

# Celebrating success

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I have written this article as part of my AST work for the county, with a particular focus on how design and technology departments might source similar venues to do school exhibitions of their own.

Lutterworth Grammar School and Community College is a large non-selective 14-19 mixed comprehensive in Leicestershire. Textiles is a very popular subject with a total of 400 students taking GCSE in Years 10 and 11 and another 60 at A' Level. As a department we consider it important to showcase and celebrate our students' achievements but these numbers make it hard to do that within school.

Over the past few years we have showcased work in two show houses in a local housing development. This was an unusual and exciting venue that was a perfect display for our work, especially for interior products. This development is now complete so this year we had the challenge of finding a new venue that would exhibit our work in the same dynamic way. We also wanted to include work from our Key Stage 3 feeder high schools, which meant that the exhibition would be considerably bigger than in previous years.

### Finding a location

We extensively researched various venues but most were either too small or were costly. As a department we have strong links with our local university, De Montfort in Leicester, and they generously offered us the use of the foyer area and several of the lecture rooms in the Queen's Building at the end of June. This building is well known for its unique internal architecture with exposed metal structures and walkways, light open spaces and its imposing impact. The added bonus for us was that it was the base for the Engineering and Technology departments which made it the perfect setting for the 'non girly' and 'technical' approach we wanted.

Preparation and organisation for the event was a challenge, especially as the venue was further away from school than in previous

years and meant that it would be much harder to come back for forgotten items. As we were also using work from our feeder high schools, the additional work involved in co-ordinating with them was considerable. There was also a lot of paperwork, especially as risk assessment forms had to be completed for both the university and the school, with the university form having several hundred check points to consider! An important factor that did not become apparent until the day of the event, and which will be important for any future event in a large public venue, was that of fire redundancy. The products we were displaying were not the concern but it was important that display stands and boards met fire retardancy requirements for public spaces. We would recommend that anyone planning a similar exhibition co-ordinate closely with the fire safety officer of the venue.

### Setting up

We used the school minibus to transport items to the venue early on the morning of the day before the event. The rest of the day was spent putting up the display. A recommendation to others doing a similar display would be not to underestimate how long this can take. It is best to plan some sort of 'packing' system before setting out for the venue linked into how you think you might display the items. Although you never stick totally to this plan it does help with organisation at the event. It is also wise to visit the venue beforehand to plan what signs and other information will need to be printed off.



### On display

The show homes had provided the perfect display props but this new venue was more challenging. Anticipating this, we put in a bid as part of the next phase of our Technology College status for a variety of display stands. We already had a variety of stands including some ex-shop displays given to us by a local firm as well as some MDF boards about a metre by half a metre, covered in calico. These were extremely useful as their size made them easy to carry and move but they were also very versatile as they could be used on their own or together to make a larger board. We were fortunate in that the nature of the venue meant they had a limited number of professional display boards, as well as a lot of tables we were able to use. Duvets and similar items were laid across tables to make beds. This looked effective but in future



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years we are considering investing in some blow-up mattresses to make the tables look even more bed-like. The open steel structure of the building was perfect for hanging fashion items from either on lightweight dummies or on wooden coat hangers.

We were keen to show all sides of textiles rather than just the traditional fashion and interiors, and our displays included technical textiles products and information and even a fibre optic fabric that had been specially made for us and which was also funded by Technology College money. There was information on display to explain to visitors what the modern textiles industry is like and what we do in school. Visitors could take away a specially designed programme and leaflets on our GCSE and A' Level courses along with information on careers in the industry.

#### The exhibition

On the day of the exhibition we had a steady stream of visitors totalling more than two hundred. We had two staff on duty with sixth form helpers on the door to welcome people. Visitors treated the work on display with great respect and no work was moved or damaged which is obviously always a concern in these types of situations, especially as much of the work was live coursework. As they left the exhibition visitors were also asked to sign the Visitors' Book and comments were extremely positive with several students being asked if they would like to sell their items. The exhibition was only open for one Saturday, although we are considering extending opening times in future years.

The exhibition received lots of local publicity both on the radio and in newspapers. This is easy to arrange: just call your local paper and invite them along! They usually ask you lots of



background questions so it is a good idea to have something pre-prepared on paper that they can take away if they wish. This type of coverage gives the event added prestige and students love it when their product is the one chosen to be included in the article.

#### A success

We consider this exhibition our most successful yet. It has continued to raise our profile in the local community and has further strengthened our links with the university. Students and parents really valued the work we did and were impressed by how professional the exhibition looked. We also feel that it has helped educate parents on what textiles is and that it was an excellent way of joining up with our feeder high schools and a good way to develop an increased sense of 'family'. Key Stage 3 pupils in particular were very proud that their work was in such an impressive venue alongside the work of older students. For us it also meant that we had the space to showcase the work of over 125 students along with a wide range of smaller displays and this would be difficult to do in school.

As a department we would fully recommend that other departments showcase their work in a similar way. We have found that venues like the housing developments we have used in the past and the university are keen to take part as it helps them to raise their own profile. Local shops are also another possible venue, especially large furniture stores, although for us we felt security might be an issue as we had so much work. Like any type of show it does take a lot of work and commitment from staff and students but we all felt it was well worth it for the rewards. The following comments in our Visitors' Book sum the event up:

'I'm proud to represent my school with my work'

'Looks more like a degree show than a school'

'It was interesting to see what work I will be doing later in my years at school - I really enjoyed the work'

'An appropriate setting for some marvellous work'

If you would like further information contact:  
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