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Leading learning and skills

# World Class Buildings: Design Quality in Further Education

## March 2005

Of interest to college professionals and architects aspiring to provide first class education in excellent surroundings

Advance Conference Copy

This publication has been produced in partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as an extension of the RIBA Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Client Forum's competition *Colleges for the Future*.

With a membership of over 30,000 architects, world-renowned library and collections that survey 2,500 years of architecture, RIBA advances architecture by demonstrating benefit to society and by promoting excellence in the profession.

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Of interest to college professionals and architects aspiring to provide first class education in excellent surroundings



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## 12 elements of good design

Design excellence in further education should encourage and support:

1. A 'feel good' factor
2. Integration with the local community
3. Student progression into higher education (HE) and the world of work
4. Attractive and safe reception areas
5. Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
6. Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources
7. Effective management of learner-centred education
8. Positive behaviour among students and staff
9. Efficient timetabling and use of resources
10. Safety and security of personnel and equipment
11. Effective management of the movement, location and tracking of students
12. Good quality accommodation and efficient management of staff

**RIBA LSC Client Forum**



# Foreword

The Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) five-year strategy published last July sets out our vision for an education and skills system to meet the needs of the 21st century. Achieving this vision is vital to our economic prosperity and social cohesion, and further education (FE) colleges will continue to play a vital role in its realisation. We therefore must ensure there is a flourishing, successful and sustainable network of colleges in place which is fully able to meet the needs of individuals, employers and our communities.

There is already excellent provision within the sector. We have some world class colleges which are at the heart of our efforts to deliver a high quality learning and skills sector. Through our *Success for All* reform strategy we said that if we are to continue to deliver reform and improve standards across the FE sector then we must create environments that inspire and support both teachers and students; that drive innovation; and that enable personalised learning.

We have invested heavily in great places to learn. It is our aim to make each and every college world class, delivering learning in buildings that are modern and flexible; that are designed to assist and inspire teachers and learners; and that are equipped to do the difficult job that we ask of them.

The designs we see in *World Class Buildings: Design Quality in Further Education*, provide an inspiring basis for thinking about future provision. They will assist other colleges to develop their educational vision and requirements and can help drive consistently high standards across the FE sector.



Dr Kim Howells, MP  
Minister of State for Lifelong Learning,  
Further and Higher Education

# Introduction

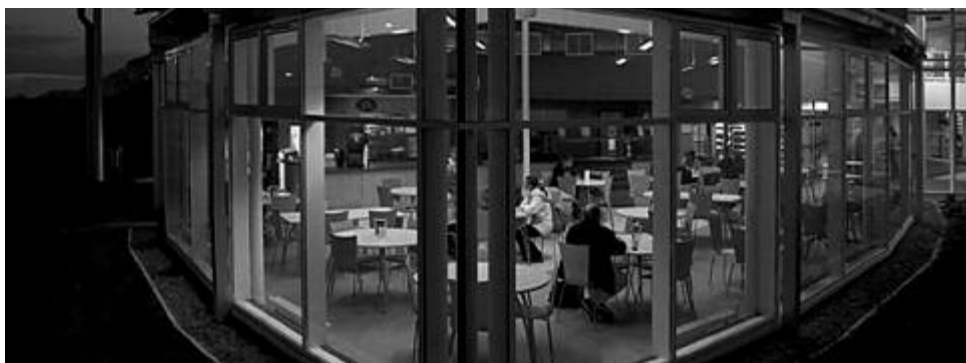


*World Class Buildings: Design Quality in Further Education* is an extension of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Client Forum competition, *Colleges for the Future*, jointly sponsored by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The competition organised last year challenged architects and architectural students to explore the design potential for future further education colleges within four scenarios. The two joint winners and three commended designs exemplified the aspirations of FE colleges and identified some of the future designs and technologies that will dominate learning in the future.

With *World Class Buildings: Design Quality in Further Education*, we hope to show college professionals and architects that excellent design already exists in today's colleges and how to achieve these designs within the LSC's funding arrangements. The 12 elements of good design are the keystones to improving learner outcomes, attracting new audiences to FE and allowing colleges the flexibility to adapt to the curriculum of the 21st century.

This publication highlights eight case studies and countless other examples showing that many of the 12 elements of good design have been incorporated into recent redevelopment projects in FE. While each college will have its own unique design issues, I hope that college leaders and architects will use these design elements to support the future success of new developments across the sector.

