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Quality, Service, Excellence: a decade of quality

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Quality, Service, Excellence: a decade of quality

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As the first education and training organisation to be recognised with an Australian Business Excellence Award in the Award's 16 year history, the University of Wollongong (UOW) Library has demonstrated how the principles of quality and excellence can readily be translated to the library and information sector. The Australian Quality Council's (AQC) Framework was selected in 1994 as the Library's change management framework. Now known as the Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF), it provides a structured and integrated management system describing the essential features, characteristics and approaches of organisational systems essential to sustainable and excellent performance. The ABEF criteria provide organisations with a comprehensive list of inter-connected criteria and descriptors against which to evaluate their strategies, processes and systems. These include the quality and continuous improvement of services and resources and provide the basis for both internal and external review and assessment as well as benchmarking of processes and outcomes. Results from such evaluations can be a powerful catalyst for a change agenda, as the assessment process provides evidence of what needs to be improved at all levels of the organisation. Addressing the opportunities for improvement can introduce new vitality and innovation in the development, management and delivery of quality services and resources to clients. The quality of provided services, therefore, is dependent on continuous learning, implementation of performance measures and a readiness to adopt a range of evaluation strategies. Over the past decade the approaches implemented by UOW Library have been recognised by accrediting and evaluation bodies as good, and in some instances, best practice. Examples include: developing client feedback systems, promoting commitment to excellence through a Client Service Charter and Service Standards, implementing comprehensive staff training and development programs, formulation of Service Level Agreements with suppliers, evaluating services through a 'Mystery Shopper' program. The adoption of the ABEF and other standards has been critical in achieving Library goals including future sustainability and recognition on the quality of Library services. This is evidenced by a range of performance indicators as well as improved clarity of goals and purpose; active involvement and participation of staff at all levels in achieving the mission of the organisation; devolved problem-solving; innovative services and programs; increased client and stakeholder satisfaction with Library services; and a collective responsibility and passion for ongoing success.

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Quality, Service, Excellence: A Decade of Quality

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Abstract

As the first education and training organisation to be recognised with an Australian Business Excellence Award in the Award's 16 year history, the University of Wollongong Library (UWL) has demonstrated how the principles of quality and excellence can readily be translated to the library and information sector.

The Australian Quality Council's (AQC) Framework was selected in 1994 as the Library's change management framework. Now known as the Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF), it provides a structured and integrated management system describing the essential features, characteristics and approaches of organisational systems essential to sustainable and excellent performance.

The ABEF criteria provide organisations with a comprehensive list of inter-connected criteria and descriptors against which to evaluate their strategies, processes and systems. These include the quality and continuous improvement of services and resources and provide the basis for both internal and external review and assessment as well as benchmarking of processes and outcomes. Results from such evaluations can be a powerful catalyst for a change agenda, as the assessment process provides evidence of what needs to be improved at all levels of the organisation. Addressing the opportunities for improvement can introduce new vitality and innovation in the development, management and delivery of quality services and resources to clients.

The quality of provided services, therefore, is dependent on continuous learning, implementation of performance measures and a readiness to adopt a range of evaluation strategies. Over the past decade the approaches implemented by UWL have been recognised by accrediting and evaluation bodies as good, and in some instances, best practice. Examples include: developing client feedback systems, promoting commitment to excellence through a Client Service Charter and Service Standards, implementing comprehensive staff training and development programs, formulation of Service Level Agreements with suppliers, evaluating services through a 'Mystery Shopper' program.

The adoption of the ABEF and other standards has been critical in achieving Library goals including future sustainability and recognition on the quality of Library services. This is evidenced by a range of performance indicators as well as improved clarity of goals and purpose; active involvement and participation of staff at all levels in achieving the mission of the organisation; devolved problem-solving; innovative services and programs; increased client and stakeholder satisfaction with Library services; and a collective responsibility and passion for ongoing success.

