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The Saltire Centre a vehicle for change within
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The Saltire Centre a vehicle for change within Glasgow Caledonian University

In this presentation I would like to discuss how the building of the Saltire Centre has acted as a catalyst for cultural change across all the support services in the university.

I think it would be useful to give a little background on the university to set the scene.

Glasgow Caledonian University is a new university created in 1992. The basis of the university was Glasgow College of Technology and Queen's College (a Nursing and Midwifery Teaching College). It has 16,000 students and is a very vocational university and believes in offering opportunities to all especially adult learners returning to education as well as students coming directly from school.

The story begins just over 4 years ago.

The Principal at that time, he retired last year, was keen on creating a campus hub. Although the campus is compact there was no obvious focus to the campus and he wanted to create one. The obvious site was the car park in the middle of the campus. This initially met with opposition not because he wanted to create a campus hub but because he wanted to do it on the car park. The loss of car parking space is the only thing that you can guarantee academic staff will present a united front against. Eventually it was agreed that we would build on the car park.

The Principal also wanted to create a landmark building, which would stand out and become a feature of the campus. He wanted an iconic building that would be distinctive and recognisable.

Academic courses were changing. The feedback from employers, remember we are a very vocationally orientated institution, was that they were looking for more than a degree. In the past, say 20 years or more ago, a degree was the passport to a professional job but only 6% of the population entered higher education at that time. Over the last 20 years there has been a steady push by the UK and Scottish governments to increase the number of people getting qualifications from university and it is now 52% in Scotland. Employers are therefore looking for other factors when selecting staff such as team working, leadership, initiative and so on. All things that you need to do to really learn. You can be told how to be a good team player but you have to do it to really learn it. The curriculum was therefore moving away from lectures to small group seminars, project work and collaborative team assignments. The problem at Glasgow Caledonian was that most of the teaching areas were more than 20 years old and were built with lecture theatres and large class rooms which were not very good for the team and collaborative group work. There was therefore a need not to create more teaching space but to create learning space where this teamwork and social collaborative learning could take place.

The relationship between students and the university is also changing. With more and more people entering higher education the government realised that they had a problem financially. When only 6% of the population went to university the government could cover the cost but with the numbers increasing to 52% it was no longer possible for all the money to come from the government. It was decided that since graduates normally got better paid jobs they should contribute to the cost of their university education. While both the UK and Scottish governments agreed that students had to contribute to the cost of their education at university it was introduced differently in Scotland from the rest of the UK.

In Scotland it was decided that graduates would pay back €3200 but only when they were earning more than €17500/year and then only small amounts each month. In the rest of the UK students pay, on average, €1400/year at the start of each year of their course. It is likely that Scotland will have to increase the sum that they ask students to pay back to match the situation in the rest of the UK otherwise Scottish residents will need to pay higher taxes to cover the difference.

The introduction of paying towards university education changed the relationship between students and universities. They were now customers and began to treat the university as they would any service they were paying to receive. Universities started to respond to this by trying to be more customer focussed. They were also trying to become more efficient as the funding from government was being cut and they had to try and make savings. It therefore became very important that the university identified what the students expected in the way of services. Failure to get this correct would result in students not getting the university experience they expected and they would tell their friends and family and this would impact on the status of the university in the local community and students would go elsewhere taking their money with them. We needed to find out what students wanted and feed this into the design of the building and the services we offered.

Many of our students come from areas, which are areas of social deprivation. Many will therefore be the first in their family to come to university and they have no support at home about what to do or how it all works and university can be a daunting place. This was not made any easier by the university structure as the university tended to work in distinct sections or silos with little cross working. For example there were in 2002 - 8 different units that dealt with students and money. Now it is all done from the one location, the Saltire Centre. To make it simple and to prevent students having to go to a lot of different units the decision was taken that students should not need to know how the university is structured to get the services they need.

The library was housed in an old building which was beginning to show its age and to renovate it was going to be horrendously expensive. It was also not a very nice looking building and it was decided to find a new home for the library and demolish the old building. The Saltire Centre would therefore also house the library.

To be more efficient it was decided to maximise the information and transactions such as paying library fines that could be put on-line and also to maximise the way that it could be displayed e.g. on computers, mobile phones, etc. It was important however, that the resource did not dominate the building. For example space taken up by rows and rows of books or computers, the space was to be predominately dominated by the learners and supported by the availability of resources

The Saltire Centre also had to be flexible so that it contained different micro environments to support individual learning and collaborative social learning. It also had to be adaptable so that the building could in 20 or 30 years time be used for something else rather than a learning centre if learning paradigms changed. This lesson was learned from the old library which although only 30 years old had been designed in such a way that it could not be adapted for another use.

