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Digital humanities and academic libraries - an Australasian survey

Results summary – February 2018

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2017 the authors initiated a study into the current state of play with services and collaboration models within Australian and New Zealand academic libraries to support digital humanities (DH) activities and projects at the institution. This was in part inspired by a similar survey of Academic Research Libraries (ARL) in the United States (Bryson *et al.*, 2011) and conversations the authors had as a result of a presentation to the Australasian Association of Digital Humanities Conference in June 2016 looking at the nature of collaboration on digital humanities projects at the University of Wollongong (McKenzie & Ross 2016).

At the time the goal was to use the information to publish the findings at a conference or in a journal. The authors also undertook to make the de-identified data openly available for participating organisations and other interested parties. While a number of circumstances have indefinitely delayed the development of the data into a paper or presentation, this document presents a summary of the results and the accompanying raw data set is also provided.

In the interests of time, the authors have made very little analysis of the data. However, overall it does not show a strong formal commitment or engagement with DH activities in Australasian academic libraries. In spite of clear evidence that libraries are engaging in DH activities, no dedicated DH roles were identified in responses, suggesting that these activities are undertaken in addition to usual library staff responsibilities. Additionally, survey participants did not identify dedicated and ongoing library funding streams for DH projects with the majority of activities funded out of the general library budget or as part of grant funding secured by academics.

This generally ad-hoc approach is consistent with the findings of the survey conducted 6 years earlier at US academic research libraries (Bryson *et al.* 2011). The US survey found that library involvement in DH activities and services is primarily based on traditional library services and support models (such as metadata or resource expertise), or specifically includes library collections or library consultation on the project.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

The survey was sent to 39 Australian and 8 New Zealand academic libraries, from the [CAUL](#) and [CONZUL](#) member lists. Seventeen libraries participated, a response rate of 36%.

1.0 Setting the scene

In general, Australian and New Zealand academic libraries are not participating in digital humanities activities in a structured way. Digitisation of library collections or materials was the primary activity, accounting for 40% of all reported activity.

Digital humanities activities in/by Australasian academic libraries - June 2017

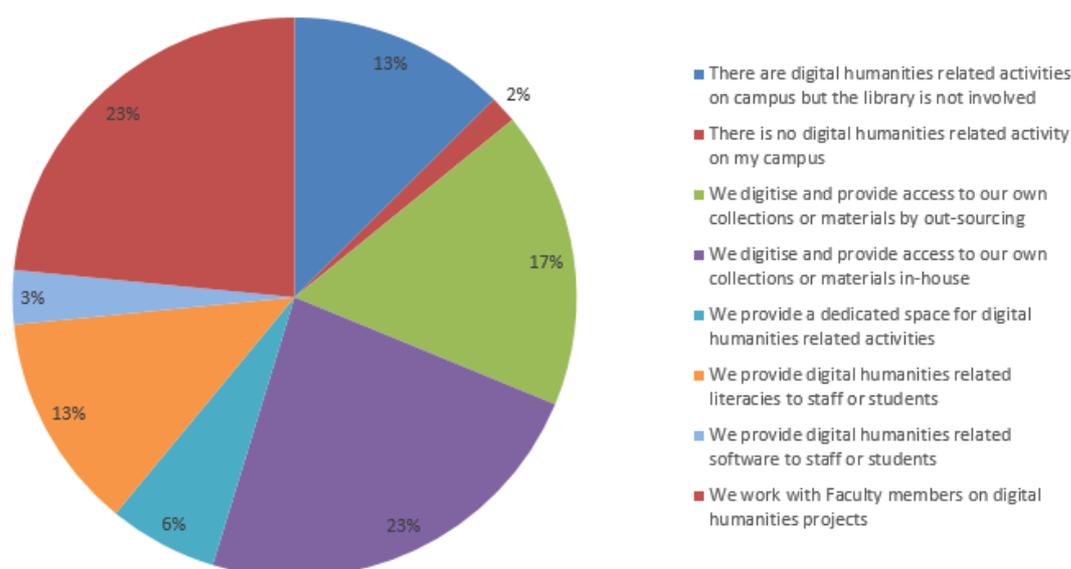


Figure 1: DH activities by library or institution (respondents could choose more than one)



1.1 APPROACHES TO DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Libraries were asked to indicate their approach to digital humanities activities. Responses were sought to indicate whether activities are reactive or proactive, with just under half the responses indicating initiated or driven by the library. About half of the respondents indicated more than one approach. There is scope for further investigation around the question of drivers for those activities that are proactively begun by libraries.

