

## **TAFE LIBRARIES IN TRANSITION: THE SOUTHBANK EXPERIENCE**

R. AUST<sup>1</sup>, H. BURRELL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Product Design & Development, Southbank Institute of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, randelle.aust@southbank.edu.au*

<sup>2</sup> *Library Services, Southbank Institute of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, heather.burrell@southbank.edu.au*

### **ABSTRACT**

Over the last decade Southbank Institute of Technology has implemented major changes in order to maintain relevance and market share in the dynamic and competitive academic and industry environment. We have evolved from a multi-campus TAFE institute to a dual sector centralised statutory authority with over 120 articulation pathways to higher education. As mandated by the 2006 Queensland Skills Plan, Southbank is addressing skills shortages in associate professional and graduate fields as well as delivering English language and literacy programs to migrants and international students. Southbank is the first statutory institute in Queensland to offer students access to VET FEE-HELP assistance. Over 500 students from Brisbane high schools study at Southbank through our STEP program. Consequently, our students are from diverse backgrounds and locations and have a wide range of information needs. Our broad client base has changed the way we deliver our library services and has created a more agile, strategic and client focused organization.

This paper will discuss some of the strategies the library has implemented to not only develop its role as an information provider, but to assist educators and students with changes to their educational environment.

### **FROM TAFE COLLEGE TO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

In November 1993, six Brisbane TAFE colleges merged to become campuses of Southbank Institute of TAFE. Each of the campuses had their own libraries whose collections supported the programs that were taught there. [1]

The first priority for the newly formed institute was to establish a cohesive identity and brand, followed by the implementation of standardised policies and procedures across the organisation. The challenge

for the six campus libraries was to integrate their staff, collections, processes and culture into a seamless library service. During the amalgamation process two of the smaller branch campuses and their library collections were closed and all staff and resources were moved to the main campuses at South Brisbane.

An institute library manager was appointed to oversee the merger and manage the libraries and their budgets. Cross campus working parties were formed to standardise work practices, write policies and work instructions. Task groups were also formed at this time to build cohesion between the separate campuses and develop new policies, products and services. This model was so effective that it is still in place today, although the names and group compositions have changed over the years.

Currently the library uses the task group model to manage key functional areas, streamline processes or develop new products and services. A librarian is usually appointed to coordinate and lead these self managed teams and liaise with stakeholders on behalf of the library. In many cases the team leader is given leadership training and team members attend training and/or are assigned resources to achieve their team goals. Library staff can stay in these teams for a year or the life cycle of the project before rotating to another team if the opportunity arises. The groups deliver a brief report at regular team meetings and often involve a wider group of staff to give feedback on their projects or get involved if required. The team leader is responsible for writing a project brief, assigning tasks and meeting deadlines – all of which assist them to develop their project management and leadership skills. Projects and team goals are often identified out of a library performance or business planning process or as a result of environmental or technical change.

In 1999 Southbank Institute implemented a *Liaison Librarian Project* as a response to the changes taking place through Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Australian National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET) reforms. [2]. The aim of the project was to equip the librarians as change agents to assist SBIT teaching staff to implement new training packages, to develop flexible learning skills and embrace technology. The librarians attended training in unpacking training packages, web and multimedia design. Each librarian also completed a six weeks personal planning schedule documenting how they would work with their teachers to achieve the goals of the project plan. As a result of this process the librarians developed closer partnerships with academic staff and raised the profile of the library and the library profession within the institute and with management. As the institute developed a greater online and flexible delivery focus and employed specialist staff, the liaison librarians stepped away from the initial project brief, but maintained their close partnerships with teachers in providing specific resources for online and face-to-face education and training, developed just in time information skills classes and assisted with or promoted new information technology. They were also able to focus on providing more library specific services and support in the online environment. [3] Today, librarians are still involved in providing support to academic staff in the use of digital equipment and in the institute's learning management systems, Blackboard and Digibank.

