

HEDQF Annual Conference 2019:
Designing for Wellbeing in Higher Education
17/18 June 2019



Pre-conference Reception

Delegates gathered in the Bayes Centre, University of Edinburgh for the pre-conference drinks reception which included talks from: Gary Jebb, Director of Estates at the University of Edinburgh on the masterplan and philosophy behind the Informatics Forum and Bayes Centre; Rab Bennetts, Founding Director, Bennetts Associates, on the design of the buildings and Karen Pickering, Chair of the Board of Directors, Page\Park, on the design philosophy for the new Student Centre at the University.

Noting that the thinking behind the Bayes Centre (funded by the Edinburgh and Scotland City Deal and completed last August) was to put industry into the same space as academics to ensure that they 'breathed the same air', Mr Jebb got proceedings underway by observing that, over the last five years, Edinburgh University, the second largest university in the UK, has developed a strategic plan to oversee investment across its five campuses.

The university has committed to make strategic investment in its estate over the next decade and, having already invested around £1.5bn over the last decade, will invest a further £200m next year; a figure that will increase over the subsequent two years. To manage that considerable investment, the university has developed a close working relationship with the city's local authority.

The university embarked on a project of design diversification five years ago and today sees multiple benefits from the different varieties of building designs produced by an ever-widening number of architectural firms.

Commenting on the design of the Informatics and Bayes buildings, Mr Bennetts, who himself studied architecture in Edinburgh, and said he is 'deeply embedded in its culture', noted that it is constructed on what was the largest derelict site in the UNESCO World Heritage site. When he first became involved, the site was a windswept gravel car park so that he was effectively given a blank canvas for the masterplan.

That masterplan for the Informatics and Bayes Buildings include a tree-lined courtyard affording a genuine public route with the buildings reflecting the townscape and the history behind the site. There was much collaboration in the design process and the building itself is designed to encourage collaboration.

Having been closely involved in the design of a new student services building for nearby 1 George Square, Ms Pickering highlighted five themes that her experience has suggested students seek from university buildings:

1. Green spaces

2. Heritage – there is a misconception that students covet shiny new buildings. Edinburgh is renowned for its heritage and students appreciate this as much as appropriate contemporary design – something she speculated could be attributed to the ‘Harry Potter’ effect.
3. Studying is the new drinking. A variety of different areas for study are more important than student bars.
4. Self-esteem. Students have great pride in their university and are obsessed with selfies, leading Ms Pickering to suggest that it is the role of architects to create attractive backdrops to those selfies which are sent all over the world.
5. Wellbeing – today’s students study, talk and share pressure. This demand for students to talk and share pressures has led to a doubling of the existing space for the counselling department in the Wellbeing Centre for Edinburgh University she is presently designing.

Main Conference: Informatics Forum, University of Edinburgh

Welcoming over 170 delegates to the main day of HEDQF’s fifth annual conference at Edinburgh, Julian Robinson, Chairman of HEDQF and Director of Estates, London School of Economics, stressed that the theme of the conference, Designing for Wellbeing, is the current big issue for the university sector.

A unique partnership between university clients and building environment consultants and contractors committed to improving the quality of design in the HE sector, Mr Robinson explained that HEDQF is a charity run by volunteers united by a passion for excellent design and a firm conviction that great design leads to better outcomes, whether related to the learning environment, the creation of inspirational and memorable university experiences or better mental health and wellbeing.

The first keynote talk *‘Why wellness is important, and the role of the built environment, drawing on the Health Education and Higher Education sectors’* was given by Jim MacDonald, Chief Executive of Architecture and Design Scotland.

A publicly-funded body whose job it is to champion good design in the built environment, ADS has evolved since its inception in 2005 to consider how its work can contribute to wider government priorities in Scotland, from sustainable income and growth to include considerations of wellbeing and kindness.

Mr MacDonald said that ADS had set itself three inter-related targets:

- to get more people involved;
- to create better buildings and places; and
- to ensure that people understand what the value of design is.

Noting that wellbeing and kindness have become integral to the Scottish public discourse, he said that the revision several years ago of Scotland’s national performance framework and set of national outcomes as a means to frame public policy was made specifically to include the ideal of overall wellbeing as a purpose of government.

This was born out of a recognition that working towards shared outcomes across the public sector and beyond was galvanising and energising and its success demanded the involvement of the widest possible number of people.

Referencing his own university career in Edinburgh, Mr MacDonald noted that while the benefits of well-designed environments has long been understood, what is new is the grasping and embracing of that recognition by policymakers and the seeking to join up the different arms of government in order to deliver those benefits through investment that will help shape the country.

Mr MacDonald proceeded to discuss ADS's 'A Caring Place' research project, which considered how we could make our town centres better for an aging population, though many of the issues and findings could have relevance to student population in the HE sector.

