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The Drill Hall Library is one of the many Grade 2 listed buildings on the Chatham Maritime campus of Universities at Medway. This legacy building, originally known as the Drill Shed, was completed around 1902 and was a key facility for the naval base, housing servicemen during WW1 and functioning as an indoor drill area during peacetime. In 1917 the building was bombed and 135 persons were tragically killed. A plaque outside the main entrance commemorates this event and the Royal Navy holds annual dedication ceremonies on the site. The youngest victim of the bombing was 17 year old Archibald Hay, and the library café is named in honour of this young victim of war. Although it was empty from 1983 and seemingly without function, the last 9 years have seen the building take on a new lease of life and it is now full of people again, as it was during its naval heyday. The building is still very much part of the local community with ex-servicemen and members of the public visiting regularly.

A history of collaboration and stock mergers existed well before the creation of the Drill Hall Library and the Universities at Medway concept. In 1996 the incumbent collection of the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) was merged with incoming stock from the University of Greenwich Schools of Science and Engineering. As the library became too small to accommodate the growing number of students on campus, thoughts began to turn towards the possibility of creating a new facility to include the 3 Universities which now had a considerable presence on the campus. This concept of a shared service was identified before the Drill Hall building was even considered as a possible location.

The development itself cost £15 million with considerable funding from the South-East England Development Agency (SEEDA) as part of the Thames Gateway Regeneration, along with sizeable contributions from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Because of the building's Grade 2 listing, architects faced many challenges but managed to create a state of the art building without losing the historical context. Aside from designing a Library facility that could succeed in such an unusual building (about 10 times longer than it is wide), finding a way to run services on campus for the mutual benefit of all 3 partners was a significant challenge. From deciding how much to charge for fines, through designing IT infrastructure that allowed everyone to log in, and delivering training to students with 3 different sets of institutional guidelines, every aspect of the library service is an exercise in partnership working.

The issues surrounding support for centrally delivered services within the Drill Hall were resolved by defaulting to University of Greenwich University support for Health & Safety, Facilities Management, Human Resources and Finance. This infrastructure decision led to the library using the Greenwich Library Management System, with integration with Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University's (CCCU's) systems in order to manage user accounts.

In 1956 the Pembroke barracks on this site adopted the motto "Omni Servimus" (We serve all). Foresight indeed as this motto could very easily be that of the current Drill Hall Library. At the heart of our philosophy is the desire to treat all of our customers the same, regardless of the University to which they belong. The first stage in this process was to create a shared desktop which means that students can use any of the 400 pcs located throughout the library.

Stock within the library is shared regardless of who purchased it. There is no ring-fencing of material and consequently students can take advantage of a collection which reflects the current teaching and research on the campus. Sports Studies courses are run here by two of the Universities so this is a good example of an area where students from each programme can borrow a much wider range of stock than is actually budgeted for in their respective book funds. There are many other examples on campus where stock crosses over from one course to another.

All Drill Hall staff are multi-skilled. A benefit of a shared service is that it opens up opportunities for staff to broaden their subject support and attend partner institution workshops and meetings, as well as to participate in training and staff development sessions. This allows staff to interact with colleagues working at the home institution libraries and facilitates an exchange of ideas and experiences as well as cementing relationships and ultimately enhancing the service at all sites.

We have resisted the temptation to have individual institutional branding within the Drill Hall Library. The concept of Universities at Medway for the whole site alleviates the need to worry about branding implications. Many students actually feel part of the Universities at Medway family rather than identifying solely with their home institution. We try to use the complexity of the partnership arrangements to develop our own unique identity and to drive innovation. Although there are headaches along the way the partnership does not hold development back in the library – in fact the opposite is true.

Our users are not solely restricted to the staff and students of the 3 partner institutions. We have representations from the local community through our public access scheme, and over 500 have signed up. Our community outreach extends to local schools which send pupils, with teacher supervision, to support their extended project portfolios. Personnel from the local Royal School of Military Engineering (RSME) have used the Drill Hall from its inception to support their academic programmes. We also have schemes for clinical access users and students from the partner institutions who may not actually live in the Medway Towns. A possible future development may be for us to support students of the Medway University Technical College which will be opening in 2015.

With 3 institutions operating on slightly different academic calendars there are major challenges to meet the demands of our users and to provide a robust service to all. The month of August is now the only time when we officially have no students engaged in academic activity. We recently piloted an 11 week 24/7 opening and this was a considerable success. We are open 7 days a week and usually until midnight. Not all students from the 3 institutions exhibit the same library usage patterns, some prefer late night opening (Kent, Greenwich) whilst others are more visible at the weekends (CCCU). We rely heavily on student feedback to help us to formulate our study space and patterns of opening.

Student numbers on this campus have been steadily rising since we opened and the use of space in the building is now under some pressure. With an increasing number of postgraduate students on campus, and more research activity taking place, we are looking at developing our collections, services and spaces to provide more for those activities. New subjects expanding at this campus, such as those covered by Kent's School of Art, are also taking us into interesting new directions. We recently hosted an art installation by a Kent student; and we enjoy being the focal point of the campus, and all of the varied student and disciplines we cater for. The shared experience means that students from all 3 institutions have a chance to interact with each other. Many find this academically as well as socially advantageous.

The Drill Hall Library is regularly referred to as the biggest success of the Medway campus. As we see this campus grow and mature we are finding that the partnerships push us on relentlessly. We'd like to be seen as a flagship for similar initiatives in the future and we will continue to strive to "serve all".

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