From paper repositories to 21st century learning environments

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Abstract

This paper and presentation will detail how the Queensland University of Technology Library has transformed its two large campus libraries from paper-based repositories to 21st century learning environments. The Kelvin Grove Library [built in 1979] and Gardens Point Library [built in 1981] were designed to deliver a library service that was primarily book based, and had not envisaged the impact that the Internet would have on resource discovery and access.

In recent years fundamental changes to the Library's collecting policies have impacted the Library's collection profile: 80% of the book allocation is being spent on virtual resources, less frequently used items have been transferred to an off-site storage facility, and a "steady state physical collections" policy was implemented in 2010. Likewise, the Library adopted a number of service initiatives that demanded new physical settings to achieve optimal success: an aspiration to move from a "remedial" to "developmental" model of learning support; simplification of borrowing rules to increase access to collections; and the provision of both collaborative and individual learning environments.

This case study will show how a modest Federal Government grant has enabled the upgrade of two moribund library buildings to vibrant learning environments that are central to campus activity. The design and fit-out has taken into consideration the 21st century environment, and the new initiatives that the Library was seeking to achieve. Technology has changed the way that students want to use our library spaces and engage with our collections and services. The design and fit-out has successfully responded to the needs of the 21st century student and is flexible enough to respond to future changes as well. Both facilities were available to students for the commencement of the new academic year in February 2011.

In 2008, the QUT Library received $15.5M funding from the Australian Federal Government's *Better Universities Renewal Fund* (BURF) for capital works at Gardens Point and Kelvin Grove branch libraries. [This grant was supplemented with an additional $130K by the University.] It was determined that the funding would be directed to two branch libraries through the following project scope:

- *Gardens Point Library* – Level 4 would be transformed from a space which was largely the print periodical collection to a collaborative study zone; and to support this change an open access compactus would be installed on level 1 for back issues of print periodicals. In the course of the project, it was agreed to allocate additional funds to undertake some preliminary work on levels 5 and 6 – to increase seating capacity and provide improved foyer areas on each level.
- *Kelvin Grove Library* – a mid-life upgrade would result in a complete transformation of the Library which was constructed in 1979. With major construction works including the upgrade of base building services to current compliance requirements, improved ICT facilities, the provision of a range of informal and formal learning and social spaces, and improved access to services for students with disabilities.

*Key objectives of bo*th projects were to:

- Transform these libraries from paper based repositories to learning spaces that met the needs of 21st century students;
- That the Library would enhance its identification as a "community hub" in the respective campuses;
- Learning spaces would be designed for either collaborative study or individual study;
- The provision of PCs and study spaces would be increased;
- Design and fit-out would allow future flexibility with minimal expenditure, e.g. limited use of built-in joinery;
- To relegate low use collection items to an offsite store – with the outcome being a decrease in collection space and an increase in student study space.

Throughout the projects, continuous access to collections and services was maintained. This was particularly challenging for the Kelvin Grove project, due to the requirement for the construction team to access all levels of the building, and the timeframe for construction being May 2010 – February 2011.

Environmental influences

In planning the upgrade projects, and specifically the design of spaces, the Library took the opportunity to consider a number of changes that had occurred in recent years. These changes directly impacted on how the Library delivered services, client expectations of what the Library should offer, and ultimately what spaces and services should be available in the Library. The upgrade projects provided the Library with a timely opportunity to transform buildings that had been built and designed in the pre-Internet era, when the card catalogue was the penultimate resource discovery tool, and libraries were profiled as places of absolute quiet.

In summary, the environmental changes that were considered when designing the new spaces were:

1. <u>Collections</u>. The Library's collecting policies have been continuously reviewed to take into account the increased availability of electronic resources. Eighty percent of the book allocation is now expended on virtual resources. The establishment of an offsite store has enabled "less frequently used" resources to be moved from the branch libraries. In addition, a "steady state physical collections" policy was implemented in 2010. In effect, this policy states that the total volumes in the physical collection will not increase – which means any design does not need to consider growth in storage requirements.

2. <u>Client empowerment</u>. Services are reviewed on an annual basis, using the Service Management Framework. http://www.tils.qut.edu.au/initiatives/servicemang/ This continuous improvement process ensures that services are reviewed and aligned to the University's top level strategic plan: *QUT Blueprint 3 2011-2016* http://www.qut.edu.au/about/university/pdf/qut-blueprint-2011-20110411.pdf The annual service reviews have confirmed the benefits of co-locating library services with other departments, e.g. printing services and the IT Helpdesk.

3. The design process also sought opportunities to enhance self service, e.g. borrowing, holds, and course reserve in line with the University's approach to improving the student experience through improved access to services.

