

1. The Fine Arts Library

The Elam Library is a collection of national significance, housing resources specific to the School of Fine Arts, including rare artist's books, manuscripts and archives, and an extensive catalogue of artist and gallery-related ephemera.

As a contemporary school of fine arts that emphasises the importance of sustained critical engagement alongside studio practice, the Fine Arts library's physical location within Elam is integral to the school's success, in terms of teaching, learning, and its standing in the professional arts community. While the breadth and relevance of the library collection is important, perhaps the most valuable aspect of the library is its position as a **place of communal learning**: a space in which conversation, collaborative coursework, and browsing is encouraged, in the context of a safe and inviting environment that is **situated within, and specific to**, the school of Fine Arts.

The loss of a dedicated space of study specific to the school would bring such spaces down to zero, thereby damaging the strength of the school and arts communities, the critical engagement of students, and the student body's sense of belonging and place.

Beyond Elam, the Fine Arts Library is a vital resource for Art History students and staff, the wider school of Humanities, members of the public, arts institutions, and independent researchers. For such users, the unique nature and breadth of the library's resources is unparalleled by any other institution in Aotearoa. Alongside the specialist knowledge of the Fine Arts Libraries, the extent to which it aids and informs research on the arts cannot be understated. Of equal importance is the physical space of the Fine Arts library. Much like Elam students, the wider community of users also benefit from the space's facilitation of communal learning. It is within the Fine Arts library that one may form relationships, develop collective knowledge, and contribute to Aotearoa's arts community.

2. The LLS and CAI Libraries Reviews

The University of Auckland has conducted a university-wide review of Libraries and Learning Services (LLS). This review proposes wide-ranging organisational change in order to achieve the university's long-term goals. This entails a subsidiary review of the Creative Arts and Industries (CAI) Libraries. The primary recommendations of the CAI Libraries Review are as follows:

1. Consolidate the three CAI libraries into the General Library.
2. Provide appropriate environments for CAI collections in the General Library.

3. Provide appropriate facilities and spaces for researchers and students to engage with the collections.

The review justifies these recommendations on evidence that the CAI library spaces are no longer fit for purposes, and that it would not be effective to refurbish the three libraries due to declining rates of usage, restricted shelf space, costly use of space, and risk of damage to the collections.

3. Objections to review processes

Although we object to the particulars of the CAI Libraries Review as regards the Fine Arts Library, we primarily object to the University's lack of transparency, clarity, and engagement with staff and students in undertaking this review.

- a. The University is accepting consultation feedback on the LLS Review, but not what the committee classifies as "supporting documents", which includes the CAI Libraries Review.¹
- b. The University is considering feedback from staff, but not students, who will be equally affected by the changes it proposes.
- c. The University did not satisfactorily publicise and consult with students regarding the likely outcomes of this review.
- d. Elam School of Fine Arts staff were not informed of the consultation period until a full ten days of the period had already elapsed.
- e. There were no student representatives from Elam School of Fine Arts or Art History involved with the CAI Libraries Review.
- f. Neither the LLS Review nor the CAI Libraries Review are transparent about the University's financial motives.
- g. The University has previously asserted its vision of using an "...evidence base to support developments and decisions"²: the CAI Libraries Review's use of evidence is often contradictory, misleading, or anecdotal, and staff and student feedback does not form a meaningful part of this evidence base.

By not considering feedback on the specificities of the CAI Libraries Review, the university is discouraging open dialogue and disregarding the ramifications of outcomes on students and staff. The CAI Libraries review contains wide-ranging proposals for change that each deserve assessment and feedback from the community. In the LLS Review, the committee writes,

*...understanding and partnering with our community will be at the centre of our culture... organisation culture will be enabled by our focus on understanding and partnering with equity groups, and with our staff and students more broadly.*³

¹ "LLS Service Delivery Model and Functional Review", p.40.

² "Libraries and Learning Services - Vision and Strategy 2017-2025", p.3.

³ "LLS SDM", p.34, emphasis added.

