



PEB Exchange, Programme on Educational Building 2002/02

City and Islington College,  
in the United Kingdom

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# CITY AND ISLINGTON COLLEGE, IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

## The policy context

The British government recognises the extreme diversity of provision for non-university post-compulsory age groups; and, spurred on by reports like those by Sir Claus Moser<sup>1</sup> on adult basic skills and by Helena Kennedy<sup>2</sup> on widening lifelong participation, it has decided to consolidate the plethora of existing arrangements into a coherent policy to improve levels of education, training and skills at all ages. In the words of the new Learning and Skills Council's corporate plan, "At present we fall far below the average of OECD countries against key indicators such as the participation in learning of young people".<sup>3</sup>

The message for the existing, well established colleges of further education is that they need to respond to ever-changing government "initiatives" while trying to maintain and improve their own strengths and efficiencies. Of all educational institutions, from nursery schools to universities, colleges of further education are those which most suffer (and occasionally benefit) from the tension between national priorities and the need for local responsiveness.

City and Islington College exemplifies all these potential conflicts and responses.

City and Islington College, in the heart of London, was formed in 1993 through the amalgamation of a range of local institutions, including a sixth form college (offering mainstream academic courses leading to national qualifications and university), two colleges of general further education and an institute of adult education. The College, which offers courses to some 4 700 full-time and 16 500 part-time students, is currently spread over ten sites.

1. Department for Education and Employment (1999), "Improving Literacy and Numeracy – A Fresh Start", London.

2. Further Education Funding Council (1999), "Learning Works", Coventry.

3. Learning and Skills Council (2001), "Strategic Framework to 2004, Corporate Plan", July, Coventry.

Not only do staff spend a lot of time travelling across one of the most congested city centres in Europe, but students suffer from having to use a set of scattered buildings, dating from the 1880s to the 1970s, some of which were not even designed for educational purposes. Four of the buildings are fine examples of the multi-storey schools built by the London School Board after the Elementary Education Act of 1870. However, beautiful as these buildings are, they were designed for children, not teenagers and adults, and therefore they lack a proper infrastructure, notably information technology (IT) facilities for teaching and learning, and social facilities. Their age and condition were the cause of the only low grade the College received in its most recent inspection.

The College has therefore embarked on a substantial capital projects programme, which will cover the government's latest policy requirements while building on the College's specific educational strengths.

## The programme

### Rationalisation

The priority has been to concentrate the College's courses onto three main campuses, each with good public transport: Angel campus in the south, Finsbury Park in the north and Holloway campus in the centre. This concentration will reduce the College's gross internal area from 38 000 m<sup>2</sup> to 35 000 m<sup>2</sup>.

The programme will include both new build and refurbishment and will cost in the order of GBP 50 million, of which 80% is eligible for partial government support (up to 35%).

### Planning

The figure of 35 000 m<sup>2</sup> has been derived from using the planning method of the Further Education Funding Council.<sup>4</sup> Previously, area was based on student numbers, or student numbers transformed into space full-time equivalents. However, since methods of attendance have become more and more varied, the Council recommends converting the annual total of student guided learning hours into a minimum number of workplaces (MNW). The MNW is a "virtual" number, representing the number of workplaces which would be required if all workplaces could be used for 100% of the teaching year (1 440 hours currently). This number is adjusted to account for a reasonable target utilisation figure (say 40%), resulting in the total number

4. Further Education Funding Council (1997), Supplement to Circular 97/37, "Guidance on Floorspace Management in Further Education Colleges", November, Coventry.

of workplaces which must be built. These are then divided among space types and allocated a workplace space norm;<sup>5</sup> appropriate additions can then be made for non teaching and learning spaces, for communal areas and for balance.<sup>6</sup>

An important space type for the further education sector is now the Resource Based Learning Centre (RBLC), where young adults leave the rigid structure of the classroom but study under supervision. The Council would like “learning” areas (libraries and RBLCs) to account for between 10 and 20% of a college’s total gross internal area. It also suggests a range of areas per MNW which should accommodate the teaching and learning activities of “normal” further education colleges (11 to 14.5 m<sup>2</sup>, with a preference for the lower figure), and the challenge is to match these guideline norms up with what derives from individual courses and specific requirements.

