



University of Sunderland

Sciences Complex

Occupancy Evaluation

Headline Report of Phase 2 Staff Interviews



University of Sunderland

This report presents the headline findings from the interviews that were conducted with staff in the Faculty of Applied Sciences in June 2011 as part of the post-occupancy evaluation of the Sciences Complex refurbishment. A summary of the key findings is given below.

Overview of findings

The interviewees expressed very positive views about the redevelopment overall. It is widely considered to provide a pleasant working and learning environment, and to have noticeably increased communication and cohesion within the Faculty.

The new environment and the updated facilities provided are held to have had a significant and very positive effect on the external image of the Faculty. In addition to raising the profile of the Faculty, this is also considered to aid the securing of research funding and opportunities to work with external organisations.

The connectedness and visibility that is afforded by the new layout, the increased provision of social space and the extensive use of glass are held to have fostered impromptu and informal interaction. This has, in turn, helped to support increased cross-team and cross-department working, as well as helping to enhance team identity and the sense of community within the Faculty. For occupants of the Academic Hub there is, however, some tension between the desire for increased communication with staff and students, and the need to carry out solo, concentrated tasks. Several interviewees complained that it is difficult to concentrate at their desks, primarily due to auditory and visual distraction, and some report increased home-working and off-site working in an attempt to find somewhere to concentrate.

Although only a minority of interviewees use the new teaching and research laboratories, those who do so expressed a high level of satisfaction with the facilities. However, some interviewees complained that for some of their teaching activities, the allocation of teaching rooms is not always appropriate for the particular requirements of their session and that it is, for example, difficult to conduct a lecture-style session in the Problem Based Learning Suite. There was also criticism that some of the teaching spaces are not equipped with the necessary AV and IT equipment.

The new entrance and layout is held to be working well, although there was some criticism that there was little or no communication alerting users to the change of entrance. The external environment surrounding the complex was not a concern for most interviewees, however some expressed dissatisfaction with the landscaping and design of the concourse.

Introduction

This headline report presents the summary findings from a series of user interviews that were conducted with staff in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University in Sunderland, as part of the post-occupancy evaluation of the initial phase of the Sciences Complex refurbishment. This forms part of a wider program of pre and post-occupancy data collection that has been undertaken on behalf of Iain Garfield, Head of Estates at the university. The data collection for the pre-occupancy evaluation was conducted in September 2010. This comprised an on-line occupant-satisfaction questionnaire survey, supplemented with a series of semi-structured occupant interviews. The post-occupancy data collection will include, in addition to staff interviews, the collection of student and senior management opinion about the refurbished environment, and an on-line occupant satisfaction questionnaire survey.

This report is intended to provide a brief snapshot of user opinion about the work environment in the Faculty of Applied Sciences in Summer 2011. This qualitative component of the data collection seeks to understand users' opinions, and to provide context to the quantitative user-satisfaction data provided by the questionnaire survey, rather than to measure staff satisfaction. We refrain from detailed analysis and interpretation of the staff interview data until completion of the post-occupancy data collection. Similarly, we make no attempt in this report to draw comparison with the pre-occupancy interview data.

We highlight that during the period preceding the collection of this post-occupancy data, the Faculty has undergone a number of organisational changes, including changes to the departmental management, and to the teaching programme that the Faculty delivers. One of the characteristics of real world research is that it is difficult to identify the many factors that may have contributed to a perceived change, and the extent to which they have done so. Some of the changes that interviewees attribute to the change in their physical work environment may to some extent reflect, or have been facilitated by, the organisational changes that have also been undertaken within the Faculty, and vice versa.

Method

The user-interviews sought to provide an insight into how staff within the Faculty of Applied Sciences use their work environment, and the impact the refurbishment has on their work practices, with particular focuses on both communication and collaboration with colleagues, and on interaction with students. The interviews employed participatory mapping, which is a rapid assessment technique that originates from ethnographic research.

