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FLEXIBLE FUTURES: THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN

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ABSTRACT

Australian academic libraries are highly adaptive to the changing needs of learning and teaching and research and the demands of the changing information environment. Liaison Librarians are absolutely central to the academic library's ability to manage change and anticipate and prepare for the future. However little is shared in conference papers and journal publications about how Liaison is organised, developed and supported by academic libraries.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and University of Tasmania (UTAS) Libraries have explicit, well established and long-running Liaison programs. UTAS recently embarked on a change process to move from an individual, school-focussed model to a faculty-focused, team approach to Liaison organisation. The process led to the organisation of teams, with team-member leadership roles in collection development, learning and teaching, and research support. The new organisation also established a learning environment in which librarians continue to change in a rapidly changing environment.

At QUT Library the Workforce Plan has set the framework for the re-examination of the highly Faculty-integrated Liaison model to improve support for the University's research agenda, to respond to the changes in scholarly communication and to work collaboratively with the University's Teaching and Learning Support (TALSS) to embed information and academic literacies into the University's curriculum.

This paper examines recent literature on Liaison, discusses two case studies of Liaison organisation at QUT and UTAS Libraries and how these changing models prepare libraries and librarians for the future of university learning and teaching and research and the changing information environment.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion of the work of Liaison Librarians in recent literature suggests that Liaison is a work in progress and entails a diverse range of activities across universities. The literature discusses significant challenges such as changes in the information environment, an increasing emphasis on the changing needs of research and learning and teaching and the need to provide services that are sustainable. In this context there is a call for greater strategic alignment of Liaison with university priorities and a sharper focus for Liaison activity.

Case studies of Library Liaison programs at University of Tasmania (UTAS) and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) examine organisational structures and planning that aligns liaison activity with university priorities and develops the capacity of Liaison Librarians to anticipate and respond to change.

For the purposes of this paper, Liaison is defined as relationship development and collaboration with faculties and other units to provide library and information services. These services include collection development and involvement in university research learning and teaching. Liaison Librarians are those of the Library staff who are dedicated to this activity and are assigned to a Faculty or Schools within the Faculty.

PERSPECTIVES IN RECENT LITERATURE

What is Liaison?

Two recent literature reviews provide useful discussion of the history and current state of Liaison – an Australian perspective provided by Rodwell and Fairbairn (2008) and a broader perspective by Fleetham (2006).

Rodwell and Fairbairn identify current Liaison activities as collection development, information literacy, relationship management, input to Faculty planning and cooperative projects with Faculty and other university units. Fleetham discusses a continuum of perspectives on the role and attributes of the Liaison Librarian (called “subject” librarian): from being a subject specialist to being an information specialist with librarianship itself being the specialisation. She concludes that the information specialist, rather than the subject specialist, is the most appropriate response to 21st Century challenges of electronic resource provision and the needs of academics and students. Fleetham’s subject librarians connect users with the information, teach information literacy, and build partnerships and collaborate with colleagues in library and IT services and with academics.

Management responsibility

Rodwell and Fairbairn call for a strengthening of the Liaison role and a clearer focus of Liaison activity. They argue for a change in management thinking about Liaison to achieve a greater “strategic fit” with university priorities and to enable an intensified engagement with Faculty. Managements’ responsibility is to ensure that the “library’s resources [are] being leveraged to create the most favourable conditions for these

librarians to attain the desired partnerships and to have the time to be innovative and core to the Faculty activities” (2008).

While Rodwell and Fairbairn noted some recent changes in management thinking to better support Liaison work (2008), there is little recent reporting on organisational structures for Liaison. Fleetham discusses a variety of organisational models that have evolved in the last ten to fifteen years and identified a trend towards team work “in which front-line staff are in more direct communication with the decision making process” (2006).

A recent restructure at the University of New South Wales provides a tangible response by management to the need for change in management thinking and action. A change process, begun in 2002, led to the restructure of the library into three large departments. Liaison activity falls within the Information Services department that incorporates two units: Academic Services and Client Services. It is Academic Services that undertakes the “Liaison” role, divided into two specialist teams of Outreach and Services. (Wells, 2007) The new structure aims to define core services and to align these with the strategic objectives of the University (Bosanquet, 2007).

