Library technicians and technical services in Queensland Government libraries

This paper aims to look at the changes within the Queensland Government library sector which have come about due to service and staffing cuts taking place in and around 2012.

In early 2012 library technicians were well represented in Government and special libraries in Queensland, until staffing cuts took positions in all areas and levels of government. Amongst others, library staff were identified as 'non-frontline' and cuts to library staffing and services were undertaken as cost saving measures.

By the end of 2012 all Queensland Government libraries had changed; some libraries closed and close to half the library staff were made redundant.

This paper will briefly examine staffing data before and after the redundancies of 2012. It will identify the changes which occurred in business models, services, tasks and responsibilities of remaining staff which influenced the staffing structures we see today.

Specific examples of the Forensic and Scientific Services (FSS) library will be provided, including the changes for the role of our library technician and the value she has brought to the organisation and to the business unit.

Data and information from other Queensland Government libraries in this paper have come from informal interviews with library managers and government staff, anecdotal evidence and a short survey regarding staffing. This paper does not intend to provide a view of the current situation within Queensland Government libraries. The focus of the paper is the changes which occurred in the FSS library and how we evolved to maintain a relatively reasonable workload and a level of service which is appropriate for our clients and one which will hopefully see us into the future.

Background of Forensic and Scientific Services

The current Forensic and Scientific Services (FSS) library moved with the Government Chemical laboratory from its premises in the Brisbane CBD to Coopers Plains in 1989. As a business unit within Queensland Health, Information Research Services (FSS library) provides services to clients based at Coopers Plains campus, as well as state-wide services to Pathology Queensland staff; FSS staff based off-site and other clients within Queensland Health (AJEM, 2012).

CSIRO and Department of Agriculture are also co-located on site, as part of the Science precinct and projects plan https://www.qld.gov.au/dsitia/about-us/business-areas/science-precincts-projects/ . The combined facility is called the 'Health Food Science Precinct'. The building is commonly referred to as the 'John Tonge Centre', or the morgue, even though this is just one small part of the campus and our business.

In 2015, Forensic and Scientific Services is now a business unit of Health Support Queensland, who provide services to Hospitals and support the Department of Health (Queensland) in matters relating to the public health of Queenslanders, such as infectious disease and bacterial outbreaks, soil, food, air, and radiation testing as well as equipment calibration, forensic and mortuary services.

We align ourselves closely with Queensland Police Services, Pathology Queensland, Health protection and communicable disease units within Queensland Health..

The FSS library is a special library. Special libraries include 'health, law, government, business, industry, media, research and other library services that are designed around a specific user group.

These services are often hidden from public view, but are essential contributors to the knowledge-based of their organisations (ALIA 2014, 3).

ALIA in the 2014 report *Putting a value on priceless: an independent assessment of the return on investment of special libraries in Australia* provides conservative estimates that return on investment in special libraries for every $1 is $5.43.

FSS Library had a period of expansion, collaboration and innovation leading up to 2010. This included collaborative library services and co-location of facilities with CSIRO and DAF (then DPI). Services included a single point of access for all three areas at the Health Food Science Precinct at Coopers Plains, the launch of a digital repository, the re-launch of the library catalogue as we had become independent from QHLN, negotiating FSS only electronic subscriptions, Athens authentication, refurbishment and staffing increases.

Queensland Government Libraries Review

The *Queensland Government Libraries Review* was undertaken during 2009/10. The object was to examine future options for Queensland Government Library and Research services. The review also sought to consider the environmental factors which impact on the provision of contemporary government libraries so as to develop strategies to ensure a 'strong and sustainable future' for the services. This report is available at:
http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/publications/categories/reviews/library-research.aspx

The final recommendation of this report was that a Queensland Government library and research centre model should be adopted as a LONG TERM strategy, to achieve a strong, sustainable and co-ordinated government library and research service (2010, 4). In the SHORT TERM, option 5 – Progressing collaborative efforts to build on existing strengths – was adopted.

Libraries in scope for the review were:

- Department of Communities including Queensland Academy of Sport
- Department of Community Safety: Emergency Services Academy
- Department of Community Safety: Corrective Services Academy
- Department of Education and Training including Indigenous Schooling Support Unit, LOTE library
- Department of Employment, Economic Development & Innovation (Now Department of Agriculture and Fisheries)
- Department of Environment and Resource Management (now Environment and Heritage Protection)
- Department of Justice & Attorney-General
- Department of Public Works
- Department of the Premier & Cabinet
- Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel
- Queensland Audit Office
- Queensland Health Central Library
- Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services
- Queensland Police Services

The libraries in scope did not have the opportunity to begin implementation of the review recommendations before the staffing changes began.

Staff changes

Voluntary Early Retirements (VER)

In the final year of the ALP government VER's were offered. Staff could nominate themselves for VER, the line manager had to agree and write an impact statement, and final decisions were made by executives. Some libraries lost positions.

