

The Hive: the joint University of Worcester/ Worcester public library that's open for business

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Introduction



The Hive

In Worcester we are, not surprisingly, very proud of our gold-clad landmark building, The Hive. Opened in July 2012 by Her Majesty The Queen, The Hive is unique in that it offers a range of services all under one roof. It is primarily a joint university / public library, the first of its kind in Europe. The iconic building, located in the heart of the city, combines excellent facilities for academic study and research, alongside spaces, resources and learning opportunities for adults, young people and children. The Hive also houses twelve miles of county archives and is home to the Worcestershire County Council Archive and Archaeology Service, which combine commercial, community and research services. In addition, the Worcestershire Hub based in The Hive provides essential services and advice – drawing people into the building who may have never before associated with a library or university (Elliott, 2013). The Hive is a busy place with an average of 2,500 visits daily and overall visits of approximately 2.9 million to date (The Hive, 2015a). The past three years have also seen The Hive gradually develop into a valuable centre for businesses, as a provider of specialist resources and as a meeting and training venue. Pre-opening plans to include a business centre have developed into an inviting networking space with comfy furniture, business books, databases, access to information and meeting rooms. With the introduction of advisers, training agencies and a dedicated member of staff, it has now grown into a dedicated business centre with a programme of events and information to point those needing business help in the right direction (The Hive, 2015b).



HM The Queen opening The Hive

The core values of The Hive – inspiration, connection, aspiration, learning, integration, inclusivity, enduring values, wellbeing, sustainability, visibility (The Hive, 2012) – underpin the ethos of services provided in The Hive: the partnership between the University of Worcester and Worcestershire County Council has benefited our diverse users in many ways. This includes the sharing

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of collections, resources, knowledge and space, thus creating a high-quality, engaging environment; connecting the business community, council services and the university; creating one hub for all – helping students see themselves more as part of the wider community; and helping employability through its student placements, volunteers, library jobs and our graduate Business Development intern post.

Planning The Hive business offer

The university and the county council have many shared values, and are committed to having a positive impact on society and the economy. The University of Worcester Strategic Plan (2013, p. 3) includes an aim 'to make a truly transformative contribution to the lives of our students, staff and the people of our region, and to make a very positive impact in society more broadly'. An economic strategy from Worcestershire County Council (2010, p. 31) described The Hive as an economic opportunity in which 'The library will be able to serve the local population whilst providing a very modern facility to fulfil the research needs of local businesses'. As part of these aspirations, one of the key plans for The Hive from the beginning, was to develop a business network and to provide support and training.

When we started thinking about what the business offer in The Hive might look like, one of the factors first considered was our user-base, which potentially is huge. The estimated population of Worcestershire is approximately 569,000 (Worcestershire County Council, 2013), and the university is one of the fastest-growing universities in Britain in terms of student and staff numbers. It has seen its applications rise three times faster than the national average over the last five years – 20% compared to the national figure of 6.65 % (The Guardian, 2015) – and now has more than 10,396 students, with 13% in our Business School (University of Worcester, 2014). This has been accompanied by extensive new building – by 2012 the university had contributed more than £250 million to the region's economy, employing more than 1000 staff (University of Worcester, 2013). More generally, the university works proactively with local businesses to create opportunities for students through voluntary roles, placements and job opportunities. Economic growth figures released by the Office of National Statistics show that Worcestershire has a growing economy – it grew by 16.82% between 2008 and 2013 (Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, 2015a). As well as numerous growing businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises, particular strengths are in manufacturing, cyber security and defence, and agri foods – including Worcester Bosch, Yamazaki Mazak, Brinton's Carpets, GKN, Morgan Motor Cars, QinetiQ, Joy Mining and Halfords. The county is also the destination for thousands of tourists every year (Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, 2015b).

As a unique service with a wide range of potential users, finding comparable examples prior to opening our business centre was a challenge. We did, however, find services that we could learn from, and had valuable visits to both the British Library Business Information Centre and Birmingham Central Library Business Service. The well-designed, informal business networking space in the British Library where people can sit, meet and study inspired the design and content of our resource. We also gathered valuable information about what may be popular resources for business development and learnt from our visits that COBRA (the Complete Business Reference Adviser) was one of their databases most used by those wanting to start a business.

Four months before the opening in March 2012, staff from the county council and university libraries held a seminar – 'Business at The Hive' – and invited representatives from local companies, the university, the county council and the local chamber of commerce. The event explored how the business community and The Hive might work together to contribute to the economic prosperity of Worcester; it inspired positive feedback and confirmed our belief that a

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dedicated space for businesses to research and network and the development of a regular programme of business-related events were desirable.



The Hive business event

A key aspiration prior to opening was to obtain permission for public access within The Hive to some of our university subscribed databases. University library staff spoke to various providers regarding licences and, although some databases remain restricted to university users, we do provide the wider public with access on a walk-in basis to some databases, including Business Source Complete.

The beginnings of The Hive Business Centre

When The Hive opened in July 2012, the business centre on level 2 was in place and consisted of a stylish lounge area for informal networking, meeting rooms and resources – books, newspapers, databases. In terms of staffing, I was the Academic Liaison Librarian for the Worcester Business School (with my main remit being working and supporting students and staff); the Business Development Manager for The Hive had recently been recruited (responsible for the PFI [Private Finance Initiative] contract management and managing the building); we had front-of-house staff (dealing with enquiries from a vast range of users split across five floors of the building); and a Business Support Team (who managed room bookings and other administrative tasks).



