

Knowledge for Healthcare: Learning Space within NHS Knowledge and Library Services in England

1. Rationale

Making the NHS ‘the best place to work’ is a central ambition for the NHS. This is based on the recognition that: “To serve our patients and citizens in the best way possible we must improve the experience of our people.”⁽ⁱ⁾ It is therefore essential to provide a quality learning environment for staff, learners and educators.

Knowledge and library specialists play a business-critical role in informing learning, and workforce development, as well as professional practice, patient care, decision making and innovation. Providing a suitable library environment is equally critical, helping staff morale, staff recruitment and staff retention across the organisation. Physical library learning space is highly valued by staff, educators and learners, and it offers benefits aligned to delivery of NHS organisational priorities. “We must show our staff the NHS values them as much as they value their patients.”⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

Complementing ‘digital first’ delivery of evidence, library space is a crucial asset to address digital poverty, enabling the workforce to build digital skills for day to day practice and to underpin a broad range of information skills.

Research shows that library learning space is essential and that creative and resourceful uses of this space secures key benefits for the workforce. Users need 24/7 access to the library and want different learning spaces within it. Survey data from 6000 NHS staff, educators and learners corroborates these benefits:

- I. **Self-directed learning: library as a space for reflection and private study.** Libraries constitute a pivotal site for managed access to resources and self-directed intentional learning and research... the mix of flexible and dedicated spaces offers opportunities for concentrated work” ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾
- II. **The best place to work: library as a health and wellbeing space.** Helping to make the NHS the best place to work⁽ⁱ⁾, library space invites reflection and offers a place of sanctuary away from the work environment. This promotes a positive workforce culture; supports recruitment, retention and staff development. Knowledge specialists provide Wellbeing Guardians^(iv) with evidence, space and resources to support staff. They offer wellbeing collections.
- III. **Collaborative working and learning: library learning spaces for innovation and collaboration.** Creative use of library space enables “collaboration, interaction and tacit knowledge exchange.”^(v) Facilitated by knowledge and library specialists, the use of the space, resources and knowledge mobilisation tools, nurtures the inception and spread of innovation.
- IV. **Digital skills and innovation: library as a technology hub.** Assisting staff gain digital literacy skills and build organisational knowledge and innovation capability to deliver more effective healthcare. It provides a safe and trusted environment to access e-learning and for experiential learning opportunities through use and

exploration of new and emerging technologies, such as multimedia tools, augmented reality, virtual anatomy and 3D printing and hence underpins delivery of the Topol Review recommendations.

Knowledge and library specialists provide the expertise in leading these creative approaches in the development of the library learning space and in facilitating the exploration of new technology by the NHS Workforce.

2. Assuring the quality of the learning environment

HEE's Quality Framework sets the standard that NHS providers have a service that provides quality services, resources and physical space as part of the learning environment to meet the needs of the current and future workforce and educators. (Standard 1.5 HEE Quality Framework). HEE's contract with placement and education providers sets out specific requirements including appropriate learning space.

3. Design Considerations

The NHS has a responsibility to provide equity of access and must meet accessibility standards and build sustainability into the design of services. These principles are embodied in the Knowledge for Healthcare strategy. Organisations, with their Knowledge and Library Specialists, can draw on internationally recognised standards^(vi) and examples of best practice for library design^(vii) to ensure a library learning space that enables the innovation and provides the range of different learning and well-being spaces required by learners, educators and staff.

4. Policy Recommendations:

The Executive is asked to approve the following recommendations to NHS Providers:

1. The library study and wellbeing space should be available to all staff, educators and learners both during and outside the working hours of the knowledge and library services team.
2. The library service space should be developed, managed by the knowledge and library services staff, to ensure value through enabling organisational innovation, and meeting the changing needs of healthcare staff, learners and educators in relation to study and reflection, health and well-being, collaboration, and as a technology hub.

References

- i. *Making the NHS the best place to Work*, NHS Improvement
- ii. Matt Hancock. 3 June 2019. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/more-staff-not-enough-nhs-must-also-be-best-place-to-work-says-new-nhs-people-plan/>
- iii. Framer, L.S.J. Library Space: It's Role in Research. *The Reference Librarian*, Vol 57, 2016 Issue 2
- iv. NHS. *We are the NHS: People Plan 2020/21 – action for us all*. July 2020.
- v. Corral, S. and Jolly, L. Innovations in Learning and Teaching in Academic Libraries: Alignment, Collaboration and the Social Turn. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, Vol 25, 2019 Issue 2-4, pp 113-128
- vi. ISO/TR11219:2012 Information and documentation – qualitative conditions and basic statistics for library buildings – space, function and design
- vii. *Designing Libraries – Planning and designing library building*.