

## Chapter 9

# University Library Staff Accommodation: Why Space Matters for the Forgotten Army

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### Introduction

The term ‘forgotten army’ is used to describe the allied forces fighting in the Far East in the closing months of the Second World War. Germany had been defeated and peace declared in Europe, but thousands of miles away the war was continuing, and the members of the armed forces involved felt forgotten by the politicians and strategists back in London. Library staff are often the ‘forgotten army’ when crucial and strategic decisions are being taken. This extends to when decisions are being reached about staff accommodation when a new library is being designed or, more commonly, when overall library space is being redesigned, extended, or altered to accord with prevailing estates strategies; changing teaching, learning, or research variables; or a need to rationalize campus space.

There are various challenges in designing university library staff space. McDonald (1996) offers the most comprehensive description, and one which establishes the parameters of this chapter. Staff space is ‘all library premises or areas not accessible to the public that correspond, de facto to “private space” that is, areas set aside for the activities of staff engaged in the management and operation of the establishment’. These areas are not inconsiderable given the surprisingly (to the non-librarian) large numbers of staff working in academic libraries, the proportion of the total library space which they occupy, and the potential impact which the design of this space has on effective delivery of services and on staff morale and motivation.

This lack of involvement extends to the general paucity of consideration given to staff space in library space planning literature. Staff accommodation is still sometimes regarded as an afterthought. Project briefs often prefer to concentrate on the educational and research benefits accruing from a new build or renovation. Much staff accommodation still gives the impression of being unplanned, of secondary importance, or requiring minimal planning or investment. This is beginning to change as evidenced in some of the work being undertaken by SCONUL, which held a seminar on library staff accommodation in 2009 (SCONUL 2009). It also has a high profile Library Design award, and the biannual conferences showcase exemplars of good library design, including staff accommodation which is seen as being an essential ingredient of overall good library design.

## Success Factors Influencing Good Library Staff Accommodation

*Spaces for Learning* (AMA and haa design 2006) had a significant impact on the design of Scottish university libraries. Some of the 12 key variables identified as critical to creating successful learning spaces are equally valid for the design of staff accommodation. They can be adapted specifically for university library staff accommodation:

1. Articulate a staff accommodation vision
2. Integrate the staff accommodation plan with other library plans
3. Involve all stakeholders (library staff are a key stakeholder group)
4. Select an informed and knowledgeable design and implementation team
5. Learn from other exemplars via site visits, case studies, discussion forums, etc.
6. Experiment with new ideas and innovative solutions
7. Integrate relevant communications and information technology
8. Integrate flexibility for different modes of work
9. Re-skill staff to make the best use of new workspaces
10. Manage the space well in terms of maintenance, layout, and utilization
11. Obtain and act upon feedback
12. Publicize the new work spaces, contribute to the literature, and hopefully win an award.

Faulkner-Brown's (Faulkner-Brown 1999) famous 10 commandments also have a resonance for the design of effective and efficient staff accommodation. Although designed for generic university library buildings, these concepts still underpin much thinking on the design of staff accommodation and library design generally. Faulkner-Brown believed that these precepts should influence all library buildings. From a staff accommodation perspective, Faulkner-Brown's principles are still appropriate and indicate the following design and construction imperatives which guided the development of the new staff accommodation implemented at Durham University Library in September 2009. The design brief included recommendations based on the Faulkner-Brown 10 commandments, namely that staff accommodation should be (Shepherd Epstein Hunter 2007):

- *Flexible*, with a layout, structure, design, and services which are flexible, adaptable, and contingent to changing need
- *Compact*, for ease of movement of staff, materials, and resources, and to facilitate good communication
- *Accessible*, to the main functions of the library, to facilitate effective communication and interface with users, and to provide access to relevant services, shelving, storage, and supplementary accommodation (staff rooms, toilets, etc.)

- *Extendable*, to allow and plan for future growth with minimum disruption, to allow for staff changes, project staff, future convergence of cognate services
- *Varied*, in the provision of workstations, storage, and supplementary staff needs such as lockers, showers, kitchens, and restrooms
- *Organized*, to optimize workflows and processes
- *Comfortable*, to promote efficiency of use, aid motivation and morale, and facilitate positive working environments
- *Constant in environment*, for the preservation of library materials and conducive to staff comfort and welfare – to be warm in winter and cool in summer
- *Secure*, to ensure the safety and security of staff working areas or controlled workspaces
- *Economic*, to be built and maintained with minimum resources both in finance and staff.

The Scottish Funding Council has also alluded to the importance of good environmental design for optimal working conditions and staff motivation (AMA and haa design 2006). It notes – quoting Mitchell in (Syllabus Media Group 2003) – that design should address ‘fundamental human needs like comfort, natural light, operable windows, good social ambiance, good views out of the windows ... all extremely important in creating good educational facilities’ (Scottish Funding Council: 16). Designing good and appropriate staff accommodation should not be difficult. In conclusion to this section, in order to create good staff accommodation, six precepts should be considered vital:

1. The basics of good light, temperature, and air quality are prerequisites for successful staff spaces
2. No two institutions are the same. What works for one may not work for another; the variables for any one library, be they financial, cultural, or organizational, are totally individual and unique to that library
3. Exemplars of good practice from other institutions, combined with on-site visits, can stimulate discussion, adaptation, and innovation
4. The importance of a strong project sponsor willing to champion the need for high quality staff accommodation on a par with student/researcher accommodation
5. Objective and participant staff opinions, views, needs, and recommendations are critical in creating the right type and quantity of work spaces
6. Feedback and post-occupancy evaluation is essential, both to critically evaluate the successes and lessons learnt and to disseminate these to the sector.

