University of Coventry Library

**Sector:** Academic Library and Archive

**Product:** Shade electronic mobile shelving; Shade static library shelving; Sysco manual mobile shelving

**Storage of:** Books, Periodicals, Digital Media

**Completed by:** Bruynzeel Storage Systems Ltd
The flexible design is essential for sustainability.

The University of Coventry’s Lanchester Library was a pioneer in sustainable construction when it was built in 2000. One of the first university libraries to feature passive ventilation, it is a case study of best practice in sustainability – and remains the largest naturally ventilated deep-plan building in Europe.

Fifteen years on and the University’s investment has paid dividends, in terms of money and energy saved. A study by DeMontfort University’s Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development showed that the Lanchester Library operates at half the energy cost of a conventional air conditioned building.

But equally important to the sustainability of the library has been its flexible space design, allowing the university to update its floor plate to meet the changing demands of staff and students. “The library has served us well,” explained Kirsty Kift, Acting Assistant Director of the library. “But because we have such heavy footfall, it was beginning to look very tired and, as our student numbers are always going up, we needed to create extra seating areas.”

The five-floor library was conceived as an open-plan space using structural steel beams, removing the need for load bearing internal walls. The essential and inflexible elements – such as the toilets and lift shafts – are housed in ‘pods’ beyond the main space. This meant that when the university undertook a complete renovation in 2015, it had the freedom to rework the interior space to meet modern requirements. “Students work in different ways today,” said Kift, who project managed the renovation. “We had to respond to that.”

Working to an incredibly tight deadline, Kift and her team began a six-month planning process in December 2014 in conjunction with Birmingham-based Associated Architects. Work started on site on 1 June and the library reopened on 21 September. “Floors one and two were completely gutted. We even took out some internal rooms,” said Kift. All the stock was moved off site during the renovations. Previously, the books had been housed on shelving on just two of the five floors. The plan was to spread the stock out, creating a sense of space and freeing up room for more personal and group study areas.

Interior photographs by Simon Hadley
Our main shelving is now on three floors, with additional rolling stacks in the basement," said Kift. "On our two big floors there are now three sections of shelving rather than four, so there is more area for seating. Every level looked very similar. We aimed to differentiate between the floors by taking out a different quad of shelving on each floor. We used low-level shelving on floor 2 and added feature ‘theatre’ seating near the lightwell on floor 1 to help orientation through distinctive points of reference."

Bruynzeel supplied 10,500 linear metres of shelving for the refurbishment including electronic mobile shelving and low-level static shelving. Both types were finished with Shade end panels, designed by Jacob Jensen, the Danish design studio renowned for its pared back designs for Bang & Olufsen. “The Shade design gave a nice clean look to finish the ends of the stacks,” said Kift. “We wanted the mobile and static shelving to give a unified look across the floor. The Shade end panels helped us achieve that, and fitted really nicely with the interior design of duck egg blue, greens, greys and wooden finishes.”

The electronic mobile shelving, which is situated in the public areas and can be operated by students and staff, stores 100 per cent more stock than the equivalent static shelving in the same footprint. “We put back in the same amount of shelving, but we’ve compressed it by using high density shelving,” said Kift. “The rolling stacks have been used to create the additional space [for study].”

In response to the varied ways students choose to work now, overly big study rooms have been split into smaller group working rooms. Individual study spaces have been created using cubicle seating. Banks of tables of computers are interspersed with low-level seating. There are even large study tables without computers: “Art and design asked for tables without computers to spread their artwork and oversized books on. So there are some areas with lots of tables without computers, complemented with individual study area furniture and reading rooms with soft seating,” said Kift.

“It feels a lot bigger since the refit,” said Kift. Yet it’s the little details that are in some ways the most satisfying. “We used to use top clip supports to hold the books in place,” said Kift. “They were really hard to use. Our staff requested an alternative and Bruynzeel suggested magnetic book supports. These were our favourite and staff report they are working very well.”
"Bruynzeel’s products matched our design ethos perfectly. The new shelving looks great and has helped transform a tired space into a workspace for the future."

Kirsty Kift, Acting Assistant Director

Additional specifications:
- Jacob Jensen-designed Shade end panels
- Magnetic book supports for secure placement and infinite adjustment
- Media drawers
- Neon end signage labels
- Removable shelf back-stops
- Additional strengthening bars for oversized book storage
- Unit lengths of up to 11 metres
- Aisle widths, low gradient entry ramps and touch panel heights in keeping with DDA guidelines
- Bright magenta end panels for mobile shelving in archive area