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The Mawson Centre:  
Access for all to Education  
Services

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## *THE MAWSON CENTRE – ACCESS FOR ALL TO EDUCATION SERVICES*

In the knowledge society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century everyone – not only children but every person, enterprise and organisation – will need ongoing access to a full range of quality education and training services. This principle, often espoused by the OECD and endorsed by the ministers of education in its member countries, has driven the planning and delivery of education and training services at Mawson Lakes, a new development on the outskirts of Adelaide in South Australia. The access point for these services, The Mawson Centre, which opened in 2005, was designed for the community as a whole.

Mawson Lakes is a rapidly growing community of some 10 000 residents developing around a campus of the University of South Australia and a technology park which is a major source of employment. It is the outcome of a successful joint project between the South Australian government and the business Lend Lease Communities.

In the past, planning for public education provisions in any new community has focused almost exclusively on the needs of children. Decisions about the timing, location, land requirement, design and capital needed to provide education in a new community have been dominated by one statistic: the projected number of children. The information, education and training needs of the rest of the community, including businesses, community organisations, people wanting new skills, older persons, people seeking advancement and the unemployed, have been given less consideration in initial planning. The idea that everyone will need ongoing access to a full range of education and training services is still not part of the planning process in many education authorities.

At Mawson Lakes the needs of the children (including the very young children) for well-designed, safe, environmentally-responsible infrastructure are being met with excellent school buildings, joint-use parks, a wetland interpretive centre, active partnerships involving university facilities and a number of designated spaces linking learning with the world of work.

But the focal point of the broadly conceived education and training services is The Mawson Centre which is accessible to everyone in the community: residents, visitors, people who work in the area and a burgeoning number of people who go there to learn.

The Mawson Centre is right in the heart of Mawson Lakes. It is sited on the main boulevard as part of the social, retail and cultural hub of the growing town centre.

The centre houses the office of the director of the Mawson Lakes Education Service, Alan Peucker. In a conventional arrangement, Peucker might have been accommodated in an office labelled “Principal” in the primary school, located far from the commercial zone.

The chancellery of the adjacent university campus forms part of The Mawson Centre. This is an important shift which underlines the notion that education is a central element in the life of Mawson Lakes and that the university is an integral part of the total education service.

The centre also links two of the most important education services at Mawson Lakes: a local government information service and joint school and town library. When the centre opened, these key components quickly became areas of high use.

There is a “computer barn” open throughout the year 24 hours a day which enables the whole Mawson Lakes community, including the university, to access information and learning opportunities through the latest information and communications technology. This is a vital element in a community where future prosperity will depend increasingly on the optimal use of new technology in sustaining social, economic and environmental development.

The Mawson Centre includes a suite of meeting rooms, a coffee house, an auditorium for 300 people and a set of classrooms for use by schools and other groups requiring teaching spaces.

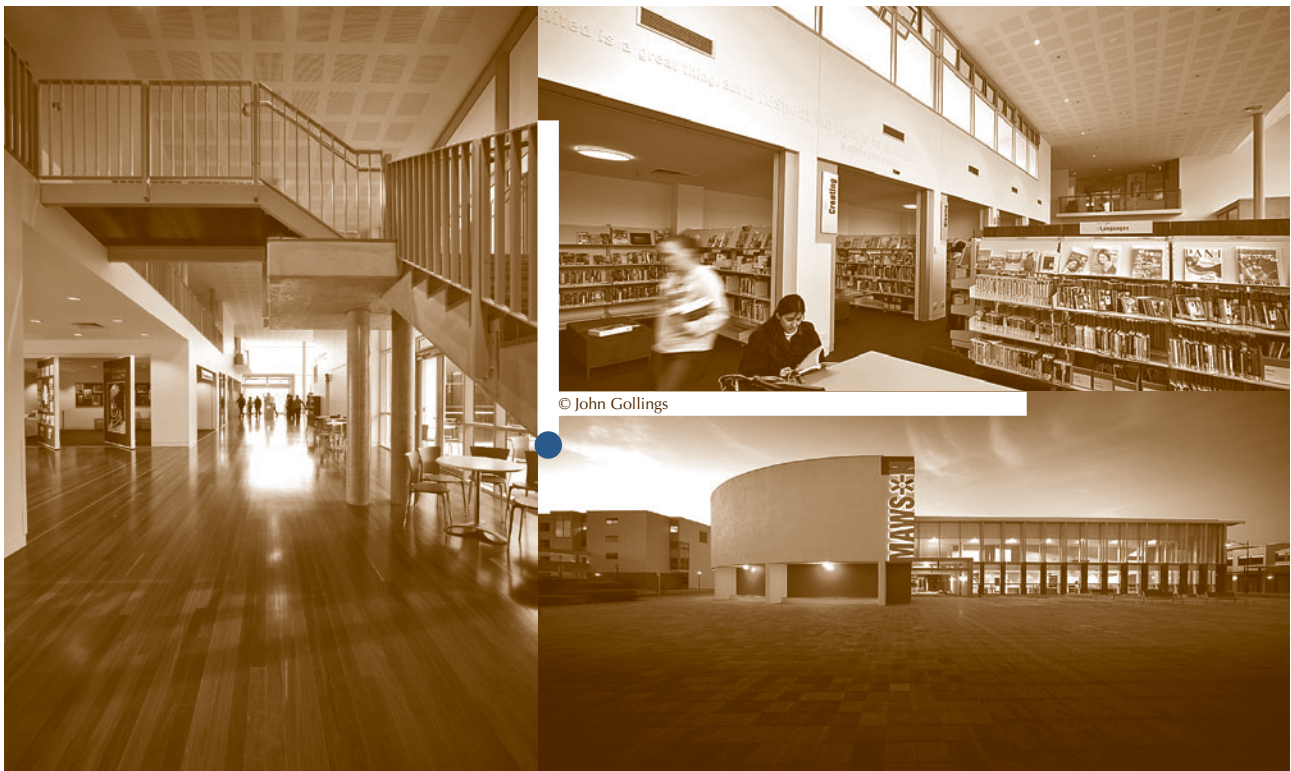
In many respects, The Mawson Centre is an expression of ideas which are gathering strength and beginning to transform conventional approaches to the provision of educational services and infrastructure. The functional design of The Mawson Centre was influenced by existing facilities, ranging from joint school and community libraries which are familiar places in many Australian rural towns, to the *mediatheques* which are now becoming commonplace in Europe.

Nevertheless, The Mawson Centre remains unique and is a landmark building in the context of education services in South Australia for four main reasons:

- **Partnerships:** Partnerships between the university, the local government (Salisbury City Council), the state government (Department of Education) and the developer (Lend Lease) were fundamental to the design, location, funding and governance decisions leading to the establishment of the centre.
- **Positioning:** Positioning the centre in the heart of Mawson Lakes is a declaration that education is a core element in the everyday life of the new community.
- **Connections:** The centre brings together access to information, education and training with the social, commercial and cultural elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century life.
- **Sustainability:** The services accessed through this multi-tenanted centre can evolve in response to changes in the demographic profile of the community and in the nature of demand for services.

Now that The Mawson Centre is a physical and operational reality, the challenge is shifting towards finding the best ways to manage and govern it and to ensure that full advantage is taken by the community of the opportunities the centre provides.

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