

University College Birmingham

*Learning Resources Strategy
2005 to 2010*

Learning Resources Strategy 2005-2010

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This strategy sets out the College's approach to the acquisition and maintenance of learning resources for the next five years. It builds on the 02-05 version of this plan and is informed by and contributes to the wider strategic planning process, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and other development plans.

This document does not include actions related to Human Resources at the College as these are covered by the Human Resources Strategy.

1.2 Definition of Learning Resources

These are resources that contribute directly or indirectly to the successful achievement of the learning outcomes of programmes. This definition includes classrooms, lecture rooms, specialist practical facilities such as kitchens, salons and restaurants, and computer rooms. It also includes the equipment provided in these, such as OHPs, TV/Video players, data projectors, computers, furniture, specialist equipment and machinery. The College Libraries, Blackboard e-learning system and the Study Support Centre are also key learning resources.

The definition also includes all academic and support staff, and the Human Resources Strategy outlines the College's approach to ensuring that the processes of staff recruitment, development and planning support the aim of enhancing the student experience.

1.3 Process

This strategy builds on the long-standing and successful practices of the College in developing high quality learning resources. The creation of the first version of the plan brought together a range of individual plans and involved the collaboration of all of those responsible for developing and maintaining Learning Resources. This revision was written by a small team of resource managers and was subsequently amended following discussion with the Senior Management Team.

2. Context of the Strategy

2.1 Characteristics of the College

The College's aims are summarised in the Mission Statement:

Our aim is to maintain an environment that encourages and supports participation in the learning process by all those with the ambition and commitment to succeed. As a specialist provider of higher and further education vocational programmes, we will promote a culture of scholarship and opportunity that equips students with appropriate skills, knowledge and quality standards to

enable them to compete, with advantage, at all levels within the sectors we serve.

The Mission Statement therefore provides a clear direction for the Learning Resources Strategy and a framework for decision making about resource development.

The Learning and Teaching Strategy makes clear that UCB:

- Is a learning and teaching institution.
- Has an important role to play in widening participation.
- Has a vocational focus in all of its work, from FE to Masters levels of programmes.
- Has specialisms in the Hospitality and Catering, Tourism, Recreation, Sport and Leisure, Spa and Complementary Therapies, and Early Childhood fields.
- Sets very high standards for students and staff.
- Places emphasis on employability as a key outcome of all programmes.

The centralised nature of the College's management of its finances means that there are few delegated budgets. This provides considerable opportunity to make large investments in resources where necessary, ensures that purchases are necessary and that best value can be achieved.

Learning resources (including classrooms and specialist laboratory/practical facilities) are not owned by any one school or department, which makes possible actions to achieve optimum usage.

The intended development of the College is a critical factor in decision making on resources. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2005-10 states that the College:

*...will remain a specialist provider and, through organic growth and via opportunities to bid for additional funded student numbers, it aims to increase both HE and FE student numbers. Target FTE student numbers by 2010 are:
2500 Home/EU UG students
500 International students
1800 FE students
200 PG students*

A large proportion of new HE students are likely to be from backgrounds with little or no experience of higher education. An increase in part-time students is also thought likely in both HE and FE programmes. It is expected that there will be greater use made of the flexibility inherent in many of the awards we offer....

The Learning and Teaching Strategy also noted in 2005 that an increase in the use of e-learning is anticipated, that the Library and Resource Centre has reached full capacity, and that a recent increase in the number of teaching staff has placed pressure on staff room accommodation.

2.2 Resource utilisation planning

The College achieves high intensity of usage of physical resources by its 16-19 FE, post 19 FE and Higher Education students. This reflects the practical industry focus of the College's programmes and the requirement by industry that the acquisition of practical skills is encompassed in the curriculum. Many of the specialist practical facilities therefore operate up to 14 hours a day in peak periods ensuring a very high utilisation factor. The high standard and contemporary nature of these is maintained through close liaison with industry and suppliers who view the College as a sound investment.

A large number of computers and IT resources are available to students and staff, with a student:computer ratio of 5:1. In addition to the resource centres, many computers are provided in computer suites and these will be made available for students to use at any time that these suites are not in use as teaching rooms (within the limits of the College's opening times). In recognition of the large proportion of students coming to the College with their own computers, a project to network enable all rooms in the Maltings student village has recently been completed, allowing students access to all College online resources from their own rooms. It is thought that this will help to reduce demand on College computers at peak times.

Online resources are seen as increasingly important to enhancing the student learning experience and *Blackboard* is the College's chosen virtual learning environment, through which most such resources will be made available. This is a 24hr service and failsafe and staffing measures will be taken to ensure that downtime is maintained at a very low level.

