

**SUBMISSION OF THE LIBRARIES COMMITTEE  
TO THE  
INFORMATION FUTURES COMMISSION.**

**GENERAL REMARKS**

The Libraries Committee of Academic Board is charged with representing the university's interests across the full range of disciplines and users of the university's various libraries, archives, cultural collections, repositories and information technologies. The members' respective disciplinary constituencies represent that wide brief. We have consulted with each other and with others in our own disciplinary areas. For some of us, access electronically to the latest research in our areas is the highest priority, and we visit the physical library rarely. Others engage with the collections, library staff and the physical infrastructure on an almost daily basis. **Our diversity reflects the diversity of the university's staff and students and our first point is to observe that the consultation paper summary outlook and strategic choices section fails to address that diversity.** Its perspective is concentrated on digital technologies, so that the problems of physical and human infrastructure that beset the university's provision and delivery of scholarly information and materials, do not receive the prominence we had been expecting. This submission from the Libraries' Committee is in response to that summary.

**The Library as Icon**

In recent weeks, the University's International Office has been hosting an extended visit from Education Agents from Asia and the Middle East. On being taken to Trinity College and its library, they exclaimed with pleasure at the sight of shelves of books: 'Oh this looks like a real university'. They did not say this on seeing the Baillieu. Perhaps if they had spent all their time on the higher floors, they might have been more enthusiastic, but the sight of extensive book storage under an unlined ceiling, the shortage of computer stations and the long queues, and the visual impression that this university's collection is small, would have been less than impressive. This university's main library is desperately overcrowded, noisy, oppressively hot, dirty at the end of each day (especially the toilet areas which are unsanitary). Tempers become frayed waiting for access to terminals to consult the catalogue. **There is a shortage of library staff at all levels of service, from disciplinary specialists to stack workers. There is a shortage of quiet space for research students and students working on their own. The current concentration on shared social spaces in learning hubs and the libraries has many critics among students as well as staff. Above all students need working spaces that are conducive to deep thought, concentration and productivity.**

A number of colleagues whom we have consulted have struggled to articulate what the role of books and artefacts as icons of intellectual endeavour should be for students. They know it is vital, but having grown up with it, find it hard to define. The university is a special place, not in the sense of being an elitist 'place apart', but a special place for

inquiry and thought which is elitist only if it is socially exclusive. If students need only a rich social environment for learning, then we need invest only in more campus coffee shops with wireless broadband. However, they need more than nice spaces in which to interact with their peers. Just as religions worldwide provide special places for worship and prayer, so similarly a university's cultural and intellectual capital on display in its library buildings becomes the embodiment of the university's reputation. If the University wishes to build a distinctive Melbourne student experience, its historic buildings, its landscape and its libraries are the physical architecture of that distinctive experience. Coffee places can be found anywhere; a great university library is a local and national treasure. **The provision of library working spaces out of sight of books and periodicals sends messages to students that they are not expected to be users of complex extended texts, reference works or more generalised knowledge outside their narrow specialism. Visible cultural and intellectual capital is what distinguishes a serious research university from a polytechnic or specialised research institution.** The new John Curtin School at the ANU may no longer need a visible physical library, but it could not survive without the ANU central libraries.

Universities are ancient institutions that guard their independence, rigour and resources jealously. They are guardians of knowledge for the future as well as the present. Their reputation is historical, built over time by the capacity of the institution and its staff to build intellectual and cultural capital that is housed, curated, catalogued and disseminated by its libraries, archives, collections and the technologies that enable discovery and access. In turn, those connecting technologies link the university's staff and students to the global networks of authorised, peer-reviewed literature, to primary source materials and to datasets that range from the numerical and textual, to the visual, aural, and artefactual. This capital is both physical and virtual, and the reputation of a university depends on the richness of that cultural capital, its ease of use and its linkages to global knowledge networks. **Can we suggest that the University of Melbourne seeks to differentiate itself by the pursuit of intensive, extended study and scholarship by contrast with the trend for "grazing" and collecting extracts of information? This is consistent with the Melbourne Model, with reducing the number and proportion of undergraduate students and with a research-led University.**

