

BioCentrum: a new masterplan for teaching and research infrastructure in the School of Biological Sciences, 2016-present

Why was the project needed?

The infrastructure on the Downing Site is poorly suited to the current needs of the School of Biological Sciences. Teaching spaces are scattered across multiple buildings which do not meet the needs of the current courses (for example, practical classes have to be delivered multiple times to accommodate all students because larger classrooms are not available, and small group seminars have to be held in lecture theatres due to the lack of flexible seminar/meeting room spaces). Refurbishment projects on the site have been sporadic and not well planned with respect to the overall needs of the School or the local environment. Several buildings are now in a poor state of repair, lack vital facilities, and are difficult and costly to refurbish to the standards required by modern day bioscience and expected by students and staff.

The BioCentrum provides a new vision for the Downing and Old Addenbrooke's sites that honours their history while transforming them into a vibrant, modern, attractive hub for learning, teaching and research. BioCentrum planning is both driven by, and itself helps to shape, the future teaching and research strategy of the School of Biological Sciences.



How was the project run? A steering group chaired by the Head of School, Professor Abby Fowden, and responsible to the Council of the School, directed the masterplanning process and conducted extensive consultations with teaching, research, and administrative staff across the School's departments. A Teaching Strategy Group composed of academics and administrators is considering how a new, shared inter-departmental model of teaching space could lead to new possibilities for the School's Tripos teaching. An Academic Forum is doing the same for the School's research strategy.

What was achieved? Consultation with stakeholders and data about current patterns of teaching led to proposals for a new teaching hub that will bring most of the School's teaching into a defined, central geographical area. Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley prepared a new masterplan for the Downing and Old Addenbrooke's sites which, as well as the teaching hub, proposes a series of interlinked research buildings, with significant improvements in the number and diversity of social and study spaces available to students and researchers.

There is strong agreement across the School that the BioCentrum project represents a major step forward for both teaching and research in biological sciences, and for the provision of facilities on the Downing and Old Addenbrooke's sites. A consultative and transparent scoping and design process has ensured that the project responds to the needs of students, lecturers, researchers, and School officials. The project is now ready to seek funding.

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