

**Growing in Esteem and Dreaming Large –from library to learning hub and back again: the redevelopment of the ERC within the framework of the Melbourne Model.**

Helen Page, Project Director, Library Learning Centres

Peta Humphreys, Project Manager, Collections and Services

The University of Melbourne Library

Academic library buildings have experienced a spate of renewal projects where space design, layout and technological integration are brought together to create environments optimised for learning. The University of Melbourne is no exception to this trend. The University's 18 libraries – designed in earlier times for a smaller number of students – have limited spaces for either individual or collaborative study and are gradually being upgraded to state of the art learning centres with comprehensive collections and IT rich spaces for individual as well as collaborative study, accommodating the various learning styles of students, as well as research requirements.

At the University of Melbourne the renewal of the library spaces has not been undertaken in isolation. The University has gone further in its design concepts by developing, in the Eastern Precinct, comprising the Eastern Resource Centre Library, the Tate Learning Centre, the Science Student Centre and the external Tate Plaza which together provide a continuum of student learning, social and community spaces designed to encourage students to spend more time on campus, offering a sense of place and supporting the student cohort experience.

This paper focuses on the ERC's place in these developments, the incremental coalescing of several visions and strategies from which the Eastern Precinct has emerged as the model that will inform the development of up to five such precincts across campus

Ms Helen M Page

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## **Background**

The University of Melbourne Library is a composite of eighteen libraries, plus off-site store, with thirteen of the libraries, including the Education Resource Centre (ERC), located on or adjacent to the Parkville campus. The Library as an organisational entity sits within the Information Services Division alongside Information Technology, and also incorporates Learning Environments which, amongst other services provided, supports the University's Student IT.

This redevelopment occurred during the period when academic libraries worldwide were re-examining their roles and the functions of their buildings. It also took place at a time of significant change in the University associated with the introduction of the Melbourne Model and set in a context of the Parkville campus with limited scope for physical expansion, where real estate is at a premium and in high demand from many competing quarters within the University. The University of Melbourne libraries' buildings are not "owned" by the Library, but by the University, and in some historical cases, by the faculties occupying those buildings. In 2006, two faculties – Engineering and Land and Food Resources – had asked for the closure of the libraries occupying their buildings in order to create more research and teaching and learning spaces. Their rationale was that their students mostly accessed all their information online.

This is not just a story about a library building redevelopment, but also a story about the role that the ERC redevelopment played in the "Library" losing and regaining its identity and its place in the University's scholarly priorities.

## **Introduction**

The libraries are heavily used. In 2006 door counts for all libraries were 2,701,468 and circulation figures were 2,897,243. The ERC is the second largest library on the Parkville campus with door counts of 382,114, and circulation at 551,682 in 2006. It houses several large collections of books, journals, theses, microforms, an extensive analogue and digital Media Collection as well as the University's 140,000 strong Map Collection, one of the largest in the country which also includes an extensive range of digital resources. The Research Collection (also referred to as the B and AB collection) of primary and secondary resources is also housed in the ERC. This collection is

multidisciplinary in scope, but primarily used by the Arts Faculty. Currently the ERC primarily services the Faculty of Education.

The redevelopment of the Education Resource Centre (ERC) to become the Eastern Resource Centre (ERC) as part of the Eastern Precinct development has been a multifaceted journey of change, involving many stakeholders, encapsulating several visions and creating manifold complexities to be negotiated throughout the project process. It has been an eventful journey. Put simply, three phases of the project implementation can be identified:

- Planning Phase
- Design and Development Phase
- Construction Phase

However, prior to these phases was the development of the strategic visions, in response to which this project was developed. During the three years from its inception, through its planning, design development, and even construction periods, the ERC project has been adapted to respond to the University's, Information Services' and the Library's developing strategies and associated revised priorities. These four phases overlapped significantly chronologically, geographically and strategically resulting in a change process which was rarely linear, but constantly dynamic.

