
University libraries and space in the digital world

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and Graham Walton
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Perfectly timed for the main theme of this issue of *Focus*, *University libraries and space in the digital world* provides a very useful overview of the evolution of the use of physical space in university libraries. For the first time I used the publisher's online pdf file to write the review, rather than a print copy, and despite my misgivings I found it just as easy and in fact more convenient to carry around and make notes on my iPad. One of the recurring themes of the book is the transition from print to digital collections and I certainly would have been happy working in one of the innovative learning spaces described in the book. The editors have commissioned a selection of essays and case studies tracing the history of the use of space in university libraries and looking forwards to identify the key strategic issues and trends that will influence future developments.

It is made clear in the introduction that this book is primarily aimed at librarians and university managers involved in developing their library buildings at a time when sometimes their very existence, and certainly their size, is being questioned as a result of technological change, diminishing budgets and new methods of delivering teaching. The chronological table of the main changes since the 1970s brought back many memories for me, some of them rather painful such as the management of tall stacks of expensive cd-roms containing business and management information. The historical perspective is a useful reminder of how much has changed in a relatively short time and the difficulty of predicting the future with any certainty. John Feather looks even further back in his chapter on the use of library space over many centuries, followed by

an overview of current approaches by Olaf Eigenbrodt and an analysis of the influence of changing technology by Robert P. Holley. These introductory chapters are full of fascinating insights, although the busy manager may be forgiven for turning straight to the specific case studies for the practical advice on buildings development.

Louise Jones describes the approach to physical space design taken at the University of Leicester in planning the David Wilson Library. It was very interesting to read this chapter alongside the article by Christine Fyfe elsewhere in this issue, which includes photographs of the award-winning library building. This chapter provides examples from other projects too, looking at the different approaches to accommodating current print collections and future-proofing the space. In the chapter on the inspirational Sir Duncan Rice Library at the University of Aberdeen, Chris Banks describes the building of a new library that is open and welcoming to everyone in the community. She covers key aspects of project planning, consultation with stakeholders, noise management, reducing the open access stock, engagement of library staff in the planning and fundraising. Anyone who has visited this building cannot fail to be impressed with the attention to detail in a very successful project. Sheila Cannell draws on her experience of leading the refurbishment of the 1960s main library building at the University of Edinburgh to highlight the particular issues that need to be addressed in a redevelopment project, including the creation of a vision, making the case, design constraints, service continuity and the importance of flexibility for the future.

In my role at Liverpool John Moores University I have been most closely involved in another aspect of library development: sharing the space with other services. Leo Appleton describes the more holistic approach to the development of learning environments adopted by several universities in the United Kingdom, bringing a range of services into the library buildings that benefit students and make good use of the space freed up by shrinking print collections. Jon Purcell considers the staff accommodation, often overlooked or given a lower priority than student space, and argues that this is a very important aspect of good library design that should not be difficult to achieve. Peter Jamieson's chapter on re-imagining space for learning describes the shift to student-centred learning and its impact on the use of space. At the University of Melbourne, a precinct-based approach was taken to the redevelopment of the library network, well integrated in the main

campus. I found this a very interesting concept that aims to acknowledge and design for the experiential aspects of the use of space to provide the richest possible learning experience for students. Terry B Hill and Mohan Ramaswamy then look at the needs of researchers and how a number of different universities have addressed the need to provide a comfortable and convenient space to support their activities.

The last three chapters consider the evaluation of space, 'green' and sustainability issues and future developments. Based on a literature review, scoping interviews, questionnaires to a group of senior librarians and academics and a sub-set of follow-up interviews, the editors summarise the forecasts of a small but expert group relating to the development of learning spaces, collections, staff space, and the esteem in which the library building is held, concluding that for the foreseeable future there will still be a need for a university library building at the heart of the campus. Graham Matthews and Graham Walton have succeeded in their aim of bringing together a wide selection of valuable insights into the use of space in university libraries in a well-organised and extensively referenced collection of essays. Examples of many of the innovations they describe can be found in the articles on recent building developments at the start of this issue of *Focus*.