department. They did not need to maintain the local server (ours was somewhat dated), and they weren’t responsible for backups and systems support such as OS upgrades and server replacements. In our case, we also saved on the cost and support issues in providing network communications from our site to the local server.

Having a web-based system meant that it would be available from any location and wasn’t dependent on desktop client software or licence. Browser technology means we can have multiple logins on one desktop.

Using Koha LMS

We use Koha's OPAC, Reports, Systems Admin, Circulation, Serials, Cataloguing, and Acquisitions modules. Overall, library staff have found the system is very self-explanatory. The OPAC gets good usage. And its responsive display technology means that the OPAC is accessible from tablets and smartphones.

Koha is easy to customise. We have made extensive use of the systems administration and tools modules. They provide a comprehensive range of configurable functions and workflow options that the systems administrator can use to best suit the way we work. We have also used (with PTFS Europe's help) Koha's technical tools, in this case, jQuery, to change some of the fields on our self-registration form to address local needs.

OPAC: <https://waht.koha-ptfs.co.uk/>

Home: <http://www.wkp.nhs.uk/>

PTFS Europe support and hosting

Since Koha went live, the library's systems administrator and PTFS Europe's support have been able to resolve support issues. (Although if IT support was needed, they are aware of the system and will investigate issues to see if it is a local issue.) Response times from the customer help desk is excellent for all types of queries. The help portal is very easy to use.

Although SQL is sometimes a mystery, the help desk is always willing to help with more complicated reports. This includes creating the right SQL script or amend, if necessary, a report from the Koha community report library (see below).

The hosting performance is excellent too. The system has been live for over eight years, and there has hardly been any downtime.

Support when undergoing upgrades is tailored to our needs as well. They are flexible on upgrade dates so that we can upgrade with other NHS libraries and avoid busy periods such as junior doctor and student inductions in September. Upgrades are usually applied early morning so that Koha is up and running by the time the library is open. As the systems administrator, I run my checks and then work through the standard tests from PTFS Europe support. Any issues are usually sorted out the same day. We also receive tailored released release notes that highlight areas of interests relevant to our Koha setup and configuration.

Being part of the Open Source community

The community reports repository is a fantastic resource. It has over 300 SQL reports developed by Koha users which can be copied to our system and, if necessary, adapted to suit our needs. We make use of more than 30 community reports.



We also attend the annual customer day (which will be virtual this year). Of course, it's a great way to network with other users and PTFS Europe and keep up to date with their plans and developments over the year.

There is also a Customer Forum which allows us to keep track of more day to day issues and vote on bug fixes. PTFS Europe has recently introduced short videos on the Forum covering how to use Koha for specific functions. For example, because of COVID-19, the support team posted a how-to set Koha up for a 'Click and Collect' service.

A word from PTFS Europe

PTFS Europe supports a growing number of libraries in the NHS sector with the Koha Library Management system. A typical implementation project takes about three months; however, the project timetable is built to meet the needs of each institution. As well as the implementation and support staff at PTFS Europe, there is a team of developers who are continually working on bug-fixing and product enhancements in Koha. So, choosing the Koha LMS means that your library will see new features added and improvements made with each upgrade. **Contact PTFS Europe** or 01483 378728 for more information.

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