Bosanquet (2007) and Rodwell and Fairbarin (2008) stress the need for Libraries to align with university strategic directions and urge academic library management to take a stronger strategic focus in clarifying the role of the library, aligning library planning with university priorities and measuring and reporting on the impact of services.

But what should Liaison Librarians be doing?

Rodwell and Fairbairn (2008) Fleetham (2006) and Bosanquet (2007) discuss the challenges to the role of the library in a changing environment: the demographic of client groups, web technology, the nature of research, scholarly communication, the proliferation and accessibility of information and resultant implications of disintermediation. In this context the existence and the importance of the Liaison role remains unquestioned. There is, however, questioning of the priorities of Liaison and issues of sustainability.

The need to grasp the reality of the current environment, focus and place our activity in the clients’ domain – namely that of the student and the academic – is sharpened by revelations of clients’ perceptions of Library services. A recent survey of librarians and academics reveal that “the consultative role of the librarian in helping Faculty in their research and teaching is viewed as an important function by most librarians, but most Faculty members do not put the same emphasis on this role of the library” (Schonfeld & Guthrie, 2007). In discussing the results of a study into researchers’ use of academic libraries, Brown and Swan suggest that too much emphasis is placed by the library on teaching and learning at the expense of research (Brown & Swan, 2007). Bosanquet argues that academic libraries lack focus. She sees libraries’ efforts in adapting to change as “jumping on bandwagons” and unnecessarily preoccupied with a diverse range activities which add questionable value (2007).

Research

The recent energy and activity seen in academic libraries supporting the now-defunct Research Quality Framework, may have momentarily disguised real and lasting

transformations in scholarly communication and a corresponding and related increase in the importance of the safe storage, management and use of research data. These changes will impact significantly on the role of academic libraries and Liaison Librarians. North American academic libraries are taking significant leadership in exploring and advocating roles for libraries in the new frontier of eResearch (ACRL Scholarly Communications Committee, 2007; Joint Task Force on Library Support for E-Science, 2007; Newman, Blecic, & Armstrong, 2007). There is a call for “greater clarity as to the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the research cycle – researchers, research institutions, and national bodies, as well as libraries – in managing the increasing volumes of digital research outputs” (Brown & Swan, 2007). The Joint Task Force on Library Support of E-Science identifies critical areas for library engagement as managing and preserving data, scholarly communication, developing virtual organisations and policy development related to data (2007).

New positions have emerged in Australian university libraries in the last several years to support institutional repositories and, more recently, positions that engage in the changing nature of research. Stokker discusses the Information Manager and eResearch Access Coordinator positions at QUT (2007). While currently outside the campus-based organisational structure for Liaison, they provide a learning opportunity for embedding research support into Liaison roles.

Teaching and learning

While a role in research is taking shape for Liaison, engagement in learning and teaching – a well-established core activity – is being questioned by some. Bosanquet believes that information literacy is “peripheral” to core academic library services and that the Google generation don’t need to be taught how to use information (2007). Fletcher (Fletcher, 2007) expresses frustration that information literacy has received undue emphasis, with questionable benefit and at the expense of services that are more vital to the teaching and research agendas of universities.

However, the needs of students to understand and effectively use scholarly information remain. Rowlands and Fieldhouse present evidence that the Google generation are “having great difficulties navigating and profiting from the virtual scholarly environment” (2008). The report urges Libraries to take a leadership role in information literacy in order to address the needs of the Google generation. The complexity of students’ learning needs, with requirements that imply information literacy at their core, are expressed in the discussion of the new University of Melbourne undergraduate curriculum. Students will be “exposed to and learn about, alternative domains of knowledge, different methods of enquiry and different ‘ways of knowing” (Davis, 2008).

While it is hard to argue that the need for undergraduate information literacy has gone away, it does not follow that information literacy is the sole domain of the librarian. Some authors see a role for librarians as information literacy experts, but are alerting these experts to the divergence between their teaching approaches and their view of the world and that of the student who they perceive to be teaching (Mitchell, 2007).

