

**RESEARCH IN THE NAME OF THE LAW: CREATING A LEGAL RESOURCE 'ONE STOP SHOP' AND CASE LAW DATABASE FOR QUEENSLAND POLICE PROSECUTORS**

**ABSTRACT**

What can you get when you mix a time-poor police prosecutions unit, a team of committed librarians and a technology initiative dedicated to improving prosecution practice and efficiency? As QPS Library Services has discovered, actually, may great things! In partnership with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Prosecution Corps, Library Services has redeveloped an existing information portal into a 'one stop shop' for all police legal resources, including a custom-made case law database which enables information access and sharing across prosecution units. This paper will share the story of our partnership with the QPS Prosecution Corps, and the evolution of the Case Law Database as a statewide data and information tool.

Since 1991, QPS Library Services has enjoyed a close working relationship with the QPS Prosecution Corps, providing information resources, research services and training support. There are around 270 prosecutors across Queensland, handling approximately 95% of all criminal matters in the Queensland Magistrates Courts. The prosecutors work in a busy environment that is unpredictable and time sensitive. They rely on experience, informed practice and research to guide their decision making. This is where Library Services is able to provide the most support. Since the advent of the QPS ProsTech Initiative in 2013, we have been able to leverage off an increased connection to technology in order to provide greater access to information at point of need.

The ProsTech Initiative was developed by QPS Legal Services to investigate new

capabilities for prosecutors within the court room, including secure access to QPS systems utilising the Queensland Government's Public Safety Network. The first stage of the initiative saw a rollout of laptops to prosecutors throughout the state to enable mobile access to information and systems wherever they may be. Working in partnership with the ProsTech project team, Library Services developed a 'one stop shop' for prosecutors: a single point of access for legal resources, case law, reference materials, manuals and more. The 'one stop shop' enables seamless access to legal information resources via QPS laptops from within the court room, a functionality not available to police prosecutors in other states.

As part of the 'one stop shop', a customised in-house database of frequently used legal cases was also created using the Library's SirsiDynix Symphony and Enterprise software. Cases were hand-picked for inclusion by Library staff and QPS prosecutors across the state and catalogued by a dedicated librarian over a 1 year period. The Case Law Database currently holds over 1100 cases with metadata specifically of interest to QPS prosecutors. It has allowed for a huge knowledge gap to be filled as it includes cases not available in other commercial databases. It has also enabled greater information and knowledge sharing across regional units, while preventing duplication of resources and potential breaches of copyright by individual teams saving copies of case law locally.

The ProsTech Initiative, including the 'one stop shop', was a finalist in the QPS 2015 Awards for Excellence.

## PAPER

Take a time-poor police prosecutions unit, add in a team of committed librarians and a technology initiative dedicated to improving prosecution practice and efficiency. What do you get? Actually, as QPS Library Services have found, some really great stuff! In partnership with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Legal Services Group, QPS Library Services has redeveloped an existing information portal into a 'one stop shop' for all police legal resources, including a custom-made case law database which enables information access and sharing across prosecution units. This paper will share the tale of our partnership with the QPS Prosecution Corps, and the evolution of the Case Law Database as a statewide data and information tool. An introduction to the Library and Prosecutions Corps will be provided, as well as details of the recent Prosecution Technology (ProsTech) Initiative. The format and set up of both the Legal Guide and the Case Law Database will be discussed, as well as the achievements and lessons learned from Library Services' recent participation in the ProsTech project.

### **QPS Library Services**

QPS Library Services has been operating in one form or another since the 1970s. After quite a few reviews and restructures, we are currently responsible for providing library services to the Queensland Police, Queensland Fire and Public Safety Business Agencies. There are twelve staff located in 3 branches at Police Headquarters in Brisbane City, Oxley Police Academy and Townsville Police Academy. We provide research, reference, training, current awareness and acquisition services to both training and operational areas. In 2016 Library Services answered over 1100 short reference queries and 240 research requests. This number included requests from units such as Prosecutions, Education and Training, Forensics, Homicide, Counter Terrorism, Child Safety, Ethical Standards, and Strategy and Policy. With a client base of over 16000 people, we are constantly looking for new ways to provide information and services in better ways.

