One college, two main homes

A beacon of excellence

In 2020 the Royal College of Physicians will open a new purpose-built office in Liverpool – RCP at The Spine. For the first time in its 500-year history, there will be two large main offices working together as one college, each supporting around 200 staff. The opportunities this new presence offers the RCP are unprecedented:

- To be a beacon of academic excellence and medical leadership.
- To lead the improvement of patient care and public health.
- To be a world class learning and assessment centre.
- To drive quality improvement and implementation science.

While working across two sites poses challenges to operations and staff, it also opens up a world of opportunities – to work differently, to collaborate with different organisations and to forge a new identity. This paper sets out a vision for our people, our structure and the building that will showcase who we are and what we are proud of.

People

The success of an organisation depends on its people. By the end of 2020 we would expect much of the staff of RCP at The Spine to include both locally recruited staff and those who have relocated from London. The new building will also be a new hub and meeting point for fellows and members in the north, who will have many more opportunities to become involved in our work, attend meetings, educational courses, lectures and other events.

As our people in all sites develop flexible, agile ways of working, they will be supported by the creation of new management structures that encourage initiative, independence and a ‘can-do’ attitude. The new matrix roles already created in our existing office in Liverpool added to matrix management across the RCP will reduce the number of single specialism roles, allowing for better support across teams. Staff and visitor wellbeing will be supported by the biophilic nature of the building itself.

Place

The site of our new office in Liverpool is very different to the London HQ site. We will be at the heart of a medical and scientific precinct, with very close neighbours focused on providing healthcare, including the new Royal Liverpool Hospital. Adjacent buildings include clinical, educational and research facilities, with a new hotel opening up next door.

This will be a gamechanger for the RCP and its activities. Doctors, scientists and researchers from the nearby buildings will be able to pop in to the downstairs café, and walk to lectures, conferences, teach-ins and other events. Instead of making a special trip, the building will become an integral feature of the medical landscape in Liverpool, improving access for our fellows and members across the north.
As the medical ‘firm’ has disappeared there are fewer opportunities to experience that sense of community. Our presence will take on an academic and cultural significance, and we will exploit that for the benefit of patients and doctors.

Our new presence in Liverpool also opens up the possibility of becoming involved in the health of the local community. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 32 per cent of children in the north west are living in poverty, compared with 30 per cent in the UK. In total 1.6 million people are currently living in poverty, which equates to 23 per cent of the population. According to the Lancet’s Global Burden of Disease study in 2016, the north of England generally suffers much poorer health than the rest of England, with lower life expectancy and earlier onset of chronic illness and disability. They report that health services in the north east and north west of England are relatively underfunded compared with London.

Our presence in the north as a beacon of public health excellence will support one of our major policy initiatives, that of reducing health inequality. It provides a new opportunity to become involved in the kind of local/regional public health research that could contribute to healthier lives, reduce multiple morbidities and health inequality, working closely with existing organisations such as the Northern Health Science Alliance, local health commissioners and providers.

Architecture

Our new building, The Spine, will in itself be a showcase for the work we do, for the opportunities we create, and the welcome we offer.

For the first time in over 50 years the officers, fellows, members and staff of the RCP will have input into the way the building is designed and used, in a more democratic way than the Regent’s Park HQ. Sir Denys Lasdun designed our existing building following consultation with fellows and staff and observing RCP functions, but it remains his interpretation and vision of our work. By leading the design of the inner shell of the new building, we can build in spaces that will support all our activities, and promote collaborative working, social networking and simply chatting over a cuppa.

The Spine will be a groundbreaking, world-leading example of biophilic architecture, supporting mental and physical wellbeing for staff and visitors. In parallel with our leading role in healthcare, the building itself will be a beacon of excellence in its field. There is a palpable sense of excitement on the part of the architectural and construction companies involved in its creation, which we will join and harness in the promotion of our presence in the north.

Conclusion

RCP at The Spine will be a beacon of excellence, attracting high-quality healthcare professionals and staff, and driving quality improvement in a pioneering atmosphere of collaboration and partnership. It is a showcase that will open up medicine – a chance for us to show and demonstrate what we are most proud of as an organisation. It will establish our presence, excellence and purpose for the next 500 years.