Like many other TAFE libraries in Australia, the SBIT library was the first unit in the institute to have internet access and to develop a website presence. The institute supported this initiative and we were able to employ a web officer as well as a systems librarian to build up our online capacity, which included a virtual reference service, Ask a Librarian with online chat facilities, email and SMS access.

## TRANSITION TO STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The *Queensland Skills Plan* was launched by the State government in March 2006 to provide a policy framework that attempted to match the supply of skilled labour to industry's needs and the demands of the economy. The plan outlined 24 actions that would reform Queensland's vocational education and training sector. Two of these reforms had significant impacts for Southbank Institute of TAFE. These were:

Action 2: Reforming the Queensland TAFE system. This action recommended the implementation of a new governance model that allowed institutes to move towards commercial autonomy by becoming statutory authorities.

Action 3: Restructuring TAFE across Queensland and creating new specialised institutes. This action mandated that "In recognition of its technological and high level skills, the Southbank Institute of TAFE will be renamed the Southbank Institute of Technology. It will be the designated lead institute responsible for a range of associate degrees, university pathways and articulation arrangements." [4]

In April 2008, the government introduced legislation that made SBIT the first statutory institute in Queensland. SBIT's *Strategic Plan 2009-2014* outlined our vision, mission and five key goals which are:

- Competitively sustainable business model
- Competitively positioned, highly regarded products and services
- Exceptional customer service
- Operational effectiveness and efficiency
- Develop 'The Southbank Experience' [5]

The reform process instigated a major organisational restructure that led to the creation of a number of director positions that were filled by experienced business managers from outside the education sector. This strategy has given SBIT a new business and commercial edge whilst maintaining the focus on delivering quality education. At the same time the Institute has also invested in a rebranding program and developed an aggressive marketing strategy to increase Southbank Institute's business profile locally and overseas.

Although SBIT has increased its commercial advantage and has some level of autonomy, it is still an integral part of the Queensland government and Training Queensland therefore we are still governed by DET policy, shared service level agreements and IT infrastructure. These structures do provide a level of protection but they also add another layer of internal processes that do restrict the development of library innovations.

The institute has adopted a balanced score card model and undertakes an annual activity based costing process for every unit including the library and e-learn (computer services and flexible learning). An annual product review process is conducted of all courses offered by the institute and this also has direct impact on the library, our services and the collection development processes. The

increased emphasis on business process has meant library management is continually looking for ways of evaluating products and services, streamlining processes and promoting the library to both management and customers.

The move to statutory authority and commercial autonomy has meant that the library is now more accountable and has to demonstrate return on investment much like special and public libraries. This involves regular monitoring of client expectations through surveys, focus groups and feedback forms. Gathering statistics has always been a focus but now we have to regularly analyse data, evaluate and report on usage. Any major changes to our business or services have to be based on evidence and documented in a business case outlining cost, benefits, risks and recommendations. Approvals have to be sought through the correct channels before implementation.

The library has also taken a key role in the management and protection of SBIT's intellectual property with the implementation of policy and procedures, training and support programs for staff and the development of an IP repository and content management system, Digibank.

## **BUILDING PATHWAYS**

With its new independent governance the focus at SBIT was to firmly entrench itself as the leading provider of high level vocational and technical education and the bridge between TAFE and university. This strategy was validated by the 2008 release of the federal government's *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* or the Bradley Review, as it became known [6]

The key principles outlined in the Bradley Review recommended creating stronger linkages between TAFE and universities and giving equal value to both VET and higher education.

SBIT has entered into articulation agreements with several universities so entry into university is guaranteed from many SBIT programs, based on the successful completion of all subjects specified in the credit arrangement. Currently there are over 120 pathways from SBIT programs to university courses.

In 2009, SBIT launched its Southbank Tertiary Entrance Program (STEP) which offers units within selected Diploma programs to school students in Years 11 and 12. STEP students are offered an on-campus experience, attending class and/or sharing facilities with Southbank Institute of Technology's full-time and part-time students.

SBIT also delivers English language training to immigrants under its agreement with the Commonwealth government through the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP).