Sustainability and greening the campus were also taken into account when designing the building so that it was energy efficient. This also helps to keep running costs down.

Therefore the Saltire Centre was to be
An iconic building
A campus hub
Resource rich but not resource dominated
Flexible space and adaptable space
A one-stop shop for all services
A social collaborative learning space
A library

At first glance this looks fairly straightforward and can be simply left to the architects to come up with a good design but it is not that simple. Unless you also consider how you will operate the building it will fail to deliver. Key to successful operation is the staff and the way they work and to actually deliver some of these changes it needed the culture of the university to change particularly in the support services.

Universities in Scotland have been around a long time. Although Glasgow Caledonian University was only founded in 1992, Glasgow College of Technology one of its main founder partners was already more than a hundred years old. This history along with the way that universities are structured around committees makes change a slow process. This inertia had to be overcome.

Many of the staff at Glasgow Caledonian University had been in post for 20 years or more and although they had at heart the interest of the student they were seeing it very much from their own perspective as a service provider. For example,

“I have been doing this job for 20 years I know what students need”.

Rather than looking at it from the student perspective and being more customer focussed.

The social environment was changing fast and universities were struggling to keep up. We needed to find out what the students expected. In 2002 Glasgow Caledonian university set up a project called the Student Access to Services Project targeted to find out what it was that students really wanted these services to deliver and this would feed into the design of the building and way that services would be delivered.

I mentioned earlier that the university was composed of silos where each service closely guarded its own territory. I also said that we wanted to be more efficient and silos are not efficient. When I started to look at the services in more detail there were 10 different reception desks. All open at different times and all doing the same types of things in each service. During the week a total 90 staff worked on these desks with them all doing a few hours each.

There were also situations where highly paid professional staff were covering desks as this was seen as everyone sharing the load but this did not really make financial sense. For example senior librarians and junior staff all worked the same reception and enquiry desks. This did not make sense when you analysed the types of enquiries with 90% being very simple enquiries or transactions not needing any professional skill to answer.

So we had identified what we wanted the Saltire Centre to deliver and that we needed to consider how we could empower and enable staff to make it work successfully.

The Principal then said that the funding was in place and pressed the go button. I now had 3 years to work with the staff and make the changes needed if the Saltire Centre was to deliver everything that was expected of it. It was also clear that I could not change the culture of all the support services completely in 3 years so I had to target sections of staff that were really key to success and then involve other staff in the change process. The building has been open a year and I am still working on cultural change with some groups of staff but I will say more about this later.

The first thing I did was to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of our on-line information and use of self-help technology. We were moving to a single point of access and information for services with the Saltire Centre and I wanted to get it working before we got there. Opening a new building brings problems in itself without introducing a new way of operation that has not been tested. This was simply too much of a risk. If I wanted to sleep at night I had to get a single desk operational and tested in the existing library.

This gave me some initial staff issues.

First, the library had an enquiry desk and a circulation desk where books were issued or returned. These desks were staffed predominately by library assistants and this is a non-professional grade but the professional staff also worked these desks and I wanted to remove them from the rota. This presented me with two arguments. The professional staff argued that I was removing their professional input to the enquiry desk and therefore reducing the service available to students but the statistics showed that this argument was

not supportable as the demand for professional staff support from the enquiry desk was so low that it could be delivered using other methods.

The library assistants argued that since they were expected to fully staff the desk I was asking them to do work previously undertaken by professional staff and therefore they would need to be upgraded and paid more to do this. This argument was potentially more difficult to deal with. It was clear that the only way to counter this argument was to set out exactly what the staff on the desk were expected to deliver. I therefore created a new more generic job profile and all the library assistants were interviewed and moved onto the new job profile. This involved sending them all the new job description, giving them an opportunity to discuss it and doing it in a manner that was not threatening.

At the same time I wanted to introduce more technology so that simple transactions could be done using technology. This would mean that staff had more time to deal with student questions or problems that needed staff intervention. However, initially the introduction of new technology was seen as a threat to their jobs. For example I wanted to introduce into the library self-issue and return machines with the intention that the machines became the main route by which books are issued and returned. This was initially seen as removing the work of the circulation staff who had previously undertaken this task. I had to convince them that this was not the case and that the new post on the new desk would be much more interesting. This linked to the new job description that I had produced for the new desk.

