

South Thames College Post Occupancy Evaluation

Background

Following the completion of the works to the new build and listed building refurbishment projects at the Wandsworth Campus and the Engineering/Technology Block on the Merton Campus, the College Corporation reassessed its Property Strategy in the context of its latest Strategic Plan. The primary purpose of the Property Strategy was to address previously recognised shortcomings in the residual estate that had not as yet been resolved through previous projects and to ensure that the College was well placed to meet the requirements of an evolving FE landscape.

The challenge was therefore to ensure its place as the leading college for vocational skills locally and to provide outstanding learning opportunities for individuals, employers and the local community. Through this the College would become the first choice for courses that engender opportunities for employment, career progression and higher level skills.

The residual undeveloped estate was therefore reviewed in the light of the above and it was concluded that the construction trades facilities within the Tower Block at Wandsworth needed urgent replacement and renewal. The preferred property solution included both a retained offer on the Wandsworth Campus and a new 1,500 sqm bespoke facility in Merton which would complement the recently enhanced vocation offer on the site. This post occupancy evaluation assesses the success of the project at Merton which completed in late 2015.

Strategic Property Benefits

In terms of the overall College estate the Merton Construction Project has further improved the overall quality of the College estate and has enabled the College:

- To create facilities which are industry standard to deliver the Construction and Building Services curriculum in a commercial industry standard environment to meet the needs of industry and students
- To assist in regeneration of local businesses and to create new jobs
- To broaden the offer of the College and to attract and retain those students not entering education and training
- To replace a redundant and unsafe buildings and facilities with a modern fully accessible facility
- To create a building to house these specialist facilities which cannot be accommodated elsewhere within the current estate
- To create facilities and an offer for the Merton community which it currently does not have
- To utilise the Merton Campus to its maximum potential and to release value from a proportion of the Wandsworth site
- To create attractive facilities which are accessible for the community and help strengthen links between the community and the College.

- To reduce the long term cost of ownership by removing old buildings with high running and maintenance costs and replacing them with efficient new facilities

Key Educational Benefits

The key educational benefits achieved through the project have included:

- Better meeting local current and future skills needs through supporting growth industries and sectors
- Achieving a positive impact on local unemployment through targeted construction employability training
- The expansion of apprenticeships in key priority sectors
- Improved progression pathways for learners
- Improved learner success

Occupant Satisfaction

Feedback from users has been positive although, as with all projects, there are lessons to be learned.

90% of users surveyed rated the accommodation as excellent or good and no users rated the accommodation as poor. Some 86% of users rated the quality of resources and equipment as excellent or good, with no ratings of poor.

The feedback has been positive about the environment in terms of all aspects.

Layout

State of the art classroom facilities and infrastructure allow access for students with all types of disability. Students with disabilities have full ramp access to all entrances and have access to lifts to all floors. Whilst the accessible design of buildings is regulated by the Building Regulations Part M: Access to and use of buildings, the Equality Act does require "reasonable adjustments" to be made when providing access to goods, facilities, services and premises. Part M sets out minimum requirements to ensure that a broad range of people are able to access and use facilities within buildings. This regulation has been fully met and in some places especially around ramp access has been surpassed.

Functionality

Lighting sensors have been included to reduce energy use as the lights will automatically shut off when unoccupied, and energy efficient lamps are used within the lighting system.

Temperature

Brand new energy efficient boilers have also been installed to ensure that future running costs are lowered, especially with the expected future energy price rises which are expected.

Inverter driven pumps within the new heating which will only use the right amount of energy for the actual requirements. Invertors work by reducing the speed of a pump, such that a larger pump may be used at reduced speed; reducing energy costs drastically, and allowing capacity for system expansion without replacing the pump.

WCs

There have been no issues reported regarding the lavatory facilities.

Noise levels

The environment is used for the purpose of learning in training workshops and study. Users are satisfied that the environment does not produce any unwanted noise levels and provides an excellent setting for learning.

Recycling

The new G block is a modern building which has benefitted from techniques designed to reduce ongoing running costs which maximises the return to the college. These include being built to current building standards to ensure energy efficiency, solar panels on the roof to generate electricity for the College.

Air Quality

The reliance on air movement / air conditioning has been removed via clever design which utilises air flow through specially a designed placement of windows which capture external airflow to cool the block itself.