

School of Clinical Medicine: refurbishment and expansion of education space, 2017

Why was the project needed?

From the academic year 2017-18, the capacity of the Clinical Medicine course at Cambridge was expanded so that all students who had studied Medicine at undergraduate level could complete their clinical training here (previously, about half of the cohort had gone to other medical schools for clinical training). The School of Clinical Medicine therefore had to find room to accommodate about 100 extra students per cohort for the three-year clinical course, an effective 63% increase in student numbers by 2019-20.

The existing teaching and student social space at the School was not sufficient to accommodate the extra students. In addition, the late 1970s Clinical School building had not been refurbished since it was built: it had suffered significant wear and tear, and many of the teaching spaces lacked the technological capability needed to deliver medical training in the twenty-first century. Since the building was still structurally sound and the cost of a new building would have been significant, it was decided to do a focused refurbishment project on those areas of the old building that were inadequate: principally the seminar rooms, library, and student common room.

How was the project run?

The project was led by Dr Diana Wood, the School's Director of Medical Education, which ensured that the design process was closely focused on educational need.

The project team worked with architects QMP, who have significant experience in both new build and redesign projects in the education sector. The project was successfully completed in a tight timescale between July 2016 and May 2017 thanks to excellent project management by the University Estates team. The final cost is forecast to be in the region of £3.2million.

Students were consulted about what they would like from the educational and social spaces in the School, and their opinions on potential design options were canvassed through surveys. One frequent student request was for as much natural light as possible and this was achieved in the final design by using glass panels along one wall of the seminar rooms on level 4. The glass wall takes advantage of the building's shape (it is built around a square of empty space) to give the seminar rooms natural light from two sides (**pictured below**).



What was achieved?

The refurbishment provided ten additional seminar rooms (up to 21 in total from 11 previously), a new state-of-the-art e-learning suite, a larger student common room with outdoor social space, and a significantly redesigned library, all within the footprint of the existing building. All existing seminar rooms were also refurbished and supplied with new IT, including video recording capabilities in three rooms for teaching communications skills. The School's teaching space is now larger and more flexible than before, and fully equipped with the technology needed for contemporary medical training. All the IT in the building is capable of connecting seamlessly both to University of Cambridge and to NHS systems.

Much of the extra space was gained by reclaiming a floor that had previously been almost completely taken up by little-used library stacks. The 100m² expansion of the student common room (**pictured right**) was made possible by building a conservatory-style extension out from the front of the existing common room onto some previously untended ground, part of which was also used to create a small walled garden.



Wherever possible, folding partitions were used between teaching rooms, ensuring that the space is as flexible as possible to allow for multiple uses and changing teaching needs. The 88-workstation e-learning suite also has folding partitions, so it can be divided into 3 smaller units, and the workstations are grouped so that they can be used either for lecture-style teaching in large groups, for collaborative work in small groups, or for examinations.



The library redesign (**pictured left**) was led by librarians Jo Milton and Isla Kuhn in consultation with staff from the Futurelib project at the University Library. Library staff conducted user experience surveys and ethnographic observation to determine the main needs of library users, and then refitted the space accordingly. Key requirements from the students included natural light, flexible work spaces and an attractive study environment. The library now has a mixture of low-, medium- and high-intensity work spaces, including dedicated tables for group work, a 'Shhh' room for focused individual study, and flexible spaces with chairs, tables and screens that students can move around to customise their working environment.

The School believes that the refurbished and re-equipped building is an exemplar of how modern shared teaching space can be provided and run in older buildings and would be very happy to show the facility to anyone who might be interested in embarking on a similar project.

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