3. A Strategy for Learning Resources

3.1 Key Aims

- To provide high quality resources to support learning, teaching and assessment at all levels;
- To reflect leading edge industry standards in specialist teaching resources wherever practicable;
- To support the progressive development of students from directed to independent learning;
- To ensure value for money.

3.2 Guiding principles for learning resource acquisition and maintenance

- Value for money is critical in any resource acquisition, but there is no suggestion that the cheapest product is the best value for money. Longevity of useful life and likely refurbishment costs are important factors in judging value for money.
- Specialist physical resources (for instance kitchens) and equipment should be sourced from suppliers regarded by industry as being of high quality.
- Rooms and resources should support the provision of high quality learning, teaching and assessment.
- All resource purchases and developments must further the College's Equality of Opportunity Policy, and comply with the requirements of relevant legislation.
- Rooms and specialist resources are not 'owned' by any programme team or individual member of staff and are held and allocated centrally.
- Learning resources should, wherever possible, benefit or be capable of use by as wide a range of students as possible. It is often possible satisfy a number of resource requests by the purchase of one set of resources.
- The acquisition of any IT resource cannot be considered in isolation and must contribute to the development of the IT infrastructure. Again, these resources are prioritised and sourced centrally via the IT Development Committee.
- Library and ILT resources are of the utmost importance to a teaching and learning institution.
- Regular maintenance and upgrading of existing resources is necessary in order to maintain their value in supporting learning.
- Increased use of the Blackboard VLE is likely following the introduction of a minimum content specification for modules and programmes and increased awareness among staff of the possibilities for using e-learning as a teaching, assessment and communication tool.

3.3 Responsibilities

- The College Corporation is responsible for approving an Annual Operating Statement outlining major physical learning resource developments. The Corporation also receive reports on contracts and single items of expenditure in excess of £20,000.
- The College Corporation's Audit Committee is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of purchasing decisions and controls.
- The Director of Finance is responsible for ensuring that resource purchases are made in accordance with the Financial Regulations of the College.
- The Deputy Principal is responsible for prioritising large resource acquisition requests, in conjunction with senior colleagues.
- Senior Management Team members are individually and on occasion collectively, responsible for prioritising and approving smaller resource acquisition requests.

- The IT Development Committee is responsible for co-ordinating all requests for ILT resources, and for proposing an annual budgetary plan for such resources.
- The Director of Estates is responsible for the creation of an annual programme of works for improvements to accommodation for student learning and residences.
- The Head of Library Services is responsible for developing and implementing a plan for the maintenance of text and other sources to support effective learning and teaching.
- The E-learning Coordinator is responsible for developing and implementing a plan for the use of the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment, in conjunction with the IT Development Committee.

3.4 Process

- A central budgeting and allocations system will be used for resourcing all resources to support teaching and learning. This helps to make the best use of the expensive specialist resources available within the College, and to enable planning for the large capital expenditure required for their upkeep.
- Financial planning will use a historical cost basis, and a planned profile of expenditure is drawn up for each section of the College. However, there is a flexible approach to budgeting in which sections attempt to achieve excellent value for money for every minor purchase, rather than set a hard and fast rule that sections may not go over budget. This has enabled the College to achieve an impressive financial performance whilst at the same time investing in high quality teaching and learning facilities.
- Proposals for large projects or expensive capital items directly related to learning and teaching will be discussed and prioritised by the Academic Management Team (AMT), chaired by the Vice Principal (Academic). These will then be taken to the Deputy Principal, who will prioritise them alongside other proposals for expenditure, for instance, from the Student Services Manager regarding Halls of Residence. A resulting set of proposals for expenditure will then be submitted to the College Corporation, which may approve them either through the setting of a specific budget or the approval of the detailed Annual Operating Statement.
- Expenditure for smaller items will be approved by section heads, within the flexible budgeting approach.
- Requests for text or software purchase for library use by students or staff may be made by any member of staff to the Library. It is then considered by the librarian and relevant Director of Programmes and (where valid) approved. There is no fixed limit to library expenditure, but the principles of best value must be achieved in all purchasing.

- Expenditure on IT resources will be planned through the *IT Development Committee*, with representatives of all academic and support functions of the College, through the creation of an IT budget proposal. This proposal will then be forwarded to SMT for discussion before being proposed to the College Corporation for approval within the Corporate Plan and Operating Statement.
- An Annual Operating Statement will be published by the Principal, outlining plans for a range of resource developments. It will be monitored by the College Corporation at every meeting.
- E-learning resource development will be informed by the e-learning strategy which in turn will be informed by and support the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

3.5 Action Plans

The action required to achieve the aims of this plan is outlined in:

- The Annual Operating Statement (especially those sections related to Building Services, IT and Teaching and Learning);
- The annual e-learning development plan;
- The annual Library and Information Services development plan.