Given the diversity of the population, there was no one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, four components of a town centre that an aging population required were identified:

1. a sense of support;
2. a sense of worth;
3. a sense of place; and
4. a sense of purpose

And 10 principles of A Caring Place were identified:

1. Friendly and accessible transport systems
2. Accessible quality external environments
3. Digital and physical connectivity
4. Housing choice
5. Design for repurposing and integrating technology
6. Relationships, output mentoring
7. Accessible and diverse amenities and services
8. Empowered carers and care models
9. Preventive and holistic healthcare options
10. Opportunities for meaningful work and activities

The aim was to come up with options and scenarios leading to a spatial brief for that place that reflects the needs of that population, reflects the qualities and assets of the place itself and seeks to present them in a way that the collective who support that population can understand and commit to. Mr MacDonald said that ADS was struck by how much more potential there is when introducing designers to the planning process as early as possible.

Another project related to a new health centre in Eastwood on the south side of Glasgow with a requirement to approach the design differently, given budget and space constraints.

Mr MacDonald concluded by suggesting that the user's voice has to be at the heart of everything that designers do; using design to give that voice some presence within discussions which lead ultimately to the buildings that we create: "it's about users leading and designers facilitating, rather than users looking to designers to tell them what the answers are."

He said that the idea underlying both A Caring Place and Eastwood Health Centre is that good design costs less. If we spend time at the right point in a project, it is much more likely to reduce overall costs than rushing to complete a project then discovering that we'd forgotten something – that means getting involved earlier in the process than we do traditionally and concluded by emphasising that collaboration in the design process must be as wide as possible with all relevant users.

The second keynote talk *'How individuals and organisations can bring about change in the way we live, work and create the built environment'* was given by Marie Dariel, Coach and Consultant for Wellbeing.

Speaking in-depth about mental health and emotional literacy in places, and how to develop a more holistic approach, Ms Dariel, referencing author Peter Zumthor's *'Atmospheres'*, emphasised the importance of first impressions: "I enter a building, I see a room and in a fraction of a second I have a feeling about it. Our emotional sensibility works very quickly."

She explained the seven principles of wellbeing:

1. Social engagement
2. Stimulation
3. Healthy lifestyles
4. Ease
5. Growth
6. Delight
7. Attachment

and spoke of the importance of wabi sabi (the traditional Japanese aesthetical world view centred on the acceptance of transience and imperfection) and of a collaborative network for better wellbeing before giving delegates a brief demonstration of the potential benefits derived from deploying wellbeing techniques first-hand.

The following interactive discussion *'Different perspectives from university and other clients'*, was chaired by Helen Groves, Architect Director, Atkins Global, with presentations from Eleanor Magennis, Senior Project Development Manager, University of Glasgow, John Curry, Capital Projects Manager, SRUC Property and Estates Group, Henry Pelly, Max Fordham and William Poole-Wilson, Will & Partners.

Ms Groves started the discussion by citing wellbeing as a lens through which we view our approach to the HE sector, suggesting it is our responsibility to take that forward for the future of our young people. Emphasising the need to remember that our aim is to create spaces which allow young people to thrive, she noted that it is not about one single solution, but about creating different spaces with different elements and different responses.

Ms Magennis stated the importance of considerations of health and wellbeing to Glasgow University and discussed how technology can help support a more comfortable and safe environment. The aim at Glasgow is for the campus to be welcoming for staff, students and visitors and she emphasised that it is people who are at the heart of wellbeing, but that they need places to support them. While the university has, like Edinburgh, a substantial programme of investment in new

buildings, again heritage is important, focussed on the historic Giles Gilbert Scott building at the heart of the campus.

Mr Curry described the unique challenges of an estate scattered across rural Scotland, describing how high-quality human design is key to wellbeing but that fear of failure and a reluctance to try out new ideas is one of the biggest challenges. He cited the case of Bill Strickland, founder of the Manchester Craftsman Guild in Pittsburgh, whose aim was to introduce arts education to deprived inner city youth and whose key mantra is 'beauty is key'.

Mr Pelly examined the pros and cons of the major certification standards for wellbeing and cited philosopher John Stuart Mill's quote that 'happiness should be approached sideways, like a crab'. Proposing that wellbeing certification does not guarantee satisfaction, he suggested that an alternative to certification could be a framework which looks at the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, mastery and relatedness to others) which all great places intrinsically meet.

Speaking about the recent BCO Wellness Guide, Mr Poole-Wilson emphasised the need for designers to focus on strategy. Suggesting that the huge perceived cost of accounting for wellness is a myth, he advised delegates to focus on what matters: what people truly care about and that will deliver better long-term options.

When the floor was opened to questions, one delegate asked if any of the panellists had encountered scepticism and, if so, how best to handle it. Mr Pelly expressed some scepticism himself about obsession with certification, suggesting that all buildings are on some level a vanity project and perhaps modern architecture has looked scientifically about stripping buildings of these elements which actually are important to making them appreciated.

Mr Curry mentioned that he sought to counter scepticism by showing clients good examples of wellness in buildings and projects while Mr Poole-Wilson's findings suggested that SMEs are better at dealing with wellness than large organisations, which often have significant healthcare issues that are not being addressed. .

