

North Block, Senate House
(School of Oriental and African Studies)

Let there be light

£17.3m

/ Project value

June 2014

/ The build commenced

August 2016

/ The build was completed

Praised as “an exciting blend of classical and modern”, the £17.3m redevelopment of the North Block at the iconic Senate House has extended the School of Oriental and African Studies’ (SOAS) central London campus and created a stunning focal point – a unique double curvature, freestanding glass roofed atrium over a multi-purpose courtyard. A Grade II* listed building of great architectural significance, Senate House remained fully operational throughout our 26-month design and construction programme that was completed in two distinct phases, namely: the delivery of a new central 500m² atria, and the refurbishment of five floors of the North Block, equating to a GIFA of 7062m.

The brief

SOAS appointed us to progress the detailed design through Stage F and subsequently onto construction completion as part of a ‘Novated Design and Build’ contract. The University’s aspiration was the creation of “vibrant, fresh and flexible spaces to reinforce the SOAS identity” that would coincide with the start of its centenary year.



“The roof structure is among the most technically demanding components of the scheme....it called on our extensive experience of scheduling complex projects to ensure we delivered a high-quality facility for students and staff,”

Rob Joyce
GRAHAM Development Director

“The project was technically challenging due to the need to build the new structures within an existing courtyard and the self-imposed timeline that would allow the building to be opened at the start of our centenary year. The finished building is an exciting blend of classical and modern, which is already receiving praise from the academic and student communities,”

Keith Jennings
Project Manager at SOAS, University of London

The challenges

Designed by world-famous architect, Charles Holden, and completed in 1937, Senate House enjoys listed status, which meant that alterations, including the materials and appearance of all proposed features, had to meet the approval of English Heritage and London Borough of Camden. In addition, we erected temporary protection to safeguard the historic original fixtures and fittings. Increasing the level of difficulty, the London Bloomsbury city centre site is situated in an urban residential zone, within the New River Conservation Area.

The solution

The construction of an architecturally-ambitious glass roofed atrium between the existing Grade II* listed buildings is the showpiece of this complex transformation project. Taking six months to complete, the glass roof structure has created a beautiful interior that facilitates both formal and informal teaching and learning. It is not only a prism for natural light, it also promotes natural ventilation that helps keep running costs and energy consumption low. Moreover, rainwater is collected from the roof, stored and reused within the building thanks to a 14,000-litre harvester – a system that has only been retrofitted into a handful of listed buildings. Incredibly, 4,000 tonnes of spoil, or two filled Olympic sized swimming pools, were excavated to produce the double height space that provides an additional 1,000m² for the new Student Hub area. In addition, 7,000 m² of high-quality accommodation over five floors within the North Block were refurbished, delivering a mixture of teaching facilities, study areas, academic areas and open plan space.

Outputs & Benefits

/ **BREEAM:** BREEAM Excellent

/ **Hardcore and Piling:** Piling was necessary within the courtyard to support the glass roof structure. Approximately 100 piles were placed and are an unseen, but vital, part of the building's structure

/ **Communication:** We appointed a local Client Liaison Officer to engage with University staff, students, neighbouring residents and businesses

/ **Digital Construction:** During pre-construction we undertook extensive 3D modelling to plan the work



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