## **QPS Prosecutors**

Some fast facts and figures on who the QPS Prosecutors are and the work that they do:

- There are around 270 QPS Prosecutors across Queensland;
- The QPS Prosecutors deal with almost all of the criminal matters that go before the Magistrates Courts;
- The Magistrates Courts can be conducted at 112 locations throughout the state<sup>1</sup>;
- Approximately 96% of all criminal matters that go before a court in Queensland do so in the Magistrates Courts<sup>2</sup>;
- In the 2015-16 year the Magistrates Courts dealt with 230,929 defendants on a total of 444,955 charges<sup>3</sup>.

As the above figures show, the QPS Prosecutors are very busy and work in an environment that is unpredictable and time sensitive. They prosecute in simple and complex matters and aren't necessarily trained legal practitioners. They rely on experience, informed practice and research to guide their decision making. This is where QPS Library Services comes in. Since 1991, Library Services has enjoyed a close working relationship with the QPS Prosecution Corps, providing information resources, research services and training support. The Prosecutors are our biggest users. As well as standard reference and research support, we are responsible for the legal research component of the trainee prosecutor accreditation, we manage negotiations with legal vendors and we facilitate access to a wide variety of free and subscription legal products.

## **ProsTech Initiative**

The ProsTech Initiative was developed by QPS Legal Services to investigate new capabilities for prosecutors within the court room, including secure access to QPS systems utilising the Queensland Government's Public Safety Network. The first stage of the initiative saw a rollout of laptops to prosecutors throughout the state to enable

seamless access to QPS information and systems wherever they may be. At the time of writing, QPS Prosecutions are the only Police Prosecution corps in the country able to fully connect with internal police information systems from court. As stated by former QPS Legal Division Executive Director Kate Bradley, “Traditionally...police prosecutors would use desktop PCs located at their office to prepare and manage prosecution files, and then take paper copies of the court briefs and law books to court”<sup>4</sup>. Now, prosecutors can access everything electronically from court as if they are sitting in their offices.

### **‘One Stop Shop’**

Since the advent of the ProsTech Initiative in 2013, Library Services has been able to leverage off an increased connection to technology in order to provide greater access to information at point of need. The ProsTech Initiative has completely changed the way Library Services has been able to provide resources and assistance to prosecutors in court. Prior to the ProsTech project, Library Services was still receiving requests to fax photocopied cases to courthouses throughout the state and were facilitating the purchase of multiple copies of bulky hard copy criminal law texts. In states such as New South Wales, Police prosecution units have purchased electronic copies of criminal law texts for use on iPads. Library Services was investigating the viability of this for Queensland when we were approached about the ProsTech Initiative. Working in partnership with the ProsTech project team, Library Services evaluated a number of options for access to information from leading legal publishers, as well as the development of in-house solutions. Making the most of the new connection to internal QPS systems, we redeveloped an existing legal information portal into a ‘one stop shop’ for prosecutors: a seamless, IP authenticated point of access for legal resources, case law, reference materials, manuals and more.