There is considerable work undertaken by academics in the field of information literacy, developing these as essential skills in context of discipline learning (Chaplin, 2003; Jones & Barmuta, 2003; Willison & O'Regan, 2007). These compelling learning

experiences illustrate the power of teaching information literacy in context of the discipline and is understood by *The Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework* (Bundy, 2004). *The Framework* aims to guide the practice of information literacy pedagogy in Australian Universities and expounds an “embedded” model where information literacy is explicit in the learning outcomes of the unit or course and explicitly taught and assessed.

Sustainability

In this context of high level demands and change, there is question of sustainability for both Librarians and their organisations. East argues that demands on the Liaison Librarian are too great a call, requiring multiple in-depth specialisations and skills in affability (“hanging out in campus cafes”), subject expertise, ability to work closely with postgraduate students and researchers, IT proficiency and expertise in teaching software, and concludes that “clearly there is nobody who fits this Identikit picture” (2007). Rodwell and Fairburn identify pressures on individual librarians in demands from their School (2008). Clearly management thinking also needs to include the need for the development of librarians’ skills and knowledge and ways of organising that does not make unrealistic demands or expectations of a super librarian.

THE CASES

The case studies of UTAS and QUT examine each Library’s organisation, planning and support for Liaison. They aim to show how organisation and planning provides direction for Liaison activity, while at the same time allowing for flexibility and autonomy for librarians to determine how best to interact with their Faculty and Schools. The case studies also show how librarians are supported in change management and to develop new knowledge and skills. Typical Liaison activities to support teaching and learning and research are discussed to show how Liaison is undertaken in context of organisation and planning

UTAS

UTAS is the sole university in the state with 13,000 full-time-equivalent students and a significant research agenda. With several campuses across the state, faculties are spread across two to four campuses with course-work often duplicated on the two main campuses in Hobart and Launceston. The Library has two large campus libraries and five branch libraries. As with most Australian Universities there is a dual emphasis on research and learning and teaching.

At UTAS Library planning is linked with the Universities’ strategic agenda. The University Librarian has input to university planning through participation in high level University committees and executive structures. Liaison Librarians represent the library on School and Faculty teaching and learning committees, and have opportunities to input to Faculty and School planning activities. This involvement informs the planning and direction of the Library and Liaison Librarians and ensures that the Library has a “strategic fit” (Rodwell and Fairbairn, 2008)

This case study relates to a change process and activities undertaken from 2005 to 2007.

Liaison Organisation

In 2005 a change process was begun to reorganise the Liaison structure to respond to changes in Faculty organisation (such as the establishment of Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees led by Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning) and the allocation of collection development funds at a Faculty rather than at the School level. In the information environment it was increasingly apparent that, with the proliferation of online access to information resources, the identification of a service with a specific campus or branch library was becoming less relevant. At the same time Liaison Librarians began to express a need for a greater focus and clarification of the purpose of Liaison and the role of the Liaison Librarian. In a series of workshops and meetings, Liaison Librarians identified core activities and possible new ways of organising to support these activities.

Core Liaison services were confirmed as: collection development, learning and teaching, research and international. A Faculty-focussed, cross-campus and self-managed team structure was trialled in 2006 and confirmed in 2007.

In the new organisation, Liaison is led by the Information Services Coordinator – a role assigned to one of the two campus librarian positions. Branch Librarians have a “portfolio” responsibility to lead the strategic development, library-wide, of one of the core services: collection development, learning and teaching, research and international. Explicit leadership responsibility was also extended to Liaison Librarians who lead the development and delivery of one of the core services in the Faculty team.

The changes established a greater Faculty focus. The strategic leadership and development of services across the library and within teams establishes priorities and ensures equivalent service to faculties across branches and campuses. Significant autonomy and decision-making capacity remains with teams to allow flexibility for the development and delivery of services appropriate to the Faculty.

The leadership roles explicitly require flexibility and continued exploration and learning. In this way the new organisation supports the goals of the Library’s Workforce Plan to develop the library workforce that is flexible, service orientated and responsive to the strategic direction of the university and to develop the library as a learning organization (University of Tasmania Library, 2006).

