

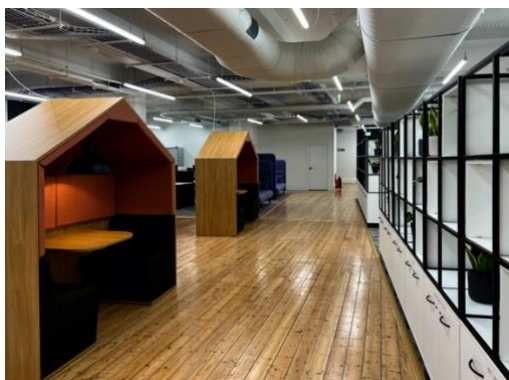
Queen Mary University of London's Dept W: Agile Working in Action

8th March 2022



Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) has recently opened its doors to Dept W – its new building for professional services staff fully designed specifically for agile working.

Along Whitechapel Road and Mile End Road in the East End of London, there is not much that survived post-war redevelopment, but one landmark is the former Wickham's department store, intended by the original owners to be the Harrods of East London and, with its iconic neoclassical façade, emulate Selfridges in Oxford Street, an ambition that was frustrated by the inclusion of the former Spiegelhalter's jewellery business in the original development, which is now the entrance to Dept W, a new building for Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) creating a 5,000 sq m agile working environment that brings together Professional Services from the different campuses into a new high quality, flexible, environment and, in doing so, provides a new standard from which to have discussions on future working environments for Professional and Academic Staff across the university, and the location of a reference visit by HEDQF on 8th March 2022.



Richard Halsall, Assistant Director for Strategic and Capital Development at Queen Mary University of London, Dan Wakelin from Henigan Consulting Group (workplace consultants) and Paul Menadue and Lynn Lindley from IBI Group (architects) described the background to the project, how it fitted into a strategic plan to create more student-focused space on the main campuses, the consultations and the design of the different spaces while

retaining some of the original features of the old department store.

It was noted that, when the project restarted after the impact of covid on working patterns could be seen, the university made the bold decision to move from its original brief of 7:10 (ration of workplaces to staff) to 4:10 and, such has been the

success of the project that the university is now considering 3:10 in future projects. This has not meant a reduction in space, but rather a greater proportion and variety of informal working, meeting, social and other spaces.

Keys to the success of the project is the variety of different spaces in which staff and visitors can meet and work, the use of colour to denote difference areas of the building, flexible IT coverage, the high quality of the different spaces and the furniture, the agreement of a Dept W Colleague Charter and induction and support during initial phases to introduce staff to the new working environments and the change in work culture involved. The university is already seeing geographical units breaking down and colleagues from different departments sitting alongside each other. It has however, post-pandemic, yet to see the building fully occupied; currently it is at 60%. Also key to success is the ability to make small changes to reflect the use of the different spaces in the building, which implies future-proofing the future electrical and IT infrastructure.

The incorporation of original features such as the staircase and glazed domes adds a touch of interest and history, while the acoustic trees are masterful additions that add colour and light in addition to the functional role. Externally, the roof terraces provide stunning views toward the City of London in one direction and Canary Wharf in another.

It will be interesting to see the impact, once the building is fully occupied, in terms of economic benefits to the local economy.

The discussion ended with the question 'What will universities be like in ten years' time, with the digital and physical environment working closely together?'

See the presentation [here](#).

Many thanks to the four speakers, Richard Halsall, Dan Wakelin, Paul Menadue and Lynn Lindley, and thanks to Overbury plc for sponsoring the visit.