Introduction

In a period of six years, the University of Wollongong Library (UWL) was transformed through a planned change management strategy. Prior to 1994 the Library was considered to be a conservative, relatively risk-averse organisation using few and questionable performance indicators and measures to ascertain the quality of its services and resources. The selection of the Australian Business Excellence Framework as the management framework to drive and support transformational change led to the development of a new cultural paradigm. Within a few years, the Library was positioned for external scrutiny and underwent assessment by third party evaluators using nationally and internationally recognised criteria of business excellence. UWL became the first, and at the time of writing this paper, the only library in Australia to be recognised with the prestigious Australian Business Excellence Award in 2000.

Commencing the quality, service, excellence journey

Terms such as ‘customer orientation’, ‘culture of assessment’, ‘customer value’ are becoming pervasive in contemporary literature and are often used to describe features indicative of a high performing service-centred organisation. Can libraries make the necessary strategic and cultural shift to embrace, support and value service quality? They can, but not without the investment needed to develop infrastructure, systems and people. It is an investment that few organisations can afford not to make. The ability to develop a unique and sustainable approach to service excellence is increasingly being recognised as a key differential in an increasingly competitive market place.

In its earliest days the University of Wollongong Library was somewhat removed from the notion of service excellence. It was characteristic of its time in being conservative, hierarchically structured, cautious in its approach and risk averse. A commitment to service was considered implicit in that libraries are service organisations and that staff intuitively would exhibit and practise the necessary behaviours associated with the desired service ethic (McGregor, 2004). Through our deepening knowledge of best practice principles, it became apparent that service excellence would require constant attention, not just reliance on the idiosyncratic behaviour of staff.

The appointment of a new leadership team in the mid 1980’s signalled an agenda for change. Strategic planning was instigated, accompanied by management training for senior staff. Staff development was embraced as a driver for change. Team-based structures were implemented in the late 1980’s and performance management was introduced driving increased involvement of all staff in planning. This formed the foundation on which to build further improvements.

In 1994, the Australian Quality Council’s Quality Framework was selected as a change management framework. The Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF), as it is now known, provided a structured and integrated management system in which the Library could build on its earlier successes as well as identifying areas that had been addressed less rigorously. The Framework provides descriptions of the essential features, characteristics and approaches of organisational systems that promote sustainable and excellent performance (SAI, 2004). In describing the ABEF (see figure 1), SAI-Global (2004) states:

‘Business Excellence provides organisations with a systematic and structured approach to assess and improve the performance of its leadership and management systems in the key areas of organisational capability, namely: Leadership; Strategy and Planning; Data, Information and Knowledge; People; Customer and Market Focus; Innovation, Quality and Improvement; Success and Sustainability’.

Figure 1 - Australian Business Excellence Framework¹



¹ See Appendix 1 for a more detailed list of the assessable items within the ABEF.

The ABEF is underpinned by twelve principles of business excellence (see table 1). When establishing criteria for the selection of a management framework, it was important that these principles were compatible with the Library's own articulated values and beliefs.

Table 1 – A summary of the 12 Principles of Business Excellence

1.	• Clear direction allows organisational alignment and a focus on achievement of goals
2.	• Mutually agreed plans translate organisational direction into actions
3.	• Understanding what customers value, now and in the future, influences organisational direction, strategy and action
4.	• To improve the outcome, improve the system and its associated processes
5.	• The potential of an organisation is realised through its people's enthusiasm, resourcefulness and participation
6.	• Continual improvement and innovation depend on continual learning
7.	• All people work in a system; outcomes are improved when people work on the system
8.	• Effective use of facts, data and knowledge leads to improved decisions
9.	• All systems and processes exhibit variability, which impacts on predictability and performance
10.	• Organisations provide value to the community through their actions to ensure a clean, safe and prosperous society
11.	• Sustainability is determined by an organisation's ability to create and deliver value for all stakeholders
12.	• Senior leadership's constant role-modelling of these Principles and their creation of a supportive environment to live these Principles are necessary for the organisation to reach its true potential

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The Library's formal commitment to total quality management and continuous improvement was launched through the *Quality and Service Excellence* program. This title was chosen as these three elements underpin most quality philosophies and succinctly describe the key aims of the UWL quality program. The quality journey commenced².