Library approaches to digital humanities - June 2017

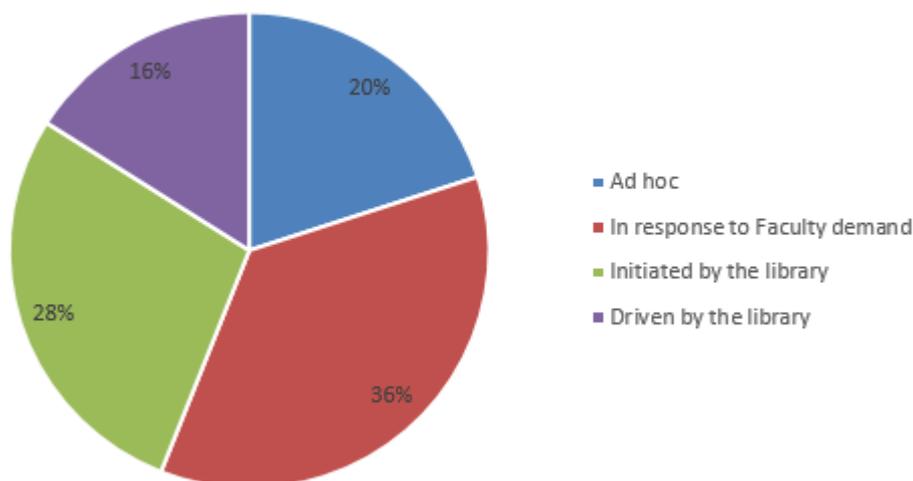


Figure 2: Library approaches to DH (respondents could choose more than one)

1.2 STAFFING

The range of position titles and roles involved in digital humanities activities was varied (see Table 1). Responses have been coded into the following broad position titles, with a number of respondents identifying more than one position in the library with responsibility.

There is a strong indication that DH activities are an addition to business as usual roles within the library and this supports the largely ad hoc or reactive approach identified in Section 1.0. The high number of liaison librarians may indicate activities as a result of existing relationships with the academic community.

Position/Role	Number of times identified
Liaison/Faculty/Subject Librarian	9
Repositories Librarian/Manager	6
Senior Management (for support and funding)	6
Archivist/Archives Manager	5
Library Officer	4
Librarian	3
Senior Librarian	2
Research Librarian	2
eResearch Librarian	1



Makerspace Coordinator	1
Digitisation Coordinator	1
Scholarly Content Officers	1
Theses Coordinator	1
Conservator	1
Metadata Coordinator	1
Digital Collections Librarians	1
Digital Initiatives Coordinator	1
Resources Librarian	1
Research Data Manager	1
Research Data Officer	1
Research Analysis Officer	1
Special Collections Librarian	1
Technology team	1
Repository assistant	1

Table 1 – broad position titles for DH activities

2.0 Tools provided

We asked respondents to identify both software/platforms and hardware/equipment that they use or provide for the use of others undertaking digital humanities activities. In both cases, respondents were invited to indicate all that apply.

2.1 SOFTWARE AND PLATFORMS

‘Traditional’ library software and platforms including bibliographic management and the institutional repository were the main tools offered by libraries in relation to digital humanities activities. It is not clear whether the role of institutional repositories is as a source of content or facilitating access to content and is another question that may be worth exploring in the increasingly important open access space.

