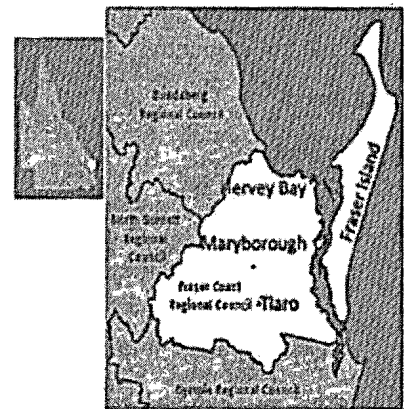


# A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE: THE HERVEY BAY UNIVERSITY/ PUBLIC LIBRARY, QUEENSLAND

**Jo Parker** *Manager Fraser Coast Libraries Queensland* and **Brenda Strachan** *Campus Librarian University of Southern Queensland, Fraser Coast Queensland*

*The Hervey Bay Library opened in March 1998 as the first joint use university/public library in Australia. It is soon to be dissolved, despite the economic, community and cultural benefits which it has provided. The reasons for this dissolution are explored. Principal among them is that the new library's building was a compromised funding convenience for its partners, particularly the local authority, which did not provide a solid foundation for a productive lasting relationship. This emphasises that sharing the costs of construction to benefit the joint use library is only the beginning of a meaningful long term collaboration requiring a shared vision and philosophy, resilience, adaptability and cooperation.*

**F**raser Coast is the gateway to the world heritage listed Fraser Island and the southern region of the Great Barrier Reef. Hervey Bay is the tourism hub of the Fraser Coast, with key leisure and tourism activities. Maryborough has unique Queensland heritage values as well as major manufacturing and engineering operations while Woocoo and Tiaro provide tree change rural lifestyles in proximity to the benefits provided by the nearby cities of Maryborough and Hervey Bay. It is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland, with two major regional centres, Hervey Bay and Maryborough, servicing its population. The estimated resident population of Fraser Coast Regional Council at 30 June 2010 was 102,080 persons and is expected to exceed 150,000 by 2030.



The economy is most reliant on manufacturing, construction, education and retail trade sectors. There is a relatively older population distribution – nearly 50% are over the age of 45. The increasing number of older adults in the region will likely result in a continued demand for leisure, lifestyle, and specialised services such as health.<sup>1</sup>

## **Fraser Coast Regional Council**

Fraser Coast Regional Council (FCRC) was formed in 2008, amalgamating Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Woocoo and Tiaro local government councils. This led to the amalgamation of the existing council library services. Fraser Coast Libraries is a six branch library service with libraries in Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Tiaro, Howard and Burrum Heads. Hervey Bay Library is the main branch of the library service. The first public library opened in Hervey Bay in 1978. Continued growth for library services saw the library outgrow three locations by 1996.<sup>2</sup>

## **The University of Southern Queensland**

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is a regional university, with a firm commitment to the communities in which it operates.

USQ's strategic direction also places an emphasis on social responsibility; to fully exploiting the benefits of a multicampus organisation; to remaining true to our mission and our communities; and to aligning our strategy, our capabilities, and our portfolio of programs.<sup>3</sup>

The main campus is in Toowoomba, Queensland's largest inland centre, a five hour drive from the beaches of Hervey Bay. In 1988 the university developed a study centre in Hervey Bay, located at the Tafe college. Only first year courses were offered, with students expected to attend the Toowoomba campus for further studies, or to participate through distance education. USQ has always had a high number of distance students, now comprising about 75% of the student population.

By 1993 the small number of students (50 efts) and the high cost of delivery, coupled with an increase in costs for the lease arrangement at the Tafe college, led to USQ seriously questioning its presence in the Bay. Proposing to withdraw its face to face classes, and replace them with technology assisted distance

education modes, the Queensland state government intervened. As Hervey Bay was then the fastest growing regional centre in the state, and indeed, in Australia, the location of a university campus was seen as vital to the economic and social growth of the area.<sup>4</sup>

A federal, state and USQ working party was formed in 1994 to investigate the need for higher education in the Wide Bay (Fraser Coast) / South Burnett region. Its report recommended that USQ remain at the Tafe site in Hervey Bay, foreseeing that by the year 2000, 100 efts students would be attending the campus. By 1995, the federal government allocated several thousand new university places to Queensland, including an extra 90 for Hervey Bay. Figures were revised (in fact in 2000, 153 on campus and 346 external students were able to access the library), and a decision was made to develop the university campus on a site that would establish the university's independence and prominence in the community.