Identifying the need for change

Application of the principles underpinning the ABEF quickly revealed that excellence would not be achieved by considering service satisfaction alone or in isolation from other practices directly contributing to both satisfaction and quality (McGregor, 2004). For the successful integration of the principles of excellence, it was necessary for the Library to: develop and support increased responsiveness and flexibility in meeting clients' needs; train and empower its staff to deliver consistently high standards of service; review process capability and the quality of delivered services and resources. Critical examination of systems, processes and practices was required to determine the Library's capacity for fulfilling its promise of quality, service and excellence. This process is known as organisational self assessment.

Structured self-assessment enables evaluation of the integration and acceptance of the business excellence principles; it is an inclusive exercise and all components and members of the organisational system are considered. This includes all units and support staff, supplier and strategic partner relationships as well as key stakeholders. Through the involvement of all key stakeholders, not just the executive or management teams, it is possible to evaluate the depth of understanding and deployment of strategies which have been developed to move an organisation forward. Therefore, self-assessment outcomes can be a valuable input into the

² See UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/about/planning/qjourney.html

annual business planning cycle (McAdam and Welsh, 2000), ensuring opportunities are prioritised, actioned and resourced as a structured approach to organisational development and growth. It can also be a powerful catalyst for a change agenda, as the self assessment provides evidence of what needs to be improved at all levels of the organisation (McAdam and Welsh, 2000).

As espoused by change management theorists, the involvement of people in planning and implementing desired change is essential to success. At UWL, planned preparation and training activities permeated the entire organisation, not only at the supervisor or team leader levels. All staff received extensive in-house training in quality tools and techniques, client service and the basic concepts associated with measurement and evaluation of their processes.

Quality Improvement Teams (now known as Business Improvement Teams) were established to drive change, identify and foster quality and service excellence champions and, most importantly to demonstrate how the people of the organisation could influence positive change across the many processes of the Library.

Evaluation of product and service quality

Prior to UWL's development of an in-house suite of performance indicators and measures, datasets primarily consisted of those mandated by government agencies or professional associations. The emphasis was mostly on inputs and outputs. At that time, and even today, there is a paucity of measures within this sector that assist in the evaluation of quality and effectiveness, as well as efficiency of libraries. In short, it was challenging to find indicators and measures aligned with the principles of *Quality and Service Excellence*.

A desired outcome of restructuring the organisation and devolving leadership to teams was that team members would become responsible for conducting, analysing and reporting their team's performance. Instilling a sense of ownership of performance indicators and measures was vital to this process.

A lengthy, but ultimately worthwhile, consultative process commenced to establish performance indicators and measures. The University Librarian with members of the newly formed Quality Steering Committee systematically worked with each team to identify key processes and activities; identify performance goals for each process; identify the factors that can/could affect performance; and select performance indicators and measures. This process generally took two to three team meetings to accomplish. Towards the end of the process, the frequency, timing and methods of reporting were determined.

As reporting expectations grew, skill gaps in statistical literacy became evident. In response, a new workshop TQM Plus was introduced. Structured on statistical models, it was designed to refresh mathematical and basic statistical skills. For some, these skills had lain dormant for a number of years. The workshop assisted staff to select the appropriate reporting methodology depending on datasets and report audiences. This was supplemented with training in statistical and data management packages such as Excel. Style guides were revised to include preferred styles for presenting data in graphical formats.

A Performance Indicator Framework was developed to provide a foundation for the systematic review of services and processes using measures aligned with stakeholder needs and expectations. All indicators contribute to the agreed Key Performance Indicator (KPI): *Client and Stakeholder Satisfaction*. Teams were expected to report results of their measures against the indicators to identify trends and elaborate on variations and corrective actions. This formed the foundation for the ongoing management and improvement of processes and services.

