

# Alan Gilbert Learning Commons

Complete

Area

Client

Architect

2012

UK England

University of  
Manchester

Sheppard Robson

The Alan Gilbert Learning Commons at the University of Manchester is a state-of-the-art study and learning centre. With 400 fixed workstations and 30 group study rooms, the space provides a stimulating and comfortable environment for study.

The build was a redevelopment of a 1960s refectory building where the concrete frame structure was retained. The final design was 40 per cent refurbishment and 60 per cent new build.

Covering a total of 5,500 sq metres, the building is structured around a central atrium. As well as housing a café in the foyer, this central area provides students with a social meeting space and adds further flexible study zones.



## Services provided

Sandy Brown was appointed by Sheppard Robson on behalf of the University of Manchester to provide acoustic advice on the design of the proposed Learning Commons. This advice included meeting standards, regulations and design guidance. Key areas for consideration included:

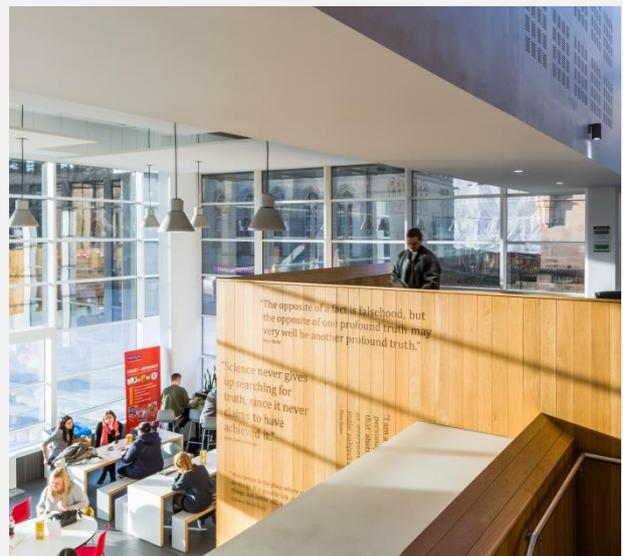
- environmental noise ingress from an adjacent busy road via natural ventilation openings
- acoustic finishes to control transfer of sound through interconnected spaces
- internal sound insulation to provide speech privacy
- reverberation time within learning spaces
- control of noise from mechanical plant.

## Special acoustic features

The design of the Learning Commons emphasises the openness of the large central atrium. A 3D model of the open plan learning spaces was therefore constructed to assess options for acoustic screening and locations of sound absorbent treatment. Treatments adopted included sound absorbent ceilings, solid glazed balustrades for screening and sound absorbent furniture solutions incorporating screening elements.

For the group learning spaces, full-height partitions were built from slab to slab, with no continuous raised access floors or suspended ceilings extending across them to provide high standards of sound insulation.

Due to its location on one of Manchester's main roads into the city, façade sound insulation was another important aspect of the acoustic design, particularly in relation to the desired use of natural ventilation. Environmental noise was measured recordings were made of ambient noise at the site. These were used to provide audio demonstrations to enable the client and design team to hear expected conditions within the building with different ventilation and facade options.



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