### **A civic precinct for Hervey Bay**

Hervey Bay city developed from five fishing villages spread along the coast. In 1995 there was no discernible city centre when Hervey Bay City Council (HBCC) proposed the creation of a civic precinct, including the university, a library, an art gallery and a performance centre. USQ took advantage of the prominent site, gained funding for the university development and entered into an agreement with HBCC to provide a joint use library for the community and the university.

### **The joint use library**

The joint use library was designed to serve a population of 200 internal Wide Bay campus students and staff, 200 external USQ students and 44,000 community members. The Hervey Bay Library was incorporated in a building that, belatedly, was required by the city council to house, and still houses, the Hervey Bay Regional Gallery. The building is adjacent to the USQ Fraser Coast campus and is close to the central business district.<sup>5</sup>

### **Agreements**

Several layers of management obligations and agreements developed for the overall site and for monitoring the site's progress since concept stages in the 1990s. The documentation consisted of a heads of agreement, a lease agreement for the civic precinct site, management agreement, a memorandum of understanding, terms of reference, and a service level agreement.

The heads of agreement established at the highest level the obligations of the former HBCC, the obligations of USQ, the establishment of a steering committee, the construction timetable for the new library building, site management, and building management. The lease agreement involving the civic precinct site was established and was to be monitored under the management agreement. The management agreement was drawn up to guide the ongoing management of the civic precinct site in relation to the parties shared interests in the site and was to address the operation of the USQ campus, subcontracting of services, provision of security services, insurance risks, capital contribution to shared facilities, contributions to infrastructure requirements, charges for utilities, and strategic planning for future growth.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the former HBCC and USQ monitored the operational management of the joint use library, through a joint use library advisory committee (Julac). It was a policy document to address the use and maintenance of the shared facility. The service agreement provided a strategy for the services provided by HBCC for USQ in the operation of the Hervey Bay Library and was reviewed annually. The agreement covered obligations with regard to acquisitions, circulation services, opening hours and schedule of fees. The terms of reference addressed senior staffing, library space, statistical reporting, committee meetings, and review periods.

The management agreement, MOU and service agreement have not been working documents since 2008, when disagreement over circulation services support, and the use and maintenance of the shared facility could not be resolved.

## **Committees**

Three committees were established to act as advisory groups for the continued development of both the precinct and the joint use facility. The civic precinct committee was established to monitor the lease agreement on the civic precinct site. This committee continues to meet irregularly. Julac was established to monitor the administrative policies and practices embodied in the MOU and service agreement. The committee consisted of three nominees from each organisation. It was dissolved by FCRC in July 2009. The USQ advisory user group was established by USQ Fraser Coast campus stakeholders to facilitate the formulation and implementation of local USQ and joint library service policies. It has not met since 2007.

## **A 2005 library review**

In 2005 USQ contracted Auslib Library Consulting to review the joint use service and provide recommendations for future development. According to the review report,<sup>6</sup> the library had four main obstacles to performing well as a joint use library: lack of space, use of two library management systems, a lack of staff to improve opening hours, and little integration of staff.

## **Space**

The first obstacle has been exacerbated by the growth in both public and student users. In 2010 the university clients had grown by more than 600% to 1480 oncampus and external students in the region. The public clientele had grown similarly. In 1992, library membership was 8790. By 2002 membership had grown to 23,315.<sup>7</sup> Space has been a critical issue for a number of years. Originally, the library building included 500 square metres that was allocated, late in the design, to the regional art gallery. The library was unable to provide tutorial rooms, effective group discussion areas, media spaces, or relaxed reading areas for patrons. As the collections grew, most of the space was taken up with high shelving. From 2006 an extensive weeding program has been undertaken, so that the collection does not outgrow the space. USQ items now number 25,000, with Hervey Bay's collections consisting of 90,000 items.

## **Library management system**

The second obstacle – one library management system – has never been resolved. There was an opportunity when the local councils amalgamated for a review of their systems. Council approached USQ to gauge interest in a shared solution in which USQ would manage council library data through the USQ library management system, Virtua. However USQ was not in a position to consider the proposal and the opportunity was not realised. Council libraries then took the decision to merge the library data from the amalgamated councils into the system installed at the Hervey Bay Library by HBCC.

