

UQL Cyberschool – collaborating with secondary schools to connect their students with university library services and resources: a case study

Diane Nibbs

UQL Cyberschool, The University of Queensland Library, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia
d.nibbs@library.uq.edu.au

Nicole Slinger

UQL Cyberschool, The University of Queensland Library, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia
n.slinger@library.uq.edu.au

Heather Todd

Learning and Research Services, The University of Queensland Library, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia
heather.todd@uq.edu.au



Copyright © 2016 by **Dianne Nibbs**, **Nicole Slinger** and **Heather Todd**. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

The University of Queensland Library (UQL) has been offering an outreach program for secondary schools for more than 15 years. The program - UQL Cyberschool, which is funded by the UQ Library, connects schools and their students to university library services and resources. It aims to develop students' confidence and skills in using tertiary level information resources to assist with the transition from school to university and to prepare students for success at school, university and beyond. Schools may join the UQL Cyberschool community for free and access many free and high-quality information resources through the UQL Cyberschool website (<https://www.library.uq.edu.au/library-services/services-for-secondary-schools>). The UQL Cyberschool also negotiates significantly discounted subscriptions to commercial online databases on behalf of schools who wish to extend the resources available to their students. In 2015 32 vendors offered 186 products to over 450 member schools. In addition, UQL Cyberschool works with vendors to trial products for up to 30 days.

While some schools only use the virtual services many do visit the St Lucia campus. In 2015 UQL Cyberschool delivered 84 classes to 1869 students, conducted 63 tours and worked with schools on many 'self-guided visits'. Local students are able to borrow from the University Library and over 600 have chosen to do this.

To support ongoing professional development for teacher librarians, the UQL Cyberschool provides an annual seminar. In 2015 the theme was Social media and the promotion of school libraries that addressed the use of social media in libraries along with marketing strategies used in various schools

for library promotion. The day is sponsored by several vendors who are given the opportunity to demonstrate their products.

In 2015 an 'extended' outreach program was established for schools that were either geographically remote, were in a low socio-economic area or had a high level of indigenous students. This is in line with the UQ strategy to attract high performing students regardless of their background. Sponsorship funds from the seminar were used to support a number of students from rural Queensland to visit the campus for an "on-campus experience day". UQL Cyberschool worked closely with the UQ Office of Prospective Students and Student Equity who provided refreshments and visits to a residential college. Feedback was very positive so future extended outreach programs will be offered.

Keywords: schools, libraries, universities

Background

The University of Queensland Library (UQL) has been offering a program for secondary schools for over 15 years. This program - UQL Cyberschool, is funded by the UQ Library and connects schools and their students to university library services and resources. It aims to ease the transition from school to university, whilst also providing benefits to the University as a whole, and aligns with the three pillars of learning, discovery and engagement, which underpin the Mission, Vision and Values as outlined in *The University of Queensland Strategic Plan 2014–2017*.

The UQL Cyberschool was officially launched in August 1999 by the then Queensland Minister for Education, Dean Wells and The University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor Professor John Hay. In his speech launching the service Professor Hay said that the UQL Cyberschool project was designed to help smooth the transition from school to University... "*Students arrive at university already equipped with tertiary level literature research skills...*"

UQL Cyberschool began with a program involving three local secondary schools being offered substantially discounted access to an online database. This was expanded to allow subscription access to all Queensland high schools. UQL Cyberschool currently has 762 member schools across Australia and also overseas with 995 individual contacts.

UQL Cyberschool has received a number of awards in recognition of its services to secondary schools and was also a finalist in the Australian Awards for University Teaching.

Schools may join the UQL Cyberschool community at no cost and access many free and high-quality information resources through the UQL Cyberschool website.

The role of UQL Cyberschool meets many of the key objectives in *The University of Queensland Library [Strategic Plan 2013-2017](#)*, being:

The Library is integral to learning, discovery and engagement at The University of Queensland. We provide access to high quality scholarly information resources, client focused services, and physical and online spaces that support teaching and research at the University.

We provide pathways to enrich learning and research experiences that enable engagement with the University and the wider community.