Service Quality Culture

The development of performance indicators and measures to evaluate Library performance, while critical, provided little in the way of describing the enabling behaviours and practices required to instil a commitment to excellence. Library Values were first articulated in 1995

through a highly consultative process. Staff workshops identified shared beliefs and norms and these underpinned the framework within which all staff were enabled to recognise and understand their own, and their peers', overall responsibility for organisational performance. As the organisational culture matured, the Values were reviewed. The latest iteration is known as the *Values and Ideal Culture*³. The concept of an *Ideal Culture* was premised on a vision of how the Library would look, sound and feel if the Values and their associated behaviours were internalised and practised to their optimal level. Behaviours aligned with developing and fostering a culture that values service quality include, for example:

Value	Behaviours
People First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Striving to understand our clients' needs through consultation and feedback
Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively seeking information to improve our processes and services • Rewarding enterprising and innovative ideas, encouraging staff to respond creatively to challenges
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking pride in planning, anticipating change and working towards achieving our goals • Recognising and rewarding individuals and teams who make exceptional contributions
Sharing knowledge and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking opportunities to continuously learn, developing the skills and knowledge to effectively do our jobs

Measurement and assessment as part of day-to-day work

A review of position and person profiles (otherwise known as position descriptions) in the late 1990's offered further opportunities to inculcate the *Values and Ideal Culture* and its supporting behaviours. Moving beyond the traditional paradigm of simply describing tasks to be performed, the new profiles placed a particular emphasis on behaviours and attributes staff were expected to demonstrate in their day-to-day working relationships. For example:

Extracts from Position and Person Profiles

Agreed Critical Success Factors and Key Performance Indicators guide the development of strategic initiatives, goals and objectives which inform the annual strategic planning process in which all Library teams develop individual objectives, strategies and performance targets.

A supportive environment which includes a range of training and development opportunities enables staff to meet the challenges of their position. In turn, each staff member has an individual responsibility to contribute to the improvement of processes within their team and throughout the Library.

Responsibilities within Position Descriptions were supplemented with articulated performance outcomes and performance indicators against which individuals were assessed twice yearly.

These documents were further supported through staff related policies, in particular the policy: *Managing for Excellence Performance – Responsibilities and Expectations*.⁴ The policy outlines the expected attributes of the Library workforce. To illustrate the intent of the policy an extract follows:

The Personal and Performance Attributes are a set of behaviours that the Library has identified to describe excellent performance for Library staff who are our most valuable asset. The Attributes, with the Values, form the *Ideal Culture*. The behaviours are aligned with the Library's strategic direction. The Attributes aim to develop a workforce that is prepared, involved, motivated and committed to achieving excellence. The Attributes:

- supplement staff's *Position and Person Profiles*

³ See UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/about/planning/vision.html

⁴ See UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/about/planning/pdfs/e03.pdf

- clarify Library expectations of staff and outline their responsibilities
- aid in the development of *Position and Person Profiles*
- provide criteria to discuss and gain feedback on individual performance
- help staff identify training and/or development needs for personal development

Identified with input from staff, the Performance Attributes have been identified in four layers:

- All staff
- Team coordinators
- HEW 6 and up
- Library Executive

Each Attribute describes observable behaviours, for example:

All staff	Demonstrated Behaviours
Contributes effectively as a team member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays appreciation of and support for other team members • Shows commitment to team improvements by contributing to decision making and planning processes* • Supports team decisions • Manages disagreements and misunderstandings openly
Channels Communication Effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies for understanding, particularly complex, technical issues and jargon • Ensures communication is clear and precise • Confirms success of communication strategies by seeking feedback and responses • Facilitates open communication between team members and other teams • Assumes responsibility for disseminating acquired information • Submits information for reports in the required format and within the set timeframes* • Actively seeks information
Integrates quality into work activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays commitment to continually improving all aspects of work* • Contributes suggestions to improve processes and services* • Understands the management framework of Vision, Mission, CSFs, KPI, Values and Goals* • Endeavours to provide service to maintain standards and reach targets*

* of particular relevance in developing a culture that values quality and service excellence

Client Service Charter

Much of this discussion has focussed on internal communication and application of assessment practices designed to foster service excellence. Its equally important to communicate this commitment to clients and stakeholders. Published *Service Standards* can provide one vehicle for this purpose. At the UWL, *Service Standards* are communicated through a *Client Service Charter*⁵ which outlines services clients can expect from the Library and the measurable standards which will apply.

