Good Client Relationships

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Introduction

New buildings can rarely be standard items, refurbishments never are. Creating a building involves you selecting, then interacting with a team of professionals who will help you realise your goal. Highly involved and informed clients obtain the best service and performance from the construction industry.

This document is not intended as a step-by-step guide on how to manage a building project. There are lots of publications explaining the process in detail (some of these are identified in the text) and the professional team will also provide expert guidance through each stage of the project. The focus of this guide is therefore on good leadership through the process – how the involvement of a committed client can transform the outcome of a project and create an excellent building that is a real asset to the College.

There are essentially 4 stages to a project. These are:

- Preparation
- Design
- Construction
- Using the building

It is during the preparation and design phases that there is the greatest opportunity for a client to influence the outcome of a project but there are contributions to be made at each stage.

Preparation

There are two sorts of preparation – firstly collecting and refining your own thoughts to create an aspirational as well as pragmatic brief and secondly getting the right information together to enable the professional team to get off to a flying start.

Building a shared vision

The first kind of preparation is about establishing a clear vision which may encompass ideas about the learning environment, the brand/ethos of the College, the future direction of the College and other qualitative aspects that need to be implicit in the design. A shared vision is extremely powerful because stakeholders are much more committed to helping achieve a successful project and using the building in the way it is designed if they contribute to the design process. A clear and project specific vision is also invaluable for the design team.

"Don't underestimate just how many of your colleagues seem comfortable with draughty, leaking classrooms, dodgy IT systems, degrading concrete and the like. It's what they know, they cope, they compromise and they are successful. They won't relish change and have little time to imagine what they might achieve in a different environment, one that was aspirational and inspiring and worked. It can take a while firstly persuading them that the Principal is not delusional, and secondly, to feel confident enough to contribute to the shaping of the vision. Taking that time will certainly pay dividends."

Lynne Morris,
Ex Principal Joseph Chamberlain College

Organising visits to other colleges or participating in external workshops/conferences to explore the potential for your own project can help raise aspiration – avoiding new and shiny versions of existing facilities - and establish benchmarks. Keep scrapbooks of these visits and use them to help brief your design team. Try to develop a critical eye – looking beyond superficial things like décor and finishes to understand what makes a successful space or learning setting. Don't forget to look at furniture and ICT too – these will have important implications for flexibility and adaptability.

Workshops to explore key issues – particularly if they affect a large number of users such as the educational environment or the IT strategy - can help clarify the brief you will give to the design team and an investment of time in the preparation stages will help with decision-making later as priorities and direction will be established. Building consensus about the schedule of accommodation required can also help manage potential "empire building" by departments considering new space.

Various documents written by CABE – the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment – which are still available online are very good at explaining how to put a good brief together and involve stakeholders. In particular "Creating Excellent Buildings: A guide for Clients" which was published in 2003.

A Project Champion and the Client team

Setting up a team interested parties which might include staff, building/estate managers, governors and students to generate ideas and build a vision is a good idea. Whilst different members of the team may act as an advocate for a particular issue such sustainability, maintenance or IT strategy, appointing an individual who can act as an overall project manager or project champion for the college is key. The Project Champion will coordinate the involvement of the client team, safeguard the college priorities and represent the college to the professional team.

There are enormous benefits in following what is known as a "Soft Landings" approach to ensure that the project meets all client expectations in use – especially those to do with building performance. A document produced by BSRIA (https://www.bsria.co.uk/services/design/soft-landings) "How to Procure Soft Landings" explains the approach and the Project Champion would be heavily involved in implementing this.

The role is extremely demanding and so other work responsibilities will need to be suspended or at least significantly reduced. Consistency is also key and so the role is not easily shared.

"Choosing the Project Champion is key to a successful project. They will guard the vision of the college, scrutinise costs and ensure that progress, and the excitement is communicated to students, staff and governors. You need someone who has the college under their skin, and that means ethos and curriculum offer. It also helps if they can understand a plan and know how space impacts on the behaviour of the users, both students and staff. They need to be both a care taker and a dreamer."
Lynne Morris Ex Principal Joseph Chamberlain College

As the design process develops it will be necessary to separate the contributing client team into groups that are involved in consultation to help build the brief or sign off the design of a particular area or element and the client team that is responsible for overall decision making – a proper steering group.

