
News from SCONUL

Celebrating outstanding new library buildings



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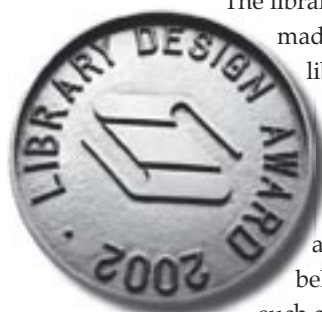
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The winners of the SCONUL Library Design Award for 2002 were announced at the autumn conference at the British Library. They are:

Coventry University,
for the Frederick Lanchester Building
Dublin City University,
for the John and Aileen O'Reilly Library
Sheffield Hallam University,
for the Adsetts Centre
University of Hertfordshire,
for the Hatfield Campus Learning Resources

LIBRARY DESIGN AWARD



The library design award is made by SCONUL for new libraries and learning centres which demonstrate excellence in terms of functional design both for users and library staff. We believe it to be the only such award in the UK and

Ireland to be judged by professional librarians on the basis of functional design of libraries rather than purely architectural merit.

It was instituted in 1973 in order to draw attention to the continued importance of new library buildings, to encourage good practice in library

planning and design and to recognise outstanding examples of cutting-edge design within the sector.

The 2002 award covers new, extended or refurbished higher education and national library buildings opened between 1996 and 2000 which are greater than 2,000 square metres in size.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The 17 libraries that had been put forward were each visited by members of an assessment panel appointed by the Advisory Committee on Buildings. A larger than normal panel was required because of the greater number of eligible projects in this particular post-Follett period.

During each visit, panel members established the broad mission of the institution and its library and the main points of the brief or equivalent statement so as to get an understanding of what the university and the library director were aiming to achieve in the new building. After a comprehensive tour with library managers, panel members discussed the main points of the design with them, focusing on the successful features and on any difficulties that had emerged.

The designs were assessed in relation to the following qualities:

- ✓ functional: space which works well, looks good and is lasting well
- ✓ adaptable: flexible space, the use of which can easily be changed
- ✓ accessible: social space which is inviting, easy-to-use and promotes independence
- ✓ varied: with a choice of learning spaces and for different media
- ✓ interactive: well-organised space which promotes contact between users and services
- ✓ conducive: high-quality humane space which inspires people
- ✓ environmentally suitable: for readers, books and computers
- ✓ safe and secure: for people, collections, equipment and data
- ✓ efficient: in space, staffing and running costs
- ✓ suitable for information technology: with flexible provision for users and staff
- ✓ 'oomph': combining these qualities to capture the minds of users and the spirit of the institution

The award is dependent upon the existence in a building of a high proportion of positive qualities and the absence of significant defects either in the planning or in the implementation.

SOME IMPRESSIONS AND TRENDS

We were most impressed with the consistently high standard of design that had been achieved necessary to meet the demanding requirements of modern learning, teaching and research support environments. Many new libraries were landmark buildings on campus with a strong 'sense of place', demonstrating the continued importance of library buildings in the digital age. They had facilitated a 'step change' in library provision within their institutions, exceeding user expectations and stimulating significantly greater levels of demand.

There was a welcome diversity of imaginative and varied designs in which good functionality, satisfying spaces and exciting features had been successfully combined. The designs emphasised a 'people-centred' approach to planning as much as providing an environment suitable for the preservation of library collections and for information technology. Planners had commendably taken certain design risks in creating conducive new scholarly environments rather than conforming to established approaches.

Users continue to enjoy daylight and welcome views of the outside world albeit through somewhat smaller glazed areas than in previous periods. There was a welcome variety of internal spaces the ambience of which had been enhanced by a range of lighting and attractive cultural artwork. Considerable attention had been given to managing the increasing amount of noise in libraries, to improving access for the disabled and to better security, particularly for 24x7 access.

Passive or even natural ventilation systems have largely replaced artificial environments and these were designed with a genuine concern for air quality and running costs. A number of buildings were designed around an open central staircase for transparent access and airflow considerations: in others the inevitable noise associated with readers moving up and down the building has been contained by enclosing the staircases. Atria were used to introduce welcome light and natural ventilation to the centre of some large deep-plan buildings.

In designing conducive environments for large numbers of PCs, greater use has been made of wireless networks, flat screens and laptops, and more space was given over to IT support, information skills training and distance learning services.

CITATIONS

All four award-winning new libraries demonstrate excellence in functional design for users and library staff, and have moved forward our concept of library planning and design in different ways.

*Coventry University,
Frederick Lanchester Building*



This stunning 'castle' like building successfully provides an important new focal point on campus for attracting and supporting both students and academic staff. Users enjoy an open, varied and well-planned interior enhanced by natural light penetrating through the five glazed atria. The innovative natural ventilation system - a revolutionary concept for a deep-plan building of this size - has enabled considerable efficiencies to be made in the use of space and in energy costs. The library symbolises the university's commitment to enhancing the student experience.



*Dublin City University,
John and Aileen O'Reilly Library*



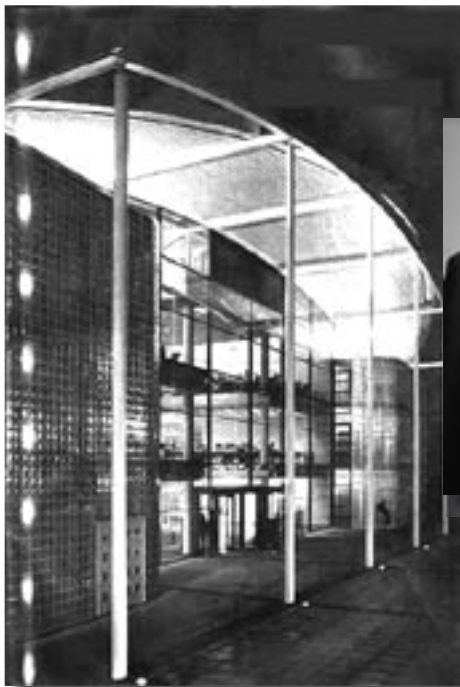
This delightful landmark building has delivered the university's vision for its new library. It has facilitated a step change in teaching and learning support within the institution as well as significantly contributing to the regeneration of the north side of the city. The lovely atrium and distinctive domes contribute to a varied, satisfying and high-quality internal environment with well-planned circulation routes. The use of space and environmental system are both commendably efficient.

*Sheffield Hallam University,
Adsetts Centre*



This striking gulls' wing design has achieved a high degree of integration of learning support services consistent with the university's mission. It is an inspired design with high quality fittings, varied learning spaces and excellent IT provision. The flagship building captures the spirit of the university, acting as catalyst for change in teaching and learning provision, and has become a model of seamless provision of learning support services.

*University of Hertfordshire,
Hatfield Campus Learning Resources Centre*



This pioneering design successfully provides a distinctive new focus on campus and represents outstanding value for money. The new building delivers a visionary concept of the net-enhanced university with integrated learning services and

groundbreaking IT services on a large scale. It facilitates excellent interaction between users and services, stimulates innovation in teaching and learning and supports independent learning and a self-help culture.



IN CONCLUSION

May I take this opportunity to thank all 17 libraries for taking part on the 2002 Award and to congratulate the four award-winning designs. I should also like to thank the seven members of the assessment panel, which included the late Ian Mowat, for their time, commitment, professionalism and humour in undertaking the assessments on behalf of SCONUL over a period of several months.