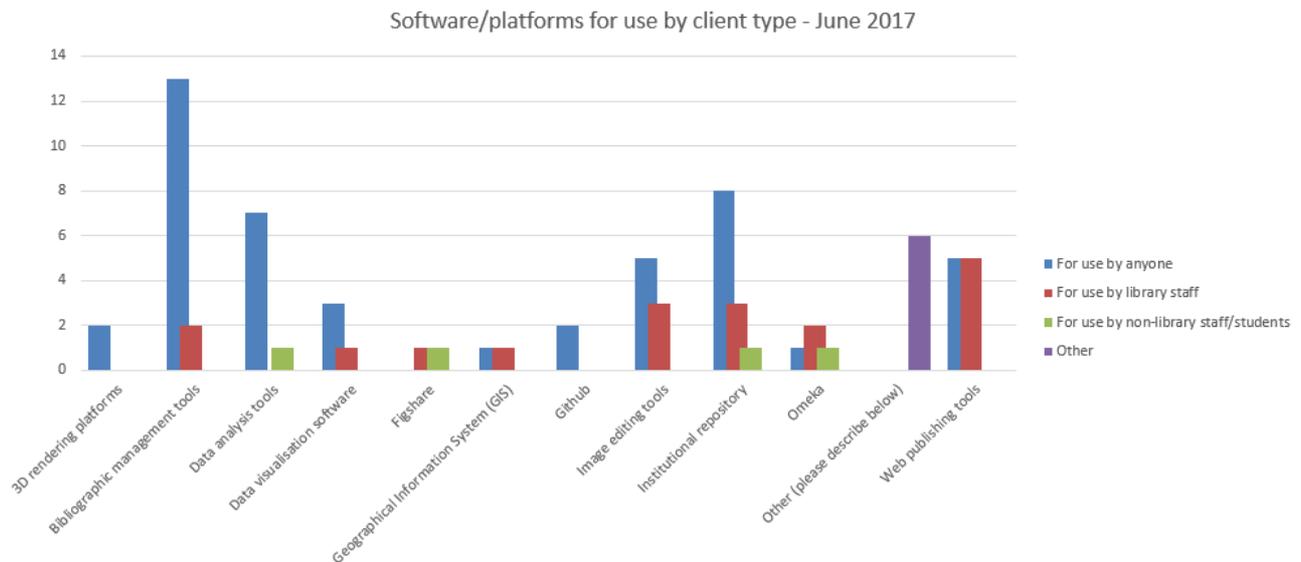


Figure 3: Software or platforms by client type use

Items in the ‘other’ category included:

- We have created Android and Apple apps as well as a bespoke web application for access to one collection
- We use ePrints software



- 3D digitisation soon to start
- Other data repository (Equella) has been used to support some projects
- Outsourced streaming platform for video material
- Scanning facility - case by case