The mission of UQL Cyberschool is to meet these key objectives by providing secondary school students with access to high quality, scholarly information resources, both physical and online, in order to provide pathways and enrich their research experience during their senior secondary years.

This paper will elaborate highlights of the service, the benefits to students, many of whom have chosen to study at UQ, as well as teachers, UQ Library and the University. Initiatives planned for 2016/2017 will also be discussed.

UQL Cyberschool services

 <p>Teacher librarians & teachers</p> <p>Come to UQ for a tour or training session, find out about products you can trial and purchase and access teaching resources.</p> <p>Explore our services > Register for the 2016 Cyberschool Seminar ></p>	 <p>Students</p> <p>Information on visiting and borrowing from the Library and free online resources.</p> <p>Borrow books or access eResources ></p>
---	--

<https://web.library.uq.edu.au/library-services/services-for-secondary-schools>

Organisational Structure

The UQL Cyberschool team consists of two part-time coordinators - both teacher librarians with over 25 years of experience and is situated within the Learning and Research Services team of the University Library, sitting within the Client Services area.

UQL Cyberschool staff have close links with Library management on various levels, reporting ultimately to the Director, Learning and Research Services, whose role is to oversee the development of policy and services in the areas of client services, research evaluation, data management and scholarly publishing. UQL Cyberschool's immediate supervisor is also responsible for 11 liaison librarians in the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty team; the Business, Economics and Law Faculty team; as well as UQ College, which caters to mature age students prior to entering university.

Being a part of this organizational structure has benefits for both UQL Cyberschool and the University Library, enabling UQL Cyberschool staff to keep abreast of library procedures and policies at the University. The main clientele, secondary students and teachers, are regarded as one of the significant client groups within the library structure, and are catered for accordingly.

The University of Queensland Library also supports the University's aims to attract the best students, prepare them for their transition to University study and to retain first year students.

UQL Cyberschool plays an integral role in this aim, easing the transition from a one-room school library to a 15 branch university library with over 2 million physical items, which can often seem daunting to first year students.

The University can see great value in having over 2000 prospective students visit the campus per year as part of the UQL Cyberschool program. Raising the aspirations of prospective students is a major benefit to the University and the Library as it will increase the numbers of people placing UQ at the top of their preferences for university courses. One student attending the St Lucia campus as part of a UQL Cyberschool outreach visit was overheard saying *“I don’t care if it costs one million dollars, I’m coming here”*.

Students will also be better prepared and have prior knowledge of the actual Library surrounds and systems, having previously attended campus for a training session or tour during their secondary school years. Improved information and critical literacy skills, learnt during UQL Cyberschool classes, should also improve the quality of incoming student skills.

Within the University Library itself, UQL Cyberschool staff work closely with other areas of the organization, including the Information Literacy team who have specialist skills in providing training and support in IT skills and digital literacy and the development of online training tools and content creation for online modules. This team can be called upon to aid in all Library projects, as recently occurred and will be outlined later.

UQL Cyberschool also utilizes the services of the Library’s Marketing and Finance teams who provide streamlined processes which enables many projects to be actioned quickly and efficiently. Both these teams were integral in the smooth organization of the recent road trip to visit outreach schools, and the annual Seminar, including responsibility for registrations and payments.

To maintain relevance within the community UQL Cyberschool serves, an Advisory Committee meets annually. Members include the University Librarian and teachers in the local school community. The Terms of Reference for this group are to:

Provide a continuing forum for advice and information to the University Librarian and the staff of the UQL Cyberschool in the areas of:

1. Innovative service solutions to meet the information needs of secondary schools.
2. Emerging challenges and curriculum development issues for secondary schools
3. Strategies for improving communication between the UQL Cyberschool and its stakeholders, including secondary schools and the UQ community.
4. Opportunities for collaboration with other outreach projects.

eResource Purchase Service

Databases and eBook collections are expensive and as a result most Queensland high school libraries have limited research resources. Teachers and students need access to quality online information resources at an affordable price. For geographically isolated students and schools, the issues are compounded. Although the Internet provides a vast range of information resources, finding appropriate and reliable information for effective learning and teaching can be challenging. The UQL Cyberschool has identified these needs of secondary

school communities and is helping them to access up to date and advanced electronic databases and eBook platforms at the most affordable price. It is sharing the University's expertise in information literacy and keeping schools aware of changes, updates and new products in this space and is providing training and professional development for teachers and teacher librarians. The program engages students by providing first-hand experience of university research materials and methods both online and at no cost, in face to face classes. It directly enhances student learning by providing access through its web page to scholarly online resources.

