

INFORMATION FUTURES 2008

SUBMISSION FROM A GROUP OF FELLOWS OF THE SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

1. The Group noted the Information Futures project with approval and thanked the organisers for the opportunity to participate. They did feel that there was a gap in the process as there did not seem to be an opportunity to comment on the report to be prepared from the consultations.
2. The quote from Abbott that *library research, as any real adept knows, consists in the first instance in knowing, when you run across something suddenly interesting, that you ought to have wanted to look for it in the first place.* (p. 9 of the Consultation Paper) rang particularly true for the Group and several of the following points flow from this.
3. The storage of the physical Collections was of considerable concern. There was no serious argument with the storage off-campus of little used portions of the Collections – to be determined by use of data available via the Loans system. However, it was agreed that, ideally, such storage should be browsable (very important), be within a reasonable distance from the campus and be accessible via public transport. The Archives site in Dawson Street was noted as an example of a site that fulfilled several of these requirements. The possibility of putting additional floors onto the north end of the Baillieu Library as a book tower was also considered to be an excellent option.
4. If the decision were made to put the storage facility a long distance from the campus – the SLV facility near Ballarat was noted as an example – then really excellent retrievable facilities would be needed and the collection should still be browsable. Even the CARM Store was considered to be too distant to fulfil the requirements in 3 above and qualified as a distant storage facility.
5. Major requirements for intensive research in the Arts, especially History, include a good browsable collection, and a quiet place in which to use it. Primary source materials which exist in published form (which Abbott described, p. 8 of the Consultation paper) must be available in an accessible, browsable location – they are used in intensive bursts and often in a serendipitous fashion which is thwarted by the off-site storage of the Collections.
6. Of equal concern was the status of the current Materials Vote. It was agreed that far more money should be allocated to the development of the Collections, in the broadest meaning of this term, to maintain the real standing of the University as a research institution. It was felt that this was diminishing even in comparison with comparable universities in Australia.

7. The question posed on pp 22/23 of the Consultation paper as to whether areas of research priority should be reflected in the way that materials funds were allocated was discussed. It was agreed that such a move would have to be dependent on a general understanding of, and agreement on, what the priorities were, which is currently not the case.
8. In the context of resource allocation and competing priorities, it was felt that the Cultural Collections might be in need of review. Each collection should be asked to provide a one page justification for their continued growth or maintenance if they have stopped growing. The use of the Collections for teaching purposes was considered to be a significant justification for continued maintenance. The maintenance of some of the resources held in the University Archives, notably the various business archives held there, was cause for special concern, particularly in the light of the role and interests of the SLV.
9. Abbott's comment that there was a strong correlation between heavy users of print and heavy users of electronic sources and that *If you are going to have a serious research library, you have to have both a physical library and a technological one* rang true with the group. The trend in some countries to diminish the presence of dedicated library facilities was noted with some alarm. It was noted that some universities which were described as operating without a library were in fact heavily dependent on the resources offered by other institutions. The Open University home page provides information to students on how to access other university libraries in the SCONUL library system across the UK, in the SCURL libraries in Scotland and has, traditionally, relied also on the public library service.
10. There was concern expressed in a number of ways at the effects of electronic resources on learning by students. These could probably be summed up in a strong feeling that the university needed to make special efforts to ensure that students were instructed in how to use the resources available online – how to distinguish good from bad sites, how to apply a critical approach to resources only available online. The use of Wikipedia and Google as primary resources was particularly remarked on as unsatisfactory.
11. While the use of online journals is now a part of everyday research routines, and the acquisition of very old monographs such as those on Early English Books Online was quite acceptable, there was general and enthusiastic agreement that currently published monographs should be purchased in paper format. It was impossible to read such books online with any comfort; reading them in a library in what was often a very noisy environment was unacceptable, while few private individuals have the physical infrastructure (eg large screens) at home to make reading online feasible.
12. The Group also felt that the purchase of current monographs only in electronic format would result in the need for considerable printing by students, with bad

environmental effects, and also noted that this transfers costs to the students which would not exist if sufficient paper copies of a book were purchased.

13. The Group agreed that there was a need for really excellent, reliable IT infrastructure on campus if increasing reliance was to be placed on electronic resources for research and teaching.

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