Voluntary Redundancies (VR)

The LNP announced the VR packages and quotas in 2012. Approximately 14000 staff were cut across the Queensland Public Sector. In most cases, the decisions on staffing were made at a higher management level.

The combined effect of staff cuts and reductions across the board meant that FSS library had to quickly reconsider the services we provided and how we provided them, the role we would play in the business; our staffing and roles internally; and future funding models.

After 2012

Libraries closed, all libraries lost staff, some changed their business models, some scaled back operations, others took on extra work, some libraries tried to be less visible, others to be more visible in their organisations.

Most libraries continued on as before, with less staff. We changed our services and how we provide them to incorporate the new staff structure. Some libraries took the opportunity to change to different business models.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet library moved to the State Library of Queensland and offers services to a number of government agencies under the name GRAIL (Government Research and Information Library).

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries are now funded by their clients. They dramatically culled and relocated the collection and staff to the Eco Sciences Precinct at Dutton Park, south of the CBD.

Department of Environment & Heritage Protection now provide library services to multiple agencies and also moved their reduced collection and staff to Eco Sciences Precinct.

Education Queensland ceased to run a corporate library service and scaled back their service provision to focus on curriculum resource services.

Central Health ceased providing library services and re-framed themselves as the 'Clinical Knowledge Resource' which is responsible for the resource which is CKN (Clinician's Knowledge Network).

Other libraries closed: Sunwater, Ergon, Port of Brisbane, Emergency Services, and Corrective Services.

Staffing

As in all small libraries the role of library technician, librarian and sometimes even manager, are blurred.

When FSS was fully staffed prior to 2012 we had three full time library technicians. One solely did interlibrary loans, one acquisitions and the corporate card, and another serials and systems administration.

Now FSS library has one library technician, that person conducts most tasks from those previous three jobs, and also other tasks as her responsibility has increased:

- Systems administration and support
- web authoring
- marketing and communications
- corporate card and financial management inc budgeting and reporting
- create and maintain policies and procedures
- advise on best practice in the tech services, financial areas
- cataloguing, acquisitions, serials management, doc delivery
- managing licenses, memberships
- archives and records.

Staffing 2015

Approximately half of the Queensland Government libraries responded to a staffing survey request in 2015. Of these libraries,

- Library technician positions decreased by 66%, from 22 to 7.3
- Librarian positions decreased by 36%, from 52 to 32 staff
- Total staff loss for the respondent libraries was 44.16%

Across the Queensland Government library sector, where managers were consulted about the decision making process most chose to retain at least one technical services position.

While we did not have time to strategically plan service changes and delivery, FSS library did have to quickly identify the core business of the library, and ensure that it aligned in a very visible manner with the business strategy of the organisation.

When FSS library was fully staffed, we performed 'nice to have' functions. With less staff we provide 'need to have' services.

As a library service, we stopped:

- 'Managing assets'- previously we purchased resources at client request for their work area. As this was an 'asset' it was catalogued and circulated to the area. We would never again see the resource, but we had to spend a large amount of time chasing the client each year with a list of books for them to inventory. The exception now is Pathology Queensland who have a set budget for text books so we purchase, receipt and invoice the item.
- Providing services to non-clients, students or for study purposes.
- Charging back for photocopying and other services which have small administrative fees associated with the activity. Staff time and raising the appropriate paperwork did not offset these costs.
- Creating newsletters and displays.
- Managing our library management system in-house.
- Providing regular and scheduled training and reader education. All training is now provided on an 'as needed' basis (i.e. EndNote).

Additionally we,

- Renegotiated licenses to reflect the new staffing numbers and requirements for resources.
- Re-evaluated our serials collection to reflect the changes in business structure (e.g. some areas were dissolved or became the remit of other groups).
- Began to rely more heavily on the existing resources within the Qld Health network rather than having a FSS 'silo' library.
- Participated more regularly with the QHLN and its promotion.

To increase our visibility and perceived 'effectiveness' in the organisation the library began participating in activities which were previously lost due to the staff reductions or activities which are seen to be required now with the change in business strategy, such as:

- Business intelligence support including tender monitoring, updates and environment scans on competitors and products.
- Social media monitoring, promotion and reporting.
- Website content creation, promotion and marketing content for all FSS.
- Digital repository and knowledge management.
- Support for institutional research administration and researcher's administrative requirement with regards to publishing.

Why did this need to happen?

To show value, effectiveness and become more visible the library needed to relate more strongly to the business values and strategies of our parent organisation. The result has been more work for library staff, and a diversification of functions provided by the library, while we maintain core business functions.

The library was already well positioned to become a point of liaison for areas such as web, research admin and marketing within our small organisation.

While our workloads are currently high, it is vital that we help develop the next iteration of the service we provide, rather than having a solution imposed upon us (ALIA, 2014, p5).

How staff have evolved

Respondents to the survey indicated that their remaining library technician positions have:

- taken on different roles,
- taken on more responsibility,
- become more engaged in organisational activities,

all in response to client and resource needs.