The UQL Cyberschool provides free trials of commercial online databases to schools to enable them to select the products suitable for their students' information needs. This is all made possible through the user-friendly website and via an online request form. It assists school library staff by providing an advisory service, negotiating discounted pricing and facilitating access arrangements with vendors. In 2015, 232 trial-related enquiries were received and 82 subscription-related enquires were received. There is no financial incentive for UQL Cyberschool and all payments are arranged directly between the school and vendor. UQL Cyberschool advises all member schools of new products, packages and special deals via their electronic newsletter service.

Database and eBook vendors understand the value of UQL Cyberschool's service. The complexity of the secondary schools' sector often makes it difficult for the vendors to contact relevant staff in schools, and as a result their knowledge of school requirements and budgets is often minimal. One database vendor indicated that their secondary school subscriptions in Queensland alone were double the school subscriptions in the rest of Australia.

As a result, database vendors have supported the program with sponsorship of professional development events, provision of publicity and training materials, as well as funding products for the year to our "Outreach Program" schools. The UQL Cyberschool has been able to act as a facilitator and negotiator to increase understanding and awareness of these areas on both the school, database publisher and vendor sides.

On-campus visits

While some schools only use the virtual services, many do visit the St Lucia campus. Training sessions provide a learning opportunity for senior school students at their point of need by tailoring the session to specific research assignments that the students have at that time. This makes the experience authentic and of vital use to the students. Research strategies are taught and access to academic resources is facilitated to produce better quality assignments. Following the sessions many students remain in the library to use the print collection print and also experience a little of the University campus life and facilities.

The time spent on campus encourages them to consider the possibility of engaging in tertiary study in the future; therefore, it is an aspiration building experience that offers immediate outcomes for students. Students are also encouraged to return to UQ Library on an individual basis in the future.

UQL Cyberschool classes also align with the five core principals of the *UQL Information and Digital Literacy Strategic Framework*, including collaboration with schools, alignment with secondary curriculum, innovative development of information literacy skills, sustainable delivery and review and evaluation of programs.

Class teachers book these training sessions for students through the UQL Cyberschool web page and send a copy of the assignment task sheets. In 2015 alone, UQL Cyberschool delivered 84 classes to 1869 students. This has grown since 2002 when 42 school groups were given training in the use of the catalogue and UQL Cyberschool page, for a total of 1029 school students.

Although the majority of classes are held in the Social Sciences and Humanities Library (SSAH), classes can also be hosted in the Law, Music or Sciences Libraries, giving students an insight into other library spaces around the University campus. Librarians from other units are called upon to assist in the presentation of Cyberschool classes in peak times.

For students who have previously attended training, self-guided visits can be booked through UQL Cyberschool. In 2015, 18 schools brought groups of between 15 and 100 students for these visits. Detailed instructions are sent to participants before they arrive to ensure the best use is made of their time on campus. If schools are visiting other areas of the University, they may just want a tour of UQ Libraries and this can also be accommodated. 63 such tours were conducted in 2015.

Feedback from visiting teachers includes:

“The boys enjoyed being ‘real’ students and I know from past experience that the day prompts them to think seriously about university.” - Brisbane Boys’ College.

“The teachers are thankful that students are being shown the worth and value of libraries and institutions and research as an integral skill.” - Noosa District State High School.

“An excellent introduction for the students to practical use of the library. Useful tips about internet searches and databases.” - Loreto College.

“Content was appropriate and pitched well. Pacing of activities was just right.” - The Gap State High School.

