

The helpdesk grows up

Last year, a new desk model was introduced at Queensland University of Technology [QUT] libraries at their Gardens Point and Kelvin Grove campus branches, reflecting a new approach to staffing and design.

Refurbishment projects at both campuses provided us with the opportunity to review the design of the desks. In designing the new desks, the design of service points in professional and retail settings was considered. In such settings professionals and clients sit adjacent to each other to discuss services. Our aim was to reflect a contemporary service philosophy for providing client support that is both transparent and inviting. Consequently, the new helpdesk has moved beyond the traditional large counter in favour of a 'precinct' comprising three service pods and two consulting spaces. To deliver a range of service to clients, each of the three service pods has the capacity for either sitting or standing interactions between clients and Library Advisers and allow for discussions with a group of students, as well as with individuals.

The desks, launched in the first semester of 2011, are now staffed predominantly by Library Advisers, rather than Liaison Librarians. This shift was significant in that for the first time we have a position within the library structure that is recruited specifically for service delivery at our helpdesk, rather than desk duty being an 'additional duty'. Library Advisers are graduate librarians or graduates from other disciplines. Our objective is for the helpdesks to become learning and study support desks – the emphasis is on providing advice on information and

study skills, as well as effective ways to access our collections and services. QUT Library has for some time been responsible for providing both information literacy and academic skills support so the integration of these two functions at one desk was a natural progression. We have also renamed the helpdesks to reflect our service goal. They are now known as Learning and Research Desks.

The introduction of the new model included the decision to discontinue Lending Services desks. This decision was a response to the decrease in lending at our branches – between 2005 and 2009 loans

decreased by 25% and, like many libraries, QUT is actively increasing its expenditure on electronic resources which now account for approximately 80% of our collection allocation. To better manage staff client interactions we also made some changes

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in 2010, including simplifying borrowing rules and setting a target of 95% for self checkouts.

There has been mixed reaction from library staff to the new model. A staff survey was

conducted in late 2011 and based on this feedback there will be some changes to the desks. Overall, however, the new design has proven to be popular. It is acknowledged that our design is not unique – some university libraries with similar desk designs include Griffith University, University of Melbourne, and University of New South Wales.

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THE NEW
LEARNING AND
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IN ACTION AT
QUT KELVIN
GROVE LIBRARY

