

## Learning Opportunities: A Partnership, Connecting Learning with Projects

**Gary Rasmussen, Sonya Dewing**

Queensland University of Technology, Leighton Contractors Pty Ltd

**Gary Rasmussen** works across Facilities and QUT Precincts in development and future use of the QUT Science and Engineering Centre (SEC). Key engagement areas are; communication, stakeholders, partnerships and SEC integrated operation. He has experience in management and development of faculty technical services and has undertaken technical reviews at QUT and in other universities. He has worked in Thailand with AusAID on laboratory and technical development in science and engineering. Gary has a keen interest in developing learning experiences and environments, particularly in active learning and laboratories. He has published papers and presented at Australian and international engineering education conferences, TechNet Australia and TEMG conferences. Gary has been a sessional lecturer and tutor at QUT for many years and is part of the Community of Practice for Collaborative Learning Spaces that has informed design and pedagogical approaches in relation to the new learning spaces in the SEC.

**Sonya Dewing** is the Stakeholder & Community Relations Manager for Leighton Contractors on the \$230M Science and Engineering Centre project at QUT. Sonya has worked for Leighton Contractors for six years and has been involved in several building projects, including the Leighton Contractors new headquarters (HQ) in Fortitude Valley. As well as managing the communications and community relations on the HQ project, she was also involved in managing the internal communications for the relocation of over 300 Leighton Contractors staff into the finished building. This program received the National Golden Target award for internal communications by the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA). Sonya has worked as a Speech Language Pathologist within the primary education sector before utilising her communication skills in a different way within the construction industry. Sonya is passionate about creating opportunities to engage with the local communities surrounding the projects on which she works.

Major construction projects undertaken on university campuses are an ideal opportunity to connect learners in related disciplines to the real thing. How often do universities take that opportunity, make the connection and value add to projects being carried out?

Discussion with students and academic staff will consistently generate enthusiasm for creating learning activities and resources related to projects. Some typical disciplines are project management, all fields of engineering, architecture, interior design and information technology. Some other areas that may not at first seem obvious are business, marketing, communication and public relations.

The new \$230m Science and Engineering Centre (SEC) on Gardens Point campus is at the heart of QUT's vision to help solve global problems.

The centre will thrust the university to the forefront of teaching and research in the critical areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

This landmark project will be:

- a hub for innovative teaching and learning
- a catalyst for relevant collaborative research
- an exciting meeting place
- a model for sustainable building practices.

The authors will provide a case study based on the SEC project of how the partnership between QUT and Leighton Contractors, the managing contractor, has delivered excellent learning opportunities through the design and construction phases of the SEC project.

Initiatives of this type do not flow naturally as a part of normal business operation for any of the major partners involved. The focus for the facilities management section is managing a large complex project from design to commissioning while the contractor must deliver the built form. Delivering learning opportunities is not business as usual for either and in fact, while teaching units (the faculties) have learning as their core business they have not traditionally been able to realise the significant benefit of having a major construction project in their backyard.

The Learning with Leighton Contractors program was set up within the project to achieve the identified value add. It was visioned, scoped and delivered successfully by a team from QUT and Leighton Contractors during the design and construction phases of the SEC project and long term partnership opportunities are being explored. It is envisaged that the strong connection made between tertiary and industry during this project will continue well into the future.