Evaluation of refurbished library spaces

Student Researcher Scheme

Researched and produced by: Ahmed ElShenawy
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In partial fulfillment of the Evaluation of refurbished library spaces research project under the supervision of the Project Lead, Julie Archibald and the Deputy Director of the Library, Anne Llewellyn.
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Evaluation of refurbished library spaces

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Researcher’s course: BEng (Hons) Civil Engineering with Industry (with Foundation Year)

Program name: Students as Researchers Scheme (LTE)

Institution name: Teesside University

Abstract:

This research project, started in January 2018 with a 5 months’ timescale to be completed. This report explores how the new refurbished library suits the students. Moreover, it mainly explores how the students use the newly refurbished library. It is essential to note that the second and third floors were recently refurbished. Phases 3 and 4 (opened October 2017). Whilst the first floor was refurbished in 2016 summer. Phase 2 (opened October 2016).

Questions where to be designed by the researcher for the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted with students from Levels 4, 5 and 6 to ascertain any differential use of the spaces at different levels of study. This evaluation is part of a wider action research approach to the design, refurbishment, and evaluation of the Library.

This report is the last phase of the entire research project which contains all the findings of the researcher and key information regarding the library’s status. The project’s timeline is as follows:

- **Phase 1**: Meeting steering group & introduction on project (Completed in January)
- **Phase 2**: Literature review (Completed in February)
- **Phase 3**: Conducting focus groups (Completed in March)
- **Phase 4**: Transcription of data (Completed in March)
- **Phase 5**: Data analysis (Completed in April)
- **Phase 6**: Final Report (Completed in April)

This report also explores the positive remarks brought up by the students in the focus groups along with the problems they found while using the refurbished spaces and their own recommendations.
Contributors:

- Julie Archibald, Customer Services Manager, Student and Library services, Project Lead.

- Liz Jolly, Director, Student and Library Services.

- Jane Aiken, Assistant Director, Student and Library Services.

- Anne Llewellyn, Library Deputy Director.

- Jackie Oliver, Library Refurbishment Project Manager, Student and Library Services.

- Tom Platt, Vice President (Education), Students’ Union.

Special thanks go out the Teesside University School Representatives and other Student Union staff members for allowing the researcher to use their monthly meeting for further feedback on the library refurbishments and to see how their schools are getting on with the new spaces, accordingly. Moreover, The Board of Trustees was of a massive help to the project as well as the library staff. This project was completed with the contribution, no matter how small, of (including but not limited to) the above students and staff members.
Introduction:

Students, library staff and academic staff have worked together with estates and the architects to redesign and refurbish the library space at Teesside University with the following objectives:

- The Library will be a place for 21st Century learning.
- The library will be a visually impressive space
- The library will be a technology-enabled environment.
- The library will be a flexible learning space
- The library will drive and enhance the student experience

Although there is a growing body of research on learning space design, there is a paucity of research on the relationship between space and learning (Temple, 2008; Scott-Weber et al., 2013). This research was set out with the objectives of exploring how students use the different learning spaces in the refurbished library to support their learning. The student researcher conducted multiple focus groups with undergraduate students. The focus groups were conducted with students from Levels 4, 5 and 6 to ascertain any differential use of the spaces at different levels of study, if any.
Focus groups:

The student researcher conducted the focus groups by individually selecting students in the library for a quick 15-20 minutes ‘chat’ as the project has seen initial difficulties finding volunteers for the focus groups. This move was a compromise over the initial plan. However, the steering group had agreed that this was the best possible approach to the situation. The student researcher also attended the monthly School Reps Meeting to further get feedback and ideas from students who represent schools.

Please note: The questions were tailored/tweaked to each individual student in regards to their course, experiences, and usage of the library. However, the following questions provide a glimpse of the scope of questions asked:

- What floor of the library do you use the most?
- Is there a reason why you chose that floor?
- Where on the floor do you spend most of your time and why?
- How do you use the space provided in that area?
- When do you use that space, is there a specific time/week of the year?
- Do you prefer the old or the new library and why?
- If you could change anything in the library, what would you change and why?
- Any overall feedback on the library’s current state?
- What are your recommendations?
Transcription and analysis of the data:

The answers received from students during the focus groups was transcribed to help the student researcher get a better understand of what trends the students were following in regards to library usage. What do all/most of the students share and what points have been mentioned more than once.

