



Report of the Review of Learning Skills

Review Meetings: November 2008 to July 2009

Report: July 2009

1 Executive Summary

An early review of learning skills has been indicated since the start of 2007, when it was decided that learning support on the Australian campuses of the university would move from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CALT) to the library. This Review was scheduled to commence in late 2008, some 18 months into service start up in semester 2 2007.

The aim of the Review was to determine whether faculty and student needs are being met by the library's learning skills programs, resources and services, and to provide an opportunity for input into future directions. The Review was informed by a portfolio of background papers and information and centred on a series of meetings with key stakeholders across the Victorian campuses of the university, including faculty Deans and/or Associate Deans (Teaching), selected Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Director of CALT and representatives of Monash undergraduate and postgraduate student associations. Learning skills at the overseas campuses is out of scope of this Review.

The Key Findings and Recommendations of the Review are summarised below. The body of the Report provides detailed background, methodology, findings and recommendations.

1.1 Key Findings

The findings listed below are a subset of the more detailed findings provided at section 4 of the Report.

- 1.1.1 Students, centres such as CALT and Monash Research Graduate School (MRGS), campus directors, and the overwhelming majority of faculties spoke very favourably about the library-based model of learning support.
- 1.1.2 One faculty commented that they were not convinced that the move of learning support to the library was a positive one for their faculty, and one faculty observed that 2008 service development had improved noticeably from a perceived diminishing of service in the latter part of 2007.
- 1.1.1 A number of faculties emphasised the need to move from patchy, ad hoc approaches to a more systematic, coordinated approach to program development within faculties, in particular at the undergraduate level with large numbers of courses, units and students.
- 1.1.3 All stakeholders emphasised the need for tailored, cohort-specific programs for students and faculties that take into account the particular features of individual faculties and student cohorts.
- 1.1.4 There was general consensus that curriculum and cohort based skills development should continue to be a major focus for the library in future and that generic programs could decrease and potentially cease, with take up and engagement by students in the latter being generally low.
- 1.1.5 Under the new model, the central university provision of learning support staffing places Monash near the average of Australian universities and the mid-point of the Group of Eight universities. Staffing comparisons suggest that, whilst staffing resources are stretched, Monash has sufficient central staff resourcing for adequate service provision for its students.
- 1.1.6 Some faculties commented that flexibility of staff resourcing by the library is required to ensure appropriate library engagement in the further development and implementation of faculty skills related curricula projects.

- 1.1.7** Provision of additional funding to the library by individual faculties may be appropriate where specific projects or additional requirements are identified that are not feasible within central staffing resources. Centralised recruitment, management and team membership of these staff has been found to be beneficial for both faculties and the library.
- 1.1.8** Some faculties commented that changing course locations, enrolment patterns and development of new courses by faculties necessitates flexibility of staffing by the library across its branches, and creates opportunities for development and use of online learning packages.
- 1.1.9** A number of faculties with additional in-house learning support staff commented that the coordination and collaboration between these groups is working well, although one campus reported some student confusion in this regard.
- 1.1.10** A number of faculties commented that drop-in sessions and individual consultations for undergraduate students should also be a low priority, given the low take up by students from some faculties of the former and the resource intensive nature of the latter. It was noted by several stakeholders that small group approaches to drop-in sessions can be an effective way of developing students' oral and written communication skills. Student representatives noted that, for many international students, a brief drop-in session was too short and did not effectively cater for their needs.
- 1.1.11** More systematic library involvement in early intervention and Academic Progress Committee processes is desired by a number of faculties, students and campuses, including coordination with Health, Wellbeing and Development services and facilities.
- 1.1.12** Most stakeholders, including faculties and students, expressed interest in the availability of online learning packages to facilitate students' development of learning skills and English-language related skills.
- 1.1.13** Undergraduate student representatives and one campus commented that marketing and communication of library services and resources to students could be improved. At the postgraduate level, effective communication mechanisms exist through the Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) and MRGS.
- 1.1.14** Some stakeholders commented on the need for the library to further develop its learning spaces, including through increased integration and coordination with other service arms, and considering favourable hours of opening of library spaces.
- 1.1.15** One faculty noted that the "nuts and bolts of technology literacy" are an issue for the faculty and could be a good area for increased library involvement, whilst undergraduate student representatives observed that there is a "real variety of students" and student needs with regard to technology literacy.