The Hive meeting room

Crucially though, what we did not have at the time was someone to develop and coordinate the business offer on a day-to-day basis. We had no planned programme of business-related events, and had not yet developed the partnerships, connections and networks to deliver the quality of service we wanted to have. Although the previous public library service had many strengths, it had not focused on being a community hub for business support; and the university library had mainly concentrated its business information

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support on academic teaching and research needs. This was clearly an area that we needed to work to change.

Our first step was to launch the business centre formally in order to generate interest. Within three months of opening we were very busy welcoming our new and returning students to a totally new library – as well as working hard to support our public users and associated services. Time was certainly at a premium! Through determined effort during that busy time, we organised an official launch of the business centre in November 2012 centred on 'Global Entrepreneurship Week'. This brought together a programme including: a lecture on entrepreneurship from one of our business school experts; demonstrations of business-related databases such as COBRA; advice drop-ins and workshops organised by the council's Worcestershire Business Central; and a display using the university's excellent Kays catalogue archive. Slowly, in partnership with others, we felt we were making a start.

The aim in the long term was to create a sustainable service and offering to the business community. One route was the Enterprising Libraries programme (a partnership between Arts Council England, the British Library and the Department for Communities and Local Government – DCLG). They were looking to fund a number of projects in which libraries will use their role as community hubs to spark local economic growth and improve social mobility in communities across the country (Arts Council England, 2015).

Although The Hive was sadly unsuccessful in our application, the process enabled us to plan and set out our aims:

- to enhance and develop the business offer throughout the county using The Hive as a 'flagship' resource;
- to expand the skills and expertise of staff, users of The Hive and the business community to become a centre of excellence for business support;
- to promote, develop and support the business sector through a dedicated programme of events, surgeries, workshops, activities and resources, using the partnership and other external links.

However, we needed capacity to develop our service, identify crucial partnership relationships and create a programme of events within the limits of the staffing and resources we had.

Developing the business offer

In 2014 an opportunity came along. As part of the university Momentum Project, which partners with local employers to support the progression of first-degree graduates into postgraduate education, The Hive was able to recruit a business development intern. The remit of this post is to work with the university and The Hive teams to improve the business services offered by The Hive and to raise awareness of the facilities on The Hive site. Vitally, it would provide a point of contact for business development, someone to work with local businesses, the county council's Worcestershire Business Central and other agencies to organise events and coordinate activity.

In the past year, our business development intern has been very successful in growing partnerships and organising events with the business community. At the same time, The Hive Marketing Officer has proved invaluable in supporting and publicising these events and services. In June 2014 a successful re-launch of the Business Centre was held, with new signage and an extended networking area. Since then there has been an expansion in business events held at The Hive, with approximately 300–400 individuals attending business-related events in the past year.

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Events have included six business breakfast and business support seminars organised with a local firm of chartered accountants, Haines Watts (<http://www.hwca.com/>). The Hive has also been a base for a number of further business events offered by Enterprising Worcestershire (<https://www.gov.uk/enterprising-worcestershire>), the County Council's Worcestershire Business Central (<http://www.business-central.co.uk/>), Worcester Business Improvement District (BID) (<http://www.worcesterbid.com/>) and local expert Stuart Allen of #Worcestershirehour (<http://www.worcestershirehour.co.uk/>). Workshop and seminar events have covered topics including social media, taxation, auto-enrolment, cyber security, profitability, marketing, selling, business support and accounting. A mailing list of over 200 business contacts has now been built up and some of the local business community regularly attend events hosted at The Hive.

The university is of course a key partner and provides invaluable support through the knowledge and expertise of the Worcester Business School. The Hive has hosted many free university events, which are open to all, and have included business school research seminars, including 'Managing customer relationships in the service sector' and 'Workplace heroes and villains'. Professorial lectures, again open to all, are also a regular event and cover some fascinating research topics such as this recent lecture: 'Why austerity Britain gorged on magazines: the making of a monopoly in the UK magazine industry'.

The Hive itself has been used within the business school as a case study for an undergraduate operations management module where students have the excellent opportunity to learn direct from The Hive Business Manager the complex nature of running such a unique building and service, and the opportunities and challenges involved. The Hive is one of a handful of PFI libraries in the UK and as such is a complex model, but one that enables Worcester to have a first-rate facility for everyone.

Developments for the future

This article has outlined a few of the key developments that have occurred since The Hive opened to help create services and events for the business community. There are now many examples of good practice, and through its partnership working, The Hive has created new opportunities and ways of working that make it good for the business community and for the university.

Of course further development and growth is crucial if we are to remain at the forefront. We need to take into account changes in agencies and governance – for example, the management of the county council's Worcestershire Business Central is moving to the local chamber of commerce and we need to explore future collaboration with them. The Business Development intern role will come to an end in summer 2016 and we will have to decide how best to manage this.

Developments to help grow services and our events and training programme will definitely involve our partners – The Hive is always looking to increase links with local businesses and agencies. We plan to make more of showcasing local successful companies in the business centre. It would also be beneficial to increase student involvement in our services to business and create further employment, placement and volunteering opportunities. The future of libraries is in debate but one thing is certain, The Hive is open for business and is a step ahead already in terms of its approach to partnership working and to creating a 'one-stop shop' under one shiny gold roof.

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