Effective and informed decision-making is key to a successful outcome and will help the design team to make good progress so the steering group needs to be a small, carefully chosen executive group with a spread of relevant expertise which will include someone with a good grasp of the funding strategy.

Project objectives and future measurement

The estates strategy will have identified the need for a building project and possible options for achieving the desired outcome which the professional team will explore and analyse during the early design stages. Ideally a first draft of a schedule of accommodation will have been derived from the college's curriculum analysis and/or new educational initiatives.

In addition to these initial pragmatic requirements, the College should put together a set of other targets they will ask the design team to address. These objectives need to be well-defined, appropriate and realistic so that they can be developed, monitored and checked as the design progresses and ultimately used to measure the performance of the building in

sustainability targets and the use of existing assessment methods such as BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method). It is possible that funding or planning consent may be linked to the achievement of a BREEAM score. To achieve the very high scores in these methods an early commitment to the process is required as evidence gathering needs to begins almost straightaway.

Collecting existing information

Assembling all the relevant data associated with the possible site(s)/building(s) will facilitate an efficient start by the design team. Existing drawings of buildings and most importantly the services are very useful as are any O&M manuals or information about site-wide services strategies or building management systems.

Information on listings (buildings and protected trees) and any previous contact/correspondence with conservation teams of planning authorities is useful. Similarly, relevant legal information about boundaries, ownership or rights of way is helpful.

Topographical or building dimensional surveys are probably best left for the design team to organise so that they can identify their requirements but any other existing surveys should be made available. Similarly any other known health and safety risks or relevant fire strategies need to be identified for the team.

Surevys

- Geotechnical
- Structure
- Services above and below ground
- Asbestos
- Noise and acoustics
- Access audit
- Archaeology
- Ecology

Building Information Modelling (BIM)

Projects receiving public funding will be required by the government to use BIM from 2016 (www.bimtaskgroup.org.) This is a modelling tool that allows the whole project team – designers, cost consultants, programmers and constructors to develop and construct a design through a system of shared 3D models that also allows structured information to be attached to them. As well as enhancing communication and streamlining construction, the final model of the building will be a useful record for the client that has the potential to be used actively for facilities management although this aspect is not yet in common use. Specific requirements stating the level of BIM to be adopted for the project would need to be made clear when appointing design, cost, project management and contracting teams.

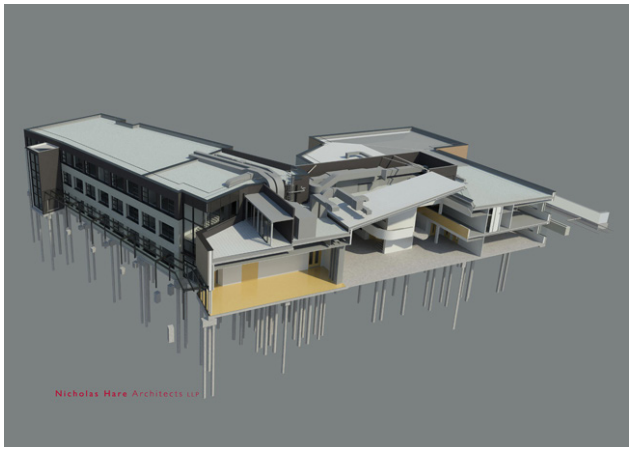
Appointing a team

The best buildings are usually the product of a successful relationship between the client and the project team - a relationship based upon mutual respect, trust and a sharing of values and objectives. The appointment process therefore needs to be fair and obtain the best value for the College but allow such issues to be acknowledged.

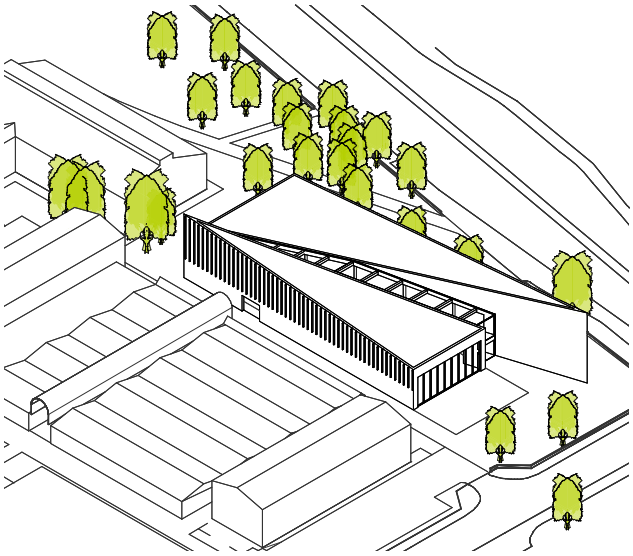
Initially it may only be necessary to appoint an Architect or Project Manager together with a CDM Coordinator (who will ensure that health and safety issues are properly addressed from the start). The Architect/Project Manager will then advise on which other consultants are needed and also different options for appointing a construction team.