The process of this review and the CAI Library review does not demonstrate a satisfactory attempt to understand and partner with our community. The University has carried out this review in a purposely obtuse fashion, designed to minimise dissent and achieve its internally-established goals with the bare minimum of community engagement.

4. Recommendations for review processes

Here are our recommendations to the University on the process of this review:

- a. Permit and publicise a month-long consultation on the CAI Libraries review, from both staff and students.
- b. Give equal weight to the evidence of both staff and student feedback in considering the outcome of this consultation.
- c. Extend the consultation period for the LLS Review to account for the university's failure to adequately inform staff of its existence.
- d. Transparently inform the community of the financial motives behind this review.
- e. Publish the LLS Review consultation feedback.

5. CAI Libraries Review - commentary and objections

The CAI Libraries Review is here discussed in terms of what it means for the Fine Arts Library, and the students and staff of the Elam School of Fine Arts.

1. Section 2 makes general claims about the fitness and quality of all three CAI Libraries, without assessing them on a case-by-case basis. Most egregious is a sentence about "the issues with the spaces", including disabled access, noise, and health and safety risks, which are applied to all three spaces, without individual consideration.
2. Section 2 asserts that given the interdisciplinary needs of arts students, they would "benefit from greater familiarity with, and greater frequency of visits, to the... General Library". The interdisciplinary reading of Fine Arts students is undisputed, but forcing them to visit the General collection to encourage this seems counterproductive. Students who read broadly would already be aware of the wider resources available to them at the General collection through LLS's excellent online catalogue and research tools. This appears to be an example of the committee reaching for benefits of an otherwise unattractive proposal.
3. Section 2 notes that students would feel a sense of loss if libraries were removed, but argues that "this is not a major problem", indicating a general lack of regard for the wellbeing of students. That the General Library "is only ten minutes walk from Elam" would indeed be a major problem - cumulatively disrupting the quality of student experience and research within Elam, and discouraging visits to the library collection

unless absolutely necessary. As it stands, in its proximity to the studios the Elam library encourages dropping by and browsing: a tremendously valuable quality that would be severely damaged if the collection was moved.

4. We endorse many of the arguments laid out in the dissenting opinion (Section 2.1), including:
 - a. "...Elam students report that library collections co-located close to their studio spaces is a high priority. This is supported by the 'hands-on' enquiry learning of studio pedagogy – a pedagogy which sets the CAI faculty apart from all other faculties in the University."
 - b. "The proposed redevelopment... does not serve CAI students who have studio spaces for study and collaboration but require enhanced access to physical collections. Relocation of CAI library collections to the General Library collections will disperse collections over a much larger collection thereby diminishing access to resources."
 - c. "Evidence of financial reasons for amalgamating the CAI libraries was not evident in the review document."

The concerns of the dissenting opinion are given voice, but are not assessed by, or incorporated into, the review at all.

5. While the review emphasises how the proposed changes are primarily to serve student needs, Section 4 notes that CAI students make up 4% of the university's population, and there is a "significant operational cost to maintain three service points for small user population in context of the current constrained fiscal environment." This seems to indicate that a primary driver behind these changes are not, in fact, reflective of the University's desire to meet student needs, but to cut costs. Further, the "constrained fiscal environment" is not elaborated on, simply used as a broad justification, and the review does not explore other fiscally viable alternatives. Instead, it appears that the committee has determined the cheapest option as a foregone conclusion, and offered a range of benevolent justifications after the fact.
6. Section 5.3 cites CAI staff and students experiencing a sense of loss, and perceiving the proposed changes as decreasing access to resources, as "challenges". The response to this, "opportunities", makes no attempt to find ways to overcome these challenges: the report simply reiterates the proposed move to the General Library.
7. Section 5.3 also asserts that the spaces are "not cost-effective to refurbish". No financial specifics are offered in this regard, and once again, the cost-effectiveness appears to reference all three spaces, rather than considering whether each individual space is cost-effective to refurbish.

