

Campus Services



Mission Workplace: *Birmingham Metropolitan College's refurbishment of the ground floor has led to a number of unique and modern features being created by the Mission Workplace team*



Modern spaces for Birmingham Metropolitan College

Learning pods, an 'E bar' and new state-of-the-art teaching areas have been put in place for Birmingham's leading further and higher education college



→ Birmingham Metropolitan College is a further and higher education institution with eight campuses distributed throughout Birmingham. The Matthew Boulton campus, formerly the main Matthew Boulton College building, serves as the second largest campus for the College and houses an array of incredible technical and design features.

However, the nine-storey building had a vast amount of empty space on the ground floor that wasn't being fully utilised. What should have been a warm and welcoming reception area, was actually rather sparse and not at all complementary to its modern surroundings. It was then that the Birmingham Metropolitan College team decided to draft in

Mission Workplace, the innovative West Midlands interiors company, to transform the area and make it match the rest of the award-winning Matthew Boulton Campus.

The project, which took eight weeks to complete, includes state-of-the-art learning, teaching and staff areas, a new entrance lobby and an outdoor area suitable for college functions. Each aspect was designed to fit the needs of staff and students, where group learning and teaching is a big priority.

The learning pods, which were especially designed to encourage collaborative learning, have a mounted LCD screen with surface mounted power and data sockets below. The lighting was fitted in a way that it would provide an individual light source for each user in the pod, thus increasing engagement and promoting flexibility.

Another of the unique features is the 'E bar', which takes advantage of the College's background in technology and innovation to enable students to study on their laptop or tablet computer in comfort. The bar has

optimised lighting directly above and data cabling to allow individual computer access. Students can then indulge in relaxed study sessions with each other or concentrate on their homework knowing that all the equipment and resources they need are close by.

To harmonise with the impressive interior, the outside of the campus has been converted from a non-descript area surrounded by a metal fence, to a striking communal patch with a glass balustrade around the perimeter. A new external entrance lobby with fully glazed windows was designed and installed to match the exterior metal extrusion of the existing college building, so that the lobby aesthetically looks consistent with the main college. In the summer external seating and benches will be added to allow for the space to be used for functions by staff and students.

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Noel Ryan, Mission Workplace's Sales and Development Director, said: “The new areas integrate with the existing college space, resulting in a natural, seamless flow to the spaces.

“While we were working on the designs for a learn-



ing laboratory for teaching small groups, we worked closely with the college and developed the concept for the learning pod, which allows close collaboration and focused learning using the latest technology.

“The staff learning lounge has a combination of meeting spaces, soft seating and an ‘E bar’ which houses technology, but aesthetically appears to float. To create this effect, the ‘E bar’ was designed with no obviously visible means of support.”

Noel added: “Maximising natural light within the building was important. We opted for curved glass as it creates a feeling of more space and also visually defines the different areas.”

Lecturers and students are encouraged to experiment with the space, technology and a new range of teaching and learning methods. Feedback will then be used to influence design and teaching practices across the College.

John Starmer, Estates Director at Birmingham Metropolitan College, said: “We strive for excellence and innovation in all that we do. The work that Mission Workplace has completed within our new professional development centre showcases what can be achieved by working closely with like-minded companies.”

Mission Workplace has also completed interior refurbishment and design led projects at Birmingham Metropolitan College’s James Watt and Sutton Coldfield sites, and for a number of other clients in both the private and public sector too. ●

Provide an inspiring learning environment in four easy steps

Birmingham Metropolitan College utilises well-equipped learning suites and professional standard facilities, along with specialist workshops, laboratories, studios and study centres to provide an inspirational learning environment. Here’s what you can do to transform your campus:

1 Make sure to get the balance of aesthetics and practicalities right. It is easy to get swayed by a design company’s ‘vision’, but consider how your campus is used and how often before agreeing to anything. Is your campus a space for creative learning in flexible and adaptable spaces or is it for more regimented teaching that requires set rooms and specific equipment?

2 Sustainable construction is the future of campus development, so make sure to do your research and use firms that can deliver on your eco-policy. Even finding companies that can reduce construction, demolition and

excavation waste to landfill to under 50 per cent will make a big difference to carbon emissions.

3 Technology is always evolving, so your learning environments should evolve in parallel. In relaxation areas, consider investing in digital signage solutions that offer instant information and news about the campus. In catering facilities, get students to order their meal online, then pick it up on the premises to reduce waiting times. In study areas, offer tablet computers alongside traditional desktop and laptop computers to encourage different forms of learning.

4 Comfort is key. If furniture looks good, but isn’t comfortable to sit in for a number of hours, you’ll quickly find that students will go elsewhere. Make sure that you test as much furniture as you can before installing it and look out for ergonomically designed items too. These can improve posture and increase concentration levels.