The RIBA has a useful book called Assembling a Collaborative Project Team: Practical tools including multidisciplinary schedules of service" which corresponds directly with the RIBA Plan of Work Toolbox. Advice is also available on their website.

BIM construction model



BIM concept models, Farnborough College



In making any appointment, carry out some thorough research. Investigate which organisations were responsible for other successful projects or buildings you admire. Talk to other clients about the service they received, relationships established and key individuals that delivered that service. Use client advisory services such as that offered by the RIBA to identify organisations with particular expertise for your type of project or if the project is small, located nearby. Draw up a shortlist and visit relevant completed projects.

Derive a selection procedure which assesses quality, team and reputation as well as fees. This is because a good design team that resources the project properly can deliver enormous value though effective design and efficient project delivery right across the whole process. Ensure that the proposed personnel attend the interview and most importantly decide whether they would be good partners for your project.

"When we made our initial appointment of Architect we checked through the usual range of recommended indicators. One of our governors ran an Architect's Practice so we were well advised. After the initial short list was selected we sent a brief with essential information for those we had invited to present to us. This information covered the local environment, the community we served, our aspirations for the students, their backgrounds and heritages. It also covered our values and how we operated as a college. All the recommended indicators being equal, it was their response to our specific and unique brief that would be the decider. We did not want an off the shelf response. Our decision was based on how much they had understood us and addressed our brief."

Lynne Morris Ex Principal JCC

Consultants

- CDM Coordinator
- Project Manager
- Architect
- Environmental engineer (MEP)
- Structural engineer
- Landscape architect
- Cost Consultant

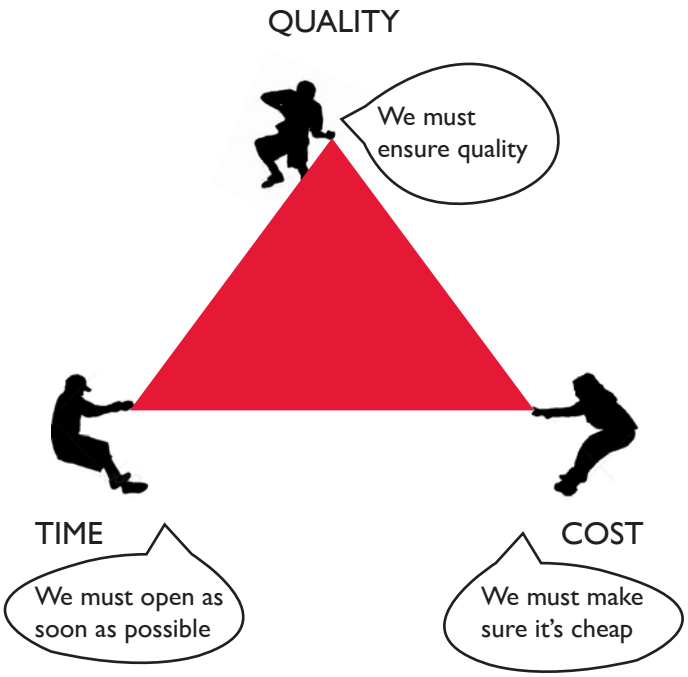
Design

Setting a context for the design

The estates strategy and the emerging needs of the College will have suggested both a desirable timescale for the project and likely sources of funding. A successful project matches aspiration – both qualitative and quantitative to budgets and time available.

Before starting the process be clear about where the college's priorities lie between these three variables. For example, it is unrealistic to expect a superfast delivery to be high quality and cheap. However sufficient design time can allow a team time to develop a simple but high quality result that represents good value. Share your budget and programme constraints at the first opportunity and explore these priorities with the team.