Linkages to digital networks can be purchased by any institution; deep collections of books, journals, and manuscripts are acquired over time by the efforts of librarians, scholars, and private benefactors. Old universities have a clear advantage over new universities in the possession of this deep intellectual capital. New universities that aspire to academic prominence, purchase this depth, often at great expense: examples near to home are Monash and La Trobe, both of which built strong physical collections through strategic investment; in the US many land-grant universities have had the income from bequests to purchase major collections of papers and materials on the European markets. Thus many otherwise obscure institutions in the US have been able to attract outstanding graduate students and leading scholars to their campuses. (There are two members of the School of Historical Studies who have testified that a major consideration in their acceptance of an academic post at the University of Melbourne from overseas was the presence of the Pitt Bequest for historical monographs.)

As one senior academic (from Mathematics) noted: "If we aspire to parity of esteem with Harvard and Cambridge, we should take the purchase, housing and use of print material at least as seriously as they do. I say "at least" because we have been neglectful of this in the past, and have some way to catch up."

### **The quality of the Melbourne collection**

We are concerned that funding and space constraints over the past decade have weakened the collection. While it has areas of depth, it has been slipping behind in its collection of current monographs. At a time when books are being published, bought, borrowed and read at a steadily increasing rate, our restricted Materials Vote and shortage of space means that the library is purchasing only 5% of books published annually. No general copyright library now exists in Australia, so that non-Australian books are largely being bought only by university libraries. (The Australian National Library has explicitly ceased to purchase non-Australian works.) In specialised areas of major significance – e.g Islamic and Middle Eastern studies, Africa and development, South Asia, Latin America – very few would be collecting the necessary monographs to support serious research in this country. We are rapidly becoming uncompetitive in being able to support research in areas of profound strategic significance to Australia, our region and to the world. **There is no reason for the best postgraduates and staff in print-intensive disciplines or in contemporary studies to come to the University of Melbourne if our university library remains in steady decline.**

The digitisation of historical runs of periodicals, newspapers, and out-of-copyright literary texts by major publishers, enables electronic access with indexing that can replace the need for a physical collection that can be browsed. However, if we already hold these in hard copy, they should be preserved in closed storage in case of technological catastrophe, or more likely, a rapid increase in annual subscriptions once publishers have achieved a monopoly.

We spend less in acquisitions than Monash and our collection is beginning to fall behind our peers locally, let alone internationally. These deficiencies are illustrated by our rapidly-rising interlibrary loan costs and the fact that we have become a net borrower rather than lender in the admirable BONUS interlibrary scheme. Our collection is further eroded by the high level of theft and poor service for re-shelving, both due to funding shortfalls in paying for the necessary staff. The most common experience for library users of the Baillieu is that the books available for loan on the catalogue cannot be found on the shelves.

**We can enhance our collection by collaborative ventures with other libraries and by buying licences to digital collections, but those also cost money and the current Materials Vote is too small to enable us to take advantage of all the products that are available. The Materials Vote has declined in real value over the past half decade: we request that the University restore it at least to parity with that of Monash.**

## RESPONSE TO THE SUMMARY OUTLOOK AND STRATEGIC CHOICES

### Research

We wish to emphasise importance of peer review in scholarly literature and the fact that the refereeing and editorial processes required for publication, and the dissemination afforded by the publishers' infrastructure, are essential to citation and international standing. What is different about the literature that a university library disseminates is that it has been filtered and has authority, and that does not come cheaply. While work that is discoverable on the Internet may be more frequently cited, work that is self-published by universities without independent scholarly review, has no status. Indeed, self-publication has always been regarded a sign of failure and an impediment to success in competitive grants. Search engines like Google Scholar, as they continue to improve, connect inquirers with refereed literature. The barriers of copyright are complex but essential. **The Open Access movement**, while good for readers, has rapidly become prohibitively expensive for would-be authors and their institutions: this may not be entirely due to greed, but reflect the inherent high cost of the complex human and technological infrastructure that makes the publishing possible. **We recommend that the University relieve the library of these costs, perhaps through the Research Office, and that staff and students be discouraged from publishing in the most expensive Open Access journals.**

**There are institutional barriers, however, to individuals' mounting web pages that publicise their own research: a lack of technical support in many schools and a fussy bureaucratic restriction of styles and editorial access. This could be remedied with the wider provision of IT technical expertise in schools and departments.** Currently it can take months for mistakes to be corrected or publications or work-in-progress added.