The interview sample comprised 10 members of staff from the Faculty of Applied Sciences, all except one of whom had participated in the pre-occupancy interviews. Stratified sampling had been employed for the initial sampling, with team leaders being asked to put forward the names of staff from their team to be invited for interview.

The interviews were conducted in June 2011. Participants were interviewed individually, in a meeting room on campus. Each interview took between 30 minutes and an hour. Data was captured through note-taking and audio-recording. The aims of the evaluation and the format of the interview were briefly explained to the participants, who were given opportunity to withdraw from the interview at any point.

The interviewee was asked to sketch a diagram or map of the environment under consideration, and to mark on it places that are significant to them and their working day. This served as the basis for a structured conversation, with the interviewer asking for explanations of issues/elements of interest to the research aims.

The achieved sample included team leaders and more junior staff, and comprised two members from each of the following teams: Pharmacy, Health, CPS; and one member from the Admin, Technical, Biosciences and Environment teams.

The audio recordings and notes from the interviews were content analysed and cross-checked by two researchers.

Findings

The key issues to emerge from the interviews are summarised below.

Communication and cohesion

All of the interviewees held that communication, team-working and knowledge flow within the Faculty has improved over the past year. Whilst it was acknowledged that organisational changes at Faculty and Departmental level have been a key factor in this, the refurbished environment was also considered to have played a significant role in facilitating these changes.

The consolidation of work teams' office space, such that teams are now located in proximal areas of the complex, and the increased provision of shared facilities was held to have fostered increased face-to-face interaction in both the new and the old parts of the complex. This has had a positive impact on team identity and sense of community.

Several interviewees held that the new work environment has helped to "break down barriers" to interaction and collaboration, and that they now know far more people in the Faculty. Increased contact with members of other work teams was also perceived to have helped to reduce 'silo thinking'. Some held that by making it easier to find out about others' skills sets and research interests, the new environment has facilitated both inter-disciplinary collaboration and cross-departmental delivery of taught courses.

The openness of the Academic Hub office environment was widely considered to have increased impromptu interaction. The visual connection between the offices and the circulation and social space that is afforded by the glass walls was identified as having a significant impact on impromptu visits from colleagues and from students. Whereas the solid doors of the old cellular accommodation were considered to be a barrier to communication (primarily because it was difficult to know if people were in or if they were engaged in a meeting), some interviewees explained that they often drop in on colleagues in the glass-fronted offices if they walk past and see them at their desk, particularly if they needed to speak to them anyway. One interviewee expressed concern that students tend to loiter outside staff offices “waiting to be seen”, rather than knocking on the door – suggesting that barriers to staff-student interaction remain.

Positives

The complex is now more conducive to forging relationships both within departments and the wider Faculty.

Co-location has fostered an increased sense of team identity and cohesion.

Informal and impromptu interaction has increased, and as a result reliance on email has declined.

Improved communication between work teams has facilitated interdisciplinary working.

Increased visibility of offices in the Academic Hub has reduced barriers to communication between staff and between staff and students.

Negatives

Some students may still be reluctant to knock on staff office doors.

“I feel less isolated. I feel much more part of the team”

“I have more conversations with colleagues now than I ever would have had before”

“I think the exceptionally good part of it is that it's broken down lots of barriers between people who work together, who weren't really aware of other people's capacities and disciplines – I think that's been hugely helpful”

Productivity

Whilst almost all of the interviewees based in the Academic Hub held that new offices have greatly enhanced communication both between staff and between staff and students (the latter being considered to have enhanced the student experience, in turn), many felt that their individual productivity had dropped as a result of the move. One academic estimated that she was between 30 and 40% less efficient in her new office accommodation.

