

July 2022

Due to the pandemic, our first physical annual conference since Edinburgh in 2019 took place this year and was based in the new Student Life Building at Cardiff University, part of an impressive £600 million transformational estate investment programme by the university to support its future plans, which was the focus of the first day of the conference.



Thursday 14th July

Dev Biddlecombe, Director of Estates and Campus Facilities at Cardiff University welcomed everyone to Cardiff and outlined the university's objectives for its recent projects for students, administration, research and enterprise and meeting the challenges of developing new building projects in the heart of the city directly adjacent to railway lines.

Cardiff University's recent new buildings

Short introductory presentations by designers and client representatives described the background to the on the four buildings to be visited on campus, by Simon Wright, the Academic Registrar, Andy Couling from FCB Studios and Andrew Street from the IBI Group on the Centre for Student Life, Andrew Kingdon from Stride Treglown and Bea Allen, School Manager, for the School of Mathematics on Abacws, Julia Roberts from Hawkins Brown and Sally O'Connor, SPARK Director of Operations, on SPARK and Andrew Ensslen from HOK and Professor Duncan Wass, Director of the Cardiff Catalysis Institute, on the Translational Research Hub – still in process of occupation, so a good time to visit.

We were ably guided around the four well-designed buildings, which were varied in their architectural character internally, reflecting diverse university objectives. If there was a connecting theme, it was central spaces and staircases, around which facilities were planned and which enabled accidental interaction and great ideas to be exchanged – but always remembering that great coffee is key, a feature built into the ground floor of Abacws.

The Welsh School of Architecture

We then moved to a fifth recent project, the major refurbishment, designed by BDP, of the historic neoclassical Bute Building, first opened in 1916, which is the home of the Welsh School of Architecture, for a drinks reception and presentation by Professor Juliet Davies, Head of the School,

after which we enjoyed exploring the refurbished building, with its well-designed new interactions, and the architecture degree show.

Friday 15th July

Cardiff University, its future and the Welsh context.

Dr Ghazwa Alwani-Starr, outgoing chair of HEDQF, opened the formal day of the conference by welcoming everyone. announcing the name change of HEDQF to the University Design Forum and introducing Professor Damien Walford Davies, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor Kevin Morgan, Professor of Governance and Development at the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University who together provided an overview of the university and its role, as the only Russell Group University in Wales, in supporting education, research and enterprise in Wales and beyond. Professor Walford Davies, being a poet, brought a literary flavour to his presentation, while Professor Morgan outlined the initiatives introduced by the Welsh Government which in many ways are more forward-thinking than elsewhere in the UK, including The Wellbeing and Future Generations Act.

Sustainability – environmental, economic and societal

May Molteno, Head of Sustainability and Stakeholder Engagement at Trilogy chaired this session which looked at three university projects which contained many different and wider aspects of sustainability.

It was noticeable that, while in the second half of the 20th century, higher education expansion was often achieved with new UK universities such as York, Lancaster and Keele being built where land was available outside urban centres, the pendulum has swung and this first session on new university projects focused on multi-faceted projects that contributed to urban regeneration, zero-carbon and to future enterprise and innovation with Ian Goodfellow from P& P presenting the UCL PEARL project located in the derelict area of Dagenham, once a major centre of car-manufacturing, James Allison of Bennetts Associates presenting the Edinburgh Futures Institute in Quartermile which illustrates lessons for designers today about how large volume spaces can be flexible and adaptable into the future and Francesco Singer from Sanaa on the thoughtful new Bocconi Campus in Milan, designed to be light, transparent and reflective, where space moves from inside to out, and set into a new landscape.

Are New Buildings Dead?

