

## EDUCAUSE IN AUSTRALASIA - 2001

### AskIT TO LEARN

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### Introduction

As the electronic age embraces education, information technology skills have become essential for effective student learning and progression in higher education. As a new initiative, the University of Queensland established *AskIT* in February 2000, to provide free information technology training and help for all University of Queensland students. The service emphasises the IT skills essential for student life and learning. It is an integrated response to articulated needs for computing assistance, and, together with the Library's Information Skills Program, provides generic IT competence for life as citizens in a developed information society.

The service offers free training and support via:

- Teaching and learning program
- Help desks on three campuses
- Telephone help line
- Assistance via Email
- Website

### Background

There are many factors that lead to the creation of *AskIT*. All of these have the same underlying theme - no degree without IT.

1. The University of Queensland's *Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan*<sup>1</sup> identifies strategic objectives and operational priorities. Among these are key *Graduate Attributes*, including two that relate specifically to Information Technology.
  - **Computer literacy.** *The ability to use computers for information retrieval, processing and presentation, to a level comparable with workplace expectations.*
  - **Information management.** *The ability to collect, analyse and organise information.*
2. A 1999 student survey at the University of Queensland found that 88% of students had access to a computer at home, 70% had Internet access and 68% used computers on campus, usually in the Library. Despite the high ownership of computers, observation of student behaviour demonstrated that many students were experiencing difficulty using IT effectively. In various surveys and feedback forms, students consistently expressed frustration at their lack of adequate computing skills and felt that this hindered their learning. Mature age students were having general difficulties, and younger students,

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.uq.edu.au/hupp/contents/view.asp?s1=3&s2=10&s3=1>

while often experienced with web browsing and e-mail services like Hotmail, were having specific difficulties dealing with applications such as word processing or spreadsheets.

3. The move to flexible delivery of learning has accelerated the need for student IT expertise in order to exploit the learning opportunities provided by multi-modal access. Students are expected to be able to use a range of applications software, electronic databases, e-books and e-journals in their everyday learning. They must access learning materials and other documents in electronic formats, enroll electronically and check their records, communicate with teaching and services staff and their peers via e-mail, submit assignments electronically and in some instances, complete assessment online.

Despite the increasing demand for student to have high IT skills, there was no coherent teaching and learning program at the University for students to acquire the IT skills essential for their progress in higher education. The Library runs a successful Information Skills program but this primarily focuses on access and management of information, rather than the generic IT skills required to use the software and resources required by students. Student difficulties were compounded by the fact that there was no single interface for IT queries. Responsibility for queries was divided between numerous service points in centres, faculties, schools and the Library, with only the Library offering help for extended hours.

The importance of access to computers has long been recognised by the University as a key responsibility. There are almost 1000 workstations located in the University Library alone, with 2000 more provided by the Faculties. However, no consolidated list of these facilities existed. There were obvious gaps and deficiencies in the University's IT service provision to students.

## **Response and Implementation**

In order to address the deficiencies in the University's IT service provision to students, the Information Technology Services Policy and Planning Committee developed and *Information Technology Services Framework*<sup>2</sup>. One of its recommendations was that a centrally funded service be implemented to support students in their use of IT for University work. It further recommended that the service be managed by and located in the Library.

A working party involving students, Faculties and central services, was established to develop the implementation strategy. The report identified three major service components:

- training
- support
- access to IT facilities

Project managers were appointed to ensure that the *AskIT* service was available to students by semester 1, 2000.

A teaching and learning program was developed to deliver the student IT competencies which were identified by the working party. These competencies included:

- basic computer skills, including use of computer peripherals and the operating environment

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uq.edu.au/itspp>

- file management
- disk maintenance
- keyboard skills
- browsing the Web
- accessing information resources, including development of search strategies
- using word processing and presentation software

Help desks were established on three campuses, telephone and email services were set up and a website was designed and content written for it.

Job descriptions were created for an *AskIT* Manager, Training Officer and Support staff. An experienced professional was employed to provide customer service training.

The *AskIT* Advisory Committee was established to oversee the implementation, to have an ongoing advisory role and to act as a conduit for the student voice in matters to do with IT skills/provision in the university. The committee is chaired by the University Librarian and includes representatives of major University stakeholders –


- Dean of Students
- Representatives from the Student Union
- Representatives from the Student Centre
- Representatives from all Faculties
- Director of the Teaching and Educational Development Institute
- Director of the Information Technology Services
- Manager of the Library Technology Service
- Key staff of *AskIT*

## The Service

*AskIT* commenced service in February 2000. The service provides free computing help and training to UQ students, and acts as a front end to all student IT services at the University.

