

# Libraries and Multimedia in the Digital Age

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**Abstract:** *The paper examines the process by which a Learning Resources Centre is planned and built in the digital age. It will discuss the issues involved; the participation and co-operation of senior management, architects, facilities managers, librarians and IT specialists. Not least is considered the financing of the project. The paper proceeds to discuss the junction of IT with a traditional library and considers the unique nature of a learning resources centre in the specialist world of art and design. The opportunities for collaborative working between the separated functions within the Arts Institute are discussed.*

## Introduction:

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth is a small (2,000 students) specialist art and design Higher Education institution in Southern England. Our speciality is film making, together with graphic design, model making and costume design for the theatre and for films. We also undertake industrial training in the print and multimedia industry.

In the mid 1990s the Arts Institute identified the need to build a new Library combining the traditional features of a Library with a high number (for the size of the college) of computers and to make it an interactive learning centre. This was **just** before the days of e-learning. The new Library opened in 1998, but we have learned almost as much since then as before the opening. The Library has been noteworthy for the way in which it has drawn together staff from different disciplines within the Arts Institute to work together, especially within the fields of library and IT. The conjunction has been of the nature of collaboration rather than merger.

## Planning

In planning the Library I visited many other libraries in Britain and the USA. In England I visited a number of new college libraries to see how they were operating. I needed to know what mistakes they had made and what was successful about them. I was given a grant by the local Rotary Club to examine how libraries were using computers in the state of Pennsylvania, USA.

In Pennsylvania I visited two sorts of libraries; Small universities and specialist colleges like our own e.g. Pennsylvania University of the Arts, and Public Libraries using computers for e-learning.

I learned a lot from how public libraries were being used to retrain the unemployed with e-skills.

The public libraries of Pittsburgh, a steel making city which was re-creating itself formed a model:

- Used for classes of poor mainly black individuals being taught new skills

- Electronic Information Network of Allegheny County ; web site [www.clpgh.org/ein](http://www.clpgh.org/ein)

This was the model used for our new digital library, using a team of planners from the college, derived from many of the academic schools.

## Finance

Money is crucially important. When we began to think about building a new library, the thinking of Mrs Thatcher was still in fashion. We would get very little money from the government to build the library. The existing library was very overcrowded and the local fire brigade threatened to close it because it had so many people studying on the stairs. It was a fire hazard. We adopted a new approach to money, since no one would give us any. We had at that time an old building 5 kilometres away where some of the students were taught. This was expensive to maintain. If we closed this site, this campus and moved everyone to be taught on one site, with the money we would save we could obtain a loan, just as you would to buy a house. So senior management agreed that would be how we would get the money to build the library, just as anyone would in buying a house!

## User Profile

The team spent much time thinking about the user of the library; an artist or designer. The user would demand access to many resources; books, journals, computers; Office applications, Internet and e-mail, Internal College Intranet, E-Journals, Digital Television with many channels, each other so that conversation should be possible, Design objects and lastly instruction on how to use software.

## What the user wants:

The planning team thought that in the future students would want access to computers on a very large scale. We believed that each study place in the library should be connected to a computer. Also we wanted computer-training rooms to be available alongside the library. It was important for the library to be at the heart of the college and so the location was important and the new building was placed at the very centre of the site, the very centre of the campus. At that time a college Intranet did not exist, but the ability to use the Intranet was much in our thinking.

## The architects

It was very important to have architects that shared our vision. We held an architectural competition. Ten architectural practices took part in the competition, including some international ones like Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. We had a problem of only having a limited price we could pay. We wanted architects familiar with how artists and designers work. We wanted architects who would be flexible and listen to our ideas. We chose a partnership called Ren-ton, Howard, Wood, Levine (RHWL) who we thought would listen to our ideas; they have built arts buildings before.

The chosen shape would:

- Look Good
- Be a low price
- Be flexible
- Be good to work in

The resulting Library looks like many Audi and Mercedes car showrooms- which give an air of quality yet are not too expensive. With the architects we toured many libraries looking at the sort of building we thought would best serve our students. We were very pleased with the result.

## Change of Government: 1st of May 1997

A big influence on our planning was the new labour government, elected whilst I was looking at libraries in the USA. They were elected on a manifesto of wanting to bring education to many poor people especially through lifelong learning and electronic learning. Libraries were seen as a vital part of their new agenda. The idea grew that libraries should offer training within them- an idea, which at the same time I was seeing in action in the USA.

## Co-operation and Planning

The Library opened one year after the change in government, in March 1998. It had many computer terminals; mainly I-Mac based which artists and designers like. What the academic staff and students told us was that they wanted access to JANET. JANET the joint academic network, is the UK broadband internet system which gives fast (1.5Gigabytes per second), free access from universities and colleges to the wider internet. All the terminals are connected to both Janet and the College Intranet. The planning team very much built the Library in co-operation with the academic staff and their needs.

Also consulted were the disabled users in the college. The building has full wheelchair access with a lift to the first floor. In line with the government's lifelong learning agenda the new library building contained within it 4 training suites of various sizes mainly to teach short computer courses, retraining those without computer skills, often to trade union members and the unemployed, often at weekends and in the evenings. This work was quickly noticed and we won various awards from the government for our involvement in lifelong learning. The library was successful because it came at the right time on an agenda given by the government.

It was successful in its initial role as not only a conventional library, but also as a place for e-training to take place.

## The Digital Learning Environment; the Development of the Intranet

Also in the planning we saw the need for a Digital Learning Environment. The library would be a place where eventually students would be able to access on-line lectures. The building was wired from the start for e learning, with computer connections in the floor and walls. Unfortunately there were faults with the original wiring, which caused some initial problems, and much of the wiring had to be replaced. Although, initially, we were involved in many training courses, these were not digital in any way, we didn't do distance learning or learning over the college Intranet.

To implement e learning was going to be difficult. To plan e learning we started an

### Intranet Working Party

The Intranet working party comprised:

- Many staff from the Graphic Design Courses
- IT manager
- Lifelong Learning Director
- Librarian
- College Registrar
- Representative from the Personnel Department.

### The Intranet working party would:

**Map overall activity within the Institute with a view to examining which areas could be incorporated into an Intranet at an early date.**

**Produce a model e-learning component for the Graphics Design degree. This area, together with the areas of course handbooks was agreed as being one ripe for activity.**

**Identify other areas for possible incorporation:**

- Library Opac
- Registry functions.
- Institute Policies and Handbooks.

## Library becomes Lifelong Learning

As a result of an increased role in teaching the Library was incorporated into a wider academic School, that of Lifelong Learning with e-learning and service to the wider community as key features.

## Research Role

The new building was used for a European ADAPT project called DIME (Defining Multimedia Employment) with a researcher appointed to examine the nature of employment within the Multimedia Industry in the UK. This project lasted from 1998 to the year 2000.

We are currently working on more research projects:

- How the library may be used more effectively within e-learning
- How the library can contribute towards the UK Governments Key skills project.
- How the small design museum in the new library can be digitised.

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