

Planning for the Future

Whether your project is to rethink, refurbish or build a learning space, it is essential that you explore – from the very start – how you might incorporate the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and/or demand. You need to be able to do this quickly, economically and successfully when the time comes.

In planning for the future, your first steps should be to:

- rethink or locate the space with the possibility of future extension in mind
- install electricity, water and other services with the option to 'open up' those services at any feasible point within the space, and even beyond it, through comprehensive wiring, trunking and piping
- where possible, use fittings, furniture, equipment and materials which can be reused or resited in any expansion or reorganisation of the learning space

The River & Rowing Museum found that after just five years with a new learning space, demand meant that a second space was required. The education team, other Museum staff and architect are engaged in 'healthy debates' about what they want to do and why. They are drawing on the mistakes as well as the successes of the first development, and focusing on an attention to detail which has only come from understanding and learning from the previous development process.

Planning for the future also means learning from experience. For example:

- What hasn't worked?
- Where are there gaps in facilities?
- Are there aspects of the learning space that do not suit specific groups?
- Are there barriers to supporting particular learning styles?
- Is the space unable to deliver new educational or cultural policies?
- Are there opportunities for expansion?

Because of its location, Techniquest has an inbuilt inflexibility: any redevelopment can only be upwards on top of the existing building. This has implications for the uses that can be made of higher floors in terms of education and exhibition space. However, the building has evolved and changed internally by rethinking spaces that are not working, agreeing a set of priorities for the use of spaces, establishing good organisation, and having knowledgeable, collaborative and watchful staff. This does not fulfil all future needs but it enables the site to progress rather than stagnate.

Site staff, education teams, funders and architects need to research and agree how best to design and equip learning spaces to meet the three challenges of:

- adapting to a site's developing vision and programmes
 - catering for technological advances
 - responding to new trends in educational and interpretative thinking
- More specifically, sites might consider how to respond to:
- support for diverse learning styles
 - new developments by institutions and sites as a whole
 - extending and improving the quality and variety of activities that can be offered
 - enlarging and redeveloping learning spaces and their facilities
 - making the site more accessible and relevant to a wider range of people
 - advances in e-learning and digital technology
 - developments across particular learning phases, including lifelong learning
 - government strategies and policies for the cultural sector, e.g. *Inspiring Learning for All* and *Culture Online*
 - government funding linked to specific social or educational strategies

Institutions themselves change in terms of what they do and whom they see as their users. This can lead to any built-in flexibility and multi-use having a limit or 'break point' because of the complex organisation required, the subsequent unsuitability of spaces for newly required activities, and a loss of clarity about just what a space is for.

For example, the Women's Library is facing such challenges head-on, with new alliances being forged between those staff not in at the beginning and the original architects. **Understanding what is happening and why can enable a site to address effectively the tensions and complexities of a brief that continues to evolve and to be rethought long after the building is complete.** Significantly, this can often be done for little cost and with only minor upheaval. It requires a fresh and critical look at a learning space, identifying and realising its potential.



1, 2 & 5
Bolton Museum & Art Gallery

3
The Lighthouse

4
@Bristol

6
The Women's Library

7
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