It is helpful to become familiar with the most commonly used set of project stages which are those set by the RIBA. The RIBA offers an interactive toolbox which can be used to plan a project and define tasks and outputs for each stage (www.ribaplanofwork.com). It is also a useful step by step guide to the whole process. The RIBA Plan of Work 2013 is a hardcopy version of the guidance.



RIBA plan of work 2013

Stage 0	Strategic Definition
Stage 1	Preparation and Brief
Stage 2	Concept Design
Stage 3	Developed Design
Stage 4	Technical Design
Stage 5	Construction
Stage 6	Handover and Close Out
Stage 7	In Use

Set project milestones for each stage of the design –Link these milestones to the funding timetable and the college's governance approvals process so the project progress is not undermined by an out of synch decision making process. The project programme also needs to identify key targets and periods for consulting with outside agencies such as planners or outside stakeholders such as neighbours or local businesses involved in the project.

It is also useful to think about the risks to a project before initiating the design process and then to review these risks at each design stage as some are designed out and others emerge. The professional team will lead this process and make their own contributions but it is important that the College identify their own issues and share these with the wider team.

Good communication is key to the success of any project and a communications strategy should be set up that that is clear, open but managed so that there is not information overload. The college's Project Champion may be a key figure in acting as a channel of communication between the team and the College.

Managing consultation with college personnel

Ask the design team to produce a consultation plan that identifies which client team groups need to be involved in helping to develop the design at each stage.

With this information the college will be able to make its own staff available at the right time. Consultations will need to be repeated as the design progresses and the level of detail of the information increases and consultations move from simple briefing to considering options and proposals. It is helpful if the design team identify well in advance the kind of information they require so that staff can prepare for meetings with confidence. Ideally, the Project Champion should attend most of these meetings so that they are as productive as possible and the college's overarching objectives kept to the forefront.

The consultation plan also needs to identify when the Project Steering Group needs to meet in order to receive feedback from the consultations and to take the necessary decisions to keep the project on track. Clearly this needs to be related to the project milestones on the main programme.

It is a good idea to share the developing design with everyone at key stages – presentations and exhibitions are an excellent way to do this but require significant effort by the design team if they are to be useful and so these need to be identified well in advance and the format and output agreed with the team. Similarly contributions and updates to the College intranet need to be considered.

External consultations

Most projects will involve obtaining consents from external organisations – planning and building consents and possibly agreements with neighbours (party wall and rights to light, shared access arrangements for example). Preparing the ground for a successful passage through such processes can enormously improve the speed and success of obtaining the relevant consents.

Keeping neighbours and the immediate community informed and involved from an early stage is helpful. It is best if this is done directly but dedicating a section on the College website to new projects and keeping it up to date is useful for prospective students as well as local people and businesses – some of whom may be project partners.

If the design team are to be involved in external consultations or presentations it is beneficial for the college to demonstrate support for the proposals by attending events and helping with any local politics.

Developing the design

The likely first activities for the team will be looking at the options captured in the estates strategy and exploring the feasibility of different design strategies. The process of evaluating these options needs to be a joint exercise with the College so that all parties understand the choices that are being made and the prioritisation that is informing those choices. Projects that are developed in this open and transparent way are usually much better received by the end users as unrealistic expectations are managed too.

It is therefore essential that the communication tools used are as clear and as user friendly as possible. Encourage the design team to use 3D techniques such as sketch models, simple visualisations or even fly-throughs to provide decision makers with a full understanding of proposals.

In the intense focus on the specific needs of the current building design, the overall context of the project should not be forgotten and the emerging design should be tested against how it might fit with any future plans for the site. Similarly the possible extension future adaptation of the building and its services should be considered. Thinking about flexibility and adaptability of the designed spaces may also make the building more efficient in use.

Once a preferred design strategy has been adopted the design process is essentially one of continual refinement and increasing detail so that ultimately it will be able to be used as a basis for construction. The design needs to be continually monitored against the project objectives and the cost plan for the project.

It is important to record the brief and the decisions made as the design progresses. It is usual for the emerging designs to be captured in a formal report at the end of each stage. Each report will need to be accompanied by a suitably detailed cost analysis.
Time should be allowed for preparing, distributing and signing off these design and cost reports and the College will need to identify who should be involved in the process.