Several interviewees reported that the change between their old cellular office accommodation and the more open, Academic Hub office environment has led to changes in the way in which occupants are choosing to work. The glass-fronted offices are associated with increased visual distraction, especially for those occupants whose desks face the circulation space, and increased disruption caused by the prevalence of impromptu visitors to the office. For those working in shared offices, the distraction is increased by the activity of their co-occupants and their visitors. Whilst some interviewees held that this is not a significant problem, a number of others report that they now opt to conduct concentrated work away from their desks – in labs, teaching rooms, other buildings on campus, and often now at home. The IT provision was considered to impair relocation to other environments – for example, some interviewees pointed out that unless staff

have a laptop, they cannot use the small meeting rooms for concentrated, computer-based work. One interviewee reported that they now carry out all of their concentrated work at home, coming in only when necessary to teach and have meetings. Other interviewees reported coming in early, leaving late, or both, in a bid to get some concentrated work done while the office is quiet.

As more people are working away from their desks, this has had the effect of lowering the average occupancy of the shared offices. Whilst some interviewees suggested that this does make it easier to concentrate in the office, they also pointed out that they are left with an 'admin burden' for those people who are working elsewhere – dealing with enquiries from students on their colleagues' behalf, and answering their telephones, for example – and that this had a negative impact on their own productivity. It was also pointed out that, whether as a result of geography, timetabling, or space, not everyone has the option to work at home in order to avoid distraction. There was suggestion by some that the poor support for concentrated working had increased their work-related stress.

There was some variation in the reported level of background noise within the shared offices and the informal protocols that had emerged regarding acceptable noise-levels. Whilst some interviewees reported that they and their co-occupants try to keep noise as low as possible, holding discussions only when necessary, others reported high levels of interaction between the occupants of their office, although in these cases it was held that the noise would be regulated sufficiently if somebody in the office had concentrated work to do. The retreat spaces provided in the larger shared offices are reported to be working well, with occupants primarily using them for impromptu discussions with visitors and for mobile telephone calls.

One element that was reported as being particularly difficult to manage in the shared offices was telephone calls. Some interviewees reported that the background noise in their office necessitates that they speak loudly on the telephone in order to be heard, and that this can inhibit the making of calls. In quieter offices, some interviewees were less inclined to initiate telephone calls, for fear of disturbing others.

As some teams that were previously located in geographically disparate office environments have been brought together in the Sciences Complex, some interviewees reported spending less time on long journeys between buildings to meet with other team members, and so had seen some productivity benefits as a result of the move.

Positives

Occupants express satisfaction with their fellow occupants' regulation of noise within the immediate office (albeit that this is somewhat at odds with their general perception of their productivity at their desk)

Co-location of teams is regarded as being very beneficial

Staff now spend less time walking between different buildings to see colleagues

Retreat facilities are being used to help limit noise in the offices, by taking visitors into them for meetings, or holding telephone conversations in there

Negatives

It can be difficult to conduct concentrated work in the Academic Hub shared offices

Glass panels in the Academic Hub result in visual distraction

Visibility is commonly misconstrued as availability – staff have no way of signalling that they are busy

Occupants of shared offices in the Academic Hub are frequently interrupted by people (staff and students) visiting or looking for their co-occupants

People report still being interrupted by colleagues even if they have relocated to meeting rooms in order to do concentrated work

Whilst some people can choose to work from home to avoid the distractions, this increases the load for those who are left in the office

Lack of provision of IT in smaller meeting rooms make it difficult to relocate to them to carry out concentrated work

Some feel that the lack of support for concentrated working has increased stress related to their job

Telephone calls cause issues in shared offices, both in terms of causing auditory distraction to others, and being disrupted by background noise

"To see us is not a problem, but to interrupt us is a big problem"

"We'd all love a bit more quiet time.. but if you've got an open door policy anyway, there's always going to be distractions"

"I think it would be a physical impossibility to for me to do what we would term research and scholarly activity in there, and I think that unless you physically take your self away from your desk, then you would be interrupted with other things, no two ways about it"

