
Library refurbishment

A case study from the University of Exeter



Martin Myhill
Forum Library Project Director
University of Exeter
m.r.myhill@exeter.ac.uk

The £48 million Forum Project was conceived in 2007 to provide an innovative, fully integrated, student-facing space at the centre of the University of Exeter Streatham campus; it brings together new formal and informal learning spaces and frontline services for students, alongside catering and retail spaces for students. For the library this involved refurbishment of much of the Old Library into a Research Commons, and total refurbishment of the Main Library on a floor-by-floor basis, with some new dedicated build and some sharing of generic Forum facilities within a ring-fenced library budget of £7.58 million. The chosen architects were Wilkinson Eyre and the main contractors were Sir Robert McAlpine.

In terms of the library, the project provides:

- 25% more shelving space
- dedicated, high-quality, research-facing facilities for library users with research-orientated collections close by in the Research Commons (refurbished Old Library)
- nearly double the original seating provision during peak use, with over 75% of seats provided with mains power and hard-wired network sockets
- a completely refurbished study area adapted to the broad spectrum of user requirements
- double the original PC provision, numerous power sockets and wi-fi throughout
- additional automated entrance and exit

The original Main Library occupied 5270 m² and provided 450 seats, including two 30-seat PC clusters, a small multimedia room and a 30-seat group study area. The refurbished Forum Library on the same footprint as the Old Library provides 500 seats, including 3-thirty-seat PC clusters, 75 individual study seats, 90 silent study seats, 120 group study seats, four accessibility rooms and over

100 social seats. Wi-fi is available throughout the building and over 75% of seats have an electrical power supply suitable for laptop or mobile phone recharging. There are just over 14 000 metres of fixed shelving and 8500 metres of mobile shelving. Additionally, the Forum includes a dedicated, new library extension, which adds a further 1600 m² to the existing floor area and includes almost 2 km of fixed shelving, a 15-seat PC cluster, multimedia and assistive study rooms, an enclosed external courtyard and a further 200 seats. It will also provide 12 seminar rooms from the adjacent seminar room block on a seasonal basis, thus contributing another 300 study seats at peak times.



New PC Cluster

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Major changes in senior university management (Professor Sir Steve Smith as Vice-Chancellor in 2002 and David Allen OBE as Registrar in 2003) and particularly the arrival of Michele Shoebridge (now Deputy Registrar) in 2006, heralded a bold new vision where the concept changed from one of a library-specific extension to the much more comprehensive Forum project (see <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/campus/forum/>)

The revised vision was partly informed by an external review of library facilities in February 2007 by external consultants (Movecorp Pty; see <http://www.movecorp.com.au/>). Amongst other things, their findings showed that over 50% of the Main Library stock had not been borrowed since 1999 and that library space could be better used to provide twenty-first century learning spaces and facilities.

Key drivers for the library part of the project included:

- Cramped accommodation: by 2002 the Main Library was 95% full and we had little room for expansion in other locations. The Main Library was built with 450 seats in 1982 to

cater for 6000 students. The university's student population currently stands at around 17 000.

- Inappropriate spaces: tired and worn décor, poor lighting and ventilation, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) non-compliant areas, difficult access and layout arrangements, lack of IT provision and power sockets for users. The 1982 design pre-dated personal computing. Two 30-seat PC clusters had been added in 1999 through re-designation of the library's main teaching room into a hands-on PC suite and the replacement of government papers by microform alternatives.
- Dated facilities: Although a 30-seat group study area had been created in 2005 by relegating bibliography collections to the Old Library, newer learning styles were poorly supported and many user complaints were received about mobile phones, general noise levels and lack of hot drink availability. There was also considerable pressure on limited multimedia facilities.
- Confusing layout: collections were not in numerical Dewey shelf mark order, aisles did not logically flow into each other and uneven collection expansion between 1982 and 2002 had made finding one's way around confusing.

DELIVERY

The project followed established RIBA phases. Stage F was signed off in mid-February 2010, prompting the release of the final tender documentation for a 'design and build' construction contract. Building preparations began on site in April 2010 and the first library floor was closed for refurbishment in July 2010. The refurbishment of the three library floors was completed according to the phasing plan in January 2011, June 2011 and December 2011, and the rest of the Forum was handed over at the end of March 2012.

Although Exeter has a number of site libraries, the collective available shelf capacity (5 km) was too low to absorb nearly 20 km of stock from the Main Library. After careful consideration of all possible options it was agreed that a floor-by-floor refurbishment was the only viable option. Services and a temporary entrance were relocated to the basement – a former staff entrance and delivery area.

