Birmingham Metropolitan College: Refurbished learning resource centres result in increased student usage

Summary

In 2009, Matthew Boulton and Sutton Coldfield colleges merged to become Birmingham Metropolitan College. To bring the Learning Resource Centres at the Sutton Coldfield and James Watt campuses in line with the modern Matthew Boulton campus, the college carried out two cost effective refurbishments.

About Birmingham Metropolitan College

Birmingham Metropolitan is a large FE college with four campuses. The College offers courses for 16-19 year olds, adult learners and companies, ranging from GCSEs, NVQs, A Levels, Access to HE, HNDs and professional qualifications.

In 2008, the Matthew Boulton campus won the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Further Education Design Excellence Awards.
The challenge

Mathew Boulton College benefitted from a new building in 2005. However, following its merger with Sutton Coldfield College to form Birmingham Metropolitan College, there was a need to give all campuses a similar look and feel for a more consistent student experience.

The Sutton Coldfield and James Watt campuses, the college’s other two main campuses, contain much older buildings. The Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) were not fit for purpose, the furniture was old and there were not enough PCs for the students.

Sue Atkins, Learning Resource Centre Manager says, “The LRC at Sutton had been cobbled together using the space available. Staff couldn’t see what was going on and as the furniture was old, there was a lack of respect for the space and equipment amongst the students.”

Fay Dayus, LRC Manager at the James Watt campus adds, “The LRC is positioned on the second floor and previously had very little use. The new-look LRC had to attract the students and encourage them to visit an unappealing area of the campus.”

The activity

The college undertook refurbishments of the LRCs at the Sutton Coldfield and James Watt campuses. At Sutton Coldfield, a more extensive refurbishment took place, along with the rest of the building, which transformed the campus to give it a new build feel. As a result, the LRC was re-positioned and has now become a focal point at the front of the building, next to the main entrance. There is a dedicated PC suite which contains more PCs than previously, open study area featuring a plasma screen for college notifications, casual seating area and bookable teaching rooms.

The James Watt campus LRC benefitted from a smaller scale refurbishment at a much lower cost. This was achieved by utilising existing furniture and equipment from the Josiah Mason campus which closed down. One of the major benefits for this LRC was the addition of extra PCs of which there were previously very few.

The outcomes

Since the refurbishments, both LRCs have been well used and are popular with the students, as Sue explains:

“We have definitely noticed an improvement in behaviour. The students treat the spaces with a lot more respect. The open space at Sutton is very attractive and although initially, we were unsure about the removal of individual study carrels, the large tables where students can work individually or on group projects work really well.”

www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
She adds, “The separate PC suite at Sutton and added PCs at the James Watt campus helps to give students the impression that the LRCs are not just about books. We use the MyPC booking system so that students can book PCs in advance. This is also linked to the Heritage library management system which means that students get reminders of overdue books.”

As part of the refurbishment project, the library catalogues from each campus were merged to help facilitate intersite loans. It has also helped towards creating a consistent student experience across all of the college campus LRCs, as students now have access to the same facilities.

**The impact**

Both staff and students have responded very positively to both LRCs. The number of issues and PC usage has increased significantly - the LRCs have collated statistical and anecdotal evidence using MyPC and running online feedback surveys which in turn, encourages use of the PCs.

Martine Owens, Associate Director of Student Services says, "The new look LRCs can only have a positive impact. The more students we get in and the more respect they have for their new environment, the better their work will be and ultimately, this will result in better achievement."

She adds, “It has definitely helped towards creating a consistent student experience across our campuses. The colours are the same and so is the furniture – this helps students who are based on the older campuses to feel more valued.”

Plans for the LRCs in the future include continuing to improve the service by listening to feedback from both students and staff, ensuring the technology and resources are kept up to date where possible, and keeping the spaces looking fresh to keep the ‘wow’ factor."

Martine says, “My advice for other LRCs who may be considering a refurb or rethink of their existing space would be to visit other learning providers to get some ideas. It’s amazing what you can do with the space and as we certainly found it with the James Watt campus refurb, it’s amazing what you can do with a limited budget!”

**Useful links**

- [Birmingham Metropolitan College](#)
- [JiscinfoNet Learning Spaces infokit](#)
- [MyPC Access Management and PC Booking](#)
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