came to work with delegates and speakers. Prescap is a community development company; they use art in dynamic ways to support regeneration and social cohesion. They prioritise work with hard to reach and socially excluded individuals, groups and communities. Our activity was four collaborative screen paintings portraying our library communities. Of course we started out abandoned by our internal visual artist. But the jewel-coloured paint was gorgeous to work with and it wasn't really possible to make a mistake. I made the gilded curly head of a non-traditional student juggling her raft of demands contained in golden balls; family, fees, work, study, egg and chips, impostor syndrome (not really that one). That makes it sound a bit better than it was actually, see picture. It was a grand activity and the finished canvasses will be available to display in the libraries of the participants.

Kim McGowan (left), Helen Anderton, Catherine Caruthers, Margaret Toft, Michelle Moore and their screen painting on the theme of Engaging your Community
Photo: Dougie Stuart, Prescap www.prescap.co.uk

It was a terrific conference and good came out of it; I know several delegates have contacted speakers to continue their discussion on widening participation. In conversation with a colleague from the public sector I learned that she'd considered prison visiting for a long time; listening to Jenn has convinced her to get on and do it.

Resonant themes emerged. Creativity can be a huge cohesive force and source of self esteem to those muted by events or nonconformity. Libraries can and do transform lives. People are resistant to being branded and we treat groups as homogeneous entities at our peril; if we want a response we need to keep listening and keep talking. And it takes more than one go, don't give up, nothing is easy, with the astonishing exception of screen painting.

A place for learning: rethinking academic library buildings,

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How we plan and use our buildings has become an issue of increasing significance in recent years. Changing learning styles, the pressure to be cost- and space-effective, and, increasingly, the drive to be 'iconic' mean that today's academic libraries have both to look smart and think smart. This seminar was jointly organised by Scottish Academic Libraries Co-operative Training Group (SALCTG) and the University College and Research Group (Scotland) to consider not only the latest thinking on the design of learning spaces, but also innovative approaches and services that could enable libraries to make more effective use of their space.

Sheila Cannell (Director of Library Services at the University of Edinburgh) considered one of the most pressing issues facing any institution planning for the future of its learning and research estate: the impact digital services are having on the design of academic library buildings. Her talk drew not only on her current experiences with refurbishment at Edinburgh, but also on her role as Chair of the judging panel for the SCONUL Library Design Award 2007.

Andrew McDonald (Director of Library and Learning Services at the University of East London) drew on his wealth of experience in the

design and management of learning spaces to give his vision for the future of how our libraries should look and function.

Chris Backler (Associate Librarian at the University of Dundee) introduced Dundee's roving reference enquiry service as an example of how the focus of a building can be changed by taking services out to its users.

Alex Hunt (Information Commons Manager at the University of Sheffield) gave a first-hand account of the challenges posed by moving to a radically different learning and physical environment in one of the most innovative learning spaces in the UK.

The talks, all illustrated with slides of the relevant buildings, can be viewed on the SALCTG website at: http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/filearea.cgi?LMGT1=LIS-SALCTG&a=get&f=/resources.htm

This paper will therefore concentrate on drawing together common themes from the four speakers.

The vision. There are very few published standards for library design, yet a building is the biggest single investment a library can make and decisions about it have long-term recurrent implications. It's important, therefore, to have a clear vision for the future and ask the right questions before planning a new learning space. Sheila suggested what some of these questions might be:

- How will the institutional mission change? (Research-led teaching, the student experience, access issues).
- What will learning be like? (Social networking, group learning).
- Will the library be bookless? (Electronic journals, books digitisation)
- What changes will there be in computing infrastructure? (The most difficult to predict - mobile / wireless; certainly technology rich.)

The users. As Andrew pointed out, we need to always bear in mind that a building is about more than bricks and mortar – it's about people, and a well-made building can change the whole culture of a campus. It's perhaps a drawback therefore that libraries tend to be planned by architects and librarians – not by the people who use them most: students. As the library is where many students spend most of their time, it has become a quality issue in student feedback and, arguably, a factor in attracting and retaining students, so it's

important to consider their diverse learning styles. Although the trend is towards group learning, this does not suit everyone so, in Sheffield for example, while the ultra-flexible Information Commons (IC) seeks to accommodate a wide range of new style learners, the main library is still available to those who prefer a traditional study atmosphere. As part of its refurbishment, Edinburgh plans to follow the model being successfully used elsewhere by having the café on the ground floor with other floors becoming quieter as you go upwards.