2.2 HARDWARE AND EQUIPMENT

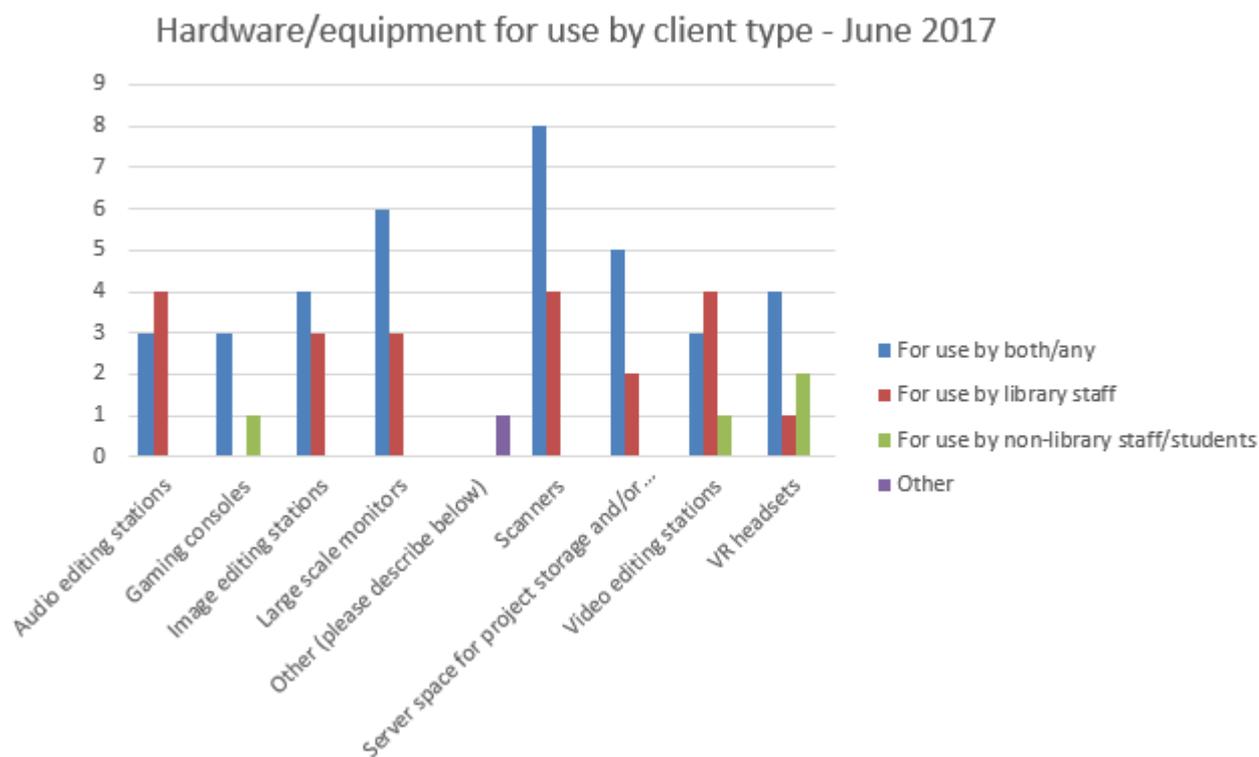


Figure 4: Hardware or equipment by client type use

Items in the 'other' category included:

- Storage is provided centrally by ICT - Research Data Store, eLab Notebooks, and CloudStor are current options.

3.0 DH Projects past and planned

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of DH projects completed in the past 2 years and planned for the next 2. More than 75% of respondents are planning DH activities over the next 2 years, although there's no total increase in activities. It is worth noting that although the numbers are identical it is not the same pattern of institutions across both columns. This is likely to reflect the ad-hoc or on demand nature of most DH activities being outside library planning control.

Total No. of DH activities	Undertaken in the last 2 years	Plans for next 2 years
1-2	7	7
2-5	5	5
More than 5	1	1
None	4	4
Grand Total	17	17



Table 2: DH activities past and planned

4.0 Resources – (money and staff)

We asked respondents about the resourcing of DH activities in both financial and staffing terms. The majority of activities were funded from within the library budget, closely followed by grants written by academics or co-written with the library. There is little to indicate DH activities or the support of/collaboration with these activities is a service model adapted as an area of BAU for libraries in its own right.

4.1 RESOURCING DH ACTIVITIES (FUNDING)

35% of identified activities are funded from the library budget, providing support for the hypothesis that digital humanities activities have been absorbed into business as usual for other roles and/or services in the library. The next highest contribution is grant funding, secured either by academics or in collaboration with libraries and this may be related to the strong presence of liaison librarians in DH projects identified in Table 1 above. Financial resourcing under 'other' included:

- In kind contribution with an exhibition, contributed to a grant with a literature review
- Supported by Central IT Services
- Unsure