Initially staff were wary of the new desk and the technology but fairly soon the feedback was that the new job was more interesting and the technology was helping them to be more supportive of the students and therefore staff became more satisfied with their job.

We had started the journey we had moved from 10 desks to 9 desks and the library desk was going to be the staff node around which the staffing for the desk would be built. I also physically removed the enquiry desk so that the main library desk became the focus.

Although it sounds easy it took weeks of hard work to get the generic job descriptions agreed and to build staff confidence in the new jobs.

The next step was to start to bring the other staff from service reception desks in other buildings onto the main library desk, which was the prototype for the Saltire Centre. This was done one service at a time. I started with the Careers Service and the arguments against doing it were similar to the ones already described for the library. The Careers desk staff did not want to move location, they did not want to be multi-skilled and do work associated with any other service even if it was similar to what they were doing already. They also would become more visible and therefore accountable in the new location as well as being part of a larger team.

The Careers professional staff argued that they were losing their reception and administrative support staff even though they would still get this work done. These

arguments had more to do with keeping the Career's silo intact and defending territory rather than trying to assess any real impact on service delivery.

Similar arguments were presented in turn by each service when they were asked to integrate their reception and frontline service function with the new desk. It was necessary to make each service feel that the new desk was part of their service and the staff on the new desk also had to feel that they were delivering useful support for each service. To do this as a service was integrated into the desk the Head of the Service would do a presentation to the desk staff indicating how the desk fitted into the service they offered. A set of protocols and frequently asked questions was created for each service and desk staff were trained and supported by the service for the first week to make sure everything was operating well.

This process was repeated each time a service was added to the desk and a training/help manual was built up. In total 12 services were added to the desk so this process lasted almost 14 months until they were all integrated but it was time well spent as it allowed staff to be comfortable with the changing job. Their job had been routine and very predictable now it was much more wide-ranging and less predictable.

Therefore almost a year before the Saltire Centre was due to open we had a working model of the new desk operating. Although the shape of the desk was not ideal nor the location in the library with other services still located in different buildings. It did give something to work from and to further develop the service offered from the new desk. One thing I had to keep in mind and watch very carefully during this period of assimilation onto the desk was the grade of staff and the activity that staff were being asked to undertake as each service joined. To avoid pressure for regarding and to prevent salary costs increasing it was important that all new activities were carefully monitored. We were widening the range of services supported but not increasing the complexity of the tasks being undertaken.

I now had the new desk operating and we had changed the way that these staff viewed their role. They were multi-skilled and would turn their hand to a wide range of tasks. Could I have similar success with the professional staff?

Apart from the librarians who shared offices most of the other professional advisers in services such as Careers, Funding, Welfare, etc all had their own office. While they would meet and talk in social terms they did not meet as a group of support services to share ideas or to seek to work better together. You will recall the silo approach that I mentioned earlier. Each adviser having their own office was a not a good use of space which on our campus is a valuable resource. The adviser's role was to meet students, which they did in their office but normally this was by appointment. When they were not meeting students their office was often unoccupied and was not available for anyone else to use. Instead of offices the Saltire Centre would have an open plan office and book able consulting rooms in the Saltire Centre. The open plan office would allow more opportunity for individual staff and staff teams to discuss activities and to seek opportunities to improve and better integrate the support offered to the students.

The bookable rooms would maximise the use of space as a resource so that the rooms would not stand empty when other staff wanted this type of space. This was strongly resisted by the professional staff across all services. The resistance was again territorial as it was their office and they did not want to go into open plan, especially as many thought it would be like a call centre with rows of desks. Also they did not like the idea of having to book appointments and to go to another room even if that room was close. Again it goes back to the provider focus of service I mentioned earlier. The advisers wanted the student to come to them but the concept of the Saltire Centre was that this was where students would go and staff would come to the student to avoid students having to go to a range of different locations for service and support.

The move to the open plan office along with the change to bookable consulting rooms was a key change in the way that staff worked and was a crucial part of the concept behind the creation of the Saltire Centre. The new open plan office would house 92 staff. It was really important that this change happen without any industrial action taking place, which could impact on the opening of the Saltire Centre. The approach was two pronged. All the staff were given the opportunity to go and see other open plan offices in the city. I had with the help of the architect arranged visits to companies already using open plan office for professional staff such as architects. I hoped that this would overcome the perception that our staff had that the open plan office would be a call centre. Not all staff took up the offer of these visits but enough did that the word spread that open plan was not as bad as it initially sounded.