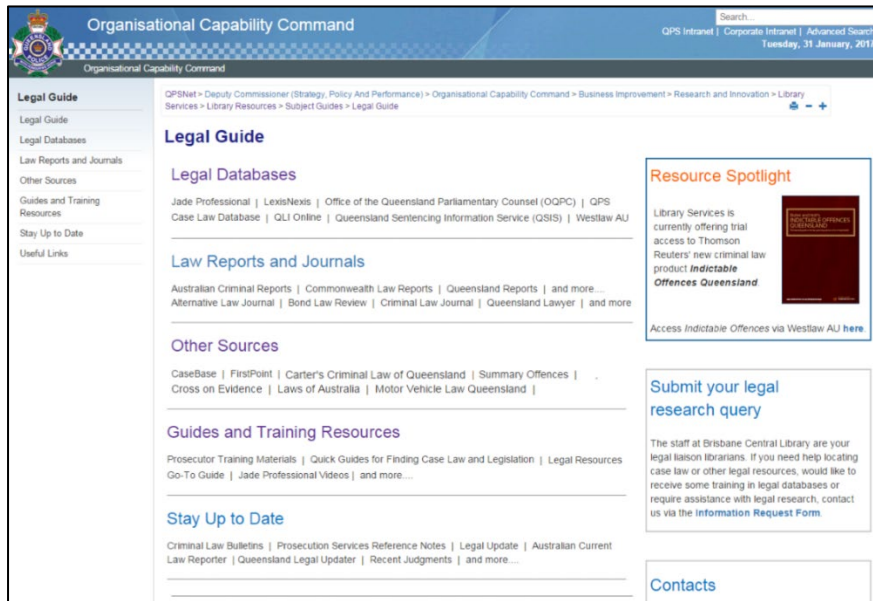


Figure 1: Legal Guide screenshot

Library Services has always provided an intranet guide with links for resources, but with the support of central Prosecutions management, the revamped 'Legal Guide' became the single point of entry for all prosecutors to get their information. We reviewed all of the content and on the suggestion of working prosecutors added links to material that had not been included before, such as internal QPS and Prosecution manuals. This has ensured that rather than having to go to multiple sites, prosecutors can find the majority of what they need in the one place.

The Guide itself is part of a larger Library Services sub-site of the QPS Intranet which utilises Microsoft SharePoint software. It has been kept very simple on purpose so that information is always easy to find. It is not in itself special. It is basically groups of links based on the type of resources we have available. What does make it unique however, is the connection that allows the prosecutors to use the Guide on their laptops from within any court room in Queensland and the IP authentication that allows them seamless access to subscription resources as if they were on their QPS desktop PCs. Since the beginning of the ProsTech Initiative the average number of monthly unique visitors to the Legal Guide has doubled and the average number of hits registered is more than 2.5 times the number recorded in 2013. We hope this will continue to grow as

we continue to develop the content and regularly market the Guide to new prosecutors.

## **Case Law Database**

Library Services created the QPS Case Law Database back in the early 2000s when a lot of Queensland case law was not available online. It was created using our legacy Unicorn library management software. Cases were included in the Database if they were frequently requested by prosecutors. The Database was partially customised, eg. fields were renamed to suit case law, however each case was catalogued using standard cataloguing rules and included LC subject headings.