"you might think that if there's six people there, the chatting might be difficult to manage, and it isn't really. You can get on with your work in that environment"

Shared spaces: Meeting rooms, breakout spaces, kitchen and toilet facilities

All interviewees expressed satisfaction with the provision and availability of meeting rooms and social space within the complex. In addition to being the locus of many impromptu interactions, the social space on the first floor of Dale building is used not only by staff based within the Academic Hub but also those based elsewhere for holding team meetings and lunchtime catch-ups, informal meetings with colleagues, and discussions with students. Some staff report having conducted tutorials in the social space, with comment that the knowledge that others are within earshot can boost the performance of both the staff member and the students, by encouraging them to "raise their game" and adding a "buzziness".

Several interviewees also report using the social space on the ground floor of Dale for informal meetings with colleagues, external contacts and students. Whereas staff in the Faculty had previously reported using external facilities such as Greggs and the library for meetings, this has diminished, with staff using the meeting facilities provided within the refurbished complex. The boardroom-style meeting room and 119 are considered to be excellent venues for large or formal meetings. There was some ambiguity about how the shared spaces should be used, with some interviewees expressing doubt about the entitlement of Faculty staff who are not based in Dale to use the communal areas in the Academic Hub environments, and whether the meeting rooms could be used without booking.

There was some complaint about the provision of toilet facilities within the Academic Hub environment, with suggestion that the number of cubicles was insufficient, and that the separation between the social space and the toilets is inadequate. The kitchen facilities were also criticised by some, with the provision of a single fridge being considered insufficient - although they

emphasised that it was not an important issue. It was also reported that there is a lack of clarity about whether staff members who are not based in the Academic Hubs were entitled to use the kitchen facilities in Dale.

Positives

Ample provision/availability of meeting room facilities (both small and large)

Breakout space and circulation space in Dale fosters impromptu interaction

Breakout spaces in Dale (ground and first floor) used for a wide range of purposes: impromptu meetings, informal meetings with colleagues, some tutorials, team lunches etc.

Breakout areas are particularly good for short interactions

Less time spent holding meetings away from the Faculty, e.g. using Greggs

Some staff who aren't based in Dale use the social areas and the meeting facilities provided in the Academic Hub environment

Negatives

Ambiguity about whether the meeting rooms can be used on an ad hoc basis

Lack of clarity about whether the occupants of Dale 'own' the space – whether other Faculty members are intended to use the social spaces and other facilities

No pens provided proximal to the whiteboard in the social area in the Academic Hubs

Ambiguity about who is entitled to use the whiteboard in the Academic Hub

Meagre toilet provision in the Academic Hub environment

Poor separation between toilets and social space in the Academic Hub

Teaching space

Overall, interviewees expressed positive opinions about the quality of the refurbished teaching spaces. However, whilst some were very satisfied with the suitability of the new facilities for their teaching requirements, others expressed concern about the availability of teaching spaces for the particular style of teaching they needed to deliver. Factors that were identified as having a bearing on a room's suitability to support an individual's teaching needs included the type and quantity of furniture, and the IT provision. Some interviewees, for example, were very enthusiastic about the Problem Based Learning suite and felt that it suited their needs very well. Others had been timetabled into there for sessions for which they felt a traditional lecture theatre would have been more appropriate, and had found it difficult to reconfigure the furniture in a way that suited their teaching style. Similarly, ground-floor seminar rooms that are furnished with 'tablet' writing chairs rather than tables were specified as being unsuitable for carrying out learning sessions that require students to work collaboratively. There was also criticism that the AV equipment in the new teaching rooms does not include whiteboards or smartboards, and as a result staff are having to rely on flip charts for illustrating concepts 'on the fly'. There was a reported mismatch between IT provision and need in many teaching spaces, with some rooms having too few computers and other areas having too many (which can impede group working). There were also issues reported concerning the lack of specific software on the computers linked to the AV equipment in some teaching environments.

