

Provision for **print** disabilities

CAVAL members unite in improving the level of support offered to students and researchers with a print disability

Sue Henczel, CAVAL

Librarians are increasingly under pressure to improve the level of support provided to students with a print disability. Aiming to share and learn from each other, representatives from CAVAL member institutions, on 30 November 2006, attended an inaugural workshop on support services for students with a print disability. All CAVAL's Victorian member institutions were represented as well as the University of Tasmania and Macquarie University. The workshop was facilitated by Dean Mason, Principal of Enakt, a consultancy practice with a strong involvement in the book publishing and printing industries and in the tertiary education sector. Dean also holds an appointed position on the CAVAL Board of Directors.

Staff with similar roles and responsibilities discussed the issues associated with support services for students with a print disability. These included managing requests for materials and liaising with the Disability Liaison Units (DLUs) within their institutions, sourcing, preparing and delivering materials in the required formats, storing, accessing and retrieving previously prepared materials, using and contributing to CAL's Masters Catalogue, participating in advocacy activities around standards, international practice and the development of inclusive strategies, understanding assistive technologies and how best to work with them.

The workshop comprised four sessions: Session 1 – Comparing workflows; Session 2 – Comparing areas for improvement; Session 3 – Technology review; and Session 4 – Scoping potential for collaboration.

Session 1 examined the relationships between the library staff responsible for support services and the Disability Liaison Units, and which library staff are responsible for requesting source files from publishers, scanning, formatting and liaison with CAL's Masters Catalogue.

Considerable variation exists in the extent to which thorough policies had been developed to support improved workflow efficiencies and effectiveness. For those

participants who operate in a less mature policy environment, it was heartening to learn that others had tackled many of the challenges they currently faced. Approximately half of the participants considered demand from students with a print disability to be significantly on the increase, while the remaining half believed the level of demand to be holding steady.

Session 2, 'Comparing areas for improvement', gave participants the opportunity to showcase what they do well in the provision of support services, and to identify and prioritise those areas that require improvement.

All universities were able to report a number of areas in which they performed well. These included the provision of rooms with up-to-date assistive technologies, strong management of the conversion function, a healthy working relationship with their DLU, clear roles and responsibilities, skilled staff supported by ongoing training programs, and having effective policy formation and development processes in place. One stand-out area was the purchase of roaming software licences at one university which made all PCs accessible to students with a print disability, rather than just those available in a dedicated room.

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Areas for improvement included reducing the turn-around time in preparation and delivery of materials to students; training of library staff; IT support for maintaining and updating assistive technologies; accessing quality source files for making electronic copies; the availability of assistive technology resources; increasing awareness among academics of the responsibility to provide accessible materials, and in a timely manner; the handling of privacy issues for students, and; in devising smoother workflows with the DLU.

Session 3, 'Technology review', covered the general characteristics of current publishing, how this relates to the necessary assistive technologies available in academic institutions, the effect on learning materials and a review of products available.

Although the responsibility for providing content in universally accessible formats appears to be shifting toward the publishers (and away from educators or readers), the mainstream industry is a long way from being able to effectively carry such a responsibility. Aside from there being no universally accepted standard format in which to store electronic files, the challenge for major publishers is to justify the enormous cost involved in bringing together all of their titles, in any single digital format.

The logistical difficulties, combined with the additional IT systems required for this form of asset management, makes this a highly complex challenge. However, the ongoing development of tools such as JAWS and DAISY will continue to bridge this gap with some success, and perhaps will continue to be more effective than attempting to create an industry-based approach. Participants agreed that the vast array of new software and hardware assistive products entering the market, and their ongoing importance in assisting students and researchers, will require all institutions to keep working at improving their knowledge and skills in using assistive technologies well into the future.

Session 4 – Scoping potential for collaboration provided an opportunity to explore ways in which ongoing collaboration could benefit consortium members by examining the major issues associated with the support services and identifying opportunities for collaboration that would enable costs, expertise and technologies to be shared across the consortium.

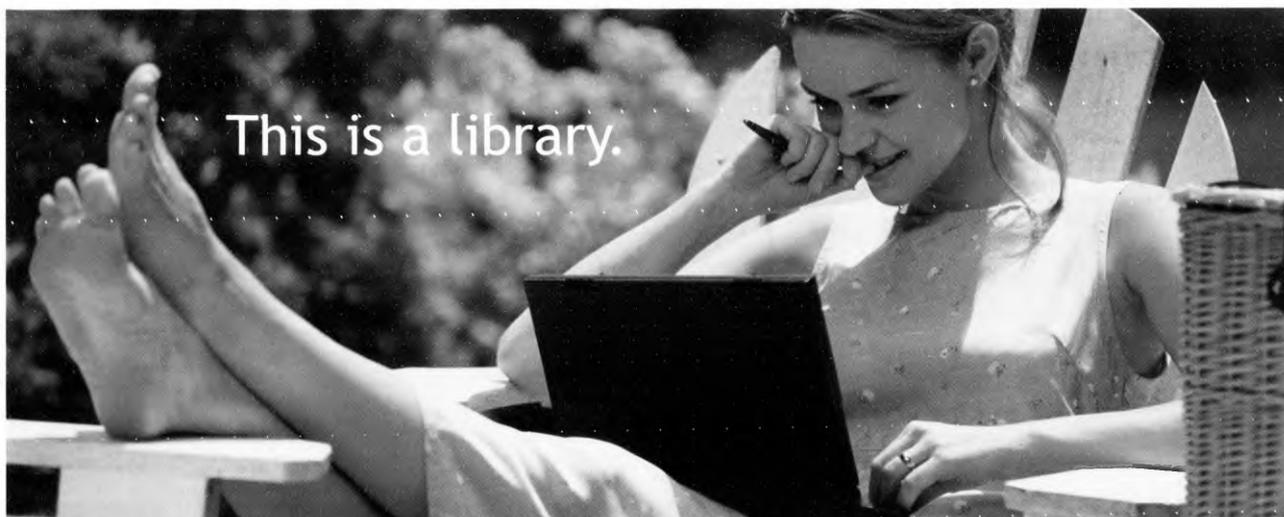
The Tertiary Libraries Disability Interest Group has in recent years promoted dialogue among librarians working in this field. All participants agreed that this was crucial to avoiding re-inventing the wheel

and to improve service levels generally.

The seminar members agreed that other areas of potential collaboration included the creation of a national repository of digitised content for use by students with a print disability; development of tools for managing e-reserves; consortia approaches to buying software licences and services, such as digitisation services; advocacy in areas such as broadening legal deposit legislation to include electronic copies of publications; strategies for improving workflows and timeliness of material delivery; advocacy in the form of raising awareness among the academic community of their responsibilities in regard to students with print disabilities, and; strategies for handling the privacy issues surrounding disclosure of an individual's print disability.

Future activities will include further workshops, forums and discussion groups.

Anyone who is interested in future activities should contact Sue Henczel, Business Development Manager, CAVAL Collaborative Solutions, at sueh@caval.edu.au



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