The panel discussion was followed by a joint presentation on recent research in wellness and what others are doing by Oliver Milton, Hawkins Brown and Andy Parker, BuroHappold. Mr Milton said that understanding issues of wellness is particularly relevant to owner/occupiers, such as HE institutions, and noted that the topic is not new, citing Vitruvius' quote from c20BC that "*The end is to build well. Well building hath three conditions: firmness, commodity, and delight.*"

The speakers concluded that, while there are certification standards available, each individual project really has to develop its own approach to how it will enhance wellness through a consideration of such factors as occupancy and location in order to work out the best solution to suit the characteristics of the project.

This was followed by a talk from Ian Goodfellow of Penoyre and Prasad referencing the new Kantor Centre of Excellence for the Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families, the new eye care, research and educational facilities for Moorfields Hospital and the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology.

Mr Goodfellow mentioned Edward O Wilson, who helped coin the term 'biophilia' which he defined as *"the inane tendency in human beings to focus on life and life-like process to an extent that's still undervalued in philosophy and religion. Our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hopes rise on its currents."*

He also made reference to medical sociologist Anton Antonovsky's concept of 'Salutogenesis', a medical approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease. Antonovsky emphasised the three factors of coherence of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness and observed that people do not respond in the same way to stress factors, something which Mr Goodfellow suggested designers must bear in mind.

An informative update on HEDQF research and outcomes of the survey results on student views of student life was then presented by Caroline Paradise, HEDQF Research Group Chair and Head of Design Research, Atkins followed by an insight into various proposed research topics on learning environments of the future, the development of a Learning Spaces Toolkit and new research into the topic of 'Designing for Wellbeing'.

The ensuing Student Panel from the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA) presenting recent work with discussion around the theme of *'Design for Wellbeing'* was chaired by Dr. Catharine Ward Thompson, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA), and Director of the OPENspace research centre with contributions from Daryl Law, MA Architecture, Oona Gavris and Peter Wheatcroft, March and Song Zhao, MSc Landscape & Wellbeing.

Mr Law's presentation on transforming Scotland's towns: rethinking Scotland's High Street was followed by Ms Zhao's project on landscaping around the Union Canal and Fountainbridge areas of Edinburgh. Oona Gavris and Peter Wheatcroft's joint presentation concerned two very different projects in Épinay-sur-Seine and Noisy-le-Grand; the former concerning the transformation of 530 homes at GrandParc through retro-fitting of green spaces and the latter integrating a mental health recovery within the urban environment with a monastery/sanctuary inspired therapy centre.

The concluding session of the conference on *Designers Perspectives, How can designers help?* was an interactive discussion, chaired by Mike Entwisle, Project Principal, Buro Happold, with presentations focussed on different aspects of design for wellbeing including master planning, sports facilities, residences and art in the built environment.

Jamie Anderson, Senior Sustainability Consultant, BuroHappold, emphasised the need to embrace complexity and proposed that modelling is key while Peter Fisher, Director, Bennetts Associates' presentation emphasised the importance of the historic connections within his Cambridge student services masterplan. Ian Pratt, Director, Scott Brownrigg, focused on the student accommodation environment for student mental health and concluded with a proposal for the creation of a design manifesto for student accommodation. Andy Simons, Director and Co-Founder, KSS, emphasised that sporting facilities on campus benefit student wellbeing and mental health while

Tazie Taysom, Lead Art Consultant, ARTIQ Art Consultancy, stressed that art helps give meaning to life and has proven to be beneficial to mental health.

Following the panel discussion, a delegate asked a question from the floor concerning what action the panel would recommend HE institutions take in order to get a wellbeing 'quick win'. Ms Taysom recommended hiring art works for short periods, perhaps for important events such as Induction or to achieve a changing environment, while Mr Simons suggested extending the availability of introductory sessions to on-campus sporting facilities, which he noted are often swamped at Induction. Mr Pratt suggested that it might be time to consider the introduction of public policies for student accommodation developments.

Noting that an increasing body of evidence indicates that design for the built environment impacts on our mental health and wellbeing, Mr Robinson brought the event to a conclusion by sharing his own personal six 'takeaways' from the conference:

1. What would be the outcome if the concepts of A Caring Place and Kindness were introduced into design briefs?
2. Should architects be challenged to design in the dark – to see things beyond the visual?
3. The importance of providing quiet and secluded spaces free from technology to improve wellbeing.
4. The importance of developing a wellbeing strategy *before* design briefs and setting targets.
5. The importance of wellbeing as part of soft landings.
6. The adoption of Google Design Sprint and modelling conditions for thriving behaviours.

He paid tribute to the breadth of talks and contributions from speakers, giving thanks to the conference hosts, sponsors and delegates and to Ian Caldwell, Trustee of HEDQF, and the Events Group who organised the conference.

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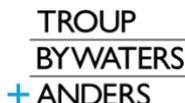
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