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Reshaping the Future

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A powerpoint presentation including photographs of the library is available from http://www.zhbluzern.ch/liber-lag/PP_LAG_08/Wednesday/Beard_LIBER08_def.pdf (accessed 9 August 2008)

Abstract

A 5.3 million pounds sterling refurbishment and new build library project was undertaken by Bournemouth University. First inception to latest adaptation spans 2000–2008. The project gave equal weight to the refurbishment and new build and the building was opened in 2003. The philosophy was one of seeking a design that would allow adaptation and change. Winning the SCONUL building award 2007 is testament to the success of designing and implementing space and service delivery in a way that is sympathetic to developing pedagogy, student expectations and the University's plans.

Key Words: Refurbishment; Academic Libraries; New Build; Adaptable Library Design

Introduction

'The ability to succeed is the ability to adapt. It's about embracing and leading change, drawing on support from those around you. We must create an active learning environment not only by maximising space but also by ensuring it is sympathetic to the developing pedagogy and to students' expectations.' (David Ball, Bournemouth University Librarian, 2007).

These words, written for the 50th anniversary of the first library in what is now Bournemouth University, encapsulate the philosophy for all our building and service developments. The words help to explain why refurbishment of our 1980's building was as important as the adjoining new build.

This case study spans eight years from 2000 to 2008. The project began with summer works in 2000 to prepare the existing two-storey 1980's building to fit what would be the adjoining new build. This preparation was separately funded and involved putting a ceiling and floor between the ground and first floors of two octagonal light wells. The process required significant disruption to shelving and seating. However, this enabled us to plan and test some of the logistics of managing the main project whilst retaining reasonable access to services and resources throughout.

Communication of the rolling programme for closed access stock retrieval and alternative locations for quiet study avoided complaint and helped with the dissemination of the concepts surrounding the main project due to begin during the following academic year.

Design Brief

The principles outlined in the following brief have been delivered and continue to underpin the ongoing development of services and space. The building was to offer:

- no difference between the new build and the refurbishment, the interiors should be indistinguishable;
- Safe, equal and autonomous access for all;

- energy-saving conformity with the University's environmental policy;
- flexible and responsive to the current and future demands of a growing and diversifying academic community;
- coherent integrated spectrum of services previously spread in two libraries and various offices;
- planning constraint of not exceeding 5 storeys and a budget of £5.3m.

Implementing the brief was intended to extend beyond the official opening by the Duke of Kent in January 2003 (Beard, Ferris, Ryland, 2003). Each year has seen a process of adaptation to meet the evolving needs of the academic community at Bournemouth.

Planning and Project Management

As with all successful projects it is essential to follow the best practice guidelines available. Our project was delivered before the JISC infoNet site launch in 2007 where there is a wealth of advice and resources available for planning technology-rich learning spaces. The website is now an essential resource for project planners.

Our project was led by the University Estates Group. There was a strategic project management group which met regularly throughout the project enabling the architect; university librarian; library project manager; Estates Group project manager and, once appointed, the construction team manager to discuss concepts and delivery of the project.

There was a project team that met at increasingly frequent intervals, which always involved the library project manager and the Estates Group project manager and others as appropriate. As the project progressed these meetings were often on site. The advantage of proximity of the new build to the existing library facilitated not only the sense of ownership but also, in a very practical way, a day by day check on project progress.

Of equal importance was the communication with and involvement of all of the library and other staff in academic services in a number of cross-service

groups and teams each with a member of the academic services executive as co-ordinator. It was recognised that the Estates Group brought the expertise of building project management, the architect brought the innovation in design concepts and the library staff were encouraged to have a significant input into the realisation of the project. It was already clear in 2000 that we wished to take full advantage of the changes that e-services and self-service would bring. The project was acknowledged as one of our agents of change not only for space use but also for service delivery.

Whether it was the modular service counter design, combining service from two libraries, the open plan subject team base, the colour of the chairs, or expertise in logistical planning of library moves: the process was motivational and all looked back with pride and a lasting satisfaction. Working groups and service wide staff meetings all helped to generate ideas and allay inevitable fears about change and how it would affect the individual staff member or the quality of the service able to be delivered.