In the beginning, the identification of measurable, guaranteed standards was approached with caution by most teams. This was partially due to the lack of process data needed to establish more informed standards, as well as concern about occasions when standards might not be met. (McGregor, 2004). To overcome these initial concerns, standards were somewhat conservative until substantive datasets could be collected to gain an improved understanding of process capability. They did, however, address issues identified by clients as being important, in particular the timeliness of response and processing times.

In the mean time, teams were encouraged to set stretch targets. These stretch targets although not communicated to clients, provided the necessary impetus to challenge existing process capability and to implement continuous improvement initiatives.

⁵ See UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/about/planning/charter.html

Improved understanding of process capability and variation has influenced the cultural language of the organisation. A recent review of Service Standards saw a significant shift in conviction and confidence in articulating the Library's intent to its clients. Instead of 'we endeavour' or 'we aim' as in past iterations of the *Client Service Charter*, Library staff now state 'we will'!

Extract from the Client Service Charter

We are committed to meeting your service needs and to continuously improving the quality of everything we do.

We will:

- Respond to you at service desks promptly and courteously within 5 minutes
- Make returned items available within 6 hours
- Have 100% of obtainable items on reading lists held by the Library or on order
- Have newly received resources ready for borrowing within 5 working days
- Fill 90% of document delivery requests within 10 working days
- Respond to urgent requests within 1 working day of receipt
- Respond to suggestions and feedback which include a name and contact details within 2 working days

Evaluating Client Satisfaction.

A library and its services can be viewed and assessed from a multitude of perspectives (Hernon and Altman, 1999). Many organisations are interested in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of their customers' perceptions and attitudes to assess the quality of services. One way to collect and measure customers' attitudes is through questionnaires (Hayes, 1998).

Internal and external benchmarking of mission critical activities is a key driver of the Library's *quality, service, excellence* program. Since 1995, the Library has utilised client satisfaction surveys. Since 2002, UWL has used the client satisfaction survey negotiated by the Council of Australian University Libraries, enabling benchmarking with Australian university libraries. The major assessment categories to evaluate customer perceptions are: *communication, service quality, service delivery, facilities and equipment, library staff*. A key aim of the survey is identify service and resource gaps. Data and information collected from the survey are used to inform planning and improvement initiatives across all levels of the Library.

A significant benefit from adopting this approach is the ability to monitor internal benchmarks of performance as well as to determining how the Library is positioned against its peers. The success of the Library's *Quality, Service, Excellence* program is demonstrated through the Library's consistent positioning in the top quartile of performance across each assessment item and its position in the top 10 performing libraries across the major assessment categories.

In using such assessment strategies, the Library recognises its obligation and responsibility for sharing the information it has gathered with its clients and stakeholders. On receipt of the survey results, an action plan for improvement is implemented and this is communicated to clients using several media, e.g. the Library website⁶, displays in Library buildings, newsletters and, reports to the University Executive.

Client Feedback Systems

Customer satisfaction measures with service quality, while extremely important, often ask customers to reflect on their service experience over a period of time. It is, therefore, not unusual that client satisfaction is often considered to be a *lag* indicator of performance. The capacity to gather more immediate and timely information on customers' perceptions can provide invaluable insights to service quality (Hernon and Altman 1999).

⁶ See the UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/about/news/survey/index.html

At UWL, client feedback has been actively sought since 1995 with the implementation of a paper-based *Compliments, Comments, Complaints* scheme. Forms are made available at all service points and, when contact details are provided, a response is guaranteed within five days. All customer feedback incidents and responses are documented, collated and circulated to all staff to generate awareness of customer needs and expectations. Feedback incidents are reviewed regularly to ensure minor issues are addressed immediately. A more formal review is undertaken twice yearly to monitor trends and to inform planning and resourcing strategies.

A review of the feedback process in 2004 drove the development of an innovative new system for the fully automated lodgement feedback and responses. The Client Feedback Database⁷ provides an intuitive online interface for clients to communicate with the Library. Expedient responses are supported by automatically directing comments to appropriate staff. As a result response times have improved significantly from five days with the previous system to a guaranteed two days.

Mystery Shopping

Customer satisfaction surveys and other feedback systems provide data and information on a range of service elements, however they are limited in the insight they can provide into the total service experience, in particular the effect of staff attitudes, attributes and behaviours on overall satisfaction. Feedback from surveys does of course offer clues to guide further investigation.

