

Costs

The project's budget will determine the location and size of a learning space, as well as the type, extent and quality of the fittings, furniture and equipment. But always remember that, whether you have a large budget or no budget at all to speak of, your project is important and should be planned carefully and in detail.

Whatever the project, three costs are likely to be involved:

- Research and consultancy costs to establish the right space and fitting-out for your needs
- The cost of equipping the space, such as furniture, fittings and equipment
- The costs involved in running or maintaining the space

If building work is involved, add in the capital cost of building or renovating the space, including professional fees and some contingency funds, however small.

There is also the 'hidden' cost of staff time for those involved in the project, such as that spent on research, meetings, reading drawings and documents, and visiting other institutions and sites.

The financial cost of a learning space does not reflect the level of thought, commitment or innovation that goes into its development; its success at promoting learning and creativity; or its importance to the work of the site as a whole. For example, Dyrham Park's study centre cost just £360, which was spent on flexible storage units and lighting. That was sufficient to meet the specific needs of the education team and its programme, and the practicalities of the space available to be developed.

Whether a learning space costs half a million or just a few hundred pounds, the issues are the same:

- Clarify uncertainties or gaps in the budget for the learning space
- Involve someone in the team who understands costings and balance sheets
- Be prepared to negotiate for what you want, and renegotiate any unsatisfactory allocation of funds
- Establish a quality standard for materials used, and for the furniture, fittings and equipment to be bought
- Compare different materials, furniture, fittings and equipment before making a choice
- Estimate running costs for the space in terms of services, materials, and day-to-day maintenance

- Be realistic about what you can afford
- When necessary, assess the implications of a smaller space, a less favourable location, a lower level of fitting-out, or a reduction in the type of activities in the space – then decide where cuts might be made
- Devise a future timetable for buying what cannot be afforded in the initial fit-out

At times, you will have to compromise on costs. Reassess your needs and establish and negotiate for what is an acceptable compromise for your particular site and the activities you plan.

Building something new to match the high standards of the original stone building would be expensive. 'We ... needed to put something down on paper to get some idea of costs, and to start applying for grants.' (Extract from the Bagshaw Museum case study)

When the Horniman Museum staff had their budget cut by 20%, they opted for smaller spaces rather than lower quality. When Bolton Museum & Art Gallery learned that a reduced amount had been awarded for their project, the education team met to discuss priorities.

In deciding priorities – and to keep within budget – Techniquest Science Discovery Centre opted to focus more on the quality of furniture than on fittings. Director Colin Johnson explains: 'There was a cost within which the project had to be achieved. The overall standard of fittings, such as lights and doors, is not good. But the quality of the envelope and the ambience, style and feel are brilliant.'

Always ask three questions when deciding on costs:

- What is essential and cannot be compromised on?
- What can be set aside or abandoned without jeopardising your priorities or principles?
- What can be introduced or reinstated in the future?

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Colin Johnson, Director, Techniquest Science Discovery Centre



- 1 & 3
The River & Rowing Museum
- 2
Bolton Museum & Art Gallery
- 4, 5 & 6
Techniquest Science Discovery Centre