The building was to open in 2003 before we had installed four new self-service terminals but within twelve months we were able to reduce the staffing of the loans and returns desk from four at peak times to one. The library assistants were released from long counter duties and began working in new ways to facilitate access to e-resources. Savings also accrued from a process of natural wastage with each vacancy being assessed and workflows adjusted. Three years after the building first opened a new job description and person specification was agreed which incorporated enhanced skills and a range of duties that are expected to evolve as service delivery continues to develop. This new entry grade for senior library assistants has been matched by a decline in the number of library assistants employed.

Communication about the project was not confined to the staff who would deliver service from the new building but also included regular communication with the academic schools, not only about the vision but, as with the previous summer, also about the practicalities of physical access during the different phases of work. This included information about noise from the new build affecting the study area, preparations for the refurbishment and the stock transfer into the new build.

The project was planned to minimise disruption with the most invasive phases being delivered post examinations and in vacations. The actual build-

ing project was scheduled to last 15 months on the new build with another 4 months for the refurbishment. The project delivered on time with the phase one new build being handed over mid-August 2002. Stock was moved in over a two-week period and the refurbishment of the old space being completed, including fitting out, by January 2003.

Design Impact

The architect awarded the tender was local and experienced in innovative octagonal buildings. The available site was to adjoin a 1980's two-storey octagon and space constraints dictated a similar shape for the new build. The resulting iconic build is evident from the pictures whether floodlight at night showing off the fibre optic sculpture emphasising the University's position as a beacon of scholarship in the community or drawing students to the centre of the campus during the day.

The success has led to images of the building being used in a number of different publications to represent the University. However, the excitement about the external design was tempered by the challenge of how to get the best out of an octagon for internal layout. The architect from Saunders Architects admitted to knowing nothing about libraries but this proved an advantage because of his willingness to listen and understand what we wanted to deliver.

The internal layout utilises and echoes the building's unusual shape. The shelving runs parallel to the external walls, each run diminishing in length towards the centre of the building to fill each segment of the octagon. This both preserves sight-lines to the windows and natural light, is more space efficient than oblong blocks of shelving, and allows a logical sequence on each floor.

Coloured lights in the floor, wall up-lighters and fittings scattering light across the supporting piers add visual interest and avoid an 'institutional' feel.

One Concept, One Project

The Sir Michael Cobham Library has 5,210 sq m comprising 2,377 sq m in the refurbishment and 2,833 sq m in the new build. When the new build opened in September 2002 it accommodated 4.5 kilometres of shelving and 440 study spaces, a special collections room, study rooms and circulation space. In January 2003 the refurbished space added a large area for open access computing, more group study space, a space dedicated to postgraduate students, learning and IT support, a law library and a language/computer laboratory. Since opening, the replacement of print by electronic journals and reference works has reduced the shelving by over 100 metres. Over 60% of all transactions are now self-service; this has enabled us to shrink the original modular counter by 40%. The space freed has been used to increase social learning spaces in a variety of informal clusters, some of our most popular study spaces. Observing groups moving seats to work together at fixed computers led to increases in the number of seats available in theses computer zones. By the summer of 2007 we had an increase of 24% in the study seats, from 775 to 964.

The resource totals in 2008 were 198,000 books, 1,700 journals; 50,000 e-books & 38,000 e-journals and report series. Ball et al. (2007) describe how the pattern of use has demonstrably changed in the five years since the building opened. Downloads of full-text articles from e-journals and, latterly, from e-books, have increased from 280,000 in 2002/3 to 690,000 in 2006/7. This represents a rise of 146% in four years. Over the same period issues of hard-copy books have dropped from a peak of 349,000 in 2003/2004 to 272,000 in 2006/7. This represents a decline of 28% in three years. However, the aggregate of hard-copy loans and electronic downloads has risen from 620,000 in 2002/3 to 962,000 in 2006/7 — a rise of 55%.

Helped by the wireless network and increased number of power sockets, the building is proving its adaptability. The number of fixed computers has remained static at 255, but laptop use is rising exponentially. Natural zoning guides to the help points, book stacks, open access computers and study areas. In the summer of 2008 the walls surrounding three study rooms will be removed to be replaced by informal seating clusters and seven techno booths each with an interactive whiteboard and plasma projection screen. The silent study zones on the upper floor are supported by signage and patrols by the security attendants and support from the student shelving team.