**Thematic analysis** process was used to further analysis the data. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to the specific research question.
Focus groups responses:

Using thematic analysis to analyze the responses given by the students, the student researcher was able to notice few trends. This part of the report will be looking into more details of what exactly the students were saying during those focus groups and the trends followed/seen by them. It is important to note that not every single comment, recommendation or suggestion was put into this report.

Question 1

Q. What floor do you use the most in the library?

- First floor (26.6%)
- Second floor (20%)
- Third floor (20%)
- No explicit answer (33.4%)

Looking at the responses, 4 students out of the 15 have explicitly mentioned that the first floor is their go to option, their main floor of work/studying. Regarding the second floor, 3 students said that they always use that floor in specific. While only 3 students have said they always use the 3rd floor primarily. The other 6 participants (40%) didn’t state clearly what floor they use the most. Some of them have made it clear that they use whatever floor that is less busy. Others have also mentioned that they use almost all floors equally depending what they are doing and who they are with.
Question 2

Q. Is there a reason why you choose that floor?

A closer look at the reasons given by the students revealed critical information as to why student use the floors that they choose fit for their studies.

First Floor:

Out of the four first floor goers, two of them have mentioned that they go there mainly for group work. “I tend to do group work most of the time, so I use the first floor for that” said Amy. Another student’s reason as to why when asked, “It’s the closest to me, so I don’t have to walk up. The booths are really nice too.” Said the 2nd year student, William. The 4th student has mentioned that he prefers using the double-screened PCs and hence why he goes to the first floor.

Second Floor:

In regards to the three students who said that they always go and work in the second floor, two of them made it explicitly clear that the only reason they use the second floor is because the first one is always busy. It’s because the first floor is constantly full of people with not enough space. “Sometimes I feel like I’m forced to work with my group members on the second floor just because there is not enough group work space on the first floor.” Said Jenny. Another reason why some students prefer the second floor, is because it is a little quieter than the first floor. Robert, a 2nd year student jokingly said. “Because I’m anti-social and I like quietness.”

Third Floor:

Responses as to why students prefer using the 3rd floor were predictable. 3 out of the 3 students mentioned that the only reason they use the 3rd floor is because it is pin-drop silent. “I use that floor specifically because floor one and two are too loud to work in.” Said Andressa, a 1st year student.
Question 3

Q. Where on that floor do you spend most of your time and why?

After examining the participants’ responses to this question, it was evident that their responses corresponded with the actual library usage. A quick run through the library would prove that the areas mentioned below are in fact quite busy.

First Floor:

There were a total of 5 responses to where on the first floor, participants believed it is best to work. Four, believed ‘Studyville South/North’ was indeed the best area to be if you’re looking to study. “I try to get to one of the double screened PCs because they’re always busy.” Said one student. Another student mentioned, “I just try to find somewhere where I can sit down and use a PC. Usually on the first floor, you find that in the North/South Studyville.” One thing to note was that a student has mentioned that they use the booths for individual work even though they were designed for group work. However, his excuse was that he likes the massive space area and quietness. “I like the space because such space is not provided anywhere else. I also used my laptop over there beside the PC because the software I wanted was not in the library. It is also quiet yet in the library atmosphere.” Said Roi, a 1st year student. Nevertheless, one student has mentioned that they always prefer using the window seats because of the electrical plug accessibility as well as comfortability.

Second Floor:

Two students, out of three, who were asked on where they prefer to study on the second floor answered with the ‘Fallen Leaves ICT’ area. One key point to be noted here, one student has mentioned that he engages in group work on the second floor in the area mentioned above. “It’s frustrating because, we simply don’t want to break the rules but at the same time, my group and I have got deadlines and things to do, if we can’t meet up on the ground or first floor, where else would we be able to meet?” Jenny, a 2nd year student expressed her frustration as to never finding group work space when it is busy. Moreover, another student who uses this area has mentioned that they like to use it simply because it is quieter than the first floor. Robert jokingly mentioned, “Because I’m anti-social and I like quietness.” One the other hand, the third student, Eddie, preferred using the ‘Pumpkin Patch’ area. “The place has just the right lighting.” Eddie made it clear he uses this area due to the fact it is one of the quietest areas on the floor, too.
Third Floor:

The three students who mentioned they always work on the third floor had very similar responses, three of them find it very quiet and relaxing. “I use that floor specifically because floor one and two are too loud to work.” Said one student. One of the three students have mentioned they primarily use the ‘Aurora’ area. “Why this area in specific?” Asked the researcher. Brian said, “It’s bright, I have a big desk, so I can spread my work out comfortably.” The other two students mentioned the ‘Reading Room’ (with booths) was their first go to once they are on the floor. “I can bring my laptop and can spread everything out and focus on what I need to do.” Mentioned Jackie. “I usually use the individual pods, they do the job for me, pretty much.” Said Andressa, happily.
Question 4:

Q. How do you use the space provided in that area?

The purpose of asking this question is to try to understand how students use the refurbished areas and to find out what can be done to improve and cut down on bad habits of in the library.