Sector comparisons of customer satisfaction revealed that the Library could improve its position in some aspects of client services. In order to thoroughly investigate services, it was considered important to use a more in depth survey strategy than those previously used. Drawing on benchmarking experience with the private sector, it was decided to trial evaluation of service using a tool known as *mystery shopping*. Mystery shopping has the potential to assess how well the agreed values of the library, as well as their associated behaviours are being practised and how these behaviours affect customer satisfaction (Calvert, 2004).

The selection of a mystery shopper approach by the Library was influenced by a number of factors. In particular, it aligned with the principles of business excellence that underpin the Australian Business Excellence Framework, adopted in 1994 as the Library's management framework.

These principles include:

- Understanding what clients value, now and in the future, influences organizational direction, strategy and action
- The potential of an organisation is realised through its people's enthusiasm, resourcefulness and participation
- Continual improvement and innovation depend on continual learning.

Mystery shopping therefore was designed to take the mystery out of what customers value. Prior to assessment, extensive consultation took place with staff to gather information on the aspects of service to be evaluated and to discuss the process and how results would be used. In 2004, over the period of one month, all services were evaluated – face to face, email, telephone, web – by students trained as Mystery Shoppers. Evaluation was based on the delivery of services using pre-established criteria identified by staff as important to measure as well as the shoppers' personal views of best practice in service.

Findings from the Library experience revealed the importance placed on the human dimension: how staff acknowledge, respond and interact with customers, the knowledge, experience and skill demonstrated and the personalisation and customisation of services to meet the individual needs of a diverse range of customers and stakeholders.

⁷ See the UOW Library website www.library.uow.edu.au/feedback/index.html

Staff Training and Development

Finding and appointing staff with the appropriate attributes is only part of the challenge of creating and sustaining a culture of service excellence. Retaining and developing existing staff to maximise human capital investment is an ongoing business task to ensure an organisation has the right people for jobs from within the organisation. It cannot be assumed that a service ethic is present – it must be defined, communicated and instilled in staff (McGregor, 2004).

The achievement of current goals and future sustainability depend primarily on our people: their capacity to learn and innovate and their ability to contribute to the fullest extent. Training and development has been valued and incorporated into our planning framework for over a decade. To ensure staff have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to deliver excellent service outcomes, a core skills suite has been identified which is fundamental to the achievement of organisational and individual goals. Training in client skills, coupled with a strong commitment to related training programs such as teamwork, feedback, Total Quality Management, provided staff with the confidence and competence to achieve goals linked to service quality.

To test the rigour of staff training and management strategies, external assessment was sought. Following a successful internal audit, application was made for evaluation against the Investors in People (IiP) standard. Accreditation as an IiP organisation would:

- *provide external verification that the Library's investment in the management and development of people is in line with best practice organisations*
- *recognise that training and development is an integral component of the Library's business strategy*
- *help identify areas for improvement*

The Investors in People (IiP) standard is made up of four principles and 23 indicators. The principles:

- An Investor in People makes a commitment from the top to develop all employees to achieve its business objectives
- An Investor in People regularly reviews the needs and plans the training and development of all employees
- An Investor in People takes action to train and develop individuals on recruitment and through their employment
- An Investor in People evaluates the investment in training and development to assess achievement and improve effectiveness

Feedback from the 2004 recertification audit process reaffirmed the Library's ability to demonstrate that *'the development of its people has improved the performance of the Library, work teams and individuals'*.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking of services provides a different lens through which to view process capability and relevance of existing performance measures. Benchmarking strategies utilised by the Library include both formal and informal benchmarking. Identification and observation of good practices occurring outside the organisation provided valid and considered reflection of internal practices. Processes benchmarked include traditional library activities such as acquisitions, cataloguing and document delivery.

