

Post-Occupancy Report – The ‘Gateway’ Student Information Service

13th December 2004

1.0 Introduction

The ‘Gateway’ Student Information Service was a concept proposed by the University’s Director of Marketing and External Relations to the Executive in 2002. The concept involved bringing together many of the client-facing advisory and administrative student services into one physical location with a view to providing a centralised facility for students. The ‘Gateway’ project was brought forward when space on the ground floor of MB Building, City Campus South, became available. The ‘Gateway’ is currently housed in this position and includes the University’s Jobshop, Student Counselling Service, the Enabling Centre, the Careers Service and the Student Financial Support Unit. The facility was completed at a cost of £255,000 and opened in October 2002.

1.1 The Report

In May 2004, a post-implementation review was undertaken to investigate whether the facility had achieved its original objectives. In writing this report, the format and methodology of the Higher Education Design Quality Forum (HEDQF) was followed.

1.2 Project Context

The Marketing and External Relations Department noted that the Student Services were scattered disparately across the University. This was causing problems amongst the student body; with, often, clients being sent to different locations in the University to resolve a single issue. This was especially noted during times of peak-activity, such as enrolment. For this reason, the Director of Marketing and External Relations proposed the ‘Gateway’ concept and became Sponsor for the Project.

It is notable that, approximately halfway through the project, due to an internal rearrangement of Senior Management, some of the divisions within the Gateway came under the remit of the University Registry. For this reason, the University Registrar became co-sponsor of the project.

1.3 The Forums

A set of forums were convened to inform this report. These were:

- A meeting with users/stakeholders of the Gateway
- A meeting with the Project Team
- A meeting with the Director of Marketing and External Relations

These meetings were chaired by Professor Roy Newton, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Strategic Planning and Resources. All the data and documentation which informed this report is available from the University's Project Office. **Key points are in bold type and the report concludes with general recommendations.**

1.4 The Project Team

The Project Sponsor was Rob Haynes, Director of Marketing and External Relations who chaired the Consultative Group and Project Team Meetings. Day-to-day co-ordination from the Stakeholder perspective came from Keith Hall who was seconded as the Gateway Manager towards the beginning of the project. The budgetary responsibility and technical direction was managed through Paul Adams, Associate Director, Property Services and was co-ordinated by the University's Capital Projects Manager, Anthony Turner. It is noted that Anthony Turner has since left the University. Further technical support came from Andy Stewart, Deputy Electrical and Mechanical Engineer and from Simon Brimble in the University's IT Services Department.

2.0 Summary

The project definition and 'Vision Statement' outlined the intended benefits of the facility.

2.1 The 'Gateway' Student Information Centre Project

Key Issues & Drivers:

- Student retention
- Eclectic nature of student problems
- Expert resources currently physically dispersed and low-profile
- Need for speedy and efficient deployment of support resource via co-location of key services
- Need to co-locate key, retention-sensitive services in a high profile, accessible, user-friendly environment

Vision:

"A centrally-located, well-signed and accessible area incorporating a common

reception/heartspace from which radiate designated support services offices and facilities...Combination of open-plan, shop style environments (eg reception, Job Shop and Careers Information Library) plus quiet, discrete areas and offices for access to information resources (printed and electronic) and the delivery of individual student interviews and assessments (Student Enabling Centre, Student Finance, Careers Interviews, Counselling Service.) Multi-service reception facility designed to facilitate initial enquiry/problem resolution and/or speedy onward referral to appropriate services via immediate access to staff or through booked appointment. Open-plan areas to be carpeted, lit and furnished to provide a user-friendly relaxed ambience.”*

* Source: Student Services Gateway Project Vision Document.

3.0 Briefing

3.1 External Parameters

An opportunity arose in 2002 when space became available on the ground floor of MB Building. The area was previously used by the Languages Department, who in 2002 came under the remit of the newly configured School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences. (HLSS). This new school was predominantly based on the Dudley Campus. The School was reconsolidated into the new MC building after the Dudley Campus was closed, with significant space-rationalisation, as outlined in the Masterplan, being achieved.