First Floor:

One student, William, a 2nd year student at the school of SSED answered, when asked, with: “I use the booths only for group work, never individual study. For the big screens booths, it’s important because we all get to see what we are doing, and all agree or disagree at once.” Nevertheless, Roi has also responded in a similar manner, “Two people sat in the booths for example or just group work in general. Double screen is individual work.” One student, however, admitted using group work space area for individual work. “I like the space because such space is not provided anywhere. I also used my laptop over there beside the PC because the software I wanted was not in the library. It is also quiet yet in the library atmosphere.” As mentioned before, his excuse was simply due to the fact he like the massive space area.

Second Floor:

When Eddie was asked how he uses the area provided (Pumpkin Patch), he responded with; “I bring my own laptop.” Jenny has mentioned few problems she has had with the new refurbished spaces, she responded with; “For the most part students use the library the way it’s meant to be used, yes, but more often than not, you find people doing individual work in group work areas. People talking in areas meant for silent student. It’s due to the fact students are just students and for some, like myself, for example, I don’t have a choice but to do my group work in the second floor and get told off every 30 minutes for it.” As identified before, Jenny was one of the students who uses the second-floor individual study area for her group work. She blames the problem on the fact not enough group spaces are available for students during busy hours.

Third Floor:

Jacki mentioned she uses the ‘Reading Room’ for her studies, when asked how she uses the space, she responded with; “Today for example, I was working on an essay and I had to look at few things all at the same time. So, I had my work spaced out on the table and it was easy for me to write my essay.” Brian, a 3rd year student has a similar response; “The desk beside me is empty so I can push my things around for more space.” Another student touched on the quietness. He pointed out that he can sit down on one of the computers without disturbance. That’s why he prefers the third floor.
Question 5:

Q. When do you use this area, is there a specific time of the day?

The idea behind this question is to figure out if students only use parts of the library during a specific time-space or all day along.

First Floor:

Key:

1. Morning Hours: 08:00-11:59
2. Afternoon Hours: 12:00-16:59
3. Evening Hours: 17:00-00:00

Please note: Some students mentioned they work all day long, no specific hour’s preference.
Question 6:

Q. Do you prefer the new or old library?

The purpose behind asking this question is to try to figure out if the students are overall happy with the new library. If not, why not.

Although, 96.5% of the participants said they prefer the new library, about 12% of them mentioned the bookable rooms on the second floor in the old library. Upon further discussion, that’s the only old space they would like to have back. “I really miss having that room, so I can be around my team-members and we can be as load as comfortable as we can while presenting and not worrying about disturbing others. I really do hope they figure out some other space for similar rooms.” Said Emily, a 3rd year student in the school of TUBS. Another student’s responds; “I really like it now, especially the third floor, it’s better to study there now. I like the new first and second floors as well, the group areas are very useful and helpful. Whiteboards are brilliant, very helpful. Overall, a great place to be.” “Recently, myself and my group were sat on the first floor using the whiteboards and that has helped us a lot.” Said Jacki, a 1st year H&SC student.
Question 7:

Q. If you could change anything in library, what would you change and why?

Participants had a lot of aspects that they would like to change. However, some of them are not in line with the current library policies as well as design. Nonetheless, some of the ideas are mentioned bellow;

Brian, a 3rd year student at the school of CM&A suggested; “I’d like a printer up in the third floor, so I don’t have to walk downstairs just to print.” Another student touched on the group space area in the second floor that is now none-existent since it’s a silent study floor. “The big desk on the second floor, when they renovated the library, they removed some of the space and myself and my group members really preferred that area because it’s in the middle and quiet. Maybe adding few tables and chairs for group work would be a good idea.” Said Roi. Not only Roi, a surprisingly large number of students have pointed out that were unhappy with the space for group work. They believe that the current space available on the ground and first floor is not enough. Another student responded similarly when asked the following by the researcher; “Have you considered using the ground floor for your group work, if the first-floor space is not enough?” The student responded with; “Yes, I have, in fact, I always look there but the space is extremely limited and it’s almost always busy with people already sitting down, not to mention half 65% of the ground floor if not 70% is taking up by cafes and library staff equipment, reception, etc.”