Consequently SBIT's student body is made up of a broad range of students from diverse backgrounds and locations and this has shaped the way we deliver our library services, for example:

## Information Literacy

Liaison librarians design and deliver customised information literacy training and products to staff and students in their faculty areas. Librarians consult with academic staff to determine appropriate formats which usually consist of one or more of the following.

- Individual appointment with their faculty liaison librarian (booked through library website)
- Information literacy class (booked by teacher) - sessions include Library catalogue/website, Copyright and Plagiarism, Citing References and Referencing, Using Electronic Resources, Internet Searching, Database Searching, Analysing an Assignment.
- Just in time learning - librarians used Captivate to develop re-usable learning objects which are stored in the institute's learning content management system and linked to the "points of need" on the library website.
- Online – SAIL (Southbank Assignment writing and Information Literacy) was first developed by the librarians in 2004 and is updated annually. It delivers modules that are comparable in content to the face to face classes.

## Collection Development

The library's collection development policy is aligned to the institute's strategic plan and core business which is to deliver training to higher level VET students. As SBIT's focus has moved to the delivery of diplomas, associate degrees and vocational graduate certificates, the library has become an integral part of the registration and accreditation process. Before a training organisation can deliver a new program, they must demonstrate they have adequate information resources. At SBIT, faculties are required to provide this evidence in the form of a *Library Impact Statement*, an analysis that is completed by their liaison librarians. If the collection is assessed as not being at an appropriate level, additional funding is allocated to the faculty's collection development budget.

Another important role has been to facilitate information access, including acquisition, licensing or creation of information in a range of media and formats, including e-resources. SBIT subscribes to more than 45 paid subscription and free databases providing access to:

Over 17,760 publications

Over 7,000 titles in full-text – millions of full-text articles

Over 25,000 digital images, videos, animations & multimedia

Over 2,500 e-book titles including dictionaries & encyclopaedias

Over 6,500 Australian standards

Most are searchable through a single federated search engine, and we are currently in the process of implementing Ezproxy to simplify access for remote users.

## Reference Services

Servicing our diverse client base in a multi-level library means that we have had to provide a range of reference services including:

- Research and reference desk support for students and staff on four levels in the library
- Research support and reports for managers and project managers (including non-teaching staff and directors)
- Online chat, SMS and email reference services through our Ask a Librarian service
- Customised resource locator application which directs customers to the exact location of a resource via the catalogue and electronic map.

We are currently trialling reference tracking software which will enable us to evaluate our reference services more effectively.

## **ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

In early 2005 the Queensland Government signed a \$550 million agreement to redevelop Southbank Institute as a PPP (public private partnership) project.[7] As part of this development project the library and e-learn consolidated into one location and relocated into four floors of a new multi-storey building. The first two campus libraries were moved into the new building in July 2007. The other two campus libraries were moved in stages as new buildings were completed and teaching areas moved to their new locations. The last collection was relocated in December 2008.

In preparation for this major change, the library established a project team, ran focus groups and included library and e-learn staff in the design process. Staff were able to provide practical advice on layout and workflows, and this created an opportunity for ownership and assisted with the change process.

Planning a new physical space gave us the opportunity to evaluate the whole library experience and define the underlying information architecture. Using MAYA's design principles [8] we looked at the four major components of the library experience, this included:

- Customers: who were our library users, their profile and demographic?
- Organisers: the things and systems that organise the materials (including the library's physical space, categorisation schemes, and librarians)
- Materials and activities: the things that customers want (computers, seating, books)
- Use/Participation: how the customers' interacted with the materials and services.

Out of this planning process we determined that the virtual space should align with the physical space by using the same terminology and corporate colours on all brochures and signage. This process also carried over into our website design project when we implemented the Enterprise Portal Solution (EPS) as part of our new library management system Symphony in 2007/08.

The next step in preparing for amalgamation was to restructure the library from a traditional campus based model to a centralised model. The library had been without a library manager since 2002 so an acting library manager was appointed from within and the existing campus managers became team managers, managing lending services, technical services, information services and library systems. Staff were appointed to teams based on their skills, qualifications and expression of interest.