The building. The building and its layout need to be adaptable enough to cope with these varied needs, and to be proof against future changes. Teaching rooms and group learning are both important, but Sheila made a clear distinction between them - she does not believe in separate discussion rooms which are too inflexible: mobile screens and study pods are more practical. For example, Alex described a flexible area in the IC with furniture on castors and power and data points on the floor which can be configured by the students themselves.

The furniture and fittings need to be robust in a building like the IC which is open on a 24-hour, 365 days a year basis, and one of Alex's regrets is that they did not "road test" them enough. After just a year, covered furniture needs replacement, and their clever lift-up power sockets lasted no time at all. Spend as much as possible on quality fittings is the message.

Computing trends are also difficult to predict. At present, 25% of reader spaces in libraries have computers on them (Andrew McDonald), but how much longer will we need fixed PCs? Will it be a safer bet to commit to a library built round wireless mobile computing? With these kinds of questions in mind, Andrew suggests including computing and network specialists in the design team. Again, flexibility and adaptability seem to be key: of the Information Commons 500 PCs, 100 are currently bookable, but this has proved inadequate and will soon increase to 200.

Noise is another issue, one which Andrew suggests should be redefined as sound management – how to manage a range of sound levels in one building - and he adds acoustic engineers to the list of people to involve in the design. Alex wishes they had designed in more areas which could be acoustically sealed, e.g. to expand the quiet areas in exam times. She was also surprised to find that some students do not consider the use of laptops to be silent, and the IC layout now includes some

laptop-free zones. Noise can also be controlled by increased staff presence on the floor - one of the unanticipated benefits that followed on from Dundee's switch to a roving service.

Another factor in many students' lives these days is that they have to fit in studying when and where they can, perhaps eating their lunch at the same time, so all the libraries described had cafés. This is now seen as essential, with Edinburgh counting its café in its tally of study spaces.

Finally, the importance of good signage is often overlooked – the architects at Sheffield thought that students would find their way around intuitively, but, unsurprisingly, this is not the case. Many libraries are now going for plasma screens, which are potentially easier to maintain and can be used as promotional tools – e.g. scrolling through images of the library's collections.

The staff. Fewer and fewer libraries now have traditional desks – a Help Desk and self-issue suite is a more common arrangement. Chris Backler's paper was an excellent example of how planning a new extension can be a perfect opportunity to rethink the way both space and staff are used. Dundee University Library wished to align itself more closely with the University's strategic plan, particularly the commitment to improve the student experience, and came up with "Just Ask", a roving help service which takes staff out to users, removing the barrier of a desk and aiming to overcome the "I'm sorry to bother you" syndrome. Added to this was the recognition that the make-up of the student population was changing, for example with the growth in numbers of mature and international students who needed help of a different kind to younger home students. The service was launched in 2006, before the extension was open, as it was a good way of informing users about issues like stock relocation as well as to publicise the new building, and to date, it has been very successful, greatly increasing the number of recorded enquiries. Feedback has been closely monitored and used to make adjustments to the service, for example it has now become a core service with dedicated staff, not just volunteers, and this in turn has had an impact on the kind of staff the library is recruiting. At Sheffield, the IC's information points are run jointly by library and computer staff, and out-of-hours coverage is provided by concierges for whom a completely new job description was written to distinguish them from university porters and introduce a clear customer focus.

Staff areas are also important. Alex feels Sheffield's is too small and in the wrong place, while Sheila is surprised that staff areas are often the same as 20 years ago, yet our work has changed dramatically – this is where the digital library is delivered from and time needs to be spent designing an environment that is fit for purpose.

Each talk contained far more detail than it has been possible to highlight here, but it is hoped that a flavour of the day has been conveyed. If one consistent theme emerged, it was that libraries will continue to be hugely important to their institutions, but that what goes on in them may change dramatically. It also illustrated how space influences services and vice-versa, and highlighted the fact that although we can try to determine the use of space, at the end of the day the students will often decide for themselves. Perhaps this is exactly how it should be.