### **General design principles**

For City and Islington College, with a view to matching overall guidance to specific requirements and to support those old war-horses adaptability and flexibility, certain principles have been adopted:

1. Keep a high proportion of generic teaching spaces.
2. Do not assign general purpose teaching spaces to specific curriculum areas.
3. Locate RBLCs near the learning resource centre and IT rooms, so the learning resource centre can expand or RBLCs can be converted for other uses.
4. Avoid replication of specialist spaces on more than one site and make sure they can be reassigned to other uses.
5. Avoid internal load bearing walls, so that spaces can be made bigger or smaller as required.
6. Make use of a scheduling system, to optimise space use over time.

### **The projects**

**Angel campus** (Gross internal area: 11 500 m<sup>2</sup>)

#### *Beacon Sixth Form Centre*

This is an entirely new build project which is six storeys high with a 90 metre long elevation on a busy traffic thoroughfare;



the exterior will be sealed using Kalwall, a translucent material, with clear glazed elements. Part of the building giving onto the road will be let as a modest convenience store. The existing gardens will be maintained and re-landscaped where necessary, to provide a variety of secure and publicly accessible open spaces.

The Centre will provide accommodation for A and AS level students (16- to 19-year-olds) during the day and for adult students in the evening. The 16- to 19-year-old students’ courses range from modern languages to music and fine arts. Even though at present most of the teaching is done in a traditionally-based closed room format, the design will allow areas to become suitable for more resource-based learning if required. The adult students will use generic classrooms and some specialist areas in the evening. In addition, the theatre (located in the adjacent existing building) will be used for public performances.

The architects are van Heyningen and Haward. Planning permission has been secured and construction will commence in February 2002.

#### *Professional development and skills centre*

An early 1960s building, built as a secondary school and more recently used by City University, will be refurbished to provide the specialist laboratories and workshops needed for optics courses and generic accommodation for other professional development courses (including IT and business, together with English for Speakers of Other Languages and basic skills for local people).

The architects are Gollifer Associates.

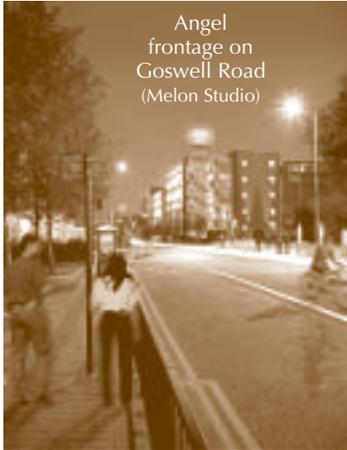
5. Department of Education and Science (1983), Design Note 33, “Area Guidelines for Sixth Form, Tertiary and NAFE Colleges”, London.

6. Department for Education (1994), Design Note 50, “Accommodation for Changes in Further Education”, London.





Angel  
ground floor interior  
(Melon Studio)



Angel  
frontage on  
Goswell Road  
(Melon Studio)

some drop-in IT facilities; it will also house a serving and eating area to be used occasionally by the catering project.

The departments using heavy equipment will be on the ground floor, whereas for privacy's sake the health and beauty accommodation will be in a self-contained suite of existing large rooms on upper floors. The rooms needing air-conditioning (mainly IT) will be in the new, sealed areas fronting onto Blackstock Road, a busy shopping street.

The design incorporates a large area (10% of total college space excluding the library) for Resource Based Learning Centres. An additional 500 m<sup>2</sup> will be funded and used by the London Borough of Islington (LBI) library service; the College and the LBI will share some resources and it is hoped that the public library users will be attracted into the College.



Finsbury Park frontage on  
Blackstock Road  
(Melon Studio)

