RIBA/LSC
Further Education Awards 2006
Design Excellence in Further Education

Of interest to college professionals and architects aspiring to provide first-class education in excellent surroundings

For information
This publication has been produced in partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as an extension of the RIBA Learning and Skills Client Forum’s competition ‘Colleges for the Future’.
FOREWORD

Across the country, new buildings in the further education (FE) sector are inspiring learners and widening participation. This award scheme – supported by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Learning and Skills Client Forum and endorsed by the Association of Colleges – aims to celebrate the best of those new buildings.

The award follows on from the very successful competition ‘Colleges for the Future’ in 2004. This year, more than 20 strong entries vied for a place on the shortlist. The judging panel, comprising professionals from the world of architecture and design, the LSC and the FE sector, were impressed with the range and quality of the submissions. Six colleges were shortlisted for a visit from the judges in order to arrive at an eventual award winner and runner up. This brochure displays those six colleges in all their glory – they serve as an inspiration for other colleges to invest in high-quality design.

Well-designed buildings can encourage students to participate in learning and can motivate students to learn effectively in a changing, 21st-century environment. Although there is no single blueprint for the design of teaching and learning spaces, there are clear messages about what makes a new building effective – those that are most successful are bold, inclusive and flexible, and support the drive to ever higher standards of achievement. We’re certain that college leaders and their strategic managers all over England will benefit from the good practice demonstrated here.

Mark Bramwell
Chair, RIBA Learning and Skills Client Forum and Principal, Totton College

Mark Bramwell
Chief Executive, LSC

CONTENTS

WINNER
North Manchester Sixth Form College and North City Public Library (MANCAT) 6–9

RUNNER UP
Stephenson College 10–11

SPECIAL MERIT
South Trafford College 12

NOMINEE
South East Essex College 13

NOMINEE
Newcastle College – the Performance Academy 14

NOMINEE
New College Durham 15
Essentials of good DESIGN

1. A feel good factor
Putting design excellence at the heart of the educational landscape positively influences the behaviour and attitudes of both students and staff. The best modern buildings stimulate learning and promote inclusion and security. They imbue learners with a sense of the ethos and character of the whole organisation. They are nothing short of inspirational – and the result is a feel good factor that brings a college’s learning strategy to life.

2. Integration with the local community
Excellent design benefits local communities. Modern, well-designed buildings breathe life into urban areas. Students contribute to the look and feel of the community – and their spending power revitalises high streets. In rural locations too, new buildings make a real contribution to the local community, attracting new interest and investment, providing important services and often becoming a source of civic pride.

3. Student progression into higher education and the world of work
Excellent design incorporates real working environments that pave the way for students to enter the workplace. The spaces developed for vocational courses replicate that of the working environments in which graduates will shortly find themselves. Crèche facilities ease the transition of young parents into education and employment.

4. Attractive and safe reception areas
Excellent design incorporates reception areas that serve to welcome visitors and safeguard students, staff and college property. Designs that enable monitoring of reception areas reduce the number of incidents and problems. Students and staff relax in the knowledge that their environment is secure, increasing the feel good factor of the establishment.

5. Ease of access (including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act)
Successful buildings treat access as a fundamental issue. Excellent design enables colleges to make their services accessible, not just available, to all those who wish to participate. Well-designed buildings are physically accessible by disabled students and staff, featuring clear signs, lifts, colour coding and other innovations. They also demonstrate a consideration of location, car parking facilities and transport links.
6. Access to information systems and state-of-the-art resources Excellent design breaks through the boundaries of conventional teaching environments and accommodates more flexible learning, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by technology and a diverse staff skills base. Well-designed modern buildings utilise open environments to offer easy access to IT, the internet and interactive learning programmes. Administrative issues can be managed through an online network and teaching staff are supported by a range of professionals including IT support staff, learning support and careers advisers.

7. Effective management of learner-centred education Excellent design enables colleges to offer increased learning opportunities to students, whatever their circumstances. This means providing facilities such as crèches, state-of-the-art learning resources, internet cafes and communal work spaces which blur the distinction between learning and relaxation environments. Altogether, students are involved in a process of continuous learning, ultimately resulting in better attendance and retention.