Paul Grainger  
Chair, RIBA LSC Client Forum and Principal,  
Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College



# Great places to learn



The learning and skills sector faces many challenges in the years ahead – raising levels of participation, improving success rates and driving up the quality of education and training naturally figure high among them. But there is another challenge that, in my view, is inseparable from the others. That is the urgent need to redevelop the further education estate to provide the high quality colleges, campuses and buildings that are essential for our young people to develop skills fit for the modern economy.

At present, too many of our learners and teachers work and learn in old fashioned buildings that are no longer fit for this purpose. Where they exist, these outdated colleges and centres of education and training fail to reflect the growing ambitions of so many of us for a vibrant 21st century environment that can inspire a spirit of learning.

That is why upgrading the college estate, building well-designed new campuses and redeveloping existing sites, is one of our top priorities. Providing the further education sector with modern centres of vocational learning equipped with the latest technology will enable our colleges to attract and retain more young people on their courses. It will also make the learning and skills sector much more attractive to employers, helping colleges and training providers to forge strong relationships with their business communities – making a major contribution to meeting employers' skills and workforce development needs at local, regional and national levels.

To achieve these goals, the Learning and Skills Council has in the last four years approved grants of £829 million to support 468 capital projects in the learning and skills sector worth a total of nearly £2.5 billion. In 2003-04 we approved grants of £330 million to support 159 projects worth a total of £935 million.

We are determined to invest more each year, as is the Government. In the Chancellor's March 2005 Budget, Gordon Brown committed an additional £350 million of capital investment in the further education estate to be made over 2008-09 to 2009-10.

This investment is really encouraging, yet capital finance is not the only issue. Alongside it there must be vision – the vision of design professionals, college leaders and partners throughout further education to work together to create the inspirational building projects that will revitalise our colleges, individually and collectively.

We know from the many examples of new college developments completed in recent years that excellent design has the capacity to enrich the learning experience, to raise the aspirations of teachers and learners and help education and training to flourish. Some of these recent projects are celebrated here.

Through our partnership with the RIBA LSC Client Forum, we will continue to highlight the critical importance of design excellence in the redevelopment of the further education estate. The new projects completed around the country have already lifted the spirits of the learners, teachers and staff who now work and learn in them. They are truly great places to learn. They also show us that our vision for world class teaching in world class buildings is achievable. And they whet our appetite for more.

Mark Haysom,  
Chief Executive,  
Learning and Skills Council

# Making learner-centred colleges a reality

The importance of good design in college buildings is often underestimated or completely neglected. Many teachers and learners in further education are not well served by the traditional learning environment, with its conventional 'corridor and classroom' architecture.

New strategies and new models are required. A college's learning strategy should come alive in its buildings. Putting design excellence at the heart of the educational 'landscape' is a huge opportunity to positively influence the behaviour and attitudes of both learners and staff and make learning more vibrant and stimulating.

Many modern building developments are characterised by scale, openness, accessibility and the provision of up-to-date amenities. The behaviour of people who use modern leisure centres, airport terminals, sport arenas, open-plan work places, supermarkets and department stores is relaxed and purposeful. They feel welcomed, included and secure.

In contrast, many older college buildings are intimidating and promote feelings of insecurity, at least in the newcomer. They make it difficult for the learner or the teacher to have a sense of the whole organisation, its character and ethos.



When specifying the design of a new college building, we all too often tend to think first of the need to provide floor areas and replicate existing architecture, rather than consider how the college working environment could be radically enhanced and learning made attractive by design ideas drawn from the architecture of the modern sports stadium or department store.

With good design, the seminar and conference rooms, learning areas, staff accommodation, catering facilities and social areas in modern colleges could have the same effect as the design features that draw people into supermarkets, regional shopping centres and unique environments like the Eden project in Cornwall.

There is the potential, particularly for large further education colleges, for powerful architecture and good design to create a modern working culture that makes learning stimulating in a way that promotes effective teamwork and encourages the efficient use of learning resources through information and learning technology (ILT) systems.



## Case study:

# Stockton Riverside College



Stockton Riverside College is a development of huge significance for the North East of England – the first new further education establishment to be built in the region for over 30 years.