As well as this approach I also increased the average space that each person had. Across the university each person normally has 7.9m² of office/personal space but in the Saltire Centre I increased it to 9.8 m². Although this may not sound a lot more it did make it more open and staff felt that they were not being crushed into a space. Remember the rationale for the open plan office had been that staff could mix and would be able to work better as multi-linking teams. It was important this was not undermined by staff believing that really it was all about saving money by crushing them into as small a space as possible.

They also had new furniture, which was also a big plus. Many had old desks and old cramped offices and they were moving to a new and better equipped working environment.

As well as all the upfront visits and new furniture there were also some general meetings to agree acceptable protocols such as no loud ring tones on phones, no eating at desks etc. This involvement of the staff in setting the rules also helped them to better accept the space. I would just like to remind you that the staff in this office ranged from the lowest clerical grade through all levels of professional staff and included academic staff at lecturer and senior lecturer level. At the end of the day when staff moved in there were no real complaints

I am also in this office but I am not really convinced that the staff welcome my presence. I think they would prefer me slightly more distant as I do not think they like being so visible.

The acceptance of the consulting rooms took a lot of negotiation. To help move it forward I agreed that each service could have a priority booking on the same rooms so long as I had their appointment availability 4 weeks in advance. I had purchased software that would allow the rooms to be reserved to match their timetables. The software was web based so every adviser could see all the rooms and who had reserved which room and when. It also displayed if the reserved room was actually booked for use with a student. This approach meant that no adviser could reserve more than they could use. This would have been noticed by other advisers who would have commented on this. This made the system self-policing by the advisers. I did not, on a day-to-day basis need to police the rules, which had been put in place about the use of these rooms. The advisers had to manage the rooms between themselves and my perceived distance from the operational aspects of the rooms helped the adviser to accept this method of working more easily.

I said at the start that we were still on a journey. The creation of the new job profile and the multi-skilling of the desk staff, the open plan office and the use of consulting rooms for advisers were key staffing issues that needed to be resolved to allow the building to function as planned.

The new desk now called the base had to link with all the services that it was the initial point of contact for. The number of staff working reception points for all the services had been reduced from the 90 staff who did a few hours each to 25 staff who spent all their time on the desk. These staff were trained to answer any questions up to a 5-minute response, anything more complex would be passed onto the appropriate service. This might be by making an appointment with an adviser or by directing the student to a workshop or drop-in session. The staff on the base (the desk) could see each adviser's electronic diary and could make appointments in the adviser's diary. This was also strongly resisted by the advisers at first as it made them much more visible especially how they used their time. This was something they were unhappy with but since the university was employing them they had no real case to prevent it being done. The same software that booked the rooms also managed the appointments, which made adoption and staff training much easier.

The link with the base and the services has been a difficult one to manage. There is still tension as some services see the base as a loss of control of the frontline function of their service. Ideas of territory and silos take a long time to remove. This wish to go back to the good old days as some of the advisers saw it has to be resisted and the interface between the base and the services has to be carefully managed.

Within the 25 staff on the base there are 4 supervisors. They are given responsibility for specific operational roles including working with the services to ensure that the base and the service are working together effectively and we are maintaining the customer focus.

To help keep this focus I joined the Customer Service Network. You may have a similar organisation in Spain. This organisation is made up of over 800 retail and commercial companies who are very customer focussed, e.g. Virgin, HSBC Royal Bank of Scotland etc. It is not very expensive to join and you are given an annual benchmark assessment that shows how you compare to the other organisations in the network.

Let me say that the first time we did the benchmark assessment we got a real fright. Staff thought they were customer focussed and giving good service but the assessment showed we had a long way to go. For example we were doing an annual survey that asked students about the service but we never gave them any feedback on what we did with it nor did we tell new students we had changed something because of feedback the previous year. To move things forward we set up a service quality group made up of a member of staff from each service and the base. Their role was to meet monthly and to develop better evaluation techniques and better feedback systems. So for example we now have a feedback icon on all our web pages that allows a student to give us a complement, make a suggestion or register a complaint and if they include their email address the appropriate team will respond in 48 hours informing what action they have taken. These are regularly review by a senior staff member and we will make operational changes if required.