### **Visions and Strategies**

Building developments of the extent of the Eastern Precinct happen in response to strategic visions. Strategic visions respond to external change drivers, and the University of Melbourne is no exception in this respect, with those drivers including national and international research priorities, addressing the size and coherence in undergraduate education to produce graduates suited to the challenges of changing workplaces in the twenty-first century, and addressing the pressures of space on a city campus. During the period of ERC development the University has established its *Gowing Esteem<sup>2</sup>* strategy, implemented the new Melbourne Model degrees (with the first intake of "New Generation" students in 2008) and established the concept of the Melbourne Experience. Significantly, in the context of the ERC redevelopment, the Melbourne Experience is supported by an infrastructure renewal plan that intends to "reshape the campus",

creating the concept of discipline related precincts that reflect the different ways in which cognate disciplines engage in research and learning, creating Student Centres aligned with those discipline precincts as the student's first port of call for advice, support and resources relating to their degree and study at Melbourne, thus encouraging a sense of strong student cohorts.

### **The Library Vision**

In 2005, in parallel with *Growing Esteem*, the Library commissioned Dr Kenn Fisher of Rubida Research to develop a 10-year strategic space renewal plan<sup>1</sup> in order that our libraries can adapt to new research and teaching pedagogies as well as providing access to changing technologies, in addition to the older ideals of being a store house of knowledge. The plan identified a core principle – the adoption of a distributed and extended “precinct learning hub library network” providing a “socio-pedagogical mapping” over the then proposed Land Use framework (now a much refined University Master Plan).

The aim of the “precinct hub” was to put the user at the centre of the campus and library experience by fostering diversity, and encouraging informal interaction amongst campus users and providing a platform for cross-disciplinary synergy. In order to support those objectives, three “hub principles” of Functionality, Wayfinding and Identity were proposed,

- 1. Functionality:** Cluster functions within the library according to type or category of use; separate clusters vertically within the library according to levels of use or social activity; zone floor plates according to activity type and noise level generation.
- 2. Wayfinding:** Locate user services close to main circulation spine for legible user movement; spatial efficiency – make use of circulation areas for informal gathering; visual links – visual and physical connections are to be maintained throughout the library and across levels.

- 3. Identity:** External – create an identity for the library that makes it a destination within the university; Internal – create a recognisable identity for different entities within the library.

### **The role of the ERC in realising these visions**

The challenge for the Library in realising its vision through the ERC redevelopment has been significant because the project was not initiated by the Library. The project is a Teaching and Learning initiative under the auspices of the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic (now the Provost) under the design direction of Associate Professor Peter Jamieson, as a realisation of the campus infrastructure renewal vision. The Library does not own the project nor the budget associated with it, and thus has negotiated its requirements into a complementary vision. At times its prominence in that vision has been precarious.

The first iteration of the Academic vision was the conversion of a Chemistry lecture theatre into a collaborative [Learning Lab](#). Following the success of that project, the University identified the Frank Tate building opposite the ERC as a suitable site for the next iteration of this vision. Given the proximity of the ERC, Professor Jamieson proposed that a section (about 50%) of Level 1 (L1) of the ERC which faced out onto Grattan Street and the newly landscaped lawns, be incorporated into the project plans and developed as an “information commons”. The principles and global drivers underpinning the Teaching and Learning space developments were similar to those that underpinned the Library’s space renewal plan, and therefore collaboration in the ERC project provided the Library with the opportunity to apply the principles outlined in that plan.

### **Change 1 – Increase in the Library’s project footprint**

I (Helen Page) joined the Library in August 2006. Having had seven years experience with the National Gallery of Victoria’s major building developments, I was asked by the then Director to participate in the Eastern Learning Hub Project’s design development meetings. By that time architects had been engaged and had well developed design plans for both Frank Tate and the ERC L1 information commons. Budgets had been allocated and costs assigned. Persistent negotiation by the Director had also ensured that the

Library's main entry area on Level 3 (L3) was included in the project, to be redesigned as a "learning hub" in line with the Library's activity type and noise level zoning principles. Complementing L1 information commons, this student collaborative learning environment would also include access to our extensive collection resources as well as additional IT. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, we were unable to include the other three levels of this five level building into the redevelopment plans.