Managing costs

Initially cost advice will be approximate – based on relevant benchmarks and costs per square metre – which will allow overall budgets to be fixed and comparisons to be made between options.

The design team will primarily refer to construction costs but the College will need an overall project cost that encompasses all fees, contingencies, FF&E, IT/AV and relocation/moving expenses. These will need inflation indices too.

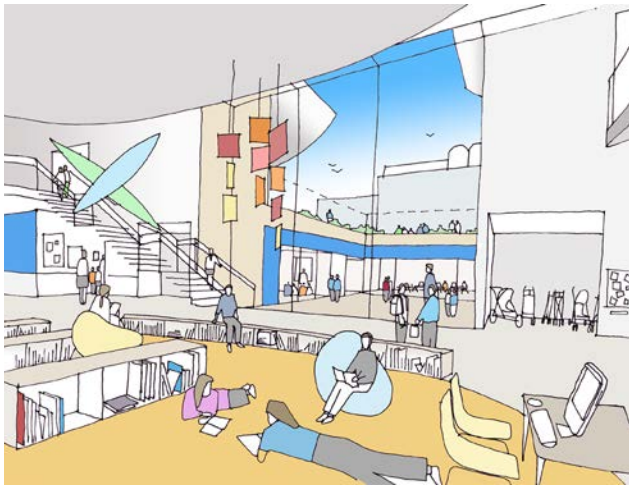
Select a cost adviser who is proactive and prepared to help the design team develop the design to cost plan targets as well as simply reporting on emerging costs. Ensure they will advise the College on costs in use too so that informed comparisons can be made between options that have high capital cost but lower running cost and vice versa. Be prepared to challenge any aspects of the cost plan and its relationship to the design you do not understand.

Insist on regular cost reporting so that there are no nasty surprises that occur too late for them to be managed properly within the programme.

Ensure that the College also has reliable advice on VAT as it can make an enormous difference to the funds available to spend.

As the design progresses and both the proposals and the cost plan become more detailed, changes in the brief or design direction are likely to lead to increased costs. Good management of the early design stages to ensure that all requirements are captured at the right stage and consistency of leadership throughout the process are therefore imperative for achieving budget targets. Staff need to be discouraged from changing requirements and newly appointed staff should not be allowed to revisit the designs agreed by their predecessors unless there are compelling reasons.

The design team should not be authorised to proceed to the next design stage without all outstanding cost issues being fully resolved.



Value engineering is a process for testing choices and specifications to ensure that money is spent wisely and to best effect it does not necessarily mean cost cutting and is best done as part of the design process through the proper evaluation of design alternatives against the available budget. It is often used as a euphemism for cost cutting at the end of a design stage or after a tender when aspirations and budget have to be reconciled in haste in order to maintain progress. If this does need to happen – and it may be because of unforeseen circumstances such as a change in the economic climate – it is important that the College's priorities prevail. Ensure that a clear list of possible savings is drawn up and the implications of each explained to the College. This can be a time when it is helpful to refer to the original vision and the principal project objectives. When alterations are made remember to communicate these and the reasoning behind the changes back to those who have been involved in the consultation process so that there are no surprises or disappointments that will undermine a positive reception of the building when it opens.

The programme

Identify all critical dates and share these with the team. The Project Manager or Architect will help develop an overall programme. If the project is to be fast-track to achieve funding or a critical occupation date ensure that there is sufficient contingency in the programme.

