







competitive nature of today's higher education sector – visit any college and they'll talk about their global marketplace. But Derek is keen to point out the subtle nuances of the thinking at Newport.

'It's not really about the commodification of education. We don't think of our students as customers. What we have is a learning community where the emphasis is on the student experience, rather than that of the staff. It's part of a cultural shift to a student-centred approach. There are many physical examples of this in the building. For example, we don't follow the traditional way, where there would be individual staff offices which students only had access to at the staff's behest. Now we have an open plan office for staff in the 'Hothouse' – where students are effectively excluded. This means staff have to physically come out to meet students.'

'The student experience has been central to the design and specification of the furniture from the start of the process,' explains Nigel Coufts of BDP. 'The aspiration is to provide world class facilities that help Newport compete on an international stage. In addition to the teaching rooms, which range from TV studios to MBA seminar rooms, we specified a range of furniture settings that promote learning outside seminar times and provide better interaction between the students and with their teaching staff.'

'Much of the inspiration is taken from contemporary workplace design. The spaces on the library floor range from living room type arrangements at the front, open working platforms for communal working, >>>>>>

>>>> City Campus' high visibility and transparency is important – it's a major element in helping the university engage with the city centre. Sometimes, of course, getting the public to engage with a university can be a challenge, but we've built on a strong heritage in which the University was always a part of the city. Going back to 2003, the University embarked on a programme to deliver a challenging strategic development plan to expand and improve facilities. The aim was to provide the highest quality student experience and to increase student numbers. This coincided with the aspirations of Newport City Council, which envisaged the University as a key part of the planned cultural, arts and learning quarter along the riverside. It was clear the plans of the city and the University would converge with the development of the City Campus.'

The campus itself is an intriguing blend of disciplines. Design, film and media elements of the Newport School of Art, Media and Design share the space with the Newport Business School. This cohabitation was no accident or convenience, as the Dean explains.

'There was always a clear vision: to raise the profile of the Business School, and at the same time engage it with what we're doing in areas such as film and fashion. It's a dynamic environment, underpinned with the idea of entrepreneurialism. We'd run a Masters in Business Enterprise Development, so now the interesting concept was this: if we're making clothes, making websites, making films – can we make businesses too?'

'Newport has a tremendous reputation in the creative arts,' adds Mark, 'a reputation that really captures students' imagination. Newport's internationally famous for photography and film. The design of the building reflects that profile and is designed to encourage students from various disciplines to engage and collaborate with each other.'

The plan was clear – cross-fertilisation of creativity and business. The implementation itself is highly considered, and significantly aided by the design of the space. This is manifested in a variety of ways, but perhaps the most telling area is how the University views itself and its relationship with students. Much is made these days of the





through groups of students, and people from the local community gathering in the exhibition space.

There's energy about the place, perhaps something that's more than is typical in most academic institutions. It's a place that's all about creativity, but with a firm grasp of business reality too. There's a strong sense of place too – an understanding of the University's position and reputation both locally and internationally. It's proud too, not in a self-satisfied or swaggering way, but with a quietly confident self-assurance. And of course the impressive architecture and design, all the physical reminders of the place are all about reinforcing the engagement of everyone with each other.

Undeniably, this is a place where high aspirations are made real. The project was embarked on with a clear idea of what could be achieved. There was never a spirit of 'good enough', or anything prosaic, or merely adequate in the mission. This is a place that aims high. It has succeeded... engagingly ●

▶▶▶and within the floor's deepest areas, individual working spaces. Book cases are dispersed to provide screening between work spaces. Additionally, work spaces are supplemented by smaller breakouts on the floors above to provide more immediate areas closer to staff and seminar rooms.

'Crucially, by providing the opportunity for students to remain within the building for much of the day, these spaces increase the opportunity for cross-sector collaboration. And of course the University's plan is that this will lead to the creation of start-up companies that combine both arts and business graduates.'

One of the most noticeable aspects of the BDP design is this very high level of importance placed on the furniture specification. Indeed, the furniture was something of a protected species for the project. This is unusual enough in any fit-out, but in a university project it's a very rare beast.

'Once the design intent was agreed with the project team, the budget was ring-fenced to ensure that unless there was a significant cost change, the intent would be carried through,' notes Nigel. And before we go on, it's worth adding that the whole

BREEAM excellent project came in on time and under budget.

'BDP promoted ideas, and we easily understood them', adds Derek. 'There was a great dialogue and a fantastic interpretation of the brief. It was a design-led approach, a little risky, but actually was all about engaging with our students...and respecting them. Sure, we had to persuade some of the more traditional members of the staff, but the furniture specification was so important – it opened up an opportunity to make a statement.'

The furniture finally selected, after a tender process, was supplied (with a great deal of love and care, it has to be said), by PJ Statham at Momentum, and includes many design-led brands such as Sancal, Lammhults, Stua, Abstracta, Allermuir and Akaba. The pieces, thoughtfully chosen, contribute in no small measure to a stunning interior. But this is no showy collection of arty pieces. It's considered and intelligent.

We descend the dramatic central staircase ('reminds me of the entrance to a stately home,' smiles Derek), admiring the striking wayfinding, and the dramatic yellow-clad Hothouse en route. We made our way



## essential ingredients

Client • **University of Wales** | Project Manager • **Mott MacDonald**

Architect, Interior Design, Lighting Consultant, FF&E Designer and Consultant, Wayfinding Designer • **BDP** | Project QS • **Edmond Shipway**

Mian Contractor • **Willmott Dixon** | Furniture Supply • **Momentum** [www.momentumcardiff.com](http://www.momentumcardiff.com)

Systems Furniture • **Mio Dino/Faram** [www.faram.com](http://www.faram.com)

Task Seating • **Interstuhl** [www.interstuhl.com](http://www.interstuhl.com)

Flooring • **InterfaceFLOR** [www.interfaceflor.co.uk](http://www.interfaceflor.co.uk)

Seminar/Classroom Chairs • **Andreu World** [www.andreuworld.com](http://www.andreuworld.com)

Storage • **Silverline** [www.silverline-oe.com](http://www.silverline-oe.com)

Loose Furniture • **Sancal, Allermuir, Lammhults, Stua, Abstracta, Akaba**