The restructure process also gave a couple of the library technicians the opportunity to apply for their personal TO3 upgrade and they took on leadership and supervisory roles in the new environment.

Leading up to the relocation, an external facilitator was contracted to run change management workshops for all library and e-learn staff. The real amalgamation began when we opened the new library to our first customer on 14 July 2007. The new library functioned as head office and the remaining campus libraries as branches. We tried to rotate staff so they had at least one day a week in the new location so they did not lose the valuable connection with their colleagues. It was a bumpy first six months as we learnt to share our resources, space and customer service desks with e-learn staff. We quickly came to realize that although the two teams shared the same space and customers, we had a different philosophy in customer service, workplace priorities, roster systems and were working under different awards.

Regular communication channels were established between the separate units and a cross training process began. This allowed staff from library and e-learn to develop a greater understanding of the different job roles and any staff member working at the customer service desk could provide basic information and service to all customers.

As we planned a new physical library and structure, we also planned the implementation of a new library management system. At this stage SBIT was still a part of TAFE Queensland and to instigate a process separate from the TAFE Library Network was not easy. We had to argue that our infrastructure needs were different to the rest of TAFE in order to tender for a new library management system (LIMS) as we did not have the time to wait for the shared services model to be adopted. We were also not confident that a shared services model would provide the flexibility we needed to take us into the future.

After a very lengthy process involving a business cases to persuade our director, then Director General, we were finally given the OK to proceed as a pilot site for TAFE Queensland. We rolled out Horizon in November 2006 and the official launch took place at the beginning of the 2007 academic year, giving us six months to become familiar with the system before moving into the new building. Key library staff were involved in the evaluation of the new system, configuration, testing and troubleshooting and everyone received training over the holiday break.

There were a few logistical problems we had to contend with, the main one was that we had configured the system to accommodate a centralized technical services department, but were still working in and undertaking technical services activities across the four campuses as we did not have enough space in any of the campus libraries to accommodate the combined collections. We did as much preparation as possible during these six months, including aligning policies and procedures and undertaking an extensive de-selection process.

In June 2005, the merger of Sirsi Corporation and Dynix (Horizon's vendor) created SirsiDynix, which emerged as the largest company in the library systems marketplace. Following the merger, SirsiDynix did not find it feasible to continue to develop and maintain two large systems. Therefore, the company decided that it would consolidate development efforts into a single LIMS platform, Symphony. In 2008,

SirsiDynix negotiated with SBIT to migrate systems from Horizon to Symphony at no cost to the institute.

## **FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Predicting the future is an inexact science but we can say with certainty is that there is more change ahead for SBIT library. We have recently engaged a consultant to carry out a review with the aim of benchmarking our services, staffing structure and profile with other dual sector libraries to develop a sustainable business model and position the library for future growth.

As less government funding becomes available to public VET providers, SBIT is offering many more full fee paying places. SBIT is the first public training provider in Queensland to offer FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP to eligible students. FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP are interest free Commonwealth loans that assist eligible fee paying students to pay their tuition fees. Fee-paying students justifiably have high expectations of the services available to them during their time at SBIT. In fact, many students have indicated that the facilities and services we offer greatly influenced their choice of SBIT as their training provider.

The impact of Urbanest, the new onsite student accommodation will also determine how we will deliver our services in the future, with students on campus 24/7. Extended hours and additional staff have already been considered and we are currently trialling new staffing arrangements.

We are also exploring the possibility of improving customer experience by enhancing library resource discoverability through the implementation of a new resource discovery layer called Enterprise. Wireless and RFID technologies are currently in project development phase and we are also piloting new mobile software BookMyne (catalogue search) and PocketCirc (circulation) later this year.

As library managers, we participate in institute business and decision making processes as the services we provide are an integral part of the Southbank experience. We are continually working to maintain our position as institute leaders in innovation and change management and we believe our experience over the past decade has provided a solid foundation for responding to future challenges.

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