Access to the Library Collection

UQL Cyberschool offers a free borrowing program for Year 11 and 12 students whereby local students are able to borrow books from the University Library. The number of registered borrowers has grown from 427 in 2014 to over 600 from 38 schools this year.

From 2014, school student borrowing membership for Year 11 and 12 students became free and an online registration process was implemented. Year 11 students are given a two-year membership period. Principals are notified when students register for borrowing to continue a marketing relationship with the school.

Borrowing for secondary students

🏠 / Library services / For secondary schools / Secondary school students

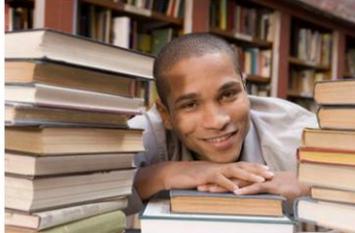
View published

New draft

Moderate

As a year 11 or 12 student you may apply to borrow from the UQ Library to access an extensive collection of books for research and assignments. Membership is free.

Apply for UQ Library membership



- You must be able to come to a UQ campus to borrow and return books
- Your school must be a member of the UQL Cyberschool community. There may be a short delay in processing your membership and sending your borrowing card whilst we gain approval from your principal
- If you have any queries about membership, please contact your teacher librarian or UQL Cyberschool

<https://web.library.uq.edu.au/library-services/secondary-schools/secondary-school-students/borrowing-secondary-students>

Off-campus activities

As schools are not always able to visit the UQ campus, UQL Cyberschool staff also attend schools in order to conduct presentations and training workshops for both secondary students and teaching staff. These presentations and workshops raise awareness of online resources and the importance of critical literacy skills in researching online materials, and demonstrate to teachers how these resources can be integrated into the curriculum.

Other off-campus activities include participation in the Queensland History Teachers' Association annual student seminars and the Future Libraries Reference Group annual Professional Development day.

Professional Development for Teacher Librarians and Teachers

To support ongoing professional development for teacher librarians, the UQL Cyberschool has provided an annual full day Seminar for school staff from South East Queensland, regional and rural areas and interstate, charged at minimal cost.

Following the inaugural Seminar held in 2003, speakers who focus on 'big picture' trends and ideas for educators and librarians are sourced. On average, between 80-120 teachers and teacher librarians attend the day which is sponsored by several vendors who are given the opportunity to demonstrate their products and participate in a trade display event. In 2015 the theme was *Social media and the promotion of school libraries* that addressed the use of social media in libraries along with marketing strategies used in various schools for library promotion.

The vast majority of attendees at both the Seminars and Update Sessions have rated the sessions' quality as excellent, and many of the participants stated that they took away practical ideas for use in their teaching. Comments from 2015 included:

“These sessions are so valuable to keep us up to speed – keep refining our skills. The Info Literacy focus is most practical and useful!!”

Each session allowed me to take away at least one gem of wisdom to improve my library services.

I walked away with great ideas about how to promote the library at my school.

I found the quality of the day very high - informative, practical and with many opportunities and ideas for extending my professional practice and implementing ideas into our library.

I now have a better understanding of promoting our Library through social media. It is always time well spent networking with other school Library professionals.

The keynote speaker was an excellent choice, engaging, passionate and enthusiastic about the role TLs can play in using social media.

I always enjoy catching up with the vendors. It was a great day.

The 2016 theme, *From adolescent brain to entrepreneur*, will see experts outline how the teenage brain functions in the age of multitasking and the processes to help them achieve their potential. Practical and inspirational examples will be used to help foster an entrepreneurial way of thinking and doing in today’s students. Attendees will see the link between Makerspaces, robotics, coding clubs and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in their schools, with the end result resulting in start-ups and other business ventures possibilities that can be taken up either during or beyond school.

Outreach Program

In 2014, an Outreach Program aimed at providing schools in need with free access to online resources was introduced, aiming to provide quality, online resources to schools in regional and isolated areas with a view to encouraging students from these areas to consider undertaking a university degree on completion of their schooling.

