

Managing Library and IT Services Within A Higher Education Public Private Environment

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Abstract

Public private partnerships (PPP) are arrangements used predominantly by state governments to develop infrastructure. It is a model which has been applied particularly effectively in Australia to develop toll ways and bridges in the major metropolitan areas of Australia. CQU has applied a variation of the PPP model to deliver university education to overseas students at its Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney, and Melbourne campuses. By its very nature this model has influenced the manner in which Library and IT services are delivered to CQU students on these campuses. This paper will explore some of the issues and tensions associated in the provision of IT and Library services within the CQU public private partnership framework.

Public Private Partnerships

Public private partnerships (PPPs) involve the private sector delivering goods and services traditionally provided by public sector. This entails a shift in the role of the public sector from supplying to buying services, with private firms designing, constructing, financing, operating and maintaining infrastructure, and the public sector paying for these services. Key features of PPPs include:

- the private sector invests in infrastructure and provides related services to the government,
- the government retains responsibility for the delivery of core services, and
- arrangements between the government and the private sector are governed by long-term contract. It specifies the services the private sector has to deliver and to what standards. (Webb and Pulle, 2002, p. i)

PPPs have most noticeably been arranged for physical infrastructure projects such roads, bridges, and airports. However, one of the most common forms of PPP is primary and secondary schooling where private, community, and religious organizations build and manage schools in return for varying levels of government funding. The PPP model is now being applied to the education of overseas higher education students, with public universities entering into arrangements with private organizations to operate and maintain operations while the university remains responsible for standards and core services.

Overseas Students and Central Queensland University

Overseas students are an important facet of the Australian higher education environment. DEST through its branch, Australian Education International report that there were just over 172,000 international higher education students in the country at the end of November 2006. (Australian Education International, 2006)

According to figures released by DEST on 2005 enrolments, overseas students on temporary entry permits accounted for 18.92% of the total Equivalent Full-time Student Load (EFTSL). (Department of Education Science and Technology, 2006) Charles Sturt University had the lowest percentage of overseas student on temporary entry permits enrolment at 4.75% of EFTSL, while New Generation University Central Queensland University had the highest percentage of students on temporary entry permits enrolled at 55.51%.(Department of Education Science and Technology 2006). Table 1 shows the ten universities with the highest enrolment of overseas students on temporary entry permits.

Provider	Temporary Entry Permit (TEP) EFTSL	TEP EFTSL as a % of total EFTSL	Total EFTSL
Central Queensland University	10489	55.51%	18895
Monash University	9180	22.71%	40429
The University of Melbourne	7972	23.65%	33713
The University of Sydney	6865	19.06%	36024
The University of New South Wales	6697	24.76%	27051
Macquarie University	6225	31.30%	19891
RMIT University	5939	21.11%	28128
Griffith University	5780	23.13%	24992
Curtin University of Technology	5538	21.20%	26118
University of Technology, Sydney	5301	24.10%	21997

(Source: Department of Education Science and Technology 2006)

Each university has its own distinctive way of servicing and supporting overseas students. Approaches include on-campus integration with Australian students, delivery of programs through third party providers such as Russo Institute or Taylors College, and the development of discrete campuses for international students.

Central Queensland University is a regionally based university which has relatively few overseas students attending its 'home' campuses at Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Emerald, Gladstone and Mackay. It has been successful in developing campuses specifically for overseas students in conjunction with its commercial partner, C Management Services (C_MS) at Brisbane, the Gold

Coast, Sydney and Melbourne. With the exception of the Gold Coast, each campus is located in an office block in the central business district. CQU manages the academic infrastructure including assessment and certification while C_MS provides campus management and student support. Each campus is branded CQU despite the fact that virtually all staff are employed by C_MS.

The success of CQU in this highly competitive arena has not gone unnoticed. The University has won two national export awards for education, and various Queensland and regional export awards. The University has also been subject to much criticism in the higher education press regarding its operations, and by the AUQA in its report. (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2006) The Queensland Auditor-General reported that in 2005 CQU received 46% of its revenue from overseas students. (Livingstone, 2006) CQU obviously has a high dependence on its overseas students operations.

This model of delivery has been in place since the first campus opened in Sydney in 1994. Since this time CQU's Information Technology Division (ITD) and Division of Library Services (CQU Library) has been involved in the provision of services and support either directly or indirectly. Over this decade or so, services and support have evolved as CQU and C_MS have developed and strengthened their relationship. Despite the fact that each partner has been heavily dependent on the other for its ongoing success, the relationship has by no means always been plain sailing due to differing cultures and organizational climates - the harder edged commercial organization and the educationally focused university.

