

Best practice for university libraries

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Many Australian academic libraries are actively involved in the implementation of quality frameworks and are utilising quality management tools such as benchmarking and performance measurement. However, much of what is happening within these libraries is not well known nor communicated outside the institution.

There is generally a lack of published literature within the Australian scholarly journals on these topics, with the result that libraries may be duplicating effort in the development of performance indicators; are undertaking projects in isolation, unaware of work being done elsewhere; or are being deterred from action by the considerable task of investigating what is available and appropriate for the institutional situation.

In 1998, the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) developed a proposal to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) for funding to carry out an investigation into such areas. This proposal resulted in an Evaluation and Investigation project (EIP), undertaken by Anne Wilson (Northern Territory University), Leeanne Pitman (University of Ballarat) and Isabella Trahn

(University of New South Wales) between October 1998 and July 1999. The findings of the project team were presented in two separate publications that were released by DETYA in 2000.


The project 'Best Practice for Australian University Libraries' investigated current 'best practice activities' within Australian academic libraries and compared Australian developments with those in selected overseas countries. 'Best practice activities' were considered to encompass the implementation of quality frameworks, and the use of benchmarking and performance measurement as tools for the continuous improvement of products, processes and services. Staff competencies required for the effective application of these frameworks and tools were also investigated.

Through a combination of surveys, site visits and an extensive review of Australian and overseas literature on the topic, the project team evaluated the extent of implementation of quality frameworks in Australian academic libraries, and the degree and range of use of quality management tools.

The project identified a number of strategies for the pursuit of best practice in Australian academic libraries. Evaluation of currently available methodologies for library benchmarking, academic library performance indicators, the applicability of quality management principles to academic library management, and the application and usefulness of library staff competencies were also addressed. Much of this work is included in the published report *Guidelines for the application of best practice in Australian university libraries: intranational and international benchmarks* — and in a more convenient handbook format, *Best practice handbook for Australian university libraries*.


The information in the handbook is particularly relevant for libraries that have done little in this area, but also for the more experienced institutions who wish to keep up to date or to promote an application that may be new to them.

The EIP Report and Handbook are both available from DETYA's website: <http://www.detya.gov.au/highered/eippubs.htm>. There are also links to these two publications through CAUL's website: <http://www.caul.edu.au/caul-doc/publications.html>. ■



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