Julian Robinson of LSE chaired a discussion/debate on the theme of 'Are New Buildings Dead' between Will Hurst from the Architects' Journal. And Gerry O'Brien from AKT2. How heated did the debate become? Will presented the AJ's Retrofirst Campaign for reuse in construction; Gerry presented the view that not all buildings were suitable for refurbishment and reuse. At the end, the two agreed – the first review should focus on the potential and options for reuse and only if that was not practicable should new building be considered. Universities have been adapting existing buildings for centuries and adaptation/flexibility is today a standard component of project briefs. The discussion moved onto the question of looking at an early stage at whether a new project was required at all – something which is part of RIBA Stage 0, but seems too often to be skipped over.

HEDQF Research

Caroline Paradise from Atkins and Alex Grigull from Grimshaw, co-chairs of the HEDQF Research Group, provided an update on the successful research programme which is core to HEDQF's activities. Research in progress includes a multi-year project to examine the impact of different

types of campus places and spaces on student outcomes, something on which there is surprisingly little information in the UK, though more in the USA, a programme that is being carried out in partnership with AUDE and Wilmott Dixon. Other projects revolve around student residences, building performance, Net-Zero/adaptable re-use, labs/science/enterprise, and campus inclusivity. Partnerships and sector involvement are key and delegates were invited to become involved in the research group or individual research projects, in particular where they could provide data, case studies and information.

HEDQF Student Prize

Andy MacFee of Andy MacFee Architects, and design prize organiser for HEDQF, and Hiral Patel from the Welsh School of Architecture presented an overview of the four prize-winners in this year's HEDQF Student Prize on which Andy had worked with students in the Learning Environments - Design Research Laboratory (LE-DR Lab) at the School of Architecture. The students had determined a programme which looked at Cardiff University's own campus to propose a variety of thoughtful learning, social and environmental interventions. Congratulations to the prize-winners Yijing Zhuang, Le Ma, Fangyi Ke and Xinyue Hong on their imaginative ideas on which we heard more during the discussion after the presentation.

The Smart Campus

Chaired by Tracy Meller of RHSP, we asked the question - with the continual development of new technologies -, what is the Smart Campus of the future? Professor Nick Tyler of UCL PEARL and Chris Dymond provided us with two different views. For Nick, UCL PEARL is itself a smart campus in that the building and its technology is designed to respond, adapt, change and create the environments in which to carry out a radical variety of research projects. For Chris, the question was how we can use data and technology to inform the design of new buildings and campuses, on which there seems to be a great amount of discussion but no consensus. Perhaps this will emerge in time.

Reuse. Retrofit and Refurbishment

Chaired by Trevor Wills, incoming Chair of HEDQF, five fast-moving presentations looked at examples of reuse, retrofit and refurbishment in locations from Sheffield to the Middle East with presentations from Matt Hutton of Bond Bryan Architects on the University of Sheffield's Engineering Heartspace, James Todd of Architype the University of Cambridge's new Eutopia Building, Tony Musson of Wilkinson Eyre on the Fry Building at the University of Bristol and Akshay Khera of BDP on different approaches to common goals in the UK and the Middle East. These projects, along with the Edinburgh Futures Institute presented earlier in the day, show how inventive and imaginative the university sector is being at reusing existing buildings, including former office blocks, telephone exchanges and hospitals, Alex Grigull from Grimshaw reminded us of the importance of designing buildings and their components for reuse, as in the new Civil Engineering Building at the University of Cambridge.

Close

Trevor Wills brought the conference to a close. The scale, breadth and imagination of projects responding to imperatives including Zero-Carbon, sustainability in all its senses and community and urban regeneration sets a level of quality for all to aspire to and will merit further more detailed investigation, perhaps with reference visits as part of the HEDQF Events programme

Thanks

A conference such as this relies on the contribution of a great many people and organisations, for whom we are extremely grateful, in particular to those at Cardiff University who have supported the the planning of the conference, assisted at the venues and organised the building visits, to all the speakers, to the sponsors and, of course, to the delegates who attended and supported it. Many thanks indeed to all.

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Ian Caldwell

HEDQF Trustee and Chair of HEDQF Conference and Events Committee

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