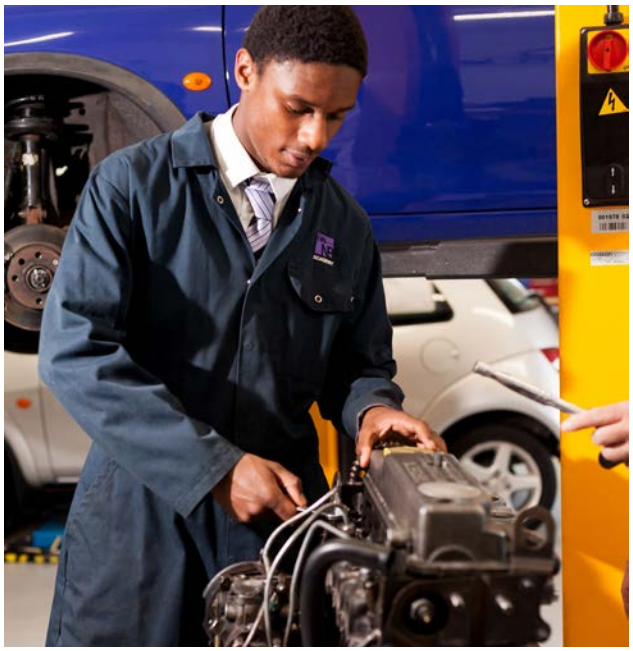
Ideally there should be sufficient time for proper design development. The more fully worked through the design, the more accurate the cost plan will be. The more thoroughly the design is developed with users the less likely there will be costly late changes. Similarly fuller and more coordinated design information will lead to a more reliable tender and fewer mistakes on site.

The initial programme may assume that design stops whilst planning or other consents are sought. The College may wish to review this as part of their risk strategy if consultations with the relevant authorities go well.

Factor into the programme vacation periods when college staff may not be present for consultation and decision-making as this can have a significant effect on the useful progress the team can make.

Factor in post construction activities such as ICT and FF&E installations as well as plans for moving. The use of legacy FF&E may also impact on the programme.

The commissioning of the building (the fine tuning of the building services systems and controls) is a long and complex process that needs to start well in advance of handover. It is a common source of problems in use and so adequate time needs to be clearly identified for this within the construction programme.



Construction

Matching procurement to College priorities

Most projects are constructed some form of Design and Build (D&B) contract where the Contractor's team takes on the responsibility for completing any outstanding design and constructing the project for an agreed budget and completion date. There are different stages at which the Contractor might be appointed and the professional team will set out the pros and cons of the alternatives. There are also choices to be made about the College's designers – whether they will become part of the Contractor's team (novated) or whether they will remain working for the College in a monitoring role to safeguard the College vision.

D&B contracts are popular because they focus heavily on the delivery of two of the three variables variables – cost and programme but they are not so effective at ensuring the third: quality. A client who is keen to maintain quality needs to think carefully about how the college's priorities are preserved in what is otherwise a very commercial arrangement.

Where quality is a key priority, arrangements that allow the design team to take the design to a high level of detail whilst still being directed by the college can be advantageous. This doesn't prevent the early appointment of a Contractor nor the use of a D&B contract. The best buildings are based on effective teamwork and having time for a productive team relationship to develop between the design and construction teams is as useful as the buildability, safety and risk analysis skills a good Contractor will bring to the design stage.

Capturing College requirements in the building contract

It is a good idea to make sure that the documents describing the College's requirements (known as the Employer's Requirements) are as full and detailed as possible. Make sure these are reviewed and approved by the College to ensure that everything is covered and firm performance specifications (rather than open ended aspirational statements) set where the design is not yet complete.

Ask the design team to do a presentation and explanation of the Employer's Requirements – highlighting aspects that affect the use of the building to relevant college members. What isn't explicitly covered in the contract documents will not be built and changes or additions later will be costly and may delay completion.

Make sure all College expectations about site access, safety and noise/disruption are also captured in the College's requirements.

Decide which elements of the design you wish to see samples or mock ups of and include a schedule in the tender documents – this might include objects which will have a lot of use such window opening mechanisms or hand dryers as well as the more traditional materials, finishes, light fittings and ironmongery.

Appointing a Contractor who will provide design work

When appointing a Contractor, cost will be a major factor but if the Contractor is to be involved in delivering the design too, research into their track record on other similar and recent projects. Interview their proposed in house personnel and take up references on individuals too as they are as important as the overall culture of the organisation.

If the College's designers are not to be novated to the contractor apply the same level of research to the proposed design team. Examine the track record of the contractor/designer relationship – what other projects have they done together and ensure that sufficient resources have been allowed in the bid for the team to carry out the design properly.

Communication

Make it clear to the Contractor that the College will be a hands on client – monitoring progress and quality carefully. Whilst the professional team will manage the contract, it can be a good idea to maintain a regular relationship with the relevant director so the College can easily raise any issues at a high level before they become problematic.

