A FANTASTIC NEW CAMPUS FOR BIRKBECK IN EAST LONDON

Birkbeck’s second home is attracting enthusiastic students as well as praise for creating new educational opportunities.

University Square Stratford - a state-of-the-art, £30m campus – opened its doors on time and on budget to students and staff in autumn 2013.

The completion of the distinctive building, with its gold and black panels and large windows, is the culmination of a seven-year project. As a result, a dilapidated car park in the heart of Stratford’s Cultural Quarter has been transformed into a futuristic landmark designed to deliver higher education.

The five-storey building is already succeeding, and approximately 1,600 full-time equivalent students are using its functional and stylish facilities.

In 2005 as a response to the low participation rates in higher education in east London, and a belief in Stratford’s future. Others also saw Stratford’s potential, and months later this part of the capital was chosen as the venue for the highly successful 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. From 2007 until the opening of University Square Stratford, Birkbeck staff taught at UEL’s Stratford campus on Water Lane as part of the Birkbeck-UEL partnership.

New Birkbeck students have their own joint campus, which they can call home. Courses are available at all levels at University Square Stratford, including Certificates of Higher Education, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Nearly 30 Birkbeck courses – from CertHE Legal Methods and CertHE Web Design Technologies to BSc Business and MA Creative Producing – are on offer.

Designed by award-winning international architectural practice Make and built by contractor Wates Fitzpatrick in association with AWW architects, the campus comprises 8,600 square metres of flexible teaching and performance space around a large, light-filled atrium. The facilities include:

- a 300-seat lecture theatre
- an 80-seat, Harvard-style lecture theatre
- a performing arts rehearsal and theatre-space
- the Weston Learning Centre – an area for quiet independent study
- and small group work
- a meeting room

Student support services at the campus include English language and academic learning support, specialist advice and guidance, disability support, and a helpdesk.

Birkbeck student Martine King, from Essex, is studying for a CertHE in Legal Methods at University Square Stratford. She said: “The facilities at the new campus are excellent and I am delighted to be among the first group of students to use them. Bringing education to Stratford and east London is so important. I would not have been able to study in central London, because it is too far from my home.”

Stratford was chosen as the location for the new campus partly because of its excellent transport links. Major rail, underground and bus services are only a short walk from the campus. Its location in the heart of Stratford’s Cultural Quarter also enables Birkbeck to foster further links with the cultural community, including Stratford Circus, the Theatre Royal Stratford East and the Stratford East Picturehouse cinema.

Local, regional and national supporters have been essential to the development. The London Borough of Newham has championed the project from the outset. University Square Stratford was financed by Birkbeck, UEL, £3m from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, £4m from the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, a significant donation from the Garfield Weston Foundation, and generous support from the Wolfson Foundation, alumni and other individual donors. Philippa Charles, Director of the Garfield Weston Foundation, added: “The Foundation is delighted to support the building, which will provide access to high-quality learning and education – we hope all who study here are inspired by this new facility”.

As well as offering higher education opportunities, the building is a prime example of the latest technology and sustainable building design. Its features include more than 700 square metres of solar panels, rooftop habitats to increase biodiversity, three rooftop bat boxes and a garden at ground level. The campus has been awarded an excellent rating – the second-highest category – by the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method.

Professor David Latchman, Master of Birkbeck, said: “University Square Stratford is an exciting development in Birkbeck’s historic mission to extend the best higher education to all, and I am delighted to see our unique, evening taught provision established in east London”. The slogan uniting both universities neatly sums up the exciting reality of the new campus: “Two outstanding universities, one fantastic place to study.”