Building for the future: The aspirational architecture of Edith Cowan University

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Edith Cowan University

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The interaction between place, pedagogy and perception has fascinated me ever since I became involved in the design of my faculty’s building while a young academic at La Trobe University in the ‘70s. The experience triggered a lifelong interest in teaching and learning spaces.

Over my career I have been exposed to a multiplicity of university architectural styles, philosophies and education spaces. I am constantly surprised at the perception these buildings portray of their institution’s character and mission and at the ways they achieve - or otherwise - their primary purposes.

Usually one has to work with what one is given with university buildings and campuses. At ECU I have been in the wonderfully fortunate position of presiding over a campus consolidation process that has both revitalised the existing built environment and led to the creation of a new university architecture tailored to ECU’s ethos.

Based on socio-demographic analysis, the University some years ago took a decision to consolidate its four metropolitan campuses into two - at Mount Lawley in the inner Perth area and Joondalup, the fastest growing region in the city’s north - and to strengthen its regional commitment to its South West Campus in Bunbury, around 200kms south of Perth.

The exciting outcome of that decision is documented in this book. The book is a visual history of the emergence of a new identity for a university as exemplified by its architecture. As ECU has sought to differentiate itself and focus on its areas of strength, so its architecture differentiates it, providing it with a powerful public face that reflects its mission and character.

ECU’s architecture speaks of youthful energy, innovation, engagement, diversity and the achievement of aspirations through the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. A core requirement was that it embody environmentally sustainable design and demystify tertiary education by creating campuses
open and inviting to our local communities.

It has provided those studying and working at ECU with award-winning, world-class buildings, state-of-the-art facilities and purpose-built learning, teaching and social spaces which really work. They are spaces our staff and students love to occupy.

Such a comprehensive building program is naturally a consultative process and requires long-term commitment and vision. There are many people to thank.

A major acknowledgement must go to the Western Australian Government whose generosity has enabled us to proceed with our campus consolidation plans and to accelerate the building program.

Three Chancellors - Justice French, Justice Nicholson and the Honourable Hendy Cowan - and many Council Members have put enormous energy into bringing our campus consolidation plans to reality. ECU’s Resources Committee has worked tirelessly to actualise the vision via the practicalities and a myriad of ECU staff have made invaluable input from our Facilities and Services Centre architects and planners through to the future users of the buildings. Our consultant architects have been marvellous - listening closely and fully comprehending what we wanted our new architecture to say. They have realised our ideas in ways exceeding our hopes.

For me personally, the process has been a source of incredible excitement and satisfaction. One of my big thrills has been donning a hard hat and boots and walking through the skeletons of our buildings as they took on flesh and life.

I invite you, through this book, to participate in the journey ECU has undertaken in creating its own style of architecture, a new public face to display its character. I think the beauty and functionality of the teaching, learning and working spaces shown in this book tell their own, impressive, story.

Professor Millicent Poole
VICE-CHANCELLOR 1997 - 2005
When ECU decided to re-locate its headquarters, it not only made history - becoming the first modern university in Australia to take such a bold move - it also began a process of immense symbolic and strategic importance for its future.

It was symbolic because, as this book illustrates, the University used inspirational architecture to create a powerful new public persona. It was strategic because these beautiful and functional structures have significantly enhanced our reputation as a provider of quality teaching and research and established us as a committed, energetic partner with our surrounding communities.

Following in the footsteps of two Chancellors before me - Justices French and Nicholson - I now have the honour of continuing to steer ECU through this exciting, multi-million dollar campus development process.

The architecture depicted in this book is the result of that process. It is also the result of comprehensive strategic planning and significant financial investment.

By 2007, ECU will have outlaid around $190 million on upgrading its Joondalup, Mount Lawley and South West (Bunbury) Campuses.

Infrastructure investment of this magnitude boosts local communities, creates jobs, stimulates local business. Our university planning has allowed for the student population to grow to around 20,000 in the longer term - such a burgeoning student and staff population will create substantial local financial, social and cultural spin-offs.

The bulk of the investment has been on the Joondalup Campus - a recognition of the demographic importance of the region. In the next decade, a third of Western Australia’s university-aged population will be clustered in this north metropolitan region. ECU will be ready to serve them.

Much has also been accomplished on the Mount Lawley and South West Campuses in constructing new buildings, revitalising the campuses and extending community partnerships in those localities. Significant work by relevant ECU
Council members, Vice-Chancellor Professor Millicent Poole and her team, University and consultant architects and builders has gone into creating these dramatic and contemporary teaching, learning and research spaces and the WA Government has provided generous financial support.

The structures are like ECU - they are bold and adventurous. They form a vibrant part of ECU's history to date and will continue to shape its future as the University creates its new history.

Hon Hendy Cowan
CHANCELLOR, NOVEMBER 2005
ASPIRATIONS
Chancellery Building
Faculty of Business and Law Building
Joondalup
With its jarrah masts soaring dramatically skyward - symbolising the achievement of aspirations through lifelong learning and the quest for knowledge - ECU's bold Chancellery Building makes a powerful statement about the University and its values. Like the University itself, the building is innovative, different and dynamic.

The organic forms of the architecture appear to rise almost naturally from the landscape. Representing giant plants rising from the ground, branches fanning outwards, the two triangular wings of this stunning iconic building stand apart in a gesture that invites the local community into the campus and act as a gateway to the University's ceremonial heart.

The overall effect is a modern interpretation of the classic components of university architecture - colonnade, court and amphitheatre.

The jarrah and steel screen, while beautiful, is simultaneously functional - providing shelter, shade and structural support to the building's three levels of work areas, courtyards, café, art gallery and visitors' centre.
Red brick was used specifically to link the campus to the red-paved streets of Joondalup's central business district - demonstrating ECU's commitment to its local community.

Vital to the design is the concept of ecological sustainability.

Energy efficiency is enhanced through the automation of internal and external lighting. A state-of-the-art air conditioning system features night purging of air to pre-cool the building in summer and an economy cycle that uses ambient external fresh air. Fixed and computer-controlled sun louvres on the building's exterior reduce heat and lower power draw-downs for air conditioning.

The award-winning Chancellery Building is the most architecturally striking workplace in Perth's northern suburbs. It has become a landmark building, transforming the site into an urban focus and a catalyst for a dense future campus.

Officially opened: 18 October 2003
Defining the rear border of the University's ceremonial forecourt and sitting in counterpoint with the Chancellery Building is the **Faculty of Business and Law Building**.

The impression created by the juxtaposition of the two structures is of a ceremonial space flowing across the distance between them, rising up over the Business and Law Building to form tiered seating for public functions, then descending via an imposing stairway to join the interior of the campus.

This face of the building slopes gently backwards to create the seating, then rises sharply to accommodate four floors of academic and administration spaces. The building has a more conservative façade on the frontage which faces the rest of the campus.

Construction is of clay brick and concrete. A metal veil of automatic louvres shields the building from the sun and a series of internal courtyards provide natural light to the interiors.

*Officially opened: 6 March 2003*
“The Business and Law Building is a modern, environmentally sensitive building and it provides a highly effective environment for the Faculty’s staff and students.”

PROFESSOR ROBERT HARVEY
EXECUTIVE DEAN, FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW
AND PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR, EQUITY & INDIGENOUS