There was complaint that it is difficult to book seminar rooms in the Sciences Complex. Some

interviewees held that this was as a result of the rooms having been block-booked by courses from other faculties, and that these rooms often go unused. It was suggested that programmes from the Faculty should have priority when booking the seminar facilities within the Complex.

Positives

Overall, interviewees report satisfaction with the teaching facilities.

Equipment in teaching spaces has been updated.

The perception that the university has made a big investment in teaching facilities is considered to have boosted morale.

Despite initial concerns, the glass fronted teaching spaces were not seen as a problem - "you're as aware as you want to be of the people outside"

Negatives

Timetabling is an issue. Sessions are being allocated rooms that are not suited to their particular teaching and learning requirements. For example, the Problem Based Learning suite (PBL) is being allocated for sessions that aren't problem-based learning.

Poor availability of the seminar rooms on the ground-floor of Dale, with block-booking by non-faculty courses.

PBL suite "gets messed up a lot" – it's not clear whether this is people not adhering to a policy of leaving the room in a certain way, or whether people are falsely expecting the room to be the way they want it, and just would prefer not to have to move the furniture around themselves.

Some criticised the seminar rooms as being designed to support teaching, not learning, with the furniture specifically cited as not being conducive to learning. Others however expressed considerable satisfaction.

There is a reported mismatch between computer provision and need in many teaching spaces.

The AV facilities in the teaching spaces is not always appropriate, there was criticism of the provision of projectors rather than smartboards in the seminar rooms – users reported that due to the absence of a whiteboard, they had been using flipchart paper stuck onto the glass windows (and that the flipchart stationery itself was often hard to come by).

People reported difficulty in finding out who is responsible for technical support for some of the teaching facilities.

"If this is supposedly the science complex's main building, the programmes that are on here should get first choice"

"I love the new seminar rooms"

Labs

The laboratory facilities within the Faculty are used by only a minority of interviewees within the sample, with some reporting that they rarely even walk past the labs. The laboratory users expressed a very high level of satisfaction with both the new labs, with some of the success being attributed to the stakeholder engagement that was undertaken in their specification. Those interviewees who used the new research labs expressed a high level of satisfaction with their functionality. There was also satisfaction with the functionality of the teaching laboratory, although there was suggestion that this has yet to be "tested in earnest (with two separate groups using the facility)"

There was a widespread view that the new laboratory facilities have had a significant impact on the external perception of the Faculty, both in terms of generating interest on open days and events, and in helping to build their image as a leading research organisation. This is, in turn, considered to have helped to secure research funding, and boosted opportunities to work with external organisations. The only negative issue that was raised regarding the laboratories is that the timetable for the teaching labs was delayed. This was partly attributed to difficulty in finalising requests from outside of the Faculty to use the labs.

Positives

New Faculty teaching and research laboratories are considered to be well equipped

Users report that the research labs function very well

Satisfaction with the teaching lab is high – although its functionality has not been fully tested yet

Lab facilities have boosted interest in the research work that is being undertaken in the Faculty

There has been increased interest from external organisations wanting to use the research facilities

Any snagging issues with the laboratories have been dealt with

Negatives

The issuing of the timetable for the teaching labs was delayed.

"The labs are superb"

"The new labs have a 'wow factor' when you're showing people around"

"They are absolutely fantastic"

"The externals that came were in awe of the labs, and the analysis that was possible"

Movement within the complex

Interviewees generally felt it was easier to get around the complex itself since the refurbishment and the change of entrance to the complex, although some still found it hard to navigate. A number of interviewees reported a feeling of connectivity with the rest of the campus, which they held was previously missing, with easier access to the library, CitySpace, and the Gateway building. Some also reported that, as a result of the geographic consolidation of work teams, coupled with improved provision of meeting, teaching and breakout spaces within the complex, they now spend less time getting from their office to colleagues, meetings, and teaching appointments.