The former Stockton and Billingham College has served local communities across the Tees Valley and beyond for more than half a century. The college provides vocational education and training to around 15,000 full and part-time students in any single academic year. In January 2003, the college moved from ageing facilities, with a total floor space of 20,000 square metres, to a new centre occupying under half the original space. With the new build came a new name and a new ethos.

The move came about when it was recognised that a modern, flexible and well-designed college was essential to respond to the needs of the local community, raise aspirations and improve learner achievements. The Board of Governors and management team set about realising that vision, working closely with the LSC, which contributed a grant of £5.8 million to the £17.9 million project, together with One North East – the Regional Development Agency – and other major stakeholders. It was delivered on time and to budget.

Previously, the college had very low space utilisation. Now some 26 acres of land has been condensed into six acres to create a new college building that is 'fit for purpose', designed to an exceptional standard and which makes efficient use of centralised resources. Staff were consulted at every stage, with requests for changes successfully incorporated into the project design.

In contrast to the labyrinth of corridors and hidden areas of the previous buildings, the new college adopted an open-plan learning and working environment. At its heart is a Learning Resource Centre that serves as a multipurpose teaching, study and resource delivering programmes flexibly using information technology (IT). It incorporates central learning pods that can accommodate groups of different sizes and includes 217 computer terminals and 63 computer workstations for individual study. The centre is designed to suit delivery of the college's modular-based curriculum.

ILT is integral to the college's vision of using e-learning to enhance the learner experience and support the professionals delivering the service. Students can access information in a cyber café-style environment promoted through information kiosks within the student common room and outside information and guidance.

The building looks inspirational. It is bathed in natural light and promotes a sense of calm, safety and security, with clear visibility for CCTV cameras. It is energy efficient and complies fully with the Disability Discrimination Act, with all areas accessible and enhancements for people with sight and hearing impairments.

The new college is centrally located and within walking distance of both Stockton town centre and Thornaby railway station. It is on a central transport route with bus stops directly outside. Free on-site parking is available for all college users. The site is adjacent to the University of Durham Queen's Campus, creating the concept of a learning park that highlights the prospects of FE students progressing to higher education.

At the formal opening in December 2002, Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed the satisfaction of everyone involved when he said: 'I can honestly say I have not seen a more magnificent college and selection of learning facilities anywhere else in the country.'

### Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Integration with the local community
- Student progression into HE and the world of work
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
- Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources
- Effective management of learner-centred education
- Positive behaviour among students and staff

## Elements of good design:

# Community participation



Local communities can enjoy significant benefits from having a college sited in their town centre. Colleges, too, gain from a central location in a busy urban area.

Student numbers increased dramatically at City of Wolverhampton College, for instance, when it opened a new building in the centre of the town. And a hitherto derelict area was revitalised when Liverpool Community College opened new buildings in the city centre, where its students make their presence felt on local businesses and on the look and feel of the community. In Runcorn, too, students are to be seen on the high street at lunchtime for the first time in many years as a result of the development of a nearby campus.

In Southend, Essex, the spending power of thousands of further and higher education students attending the newly-opened South East Essex College building are revitalising a high street that had been losing out to out-of-town shopping malls.

In this way, the development of new restaurants, bookshops and other services to cater for an educational institute in their midst brings life back to a town centre. It also reduces the need for colleges to dedicate valuable space and management time to provide extensive catering and stationery



facilities on site. Being in a town centre effectively outsources this provision to local businesses and helps the college maintain an environment devoted to learning.

Integration of college and town need not stop with supporting small retail and catering outlets. City and Islington College in London has formed a partnership with Camden libraries and other colleges open their leisure facilities to the public. Most further education colleges operate real working environments that offer hairdressing, beauty treatment and catering to the local community. This can be seen to good effect in Liverpool Community College's Duke Street development.

Integration with the community can also help prepare students for the workplace. Wirral Metropolitan College has opened vocational centres in construction, engineering, childcare and motor vehicle studies that replicate the working environments in which students may well shortly be employed.

In this way, the college becomes a part of the community, attracting investment, providing a service and becoming a source of civic pride.

## Case study:

# Newcastle College – The Performance Academy

One of the largest colleges in the UK, Newcastle College serves some 40,000 students from the North East region and has a turnover of over £50 million. The institute was in financial difficulties in 2000, but has since improved its performance, reflected in its recent outstanding inspection results.