The proposal for the University to invest in data, especially digital, storage is to some extent outside the brief of the libraries committee. **While we should be providing a capacity for storage comparable to our peers, we should also explore taking advantage of our recent MOU with the ANU to participate, (as we have been invited) in a consortium for the National Data Archive.** (We already have close collaboration with the ANU Butlin Archives.) They have an electronic data expertise we lack, whereas we have a digital archival expertise they covet. Deborah Mitchell has had recent success in persuading NCRIS to extend its funding to humanities and social science computing, and a national data storage at the national university would be a better national strategy for a data commons and concentration of expertise. In hard science, data are more commonly managed by multi-institutional consortia that can move from university to university. The University of Melbourne would need to be able to claim an exclusive investment in the creation of a dataset to have a justifiable claim to 'ownership'. (This is certainly not the case in the example given in the Consultation paper regarding the convict records, which belong to the Government of Tasmania and its archives.)

**That said, this committee would fully support the University's investing in significantly bigger high performance-computing capacity. However, this should have no impact, especially a negative impact on the other real and urgent needs of the library and its physical collections.**

The deficiencies in research training in fact link to some in teaching and learning. The library has lost a critical part of its expert workforce in the last decades: that is knowledge and bibliographic experts who can work between collections and their users. This applies across the disciplines, and the submission from MDHS makes specific mention of it. If we are to provide an outstanding research environment, and especially research training, we need to emulate the great US and UK scholarly libraries where specialist scholars are employed by the library to curate and connect users with their special collections. **We recommend the trial employment of retired or semi-retired scholars, perhaps on a part-time basis, to work under the Director for Collections, directly with students and researchers enabling them to make the best use of our deep collections. Such a scheme could also apply in many science areas, where training in literature searching requires advanced knowledge a discipline, a level of expertise that cannot be asked of librarians. In addition, we note that the library is severely understaffed at the service level of basic librarianship and knowledge management.**

We recommend that the library reassess its collections, both current and research, for accessibility. It is not necessary to have everything on open shelves, but if lower use works are to be stored offsite, they must be properly catalogued. **The first priority, before rationalisation of the storage of the physical collection can begin, is the commitment to a completion of all the unfinished electronic cataloguing (including the cultural collections) and the revision of any collections that are to be put in closed storage, for the accuracy of the catalogue description.** Too many of our books in foreign languages, if they are catalogued at all, are done so badly with poor translations. (These are short-term projects that could be undertaken by multi-lingual postgraduates and retired academic staff.) As for the Archives, we should commit to the enhancement and completion of online searchable guides to records of all collections with the University of Melbourne Archives: word-processing the large backlog of typed lists for transfer to the Web; filling out descriptions in existing on-line catalogues, and scanning and cataloguing for on-line access the collection of photographs of which only a small proportion (5000) now appears."

**That said, it is the open access of the research collection in the ERC that sets the student experience of this campus apart from our peers in this country: to lose that, for our best students, is to lose a very important part of our distinctiveness.**

### **Learning and Teaching**

We appreciate the strong desire of many faculties and schools in the University to a renewal of precinct and specialist libraries, to enrich the student experience, build cohort cultures and focus students on their disciplines. This we support. However, at the same time this cuts across the Melbourne Model's aspirations to encourage interdisciplinarity, in particular at postgraduate study and project research. Moreover, we would be turning our back on the international trends for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary responses to complex problems and systems. To have all the economics and economic social science collection geographically isolated from the 'main games' on campus, would be a retrograde step. We will return to this dilemma in our final recommendation.