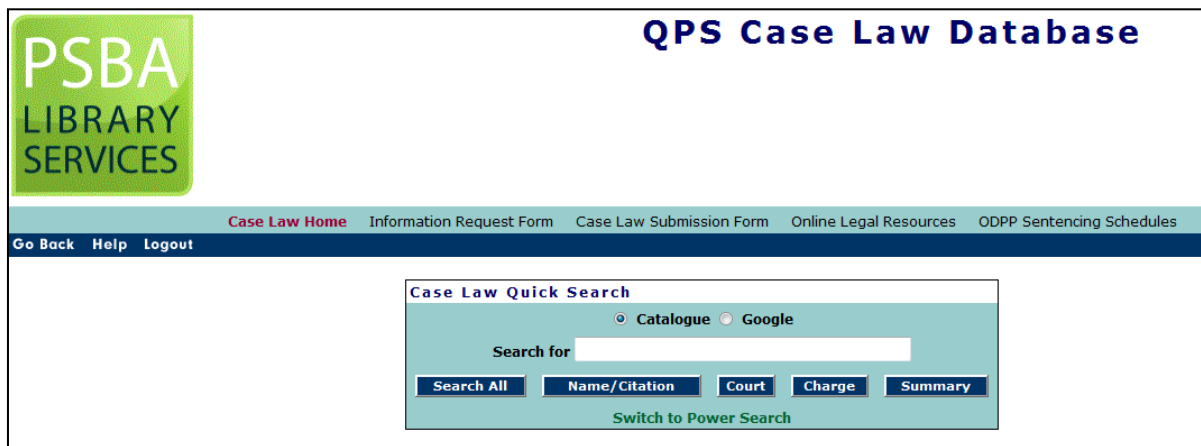


Figure 2: Old QPS Case Law Database interface

The original Case Law Database was not well utilised, other than as an access point for other linked resources. Library Services became aware that individual Prosecution units were building up locally saved repositories of their own frequently referred to cases and cases of note. There was not a lot of information sharing happening and Library Services continued to receive repeated requests for the same type of cases from people all over the state. While we launched multiple campaigns encouraging prosecutors to contribute to the Case Law Database, despite our best efforts, we just didn't have the buy-in that was needed to make it a really useful resource. Therefore, by the time the ProsTech Initiative began, it had been on the Library Services agenda for a while to revamp the Database. With the support and assistance of the ProsTech project team, as well as a long overdue upgrade to our Library Management System (LMS), we were

able to completely overhaul the Case Law Database and make it more suited to the needs of operational prosecutors.

Working with the ProsTech project team and other consultant prosecutors, a dedicated group of Library staff started from scratch. We created a new template for case records, including fields with core information about each case, but also adding other fields at the request of prosecutors, for example fields for internal QPS file numbers and information on the type of plea. A standard index of charges and legislation was created, as well as a standard list of phrases and order for catchwords. With assistance from our LMS vendor SirsiDynix, we were able to create a completely customised interface for the Database utilising the SirsiDynix Enterprise software.

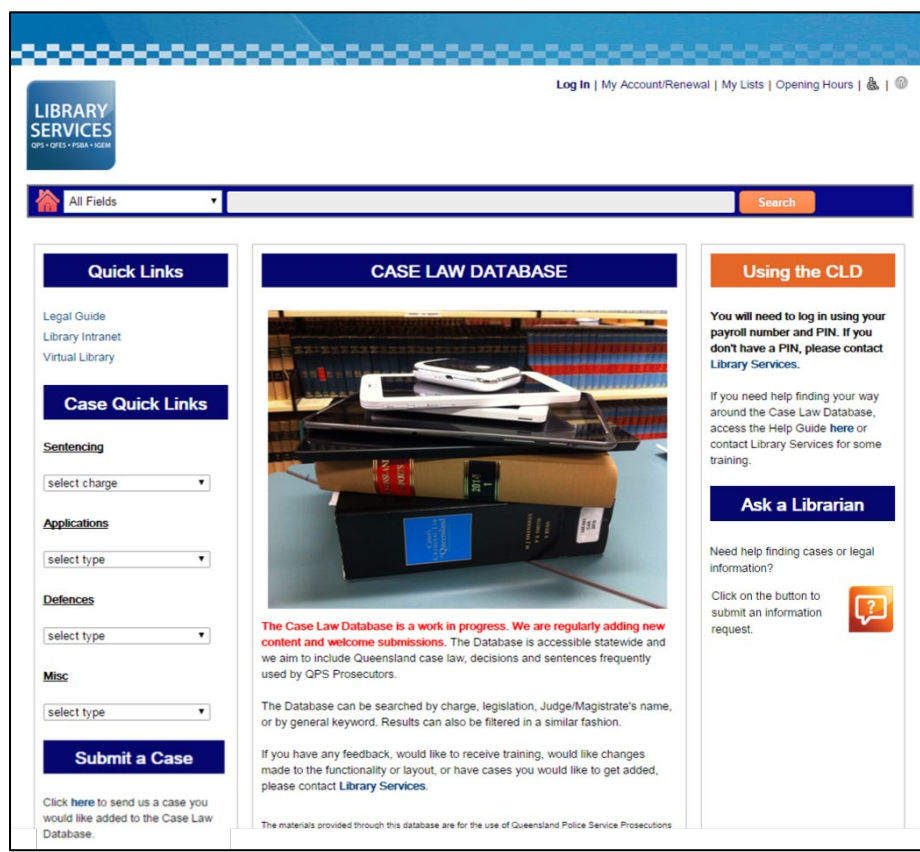


Figure 3: New Case Law Database interface

The Enterprise software provides a web interface that does not have to conform to standard cataloguing rules and practices. We were therefore able to rename



established fields such as Title and Subject and create new search fields for information such as the Court, the Judge or Magistrate's Name, Charge and Penalty/Outcome.