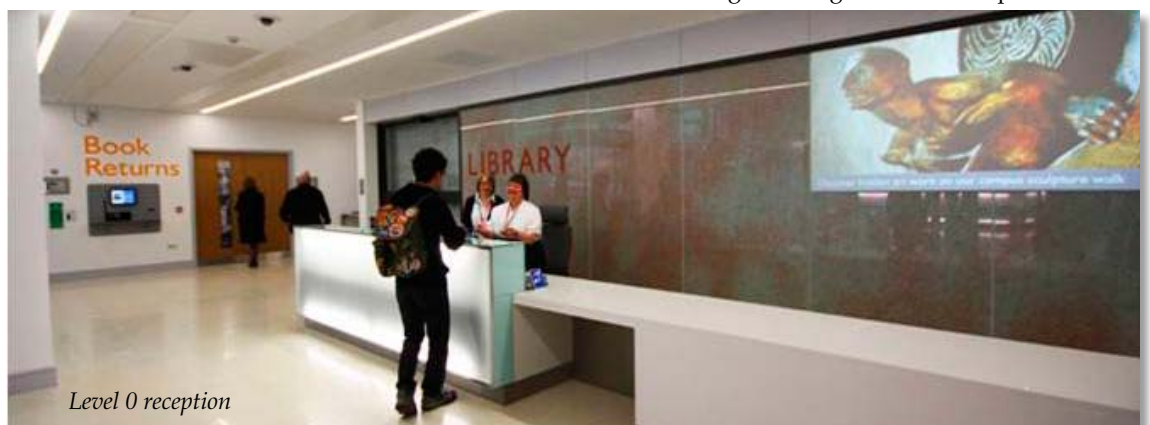
The floor-by-floor refurbishment plan reduced the total Main Library shelving capacity from 20 km to 12 km. In full agreement with Colleges it proved possible to dispose of nearly 4 km of stock, such as multiple copies of older editions and printed copies of journals available online and included in the UK Research Reserve project. Using lending data from our Millennium system it also proved possible to move over 4 km of older, research-orientated stock to the 'Research Commons' which resulted from transformation of the former Old Library as a pre-cursor to the Main Library redevelopment during 2008–9. The first phase of this had been the installation of 10 km of mobile shelving, increasing capacity in that building by 50%.



The Book Lounge

DESIGN AND GOVERNANCE

The library aspects of the Forum Project were managed as part of the main project with a hierarchy of committees and groups including those coordinating the mitigation of the impact of the



Level 0 reception

construction work on campus (and particularly library) users. The Forum Library Sub-Group met monthly throughout the project, starting in October 2008, to oversee concepts, design and library-specific project delivery. Membership was drawn from senior members of the library team, the academic deans plus one other academic member of staff and the Guild of Students Vice-President (Academic Affairs). Although initial discussions concentrated on a high-level design overview, during the course of the project they included much more detailed consideration such as the location of power and data points, seating layouts, operational improvements, etc. Furniture design was scoped during an open Student Engagement conference in May 2010 and a Library Student Consultation Group (consisting of representatives from each school) was established to consider various options such as the relocation of the short loan collection ('Ready Text').

The transition from handover to operation was managed by a Library Forum Implementation Group (FIG), which met fortnightly from the start of the construction phase in May 2010, and comprised senior and specialist library staff.

COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Effective communication was vital. The project devised a communications plan at the start of the construction phase; this identified the need for specific communications (e.g. pending closure of a library floor for refurbishment), target audience(s) and the means of communication such as web pages (including one outlining the day's construction activity and likely disruption), internal signage to warn of disruption and alternative arrangements, a 'noiseometer' at the library entrance, reminders of alternative quiet study locations and individual replies to specific comments, queries or user complaints. E-mail bulletins were sent regularly to all/selected user groups regarding progress, impending work and disruption, and a reminder of intended outcomes; in addition, articles and replies to letters were submitted to the student newspaper.

PROJECT REVIEW AND APPRAISAL

- The original investment appraisal for library refurbishment included the requirement of a review twelve months after completion, according to the following review criteria and measures:
- creation of good quality, fit-for-purpose facilities to attract potential users and satisfy the

requirements of existing staff and students whether for research or teaching

- increased visitor traffic
- increased lending statistics
- increased IT provision (eradication of queues for PCs)
- creation of a standard of collections and environment sufficient to qualify for RLUK (Research Libraries UK) membership
- provision of long-term expansion space for print collections with appropriate storage
- integration with other campus development plans, especially the Forum concept
- significant contribution to the university's ambitions to be a top-10 university
- improvement in library aspects of key indicators such as average NSS (National Student Survey) rating
- improved ratings in user surveys
- improved library staff experience (staff survey etc.)
- deliver to project on time
- deliver to project on budget

While it is too early to apply any measures to these criteria, early indications are that the project will meet all these targets.

OTHER LIBRARY REDEVELOPMENTS

Exeter has libraries on its three campuses. The library at the St Lukes campus (Exeter) underwent a transformational £1 million refurbishment during the summer vacation 2009, including the remodelling of the entrance of a building dating back to the 1930s and major changes to create new study spaces and shelving provision. The library even includes a small garden.

The provision of additional space in the Forum Library enabled the transfer of Exeter's law collections from the separate Law Library in June 2012. This has enabled the redevelopment of the latter as a new study space offering over 200 seats in a variety of bookable configurations (silent, group, individual, etc.). Although this no longer includes physical book collections, the library retains control of this space and of the recently refurbished Lower Exam Hall which has a further 180 quiet study spaces.