The disciplinary experts that we recommend for research could make a major difference to students' engagement with research materials and support small group teaching, reducing teaching costs in saving tutors' time. With masters and PhD students, they could play a critical role in finding and shaping research topics to the available resources and then in training students in advanced use of those resources. This is a task best suited to senior experienced researchers and would enable us to retain the expertise of our retiring staff (a recommendation of the 2020 summit about keeping the intellectual capital of the older generation in the life of the society and economy).

We are also concerned by some of the assumptions about student learning in the paper. **Students have many different learning styles and our systems need to support that diversity.** Many, especially in the humanities, dislike collaborative work and all students need to spend time working alone on problems, texts, projects, models or images. They prefer private quiet space combined with the opportunity to break out into social learning and interaction. While students desire online finding access, discovery is only the beginning of their engagement with material. At some time, they have to spend time with a text or problem. Most still prefer to work from texts that are printed out or in print form. This year, first year students in a large university breadth subject have shown great reluctance to read online for any length of time.

**More importantly, most synthesising work – such as writing – requires the management of multiple texts and sources simultaneously, and as our mathematician noted 'Simultaneous work on more than a couple of text sources is problematic on a modest-sized computer screen, but it is easy to leaf through and have open a dozen sources.'** If we are to support the way students and scholars actually work, we would need to provide multiple screens and a level of infrastructure for which we have neither the space nor the funds. It would be worthwhile investigating whether the use of computers to store research notes has actually led to a decline in completion rates in those disciplines where the data are in multiple note form that is difficult to sort and assess on a screen. On the other hand, especially for collaborative work where it might be cost-effective, we would like to see at least a trial of the ways in which a large screen or several screens or other devices might be used to simulate or enhance the collation or information from multiple sources. This could be a real research problem to be undertaken in the "Centre/Institute for Information Science (or Informatics)" that has been proposed in the submission from MDHS. Such a Centre or Institute would raise the profile of the University in the Library arena, attract grant funding and provide a focus for development of new expertise in information studies.

The management of personal 'pdf' libraries is currently being met by numerous open source and private software groups and the library has no need to provide this sort of service (eg Zotero from Mozilla, Papers, iPapers etc). At the individual level, research groups, commercial companies, open-source enthusiasts and research groups are the cutting edge of innovation in data management: we should be wary of spending scarce funds on reinventing wheels, while new wheels are appearing almost on a daily basis.

Finally, we wish to say something about generic skills. The research paper currently before Academic Board takes a limited view of generic skills, one that could fit secondary schools or technical colleges just as well as a university. We would contend

that the generic skills to be gained from university study include research skills, the ability to read, comprehend and manage extended texts, critically access and use professional literature, and the capacity to summarise and synthesise data, theory, textual and visual material. These tertiary professional skills cannot be developed in an academic culture that promotes hasty work amidst noise and distraction, uncritical use of the Internet and non-authoritative sources, and promotes the reading and use of abstracts and short texts and extracts. **If we are to produce outstanding graduates, they need to have professional intellectual skills.** Employers are often ill-informed about education and reluctant to assume costs of on-the-job training. They are a necessary part of the conversation about education and training, but they should not be the key drivers.

### KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER & LINKING THE STRANDS: A GATEHOUSE RESEARCH LIBRARY

**We request consideration of a new building to bring together many of these aspirations and needs: a named and iconic building, dedicated to advanced research, housing the research collections of all the faculties, and a Centre/Institute for Information Science/Studies as proposed by MDHS. The Libraries Committee recommends that this Centre have a wider brief to support and research integrative activities to promote interdisciplinarity, and communication and interaction with the wider community for knowledge transfer.** In addition to its e-research, it would include academics with expertise in the sociology of knowledge and knowledge communication, who could work on the theoretical and applied problems of interdisciplinarity in teaching and research. Another group could work on the skills and problems of knowledge brokerage between the ever-expanding cultures of expertise of techno-scientific societies, and the challenges these present to democratic governance. It would thus be a gatehouse to the university's intellectual capital embodied in its book, archive and cultural collections, digital technologies and collections and in its visible, accessible and dedicated engagement with the most difficult problems of knowledge politics, teaching and learning and interdisciplinary research. It might provide leadership across the university in science communication, for instance. This building could contain and showcase selected cultural collections, rare books, access to archives and special visual and audio collections. And it should provide public spaces and ICT tools that directly engage with the politics of knowledge, citizenship and democratic practice. **It should build a world-class reputation for innovation in information sciences, library practice, integrating technologies across knowledge domains, and the theory and practice of knowledge transfer.**