Originally, the idea involved inclusion of Residential Services, Registry and Finance, as well as the other services, which eventually resided in the ‘Gateway’. Due to a number of reasons, these services were excluded. These departments stated that representatives required immediate access to student files and University records and that a permanent residence would not be feasible. Furthermore, that there was a lack of staff available and that this would mean duplication of services. It was ultimately the limitations of space, as well as the defining of the most necessary services, which led to the final grouping being chosen. It is also significant to note that, during times of peak activity, these departments have temporary representation in the ‘Gateway’.

3.2 Developing the Brief

Rob Haynes, Director of Marketing and External Relations had noted from research in the sector and from staff observations that a more centralised service for frontline student-facing staff was required. Rob Haynes wrote an initial ‘Vision’ Statement and Justification for the ‘Gateway’ concept which was presented to the University Executive in the Spring of 2002. On the approval

of Executive, a consultative group was established. This group, chaired by Rob Haynes, made practical proposals for the realisation of the Vision Statement.

The final occupancy of the 'Gateway' was chosen as being the University's Jobshop, Student Counselling Service, the Enabling Centre, the Careers Service and the Student Financial Support Unit. The group decided on the requirements of the different sections, the most practical configuration and produced a brief for the Project Team.

In the Forum held with members of the technical team, they considered that the brief provided was very clear and straightforward and that this was a significant contributory factor to the Projects' success.

Recommendation: A clear and straightforward brief.

Data-sheets were not used in the project due to the time constraints but understanding of the requirements was straightforward.

3.3 Project Management

The responsibility for managing the project, following production of the brief, was assumed by Paul Adams, Associate Director, Property Services.

Executive declined the request for a new Gateway Manager and new administrative staff, stating rationalisation as requirement. Rob Haynes and Jane Nelson, the Academic Registrar and co-sponsor, agreed to jointly fund a part-time Manager and Keith Hall was seconded to the post.

Once appointed as Manager, the day-to-day Project Management was undertaken by Keith Hall, who produced regular monitoring statistics. Rob Haynes was updated regularly, and involved in significant decisions; such as the furniture requirements.

The project progressed smoothly; this was considered a result of continuing discussion and collaboration with the clients.

Recommendation: Continuing discussion and collaboration with the clients.

3.4 Financial Management

The financial management was a success, with the project coming in on budget and on time. This was deemed as being a result of clear lines of responsibility for the budgets within the project. IT Services had overall

responsibility for the 'active kit' and the Facilities Department managed the rest of the project.

Recommendation: Clear lines of responsibility for project budgets and clearly designated areas of responsibility.

The budget was controlled by Property Services, through the Capital Projects Manager, Anthony Turner. It was considered a particularly effective method of Financial Management for the Project Sponsor to be advised on budgetary matters, but with the budget being ultimately controlled by the University Department which had the specialist knowledge of building matters.

Recommendation: Project Sponsors to be regularly advised on budgetary matters and for the budget to be controlled by the department with the appropriate specialism.

4.0 Design and Construction

4.1 Architects

Architects were retained to provide drawings in lieu of a resident Architect in the Facilities Department and were not required to provide consultancy on wider-development Masterplanning issues. The Architects, Martin Ward & Keeling, were considered as being very suitable for the Project and the arrangement worked well in the final analysis.

Recommendation: An appropriate Architect for the size and type of project.

4.2 Contractor

The Contractors 'Myras Interiors' were co-ordinated by the Facilities Department without any significant problems encountered.

5.0 Building Management

There were no problems with the management of the facility during the building process.

6.0 Staff Users

6.1 Positive Feedback

Interview rooms were originally earmarked for use by certain departments, but had since become used by others. The example given was the Finance Interview room which was presently being used for interviewing students about dyslexia by the Communications Support Unit. The possibility of these changes to the original brief was testament to the flexibility allowed by the design.