This involvement with the Customer Services Network and the setting up of the service quality group has helped change the culture from being a provider focussed approach to one that is more customer orientated. It has also firmly put the staff in the driving position regarding the quality of their service. Service quality is now something that the staff own and not something that someone from outside the service sets in place and assesses. While having external quality assessments is good the really important thing is that staff own and feel responsible for the service they are delivering.

I have I hope given you an insight into the human resources issues we had to overcome to make the Saltire Centre deliver its vision. It is not finished yet. Cultural change takes time and needs to be pushed from time to time. The introduction of multi skilling with the base staff made them more efficient, effective and more able to support the students. This I think would also be the case with the specialist advisers. While from time to time we might need a specialist it is more often the case that the student need is for a more general and broad support. For example a student seeking help from the wellbeing adviser about anxiety or depression might disclose that the depression results from his/her inability to manage their money and he/she is facing possible eviction from their flat. At the moment this takes two staff one to advise of the health issues the other on managing money and possibly giving some money from the hardship fund to help the student get on their feet. But both of these are activities can be done with relatively little training. Therefore why can the same person not do both of them and others as well? I think for me the next step is to multi skill the advisers. Students normally have multiple issues that can be best helped with a more general support mechanism. This way you would maximise the number of students you can support but still have the option if needed to buy in specialist support.

Another issue that I intend to address is flexibility of staff contracts. At the moment the core staff work days during the week with extra staff bought in to support evenings and weekends. This reduces the flexibility to staff the service to match the demand. It also can give rise to different levels of service because the weekend staff could do things differently from the normal weekday staff. I would rather move to a more flexible contract where staff also worked weekends and evenings on a rota system. This would help to ensure that students always received the same level of support and it would not matter if it was a weekday, an evening or at the weekend.

Finally I need to arrange more staff develop on awareness of multi-cultural factors. Glasgow Caledonian has in the last year made significant strides into the international students market and now 1-in-5 of our students are international. This does not include students from the EU. Our international students are predominately from China, India and Pakistan with smaller focus on African countries. It is important that staff are fully aware of differences in culture so that they are better able to assist students appropriately.

In conclusion – we have got to this stage of the journey and like the design of the building the staff have to be equally flexible and adaptable. This change in culture has to be supported and if necessary pushed through by changes in contract carefully supported by appropriate staff training.

The service and the way that the staff support the service has to be regularly monitored but the quality of the service and the performance of the staff should be something that they feel they are part of and have ownership of. Otherwise performance appraisal will be seen as being forced on them and it will be resisted and inevitably this will lead to a lowering of staff morale and a drop in service quality.

The Saltire Centre has been a success. It has won several national UK awards but more importantly it has received 92% approval from our students that it is good or better in their recent opinion survey. This would not have been possible without the staff. It has been quite a change for many of the staff. A small number decided that all this change was not for them and left through a voluntary severance scheme that we set up which allowed them 1 year's salary as a golden handshake. This enabled me to bring in new blood and to change the staff profile. For example, rather than replace a senior librarian I introduced a customer development post, at a senior level, which was taken by a customer service manager from a large retail company (Asda/Wal-Mart). This helped to keep the cultural change on track and also brought in the experience needed to move the service onto a higher awareness and level of customer focus. The manager of the base (the new style desk) also came in from a role in customer services of a major bank. This was important the university did not have experience in this area, if you recall it was very provider focussed rather than customer focussed. Change had to be kick started to move the institution forward and changes in the staff profile helped bring this about.

There is still some way to go to be the 24*7 support needed and expected by students. We do not operate a 24*7 campus but it is likely that we will do this soon. Although some support can be on-line and we have already tried to put as much on-line as we can.

It is still clear that students are people and at times want to speak with and be advised by people. It is also clear that we need to be more pro-active and try more in the way of early intervention to try and solve problems before they get to the stage where it needs a specialist to handle the issue. Therefore you need to structure your staffing to be able to give the general support needed by most of your students and buy-in the specialist support when it is needed. This makes your staffing profile more flexible and more effective. It also introduces a level of resilience that covers for sickness and holidays without the need to make special provision for holidays or to accept a lowering of service during holiday periods because specialist staff are on holiday.

I have I hope given you an insight into the impact of building the Saltire Centre and the requirements we had to change the culture and the staff profile in order to deliver on the concept behind the building. If you are in Scotland please come and see the Saltire Centre. You would be made very welcome.