



Electric Gate

‘This was an opportunity to look at what we do and how we do it. Essentially, it’s all about a better way of delivering student facing services.’ Ruth Draper, Head of the Executive Office at Newcastle University, is giving us the background to the impressive new King’s Gate facility.

It’s an interesting story. As Ruth explains, King’s Gate is about ‘providing a better service for students.’ And it delivers that service with impressive style – of which more later.

Yet this is a place which delivers plenty of other good stuff too. There’s been a work culture change for the staff, efficiency and communication have improved, and there’s an important green angle too.

Another thing – there’s a buzz about the place.

You don’t need us to tell you about higher education in this country. One thing to remember though – it’s a competitive ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶





business. Students, and their parents, demand the best, and that delivery includes academia, welfare and future prospects. King's Gate helps Newcastle University to compete on the world stage, as Ruth explains. 'This is our front door, if you like! Previously, our provision of services was spread across our city centre campus, mostly because the University has grown rapidly. There are all sorts of issues the students need advice and support with, such as

accommodation, grants and course registration, to name just a few. University is difficult enough for many as it's their first time away from home – with King's Gate we've taken away the confusion by providing somewhere they can come to.

'It's a bit like a triage system. The students come to a Help Desk where we have trained staff who can answer around 80% of questions there and then. If they need more specialised help they can be

directed specifically to where they need to go and who they need to talk to. The Help Desk is a key part of our Student Support Services, very student facing, providing help on all kinds of issues including finance, accommodation and careers. In fact we offer careers support for students for up to three years after they leave Newcastle.'

Our tour, during the summer holidays, revealed a busy hardworking team. Face to face enquiries, telephone queries, helping some students clearly thousands of miles from home...really, really impressive.

But we weren't visiting the Geordie nation just to be wowed by Student Support. We asked Ruth about King's Gate's other role, a home to about 500 staff. 'Our executive offices were previously in an elegant terrace where staff worked in cellular offices off long corridors. People had to make an effort to see each other, and it was very inaccessible. We're now in an open plan office – which was a big cultural change – and it's very flexible. To a person the response has been that it's much better. It makes you feel more of a team; you know what's going on, there's better morale and it's a nice space. What's more, you don't have to walk a hundred yards through several fire doors!

'The move, last October, was carried out floor by floor and was virtually seamless. It's





Case Study

we've got 493 workstations spread over five floors.

'Of course, a major part of the move, as important as the logistics, was 'selling' people the change to their work culture. What everybody wanted was improved interaction with each other – what we've provided is a space that helps people talk to each other. And, of course, a space that absolutely promotes efficiency.'

We asked about the purchasing and specification process. 'Newcastle University is part of the North East Universities Purchasing Consortium,' explains Leigh. 'There are five furniture suppliers on the framework – we asked each to bid and to look at various planning options. It's quite an in-depth process which takes in all sorts of aspects such as specification writing and identifying service requirements...by talking to everyone we got a feel for what would be right for our needs, not just in product and price, but also service and support.'

'Our space plan was based on 120° clusters, and we selected Elite for the workstations and furniture supply. There is a wide range of storage solutions from Silverline, and a choice of five chairs from Boss Design. The key point is that every single employee tests and signs off their workstation with considerable scope for individualisation due to their own personal health and safety requirements. It's an unusually high level of involvement by individual users, but it's managed carefully and provides a high degree of satisfaction.'

'Everyone had come from a variety of locations before – Park Terrace, Armstrong Building and Windsor Terrace – and generally in pretty cramped conditions. We're proud of what King's Gate represents – it's the gateway to our University.'

With roots that go back many hundreds of years, Newcastle University has a proud heritage – it's a true civic university, with traditions closely linked to medicine in particular. Today's Newcastle University is proud of its heritage, but just as proud of its position and status in the 21st century. King's Gate impressively demonstrates its values and strengths ●

»»»» much more efficient, not least because we had a major clearout of paper and now use an offsite storage facility with 24 hour turnaround. We've got a lot of meeting spaces, both formal and informal – before, we only had three large meeting rooms. It's also worth noting that we have very close links with Newcastle City Council on sustainability, covering energy and transport and so on. Newcastle has aspirations to be a leading 'green' city...and we are working hand in hand with them on that.'

We asked Leigh Anderson, a Procurement Officer at the University, about the work that's created a successful result. 'We did a lot of work to make sure everyone was happy. This meant questionnaires on individual needs for everybody, from a filing clerk to the Vice Chancellor. This consultation included everything from pedestals to seating, testing pilot workstations – everyone was involved.'

'A comprehensive storage audit was an important part of that, and in the end

essential ingredients |

Client • **Newcastle University** | Architect • **Bond Bryan Architects** 0114 266 2040

Principal Contractor • **BAM Construction** 01442 238300

Systems Furniture • **Elite Office Furniture** 01405 746000

Carpets • **InterfaceFLOR** 08705 304030

Partitioning • **Komfort** 01293 529500

Lighting • **Thorn Lighting** 020 8732 9800 / **Zumtobel** 020 8589 1800

Concord Marlin 0870 606 2030 / **dwindsor** 01992 474600



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