The inclusion of L3 made the project more complex as that floor also contained all the staff offices, the returns room and the service points. To create the "learning hub" component it was planned to relocate all staff offices to Level 4 (L4) and relocating the Maps collections on that floor to L2, thus providing the opportunity to partially upgrade those two additional floors. Opening up the space also required the relocation of the L3 returns room, albeit on the same floor. A major concern for the Library was the fact that the architect's design had removed the main library stairs from within the library envelope and had also cut out a section of the south-east corner floor plate to create a large light void into foyer area below. Staff and Library management were not happy with that aspect of the design but were having little traction at that time in getting it changed.

Adding to the complexity was the intention to introduce a changed service model designed to create more self-service loan transactions along with creating a single service desk so that staff could be released to undertake more of the "enrichment" activities that had been identified during the Melbourne Model planning processes as needed in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century University, and thus in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Library. This was asking for a significant amount of change from staff, in an environment that had already been subject to major changes in the previous two years. Include in this mix a long history of unresolved EH&S issues in relation to the returns room. In December 2006 I took over the role of Project Director (as well as the role of IES Acting Director) following the previous Director's departure, and Peta Humphreys, who was managing the relocation of the Engineering Library collections, joined as Project Manager to manage the collection and services relocations. It was into this "tense" environment that we brought the architects and the staff together in late 2006 in order to develop the designs for L3.

**Change 2 – Decrease in the Library’s project footprint**

Until that point the architects had been working on “virgin” spaces, with no contact with staff who would be working in the spaces they were designing. It may have been a coincidence, but in early February 2007, a day after an apparently heated meeting between staff and the architects working on the redesign of the returns room, I attended a high level design development meeting where it was proposed that the project return to its original scope of Frank Tate and L1 information commons because of concerns that budgets and timelines could not accommodate the Library’s requirements.

Understanding their concerns, but also recognising that the Library would lose a critical redevelopment opportunity, I referred the decision to the Steering Committee chaired by the Provost, with the outcome that the Library’s position as a key component in the project was ratified. However, it was also reaffirmed that the expected completion date remained as first semester 2008 – only a year away – therefore after examination of all the options the decision was made that the library would need to temporarily close and collections temporarily relocated in order for this timeline to be met.

**Change 3 – Increase in the Library’s project footprint**

We were then to get the main stairs reintegrated into the Library, as well as removing the void and returning that floor area to library use. It was also agreed that the L1 “information commons” would open through to the library, with the ability for it to be closed off to provide potential 24/7 student IT access. However, the additional two entries on that level were still deemed to be essential, as was the main library entry on L3, providing the Library with the operational challenge of monitoring three exits. Meanwhile, design work progressed rapidly on relocating the Maps area from L4 to L2 and staff office space on L4, providing both areas with much improved amenities in terms of light and space.

**Change 4 – collection relocations, protests and phased construction process**

A significant challenge for the Library with the decision to temporarily close the ERC was that there was no available space on campus nor in nearby library store for collection relocation. The Library was therefore left to find alternative locations for the nearly

600,000 items housed in the ERC. The only solution was to lease additional storage from CAVAL at Bundoora – which is also the location of the CARM store, a negative association for our academics with “cessation of ownership”. High-use collection items would be relocated to the Baillieu Library, in itself short of space, and low use items relocated mainly to the leased, climate controlled, store at Bundoora, with the remainder to the Brunswick store which was still undergoing renovation by P&CS. Both Bundoora and Brunswick stores would be supported by 24-hour retrieval services, which the library would need to resource.

Following March 2007 decision that the library components of the ERC project would go ahead, these plans had been communicated to the Academic community through central Libraries Committee and relevant faculty library committees, without any adverse feedback. One can only assume, given subsequent events, that all faculties were somewhat preoccupied with the redesign of their courses for the Melbourne Model to give the implications of the message much thought – until the time for closure approached.

Although the Education Faculty has the highest use of the ERC, it was the Arts Faculty who, in July 2007, eventually voiced the greatest concern with regard to the redevelopment of the ERC and in particular the relocation of the B and AB Research collection. Members of that Faculty protested strongly against the ERC closure and the off-campus collection relocations, insisting that the ability to browse this collection was a high priority, which could not be achieved if it was relocated offsite. There was also a false perception that the library was to become a “library without books” because the redevelopments were promoted as being for the creation of IT supported collaborative learning spaces, with the digital being perceived as being able to replace the printed volume, a perception which may have been reinforced because of the Engineering and LFR libraries recent closures and collection relocations. In reality, 70% of the ERC space was always planned to house the physical collections.