The program targets students from schools in low socio-economic, rural or isolated areas, and/or those with a high indigenous student population. Working in partnership with some of our vendors, UQL Cyberschool helps students gain free access to commercial, online e-resources that would have otherwise been unattainable for their school.

All UQL Cyberschool member schools were invited to apply for the program. Their involvement was determined according to a variety of criteria, including: school population; presence of a teacher-librarian in the school; current paid database or eBook subscriptions; proximity to Council libraries; and necessary IT requirements to host the product.

Applications were assessed by UQL Cyberschool staff and successful applicants were provided with access to a free e-resource for a calendar year. Participating schools ranged in geographical location from the northern most point of Queensland to northern NSW, spanning 2900 kms.

In 2014, seven of our vendors donated 15 products which were taken up by eight schools. Now in its third year, 12 vendors have made 25 products available to the 12 successful “Outreach” schools. Teachers taking part in the program were surveyed to establish the efficacy of the program for student learning outcomes.

Feedback included:

“It was a very good experience for students to access academic information from a reliable source. Students seemed to navigate them quite well.”

“It gave the students a greater opportunity to access academic databases and to learn that there are more reliable pathways than Google to relevant information.”

“Students were able to locate accurate and up-to-date information suited to their reading level for use in a range of learning tasks. They successfully saved this information and were able to acknowledge the source of their information. Presentations of student work noticeably improved as a result of using this resource.”

In 2015, as a further extension to the pre-existing Outreach Program, the program was expanded to support a number of students from rural Queensland and northern New South Wales to visit the St Lucia campus for an “on-campus experience day” resulting in 5 schools each bringing a group of students (university aspirants) to experience the St Lucia campus first-hand. UQL Cyberschool funded transport and morning tea for the visiting groups.

The visit commenced with a tour of the whole St Lucia campus, generously guided by staff from the Office of Prospective Students and Student Equity (OPSSE). Highlights of the tour included visits to the Advanced Engineering Building, Global Change Institute and the Student Union precinct (shops and food!). Some of the groups were also able to go on a tour of a residential college, and see other college facilities such as the college library and dining hall.

UQL Cyberschool staff conducted a library research skills lesson. Students were given the opportunity to search the UQ website for information on possible future study options and course prerequisites. This was followed by a session looking at online sources of information and using databases. Search tips such as phrase searching, truncation and wildcards were also provided.

Free time during lunch allowed students to visit places of interest such as the Great Court, Antiquities Museum and Bookshop before departing.

Feedback from the visit program has been overwhelmingly positive. Student feedback includes:

“The UQL trip was amazing and the facilities were an experience and a half. I would love to go again. It gave me a great insight into Uni life.”

“The UQ visit was an amazing insight into university life, with friendly and informative tours throughout the university. This trip is a perfect way to get a taste of university life and the positives of going to UQ for your university degrees.”

“I found the UQ Day really fun and quite a good experience. The facilities and food were awesome. After attending this day, I have decided that I would like to attend this Uni.”

“I believe the UQ trip was very beneficial to me as I got another insight at Uni life with the tour of the residential college and the access to look at facilities and courses available at UQ ... If given the chance I would jump at the chance to go again.”

“It was a good experience. We got to find out what the Queensland University is like, and what it is like to live in one of the collages. We also learnt how to research properly. It was a good day.”

“I found that it was good to experience that environment and see how uni operates. Especially for people who want to go to uni after school. It was really good and I really appreciated it. It was good to be able to ask questions and find out more about the courses and the facilities. It made me look forward to going to university and I am really excited.”

2016 saw the Outreach Program expand further with the inclusion of a road trip by UQL Cyberschool staff. It was determined that the schools could be better supported by an on-site visit, which took in five schools in a 900km return trip. The aim of the school visits was to provide support to library staff in the implementation, promotion and use of the electronic products (databases or eBooks) donated to the school via the Outreach Program. We were able to work with teacher librarians and students and show them how to make the best use of both the donated products and other freely-available online resources.