1.2 Key Recommendations

The recommendations listed below are a subset of the full list of recommendations provided at section 5 of the Report.

- 1.2.1** The library continue to build its developmental model of learning skills services, working in partnership with faculties and other stakeholders, through formal and informal mechanisms, to meet the cross-campus needs of faculties, campuses and the range of student cohorts.

- 1.2.2** The library continue its focus on working with faculties, campuses, MRGS and MPA to develop systematic, coordinated approaches to embedding and integrating skills development for students. The aim of this approach is to improve the transition and overall student experience and to foster development of the Monash Graduate Attributes in all students.
- 1.2.3** The library work with faculties, departments and unit coordinators to incorporate skills development learning modules within MUSO unit sites.
- 1.2.4** The library work with faculties, campuses, the MRGS and MPA to identify gaps and further develop programs tailored to the transition and skills development needs of the growing cohort of pre-honours and honours students, in support of the Monash Passport.
- 1.2.5** The library continue its flexible staffing model, facilitating staff movement across branches in support of projects and library engagement with faculties and campuses.
- 1.2.6** The library work with faculties on direct funding arrangements where additional resourcing requirements are identified, using the model developed with the Faculty of Law.
- 1.2.7** The library work with faculties and campuses to facilitate communication and collaboration by library learning skills and faculty learning support staff to ensure seamless services for students.
- 1.2.8** The library work with faculties, campuses and Health, Wellbeing and Development to develop more systematic and coordinated approaches to early intervention and Academic Progress Committee processes.
- 1.2.9** The library investigate and implement a range of online learning tools and packages for all students, including off-campus and international students, across a range of skills development areas, including academic English,¹ oral and written communication, reading, listening and note-taking, and academic integrity.
- 1.2.10** The library examine options for future development of drop-in and small group programs for students, and referral processes for individual students, as part of the library's Service Points Review,² currently underway.
- 1.2.11** The library continue to identify opportunities for improved learning spaces, including consideration of options for improved integration and coordination of service delivery in collaboration with Information Technology Services (ITS) and other central service providers.
- 1.2.12** The library continue to work with faculties, the MRGS, MPA and undergraduate student representatives to improve targeted communication of the library's service offer.

¹ The library model does not include English language teaching. See section 2.1 regarding the library's suite of services.

² The library has commenced a review to identify and implement a user-centred physical and virtual service points model. The project seeks to establish management and service principles, and to create a student centred approach to service delivery regardless of location.

- 1.2.13** The library progressively reduce its offerings of generic programs as the focus increasingly shifts to in-curriculum and cohort specific, targeted skills development programs.
- 1.2.14** The university consider options for effective development of students' technology literacy, through collaboration between ITS, the e-Education Centre and the library, the latter within the framework of its Service Points Review.

2 Introduction

Learning support services at the Australian campuses of the university, previously found principally in the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT), became the responsibility of the library from semester 2, 2007.³ In addition to the centrally provided service, some faculties currently employ their own academic staff to provide specific, tailored learning support services for their students⁴. One faculty provides funding to the central library service for support in addition to its central allocation,⁵ and the Faculty of Business and Economics has a fee for service arrangement with Monash University English Language Centre (MUELC) to provide the ADEPT⁶ program to its postgraduate students in the Graduate School of Business⁷. The Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences has an arrangement with the University of Melbourne regarding the use of the Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELA) for its first year students.⁸ The library provides a follow-up program for students identified through the DELA.

2.1 Monash University Library

The library's model of learning support builds on its established foundation of information literacy programs and services and on the concept of the learning commons, whereby learning support is integrated with other support services available in or through libraries, such as information technology support. The library's vision is to provide a high quality, cost effective and centralised precinct with services and resources that support students' learning needs and inspire them to actively participate in the learning process.

The library's learning support model is based on an understanding that library services are inclusive, developmental and pro-active. Accordingly, the library decided on the term learning skills for its learning support, to indicate a positive service for all students, from first year undergraduates through to higher degree research (HDR) students. Learning skills include effective study, reading and exam preparation skills, techniques for effective listening and note-taking in lectures and seminars, oral communication and presentation skills, analytical, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and academic essay, report and thesis writing skills.