The strength of the protest resulted in the University asking both the Library and Property and Campus Services to devise an alternative staged construction strategy retaining 172,000 of the 327,000 B and AB collections in situ as well as 246,000 items of the Education, Media and Maps collections. The University allocated Old Quad at the

centre of the campus, previously earmarked for other developments, to be temporarily refurbished to house 55,000 B and AB collection items along with the high use Engineering collections. A loans desk was also established, thus allowing both browsing and borrowing. The remaining B and AB collections were to be located at Brunswick store, housed in such a way that they can be browsed by appointment, with store staffed in order to facilitate this. The ERC library has therefore remained open with access available to academic staff and students throughout the construction period, with limited disruption to services.

### **Change 5: Reduction in ERC library project scope**

The scope changes were not over though. In September 2007, following the decision to refurbish Old Quad, a cost review on the L2 refurbishment for the Maps relocation was deemed too expensive to progress. The knock on effect of this decision meant that the space to be vacated by Maps on L4 to make way for the staff offices would no longer be available. In order not to cause further delay and increased costs to the construction aspects of the project which had already been contracted, the Library was asked to redesign the office allocation on L4 in the space of two weeks. This it did, trying to maintain the quality of the staff spaces, but inevitably compromising some of its operational objectives, particularly in having to separate staff offices across two floors.

### **Change 6: addition of the Science Student Centre to the project**

Also in September 2007 it was announced that the Plaza Conference Centre would undergo a major refurbishment (read demolition and rebuild) to create the Science Student Centre. At this point in time the project became the Eastern Precinct Project. Similarly, the Library absorbed this change of precinct focus into its strategic alignments. The ERC will eventually become Sciences and Engineering Library when the Education Faculty, along with the development of a new graduate focused library, relocates as the Melbourne Graduate School of Education to a nearby off-campus location.

This major scope change had a significant impact on the library's L3 entry area, which again had to undergo review and redesign. This change also meant that ERC staff would have to contend with greater impacts from the construction than had initially been

envisaged when first asked to keep the library open. Despite this, staff remained determined to stay in the building.

### **How we coped during the staged construction process**

A significant contributor to the success of the staged construction strategy was and is the willingness and commitment of the ERC staff to work in what they knew could become, at times, unpleasant working conditions. Their personal attachment to the library, their commitment to being there for the students and staff of their faculty and their overall stoic attitude were essential to maintaining services for students and academic staff in the following few months.

An important aspect of the design of the library from the library staff perspective was the design of the new service desk and the new returns room, with discussions between staff and architects at times heated, and often lengthy. Frequently we were confronted with very short time lines, two or three days or less in which to organise and conduct staff meetings, present the latest version of the plans, document feedback and forward it to the architect. This time pressure and short deadlines became a characteristic of the project. Our initial plans to close the library required moving high use collections to alternate locations on campus; relocating staff; relocating the large and complex Maps and Media collections and their accompanying staff and facilities to the Baillieu Library; organizing a retrieval service for staff to access the building at least once a day to retrieve requested 'low use' materials. However, with the implementation of the staged construction strategy we were suddenly planning to provide library information and lending services for sizeable collections along with a large variety of facilities, including viewing and playback facilities, student computing, staff accommodation, and so on from a building that was partly a construction zone. All to be achieved in the space of a few months. Planning had commenced in November 2007 and included construction of new staff offices on L4, relocating most staff to newly constructed accommodation on L4, with some staff having to be relocated to alternate buildings due to lack of space, creating a temporary loans and returns room on L1 and a temporary information desk to L4, relocating student computing to L4 and L5, photocopiers to L5, collections to elsewhere in the building and temporarily to other libraries and the creation of a new entrance via

L1. The most difficult aspects came in early February when L3 was scheduled to be closed, with staff offices, the loans and information desks, the returns room, photocopying facilities, the journals and reference collections, student study space, most of the library's OPACs having to be relocated in readiness for the arrival of students at the start of first semester.

