

Press release

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Sheppard Robson remodels Lancaster University Library

Sheppard Robson has completed the remodelling of Lancaster University's main library, with total overhaul of 14,500 sq m of interior spaces to create a state-of-the-art learning facility fit for the 21st Century.

The client and end user's aspirations were to create a transformed structure that integrated the latest technologies and learning techniques, whilst offering a range of spaces able to cater for a range of different learning styles. The renewed 24/7 facility delivered by Styles & Wood reaffirms the library at the heart of the university's campus, creating spaces befitting one of the top ten universities in the UK.

The existing library, situated on Alexandra Square, comprises the original library building constructed in 1967 and an extension added in 1997 to the west. The project properly unites these two structures for the first time, with the focus of the remodelling effort on the original library building, with Sheppard Robson's design stripping the building back to its concrete frame, allowing for the spaces to be totally reimagined.

Physical overview

Key to transforming the quality of the learning spaces was to address the lack of natural light: book shelves had been positioned against the windows, floorplates sub-divided affecting the legibility of the spaces and interrupting sightlines between different areas within the library.

Sheppard Robson addressed these challenges by restructuring the floor plates to create open spaces that encourage connectivity and improved navigation. The new floorplates position formal study space around the perimeter of the building, allowing students to benefit from natural light. Book shelves housing the university's collection of over 800,000 volumes have been repositioned between the perimeter and core, accommodating different areas for focused study. A services 'spine' has been created at the centre of the building relocating for the first time almost all delivery services into one place and creating a clear and legible structure to each floor.

At the heart of the project is the atrium, which was previously external space un-used by the users of the library. Sheppard Robson reclaimed this area by enclosing the space, creating viewing galleries from the floors above and using bespoke joinery to integrate it back into the main body of the building. The glazed roof lets light penetrate deep into the building where a tree within this new atrium also creates a focal point to the design aiding user orientation and providing a calm environment to study in.

Sheppard Robson has reopened the original main staircase to the left of the entrance, re-establishing this as the main circulation route. To aid navigation and reinstate it as a design feature the outside of the staircase has been clad in yellow glass contrasting the architectural strength of the concrete shuttering now revealed and celebrated to the inside.

Whilst the majority of the remodelling is focused on the interior spaces, strategic design decisions have been made to lift the exterior appearance of the building and improve the way it showcases its services. Large sections of glazing have been added to the entrance, making the range of library services clearly visible and strengthening the building's presence on campus.

With libraries in a state of flux between digital resources and books, and with the demand increasing for different type of learning spaces - from formal to collaborative, consultation with stakeholders was of vital importance in underpinning key design decisions. Sheppard Robson and its interior design team ID:SR met with over 500 people, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, staff, members of the faculty and maintenance staff. This has very tangible result on the design outcome and shaped the decision to dedicate 60% of space to formal study, 25% of space to informal individual study and 15% of space to group study areas. The consultation process also led the decision to not have a traditional reception desk, instead placing emphasis on a clear, intuitive navigation system and interactive screens.

Partner Alex Solk comments that: "It is fantastic to walk through Alexandra Square on the campus and see the library now re-established at the heart of the University with research and learning on display.

"At a University that is highly rated for its research and teaching it was so important for us to deliver a library space that provides for serious study, leaving other amenities on campus to provide for further aspects of University life".

Mark Swindlehurst, Director of Facilities, Lancaster University, said:

"Lancaster University now enjoys a resource that reinforces and reflects the University's reputation as a world-class centre for teaching and research.

"The re-modelled library offers a flexible, inspiring, technology-enabled environment with a range of individual and group work spaces to support different learning styles.

"Our students and staff are delighted with this contemporary facility, which meets the very highest design standards and the modern needs of its users."

ENDS

Notes to editors

About Sheppard Robson

Sheppard Robson is an award-winning design practice, whose key services are Architecture, Interior Design (ID:SR) and Masterplanning. Our design approach is defined by the exploration of new ideas, processes and technologies, and our commitment to sustainability.

We work on projects around the world from our offices in London, Manchester, Glasgow and Abu Dhabi. Ongoing Manchester projects include Arkwright House, City Tower and Salford Student Residential scheme due for completion in September this year. Recently completed include the nearby multi-award winning Citylabs 01, Alan Gilbert Learning Commons for the University of Manchester and Birley Campus for Manchester Metropolitan University.

The practice was formed in 1938 and its founding principles of innovation and sustainability continue to shape our work today.

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