**Finsbury Park** (Gross internal area: 6 900 m<sup>2</sup>)

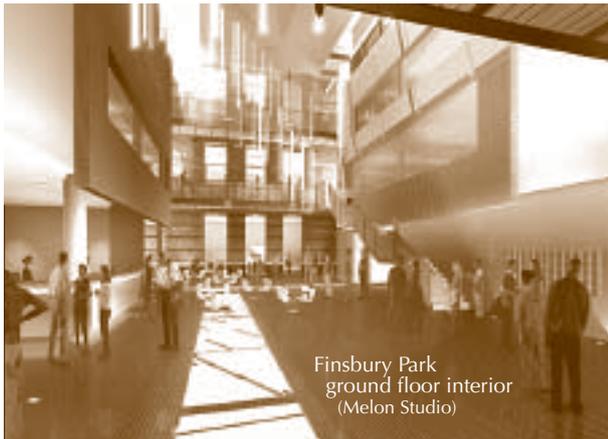
*Lifelong learning centre*

This site will be the first new major adult education facility to be built in North London for a generation. It will offer a full curriculum range including information technology, courses in basic skills and English (for asylum seekers among others), together with health and beauty therapy, ceramics and furniture craft. The site will also house the "catering project". This is a part-time course designed for adults who need basic living skills; small groups come in for two or three days a week, shop, prepare food and serve it to the other users of the site.

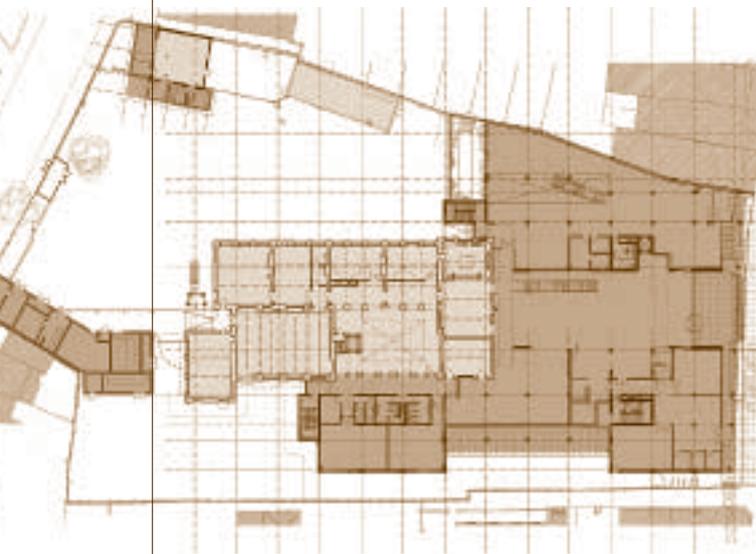
The one Victorian school remaining to the College is on this site and the new planning preserves it, partly hollowing out the building and wrapping it around with new build. The resulting atrium will house a cafeteria, a cyber-café and



Finsbury Park section (Wilkinson Eyre Architects)



Finsbury Park  
ground floor interior  
(Melon Studio)



Finsbury Park ground floor plan (Wilkinson Eyre Architects)

The architects are Wilkinson Eyre. Planning permission was granted in September 2001 and construction is due to commence in 2002.

### **Holloway campus** (Gross internal area: 16 200 m<sup>2</sup>)

#### *Centre of Vocational Excellence*

An existing three storey 1960s building will be refurbished, and virtually all the vocational courses for 16- to 19-year-olds will be located there, to provide a vocational sixth form centre. The increase in numbers and the need for upgraded facilities for performing arts in particular will give rise to around 2 700 m<sup>2</sup> of new build, to be distributed around the site and grafted onto the existing building. The site has room for future expansion.

The project is at feasibility study stage and the architects are Wilkinson Eyre.

### **All sites**

On every site the design pays particular attention to the social and support needs of staff and students: there is a crèche at Holloway and Finsbury Park; staff workrooms are limited to eight to ten users; college social spaces range from noisy to quiet and reflect the age and ethos of different users; security arrangements are discreet. Having commissioned “landmark” buildings from architects with very different styles, the College is consulting on how to present a corporate image using colour as an important indicator, so that passers-by know what institution they are looking at.

#### **Lessons and conclusions**

- Understand that theory (guidelines, space norms, targets, etc.) is not enough. Theory provides a useful starting point but has to be tempered by practicalities and pragmatism.
- Recognise that the budget needs to cover much more than construction costs; allow at least another 40% for fees, fit out, removals, statutory and advisors’ fees and contingency.
- Build the team you need, gradually if necessary.
- Keep everyone in the loop.
- Identify all your risks; be open about them and plan for the worst.
- Beware of overestimating the space required. Real utilisation is always lower than you think it will be.

Web sites:

City and Islington College, [www.candi.ac.uk](http://www.candi.ac.uk)

Learning and Skills Council, [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

Department for Education and Skills, [www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolbuildings](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolbuildings)

*This article was contributed by Grace Kenny, who welcomes your questions and ideas.*

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