Planning

A significant challenge to Faculty-focussed teams for UTAS Library is its dispersed service points across multiple campuses. Planning was seen as one way of redirecting librarians’ focus from a physical service point to the Faculty.

Initially an external consultant was engaged to lead a planning workshop in late 2006. The workshop had a practical goal to develop Faculty team plans for 2007 as well as consolidating the new organisation and developing team work. The team plan acts as a tool for encouraging a team based approach to the Faculty where team members are dispersed in branches and campuses across Hobart and Launceston.

How organisation and planning supports service development and delivery

Examples discussed below illustrate how the organisation works to support the library-wide development of services and the delivery by teams and individual Liaison

Librarians. The first discusses the exploration of research services led by the Science Librarian and the second how the Faculty of Arts team worked to embed information literacy in the Faculty of Arts generic skills program.

In the new organisation the Science Branch Librarian has the senior portfolio role to lead library services for research. Commencing that role on a trial basis in 2006 the Science Librarian leads the team of Liaison Librarians from each Faculty team with responsibility for research. An initial activity of the group was to explore the implications and an appropriate response to the now abandoned Research Quality Framework (RQF). The Science Librarian attended national workshops on the RQF and bibliometrics and investigated research support in other academic libraries. Research representatives from the Liaison Teams collected literature relevant to the RQF and the needs of researchers. Knowledge gained was disseminated within Faculty teams and more formally at a one-day seminar for Liaison Librarians.

A major response to research needs was the establishment and promotion of the UTAS ePrint repository. The role of the Liaison teams was to promote the repository and train potential users in collaboration with the ePrint Librarian and with the support and leadership of the Science Librarian. Workshops were held for researchers, Liaison Librarians discussed ePrint at Faculty and School meetings and a series of morning teas, supported by Liaison Librarians, were hosted at the Staff Club.

Previous to the new organisation, the main strategy to further the information literacy agenda at UTAS was for individual Liaison Librarians to work with interested academics in specific Schools. During the trial phase of the new organisation, teaching and learning representatives developed the Library's Information Literacy Framework (University of Tasmania Library) that supports the University's Information Literacy Policy (University of Tasmania, 2006) and provides the basis for a systemic approach to embedding information literacy in Faculty curriculum

As a member of the Faculty of Arts Teaching and Learning Committee, the Arts Team teaching and learning representative promoted the Information Literacy Framework to the Faculty. This resulted in the Framework being adopted as a key component of the Faculty's Generic Skills Program, commenced in 2007 (University of Tasmania. Faculty of Arts, 2007). The teaching and learning representative has continued to work with key academics in the Faculty to develop models of embedding information literacy in context of the Information Literacy Framework. These models subsequently informed the work of other Arts Liaison Librarians in their work with their Schools.

In the new organisation the senior Liaison positions lead the library-wide approach to investigating, developing and reviewing services to respond to changing needs of research and learning and teaching. In turn the Faculty team representatives lead the team's delivery of services in accordance with the established strategic direction.

Professional development and support

The ever increasing complexity of Liaison work requires effective support and professional development. At UTAS, the Information Services Position Framework was developed to provide a context for learning and leadership development. This creates a 'spiral curriculum' approach where learning is structured and explicit in the positions:

- Entry-level Liaison Librarian A positions enable new or recent graduates to learn broadly and develop knowledge, skills and capabilities
- Liaison Librarian B positions encourage experienced librarians to develop specialist knowledge and leadership skills within the team, and
- Senior Librarian positions (Branch Librarians) that require the development of expertise and leadership in aspects of Liaison services at a library-wide level. (University of Tasmania Library, 2007)

Professional development is centred on two “Liaison Days” a year where activities are determined by Liaison priorities and planning. For example, during the trial in 2006 the Liaison Day involved presentations by Branch Librarians in developments of the portfolio roles.