Environmental Issues for Refurbishment and New Build

The building is served by two staircases, one of which is for emergency use only. A bold decision was made to only have one lift, designated for priority use by those with additional needs. The windows in the new build are angled to minimise solar gain and the ventilation is predicated on the concept of a wind-tower displacement ventilation system, night cooling of the structure and additional air handling as required. Full air conditioning is confined to a few areas and with a targeted heat curtain across the automatic entrance doors, these measures contribute to the boilers achieving 94% efficiency and an ambient temperature of 22 degrees centigrade. The lighting is controlled by a programmable lighting control (ECS system) with the exception of lighting to utility and plant rooms. External lighting is controlled by a combination of time lock and photocell.

A lesson learnt from the refurbishment was that if walls are erected in an area previously with free circulation, the ability to maintain ambient temperatures can be compromised. Remedial action had to be taken to improve the inherited air conditioning system in the refurbished building.

Efficiency, Safety and Sustainability in Space & Staffing

Shutters and certain doors to staff areas and special collections are operated by key cards, giving controlled access, while CCTV monitoring and direct link emergency phones ensure the security of staff and users. Stock has of course security tags, which activate exit barriers.

An innovation introduced after advice from our community police liaison officer was the Chelsea clip, a simple device used in nightclubs to suspend a bag securely from the underside of the study tables.

The CCTV coverage is augmented by two-way radio communication between the two security attendants on duty whenever the whole building is open. The shutters and cameras are sufficient to enable the late evening opening of the refurbished part of the building to be managed by one security attendant. Students have access to computers, study space and the self-service machines

in this area from 08.00 am until midnight. 60% of all transactions are delivered through self-service.

The shrinking hard copy stock and increased self-service have allowed us to reapportion space and redirect staffing.

Innovation in Service and Design

The integration of the various service strands into one building has improved communication, while careful planning has given each team its own dedicated space in the relevant zone, so it is more obvious where to go for library help, computer or learning support. The creation of a single library subject base has been particularly successful; a specialist subject advice service is located next to the reference collections and the subject team base.

The refurbished area also houses support for academic skills development, our Peer Assisted Learning Scheme and for those with additional learning needs. The challenge here was to offer ease of access, whilst retaining a degree of privacy for users. The service is offered from the ground floor, within easy sight of the building entrance, which has doors and entry gates controlled by proximity sensors offering unimpeded access to all.

To maximise light and the sense of space, the majority of the partitions are of glass, but those of the learning support area are covered in opaque film using curves echoing those of the computer desks.

Despite falling loans of stock, the footfall has not decreased and the building remains and has developed as a focal point for learning on campus.

The library café is located outside the building, opening onto a courtyard with group seating and a stunning sculpture by Koichi Ishino. By September 2008 there will be vending available inside the ground floor area, increasing the accessibility of food and drink throughout the opening hours. A combination of hard flooring, increased cleaning frequency and the availability of keyboard wipes is expected to maintain the excellence of the study environment.

Ambience

Colour and finishes have contributed to a building acclaimed for its purposeful spaces, fostering a wide variety of learning styles. Perforated steel end panels give a contemporary feel, and link visually to the dividers on the study desks. The colour scheme is neutral with silvers, blues and black accents, linking the clean lines and colours of the external design. The result is a visually uncluttered and calm environment for study. The environment has been respected and shows no distress after five years.

The colour schema has worked equally for those wanting to study in groups or in one of the silent zones on the upper floors.

SCONUL Award

The citation given by the chair of the SCONUL award judging panel Sheila Cannell gave recognition to the success of the design and its implementation: '….very impressed by the intelligence of the design … thoughtful library, where a lot of attention had been paid to the detail of the design. The site was not easy and required an octagonal shape … this has created a landmark building …[that] has already proved that it can adapt to new uses…This building can continue to respond to changes in library service because it is so flexible.'

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JISC infoNet, www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/learning-space-design

SCONUL award, http://www.sconul.ac.uk/groups/space_planning/design_award/