The transformation of the college's fortunes includes its new £20 million Performance Academy, a state-of-the-art building for music, performing arts and media. It is the first phase of an accommodation strategy across the college's 17 hectare Rye Hill Campus and it sets the style of 21st century architecture the college authorities want for subsequent developments.

As with so many other colleges, Newcastle College inherited a 'mixed bag' of buildings from local authority days: some good, some badly deteriorating, some in the demolition or disposal category.

The new Performance Academy, which encompasses some 9,100 square metres of highly specialised space, had to be planned, procured, built and delivered in only 28 months. The design presents a symbol for the performing arts industry with a strong 'front of house' feature and a huge black box – a 'back of house' facility – containing:

- a fully functional theatre complete with fly tower
- studio theatre
- a music venue
- radio station

### Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources
- Positive behaviour among students and staff



- TV studios
- recording studios
- acting studios
- dance studios
- music rehearsal rooms
- music and media technology suites.

The LSC contributed a grant of £6.5 million to the new building. Certain key features were vital to make the building work – acoustically, for instance, the designers had to ensure sound was contained in many separate spaces and prevented from 'leaving' the building.

The biggest gain from this innovative college building is to be seen on the ground. At the entrance is a large atrium, the only social space in a building where 1,000 drama, dance, music and media students have been brought together for the first time in the new academy. The result is truly spectacular.

## Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Integration with the local community
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)

## Case study:

# South East Essex College

In the 1990s, South East Essex College of Arts and Technology operated from multiple sites within and on the fringe of Southend town centre – facilities that were becoming outdated and expensive to maintain. In 1993, the college prepared an accommodation strategy to consolidate most of its facilities in a new building on a single main site in the heart of the town.

In 1996, South East Essex College acquired an undeveloped 2.4 acre derelict site that satisfied its need to build close to the main high street, both to attract and retain students and to open the facilities to the community. The site was next to a mainline rail network and within walking distance of the bus terminus. The college aimed to promote the use of public transport for both staff and students, while regenerating an under-used town centre site.

The college's innovative teaching emphasises group activities and called for flexible, largely open-plan learning spaces to meet its needs for the foreseeable future, together with dynamic recreation spaces to provide an inspirational environment to attract students and encourage learning. Throughout the project, local residents had the opportunity to highlight any concerns, as the building is adjacent to residential streets.

The new college provides some 26,500 square metres of 'stepped' development, rising from four storeys to eight storeys. Flexible learning spaces are arranged in a series of stacked 500 square metre teaching modules, each of which can be linked and sub-divided in numerous combinations to support changing curriculum needs through moveable partition walls.

Each module comprises an open-plan floor area, achieved by 14 metre-long concrete hollow core floor slabs, which form part of the main building 'Termodeck' ventilation



and cooling system, which reduces costs and eliminates wider environmental concerns associated with traditional systems. A Building Management System controls and monitors all of the mechanical plant feeding the Termodeck system.

The southern elevation has a large, covered atrium housing a striking red performance 'pod' and curved dining decks. The 'pod' contains a raked auditorium and stage and provides a multi-functional environment for up to 250 people to participate in lectures, presentations, live music events and screening previews. It is an essential part of the college's policy to integrate with the community and allow the public entrance to certain performances.

The dining decks were made from glass-reinforced gypsum to create curved forms that 'float' in the atrium. These platforms act as informal meeting areas to encourage learning and discussion beyond the formal teaching space, as does the atrium ground floor 'garden', which is occupied by curved seats, planter beds and a sports area. Two

dining areas provide catering students with real life work experience and are available to the community, along with a 450-seat conference facility. A 37 metre-tall red 'skylon' feature at the entrance sits in a pedestrianised square, a prominent addition to the skyline that highlights the college to the town and identifies the main entrance from the high street.

A specialist consultant advised on access, facilities and resources for people with disabilities to ensure that the new building, where practicable, complied with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

The new building has had great impact on the physical and educational landscape, as well as acting as a catalyst for further developments in the area. It is helping to raise aspirations and participation levels and contributing to the social and economic regeneration of Southend and the wider South Essex area within the Thames Gateway. The LSC contributed £15.4 million to the project.

## Elements of good design:

# Access



Issues of access are fundamental to the design and location of college buildings. A building can be judged successful only if it makes its services accessible, not just available, to all those who wish to take part.