Librarian positions have had to increasingly take up technical services such as document delivery, cataloguing, circulation, shelving and all collection management.

Respondents indicated that while demand and supply initially dropped, management expectation was for staff to cope with the greater work volume required of us. It was reported that all staff 'share the load', staff have become 'multi-skilled' and 'everyone is happy to chip in and provide assistance where required'.

FSS library cut many of the 'nice to have' services which were primarily duties of the technical services staff. In return, we have commenced or ramped up delivery of services which all staff should be participating in. In an environment where we are providing the same level of service with less staff, staff need to be across all aspects of the library. Regular meetings are required and all staff are expected to contribute their knowledge as we build a base of support for change (Dougherty, 2008, 258). Every action we take needs to be evaluated across a number of criteria:

- can it be conducted in a timely fashion,
- can we make it quicker,
- can we 'delight' the clients,
- does it show the library value,
- does it correspond to the business strategy.

The FSS library technician position now contributes more holistically to the library and is across all of the technical services. She liaises with the finance, facilities, and campus management and administration teams. She provides detailed and relevant budget reporting to the team leader and is the first point of contact for many of our clients.

To facilitate the increase in responsibility we have upgraded the position description and pay point for this position.

In creating suitable workloads for staff, we have focussed on the work staff do, not who has the 'responsibility' to do it. What is most important is that there is work that needs to be done. As Dougherty (2008) states: informed and trained staff workers will be motivated to take responsibility (258).

It was a common situation in other government libraries that where positions were lost, the end staffing resulted in a librarian heavy roster. This is partly because librarians should be able to conduct all library services and are seen as being remunerated appropriately, but also to show the 'professionalism' of the service; to increase the value.

Moving forward

We have survived, but to ensure the continued success and survival of the library service, and its individual staff members, we must make further changes.

- Consolidate staffing and ensure that positions are filled, as well as ensuring that the position roles are meaningful and relevant to the organisation.
- Create consistency in activities and promote these.
- Look for efficiencies for our users. As Denning, 2015 states "changes that make things better for the library, but things worse for users, are not the answer".
- Collaborate more effectively with the wider networks available to us within Queensland Health, and the libraries in the government sector to increase the value and potential of the organisation.
- Participate in organisation wide capability development programs to identify skills gaps in the organisation.

A comprehensive analysis of the library service should be conducted in the future and successes reported widely.

As at late 2014, the FSS library catalogue (DBText managed in house) was migrated to the Queensland Health Library's (QHLN) system, Voyager. The QHLN library management system is being upgrading to ALMA this financial year. While the initial outlay in staff and time has been huge, the end outcome will be an increased collaboration with the QHLN, increased visibility, increased usage, ability to utilise staff time and skills in other tasks, reduced duplication of effort across the network, and increased access to a wider range of information resources.

How have FSS library 'succeeded'

- We have developed our agility, both in staff duties and services provided.
- We continue to 'delight' our customers which is always important as they are our best champions should further change occur .
- We empower all staff to make decisions and conduct their duties.
- We diversified our services and roles.
- We made sure we understand the organisational strategic plan, tailoring every service to this plan, the vision and the mission of the business.

The staff at FSS library are largely a self-managing team and all staff that remain are fully dedicated to their roles and the organisation.

As we continue to gain clients and receive requests from non-FSS library client groups, we must consider the benefits of providing services to these groups. A full report and analysis in the future may be beneficial for both funding and staffing.

Evolving roles: library staff and library services

Changes in the library, and in the organisation, shouldn't bring restrictions, just opportunities (Jones, 2009). Embrace those opportunities even if it does mean your workload is high; show your value!

Less in-house work on any level (finance, acquisitions, document delivery, serials, systems) means that library technician staff are engaging in less technical duties such as management and strategic planning. All staff are important resources when it comes to strategic planning, don't think that you aren't! Hierarchical barriers (already soft in special, OPALs and government libraries) are softening further. (Jones, 2009).

Summary

The perception, threat, or reality of job security raises anxiety in staff. At FSS library were out of the decision loop and the library was told to keep a low profile for a very long time (which resulted in a name change to Information Research Services). This mentality meant that we lost a staff member to natural attrition, and lost the position as well. It has also resulted in a lack of resolve to escalate issues such as staff vacancies to senior management.

However times continue to change and we have moved beyond providing *just* library services. Our staff, particularly our library technician has been instrumental in this process.

The greatest change has been in our technical services role who has taken on more tasks with more responsibility. While not necessarily positive with regards to workload and stress levels, it has made staffing more fluid and responsive, as well as making the library more valuable and visible in the workplace.

The staff cuts and threats to government libraries in general were the drivers of change towards a more outward looking, professional image within the government libraries in Queensland. This has been at the cost of many library technicians, and it is yet to be seen how FSS and other libraries fare in the future with less technical staff.

FSS library have looked beyond the role definitions to try to create an agile workplace. This has worked for us because our workplace was small and the fear was very real.

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