

Spotlight on The Learning Grid at the University Of Warwick

The brief was to create an innovative, rich learning environment. Open 24 hours a day, 364 days a year, suitable for a new experimental service delivery approach, with a wide range of electronic equipment, but also inspiring, user friendly and adaptable. The budget was tight and the 1980s building unpromising. This marked the start of the Learning Grid project.



The brief was prepared by Anne Bell, the University Librarian, with the aim of supporting collaborative research and student learning for individuals and groups - effectively providing an alternative facility to the traditional learning facility provided by the central library.

The Learning Grid was to be based on a digital environment, with areas for brainstorming, presentation practice and multimedia video editing, as well as access to core reference books. The aim was to create a modern, functional, relaxed and informal space where, for example, food and drink would be allowed and student interaction encouraged, whilst maintaining the character of a purposeful environment for study. The facility was to be designed to foster new ways of learning, teaching and research, to attract prospective students and encourage staff and students to mix.

The planning, development and management of the project was undertaken in a truly collaborative effort between the University masterplanners MacCormac Jamieson Prichard Architects (MJP), the Library, IT Services, Student Union and academic staff.

The first major design move was to locate the facility so that it was directly visible and accessible from the building's atrium at both levels. This was an important design decision to ensure that ownership of the building was balanced between both staff and students.

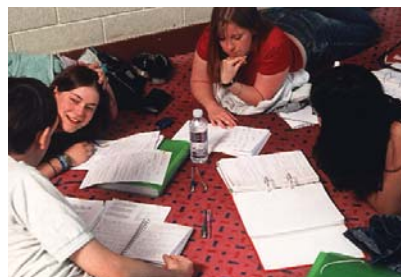
The second move was to link both levels physically and visually with a contemporary perforated steel staircase that is a feature in the space, and which deliberately contrasts with the institutional character of the existing building.



A range of screens and furniture have been used to create a loose arrangement of working areas that students can configure to suit their changing needs. Curves, colours and textured materials create a lively environment and contrast with other facilities which provide rows of computer desks.

An evaluation of the success of the completed facility undertaken by the Library, and the Librarian, Anne Bell, confirmed that it has been "extraordinarily successful" for both academic staff and students. Students commented on the comfortable and relaxed atmosphere and feel they have genuine ownership of the space, which helps to motivate them to work more effectively.

The success of the facility has led to a reappraisal of both learning and teaching practices and is likely to have a big impact on future provision of library learning facilities at Warwick.



A satellite facility called 'Bio-Grid' has already been completed, and there are current proposals for the refurbishment of the central library integrating a new 'Teaching grid' facility with a new approach to how academic staff

develop teaching methods and their curriculum.

All of these key improvements are part of the university's drive to coherently develop its estate and will enable it to sustain its position as a top educational establishment.

Outline material provided by Liz Pride, Director, MacCormac Jamieson Prichard Architects. 