The different business requirements of the institutions are very hard to accommodate in one system. USQ staff has been torn between upholding USQ policies for a consistent experience for students, and working with FCRC library policies. USQ uses the council system for circulation. However students need to use both systems for a complete search, as access to USQ's collection of electronic books and journals is restricted to the USQ catalogue. Circulation data is also only available through the FCRC catalogue. Students at Fraser Coast are disadvantaged, in that they need to learn two different library systems and remember two different logins, in order to effectively use the libraries. As internet access has grown, the public library has been unable to use USQ internet facilities, because of licensing restrictions and a lack of willingness from USQ to share this expensive resource. Although there is a computer lab in the library, it can only be accessed by USQ students. The public library has had to charge users for internet usage in order to subsidise the cost for its patrons.

## **Staffing**

The third and fourth major obstacles – the lack of staff and an integrated staff – have also contributed to the imminent dissolution of the library. Although staff numbers have increased for the public library since 1998, they are still short of the State Library of Queensland recommended minimum standard. Staff for the university also increased to its present 3.5 staff. The public library is a very busy library, with almost 1 million loans per year. Loans by USQ clients average about 3% of the total. Until the introduction of RFID technology in 2009, reshelving was a critical component of the functioning library and a source of possible conflict between the partners. The goodwill of all staff was stretched to the limit as staff numbers barely covered the demands of this high circulation library.

One unique USQ staff position exists, as USQ went from paying FCRC a fee for circulation services, to providing a staff member to work in lending services. This position is directed by FCRC, but paid by USQ. Both parties wished to preserve their staff for their institution. The vision was not for a united library service for all clients in the region, but for separate services to provide for each set of clients.

### **Services**

The joint use library also operates separate information desks. USQ's focus is on information literacy, and staff deal with complex queries regarding research. As the public does not have access to the large number of electronic resources provided by the university, a seamless service is unachievable. The collections are integrated – the nonfiction collections of both services sit side by side on the shelves and are available for loan to all. Hervey Bay Library can be defined as a joint use library because the circulation services are integrated and there is one service desk for circulation service enquiries. However, both institutions continue to use their own business models in the delivery of information services to clientele, in programming, and in technology developments.

### **A shift in vision**

Rather than apply the review report's recommendations, restructures within both USQ and HBCC introduced new management foci and a shift in the vision for the services. In 2006 HBCC commissioned the USQ Fraser Coast regional research unit to explore public opinion of the usability and usefulness of the then three Hervey Bay libraries at Pialba (Hervey Bay), Burrum Heads and Howard. The study,<sup>8</sup> suggested that library users at Hervey Bay were unhappy with noise levels in the library and lack of space. There was community criticism that the library over catered for the university needs; the students were noisy; and USQ resources such as DVDs and current medical resources were only available for loan to students. There was also criticism that the library did not have rooms for group work, or sufficient study areas. A finding of the study was that users were dissatisfied with the joint use service and facility, which did not meet their specific needs. Students wanted improved space for group study and quiet study. Public borrowers wanted larger areas for social activities and the visiting speakers program, improved space for genealogy research, a larger junior area, and free, wireless, high speed internet access.

### **A USQ review**

In 2009 a review of the USQ Division of Academic Information Services, recommended the reestablishment of the position of university librarian. This has resulted in a more focused approach to the library service, and its learning and teaching functions through information literacy and new technologies. Creative spaces for learning were being established at Toowoomba and Springfield libraries, but it was soon acknowledged that this was not possible at Fraser Coast because of the lack of space. Demand for a recognisable USQ library area was growing. The university has not changed its vision to be community based, so when the libraries do separate, community members will still be able to access and use the university collection by registering for membership. It is interesting to note that 40% of university items lent are to public library users.

### **Local government restructuring**

With local government amalgamation in 2008, Hervey Bay Library became the main branch of the Fraser Coast Libraries with a focus on the delivery of library services to a regional population of 100,000. The regional library service is working to position itself as the community link to lifestyle, knowledge and place. The civic precinct in Hervey Bay has been developing, with renewed council focus since amalgamation. A large community centre has been built within the precinct, the recreational facility managed by Police Citizens Youth Club has been extended, and the funding and building plans for the regional gallery and Tourism Queensland interpretative centre are confirmed for a purpose built facility to be constructed in 2012.

### **The library building: its future**

Concept plans for the library facility were renewed to spread the joint use library over the 500 square metre space made available by the gallery's relocation. At this point USQ expressed its intention to negotiate for a separate university space within the building. These negotiations are held at meetings of the civic precinct committee. USQ will create a separate library, removing the campus library holdings from the shared management system and using its own management system for the circulation of its

resources. Without a shared circulation system, the joint use library will no longer operate. USQ and the Hervey Bay Library will be independent library services in a shared facility. Space for the public library will, however, continue to be an issue, as USQ extends into its original negotiated space.