Another concern to few students, although important, was the software availability on the library servers. Some of the students have mentioned to the student researcher that they couldn’t find their desired software on the library computers. Hence, they must study in their specific school buildings. However, not an efficient solution as some of the schools are not open 24/7. “I often find myself always bringing my laptop over there beside the PC because the software I want is not in the library. Going to my school’s building isn’t always an option.”

A main concern with a lot of the participants was noise level on the second floor. One student said; “I would like to add that somethings needs to be done to make the second floor quieter as it is a library and many people I know find it just as frustrating as I do.” Another student added; “They just don’t listen really even after being told off by staff. You might suggest the third floor to me, but I’d say, I don’t really feel comfortable there because I’m afraid to drop my pen, make a noise and people would look at me in a weird way.” Students do in fact still see group work and a lot of group discussion on the second floor. Some students find it extremely difficult and frustrating to study on the second floor, for that reason. “For second floor, they’re trying to police it better. However, you still find loads of groups working and talking there.” The following is a focus group conversation;
The following was a conversation that took place during a focus group:

Researcher: In your opinion, what do you think is the biggest problem of the library, if there is any?
Participant 2: Noise.
Participant 4: Noise, definitely.
Participant 7: Yeah, it’s the noise.
Participant 8: People for some reason, use it as a social place rather than a study place.
Participant 5: I think there is not enough awareness on noises and its management. I was going to mention that I’ve seen people sit in the booths in the first floor just to eat and laugh rather than to work.
Participant 7: Oh yes, that gets me too!

Please note: 35% of the participants have no problems/complaints/suggestions on the library’s current state. The figures below represent 65% of the participants’ opinions only.
Question 8:

Q. Any overall feedback on the library’s current state?

This question was asked to try to see if the library’s original objectives as to the refurbishments were achieved. The objectives were:

- The Library will be a place for 21st Century learning.
- The library will be a visually impressive space
- The library will be a technology-enabled environment.
- The library will be a flexible learning space
- The library will drive and enhance the student experience

The overwhelming majority of the students love the new refurbished library. “I really have got no negative feedback, I like the 24/7 system, so I can work whenever I want. Overall, the library is a brilliant place to be in” Said Jacki, a 1st year student. Eddie, a 3rd year CM&A student seems to agree when asked; “Do you prefer the old library or the new one?” “I prefer the new one, it’s way more comfortable, student friendly.” Regarding the noise levels, a student responded when asked; “What do you think of the new furniture?” “I personally think it’s brilliant, it is definitely a lot more sound proof, since the previous years used to be louder. But the chairs can sometimes get unconformable. There isn’t really much of back support. Other than that, everything is great. White boards are great too.” He then proceeded to say “I personally think the library is a great place to be. With few tweaks here and there, this could be one the best libraries in the entire of England.”

The following was a conversation that took place during a focus group:

Researcher: Any final comments you’d like to make about the library?

Participant 4: It’s amazing

Participant 3: I think it works brilliant, generally it’s a really nice place to be.

Participant 4: I like the new library.

Participant 2: Yeah, I love it too.
Question 9:

Q. What are your recommendations?

The main reason why this question was asked is to try to understand how students believe problems they may have encountered may be solved. Some of the responses were brilliant and those are the ones mentioned bellow:

Printers and printing rooms:

There were few comments made on the library printers. Brian said; “I’d like printers on the third floor, so I don’t have to walk downstairs just to print.” Another student mentioned; “I’d definitely add more printers, sometimes the printers are simply not working due to shortage of papers or quite busy towards the end of the semesters and even mid semester. I often find myself running between floors just to get my printing done.” The student also talked about the printer rooms; “I also, don’t see the point of the mono printers. Why not just make all printers coloured and if someone wishes to have a black/white print, then they can make that happen by changing the settings. Most people need coloured prints and that’s why they’re always busy. I also couldn’t find printers on the third floor. I don’t think they have them up there. Another thing is that the printing room is always hard to find, a better signage system would be of so much help.”