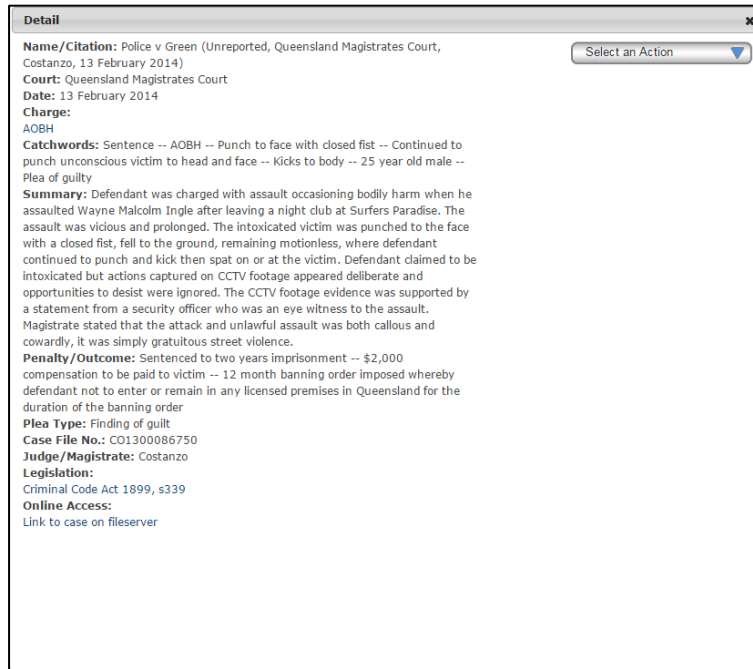


Figure 4: Case Detail screenshot

The search function relies on fuzzy logic and search results can be narrowed down by a number of facets. To make things as easy as possible for the prosecutors, we customised the facets and limited them to only Charge, Legislation, Court and Judge/Magistrate's name.

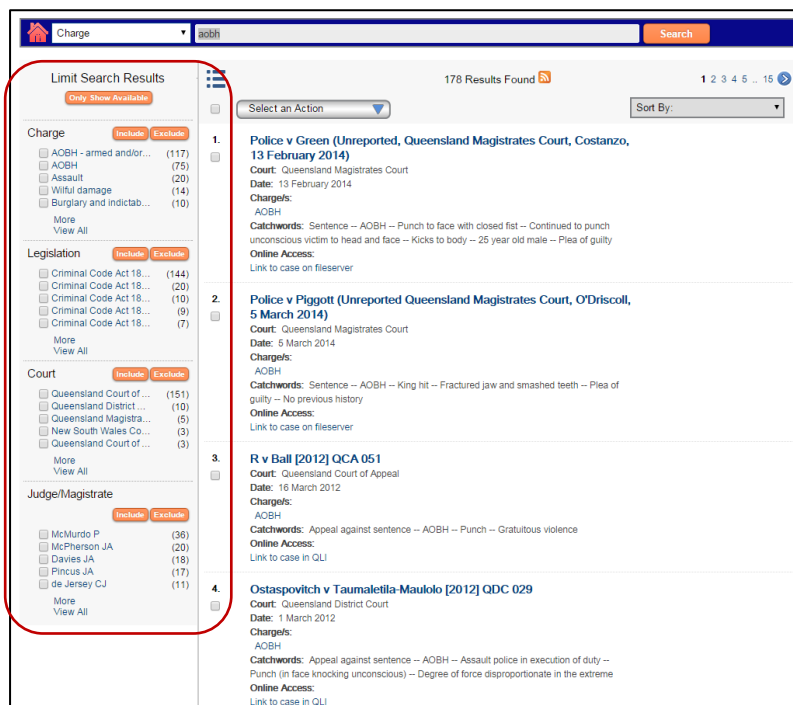


Figure 5: Search Results screenshot

We also added quick links to the front page to produce focused results based on particular Charges, Type of Application, Type of Defence and other miscellaneous searches such as “Breach of suspended sentence” or “Admissibility of Evidence”.