### **Benefits of the joint use library**

The Hervey Bay Library is unique in that it was the first joint use university/public library in Australia. Many economic, community and cultural benefits have accrued from this marriage of convenience, and many lessons learned. The community gained access to an academic collection, improving the depth of the community's nonfiction collection. The library was a connection between the student and staff population of USQ and the public. It provided an opportunity for USQ to promote the campus and courses available to community library users. There were opportunities for collaboration between the partners, such as the combined pedagogical centre and toy library available to all library users. Education students had access to resources which complemented the curriculum collection of the centre. Staff cooperation assisted USQ students to have a service with longer opening hours than would be available to them if USQ library staff operated alone. Library colleagues from both institutions were able to share experiences and staff development opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

However, the human factors, as described in Humphreys paper,<sup>9</sup> are now missing – shared vision and philosophy, resilience, adaptability, and cooperation. The once dynamic culture of the partnership library has been swallowed up by the dynamics of change in the institutions themselves. The dissolving of Julac by executive management, and the lack of operational documentation when the MOU and service level agreement managed by Julac were not continued, left library staff without organisational structure to take the partnership forward. Strategic planning for the joint use library was not supported and long term objectives were not agreed, including funding arrangements and budgetary commitments to ICT and equipment management; and strategies for growth. Without a strategic plan, the joint use library has been pulled by its partners into the individual corporate planning of the respective institutions.

### **Lessons learned**

So, what have we learned from our 14 years of operating a joint use library?

- all the goodwill in the world does not make up for lack of structure, lack of funding, and lack of strategic vision – but it certainly goes a long way to operating a functioning library with colleagues who have unique requirements specific to their audience, and a shared commitment to library service.
- planning for the future and gaining the support of management from both institutions is essential for the future success of the enterprise.
  - We need to persist in encouraging true believers – people who are passionate about joint use libraries and the benefits they bring to the community as a whole.<sup>10</sup>
- a marriage of convenience is not a solid foundation for a long and productive relationship. *Sharing the costs of construction to benefit both parties is only the beginning of a meaningful collaboration.*

### **References**

- 1 Office of Economic and Statistical Research Queensland Treasury *Population and housing profile, Fraser Coast Regional Council* 2011 <http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/profiles/pop-housing-profiles-lga/pop-housing-profile-fraser-coast.pdf>
- 2 Hall, B *Hervey Bay Library the first 25 years 1978-2003* Hervey Bay, Hervey Bay City Council 2003
- 3 University of Southern Queensland *USQ 2012 priority plan* 2011
- 4 Humphreys, J and Cooper, M *A joint academic/public library: bringing the mountain to Mohammed in OECD experts' meeting on libraries and resource centres for tertiary education* Paris, 1998
- 5 McPherson, M, Curry, D and Humphrey, J *Hervey Bay joint use library: lessons for tomorrow Australasian public libraries and information services* 11(2) June 1998 pp75-89
- 6 Bundy, A *At a crossroad: the Hervey Bay joint use library: a review* Adelaide, Auslib Library Consulting 2005
- 7 Hall, B op cit

- 8 Shield, J and O'Brien, P *Developing the Hervey Bay libraries (a usability study)* Hervey Bay, University of Southern Queensland 2006
  - 9 Humphreys, J and Cooper, M op cit
  - 10 Hamblin, D Innovation, experimentation and persistence. The success factors of an Australian tripartite library, in Bundy, A ed *Joint use libraries: an international conference Manchester UK 19-21 June 2007 Proceedings* Adelaide, Auslib Press 2007
- 

*Editor's note*

In 1998 the journal *Australasian public libraries and information services* published a substantial article about the Hervey Bay joint use library which has appended to it the detailed MOU for the library, the terms of reference for its advisory committee and the 1998 service agreement. That article perceptively concluded that

For the Hervey Bay Library to survive beyond the early euphoric, and exhausting stage of establishment, the services it provides must clearly meet the requirements of its stakeholders. That these stakeholders come from diverse backgrounds of government, academic and community with, in some cases divergent needs promises to continue to provide an interesting and challenging exercise for the staff.

McPherson, M, Curry, D and Humphrey, J Hervey Bay joint use library: lessons for tomorrow *Australasian public libraries and information services* 11(2) June 1998 pp75-89