Suitable access can differ according to the markets being served. Many sixth form colleges have developed at the edge of towns, convenient for playing fields and large car parks. In contrast, South East Essex College increased its student numbers significantly at a town centre location with good rail links, despite having no student parking facilities. Making use of existing transport corridors makes good sense as car parking is a frequent cause of tension, for both staff and students.

Being near to efficient rail or bus links makes good ecological sense. The Department for Education and Skills' Transport Development



Pathfinder Initiative (2002) looked at ways that transport routes and lines could improve access to college sites, including disabled access.

A town centre location is generally preferable in terms of encouraging access. It also reduces the need for a college to provide services that can be made available within the local commercial environment, catering facilities in particular. This enables the college to focus on the effective

management of learning, and reduces the need to provide expensive restaurant space, with its associated management issues. Liverpool Community College, for example, provides some limited canteen provision, but is surrounded by commercial, high street outlets offering a wide range of facilities.

There can be security considerations and it is important to keep the number of entrances to a minimum to avoid unwelcome visitors and mis-use of resources. A single point of entry and adequately staffed reception is preferable. Reception areas should be welcoming and give a sense of the learning community people are entering. The doors should shield the staff from draughts. Receptionists should not be isolated and their security should be a major feature of the design. In the Runcorn Sixth Form College, the reception is recessed into an open-plan staff area and reception staff can tell at a glance which staff are in the building without phoning the staff room. They can get advice or summon assistance at any time.

Within the building, good access to information technology (IT) systems is of great importance. If these are located in a learning centre that is too overtly managed and security-conscious, then students may be put off from using them. Computer facilities and IT generally are much more likely to be used by young people when they are more widely available throughout the college, along main circulation routes and within cyber café environments, for instance. In that way, the latest technology becomes much more integrated into their overall study programmes.

For compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, the experience of many colleges is that direct consultation with disabled students and their teachers can be more effective than using design teams. Liverpool Community College colour-coded the floors of its high-rise buildings in response to suggestions from partially-sighted students.





## Case study:

# Wirral Metropolitan College

Wirral Metropolitan College is a large further education college supporting over 17,500 students studying a range of courses from basic skills to higher education, with an emphasis on vocational skills.

Five years ago, the college received the second worst inspection report in the country and had a £13.9 million debt. It owned a building stock that was generally in poor condition due to a lack of investment over many years. This included almost 50 per cent more space than was needed to deliver its curriculum and costing approximately £1 million a year to maintain.

In 1999, a recovery plan was put in place to address these issues. Today, it has repaid its debt, dramatically improved the recruitment, retention and achievement of learners and delivered an impressive £14.5 million accommodation strategy on time and within budget.

The focus of this strategy puts the needs of learners at its heart and has engaged the whole community in an extensive public consultation that led to the largest investment in further education in Wirral for over 50 years. This included building the brand new Twelve Quays Campus at Shore Road, Morpeth Dock in Birkenhead. With support from the LSC, which contributed £6.2 million to the project, plus European Objective One funding and careful investment and management, Twelve Quays Campus opened its doors in September 2003.



### Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Integration with the local community
- Student progression into HE and the world of work
- Effective management of learner-centred education
- Good quality accommodation and efficient management of staff

The new campus design provides a modern, light, bright building for vocational courses including construction, engineering, (including motor vehicle and motor cycle technology), childcare, science, the performing arts and media, health and social care, together with the Wirral Arts School on the top floor, with inspiring views overlooking the River Mersey and the famous Liverpool skyline. The

Waterfront Nursery provides crèche facilities for hundreds of babies and toddlers whose parents work or study at the college.

The accommodation strategy involved all three of the college's campuses, ensuring that the overall standard of the learning environment was improved for all students.

Wirral Metropolitan College has introduced many key innovations and developments in recent years. Such is the commitment of the college's board, supported by staff, that it has recently changed its vision to 'become an outstanding college'. The new campus is part of a much bigger picture that has enabled the college to restore its reputation for providing good quality education and training in an environment that can now be more appropriately described as a 'college for the future'.

## Case study:

# City of Wolverhampton College



City of Wolverhampton College was established in 1999 as a consequence of the merger between Wulfrun College and Bilston Community College. Since its formation, the college has gone from strength to strength and achieved a commendable outcome when inspected in 2003. In the 2004/05 academic year the college expects to recruit around 2,000 16-18 year old full-time students, 900 full-time students aged 19 and over and more than 20,000 part-time learners. Its turnover exceeds £33 million.