Through its flexible training program, supported by online documentation and access to interactive self-paced training modules, *AskIT* is able to empower the students to obtain IT competencies at the point of need. The *AskIT* teaching and learning program caters for all students regardless of their previous experience preferred learning style, or personal schedule. As academic staff increasingly recognise the significance of IT skill for progress in higher education, they recommend *AskIT* training to their students. Progressively, *AskIT* is working with teaching staff to incorporate IT skill training into academic courses.

The help service provided by *AskIT* supports and extends the learning process and acts as a "safety net" for those students who require further assistance. *AskIT* support is available in person at help desks, via telephone, email and the Web. The *AskIT* ITAnswers




**Computing help and training  
for UQ students**

- Ask IT Windows**  
File management, saving, printing, disks
- Ask IT Office**  
Word, Excel, PowerPoint, PhotoEditor
- Ask IT Email**  
Eudora, Pegasus, Netcape Messenger Mail, Microsoft Outlook Express
- Ask IT Web**  
Browsers, Gateways, Downloading, Course materials

**Ask IT**  
for computing help and training

**contact us:**

<b>Desk</b> Level 12, Duhig Tower, St Lucia Campus Library, Ipswich Campus Library, Gatton Campus	<b>Phone</b> (07) 3865 8811 <b>Website</b> <a href="http://askit.uq.edu.au">http://askit.uq.edu.au</a> <b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:askit@askit.uq.edu.au">askit@askit.uq.edu.au</a>
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 THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

provide vital support for specific needs and are also available to all secondary schools in Queensland through the Library's Cyberschool program<sup>3</sup>.

The support and training offered covers:

- Windows Operating system (file management, saving, printing)
- Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Photo Editor)
- General web browser (Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer)
- E-mail program (Pegasus mail, Eudora, Netscape Messenger Mail, Microsoft Outlook Express)

Staff in University Schools and Faculties provide support for specialist application software, like SPSS.

The free service offers IT training and support via:

- **Teaching and learning program**

A modular tiered teaching and learning program, available via **c-learning** (class room learning) and **e-learning** (electronic online learning), offers training in information technology for students at all levels of ability.

The **c-learning** program begins in Orientation week and continues throughout the year. Each class is two hours in length and they are scheduled in the evening and at weekends in addition to normal weekdays. The c-learning program consists of:

**Working with Windows**

This class covers:

- The components of the computer
- Using keyboard and mouse
- Basic Windows 95 environment
- Starting applications and switching between them
- Browsing files and folders with My Computer
- Creating, saving, printing and deleting files and folders

**Computing at UQ**

This class covers:

- Using Web Browsers and netiquette
- Websites - UQ, UQ Library, AskIT
- myUQ (student portal)
- Basic Email
- Using mySI-NET (student information network)

**Microsoft Word Level 1**

This class covers:

- Creating, editing, formatting, saving and printing Word documents
- Cut, copy and paste
- Using Word Wizards
- Saving Word documents as web pages
- Using Online Help to locate help topics

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/schools/index.html>

## Microsoft Word Level 2

This class covers:

- Using bullets and paragraph numbering
- Inserting pictures in Word documents
- Inserting and working with tables
- Inserting footnotes and endnotes
- Formatting columns

## Microsoft Excel

This class covers:

- Designing and creating a simple spreadsheet
- Entering data, labels, formulas and simple functions
- Formatting and sorting data
- Presenting data in tables and charts
- Using Online Help to locate help topics

## Microsoft PowerPoint

This class covers:

- Creating, editing, printing and viewing a slide presentation
- Applying a template, ClipArt, or WordArt to slides
- Using transitions and builds
- Importing text and images from other programs - eg a web browser
- Saving PowerPoint presentations as web pages
- Using Online Help to locate help topics

## Ask AskIT!

This is not a structured class but rather an opportunity for students to bring along their assignments or questions and have the trainer assist with technical difficulties.

The **e-learning** program, using *EasyTutor*<sup>4</sup> software via the AskIT website, offers 24hours x 7 days a week access to self paced training in:

### Proficient-level Tutorials:

- Excel 97
- Word 97

### Expert-level Tutorials:

- Access 97
- Excel 97
- Outlook 97
- PowerPoint 97
- Word 97



<sup>4</sup> <http://askit.uq.edu.au/easytutor/index.html>

- **Help desks on three campuses**  
The help desks provide face to face assistance, printed self-help material and is available up to eighty-four hours a week.