4. <u>Borrowing conditions</u>. To support the client empowerment initiatives, reviews of borrowing conditions were undertaken in 2009 and 2010. The intent was to make it easier for clients to borrow material, and to minimise the need for staff intervention in the lending process.

5. <u>Decrease in lending transactions</u>. Between 2005 and 2009 loans decreased by 25%, and the expectation is that this trend will continue as more resources are acquired in electronic format, and publishing models change. This trend has implications for both space requirements for collections and lending desks.

6. <u>A new Helpdesk model</u>. The Library's *2008 Library Workforce Plan* identified the need to move to a staffing profile and structure that supports a single integrated Library Helpdesk. The focus of the one Library Helpdesk would be learning support, with the Library desk staff providing academic and information literacy support, as well as managing all other Library enquiries including lending.

7. <u>Student use of spaces</u>. An Australian Learning and Teaching Council [ALTC] grant provided the opportunity to undertake research on library places and spaces as experienced by learners. The student consultation revealed a significant number of issues that needed to be considered, including: ability to eat and drink, provision of power for laptops; appropriate furniture for function of space; views to the outside world; visually appealing and pleasant ambience; spacious work areas; variety of work spaces; increased group spaces; social as well as study spaces.

The upgrades were therefore an opportunity to re-design library services based on client feedback, organisational policy, and a changing environment, rather than the limitations of an existing building. This paper and presentation will focus specifically on the outcomes of the Kelvin Grove branch library project, however, the same principles apply to the Gardens Point branch library.

Design and service outcomes

There are a number of significant design and service outcomes from the upgrade projects that should be highlighted.

1. **The entry level .** From the moment that the doors to the "new" Library were opened in Semester 1 2011, there has been an overwhelming positive response to the new space. The "before" and "after" images are perhaps the best "description" of the transformation. The images below are of the entry level. Prior to the upgrade, the entry level had been modified many times in its 30 + year history – each time to accommodate changing client needs, and changes in available technology. Image 1 shows the Lending Desk and self checkout units. The colour scheme is out-dated and uninspiring. The entry level, which was 595 square metres, included the Lending Desk and a staff area for processing returned library resources, two Information Desks, Holds and Closed Reserve, a display area, newspaper reading area, student PC access, and a "quiet space" in which clients could orient themselves to the building. It was obviously too much for such a limited space!

   In contrast, the same space [Image 2] within the new entry level, includes the new Learning and Research Desks, casual seating, newspaper area, new books display and PC access [either standing or sitting]. The footprint has been expanded to take in the area which was previously another building, and this is where clients can access services such as Holds and Closed Reserve, printing and copying services, IT Helpdesk. The total footprint of the entry level is now approximately 1750 square metres.

   Perhaps the most breathtaking transformation, however, is the staircase between levels 2 and 3. Clients are drawn to the staircase, and they are rewarded with the sight of the artwork – "*Book Canopy".* The artwork was the concept of the Design Team at James Cubitt and Peddle Thorp Architects and realised by Urban Art Projects, Brisbane. Constructed of discarded library books, the artwork provides a reference to the traditional library, but also signals the use of vibrant colour within the library spaces.

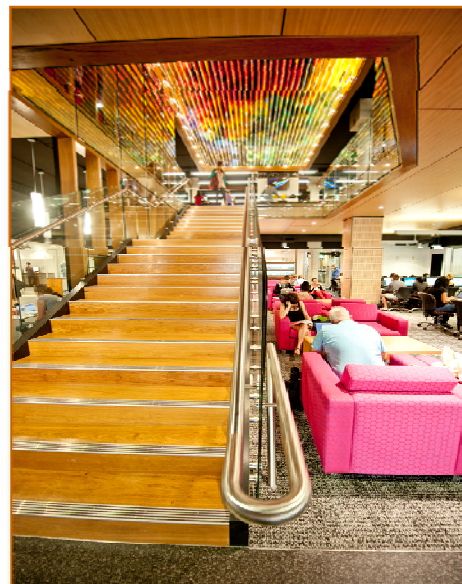Image 1 Pre-upgrade, Entry level

Image 2 Post-upgrade, Entry level

2. **Co-location of services.** Recognising that from a student perspective it is convenient to have a number of services co-located, the Project Brief included the co-location of the IT Helpdesk, the assignment submission service - Assignment Minder, and printing services within the Library. This objective has been achieved at both Kelvin Grove and Gardens Point branch libraries.