QUT

With 28,500 full-time-equivalent students and a growing research program, QUT is one of Queensland’s larger universities. It has three Brisbane campuses, and a smaller regional campus. The faculties are largely campus-based, and only one Faculty has major administrative structures and course delivery across two campuses. Campus-based faculties provide an ease of organisation, without the complex issues that arise with cross-campus faculties at UTAS. However, recently established multidiscipline Research Institutes provide some challenges to the campus-based approach to Liaison.

QUT Library is part of the Division of Technology, Information and Learning Support (TILS). This structure influences library planning and facilitates collaboration across the information technology, learning support, help desk and printing services units.

As at UTAS, planning at QUT Library is linked with high level plans at University and at Divisional levels. The Director, Library Services participates in high level committees and executive structures, ensuring a “strategic fit” for library planning and services.

The Library’s senior management team take their part in representing the Division of TILS on Faculty Academic Boards. Liaison Librarians represent the Library on School and Faculty teaching and learning committees, and have opportunities to input to Faculty and School planning and activities.

Liaison Organisation

The QUT Library Liaison program is well established, with its origins in the pre-amalgamation days of the Brisbane College of Advanced Education in the 1980s. The priority areas of the Liaison teams reflect those of UTAS: collection development, teaching and learning and research. Two or three Liaison Librarians are assigned to Schools in each Faculty, and their work is supported by Reference Librarians. While Liaison Librarians are allocated to Schools in each Faculty, the extent to which they function as a team is largely determined by the Librarians. They organise their own meetings, decide who represents the library on Library and Faculty committees, consult with their manager and report on a quarterly basis.

The Branch Library Manager leads Liaison on each campus through planning, monitoring and reporting. Leadership and direction is also provided by Associate

Director positions responsible for information resource management and library services and corresponding Committee action plans.

Three other key positions influence Liaison direction, activity and development of knowledge and skills - the Integrated Literacies Coordinator, the eResearch Access Coordinator and the Information Manager in the Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI). These positions take advantage of the Library's position within the Division of TILS and collaborative arrangements University-wide. The Integrated Literacies Coordinator straddles both the Library and the Teaching and Learning Support Service (TALSS), and is leading a project to take a collaborative approach to students' academic and information literacy skills and to ultimately embed these skills in an integrated way into the curriculum. The eResearch Access Coordinator works with Liaison Librarians to promote ePrint and open access publishing and, with the IHBI Information Manager, is exploring and modelling new roles that will influence the direction of Liaison support for research (Stokker, 2007).

The QUT Library Workforce Plan aims to build on the success of its Liaison model and prepare Liaison Librarians for the future. The Plan provides a framework to further extend the Liaison role into research support and to improve support – including human resources - for the Liaison positions. The Plan also identifies the need to develop Liaison Librarian expertise in areas of research, ICT, collection development and teaching and learning. These expert roles will explore opportunities for innovation and provide support and leadership to other Liaison Librarians (QUT Library Workforce Planning Working Party, 2007).

Planning

Branch library action plans provide the main direction for Liaison. The Branch action plans incorporate key elements, as they apply to the Branch's client groups, of the Library's strategic plan and other planning documentation of the Division of TILS and the Library. Two key initiatives are currently impacting on Liaison services from a Divisional level. These are the Integrated Literacies project and the TILS Research Support Plan.

The established tool for planning at the Liaison Librarian level is the School Information Resource Plans. These plans are developed at the beginning of the year in consultation with the Head of School. While this is a very effective approach to collection development in context of the needs of School, similar detailed planning has not traditionally occurred for research and learning and teaching services.

A new approach to planning for Liaison activities is currently being trailed with Kelvin Grove campus Liaison teams. A planning retreat was held in November 2007 where Faculty-focussed team plans were developed for 2008. Input to the plans included Faculty priorities and planning documents of the Library and Division, including committee and project plans and the Library's Workforce Plan. The Faculty team plans are guiding Faculty-wide initiatives as well as individual Liaison Librarian activity with their respective Schools. The plans also form the basis for quarterly team reports (previously School-based), further consolidating the Faculty-wide approach. Individual input to Faculty plans is developed further in individual performance plans.