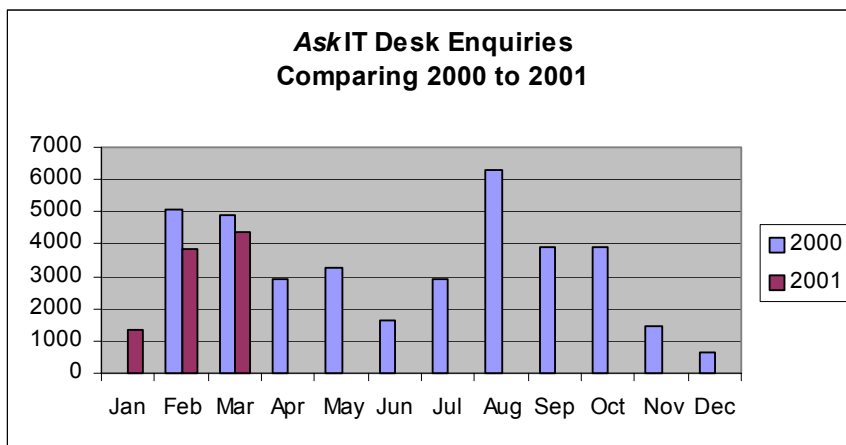
- **Telephone help line**  
The phone service is available up to eighty-four hours a week and provides the “just in time” assistance

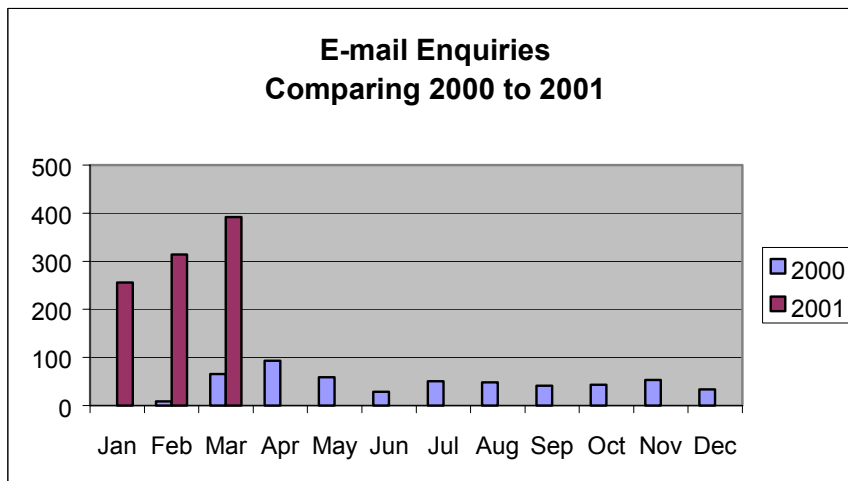
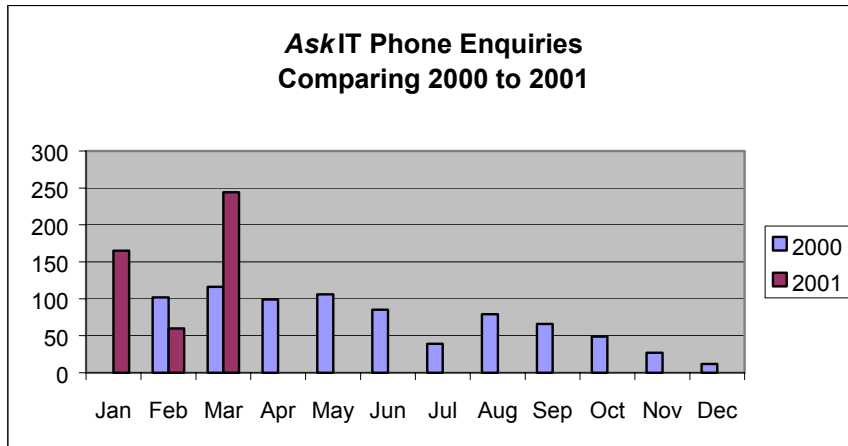
- **Email service**  
Students are able to email *AskIT* either directly or via a form on the website. The form assists students with problem identification through a drop down menu. Emails are responded to within twelve hours.

- **Website**  
<http://askit.uq.edu.au/>  
The *AskIT* website is the single integrated interface to the service and also to the student IT services across the University. It provides a comprehensive source of information, in the form of *ITAnswers* - tailored responses to student needs that have been identified as frequently asked questions. Links are made to the *AskIT* training program, the University’s Information Technology Services, Faculty and school computer laboratories and other important IT resources.

## Achievements and Statistics

- Face to face enquiries average 3606 enquiries per month
- Phone enquiries average 375 enquiries per month
- Email enquiries average 392 enquiries per month





In December 2000, *AskIT* was announced joint winner of the Australian University Teaching Award – Institutional Category.

Analysis of feedback data contributes to the development of training modules, documentation and the design of the *AskIT* website, and assists in collection development to support student IT.

*AskIT* is innovative in concept and practical in its approach, cutting across traditional organisational structures to deliver a critical central support service.