The library model does not provide counselling services or proof-reading, editing or correcting services (see Appendix 5, Learning Skills Description of Services). Whilst services and programs are provided for students to improve and develop their academic writing and oral communication skills, including grammar, English language teaching is not included in the suite of services provided by the library.

³ The overseas campuses of the university were initially out of scope of this change, although both campuses have subsequently elected to adopt the Australian campuses model of learning support.

⁴ Currently, the faculties of Arts, Education, Engineering and Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, employ from 1 to several learning support staff on the academic scale.

⁵ The Faculty of Law has provided direct funding to the library to support service provision at the city Law Chambers in particular, from January 2008.

⁶ Academic Development and Enhancement Program for Tertiary Studies

⁷ This arrangement was originally brokered by CALT, then by the library.

⁸ More information about the DELA is available at <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/asu/services/DELA/index.html>.

Central to the library model is the employment of learning skills advisers within branch libraries across the Victorian campus network, distributed according to the cohort characteristics of the different campuses and faculties.⁹ Learning skills advisers are co-located with librarians with whom they work closely to develop programs in support of the skills development of students.

Whilst the model of locating learning support services within university libraries is not unique to Monash, this fully integrated library model of learning skills advisers and librarians being employed by and co-located within the library is breaking new ground in the sector. Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Library has also changed its service model for student skills development, bringing together librarians and academic skills advisers¹⁰ within the library structure and service model.

During 2007 and 2008 significant work was undertaken in several branch libraries to accommodate staff, in particular to co-locate advisers and librarians. Work has also been undertaken on adapting existing rooms or constructing new rooms for use for drop-in and other small group sessions. A particular focus has been improving the flexibility of meeting/teaching and learning spaces to enable better utilisation of library spaces and to provide flexibility of location to provide learning skills services.

To date, a team of approximately 20 HEW7 learning skills advisers (approx. 17.6 EFT) has been employed by the library, based in branch libraries on the Berwick, Caulfield, Clayton, Gippsland, Peninsula and Parkville campuses. This compares with approximately 15.4 EFT lecturers under the previous CALT model. At the larger and specialist libraries, advisers have been assigned particular faculty responsibilities and specialist advisers for HDR student support have been identified at the Matheson and Caulfield libraries. This team is led by a Learning Skills Manager at HEW9. The current staffing structure has as its framework the budget transferred from CALT in late 2007.

2.2 Transition and communication of the new model

The first part of 2007 saw the establishment of the initial organisational structure,¹¹ staffing profile and budget for the library's Learning Skills Unit. A communication strategy was developed and delivered to various groups during the first half of the year, and included face to face meetings with and presentations to faculty academic staff, boards and committees, key university committees, student groups, library and learning support staff and other key stakeholders. An email bulletin to deans and associate deans teaching was also delivered, as was website information, email and MUSO¹² updates. Print publications for service start-up were developed and delivered for campus and faculty orientation and were made available in the library and at campus and faculty service desks. A learning skills web page was also developed for initial implementation in mid 2007, followed by further development and updating in 2008.¹³

⁹ The staffing profile across campuses and faculties was established, within the inherited budgetary parameters, according to EFTSU weighted for international and HDR students.

¹⁰ QUT Library has a small number of academic skills advisers (approx. 2) as well as a larger cohort of HEW3 student peer advisers.

¹¹ Appendices 2, Monash University Library Organisational Chart 2008, and 3 (Monash University Senior Staff Organisational Chart 2009, provide the overall organisational structure for learning skills within the library and university.

¹² Monash University Studies Online.

¹³ See <http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/learning-skills/>.

During the first half of the year library senior management, the PVC (Quality), and the Director and Deputy Director CALT met regularly to ensure the smooth transition of learning support from CALT to the library. It was decided not to establish a separate, additional steering committee for learning skills but to use existing committee structures, primarily General Library Committee and Education Committee (and other committees as appropriate) to communicate and discuss significant issues with key stakeholders within the university.