The new reception desk was held to be an asset, particularly when receiving external visitors to the Faculty.

Issues were raised regarding the status of the swipe-card entry door into the Fleming building, with it remaining unclear amongst interviewees whether it is blocked off, being used as an unofficial egress by some, or actually in unofficial use. Another criticism was that, at present, deliveries have to go through the main entrance to the complex. This is anticipated to be a short-term issue, which will be resolved once the Pasteur Yard redevelopment is completed.

Positives

The proximity of the offices and teaching spaces, particularly for staff in Dale

Less time spent in transit – partly due to co-location of teams, as well as increased facility provision within the complex

Complex now feels better connected with other areas of the campus, particularly the library, CitySpace and Gateway building

Most interviewees thought that circulation around the complex was easier

The reception desk was praised by some, particularly for when meeting external visitors

Negatives

The complex is still considered difficult to navigate by some

Poor communication regarding changes to the swipe-card entrance to the Fleming building

The access to Fleming building is longer than previously, due to the swipe-card access being closed (although this may not be the case – see previous comments above)

"I get myself lost, and I get the students lost. It is a warren".

"Everywhere feels that little bit more accessible"

IT

Several interviewees were highly critical of the IT provision within the department, and the negative impact that this has on the usability of the space. It was felt that, without either laptops or the adoption of roaming profiles with networked software and storage, it was very difficult for staff members to relocate from their desk to carry out concentrated computer work. In some cases, interviewees reported that they had to rely on external software and storage services because these facilities are not currently provided in-house. The absence of roaming profiles, and the inconsistency in software provision across campus has resulted in some staff being unable to use teaching spaces that they have been allocated, because they cannot access the software that they require.

Whilst telephone calls were specifically identified as a cause of distraction within shared offices, interviewees seemed unaware of the capabilities for transferring incoming calls into the smaller and shared meeting rooms. Similarly, although telephones ringing on unoccupied desks were identified as highly distracting, interviewees reported that there is no widespread practice of leaving their phones on silent, or diverting to voicemail when people were away from their desks.

The recent provision of computers in the smaller meeting rooms within the Academic Hub (which was held by some to be a temporary fixture to accommodate exams, although others considered it to be a permanent addition) was seen as positively enhancing their usability.

Positives

Provision of computers in the small meeting rooms enhances their usability

Negatives

Poor access to software and data is a barrier to working away from the desk

A perceived lack of suitable shared network storage means that staff are adopting disparate third party solutions.

Lack of software on computers within some teaching spaces limits their suitability for some lectures

Inability (or lack of training) to park and transfer calls

Lack of voicemail or other method of limiting the distraction caused by telephones ringing on empty desks

External space

The redevelopment of the external environment at the front of the Sciences Complex was not raised as an issue by many interviewees. However, some held that the concourse area is unattractive due to too much concrete, insufficient foliage, and the residual “eyesores” – namely the portacabins and temporary car parking. There was also some suggestion that, particularly given the climate of the North East, it is a poor use of the space.

Positives

Not raised as an issue by most interviewees

Negatives

External space considered to be poorly landscaped by some

Concourse area is unattractive, with residual ‘eyesores’

Design of the concourse area may be unsuitable for typical weather conditions in Sunderland

“It’s a vast, open expanse”

“it’s just a bit of a moonscape really”

External image

There was a widespread view that the refurbishment of the Sciences Complex has had a significant and very positive impact on the Faculty’s external image. A number of interviewees held that the refurbishment project has been particularly effective in highlighting the Faculties’ research capabilities, which is, in turn, important for attracting research funding and has already helped to attract opportunities to work with external organisations. The positive impression that the new environment creates on open days and ‘walk arounds’ was considered to have had a positive impact on student recruitment, and to have generated significant regional interest in the Faculty.

Some interviewees reported that, having previously avoided showing external contacts their work environment, they were now happy to hold important meetings at the Faculty.