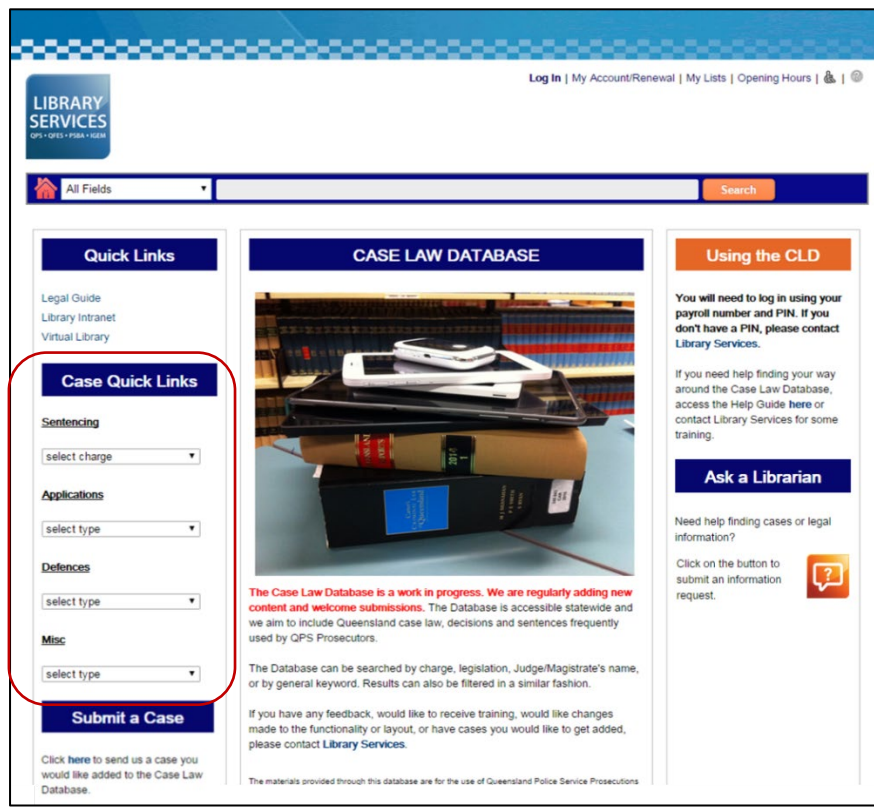


Figure 6: Case Law Quick Links on Case Law Database home page

The purpose for the Database, as well as the functionality, was also re-evaluated. We wanted the Database to provide the Prosecutors with

- a) a tool that would save them time;
- b) a search facility that was quick and easy to use; and
- c) information that they couldn't find anywhere else.

One of the biggest information gaps for QPS Prosecutors is comparative case law from the lower courts. The QPS Prosecutors are often required to submit examples of comparative sentencing to the Court and as they deal mainly with summary matters ie traffic offences, burglary, public nuisance, it is the decisions of the lower courts that are of great interest to them. Traditionally, the decisions of the lower courts in Queensland are not generally published and have always been hard to find. While the Supreme

Court Library Queensland has now started publishing some Magistrates Court decisions, the number is still very low. We were therefore determined to ensure that the Database could house and share the decisions that individual prosecutors had sourced directly from the Court and held in their own collections. Details of cases in the local repositories from Maroochydore, Southport and Brisbane Prosecutions were obtained and funding was received from the ProsTech Initiative to hire a dedicated legal cataloguer for 2 days a week for a 1 year period to add the metadata for each case to the Database. The original 320 case records in the Database were also reviewed for relevance and were either updated to the new format or removed. The metadata entered is not just a straight copy from the case headnotes, but each case is reviewed and the items of relevance to the QPS particularly highlighted in the Catchwords and Summary fields. After they are catalogued, each case is reviewed and quality controlled to ensure accuracy and to allow for adjustments to the web interface quick links for new charges etc.