How organisation and planning supports service development and delivery

Two strategic activities in 2008 for QUT Library is increasing support for research (the Divisional Research Support Plan) and the Integrated Literacies project. Examples discussed below illustrate how planning assists team work and the exploration of new services to support research, and how Liaison team innovations both inform and are informed by the Divisional Integrated Literacies Project.

Team planning has assisted the Health Liaison Librarians at both Carseldine and Kelvin Grove campuses and the IHBI Information Manager to work together in supporting research. Informed by the Division of TILS Research Support Plan, the Health team is currently identifying research cohorts as an initial step in reviewing the information and library services needs of honours students, research higher degree students, early career and established researchers. The team is also working with the IHBI Information Manager and the eResearch Access Coordinator to customise and deliver training programs including evidence based practice, managing information, bibliometrics, and exploiting Open Access publishing. The team meets regularly to review progress against the plan and review strategies and activity.

Other sample activities by Liaison teams in 2008 that address the Research Plan include workshops in bibliometrics, targeted collection development, supporting responses to the Excellence in Research for Australian (ERA) Initiative, the promotion of funding arrangements for publishing in PLoS and Bio Med Central and a display of Faculty of Education academics' book publications.

The Integrated Literacies Project is both informing Liaison activity as well as being informed by the innovative work of librarians. In 2008 the Faculty of Creative Industries launched the new foundation unit for 1400 first-year students. Liaison Librarians were involved in curriculum planning from the start. They also worked with TALSS learning support staff to develop learning resources for Blackboard (QUT's learning management system). A train the trainer approach was taken to the delivery of academic and information literacy skills, where Liaison Librarians trained Unit tutors to teach the literacies in context of the discipline-based tutorials.

The Creative Industries experience informs the Integrated Literacies Project by providing a tangible model which also informs other liaison librarians and TALSS staff in their work with their faculties.

These sample activities show how Divisional and Library planning provides direction for Liaison. Organisation and planning provides flexibility for Librarians and teams to deliver services and take innovative approaches appropriate to their client groups.

Professional development and support

A range of opportunities are available to Liaison Librarians to adapt to and develop new knowledge and skills. In 2008 these include Change Readiness seminars (for all Library staff), a "reading circle" on scholarly communication and a program of whole-day seminars more specifically targeting Liaison Librarians. Whole-day seminars on teaching and learning and collection development have been held to date in 2008. A research support seminar is planned for November. The seminars are forums for imparting expert knowledge from leadership positions, as well as drawing out the

expertise and experience of Liaison Librarians through show-casing good practice and workshop activities.

In response to the changing scholarly communication trends, a reading circle called Transformation of Scholarly Communication (TOSC) was established in October 2007. An old-fashioned response to new developments, staff select and discuss articles on publishing trends and related topics of eResearch. Articles are collected in a Connotea Bookmarking site: <http://www.connotea.org/user/TOSC>. The informal reading circles are popular and well attended by Liaison Librarians, IT and High Performance Computing (HPC) staff.

Leadership roles in exploring new domains of ePublishing and data management are implicit in the IHBI and ePrint positions. IHBI Information Manager has a key role in coordinating the IHBI multi-Faculty support group of Liaison Librarians and HPC staff. Learning is undertaken in the process of the eResearch Access Coordinator working with librarians to promote ePrint and open access and to develop training programs, thereby developing knowledge and exploring new areas of support.

CONCLUSION

Organisational structures and planning at QUT and UTAS Libraries provide strategic direction for Liaison and maximises Liaison Librarian autonomy and decision making. In this way Librarians and teams determine how they best interact with their client groups.

Librarians are equipped for change by professional development programs and leadership. The UTAS Library structure aims to develop leadership roles at different levels of staff within Liaison services. Innovative positions at QUT provide leadership in working with Liaison Librarians to forge new ground.

The Workforce Plans of both organisations anticipate change and provide the context for positioning Liaison Librarians and the Liaison service for change.

In these ways, the organisations are responding to the changing needs of students and researchers, the changing nature of research and scholarly communication, specific drivers within the two institutions and a realisation that, in an increasingly complex environment, the individual Liaison Librarian needs effective organisational structures, planning and support to be effective.

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BIOGRAPHY

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