
Library services for all ages, all abilities and all levels – welcome to Buxton!



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In 1998 the University of Derby merged with a further education (FE) college based in Buxton, some 35 miles north of Derby. The existing site was fairly run down and was situated at Harper Hill just outside of the town centre. One of the first initiatives by the university was to establish a campus in the centre. This led to the university taking over the Devonshire Royal Hospital, the former grand stables of the duke of Devonshire, a historical landmark in the centre of Buxton. In 2005 the new Devonshire campus opened and became home to one of the university faculties – the University of Derby, Buxton (UDB). The

faculty has two parts to it – the school of culture and lifestyle and the Buxton College of further education.

We are probably unique in the range of support we have to offer; with students studying at a basic skills level through to PhDs, the library has to serve a diverse spectrum of users. Our FE students can be aged 14 upwards. There are over 900 16–18-year-olds enrolled on full-time courses, studying various vocational programmes typical of a general FE college. We have pre-entry students and those with learning disabilities and additional needs. FE also services the community and adult learners, with a range of part-time courses from dry-stone walling to counselling. The higher-education (HE) school of culture and lifestyle has nearly 1,500 students studying foundation degrees through to research degrees. The general public are welcomed onto campus to use student training facilities and they also have open access to the library as a reference resource. The building is very much a tourist attraction in the town, and so we have visitors wandering through, plus many ex-patients and staff of the hospital, keen to see what it looks like now and to reminisce.

So what are the challenges of delivering a library service for a mixed-economy campus? You have to be aware of working with two different funding streams and two different quality systems (QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Educa-



Main entrance to the Devonshire campus, Buxton.

Credit Sally Edwards, University of Derby.



Devonshire Learning Resource Centre.

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tion) a few weeks ago, Ofsted next week!) and, in terms of service, to have as little differentiation as possible. Although services to both groups of students are essentially the same, we produce separate guides to the library service. These reflect a wish to use slightly different language, terminology and presentation styles, as well as a need to emphasise different resources for the students. Any posters or signs are checked for accessibility of language – this is good practice in any library, but something we do need to be especially aware of.

In setting up the service one of the first considerations was opening hours. To reflect HE needs and expectations, evening and weekend opening were essential. The FE term is 35 weeks and the HE term is 32 weeks, and, as these weeks do not always match up, we have to commit to a minimum of 40 weeks of term-time opening. Our library management system does not allow us to treat FE and HE students differently in terms of which weeks library fines apply. So although FE and HE students get fined in the same weeks, they are *different* weeks to students on the Derby campus – we do not fine during the FE half-term break, but we start fining earlier in the academic year. We still reduce our daytime staffing levels during the FE half-term weeks, on the basis that there are fewer students using the library and that HE students should be more independent. It is noticeable that HE student activity in the library is starting to increase during these weeks, with HE students making the most of having the space

to themselves. Time to put in a bid for more staff hours, maybe?

Levels and type of staffing also have to cater for both groups, and have their roots in FE provision. We have a library facilitator role that came very much from FE needs, and this post does not exist in the other University of Derby libraries. Our facilitators provide a lot of IT support to the students, and we have expanded the role to include general support for library resources. They deliver inductions and workshops to FE students, while subject librarians deliver library and information skills training to the HE students. With our duty-of-care responsibility to students under 18, we have a commitment to supervise all areas of the library. This means having to staff both the circulation desk and the helpdesk in the main room during FE term weeks, including evenings and weekends.

The resources budget is allocated as a whole, and the subject librarians divide it between FE and HE subject areas. There is obviously a little overlap in the titles we purchase, but of course we have resources for all levels, from our read-ability collection, aimed at adults with low reading skills, through to examples of dissertations. We have made the decision not to segregate the core collection, or to mark titles aimed at one level or another. Students can access anything on the shelf, and we did not want any group of students to feel excluded from using any of the stock. Classification is standard, although we would take the

simple option rather than make it complex with long strings of numbers. Mindful of our younger users, 15- and 18-certificate DVDs are kept in security cases, so all students have to bring them to the desk before they can watch them in the library!