At merger, the college inherited an estate of 45,000 square metres spread in an arbitrary fashion across 13 freehold and seven leasehold sites. Most buildings were unsuitable for their purpose. The college's mission, post-merger, was one of rebuilding:

- the confidence of a beleaguered staff team
- the curriculum to reflect the then emerging skills agenda
- confidence in further education within the community
- and, literally re-building.

The property strategy envisaged four phases of development costing £30 million, at the end of which the college would be utilising around 28,000 square metres. The first phase of development was Wellington Road. The physical transformation of this site was, for the community and for many staff, an opportunity to re-engage with the teaching and learning process. Wellington Road opened its doors in September 2001 and by 2003/04 student numbers had grown by 70 per cent and success rates were above national averages. The LSC contributed grant of £2.5 million towards the £7.5 million project at Wellington Road.

The college management believes that the time invested in the design stage has paid handsome dividends. Staff were engaged in the consultation process, from which it emerged that safety and security, teaching room specifications and achieving a general 'feel good' factor were high on their agenda. In response, a light, bright and well-resourced facility was developed with two main entrance and exit points off the main glazed atrium. The atrium is configured to allow security staff to cost-effectively

### Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Integration with the local community
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)

monitor people entering the site and there has been a significant reduction in the number of problems and incidents, helping to create the secure environment and feel good factor that staff and students wanted.

In his speech at the 2004 RIBA LSC Forum Conference, Alan Johnson, the then Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, spoke of the 'remarkable transformation' that had taken place at the college and acknowledged that the new facilities made students feel more valued. This, in turn, had a positive impact on patterns of behaviour, academic application and achievements.



Elements of good design:

# Learning



The traditional design of colleges has emphasised an environment suited to conventional teaching methods. New designs need to accommodate more flexible learning that takes account of the new opportunities created by IT and a wider range of staff with different skills.

The conventional classroom is largely inflexible and ill-suited to activity other than formal teaching, which challenges attention spans and, over a long period, leads to restlessness amongst adolescents in confined spaces. Opportunities to check learning and monitor progress are also restricted.

Many newly-designed colleges include open learning environments that provide a wider range of resources – easy access to IT, the Internet, college intranets, interactive learning programmes and 'virtual' learning environments. Teaching staff have the

challenge of managing activities in a multi-task environment, where they are not the only source of information and knowledge. However, they can be supported by a greater range of professionals; staff qualified in IT systems, advice on study skills and technical and learning support. Students communicate by email, and many administrative issues, from registration to coursework deadlines, can be managed through the online network.

In formal demonstrations, talks or seminars, students are engaged in a common task, and there remains a significant requirement for this activity in well-equipped seminar rooms. However, the development of individual learning plans takes the student away from this group approach. In a large, open area, students can receive individual support adapted to their learning needs and develop assignments and extended projects supported by a range of resources and professional help.

In this kind of open environment, students are able to develop additional learning styles, including peer group learning, with



increased opportunity for practical activity. The teacher still needs to manage this learning, but is supported by other professionals. The curriculum is increasingly structured towards individual and group learning activities.

Large open learning areas used by a mix of students of varying ages and ability and a wider range of staff also promote improved behaviour; inappropriate conduct usually takes place in unsupervised or hidden areas. At South East Essex College, a number of groups can share a space and have reasonably intimate conversations without disturbing others. Students have to become responsible for their own behaviour because it is observed.

## Case study:

# City and Islington College



### Elements of good design

- A 'feel good' factor
- Integration with the local community
- Student progression into HE and the world of work
- Attractive and safe reception areas
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
- Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources



By September 2005, City and Islington College will have completed a huge accommodation strategy based on five post-16 centres of excellence – including a sixth form college – across the borough of Islington, each specialising in its own distinct subjects.

The college was formed in 1993 from four former Inner London Education Authority institutions. The new college inherited a talented set of staff and 13 buildings, spread across north London, that had suffered from serious under-investment.

For seven years the governing body put together a plan for what has now become the largest investment in further education buildings in the UK. Faced with challenging cost constraints, the college kept design high on its agenda. Senior staff have continued to champion good design through membership of the RIBA Education Forum. With cost parameters fixed and timescales for completion pre-determined by the academic calendar, the college embarked on its building programme in 2002.