Library contribution to funding of DH activities - June 2017

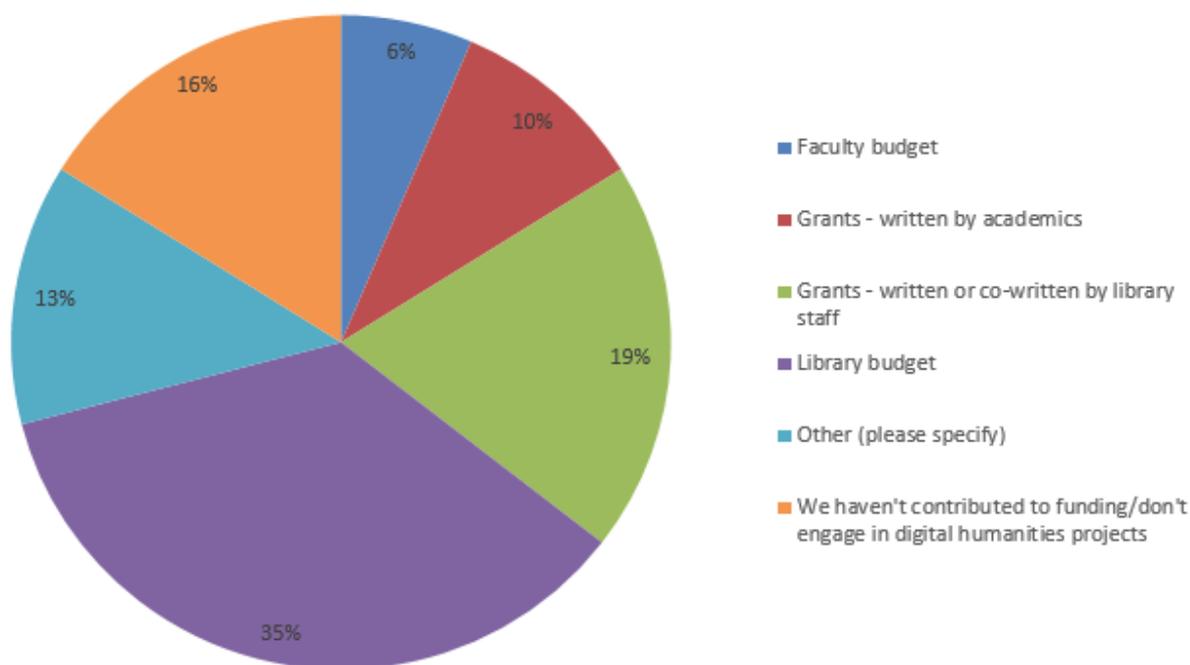


Figure 5: Library contribution to funding of DH activities

4.2 RESOURCING DH ACTIVITIES (STAFF)

Overwhelmingly, respondents identified a traditional library service model in the way they engage with DH activities, either with skills such as metadata support or providing access to collections or working as a support to DH projects rather than a partner to the activities, supporting the already identified ad hoc nature of the involvement in DH activities. Further questions to be explored could include whether DH is therefore an emerging thing or are libraries merely dipping their toes in the water, responding to need/demand and experimenting with approaches?



Library staff involvement in DH activities - June 2017

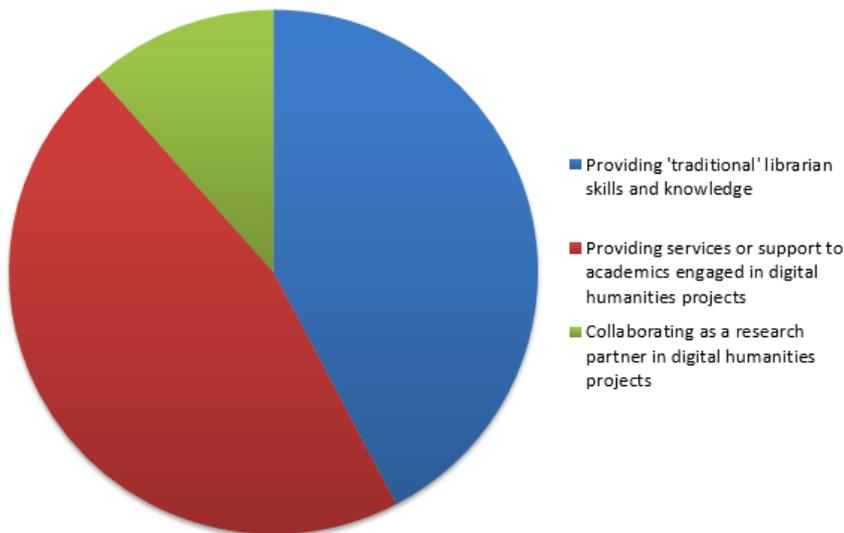


Figure 6: The nature of library staff involvement in DH activities

CONCLUSION

The responses to most questions support the ad hoc nature of academic library involvement in DH activities in Australia and New Zealand. The authors cannot draw any strong conclusions from the data, but suggest DH is still an emerging area for many academic libraries, with individual libraries or library staff largely responding to need/demand from the academic sector at the institution. As noted above, these initial findings resonate with an earlier US study conducted in 2011. Unfortunately there is no current US data to indicate whether the presence of DH in academic libraries has strengthened or not and so it is difficult to project the direction it may take in Australasian academic libraries. Further analysis of the accompanying data to this summary may reveal more, and will at the least provide a platform for a comparative assessment in the future to look at whether the service model has changed in any way.

REFERENCES

- Bryson, Tim, Mariam Posner, Alain St. Pierre, and Stewart Varner. *Digital Humanities*. SPEC Kit 326. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, November 2011. <https://doi.org/10.29242/spec.326>
- McKenzie, Clare and Kerry Ross (2016): What's going on over there? Ventures into digital humanities at the University of Wollongong Library. Presentation delivered at the aaDH Digital Humanities Australasia Conference, Hobart, June 20-23 2016 <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.4955684.v3>

