

LIBRARY PROFILE: NEWCASTLE TAFE



Sometimes an opportunity comes along and you've just got to grab it. That's how Jenny Banville, Head Teacher Business and Computing (Information Services) at TAFE NSW, Newcastle, felt when she heard her colleagues in the IT team say at a meeting that their area wasn't working for them as a teaching space. "I came from left field and said 'let's swap'. They thought it was a great idea. It had to go through the campus managers, but after that it happened very quickly and we moved into our new space in April 2012."

Why didn't the IT team like the space? "Most of the issues were about having an open teaching area – but what you do in libraries is very much open to everybody, so it simulates the type of workplaces students will be going into. That's what made it right for our needs."

"Previously we had one dedicated classroom on the first floor and other classes were held in other classrooms around the college. Our new area of 460 sq metres gives us a completely standalone space on the second floor. It can accommodate up to 60 students in three teaching areas around an 'L' shape. We also have a break out room for 10 people." The current student enrolment is 70 students studying Certificate III and Diploma, with two

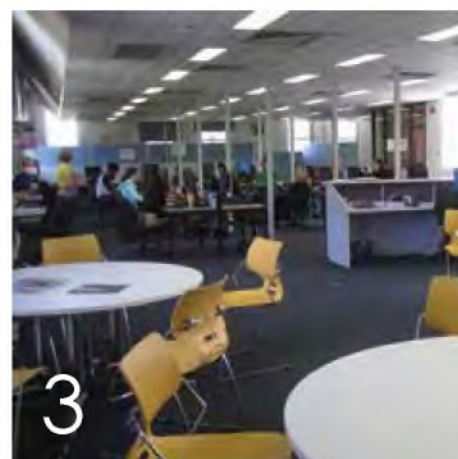
full-time staff – Jenny and Narelle Bell – and four part-timers – Trish Aguado, Jenny Hope, Cathy Meany, and Diane Schofield.

Having agreed to the swap, everyone was keen to make it happen. "It only took two days to move us all. It was a real collaborative effort over a term break, so there were no students around and we were free to just get on with it. One of our biggest helps was that we had IT people on hand to set up our computers. It was in their interest to see us happily settled in."

"We got rid of some old furniture – worn, mismatched, broken – and the campus manager found funding for four brightly coloured feature chairs, then went on to find others elsewhere in the campus, so we now have 16."

Jenny says her teaching space is much more open than other classrooms and it has had a significant impact on students and teachers. "Teachers love it because it's flexible. We may want to move within different teaching spaces instead of being locked into classrooms. I've had people come into the space and say 'this looks like a library', and I had another comment from someone who hadn't been up to see us: she said, 'it feels friendly'."

It has had an interesting effect on the way students learn. "Students use



the informal roundtable area for group work and study. It has had the effect of creating a learning space that students feel they own. They arrive before class and stay later to complete their work. Some students may not have the study space at home or limited internet access, so they can stay and use our fast internet access. We also have Certificate II business administration students collaborating with library assistants completing Certificate III and they come over to use this informal space."

Rather than an anonymous classroom, Jenny and her colleagues have created a welcoming, library-like environment with everything from a circulation desk to a wall of trophy library bags, and everyone is delighted with the impact this has had on teaching and learning.

Images:

- 1 Narelle Bell with one of her students
- 2 Jenny Banville teaching her class
- 3 The group working tables