While this chapter focuses on staff accommodation in university libraries, it should be remembered that a significant amount of higher education provision is

now being delivered in Further Education colleges. Eynon's edited and updated *Guidelines for Colleges: Recommendations for Learning Resources* (Eynon 2005) provides an excellent overview of recommendations for space utilization and planning in UK Further Education colleges.

### Variables Influencing Library Staff Accommodation

This chapter has considered some of the design features which staff accommodation should encompass to ensure a good fit between the functions carried out in library staff areas. The interrelatedness has been highlighted together with the need to plan in facilities appropriate to modern buildings, not forgetting conformity to current building regulations. There are also some systemic variables which impact on designing efficient and effective staff accommodation. They include best-fit open plan staff working areas, staff involvement in workplace design, and the opportunities accorded by change management and process review. Good workplace design does not just happen; it is the result of many individual and collective decisions pertinent to the organization concerned. Much depends on the management culture and style of leadership operating in a particular library or institution. The degree to which staff views are taken into account when staff workplace decisions are being taken is also crucial. It should be self-evident that staff accommodation cannot be planned in a vacuum. While staff involvement is critical from a workspace planning and motivational perspective, library management also have a pertinent interest. They must ensure maximum flexibility in design, incorporate any changes in work flows, and implement process reviews. Workplace redesign is a possible solution to existing problems which may be staff related, systems orientated, structural, or relating to more deep-seated organizational or cultural issues.

#### *Open Plan v. Open Plan?*

In 1943, Winston Churchill observed that 'First we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us' (see Grothe 2012). This statement is very pertinent when considering the very strong feelings engendered by open plan office environments, which are now a common feature of many new library redesigns. Open plan design is relatively new, developed in Germany in the 1950s as a radical new office layout. The idea of *Burolandschaft* or 'office landscape' quickly gained wide acceptance, so that by the twenty-first century cost savings and technology lay behind the seemingly unstoppable mania for open plan offices. Given the widespread usage of open plan office accommodation in university libraries it is worth considering some of the factors influencing this choice of staff layout.

Some of the advantages of open plan work design include:

- Non hierarchical environment – allowing for different models of workforce design and experimentation
- Improved organizational communication
- Allows for future flexibility
- Good flow of ideas/knowledge sharing
- Opportunities to review work processes
- Operational cost reduction – economies of scale
- Culture change – flexibility, job rotation, job design, process re-engineering
- Sense of community – ‘we are all in this together’
- Economical – a more effective use of staff space
- Enhanced supervision
- Faster decision making.

There are also some disadvantages to open plan library staff accommodation, including:

- Noise: which can be counterproductive and unhealthy
- Increased interruptions and intrusions to distract staff
- Need for staff working protocols – agreeing workplace courtesies, telephone etiquette, etc.
- ‘Snoopervision’ – individual devaluation where staff feel that they are being too closely monitored or supervised
- Poor lighting, variable air quality, extraneous noise, and other distractions
- Temperature variations – too hot or too cold
- Lack of privacy
- Chaotic and untidy work environments
- Potential for decreasing productivity
- ‘Open plan flu’ – increased risks of infection with staff working in close confines
- Lack of individual environmental controls
- Degrees of separation from users.

Design and layout obviously matter. Really effective open plan staff accommodation requires a number of design interventions to negate some of the commonly identified problems of open plan. The need for a number of private or break-out rooms where confidential discussions need to take place is one commonly observed necessity. Any HR-related issues such as annual reviews, performance management, or return to work interviews, etc., cannot be done in open plan settings and privacy is an absolute must. Similarly, there is the need to avoid the stigma of ‘naughty rooms’ when delicate HR related issues need to be discussed, so a number of syndicate or small meeting rooms need to be planned to enable the most flexible and effective use of available space.

Another interesting debate surrounds the question of which categories of staff should work in open plan environments. There is a question about whether

this extends to senior managers or staff whose responsibilities require them to have an enclosed private office – systems librarians, for example. The same benefits which operate across all staff levels apply to senior staff in terms of improved communication, more effective decision making, team cohesiveness, and information sharing. Some of the disadvantages cited include the difficulty of strategic thinking and reflection in a more open plan and noisier environment. There is also an increasing tendency to work from home or to find quiet spaces for report writing, telephone calls, and one-to-one conversations.

The general view is that open plan staff working areas require guiding principles or guidelines for working practices to ensure staff compliance, and to provide staff with an understanding of how individuals may be affected by working in an open plan environment. Recent examples of such protocols also reiterate institutional imperatives to ensure compliance with carbon reduction targets and environmental factors to aid organizations becoming environmentally friendly and sustainable institutions.