When communication protocols are set up, try to preserve continuity with the procedures established for the design so that consistency of approach and complete familiarity with the College priorities is maintained. Ideally the key individual representing the College will remain the Project Champion. If there is still design work to be done, ask the Contractor for a timetable for this design work identifying when the College can expect to be involved in decision-making. Prepare staff for this and agree how the sign off procedures will work within the timescales set for approval so that the construction contract is not delayed.

The best contractural relationships are based on openness and transparency and so when agreeing protocols for reporting, ask for unedited design and quality reports from the design team as part of the regular Contractor's report - even if they have been novated to the Contractor. Similarly it can be a good idea to require key design team members to be present at Project/ Client Meetings.

Visit site regularly (at least before every Project Team Meeting) and ask the contractor to allow managed access for College members from time to time so that awareness and enthusiasm for the project can be maintained.

Completion

Nearer completion insist on proper training for your technical staff and also sessions for ordinary users on how to use the building and get best out of the design. Research into the performance gap between the predicted energy use of a building and actual performance in use shows that the building not being used as designed is a key issue. Managing expectation will also affect how well the building is received and users are more likely to tolerate or help with the inevitable teething problems if they understand the systems and design intent.

Ask for a short user-friendly manual that can be put on the College intranet so that new college members will also know how to use the building in the future.

Make it clear that the College expects project and equipment specific technical O&M manuals and not just general extracts from brochures. Do not accept them until they are fully complete and College's building manager is confident that he/she has everything he/she needs. Drafts need to be provided well before handover.

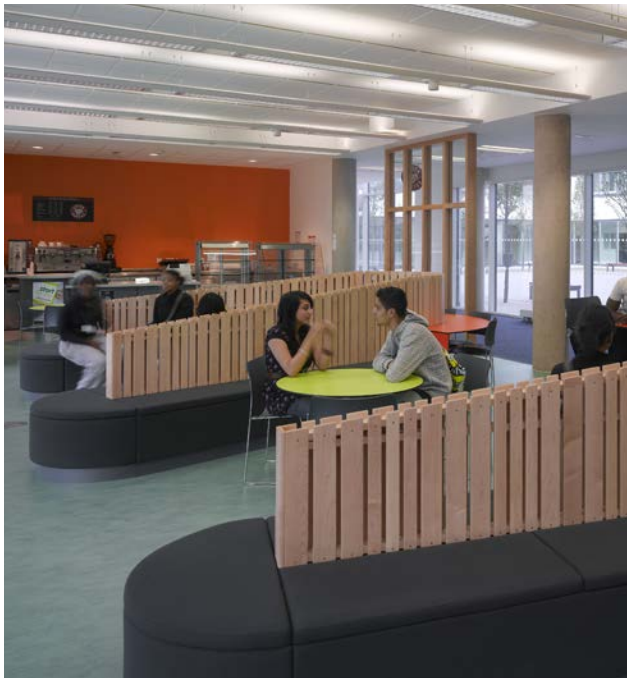
Try not to be pressurised into accepting a building that has too many outstanding snags or incomplete manuals. If work remains to be done after handover agree procedures for access with the Contractor that meet any security, safety or disruption concerns the College may have and agree a timetable for the outstanding work.

Using the building

If the College is following a soft landings approach there will be a plan in place for extended aftercare (beyond the initial 12 month period set by the contract for remedying defects) and post occupancy evaluation (POE).
In any case it is important to review the design to see if the project objectives have been achieved and how well it satisfies the detailed brief. This is best done after the first year of occupation when defects and snags dealt with and the building/users settled down.

Ideally this would involve both an energy survey as well as some form of measuring user satisfaction – whether an occupant review survey (such as the Building Use Studies method) or a workshop which reviews performance against the headline brief or the Design Quality Indicators if they were set.

The advantages of such reviews in use include:

- The continued interest and involvement of building users in how best the building can perform which can lead to behaviour changes that improve performance or greater satisfaction levels.
- The ability to undertake any necessary refinements to the building from an informed perspective
- Learning lessons that can be fed into other College projects.

A good client will understand that each building is a one-off design unique to site and user requirements and so is as unlikely to be as perfectly refined as a mass produced object. This understanding is crucial to a very successful POE which needs to be conducted openly and in a genuinely enquiring manner so that issues are fully debated and underlying causes of problems identified. Creating this culture and taking advantage of the lessons learnt is the last, but one of the most important, tasks for the Client.