



# QUALITY IS CRITICAL

**T**he need to reduce costs and maintain or extend services has led to an increasing focus on continuous improvement strategies within libraries.

*Janine Schmidt looks at research outlining the changing nature of quality assurance.*

The libraries of the Australian Technology Network (LATN), comprising Curtin University, RMIT University, Queensland University of Technology, the University of Technology, Sydney, the University of South Australia and the Auckland University of Technology, have collaborated for some years on various projects. Tang's paper describes the maturing of service improvements by the group from 2005 to 2010.

In 2005, a study reviewed quality assurance practices at the member libraries through examination of websites, a questionnaire and interviews. In 2010, these findings were revisited, using the same questionnaire, to determine further actions undertaken. This paper focuses in particular on the responsibility for quality assurance, the use of appropriate performance frameworks, and the extent of involvement of individual training and work planning, to determine growth in line with a framework developed by Wilson and Town in the United Kingdom. This framework establishes five levels of quality assurance, from an ad hoc approach at Level 1 to an advanced approach at Level 5, where all activity and the organisation culture are focused on continuous improvement.

What is quality assurance? It includes performance measurement, planning and benchmarking against others to ensure that services provided are 'fit for purpose'. Who determines the quality? The customer.

Concepts such as total quality management (TQM), the balanced scorecard, the Australian Business and Service Excellence guidelines, 'Approach, Deployment, Results, and Improvement' (ADRI) and lean systems have expanded on the approach. The paper notes the changing emphasis on quality, referring to the Australian Universities Quality Agency

(AUQA), whose activities have since been transferred to Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA): 'We aim to create a smarter future for Australia – by upholding standards for students'.

The paper notes the growing sophistication of approaches to quality assurance within the libraries studied. All have a documented quality framework, most allocate responsibility for quality improvement to a specific staff member, and almost all provided training programs at the individual level and emphasised individual performance as part of organisational performance. Planning, performance measurement, client surveys, documentation, systematic reporting and analysis of findings, and encouragement of best practice have all become part of the organisational conversation. Most libraries have undertaken continuous improvement strategies as part of their overall institutional framework.

Libraries continue to operate under significant pressures for accountability. The tertiary education changes currently mooted add to the importance of ensuring that library services meet client needs effectively and provide value for money. All libraries must operate within a quality assurance framework. Collaborative activity, an appropriate organisational culture, training of staff and an emphasis on performance measurement from the client perspective will assist libraries in ensuring they deliver services cost-effectively. Libraries who wish to win awards and plaudits from their customers must manage their quality assurance processes effectively.

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## FROM OUR COLLECTION:

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