The governing body approved an ambitious programme involving three concurrent £10 million building projects and appointed a dedicated in-house client team to manage consultants and oversee the briefing process. Key elements of the brief for each project included creative design, the importance of natural light, sustainable low energy solutions, flexibility of design, and, of course, low cost solutions. The first project, the sixth form college, which was completed on time and budget, opened for students in September 2003.

A model for curriculum delivery was introduced based on the creation of the five centres of excellence on four sites. Using the new buildings to create individual communities of learning has helped to unite staff and learners at each centre with a unique curriculum and a focus on learners under a common mission and purpose.

The 'Building a Better College' programme at City and Islington College is far more than just replacing old building with new ones – it has involved a complete rethink of how learning is organised and coordinated across the new campus and how excellent design can transform the aspirations of staff and learners, even with the most limited of budgets.

With over 3,000 full-time 16-18 year olds and more than 20,000 learners in total, City and Islington is now the largest FE college in London. The LSC contributed £13.6 million towards the building programme.

## Elements of good design:

# Management



A new building gives college management teams an invaluable opportunity to decide afresh how to manage learning within the college and provide space to support learning activities in a new way, rather than having to adapt to a pre-determined cluster of spaces.

Within areas for teaching staff, good design can promote teamwork and provide easy access to management. Open-plan spaces help encourage face-to-face contact, which is more difficult in the traditional corridor and classroom environment, with small, isolated staff rooms. Where direct communication is not possible, easy access to email is important. Open spaces, light and more comfortable heating also benefit staff morale.

Open-plan designs for learning reduce the need for long corridors and other costly space for the movement of students and staff between separate, isolated rooms. Large learning areas can be used flexibly to accommodate groups of different sizes and the behaviour of students can be improved by ensuring that CCTV cameras and strategically-based staff locations have good visibility across a range of learning activities.

Security of staff and equipment too can be enhanced by careful design. In the new Runcorn Sixth Form College, for example, ground floor windows are too small to allow entry. On the ground floor, a single point of entry is configured in an S-shape to prevent ram raiding and stop draughts reaching the reception area. Allowing in lots of light also improves security, ensuring there are no dark, hidden corners. The college's large learning area is lit by an atrium rising through the centre of the building and, elsewhere, an art area is lit by natural light through the roof.

Access to IT at the college includes a cyber café in the students' social space. An open-



plan area allows for 'hot desking' for staff who are not based at the college and all administration is handled electronically from the sister college in Widnes.

At the college, one floor each is devoted to sciences and to arts to reduce student movement. All areas of the college may be observed by staff in four strategic locations, enabling the college to be fully open with minimal staffing. The location of staff assigned to coordinate teaching and learning activities is important, as they can set the work ethos of an area and identify potential causes of disruption. Student services and learning support resources can be located within such centres.

All these factors help to set the tone and ethos of a well-managed learning environment, where individual students are able to consult with a number of staff, without intruding on the activities of others, while others work in groups.

In these environments, the teaching member of staff is one of a team, free to produce curriculum materials and to tutor individual students, liberated from the shackles of a formal classroom. In a modern

college, many administrative duties can be covered at less cost through central administrative services. For example, the use of swipe cards to support electronic registration and unique log-on numbers for tracking the movement of students.

Coordinators can also electronically manage the curriculum, logging receipt of student work assignments and reminding students of course work deadlines through messages on the log-on screen. This helps management to deploy staff with greater efficiency.

In this way, the student is involved in a process of continuous learning, rather than awaiting specific timetabled classroom teaching interspersed by free social time. The open learning space promotes more positive learning activity. As a result, students make less distinction between learning and relaxation spaces. The environment is pleasant to be in, and is not confined or 'custodial' in nature. Gaps in timetables are more easily filled leading to a greater focus on the part of the student, fewer distractions and, ultimately, better attendance and retention.



## Case study:

# New College Durham

New College Durham has been transformed by a major £35 million redevelopment programme.

Six years ago the medium-sized college of both further and higher education was in poor financial health and causing concern. It operated from two outdated sites on the outskirts of Durham City – the Framwellgate Moor site, mainly further education provision, and the Neville's Cross site, predominantly for higher education.

