

6. Campus Development to Support Learning and Teaching

Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

RCSI is committed to providing learning environments that support and enhance teaching across all its programmes of education. In support of the University's strategic objectives, the creation of a state-of-the-art education and learning hub was progressed. This required redeveloping an existing site within York Street, building on RCSI's heritage of excellence and innovation and its historical presence on St Stephen's Green.

Initiative

Six years of design, planning, construction, testing, and benchmarking with global sites, supported the ambitious plan to expand RCSI's Dublin city-centre campus. From the outset, the intention was for the building to be wholly student-focused with multiple learning and study environments, sports facilities, and innovative technically advanced simulated environments for clinical and surgical training. The project was led by the Director of Corporate Strategy, a member of the SMT, who assembled a diverse project group from across RCSI and implemented strong governance and stakeholder management. Working with a great team of architects, Henry J Lyons, the University invested +€80m and delivered a facility providing a truly transformative and optimised place of learning for deep integration, from a curriculum, and student experience perspective.

Extensive engagement and consultation was undertaken with users and stakeholders - over 50 interdepartmental workshops, over 500 project meetings and over 20 benchmarking visits to the UK, US and Europe. This included undergraduate and postgraduate students, student societies, academic staff, researchers, SMT, RCSI Council, local residents and professional services departments. The team combined learnings from these consultations with feedback from existing student surveys and published literature, to design an integrated setting, supporting the university's commitment to "educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health."

Designed to benefit all learners, the building has a variety of spaces, responding to different learning styles and stages of learning, and appropriate for undergraduate through to qualified healthcare professionals. The individual spaces and their inter-connectivity were informed by pedagogy, and designed to facilitate deeper learning and revisiting of topics by students through self-study (1st floor library), with peers (learning commons/café) or in other learning modalities such as working with task-trainers or simulated patient educators. The spatial design and floor stack of the building was cognisant of the iterative nature of health professions curricula. RCSI sought to figuratively utilise concepts of spiral learning by building in an increased probability of "successive encounter(s) building on the previous one, and the competence of the students increasing each time" as learners move from simply acquiring knowledge (in the basement lecture theatre) through the library and study areas to achieving mastery of skills in the top-floor skills suite¹.

Outcome

26 York Street (26YS) opened in 2017 as a world class facility for education and training. Designed to provide hands-on practical, professional healthcare training in multiple learning and study environments, this world-class facility also provided new national capacity for qualified practitioners to refresh their skills (technical and non-technical) and to learn innovative techniques in international advancements. The 120,000 square foot development, spanning 10 floors, includes a world-class surgical and clinical training suite containing a flexible wet lab, operating theatre, clinical training wards, standardised patients rooms² and task training rooms. It also includes a library spanning three floors with +500 study spaces, a 540 seat auditorium, sports and fitness suite. It has been designed to be energy efficient and environmentally responsible. It is designed to support the diverse pedagogy required across the spectrum of lifelong healthcare education, while encouraging social interaction and well-being. Student Feedback on the library has been positive with 78% of students agreeing with the statement that "RCSI Libraries provide study environments, services, and resources (books, journals, databases etc.), that support my learning online and onsite". Comments received include recognition of the rationale in structuring the library space: "Great options for students who require different forms of study (such as silent study vs collaborative study), and a myriad of areas to sit in or even hang out at."

Whilst 26YS has contributed on so many levels to university life (e.g., sports, library, informal learning spaces, community engagement through MyHealth lecture series), this case study hones in on the contribution made by the top three floors dedicated to experiential and simulated learning. Learning in a safe simulated environment allows novice learning and skill mastery to occur in a low-stress, high-feedback environment while protecting patients from procedural inexperience.

The building of 26 YS led to a fundamental shift in RCSI's approach to skills acquisition and development within RCSI. Ultimately it led to RCSI being awarded €1.2m by the HEA for the establishment of a centre for Simulation Education and Research, which has become the RCSI SIM Centre for Simulation Education and Research. An unforeseen benefit of this was the significant role played by simulation during the COVID-19 pandemic in supporting students and clinicians with an environment to practice clinical skills through simulated programmes, when it would have been unsafe to do so in the clinical setting. Some of these new and alternative learning opportunities, i.e., Point of Care Ultrasound (PoCUS) Workshop, have now been incorporated into the curriculum. The experience of the RCSI School of Physiotherapy has resulted in a published national study, on how simulation can better prepare students for practice, and the challenges experienced by educators. 26 York Street has earned multiple awards since opening in Autumn 2017³.



References: ¹ Harden, R. and Stamper, N. (1999) 'What is a spiral curriculum?', Medical teacher, 21(2), pp. 141-143. doi: 10.1080/01421599979752.

² Standardised and simulated patients at RCSI. <https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/about/simulation/simulated-patients>

³ Orlagh O'Shea, Claire Mulhall, Claire Condrón, Suzanne McDonough, James Larkin, Walter Eppich. International Journal of Healthcare Simulation: A qualitative study of physiotherapy educators' views and experience of practice education and simulation-based learning. 10.54531/hkoi8650. Adi Health + Wellness. <https://www.ijohs.com/article/doi/10.54531/hkoi8650>