HEDQF
The Challenges and Complexities of Academic Working Spaces

As part of HEDQF's ongoing programme of workshops with estates professionals within the university sector, we ran a seminar and debate at the University of Reading on 8th February 2017. The aim was to bring to the surface the perennial tension between open and collaborative spaces and traditional cellular offices. Rather than polarise the debate like this, the content considered a range of examples that included academic spaces for writing, research, tutorials, and discussion groups, through to administration for the professional support services.

The debate was facilitated by Trevor Wills and the host was Colin Robbins from Reading. The speakers were:

- David Wallace, Strategy and Space Management Director at Reading, who talked about flexible spaces using three case studies - the executive team office space, collaboration between creative disciplines, and a new approach to laboratories.

- Mark Gabbey, Director, Rock Townsend Architects, and Chantal Gautier, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Westminster, who talked about the briefing and concept stage, early obstacles and resistance, and then how trust was established for the new working areas, as well as student dimensions such as learning, tutoring, play, etc.

- Helen Wallace, Head of Space Management and Design, University of Exeter, who described the key themes and challenges faced in her institution and case studies illustrating innovative approaches and success.

10 top tips to achieving an acceptable solution:

1. Make sure you have the right team appointed to work on the solutions
2. Use examples from elsewhere in the HE sector with good images
3. Agree clear goals and how the outcome will be measured
4. Avoid a one-size-fits-all solution and be prepared to be flexible according to need
5. Whilst this is about issues that are felt to be unique to HE, be prepared to use examples from elsewhere too
6. Always get buy-in through engagement rather than adopting a particular position
7. Build confidence and take away the mystery by exploring different floor layouts and technology
8. Be sure that you have support from the senior leadership
9. Identify a champion or, better still, champions, in the stakeholder group
10. And when it works, shout about it!

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