Whilst some drew attention to the contrast between the refurbished parts of the complex and the older environment, and some reported trying to prevent visitors from seeing the non-refurbished parts of the building, others held that the disparity was barely noticeable. The 'tidying up' of some of the non-refurbished areas (such as the circulation space in Fleming) was widely considered to be beneficial, although there was some criticism that some of the office environments are still in a very poor state. Further, there was suggestion that the tidying up had been done in preparation for Robert Winston's visit to the Faculty, and that it could (and therefore should) have been carried out prior to this, for the benefit of the students.

Positives

Work environment is a source of pride

The Sciences Complex creates a positive impression on open days and 'walk arounds'

New facilities have already had a positive impact on attracting funding and external interest in research work

External visitors have expressed very favourable comments

Some of the older areas have been tidied up

Negatives

Some of the older office environments are still in need of maintenance work – e.g., still some carpets with gaffer tape

The timing of the redecoration and 'tidy up' of some of the older areas of the complex was negatively interpreted by some

"In terms of this building, it's a pleasure to bring people into"

Project delivery process

Some elements of the project delivery process were highlighted by interviewees as being particularly successful – in particular the stakeholder engagement in the specification of the laboratory facilities. However, there were also a number of criticisms, largely about poor communication with users during the move and initial occupancy period. A particular issue was the lack of communication to staff and students in the Faculty regarding the closure of the Fleming entrance to the complex, with the effect being that on the first day it was closed, groups of students were clustered outside, trying to gain entrance to the building.

Whilst some commended the way in which snagging issues were handled by the Facilities team, there was also complaint that feedback about reported issues (e.g., about the projected timescales for dealing with them) was poor.

Positives

Stakeholder engagement regarding the design and specification of the laboratory facilities

Single contact in the Facilities team for reporting snagging issues was viewed positively

Negatives

Poor communication regarding the closure of the Fleming entrance

The door numbers were changed shortly after occupancy, which caused confusion

Poor timing of the move – fresher's week

Some felt that the communication regarding progress with snagging issues was poor

Overall opinions

The overwhelming majority of interviewees expressed very positive opinions about their current work environment overall. It was widely considered to support occupants very well in their work activities, with the exception of support individual, concentrated working in the Academic Hub offices.

Satisfaction with their office environment was not limited to staff members who were based in the Academic Hub offices – the new shared facilities within the complex and the co-location of teams were identified as having improved the work environment throughout the Sciences complex. There was little indication that interviewees who were based in the non-refurbished parts of the complex were aggrieved at the disparity between the old and the new environments.

Overall, the changes to the laboratory, learning and office facilities that have been carried out as part of this phase of the refurbishment project were viewed very favourably. Dale building (and the refurbished facilities elsewhere within the complex) was reported to be a source of pride by a number of interviewees. Furthermore, the refurbishment was widely considered to have made the Sciences Complex a more pleasant environment in which to work and learn.

"It's just fab – really good. And we love it"

"It's modernized the building and brought everybody together, and there's a buzz about the place"

"For me personally, it's been a huge, huge improvement, and it would certainly encourage me to keep working here"

Concluding remarks

Since this report presents the findings from only one component of the post-occupancy evaluation of the Sciences Complex, we refrain from interpreting and drawing conclusions from the results until the completion of the program of data collection.

However, these results do suggest that from a staff user-perspective, the refurbished environment is performing well overall. For the most part, the focus of conversation about the work environment has now shifted away from the physical setting to other factors – notably IT provision on campus. Some of the negative issues that have been raised, such as the poor support for concentrated working in the Academic Hubs and the poor allocation of teaching facilities appropriate to the requirements of particular sessions, may be alleviated through changes to the way that the space is managed (e.g., in the case of the former, through the establishment of office etiquettes or protocols for quiet working). The key issues that have been highlighted in this report will be further explored through the post-occupancy user questionnaire survey, which will be conducted in July 2011.