8. Efficient use of resources Excellent design renders buildings ‘fit for purpose’. The buildings in question may represent the regeneration of an under-used town centre site or the overhaul of old and unsuitable stock. Equally, they may be new buildings, designed to embody a modern spirit of learning. But they are sure to hold certain things in common. They use resources efficiently and space flexibly. They are bathed in natural light, vibrant and secure. And they demonstrate a commitment to energy efficiency, proving that in terms of heating, ventilation and power, new build does not have to mean high impact for the environment.

9. Safety and security of personnel and equipment Excellent design responds to modern safety and security concerns. With one or two main entrances leading to open plan reception and staff areas, staff are able to conduct low-key monitoring and summon assistance easily if they need to. Maximising natural light provides clear visibility for CCTV cameras in different parts of the building. Combined with new initiatives such as swipe-card entry systems and wireless communications, these measures achieve the sense of security that is high on both staff and student agendas.

10. Effective timetabling and management of the movement, location and tracking of students The best education building design enables students to take the fullest advantage of their time in college. These buildings do away with labyrinths of corridors and fixed, inflexible spaces. Instead, they feature floors or areas devoted to subject areas, to reduce student movement. They incorporate flexible spaces that can be linked or subdivided according to changing curriculum needs, freeing teachers from the shackles of the traditional classroom environment.

11. Good quality accommodation and efficient management of staff Well-designed buildings are not only great to learn in, they are also great to teach in. Open plan staff areas encourage face-to-face communication and give staff good vantage points from which to supervise students. Flexible learning spaces make it easier to break away from formal teaching. A range of resources allows teachers to deal with administrative tasks through online networks. Added together, these factors increase efficiency and staff satisfaction and allow teachers to devote more time to doing what they do best.
Well-designed buildings show just how much we value education. During my 30 years in education I have always been very keen on developing strong, innovative buildings that make a statement about education – city landmarks that attracted and retained students – because students are attracted to good new buildings. As the colleges in this brochure demonstrate, the right environment can make an immediate and positive impact – on applications, on enrolment, on retention, on achievement and on student behaviour.

The six colleges on this year’s shortlist have been selected from 21 entries. All six are winners – successful, attractive buildings and colleges that make a statement about education. They are welcoming. They encourage community participation. They are easy to access and navigate. And they are iconic.

In the case of some of our shortlisted colleges – notably the wonderful South East Essex College and Newcastle College’s unique, state-of-the-art Performance Academy – the success of the college has been the catalyst for the regeneration of a whole urban area. In all the shortlisted entries, the overall effect of fulfilling the above criteria is that learners are stimulated by their college’s true commitment to learning. North Manchester Sixth Form College and North City Public Library (MANCAT), for instance, is a perfect example of appealing to new learners by putting learning into the community.北

To put a sixth form college in such a deprived part of Manchester seemed like an almost impossible task, but there was real engagement with staff, with learners and with the community. And initiatives were developed – like the early birds’ breakfast, where students arriving between 8am and 8.30am get free tea and toast – which are proving hugely popular, because they reflect MANCAT’s determination to be of real value to its community.

Sustainability is another major issue, one that we anticipate gaining even more significance in the future. We need to recognise our public responsibility for the students of the future. And, since our learners are becoming more and more interested in sustainability and in studying in sustainable buildings, we need to capitalise on that interest.

The buildings on this year’s shortlist meet our sustainability criteria in different ways. South Trafford College, for example, is constructed from renewable, recyclable resources and is naturally ventilated. Passive ventilation wasn’t an option at Stephenson College because of the noise from its industrial workshops, but the development is energy efficient in other ways, through natural light maximisation and various means of heat recovery. New College Durham, meanwhile, demonstrated good collection and use of rain water for non-drinking purposes. And, like one or two of the others, it’s based around a ‘street’, a functional, social space which tends to make buildings easily navigable and very light. But most of the buildings on this year’s shortlist were probably first designed four or five years ago. So, as pressures on our resources grow, the sustainability dimension will become even more important and future entrants will be expected to show real innovation in this area.