Protocols for open plan working practices generally involve the following:

- Waste management and energy usage including ‘no desk bin’ policies, recycling targets, energy awareness, and ‘switch off’ exhortations
- ‘Good neighbour policies’ – maintaining a ‘professional environment’, speaking quietly, avoiding lengthy ‘at desk’ or non-work conversations
- Guidelines on avoiding unnecessary conflict situations
- Guidance and protocols for using multi-functional devices
- Procedures for booking syndicate rooms
- Protocols for visitor management
- Housekeeping hints and tricks for tidy desks
- Eating and drinking ‘dos and don’ts’
- Guidance for using telephones
- Management of stationery
- Protocols for ‘out of hours’ and ‘working from home’ operations
- Emergency procedures
- Kitchenettes and coffee point arrangements
- Security arrangements
- Cleaning and caretaking.

Some or all of these working practice guidelines can appear to be overly prescriptive and dictatorial. Despite this, they recognize the need for some regulation of open plan work spaces to ensure some basic principles which will ensure a modicum of safe, reasonable, comfortable, and tolerable working conditions for the library staff working in these spaces. These protocols are also designed to ensure compliance with the cultural norms of the library. They reinforce these norms to existing staff, especially if moving into a new building or reconfigured work space, and also act as an induction tool for new staff appointees. Some institutions, moving into a new

building, prefer to have a minimum set of working practice protocols; others rely on self-regulation. Between both extremes a balance can be achieved.

Possibly the one aspect of open plan work design which is most overlooked is that of organizational culture because of its complexity and the difficulty in quantifiable measurement. Knoll (2007) describes culture as containing a whole host of organizational values and behaviours, belief systems, management values, expectations, and attitudes; and employee values, expectations, and attitudes. This mishmash of cultural values often comes to the fore whenever organizations make a move away from cellular offices to more open plan working areas. The loss of individual private offices can often be regarded as a demotion or disincentive.

Knoll's work would indicate that 'the kind and quality of space one is given is related to one's status within the organisation'. Building redesign, extension, or any significant change of use is an ideal opportunity to review staff accommodation needs. This can have a range of effects, from small-scale modifications to layout through to quite major reorganization of staff space utilization.

### *Communication*

One critical feature of any realignment of staff space is communication and the active involvement of staff involved in the process. Of all the 'C' words used in change management (consultation, collaboration, and communication) communication is by far the most important and the easiest to get wrong. The space occupied by staff is 'their' space and not public space, so their involvement in the planning, layout, and implementation of any change of use is critical to the overall success of the project. Various means can be employed to ensure staff buy-in such as focus groups, cross-grade representation on planning or design teams, or by the simple expedient of asking staff for their suggestions for the type of facilities they would like to see implemented in any redesign of their workspace. Active and frequent communication via blogs, checklists, newsletters, team briefings, online updates, etc. are also critical for keeping staff informed, motivated, and interested. The timing, method, and frequency of messages are as significant as the content (Corrall 2000), which underlines the need to keep staff informed, involved, and in the know.

### **Library Staff Space of Tomorrow**

The future is always very difficult to predict, as are the changes which are likely to impact on library buildings, the services offered in these facilities, and the staff who will deliver the services and occupy the buildings we know today as 'libraries'. From a staff accommodation perspective, a likely scenario may include fewer lower-grade staff as a result of a greater proportion of clerical and administrative tasks being outsourced to suppliers or becoming part of a shared service. Flexible working, a greater emphasis on working from home, job sharing, mobile working,

hot desking, to name but a few possibilities, will all have an impact on the shape, location, dimensions, and facilities required for staff accommodation. As buildings change and adapt to reflect the changing needs of their constituencies, and as staff roles continue to evolve, the accommodation needs of staff will also continue to change. More public-facing and client-driven services may require more direct interfaces with library staff.

This may lead to open plan working no longer being cost effective or relevant, and there may even be a return to decentralized location-specific staff clusters, heralding a return to smaller offices. Organizational restructuring variables including a trend towards services convergence, 'one stop' information hubs, joint services, etc., may also play an important role in determining staff accommodation. It is interesting to note that the most recent Primary Resources Group report (Primary Resources Group, 2011) predicted little change in library staff accommodation over the next 10 years.

Despite this, it has been predicted that the current tough economic times are likely to continue well into the future. Leaner times also make it critical to plan for efficient staffing, and 'it is important to design a library that can be staffed safely, efficiently and effectively by the smallest possible number of people, (Khan, 2009). In the UK, there has been a recent spate of new university library buildings followed by even more recent continuing evolution of existing university library buildings. Every three to four years brings forth another new library building which becomes the temporary arbiter of 'newness' or exemplar of how space should be designed. What we can be sure of is that each university library will evolve to suit the prevailing teaching, learning, and research needs of its academic community. The challenge will be to evolve a library that is a holistic entity with staff accommodation being part of the overall design and not a bolt-on or an afterthought.

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