Managing noise levels:

A handful of students suggested few options to control the noise levels. Emily said; “I think maybe make them more aware about group study spaces around the campus if they didn’t find any on the first floor of the library.” She also added; “Maybe police it a little better with more staff or more rounds.” Another issue brought up by the participants: “Another major issue is that if you’re sat on the third floor, nobody would be making noise in there, but the noises and laughs would travel between the floors. So, you’d be able to hear people talking in the first and second floor even though you’re on the third floor. In the booths area specifically. As soon as you walk through the glass door though, the noise cuts off, so it’s only in certain areas. More doors would help I think.” Another student added: “I’d suggest more awareness, I think there is not enough awareness on noises and its management. I was going to mention that I’ve seen people sit in the booths in the first floor just to eat and laugh rather than to work.”
Conclusion:

In summary, the overwhelming majority of participant students agreed on the newly refurbished library spaces being an outstanding place for 21st Century learning. They believe it is not only a visually impressive space but also a flexible learning space. 96.5% of the participants voted on the new library being more advanced, technology-enabled environment, yet at the same time, student friendly. The researcher confidently believes the 5 objectives the library staff set out to achieve by refurbishing the library over the summers of 2016 and 2017 have been achieved. This belief is based on all the research and narrative accounts from the students themselves.

After speaking to 15 students from different study levels, the researcher believes that the spaces are mainly being used for what they were designed for. However, most of the students have touched on the second floor being misused. Since it is between the group study floor and the individual study floor. Therefore, library staff need to ensure the vision for the whole building is being clearly communicated. The suggestions and recommendations provided by the participants should give an idea of how the problems they found could be solved. Multiple students touched on the fact that there are simply not enough group study spaces. Hence, forcing them, the students, to engage in group work in the second floor even though it was designed as silent floor.

After looking at students’ level of study and what floors they primarily use, there was no correlation found. Some of the participants were 1st year students using the third library floor and on the other hand, 3rd year students using the first floor, and vice-versa. The choice of area/floor in which students prefer to study in/on is based on the individual course each student is doing, their assignment/exam title and their studying lifestyle.
Brief information about the participants who took part in the research project.

Please note:
- Names have been changed to protect anonymity and confidentiality
- The researcher has assumed some information.

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## Evaluation of Library Spaces Project

### Consent Form

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<tr>
<th>I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reason, and a right to withdraw my data if I wish. To withdraw from the project please contact <a href="mailto:a.elshenawy@tees.ac.uk">a.elshenawy@tees.ac.uk</a>. Data may be withdrawn before 27th April 2018. After this date, this may not be possible due to the data having been anonymised.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I give permission for any data to be used (by use of pseudonym).</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the research report and that no information that could lead to my being identified will be included in any report or publication resulting from this research</td>
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Name of participant: ……………………………………………………………………….

Signature: …………………………………………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………………………………………………………………………

Two copies of this consent form should be completed: One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher

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<th>I am happy to be contacted for any further follow up studies</th>
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Phone number………………………………………………………………………………
1) **Research project title and purpose**

The project is called Evaluation of Library Learning Spaces. The purpose of the project is to gather information about how the different learning spaces are used to help your learning. We want real examples of how students use the different spaces within the Library and how this contributes to their learning. We may use some of the data for marketing and publicity, but this will be anonymized and you will not be identifiable.

2) **What do I have to do?**

You will be asked to participate in a focus group with 6-8 other people, where you will be asked about how you have used the different learning space for your learning. The focus group interview will be conducted by a Student Researcher, who will be trained and supervised by experienced researchers in the Project Team. The focus group will take no more than 1 hour and will take place in one of the teaching rooms in the library.

The data will be analysed and published as part of a wider evaluation of library learning space. In any form of dissemination, participants will be anonymised and any information that is gathered will be treated with confidence. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and transcripts of interviews will be stored on an encrypted USB port. The data will be used for no other purpose than this.

3) **If I volunteer and then decide that I can’t commit to complete the project, can I withdraw?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, you can leave at any point. If you wish to withdraw your data after submitting, please contact Julie Archibald (j.archibald@tees.ac.uk). Data may be withdrawn before 27th April 2018. After this date this may not be possible due to the data have been anonymised.

4) **What are the possible disadvantages/benefits of taking part?**

The only disadvantage should be sacrificing your time when you participate. The researchers will compensate you for your time by providing refreshments.

5) **Will my data be kept confidential?**

Yes – any information you provide will be kept as confidential and anonymised so that you cannot be identified in any reports or publications.
6) What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint about anything you experience throughout your involvement in the project or following results dissemination, contact the project manager, Julie Archibald at Teesside University (j.archibald@tees.ac.uk). If you feel your complaint has not been handled appropriately you can contact Nicola Poppitt who is independent of this research project via email n.poppitt@tees.ac.uk.

7) Will be contacted again?

No, it is not anticipated at this stage that there will be any follow studies to this project.

8) Contacts for further information

If you require further information, email Julie Archibald, the Project Manager at Teesside University (k.archibald@tees.ac.uk)

Thank you for your time and participation in this research.