One of the most exciting things about this project is the knowledge that these buildings reflect the evolution of education buildings across the whole of England. From Newcastle to Southend; from a capital cost of £2 million to a capital cost of £52 million; the colleges on our shortlist set a standard of excellence to inspire others in every part of the country. And this considerable emphasis on the importance and value of capital build within the education sector is something of which we can be very proud.
The judges

Isabel Allen has been Editor of the Architects’ Journal since 1999. Her book, Structure as design, was published in 2000. She has been a member of the Stirling Prize jury for the last four years and has just been made an Honorary Fellow of RIBA.

Mark Bramwell began teaching in 1976. He has held Head of Department, Vice Principal and Principal posts in three sixth form colleges and is currently Principal of Totton College. He has also worked extensively in adult education.

Dame Sandra Burslem is the former Vice Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University and has been a member of the National Council of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) since its formation in 2000. She is also chair of the LSC’s Capital Committee.

Fiona Duggan is Director of Fid Ltd, sits on RIBA’s Higher Education Design Quality Forum and participates in the Building Schools for the Future programme, working with educational institutions to explore how space can support their learning and working practices.

Roger Hawkins, an architect with over 20 years’ experience, is currently designing schools in Leeds and Greenwich as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. He is also Convenor of the Higher Education Design Quality Forum.

Philip Head is Director of Infrastructure and Property Services for the LSC. A Chartered Surveyor, Philip has been with the LSC since it was formed in 2001, having previously held senior posts in the FEFC, Welsh Development Agency and Milton Keynes Development Corporation.

Lizzie Pomeroy is the Sustainable Buildings Adviser at the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), which provides advice to government departments on building standards and public sector building procurement programmes.

Johnny Winter is Senior Director of Edward Cullinan Architects. He is currently a member of the RIBA Learning and Skills Client Forum and contributes to the Part 3 Architectural Course at Cambridge University.
Integration with the local community ✓
WINNER
North Manchester Sixth Form College and North City Public Library (MANCAT)
Architect: Walker Simpson Architects Ltd

"A very attractive, stimulating environment – a very worthy winner."
Judges’ view
The MANCAT building project has delivered a significant example of sustainable design at national, regional and city level. The brainchild of Walker Simpson Architects, its iconic status and high visibility has raised the profile of education in one of the most disadvantaged areas of the country – and now twice as many 16–19-year-old students are enrolling on courses. What’s more, the £9 million building meets the needs of a local community that previously lacked access to public facilities and space. It’s an achievement made possible through effective consultation – and the result is an important community hub that’s attractive to students and reflects the spirit of the city.

Visitors enter the building through an impressive glass façade and are welcomed up to the first floor library, which is shared between the sixth form college and the city. The library houses a whole range of IT and computers, which are linked to the city’s intranet. This means that members of the community, as well as students, can get information about the benefits system, social housing system, transport network or anything else that they want to know about, at the touch of a button. And the statistics speak for themselves – more than 28,000 people visited the library during its first eight weeks of opening.

“
In terms of its environmental contribution and what it says to local residents about the importance of their community, the design of this building is spot on.
”

Mark Hackett, Executive Member, Culture and Leisure, Manchester City Council
MANCAT also impressed the judges with its cutting-edge environmental design (see the Better building box). As well as providing an innovative, stimulating environment, the building raises awareness of the importance of sustainability in building design, and for this, the judges deemed it a very worthy winner.

**Better building**
- MANCAT’s two four-storey blocks are constructed with exposed concrete frames – to retain heat – and other high-quality materials with low maintenance requirements. The college uses solar panels and photovoltaics to generate its own energy and, inside the building, a dramatic atrium maximises natural light and visibility across all four storeys. The development also features passive ventilation systems and a community garden, whose rainwater-harvesting tank ensures that even flushing the toilets impacts minimally on the environment.