3. **Learning and Research Desks.** Prior to the upgrades, the Library provided two service points: Library Helpdesk [for reference enquiries and learning support], and the Lending Desk. As previously mentioned, the Workforce Plan identified an objective to move to a single integrated desk model – one desk where all enquiries could be answered. The model also proposed that the Lending Desks would be removed. The removal of the Lending Desks has been supported by the introduction of additional self checkout units in libraries, and the review of borrowing conditions that limits the need for staff intervention in lending transactions. In introducing this change, management acknowledged that the new model was a "future oriented" solution, and that it may take some time for lending transactions to further decline and reflect the full impact of the increased usage of electronic resources in preference to print resources.

   After considerable discussion between the architects and project group, and consultation with lending supervisors and Library Helpdesk staff, a 'service pod' model was endorsed. In designing the service pods, consideration was given to the design of service points that are being used in contemporary professional and retail settings. In such settings professionals and clients sit adjacent to each other to view merchandise or discuss services. A similar "desk" design has been implemented at Helsinki's *Library Ten* where staff and clients sit together, rather than across a counter. To deliver a range of service to clients, each of the three new service pods has the capacity for either sitting or standing interactions between clients and Library staff. A staff member has the ability to have discussions with a group of students, as well as an individual.

   The design objective was to provide service to students and staff in a setting that was both transparent and inviting. Located centrally on the main entry level of the Library, the service precinct offers a highly visible destination comprising three service pods and two consulting rooms. The consultation rooms are used for the Library's Study Solutions service; one-to-one consultations between Library professionals and clients. Library Staff have indicated that they appreciate the "openness" of the consulting rooms, for the Study Solutions service, in preference to other areas within the Library.

   To ensure that self service is convenient to the client, there are two self service checkout units adjacent to the service precinct, as well as one self service checkout on each of the three floors where the collection is located.

   Our objective is for the Helpdesks to be "learning and study support" desks – the emphasis is on providing advice on information literacy and study skills, and effective ways to access our collections and services. They have therefore been renamed "*Learning and Research Desks*".

Image 3 Concept drawing of the new Learning and Research Desk

4. **Collaborative and individual study zones within the library**

Within a university setting, it is important to provide a range of study spaces, as there is demand for both collaborative and individual study spaces. This demand is influenced by individual preferences, as well as QUT's requirement of group work in assessment. Collaborative spaces can be either meeting rooms, or spaces where discussion and group work is encouraged and supported. Individual study spaces generally need to be in a quiet environment.

The design solution to this need has been the development of "zones" within the Library. Each floor is designated either as a "collaborative learning zone" or an "individual learning zone". The use of colour and furniture has successfully communicated their intended use to students. In fact, the design has been so successful that signage regarding noise zones is minimal. Levels 2 and 3, for example, are furnished in vibrant fuchsia tones and as the client ascends the building the colour scheme [and zones] change.

Kelvin Grove Library project: Levels 2 - 6	
6	Individual study zone; Researcher's Study Centre
5	Individual study zone; collection
4	Collaborative study zone; collection
3	Collaborative study zone; training room; collection
2	Entry and exit – Collaborative study zone; training room
1	Periodical collection – Open access

Image 4 Zoning and colour design with Kelvin Grove Library

5. Wayfinding

The success of any new space or building can be dependent upon the ease of navigating through the building and how intuitive clients find the wayfinding. In designing the layout of each floor, the intention was to have key services in the same location on each floor. Self checkout units and photocopiers, for example, are located in the same area of each floor plate.

Each floor has a directory board that indicates the location of all services and areas within the Library, as well as highlighting what is on the specific floor. Layout and clear sight lines has minimised the need for signage – in many cases you can see the difference spaces from the foyer of each floor. "Place marker" signage is action based to inform clients what activity occurs in the space, e.g. "*borrow here*", "*print here*", "*bind here*".

| Image 5 – Directory boards | Image 6 – Action based place marker |

6. Technology

The Kelvin Grove Library was built in 1979, and its design reflected the dominance of the book collection, the card catalogue as the resource discovery tool, and the Library as a "quiet haven". One of the key objectives of the upgrade project was to enable increased client use of technology.