Information Technology Issues

Although IT Service provision appears transparent to students, the provision of IT services is jointly shared between CQU ITD and C_MS. Originally, various aspects of IT service provision (e.g. Authentication) were handled by C_MS. The model has now evolved to the following:

- Provision and support of all desktop computers for staff and students is handled by C_MS IT support staff. CMS IT Support staff act as the first point of contact for international students, however ITD does not prohibit students at C_MS managed campuses from contacting ITD Helpdesk.
- CQU IT Division is responsible for campus internet connection and associated end equipment. (i.e. network to the door)
- C_MS is responsible for all internal campus network infrastructure and telephony services.
- CQU IT Division is responsible for authentication services for both staff and students.
- CQU IT Division is responsible for the provision of corporate applications such as Student Administration, Learning Management Systems, Student Portal and email system.

- C_MS is responsible for staff email and calendaring system and other systems necessary for business operations (e.g. HR and Finance System)
- CQU oversees ICT policy and standards as well as IT Security.

The IT Support model has evolved over the lifetime of the C_MS-CQU partnership. Originally the IT Service arrangements between C_MS and ITD were loosely defined by overarching contract between CQU and C_MS. This contract lacked the specificity required to deal with an ever increasing utilization of IT services in education delivery. As issues arose and technologies developed, this arrangement has now evolved to a Service Level Agreement that explicitly addresses IT Services. The Service Level Agreement is based on 'best practice' principles from IT Information Library (ITIL). The Service Level Agreement clearly defines service components, responsibilities and targets for C_MS and ITD. These service targets consist of measurable items such as 'Service Availability' and 'Service Resolution' times. At the management level, CQU IT Division management meet with C_MS IT management on a regular basis to address service issues and projects. On a daily basis, IT Service incidents are logged and handled through normal ITD Helpdesk and C_MS IT Helpdesk.

The commercial nature of the partnership, strong growth in international student numbers over the last 2-3 years, and the increasing utilization of IT in teaching have created a number of issues. Some of these issues like workload and flexibility to meet the business needs are not new to higher education institutions but are arguably more acute in a commercial partnership. Some of the key issues that have had to be addressed in this partnership are outlined.

CQU and C_MS have different business processes for the same activity. This frequently places pressure on CQU ITD's Corporate Applications and Infrastructure section. An example is the enrolment process. CQU's enrolment process is completely online whereas C_MS has a facilitated enrolment process. The facilitated enrolment process consists of a student being guided through course enrolment and fee payment by C_MS staff prior to commencement of a term.

The introduction of new technologies into international campus operation is often problematic due the IT Service model. For example, the introduction of convergent technologies like Voice-Over-IP, Video Conferencing and video streaming by CQU into international campuses is difficult due the lack of ownership and control over internal network infrastructure. This is now being addressed through the development of appropriate ICT standards and definitions in Service Level Agreement.

The implementation of University wide strategic initiatives that improve service delivery to both staff and students require comprehensive service guarantees and additional controls. CQU implemented authentication systems at AIC

campuses to ensure that students and staff had the same password for all IT Resources in 2003. Previously, C_MS created independent username/passwords for staff and students at AIC campuses. The final implementation provided an in-house application which allowed C_MS IT staff to undertake account management (i.e. password changes) with service guarantees around application availability.

CQU's internal procedures and policies restrict ITD's ability to provide a cost-effective service at time of need to our commercial partner. The current Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) makes it difficult for ITD to provide infrastructure support for C_MS during the hours they operate. Each AIC campus generally is open longer each week day and on weekends, whereas ITD staff availability is essentially restricted to standard business hours. ITD has had to deal with working around daylight saving in Sydney and Melbourne as well as supporting campuses in Fiji and New Zealand which operate in different time zones.

The rapid growth in student at international campuses in recent years and C_MS commercial culture to 'grow' new markets has placed extreme pressure on ITD staff and infrastructure. To ensure that the organizations remains flexible and agile, ITD are investing in various technologies to assist with this business requirement such as Storage Area Networks (SAN), GRID technologies, and server virtualization (VMWARE).

Library Issues

Unlike ITD, CQU Library has been directly involved in the delivery of services to students. Originally, library staff and resources were provided by CQU Library. Over time this model has changed to where:

- on campus library services are delivered by C_MS employees, with information literacy support provided by CQU Library.
- Print resources are provided by C_MS but sourced via CQU Library,
- CQU Library is responsible for the provision of online library resources and services, and
- CQU oversees policy and quality control.

This model has developed over time, and as the model has developed issues have arisen which have needed to be addressed, understood and negotiated. At the management level issues are addressed by the CQU Library C_MS User Group which meets on a regular basis. Operationally, AIC Library staff liaise directly with CQU Library staff, and AIC library staff are invited to participate in a number of CQU Library committees and working parties.