Not all went to plan and the move took longer than the anticipated three days. Library staff were very stressed by the need to keep the building closed several days in order for IT infrastructure problems to be resolved at a time when new students were arriving, requiring much positive reinforcement from supervisors and managers in order to reassure them that we had done everything asked of us on time or earlier.

Although the builders had been on site for five months by February, suddenly the construction phase of the project really seemed to impact on staff, students, collections and services. Construction zones had to be physically separated from library zones to ensure the health and safety of library staff and users.

EH&S issues for library staff and users were a constant issue during this time, and were always given the highest priority. Plans focused on providing a safe and healthy working environment for staff, with temporary desks set up in a building a couple of blocks away for when staff found working in the ERC unbearable. Staff were informed that they did not have to continue to work in the ERC if and when the noise of the building works (and initially this was mostly demolition works) became too much for them. Staff were also told to take as many and as long coffee and lunch breaks as they felt they needed, of course communicating with their supervisor at all times. Although it did get noisy and unpleasant in the early part of the construction phase, very few staff asked to be relocated for any length of time.

We frequently asked the builders and project communications manager for building schedules and/or notification of any activities that could potentially impact on library staff or students. The definition of 'impact on library staff or students' needed to be in the broadest sense. Usually we did receive email or verbal notification of activities, email being preferable as it could be quickly forwarded to all relevant staff. However, sometimes this did not happen, usually not through anyone's fault, just the builders encountering obstacles that required them to change their own schedules or plans. At

times this meant making decisions about interruptions to services, relocating collections or facilities, at very short notice.

When Semester One 2008 commenced, the ERC was almost unrecognisable with its white builder's hoarding on every floor, the loans and information desks separated by three floors instead of within a few feet of each other, and in particular its main entrance via a 'tunnel' made of builder's hoarding protecting students as they walked through the new IT zone that was being constructed on Level One. However, the challenge for people entering the ERC was not navigating this 'tunnel', but navigating the areas surrounding the building which were all fenced off as part of the construction zone in order to find the entrance to the ERC! Large maps on the fences, signs, web maps, etc were used to assist people, but none the less it was difficult, more so because the fences and routes to the ERC changed over the months as the construction phase progressed. Communicating these changes to the University community became a full time task and beyond our resources. Fortunately, in September 2007 Property and Campus Services employed an external company to assist in the management of the project, which included the appointment of a Communications Manager whose primary task was to ensure communication between the builders, the project team and other stakeholders. For the past few months our focus has been on managing short time lines, major and minor crises (we have had around five emergency evacuations of the building since February), communicating with staff, liaising with faculties, talking to builders, and much more.

### **The end is nigh**

At the time of writing, L1 Collaborative Student IT environment in the ERC is open and extremely well used by students from the moment the doors opened. The Tate Learning Centre opens on 8 September, and we are preparing to open L3 in early October, although not the main entry as this is dependent on the Student Centre completion for Semester 1 2009. Until that time we will continue with an interim loans desk on L1.

From the experience, we have learned the following lessons:

- There cannot be too much communication with staff and clients.
- It is very easy when managing daily issues and crises, to lose sight of the ultimate goal.

- No matter when you book in for leave, it will inevitably end up being at the wrong time.

If the success of L1 is an indicator, the trials and the tribulations will have become a triumph.

### **Change 8 – the BIG one – Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Future**

Every cloud has a silver lining. An outcome of the academic expression of concern and support for the Library and its future associated with the ERC redevelopment was the establishment in early 2008 of the Information Futures Commission (IFC), chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Following six months of extensive and intensive consultation within the University, nationally and internationally, the Commission’s recommendations outlined in *Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Future: A ten-year strategy* (July 2008)<sup>3</sup> have been endorsed by Academic Board and the University’s Council. A key recommendation is that “the ten year master plan for the Parkville campus will create a small number of discipline-based precincts...within the precincts, the library will continue to be the focal point of a networked world, providing spaces for independent and collaborative learning and research, with access to scholarly works in appropriate forms and to information professionals.” As we speak, the renewal plans for more of our libraries are underway.

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