

Storage & Display

'We have odd-shaped equipment which does not fit easily into drawers and cupboards – even though our storage space was quite considerable.'
John Rhymer, Director, Bishops Wood Environmental Centre, Worcestershire

Storage – and, to a lesser extent, display space – remains one of the most problematic areas in developing and running learning spaces. A common refrain is that 'there is never enough storage space'. The main issues to consider are the items and materials that need to be stored, the amount and type of storage required, and where to locate it around the learning space.

Storage may seem an unexciting aspect of planning a learning space, but the consequences of inadequate storage facilities can have a detrimental effect on the work of the education team. Spaces can quickly become overcrowded and untidy; some activities may be curtailed when materials or equipment are unavailable because they cannot be stored anywhere.

Significantly, our survey of museums and other sites found that over three-quarters of respondents are not satisfied with their storage space for works, resources and materials.

Order, neatness, clear worktops and accessibility are some of the essential ingredients of a successful storage policy. Some venues, like Bagshaw Museum, hide storage space behind cupboard doors or 'fat' walls. How, therefore, can you identify and acquire the kind of storage facilities that will make your space work well?

Establish your storage requirements

General considerations include:

- The type and frequency of the activities you offer
- The number and age range of the children, young people or adults involved
- Fire and health & safety regulations
- Your future needs (see *Planning for the Future*, p.14)

Consult with staff and users to help you answer five key questions:

1. What items do you need to store?
2. Which items are used regularly and which stored long-term?
3. How might this affect the location of storage?
4. What capacity should the various types of storage have for the size, shape and weight of equipment and materials you use?

5. How much secure or lockable storage do you need?

Check that you will have storage capability for:

- materials, tools and equipment (e.g. *interactives, paper, paint, pens, pencils, brushes, clay, fabric, glazes, plaster, stone, wood, OHPs, monitors, television, video*)
- reference material (e.g. *books, magazines, slides, CD-Roms, tapes, prints, models, and 'found' items for stimulus and still-life work*)
- the work being produced (e.g. *written/art work, sketchbooks, models*)
- people's belongings (e.g. *bags, coats, lunch boxes, teachers' and gallery educators' personal items*)

Storage must be capable of holding 3D objects (stimulus or works created in the space). A plan chest is the best thing for larger paper sizes. Standard kitchen units are popular in learning spaces, but check that they are strong and deep enough, and meet your particular needs. Other items needed might be hooks and trays.

Here is a checklist of things to do:

- Calculate how much space you need, based on the answers to the above questions, and on the DfES guidance for schools (see *Location & Dimensions of the Space*, p.12)
- Establish the budget to be allocated for creating storage
- Draw a plan of where you need the different kinds of storage to be located
- Consider what should be the right height, depth, and materials used for the different kinds of storage
- Check the accessibility of proposed storage spaces for every kind of user
- Consider ways in which storage might be 'hidden' behind doors or inside 'fat' walls
- Check what equipment and materials need to be stored on open shelves for easy accessibility
- Make sure you can keep different kinds of items separate in storage, e.g. paper supplies and cleaning equipment
- Consider how and where to store valuable artefacts for handling sessions/study collections
- Identify ways to create flexibility and adaptability in storage



- Assess such practicalities as the need to move heavy items around, e.g. using storage trolleys for accessibility and versatility
- Consider issues of visibility; what should be on show and accessible to make it clear what goes on in the space

Ask other people about their storage successes and failures, and test storage options to check what works best for you. What looks a good buy may not work well. Consult staff and users, and include them in the testing process. Look through up-to-date supplier catalogues and ask other people to recommend national and local suppliers.

Cupboard shutters that are hard to operate, and catch fingers because of too little space between shelf edge and shutter. (Extract from the Horniman Museum case study)

Storage facilities need to be within or adjacent to the learning space, and readily accessible. One learning space has to store equipment under the education room: it takes two members of maintenance staff to move the equipment each time. Often, useful storage in the learning space has been taken over for other needs, such as housing cleaners' materials or even part of the museum's collections.

Having done the research on what you need, what is available and the likely costs involved, discuss all this with colleagues – and, in the case of a refurbishment or new build, with the project manager, the architect, and (where relevant) the contractor. A continuing dialogue while you are doing the research is even better. Negotiate the best storage you can for your space. Insist that storage should look good and match the quality of the rest of the learning space, and the venue as a whole. At the same time, keep in mind that 'quality' does not need always mean 'expensive'.

At this stage:

- Consider carefully any suggestions for change and improvements made by colleagues, users, project leader and architect
- With a refurbishment or new build, keep in mind that architects may have different criteria for judging the location and type of storage. They may not be aware of the nature and extent of your storage needs; so be very detailed in specifying your requirements, and always check what they are proposing to install
- Make sure that what you, or others, are proposing is compatible with the location of other elements of the space, e.g. sinks, power points, circulation, and opportunities for display

- Check that the storage plans do not conflict with creating a light, open and airy space in which to work
- Establish what you are prepared to compromise on, and what you are not
- Remember that storage problems increase when a space is used for activities other than learning. For example, you may have to 'hide' equipment and materials when using a space for a formal lecture or corporate event
- Be ready to make alterations if you find the layout or type of storage can be improved once in use, when priorities change, or when more people are involved in the learning activities

Display

At the far end of the Workshop is a glass-walled room used for meetings or quiet study. The walls of the room – which look on to the Workshop space and out to the central area of the Education Centre – are constructed as transparent, cube-shaped display cases for art work created on site. (Extract from the Lighthouse case study)

Dedicated areas for display purposes are important for any learning space, but from our survey seem to be frequently overlooked. Just one in five sites consider their display space to be 'good'. Use the following guidelines to assess your display needs and the potential of your learning space for display:

- Consider the type, size, amount and location of display equipment needed
- Identify the best location for the display of, for example, artefacts, project work, drawings, models
- Do not sacrifice working space for display space – both are essential
- Ensure that the materials being used for the walls and floors of the space suit your display purposes and the hanging systems you want
- Check that the type and extent of material used for display purposes will not be regarded as a fire or health & safety hazard
- Try different options for display, e.g. wall-mounting using garden trellis
- Find ways to make displays visible beyond the learning space
- Identify locations for display in other parts of the venue, and outside it



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| 1,2,3,5,7 & 8 Horniman Museum | 9,10 & 11 Bolton Museum & Art Gallery |
| 6 The Lighthouse | 12 Bagshaw Museum |
| 4 The River & Rowing Museum | 13 Ulster Folk & Transport Museum |