It may seem strange, but our FE students can access more online resources than our HE students. We subscribe to some FE-specific online resources, and the rate we pay is based on the number of FE students, rather than the higher band, based on the total number of university students. We therefore block access to these resources to HE staff and students. There are no such restrictions on the HE online resources, although many are at an inappropriate level for most of our FE students, and so we would not expect great usage by them.

There is little direct conflict between HE and FE students in the library. However, at HE programme committees and in user surveys one of the biggest recurring complaints from the HE students is around 'college kids using the computers to play games' and the amount of noise the 'pesky FE students' make. This is then followed by requests for a separate HE study space in the library.

Having separate FE and HE areas in the library was something we gave a lot of consideration to when we were setting up the library. We decided not to segregate the students in the library for a number of reasons. Firstly, the very practical: we have finite space, and there are English Heritage restrictions on building walls and partitions. To restrict one of the few rooms in the library to one group of students would limit our flexibility. We recognised the need to cater for students wishing to study in different environments so we have a group-study room, a silent-study room and a casual 'coffee 'n' cake' area available to *all* students. Monitoring use of a restricted area would be difficult – it is not always obvious who is an FE or HE student. Secondly, we wanted to reflect the philosophy of the campus – the aim is not to have segregation of the students. All students can use the bistro, oasis space and other central areas.

We do, however, offer a number of specialist services to specific groups of students. At certain points of the year we reserve one of the IT rooms for dissertation students. We have a laptop short-loan scheme, which only HE students can make use of, to give them a little more flexibility. The study advisor scheme (a peer-mentoring support

scheme) that the library has been successfully running in Derby was expanded to Buxton, but only for the HE students. (Our FE students have other additional support available to them through the curriculum.)

It is no surprise to hear students complain about too much noise in the library and not enough computers. These themes are common at the main Derby library as well. At Buxton, however, the HE students often blame the FE students for any problems, including litter, noise, swearing and use of Facebook. I find this generalisation frustrating, and it is just not true – although I'm not saying that all the FE students are angels! Some students behave responsibly and others don't. We know there are noisy HE students and quiet FE students, and vice versa. It was interesting to note a comment made at a recent programme committee, where a HE student observed that it had been just as noisy in the library during FE half-term, when mainly HE students were in! We all know that managing student behaviour is difficult, but how about that other group of users?

One of the hardest areas to balance is the different ways HE and FE lecturers want to use the library with their students. The FE lecturers often want to bring a group to the library – which is of course fantastic. However, when they're teaching to a group in the main area it can be very disruptive to other students working independently. To make sure we can provide enough drop-in space for students, we try not to book all the rooms out to groups at the same time. We've worked closely with the academic staff and tried to respond to their needs, while taking a holistic view of how other groups want to use the service.

One of the key things to consider is the advantages and disadvantages to the students in our mixed-economy library service. FE students get access to a far greater variety of resources, especially online resources, than in a comparative FE college. FE students wishing to stretch themselves have easy access to higher-level texts. The library's opening hours are longer than many FE colleges would normally provide, especially across seven days a week, which benefits many of our adult part-time learners. Many of our HE students would say that having the FE students around was the main disadvantage. They are perhaps less quick to spot the advantages. However, the extent of staff support they get, our commitment to always having a staffed helpdesk and the quick 'just-in-time' IT support is there because of our FE students, and I know from feedback

that it is something they value. The range of resources supports HE as well, and if students are studying a new subject area, they often use books aimed at FE students to gain their basic understanding before moving to the undergraduate texts. Although we deliver different induction programmes to different student groups, we have very much borrowed good practice from each strand. So elements that were initially developed for FE students, such as using voting pads, have been used with good effect with HE groups. IT help-sheets that were adapted and simplified with the FE students in mind are heavily used by the HE students.

The staff working in the library have gained skills from working with the diverse range of students, and they are able to get involved in a wide range of activities, from display work to support the government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda to organising poetry readings with our HE students. I think it's very much the best of both worlds.