Meetings were held with senior staff of MUELC and relevant faculties regarding coordination of programs, and with senior Monash College staff to enhance understanding of library – Monash College activities and overlapping areas of interest.

2.3 Programs

Learning skills programs range from generic, through faculty/discipline specific, to unit specific and cohort specific programs, run as stand-alone, adjunct and integrated/embedded programs. As well as being developed in collaboration with librarians and with faculty academic staff, programs are also devised and delivered in conjunction with the MPA and MRGS (exPERT program). Programs have also been developed to meet the needs of part-time, mature age students as well as on and off campus student cohorts.

During semester 2 2007, a total of 294 learning skills program sessions were taught to a total 3913 students across the undergraduate, postgraduate and HDR student cohorts. In 2008, this grew to a total of 976 learning skills program sessions for 17,504 students.¹⁴ Across the same 2008 period, 1015 information research skills program sessions were taught to 16,322 participants. In 2006, under the previous CALT model, more than 650 learning support program sessions were taught to 13,573 students. Most library programs (excluding those integrated in units) are advertised via the library website and use the library class booking system to manage class enrolments.

A major focus of the library model is to establish an integrated model for learning skills and information literacy within faculty curricula. Information literacy is an understanding and set of abilities enabling individuals to "recognise when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information".¹⁵ Learning skills advisers and librarians involved in teaching information literacy work with faculty academic staff to ensure that students develop the suite of skills and understandings they need to succeed in an academic environment and for lifelong learning.

During 2008, in addition to the above program sessions, 180 combined information literacy and learning skills sessions were taught to 5044 students. A major aim of the library service is to see this area of activity increase, with a growing number of integrated and embedded programs developed and delivered. This is commensurate with the library's developmental or enhancement model for learning skills.

¹⁴ The totals reported in slides 11 and 13 of the learning skills presentation (Appendix 7, Learning Skills Presentation 2008) comprise a subset of these statistics for January to October 2008.

¹⁵ During 2008, the library adopted the term information research skills to improve communication of information literacy programs and services to students.

Key examples of embedded skills development programs are the Faculty of Business and Economics first year Bachelor of Business at Caulfield campus, and the Research and Writing Unit in the Faculty of Law first year LLB.

Learning skills advisers, librarians and CALT staff have played a key role in the review of the Bachelor of Business first year program with the Faculty of Business and Economics. The revised curriculum, in which learning skills and information literacy are fully embedded within the curriculum and assessment of Foundation Year units, was implemented in 2008. Learning skills advisers and librarians worked in support of the six core units in 2008, including targeted teaching as identified. This model of skills development is now being investigated for possible application to the Faculty's Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Business and Commerce courses. The Law Research and Writing unit, a compulsory first year unit, was developed collaboratively by Law Faculty academics, librarians and learning skills staff. This unit was implemented from semester 2, 2008 with teaching input and support from librarians and learning skills staff.

Other noteworthy programs that have been developed by the library in partnership with faculty academic staff include the Keys to Success program for Faculty of Information Technology coursework Masters students at the Caulfield and Clayton campuses and a follow-up program of workshops developed for BIO1022 Biological Sciences unit in conjunction with diagnostic testing of students.

Appendix 8, Report on Library Learning Skills Programs for 2008, provides details of these and many other examples of learning skills programs that have been developed in partnership with faculties in 2008. Work has also commenced on developing and implementing in-curriculum skills development for undergraduate students with the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Additional learning skills services provided by the library include a schedule of drop-in sessions run during semester across all branch libraries and advertised on the library website and in print publications. A total of 365 drop-in sessions was run across the library in semester 2 2007, with 961 students in attendance across the undergraduate, postgraduate and HDR cohorts. During 2008, 1220 drop-in sessions were held, attended by 2057 students. In semester 1 2006, under the previous CALT model of learning support, 193 drop-in sessions were held in CALT and faculty spaces.

Referral and appointment processes have been developed and implemented for one-to-one learning support for HDR students and for students identified as in need of higher levels of support. During 2008, 2103 students attended 2222 individual sessions. In semester 1 2006, under the CALT model, 348 students attended one or more individual sessions.