Feedback from the teachers included:

“It is an amazing experience for not only the students but myself also to have access to two qualified Teacher-Librarians through the UQ Cyberschool Outreach Program. This visit provided the opportunity to learn so much more about where to go to access resources and what is actually freely available or easily accessible to support a range of senior classes. The ladies demonstrated a number of search strategies to enhance what the students have been learning in recent weeks so it was invaluable for students to have firsthand exposure to experts in the field of library science. We sincerely hope to be involved in this program into the future and are so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet and learn from two experts in person. Kind regards & many thanks for driving all the way to Gin Gin to help us, we are very grateful.” Gin Gin State High School

“Thank you for your recent visit to our school. I appreciate the time you gave to have a look at how I have set up the resources that our school has available for the year. Thank you for your feedback and all of the answers to my questions. It was great to speak face to face as one question and answer lead to another and so a discussion came into being – at times hard to happen over email.” - St Mary’s College Maryborough

Student feedback was also positive:

“Very enlightening, wish I knew about these resources sooner” - Katie

“Great lesson, very informative and will definitely help with my studies” - Safron

The personal visits are very much appreciated by rural teachers and teacher librarians who often work in isolation to provide information resources for their students. As a result of these visits some schools subsequently subscribe to their first database. In these communities the visits raise the profile of universities and awareness of educational opportunities for school students, many of whom would not have previously considered tertiary education as an option for their future.

Interaction with other UQ areas

UQL Cyberschool staff recently identified an issue with the coordination of secondary school involvement across the University. After surveying UQ Schools, it was found that 38 Schools are currently offering services to secondary schools, however, very few of them were aware of other UQ offerings. UQL Cyberschool has now initiated a shared calendar and twice yearly meetings with these 38 UQ Schools that has resulted in UQL Cyberschool staff being asked to contribute to various UQ Schools' programs, and co-teach or run specially prepared sessions. As previously mentioned in this paper, the fact that Cyberschool is situated as part of the University Library structure is beneficial. For example, the UQL Cyberschool staff were involved with the production of resources for the UQ School of Law, which runs a Pro Bono service for secondary schools. By involving the Library's Information Literacy team, podcasts, video and possible webinar resources will be produced. These resources will allow secondary schools which are unable to visit the St Lucia campus to gain access to these products which be made freely available via the UQL Cyberschool website.

Other recent collaborations have included:

- School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering in the running of coding workshops;
- Office of Prospective Students and Student Equity who were asked to participate in visits from our "Outreach Program" schools;
- Participation in School of Languages Summer High School Program; Solid Pathways Program; Brain Bee Challenge; InspireU Engineering Camps; Young Achievers and Young Scholars Program; Enhanced Studies Program Students and Science Teachers Professional Development Day.

Initiatives for 2016/2017

Initiatives for 2016/2017 included an invitation to all UQ Schools who deal with school students to send representatives to a 'Meet and Greet' morning tea and networking opportunity. This led to the creation of a shared UQ calendar which will lead to a more balanced approach to secondary school interactions and ensure equity is attained between schools.

Collaboration with UQ's Pro Bono Centre was another new initiative with the end result being the hosting of online teacher resources from the UQL Cyberschool website. Again,

student equity for those living too far from our campuses will be achieved through access to online resources.

UQL Cyberschool have also taken on responsibility for the trade fair component of the Future Libraries Reference Group professional development day for teacher librarians. Our expertise in dealing with vendors will enable a seamless experience for conference organizers and vendors alike.

Further refinement to the online registration process for student borrowers is also planned, to be in place for the commencement of the 2017 school year. This will focus on refining the process for seeking principal or parental indemnity for loss of resources.

The road trips to “Outreach schools” was also enhanced in 2016, changing from end-of-year to start-of-year visits. This was to ensure a smooth introduction and enhanced promotion of donated products so that students gain as much as possible from the quality resources they received.

References

The University of Queensland Strategic Plan 2014–2017.
<http://www.uq.edu.au/about/planning>

The University of Queensland Library Strategic Plan 2013-2017.
<https://web.library.uq.edu.au/about-us/reports-and-publications>

UQL Information and Digital Literacy Strategic Framework.
<https://web.library.uq.edu.au/about-us/policies-guidelines>