Counselling Services commented that they were happy with the location and the space they had been allocated was useful.

Those present at the 'Stakeholders Forum' noted that it was useful having the Students Union as a separate entity and not represented in the Gateway.

The Gateway Manager observed that the project has shown how changing the physical environment through building development could bring together disparate departments into a cohesive facility.

A number of MER staff were cross-trained to act as 'Information Officers', which initially caused difficulties with the Personnel Department. Rob Haynes stated that, with hindsight, this was a very positive move and the service offered was greatly enhanced.

Recommendation: A clear understanding of the staff training required to operate new facilities.

6.2 Problems encountered

The 'end room' was not sufficiently soundproofed; a problem exacerbated by the large numbers of people standing in the corridor outside. It was explained that this problem would be limited when the windows were replaced in the next 2/3 years under the Facilities replacement/refurbishment plan for the building.

Interface with the International Office (presently located on the first floor) was deemed as being very good. Conversely, interface with the Graduate School was deemed as being very limited. Stakeholder representatives also raised doubts over the "one-stopness" of the Gateway; explaining that there were limits to the service to students offered by the facility. Examples given were Residential Services and Registry, and although a major presence was not essential, closer links through closer proximity were suggested as possible improvements. The relocation of the Graduate School in MB Building and the configuration of services in the Gateway were controversial decisions at the time and would be reviewed in the imminent University review of the Gateway and its services.

6.3 Security issues

The positioning of the reception desk meant that people could access the building from Stafford Street, and subsequently access the first floor, without being seen by the Receptionist. This was remedied shortly after completion of the facility when the Stafford Street entrance was closed.

Since the opening of the Gateway, 5 minor incidents had been reported, including the theft of some personal belongings. However, no serious incidents had been reported and Representatives of the Gateway staff present considered this to be very positive.

Users noted that the care-taking staff were very pro-active in checking the facility and that this could be a reason for the good security record of the Gateway.

7.0 Student Users

7.1 Feedback to staff

The 'Physical accessibility' of the Gateway was noted by the users as being something which was appreciated.

Surveys, as well as direct feedback to staff, had shown that Students considered the Gateway useful and a very positive initiative.

Rob Haynes noted that the Students' Union stated that the Gateway was a positive development in their Annual Statement.

7.2 Quantitative Feedback

The Management of the Gateway undertook an annual review of the facility and produced a report which was presented to the University's Academic Board on 27th October 2003. Findings are summarised below:

- 29,656 visitors were recorded at the Reception Point over the monitoring period (September 2002 to August 2003 inclusively)
- A satisfaction survey was distributed to all visitors with approximately 300 returns received in the first semester:
 - 2% stated that they were dissatisfied with the facility and services offered. (Notably, all negative responses were from unsuccessful or ineligible applicants for financial support.)
 - 98% stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the facility and services offered.

The report went on to comment, “It is worth noting that visitor records for the first weeks of September show that Gateway visitor numbers have doubled compared to those in '02 (from 250 – 300 per day to 500 – 600 per day_ suggesting that new and returning students perceive the Gateway as a useful addition to University services on City Campus...In conclusion the Gateway model continues to offer what it was designed for; student demand is being satisfied more efficiently with many ‘walking tours’ reduced to a minimum and some no longer necessary at all...client demand is satisfactorily high.”*

*Source: Student Services ‘Gateway’ City Campus Pilot, 1st Annual Report 2002-3. Presented to the Academic Board on 27th October 2003.

8.0 Recommendations

- A clear and straightforward brief
- Continuing discussion and collaboration with the clients.
- Clear lines of responsibility for project budgets and clearly designated areas of responsibility
- Project Sponsors to be regularly advised on budgetary matters and for the budget to be controlled by the department with the appropriate specialism
- An appropriate Architect for the size and type of project