**When you combine great design with appropriate local services, then local people do use public buildings.**

_Nicky Parker_, Acting Head of Libraries, Manchester City Council
RUNNER UP

Stephenson College

Architect: Pick Everard

“An innovative, inclusive approach to learning.”

Judges’ view

✓ Attractive and safe
✓ Effective timetabling
Stephenson College

Left • Bright airy corridors ease navigation Above • Even at night the accommodation is bright and welcoming Below from left • Working and dining; moving from cluster to cluster; learning in a realistic environment

The collection of buildings that previously comprised Stephenson College had become unfit for purpose so, following consultation with staff, the decision was made to commission a new building on the outskirts of Coalville. The result, a £15.2 million development by Pick Everard, is a striking building within walking distance of the town centre.

Designers worked hard to ensure that in this case, a greenfield site doesn’t mean an inaccessible one. Located within easy reach of the M1 and M42, the landscape of this high-profile building makes it difficult not to learn. In this innovative model of vocational learning, six ‘learning clusters’ are situated around a ‘street’ – a light, comfortable area that provides social space and shared dining facilities for staff and students. Each cluster serves a subject area and contains a library and IT facilities, a fully staffed reception and a staff room, encouraging close interaction between teachers and students and enabling easy navigation around the college.

The IT infrastructure is an important aspect of the college, allowing staff and students to work, as far as possible, in a paper-less environment.

Judges were also impressed by the college’s attitude towards and facilities for hard vocational subjects such as motor vehicle engineering and construction. “If we are to attract young people into vocational areas, we need to provide the right environment and the sense that they are of the same value as the more academic qualifications,” says Sandra Burslem. “Stephenson College is exemplary in this respect.”

Better building

Stephenson College embodies a modern approach to learning. Its central street, full-height atrium and curved façade are glazed, maximising natural light and contributing to the development’s energy efficiency. These light, spacious communal areas are balanced by flexible learning spaces and practical, robust workshops, which are secured by a sophisticated locking system.
SPECIAL MERIT

South Trafford College
Architect: John McAslan + Partners

The £2 million development of the Creative Arts Block at South Trafford College proves that excellent design doesn’t need to cost a fortune. Designed by John McAslan and Partners, the building forms phase one of the ongoing development project that will see South Trafford College update all of its outmoded accommodation sequentially.

A relatively small single-block development, South Trafford’s Creative Arts Block is exemplary in its effective use of space, and for this the judges deemed it worthy of special merit. Integrating flexible teaching areas and staff facilities with creative studios for ceramics, sculpture, photography and computer-aided design, the building provides the perfect environment for students to express themselves in. And with social space that doubles as a gallery – almost in the form of a ‘street’ – there’s ample room to exhibit the fruits of their labours.

"The Creative Arts building provides an inspirational learning environment and will increase student recruitment and attainment in the future."

Bill Moorcroft, Principal, South Trafford College

Better building

A steel frame was chosen because of its recycling potential, while the use of natural ventilation and light minimises the need for artificial ventilation and light. Other materials – such as the hardwood cladding from a sustainable source and the CFC- and PVF-free rubber flooring – were chosen because of their durability or low maintenance requirements, resulting in a technologically unsophisticated, low-energy building.

Efficient use of resources

✓ Learner-centred education

✓
A truly iconic building, this £52 million development arose from South East Essex College’s determination to centralise and consolidate their previous facilities on a single site. Now, centrally located, easily accessible and spearheading the regeneration of Southend, the college has successfully realised its academic vision of a department store of accessible learning.

Teaching practices at the college emphasise group activities in environments inspired by typical workplaces, so flexibility is vital. A large, bright atrium and dynamic, plant-filled recreational space complement formal teaching bays, which are themselves open plan and capable of supporting numerous configurations through the use of internal partitions. The glazed partitions also allow light to penetrate the building, increasing visibility and therefore security. Add to the light, the flexibility, publicly accessible social spaces and the sense of pride the college instils in the local community, and the judges were left in no doubt as to the excellence of the building.