8. Section 5.4 asserts that “it is possible that ... Fine Arts ... students make use of their studio spaces to work in rather than the library”. This generalisation is not quantified at all.
9. Section 5.4 asserts that there has been a “steady decline in occupancy rates”, but this statement does not hold up to scrutiny of the data provided:
 - a. The assertion of decline conflates occupancy rates of all CAI libraries, rather than taking occupancy rates on a case-by-case basis.
 - b. The occupancy rates are only assessed over the period 2010 to 2016.
 - c. While the occupancy rates of the Elam library fluctuate, they generally hover above 32%, and from the data given there is no evidence of a “steady decline”.
 - d. Later in the review, in Section 7.1, to support its argument about digital resources, the review contradicts its previous claim about declining occupancy rates by saying that “use of our spaces has remained constant”. This is also noted in the LLS Functional Review, which says “2017 occupancy data reveals that the use of study space in libraries and information commons has remained relatively constant”⁴.
10. Throughout the review, the needs of Elam students are conflated with the needs of Architecture, Music, and Dance students, despite the fact that the needs of Elam students are very different to those in other disciplines, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Access to hands-on visual material as fundamental to visual arts practice.
 - b. Considering the importance the school places on critical and visual material as components of a holistic studio practice, this material needs to be as easily accessible as studio space.
 - c. Community-building and collaboration as a primary foundation of success in visual arts practice, both during and post-study, and spaces that encourage this as integral to such success.
11. The LLS Review emphasises the importance of digital resources to the future of libraries. The CAI Libraries Review does not address this in terms of visual arts learning and underplays the contradictory importance of tactile resources to visual artists, except in cases where it serves their argument to move the collection.
12. Section 6.1 makes reference to the research habit of artists, including their idiosyncratic information needs, including that beyond art subjects, a preference for browsing, and a need for social information gathering. These research habits do not inform the review beyond supporting its own assertion that a move to the General Library would be beneficial to CAI students. The “challenge” of library users’ sense of diminished access

⁴ “LLS SDM”, p.12.

to a space that encourages their idiosyncratic research needs remains unaddressed. The review does not take into account the Fine Arts Library's unique value as a library with high rates of browsing, or as a place in which collaborative and like-minded community bonds are formed and strengthened, or its specific value as a safe and inviting place for Fine Arts students.

13. Section 5.5 states that increasing opening hours for libraries would be cost-ineffective. However, the committee has made no attempt to discern whether longer opening hours are actually a priority for Fine Arts students.
14. While the review mentions that "high-level planning" is underway to improve the General Library, the outcomes of this particular review precede the outcome of high-level planning, thereby making it impossible to know the specific outcome of the consolidation of the Fine Arts collection into the General Library.

6. Recommendations for CAI Libraries Review

On the basis of this review, consolidation of the Fine Arts Library into the General Library is an outcome based on poor consultation, unclear financials, limited and poorly interpreted statistics, and a general disregard for the specific needs of Elam students, as well as the history, community, and value of the Fine Arts Library as a place and collection. Here are our recommendations to the University:

1. Transparently consult with, and consider the recommendations of, students, staff, and the wider Fine Arts community, allowing feedback on the CAI Libraries Review, with specific regard to the Fine Arts library, before making a decision on its future.
2. Take more time to consider the value of the Fine Arts library beyond the limited metrics of usage statistics, including its value to the community of Elam and the wider arts community, as a browsing library with visual resources, and its specific proximity within the school as a driver for the success of Elam students and their research outcomes.
3. Consider possibilities for retaining the Fine Arts library as a space of communal learning for Fine Arts students, with reference to community feedback, and with measured and transparent consideration of the costing of this.

With regard to point 3, here are some suggestions we can offer that would address challenges faced by the Fine Arts library, and would be more cost-effective than disestablishing the library and moving the entire collection.

- a. Moving all content concerning historical practice (e.g. pre-1945), to the General Library, thereby easing shelf space and situating the Elam Library as a specifically contemporary fine arts library.

- b. Moving the archives and other precious resources to the general collection, as recommended, preserving their integrity and student access to these resources, while easing space in the Fine Arts library.
- c. Rigorously assessing resource usage statistics and moving the least-used resources to the General Library.
- d. Refurbish the library only as required, in terms of its specific accessibility and health and safety risks (not identified in this review), in order to retain its character and place within the school.