The new Database was launched in July 2015. It now has over 1100 cases in it and is still growing. Our Web Services team created an online submission form for us so that prosecutors can submit case law for inclusion to the Database. We also have a folder set up on our internal fileserver so that prosecutors can make bulk submissions at any time. Cases now include unpublished decisions of the Magistrates and District Courts not discoverable in any other commercial databases, as well as unreported and reported decisions from free and subscription resources. Where the case is available online, a link to the resource is included in the case record. Where the case is not available elsewhere online, we provide a link to a saved copy of the document.

Since the Database was relaunched in its new form, the average number of monthly unique visitors has almost doubled and the number of user sessions is 1.5 times greater. Following our initial sourcing of cases, we have also had some success with

prosecutors submitting cases, though we hope this will continue to improve. Awareness of the Database has definitely increased and Library Services staff have noticed a decrease in the number of urgent requests for copies of cases for court. We have also been approached by other units wanting to widen the scope of the Database to include cases of interest to their areas. A number of these opportunities are being investigated.

### **Lessons learned**

We learned a lot about the capabilities of our new Library Management System and what we could do with it, particularly when it came to manipulating search fields and how data displayed. We were able to apply some of these new skills when we set up our regular library catalogue interfaces for both the QPS and the PSBA.

We learned a lot more about an important client group and the kinds of information and assistance they really need to do their jobs effectively. Particularly when it came to establishing the fields for the Case Law Database, we learned a lot about the type of information in individual cases that prosecutors were interested in. We have been able to apply this knowledge to all reference, research and training assistance that we provide for the Prosecution units on a daily basis.

I think one of the biggest lessons learned though, was that regardless of how great a resource is and how much the Library promotes a resource to users, the best way to get them to use it is to show exactly how the resource will help them. Make the resource as specific to their needs and customised for their purposes as possible. Make it appealing. And above all, get the support of the central leadership, so that they will teach and encourage their staff to use the resources and contribute to their ongoing development.

## **Achievements**

The review and revamp of the Legal Guide and Case Law Database provided many benefits to both Library Services and Library clients.

The Legal Guide:

- is now a 'one stop shop' which provides a single point of entry for easy access to all relevant legal resources;
- provides seamless, IP-authenticated access to QPS and subscription resources;
- is accessible to all QPS Prosecutors from any court room in Queensland;
- has raised the profile of Library Services among a key client group; and
- provides a great ongoing marketing tool for legal information and resources.

The Case Law Database:

- has allowed for a huge knowledge gap to be filled as it includes cases not available in other commercial databases;
- provides a single point of entry for important case law searching;
- provides customised case law information to assist QPS Prosecutors;
- enables greater information and knowledge sharing across regional units;
- prevents duplication of effort and resources as individual units no longer need their personal repositories; and
- prevents any potential breaches of copyright due to individual teams saving copies of case law locally.

Both the 'one stop shop' and the Case Law Database were included in the ProsTech's nomination for the QPS 2015 Awards for Excellence. The ProsTech Initiative was a finalist for the awards and Library Services staff were recognised for their contribution to the project.



Figure 7: Members of Library Services and ProsTech team at the launch of the new Case Law Database

## REFERENCES

1. Magistrates Courts of Queensland. (2016). *Magistrates Courts of Queensland Annual Report 2015-16*, p.32. Retrieved from [http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf)
2. Magistrates Courts of Queensland. (2016). *Magistrates Courts of Queensland Annual Report 2015-16*, p.18. Retrieved from [http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf)
3. Magistrates Courts of Queensland. (2016). *Magistrates Courts of Queensland Annual Report 2015-16*, p.19. Retrieved from [http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/498461/mc-ar-2015-2016.pdf)
4. (2014). "Police prosecutors power up with mobile technology". *Police Bulletin*, no. 397, p. 21.