Both sites had suffered under-investment and had a significant backlog of maintenance. They were under-utilised, inaccessible, lacked social space for students and space for learning resources. Nor had the college invested in new information systems. The buildings were generally regarded as unfit for purpose.

The college supports some 3,000 full-time students and 17,000 part-time students, studying courses ranging from basic skills to full honours degrees, with a large number relating to vocational qualifications and skills.

In August 1998 an action plan was formulated to address the poor financial health of the college and the poor state

### Elements of good design

- Student progression into HE and the world of work
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
- Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources



of its buildings. The college put forward ambitious plans for major redevelopment, involving the sale of the Neville's Cross site to a housing developer and building new facilities on the Framwellgate Moor campus. As the college did not have the luxury of developing on a green field site, it was essential that construction was phased to allow teaching to continue throughout the development.

Operating to tight timescales, building work started in March 2003. The £35 million project was funded through capital grant of £12.28 million from the LSC, capital sale proceeds, loan financing and reserves. The phasing process involved building some new accommodation, moving into it and then demolishing old buildings to allow further new building to take place.

The college occupied the new technology block in December 2003, the new higher education building in June 2004, the main further education building in September 2004 and plans to take over the sports and music building in May 2005. To date the project has been delivered on time and on budget.

The new facilities include a large learning resources centre with 200 networked PCs, a library of 70,000 books and an integrated data, voice and CCTV system which allows for new initiatives such as wireless communications. The campus has a range of facilities to support progression to higher education.

The campus is modern in design with bright open spaces around two malls, which feature the vocational work of the college. It is space efficient, with overall floor space reduced by 6,000 square metres.

## Case study:

# Hackney Community College



Hackney Community College caters for a total of 13,000 students, many at the Shoreditch campus, which opened in 1997 to much acclaim and awards for its exceptional design. Since then, the campus has expanded to include a purpose-built sports and performing arts centre, SPACe, a construction workshop and arts/media blocks, all seamlessly incorporated into the original design, which was described as 'an oasis' by Ofsted inspectors two years ago.

The college is proud to offer 'more than a qualification' and the two latest additions are essential to its provision.



### SPACe

SPACe is open for public and community use, including Year 11 pupils from the former Kingsland School who are currently housed in the college's Seacole Centre. It houses first-class theatre, dance and fitness studios and provision for numerous sports, including wheelchair basketball. SPACe also supports three thriving sports academies for basketball, cricket and football. There is a controlled car park and an attractive and safe reception equipped with CCTV cameras and an access control swipe system linked to the main campus, which is key to safety and security within the college.

### Puttnam and Rotblatt blocks

Part of the arts/media block, with its eye-catching reception and high street frontage, this is leased to London Metropolitan University. Units are also let to small start-up companies. A stand-alone building, its design emphasises adaptation and flexibility to meet changing curriculum and timetabling needs and recent alterations incorporated additional workshop facilities for 3-D Art. Priority is given to ease of access and the requirements of people with disabilities.

The building houses up-to-date and fully equipped workshops for ceramics, photography, video and radio, including kilns, sinks, editing suites and a darkroom pod.

The whole campus clearly reflects the college's mission statement – 'working in partnership, widening participation and raising achievement to meet the needs of the community we serve'.

### Elements of good design

- Integration with the local community
- Attractive and safe reception areas
- Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
- Efficient timetabling and use of resources
- Effective management of the movement, location and tracking of students

To facilitate movement and management of staff and students, curriculum, support and administrative departments are located in designated areas, but there is easy access to all sections of the campus by lifts and walkways, including access for people with disabilities. Communications are provided through networked data systems for IT, telephone, Internet and internal as well as external email systems.

There are clear, corporate signs inside and outside every block, good staff accommodation and all staff and students have access to special facilities and software to suit their needs.

Care has been taken to maintain the environment as a whole, with a spacious courtyard and abundant landscaping, including existing trees and lawns and shrubbery to provide a respite from the surrounding heavy traffic in a densely built-up and deprived area.



# Acknowledgements

The RIBA LSC Client Forum is one of various RIBA client groups. It provides a framework in which the opinions and interests of those who commission buildings can be voiced, debated and then learned from by other clients and by building professionals. Through a programme of quarterly meetings and annual conferences, the group aims to promote communication and knowledge across the sector, demonstrating that added value can be achieved through design quality.



**Related Publications**

*Colleges for the Future* ©LSC May 2004

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**Useful Websites**

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