“It is a landmark for both the regeneration of the town and the importance of lifelong learning in the region.”

Jan Hodges, Principal and Chief Executive

Better building

South East Essex College has been constructed to consume extremely low levels of energy, using concrete hollow-core floor slabs to form part of the ventilation and heating system. Accessibility is also a priority. Outside, the proximity to the railway station and nearby town centre bus station makes travelling by car unnecessary. Inside, the appointment of an independent auditor to review the facilities for disabled people has ensured that the college is fully compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Ease of access

Attractive and safe

NOMINEE

South East Essex College

Architect: KSS Design Group Ltd
With over 40,000 students, Newcastle College is one of the largest colleges in the UK, so it seems only fitting that the first phase of its redevelopment strategy is represented by the £21 million Performance Academy. Designed by RMJM, this complex, state-of-the-art building was constructed in just 24 months.

Boasting performance and studio theatres; TV, dance, acting, recording and production studios; a music venue; support facilities; and social space, the Performance Academy engages a wide range of students. They are attracted by the world-class facilities and the recreation of professional working environments – and by the priority that is given to accessibility as a means of demonstrating the possibilities of further education. As well as offering dedicated facilities for students with special needs or learning disabilities, the building acts as a creative community hub, providing much-needed facilities to a socially neglected neighbourhood.

"A very, very exciting development, with state-of-the-art equipment."

Judges’ view

Better building

The Performance Academy has been designed with sustainability and accessibility in mind. The location of the building, close to train and bus stations, encourages students to use public transport. Its position maximises the admittance of natural light, thereby optimising visibility, security and heat recovery, while the polycarbonate façade diffuses direct sunlight.
Following a review of its outmoded, split-site accommodation, New College Durham decided to consolidate its facilities and develop a unified, vibrant ‘campus under one roof’. The result – a £35 million landmark by RyderHKS – has raised the profile of the college throughout the city and allowed it to re-brand its education opportunities for an increasing number of participants.

The design and construction process revolved around the need to keep the college functional throughout the building work: old facilities could only be demolished when new facilities were up and running. The main building is comprised of three blocks linked by two atria, designed to resemble not so much a street but a mall, complete with refectory, shop and hair and beauty salons. The commercial environment benefits vocational students seeking experience and the covered, enclosed spaces reduce heating demands and increase opportunities for monitoring and managing student movement. It seemed like a big undertaking, but New College Durham’s development solution is dramatic, it’s efficient – and it works.

“An iconic statement with an emphasis on sustainability.”

judges’ view

**Better building**

Flexibility and energy efficiency were key factors in keeping the running costs of this large development down. Large buildings, capable of supporting numerous configurations through the use of internal partitions, were chosen to minimise the external wall-to-floor ratio. And a heat recovery system circulates air from the atria through teaching spaces, thus reducing the need for artificial heat.

Effective timetabling

Student progression

---

**NOMINEE**

New College Durham

Architect: RyderHKS
As mentioned in our Annual Statement of Priorities, the LSC wants all buildings to be world class. That’s why we have already committed some £4 billion into building projects, spread over more than half of the college estate.

Our aim isn’t simply to invest, however. We want to make sure that the money we’re spending on behalf of the public is meeting real educational needs – and so helping drive up performance, increase participation and create a real sense of worth in the education landscape.

Over the last few years, the LSC has worked closely with RIBA to acknowledge and reward excellence in building, and it’s something we will continue to do. Whilst this document showcases the winners, there are huge numbers of projects, large and small, all across the country that deserve recognition for the impact they’re having on learning and skills.

We’d like to thank all the colleges that were nominated for the RIBA and LSC Further Education Awards this year for the work they’ve done. We’d also like to thank and commend the architects, planners and construction companies for their contribution. We hope to run similar competitions and award schemes – and showcase similar excellence – in forthcoming years.
Useful website
Visit RIBA’s website at www.architecture.com

Further information
Visit the LSC online at www.lsc.gov.uk for up-to-date news on the LSC and education and training in England