It should contain a **magnificent scholars' library**, probably as series of specialist readings rooms, open to those with a reader's ticket and provided with speedy book and materials delivery to and from precinct libraries, university repositories and CARM. A reader's ticket should be obtainable by staff, associates, research students both for thesis and course work, research staff, benefactors, and members of the public who have a valid research purpose, (eg not family history). It should provide Carrels to research

students and staff that are reviewed annually for frequency of use, (a named Carrel might be an inducement to smaller bequests). The actual research rooms might also have naming rights independent of the building. They should also showcase the university's cultural collections – art works, museum collections etc. They should become as photographed and iconic as the cloisters, but they should but unreservedly modern.

**This research library should house the ERC collection, and the research collections of all faculties, thereby enabling and promoting interdisciplinarity.** The book and hard-copy collection would ideally be underground (for environmental and cost reasons), with moving compactus to enable browsing for limited time in the stacks. The use of offsite stores for material of very low use, duplicate copies and runs of journals currently available digitally, would remain.

It should provide access to advanced scholarly ICT and virtual conference and teaching facilities, with studios and external public screens. It might also house a small centre of Interdisciplinarity that provides a **communication node for interdisciplinarity in both teaching and research across the university (perhaps a home for university breadth teaching). This could be part of the proposed research Centre/Institute).**

The building should ideally have a street front, with a lecture theatre, seminar rooms and small museum spaces. This should be open and welcoming to the public. The most suitable position would be the corner of Swanston and Grattan Streets, next door to the School of Graduate Research, with which it should have a special relationship supporting and enriching the campus experience of research students. It would also be closer to the centre of gravity of the university as it moves south of Grattan Street. **It would also provide an iconic gateway to the university from the city.**

It could contain a studio for e-scholarship and promote the connection of schools and public libraries to the University of Melbourne **knowledge transfer node** in this building. There could be an academic team in the proposed Centre/Institute dedicated to the theoretical and practical leadership of Knowledge Transfer in the university curriculum and research cultures. To further this, by integrating more closely with the online catalogues of the major state cultural institutions, it could provide a special linkage between the vast collections in natural history and Indigenous Cultures and cultural history in the Museum Victoria catalogue (currently over 1.3 billion described items, many with digital images), the Herbarium, the SLV, NGV and PROV, as well as regional and suburban libraries, regional galleries and museums. **The virtual gateway to the intellectual capital of the University of Melbourne should be on every home PC and in every local library and school.**

It should be architecturally distinctive i.e. internationally recognisable – requiring a design competition rather than a tender to a minimal budget) with an expected life of one hundred years rather than the usual 20-30 years, ecologically innovative, and have public spaces that welcome the wider community, so that it becomes an icon of the University's and the City of Melbourne's dedication to scholarship and knowledge transfer. It should be an exciting place to visit. It should foster collaborative relationships by linked catalogues and shared metadata with the SLV, the NGV, MV and the PROV,

to make Melbourne a 'Knowledge City'. It should be distinctive enough to equal the Old Quad as a visual symbol of the University of Melbourne in the C21st, but be visible and accessible without having to "enter" the University territory - a barrier to the public and a symbol of being a daunting 'place apart'. It would make the University of Melbourne a public institution in everyday life.

**Professor Janet McCalman (chair)**

**Professor Geoff Stevens**

**Professor Peter Harris**

**Dr Cecily Close (Convocation)**

**Associate Professor Richard Pennell**

**Associate Professor Chris Marshall**

**Dr Jen Davoren**

**Aaron Mannion (UMPA)**

**Professor Steve Howard, (absent)**

**Professor Tony Sagona (absent)**

**Allegra Reinalda (Student Union - absent)**

**Dr Angela Bridgland, University Librarian (present for discussion but did not contribute to report)**

**Mr Jock Murphy, Director of Collections (minute taker)**