Since the first CQU Australian International Campus (AIC) was opened in Sydney in 1994, an ongoing topic for discussion and debate at management level has been, "what should the library look like". The CQU University Librarian at the time envisioned that the libraries should be electronic libraries with hard

copy support provided by already established libraries in the vicinity. This soon proved to be impractical as the technology at the time proved to be problematic, necessary material wasn't available electronically, and AIC students, generally, were not accustomed to using technology to the extent required. Regardless of how resources would be accessed, support was, and continues to be, provided by professional librarians. It soon became apparent that set texts and recommended readings were required to be readily available to students. As the number of students grew on each campus there became a need to provide additional material. The situation today is that at their campus library students have access to:

- a highly focused print collection of set texts, recommended readings, and support material,
- all of CQU's electronic resources, and
- host libraries in each metropolitan area,
- in addition to access to other university libraries via University Libraries Australia.

Combined, the AIC libraries now have a monograph acquisitions budget larger than libraries directly controlled by CQU. In certain areas, the AICs also have more modern and up to date collections than their Central Queensland counterparts.

Students' perceptions of the AIC libraries has not always been favorable. Many of them arrive from less well developed countries with a perception of what a university library should look like. Needless to say there has been considerable disappointment when they first encounter their AIC library. Both partners have worked quite hard addressing this perception by emphasizing the resources available online. However, despite these efforts client satisfaction with collections and facilities at AIC libraries is lower than that recorded for Central Queensland libraries.

CQU Library currently acquires and subscribes to all library resources available to students on the AICs. CQU Library is reimbursed for the cost of these resources plus a fee for staff time and materials. In effect CQU Library plays the role of supplier to the AIC libraries. This has put considerable pressure on CQU Library's Technical Services section due to the volume of material being processed, AIC specific demands and accountability requirements, and the overall complexity of the operation. Issues such as efficiencies and cost control would be addressed regardless, however needing to meet AIC timelines and meeting their financial accountability issues are additional burdens that would normally be met by a vendor and not a library.

Many of the overseas students recruited by CQU, and no doubt most other Australian universities, are from developing countries. English is their second language, they may not be as IT literate as Western students, they have differing cultural perspectives, they have been educated in systems that have adopted

different pedagogy, and they are under enormous pressure to succeed due to costs and family expectations. Consequently, the servicing of students at AIC libraries can be significantly different to how students are serviced in Central Queensland. With information literacy classes for example, lessons prepared by CQU Library liaison librarians may be modified to meet the language skills of students. This may mean that classes are shorter due to high concentration levels required by the students, or it may mean that classes take longer to deliver in order to cover the same amount of material. AIC library staff offer a more personalized service for students at the information desk by providing one-on-one instruction and assistance, whereas staff at a Central Queensland campus library will offer one-on-one service as an exception rather than the norm, preferring to encourage students to develop their skills independently.

These different approaches to achieve the same outcome, ie successful students, can be a source of tension between AIC library staff and Central Queensland library staff. Although the desired outcome is the same, the means to achieve this outcome requires distinct philosophical and pedagogical approaches due to the different operating environments.

C_MS and CQU have developed a service level agreement, which is soon to be implemented, to ensure services are effectively delivered and that costs are fully recouped. This agreement will be implemented across the university to all relevant academic and support areas. For library matters this agreement covers all services provided by CQU Library to C_MS. It covers such things as turnaround times on order requests, processing charges, information literacy support, library IT systems and the library webpage. It does not however address those services provided by C_MS which are delivered on behalf of CQU, such as library facilities and library service delivery.

CQU has a responsibility to all CQU students for governance, the curriculum and the quality of its academic program. Library services are regarded as a key factor in academic quality. Accordingly, the Library Director was 'invited' to develop a document which detailed standards and would provide a basis for auditing. CQU Library Standards was approved by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee in October 2006. This document was developed to ensure a consistent standard of library service is delivered across all CQU campuses or where CQU students are being supported, ie CQ campus libraries, AIC libraries, libraries at overseas locations, and study support centres. The document covers resources, information literacy, facilities, staff qualifications, professional development, reporting, planning, and client feedback. CQU Library staff and representatives from C_MS were consulted in its development. 2007 will be the first year where audits will be held against the document. (Central Queensland University Library, 2006)

Conclusion

There are a number of similarities in the experiences of ITD and CQU Library. The similarities stem from factors such as separate management and control of staff and facilities, different operating environments, the need to ensure high levels of standards of service delivery to CQU students regardless of their location, different organizational cultures, and the requirement of university functions to provide commercial services.

Despite occasional tensions between CQU and C_MS in the delivery of IT and library services, managers of both divisions along with their colleagues in C_MS have established co-operative and professional working relationships. This co-operative relationship has enabled CQU to undertake joint initiatives and projects that deliver benefits to students, CQU and C_MS.

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