

Introduction

Oxford Brookes University is seen as one of the best of the 'new' universities but its ambition is to become simply 'one of the best universities'. To achieve this, its ageing estate needs to be brought up-to-date inline with its academic aspirations.

Space to Think was a comprehensive master planning project to shape the development of the University's two main campuses over the next 20+ years. Mistral was appointed to help create acceptance of the Space to Think master plan as the blueprint for development by the local planning authorities, staff, students and the wider community.

Objectives

Working closely with the Oxford Brookes in-house communications team, our objectives were to:

- Convey as much information as possible to all stakeholders about the University's master plan, the options being considered and the benefits the proposals will have to academic life and the community
- Ensure stakeholders understand why the master planning exercise is a necessary and effective process
- Encourage stakeholders to take an active interest in the master plan options and provide their reactions and feedback to the proposals
- Report these reactions to the University in a form which was useful to developing a final master plan.

Strategy

Combining our past experience with the requirements outlined in Oxford City Council's Statement of Community Involvement, we recommended a variety of engagement techniques to raise awareness and gather feedback on the master plan. These included:

- Comprehensive stakeholder database development
- Staff, student and community focus group facilitation and feedback reports
- Public exhibitions
- Newsletters
- Posters/adverts in the local press
- Media relations
- Preparation of a presentation for the Local Planning Authority's two Area Committees
- A comprehensive Q&A document to assist the core project team with its messaging.

Results

The relationship between Mistral and the University was efficient and very successful. The consultation was commended as "exemplar" by a consultant contracted by Oxford City Council to assess the project.

When completing a subsequent satisfaction survey about Mistral's services, the client commented: *"An approachable, friendly and professional service. I never got the feeling that the clock was ticking. The people selling the product were also responsible for delivery of the project (unlike larger competitors). You listened and understood our requirements, helped us shape our thinking and then helped the internal team deliver a successful project."*