During semester 2 2007, the start-up period for the library's Learning Skills Unit, some 5800 students had some contact with the service. During 2008, there were approximately 27,000 student participants across the full range of learning skills services (programs, drop-in, one-to-one sessions).¹⁶ Appendix 5, Learning Skills Description of Services, provides a description of learning skills services provided by Monash University Library.

2.4 Planning and quality

The library model is based on achieving quality outcomes through collaboration between staff within the library and, more broadly, with faculties and other areas of the university.

¹⁶ Numbers reported are total numbers, not necessarily unique individuals.

During 2007, the library Service Level Agreement was amended to include a new learning skills service statement, summary of services and learning skills service Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (see Appendix 4, Monash University Library: Learning Skills Service Statement). The latter were prepared with input from the Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ), the PVC (Research) and Faculty of Education and, as well as reporting against standard university survey instruments, also attempt to report on student learning outcomes. The new service statement and KPIs were endorsed by General Library Committee for use from 2008.¹⁷

The inaugural annual report against these KPIs was presented to the General Library Committee at its first meeting in March 2009, and is provided at Appendix 9, Learning Skills Key Performance Indicators Report for 2008. As noted in this report, the learning skills KPI related to student outcomes seeks to measure and report on improvements achieved where learning skills programs are integrated in identified units. Sixteen individual units are reported on for 2008, with key outcomes including both positive student feedback and improved learning outcomes for those units where learning skills (and information research skills) have been incorporated. Whilst there is acknowledged difficulty in reporting against a learning outcomes KPI, the interest in this area warrants its continued inclusion and the results as detailed in the appendix do consistently suggest positive trends.

Learning skills has been incorporated into the library's information research skills class/workshop reporting tool, and standard evaluation forms are in use. A database for recording individual consultations has also been developed.

A separate 2007-08 Learning Skills Strategic and Operational Plan was completed by mid 2007 to facilitate the implementation of learning skills within the library. Subsequently, from 2008 learning skills has been incorporated as a new Key Area in the Library Strategic Plan, in line with its further integration into the suite of library services.¹⁸

The library, along with other centres and stakeholders, has representation on a number of university and faculty committees of relevance to learning skills, information research skills, and the broader education portfolio, including Education Committee, Educational Technology Committee, Education Policy and Programs Committee, MRGS Committee, Honours Task Force, Admissions Pathways Advisory Group, VC's Showcase of Teaching Excellence Working Party, as well as specific faculty boards and education committees. This facilitates a holistic approach to student development of a suite of academic literacies, both within the curriculum and with full participation of key groups across the university. Representation on university and faculty committees also provides the library with formal opportunities to influence university policies and practices in relation to student skills development, including policies regarding use of plagiarism software, English language entry requirements, admission pathways, and the like.

2.5 Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching

Under the new model, CALT has retained responsibility for the provision of teaching support to staff. This teaching support includes the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education, the Foundations at Monash program for commencing academic staff, the CALT sessional staff training program and the Communication and Language

¹⁷ The finalised learning skills service statement and KPIs were also provided for noting to Education Committee meeting 06/2007.

¹⁸ The latest version of the Library Strategic Plan, currently 2009-11, is available on the library website at <http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/reports/stratplan/2009/>.

Enhancement for Academics and Researchers (CLEAR) program. CALT is also implementing the CLEAR program to academic staff at overseas campuses of the university.

2.6 Overseas campuses

A review of learning support at the Sunway campus, Malaysia, was undertaken in 2008, chaired by Monash University Library's Director, Client Services – Humanities and Social Sciences, with other members of the Review Panel comprising the library's Manager, Learning Skills and the Sunway campus Director of Administration and Chief Librarian. As a result of this review, the campus is moving to implement the library based model of learning skills established at the Australian campuses. A learning skills adviser, reporting to the Chief Librarian, is due to commence in mid-2009. Monash South Africa has also implemented the Australian campus model, with a learning skills adviser, reporting to the Chief Librarian, appointed in 2008 and the existing CALT staff now focusing on academic staff support. Monash University Library has provided support to the overseas campuses in their development and initial implementation of the learning skills model, and continues to do so as part of its ongoing relationship with both campuses. This support includes staff involvement in the university's cross-campus mobility program to facilitate understanding of the new model, staff development and opportunities for collaboration.