In addition to increasing the number of PCs [which provide both Internet access and access to our electronic collections], it was a priority to meet the needs of students who bring their own mobile devices. It seems you can never have enough power points! So, the design has provided power points in as many locations as possible: study carrels, study booths, adjacent to casual seating, and even in the outdoor spaces.
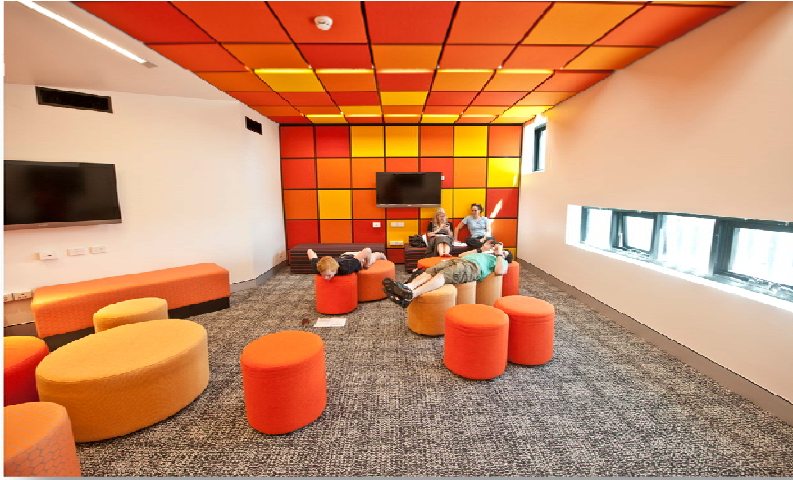
Image7 Games Lab, Level 4

The Kelvin Grove Library has provided a GamesLab and games collection for some years to support the curriculum. The Games Collection was initiated in response to requests from Faculty of Creative Industries.

Student focus groups and surveys conducted prior to the design process indicated that students also valued the GamesLab as a means to relax, while spending time between lectures.

"*we can't study all the time*".

The new Games Lab has been fitted out in vibrant colours and flexible furniture. Equipment provided includes Playstation, xBox and Wii games.

Feedback and evaluation

As stated above, there was an immediate response to the transformation from clients. Unsolicited feedback was received face-to-face at our service points, emails were received from Faculty staff, and perhaps best of all, and we were able to monitor immediate and very informal feedback via Twitter. Below are some of the examples of tweets:

@QUT lovin' the new library at KG! #winning

Wow oh wow! Went to the uni library today (on my own will) and it looks snazzy. I'm actually going to spend more time at #QUT this year now.

How good does the new #QUT Kelvin Grove library look?! There are books on the ceiling!! http://twitpic.com/499vhe

QUT Awesome books, awesome view @qutlibrary RT @avengermattman: 4 May via HootSuite

Re-designed library is pretty freaking cool. It smells like new car in here! (@ QUT Kelvin Grove Library) http://4sq.com/eUP3mn

this is the place to be! (@ QUT Kelvin Grove Library)

Likewise, we have received very positive feedback from Faculty staff:

> *"Students talk about it – they like to hang out there".* **Fashion lecturer, Faculty of Creative Industries**

> *Congratulations on the 'new' library. I spent some time in there this morning just walking around and admiring the renovations and the views. I really enjoyed the innovation above the timber staircase and ended up on Level 6 peacefully browsing the journals. The building has a lovely feel and is bright and inviting and today it's also full of students so even better.*
> **Faculty of *Education Head of School***

In Semester 2 2011, our intention is to undertake some formal surveys of client satisfaction with the transformed library. This timing will have allowed students and staff the opportunity to use the new facilities for at least 6 months, reflect on what they like best, and what changes they would like.

Library staff will also have the opportunity to provide feedback on the changes. In particular, staff will be asked to comment on the new Learning and Research Desks. It is recognised that it was a significant service change, and it is important to seek staff comment.

Depending on what feedback is received from staff and students, management will have the opportunity to consider if change is required, and what can be implemented prior to the commencement of Semester 1 2012.

Conclusion

After only six months of use, the Library is very proud of the transformation that has been achieved. Feedback from both students and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. Looking back to the project objectives, it can be confirmed that they have been achieved:

- ✓ our spaces have been transformed into vibrant learning spaces;
- ✓ our libraries are community hubs for their campuses – they are destinations for campus events, displays and places to just simply "hang out";
- ✓ learning spaces have successfully been transformed into either collaborative study or individual study zones;
- ✓ the number of PCs, and study rooms and spaces has increased, e.g. at Kelvin Grove Library an additional 150 PCs have been provided, an additional 200+ study spaces, and bookable meeting spaces has increased from 8 to 15;
- ✓ there has been very limited use of joinery in the fit-out, and where appropriate furniture is able to moved easily;
- ✓ less frequently used collection items have been transferred to the Library Store, which has resulted in 30% additional space for students.

But of course, the change is not complete. If the Library is to keep pace with user expectations it must be prepared for continuous improvement. Later this year, the results of the student and staff surveys will be reviewed and based on those comments; plans will be made for further improvements. After six months of delivering services in our new environment, however, there is confidence that the Library is moving forward from a very successful transformation!