More challenging was benchmarking the principles of business excellence, for instance, leadership effectiveness, communication, strategy and planning and management of change. Involvement in the former Australian Quality Awards and the Australian Business Excellence Awards offered an entrée into organisations outside the library and information sector. The Library has benchmarked with a diverse range of firms and organisations including: legal, telecommunications, pharmaceutical and health. Fundamentally, most organisations desire the same things: to be leaders in their field; to have an extensive and loyal customer base; to possess the capacity to respond to and lead change effectively; to develop skilled and knowledgeable staff and to sustain their viability and success over time. (McGregor, 2004). The

diversity of organisational practices identified through benchmarking outside the sector introduced new vigour to the examination of Library practices. The subsequent review and redesign of processes yielded significant improvements.

The most rigorous form of benchmarking and structured assessment evaluation was through the Australian Business Excellence Awards application process. A team of independent evaluators examined a comprehensive, 50 page portfolio of evidence, followed by a one and a half day site visit to evaluate performance against the 7 ABEF categories. Through this process, the Library was benchmarked against globally recognised principles of excellence. After evaluation, a feedback report was presented, identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement. The successful actioning of this feedback is reflected in the external recognition: Australian Quality Award, Achievement Level in 1996 and Australian Quality Awards for Business Excellence, Finalist 1998.

In describing the criteria for recognition, SAI-Global, Business Excellence Australia notes:

- Applicants should have a systematic approach to measuring and improving their performance
- At least three cycles of data showing positive trends is evident
- The organisation is learning and is willing to share its learnings
- A best practice culture will have been in place long enough to sustain continuing improvement and be robust in the face of the major change
- Its activities will be benchmarks for others

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The Library was assessed as meeting this criteria through winning the Australian Business Excellence Award in 2000. It had achieved its goal of developing and fostering a culture valuing service excellence. The integration of best practice principles of process management and service delivery into the day-to-day management and long term vision of the Library has resulted in:

- improved clarity of goals and purpose
- active involvement and participation of staff at all levels in achieving the mission of the organisation
- increased client and stakeholder satisfaction with Library services and
- a collective responsibility and passion for ongoing success.

Conclusion

Self assessment against recognised standards of excellence continues on a regular basis. Planned review of key activities is scheduled in an annual calendar of events and plans. The Performance Indicator Framework and Service Standards are formally reviewed every two years to test for relevance and to identify changes in process capability and to respond to the ever-changing needs of clients and stakeholders.

Client satisfaction results are benchmarked nationally, providing a new focus for continued improvement as well as offering potential for the sharing of good practices across institutions. The biennial Client Satisfaction Survey (2004) indicated that the Library provides quality service and has improved access to information resources. 91% of clients rated the overall quality of the Library as good to excellent and 88% of clients rated their overall satisfaction as good to excellent. The Library was placed in the top quartile across all assessment items and placed in the top 10 nationally across all assessment categories.

The decision to adopt a business excellence framework as a management framework for the Library has been vindicated through increased external scrutiny of higher education institutions, most notably by the Australian Quality Audit Agency (AUQA). Brendan Nelson, Australia's Federal Minister for Education (2005) has stated that 'perceptions of quality will need to be informed by freely accessible information about performance outcomes.' The development of a culture valuing assessment has positioned the Library for external scrutiny and assessment, today and for the future.

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Appendix 1

Categories and Items of the Australian Business Excellence Framework	
1.0	Leadership
1.1	Strategic Direction
1.2	Organisational Culture
1.3	Leadership throughout the Organisation
1.4	Environmental and Community Contribution
2.0	Strategy and Planning
2.1	Understanding the Business Environment
2.2	The Planning Process
2.3	Development and Application of Resources
3.0	Knowledge and Information
3.1	Collection and Interpretation of Data and Information
3.2	Integration and use of Knowledge in Decision-Making
3.3	Creation and Management of Knowledge
4.0	People
4.1	Involvement and Commitment
4.2	Effectiveness and Development
4.3	Health, Safety and Well-Being
5.0	Customer and Market Focus
5.1	Knowledge of Customers and Markets
5.2	Customer Relationship Management
5.3	Customer Perception of Value
6.0	Innovation, Quality and Improvement
6.1	Innovation Process
6.2	Supplier and Partner Processes
6.3	Management and Improvement of Processes
6.4	Quality of Products and Services
7.0	Success and Sustainability
7.1	Indicators of Success
7.2	Indicators of Sustainability