

Library makes business finals

The University of Wollongong Library is one of six finalists in the 1998 Australian Quality Awards for Business Excellence — the first library to make the finals in the award's eleven-year history.

'The awards demonstrate that improvements in performance and cost-effectiveness are possible regardless of whether your bottom-line is profit or service to others,' Margie Jantti, the library's quality co-ordinator, said.

The library is competing against a combination of private and public companies in the finals such as the Sydney and Melbourne offices of the law firm, Clayton Utz, and South East Water of Victoria.

Conducted by the Australian Quality Council, the awards assess and measure business improvement within an organisation in seven categories: leadership, strategy and planning, information and analysis, people, customer focus, processes, products and services, organisational performance.

According to university librarian Felicity McGregor, the implementation of the quality-management framework was a unique learning experience.

'The framework was an excellent management tool which helped us to reflect on our values and beliefs — what actually drives our decision making and strategy development,' she said.

'In staff surveys commitment to values rates at over eighty-seven per cent. The belief that people are the key to success was and still is the cornerstone of our quality philosophy.'

The library's improved performance statistics are impressive:

- sixty-three per cent reduction in delivery times for new acquisitions from 1996–98;
- loans processing times reduced by twenty per cent from 1996–98;



Quality co-ordinator, Margie Jantti and university librarian Felicity McGregor review the library's strategic plan

- fifty per cent reduction in binding turnaround times in 1997–98;
- forty-seven per cent increase in the number of databases available by remote access since 1997;
- forty per cent improvement in participation in information literacy programs since 1994;
- sixty-six per cent improvement in service standard for cataloguing of new resources; and
- formation of a Strategic Realignment Team to evaluate outsourcing potential.

Ms McGregor said the business cost of implementing the framework was considered an investment for the future. The library would continue to develop partnerships with key suppliers which had already resulted in significant improvements to key processes.

Innovation and continuous improvement was crucial in a higher education environment of reduced funding and greater accountability but there was also a growing expectation of customised courses and services which can be electronically delivered — regardless of location.

Ms McGregor said the library saw its main challenge as maximising the potential of the electronic revolution to support student-centred teaching and the university's expanding research program in a community of nearly 15 000 students and staff.

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The library did not win the award which was judged on 11 November. Ms Jantti told *inCite*: 'We are all a bit disappointed, but just making the finals was an affirmation of our quality management practices.'