



**City University**  
London

The University for business  
and the professions

# Project Phoenix

A case study of City University's recovery from fire



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David Rhind<sup>1</sup>, Frank Toop<sup>2</sup> and John Tibble<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vice-Chancellor and Principal of City University, London

<sup>2</sup> Director of Finance and Business of City University, London

<sup>3</sup> Director of Student Services of City University, London

This report has been produced voluntarily by City University, London as an attempt to share experience gained in their disastrous fire of 21 May 2001. I welcome it because the university sector – though fortunately it has suffered few major disasters – needs to be prepared for dealing with them. For me, the report has the great merit of being clear, open, practical and honest: issues like the human factors involved as well as operational recovery ones are covered. In addition to reviewing the strategic issues, it also has the virtue of giving much detail – and it is at the detailed level that problems can so easily escalate if not dealt with immediately.

I commend it as valuable reading to all Vice-Chancellors and their colleagues, as well as to Chairs of governing bodies.

Diana Warwick  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, UNIVERSITIES UK

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## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document has two purposes:

- to serve as a common record of the events of 21 May and its aftermath for use by City University. It is intended as an *aide memoire* in making changes to our internal approaches so that we perform still better in any future disaster. It also serves as an account for Council, the University's governing body, drawn from documentary sources.
- to provide information for any other interested parties on how we tackled the emergency – a rare<sup>4</sup> event in University experience – and on what, with hindsight, we should have done in another way.

## METHOD OF PRODUCTION

Whilst the three authors compiled the document and take responsibility for its contents, the material herein has been augmented and checked by many people directly affected by the fire. This proved essential, since views on the significance of different events differed significantly amongst those involved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is dedicated to all those who contributed to a successful recovery from the events of the evening of 21 May 2001 in City University, London. This includes City staff in all categories and at all levels, the emergency services, the bulk of our contractors, the staff of the London Borough of Islington and the many people who expressed sympathy and offered help. Thanks are due to all of them, including colleagues in other universities who offered temporary space, friends in Livery Companies and elsewhere in the City of London – notably the Lord Mayor, our Chancellor (figure 9) – and former students. We regret that the list of names of all those who made substantial contributions is simply too long to itemise, and any such list might offend if one name was inadvertently missed off.

We are grateful for permission from the *Evening Standard* to reproduce their front page and, in particular, to Steve King for permission to reproduce the photograph therein.

On the night of 21 May 2001, City University suffered a major fire in College Building. This is its largest building and houses a number of academic and administrative departments. The fire or water-induced damage to some departments, notably Computing, Music, Personnel, the Vice-Chancellor's Office and the University Secretary's Office, was severe. Other departments were affected to various degrees. This occurred at the height of the exam period in College Building and whilst teaching was still active therein. As a result of the fire, a significant part of College Building will be out of commission for about two years and the total cost of restitution and temporary measures will exceed £10 million.

This paper summarises the events of the fire, the context in which it took place, the actions taken (both in the short term and the longer term) to remedy the situation, the necessity of assuaging harmful press reports, the outcome at the time of writing and the lessons learned from the experience. A timetable of some of the events and actions is given.

In brief, the lessons learned are:

- 1 : Setting up an ad hoc Emergency Management Team with a range of expertise from across the University and running all the actions through its membership was crucial to the success. It was, however, closed down three months later and 'normal process' resumed.
- 2 : Close monitoring of all activities is essential, especially those carried out by external contractors.
- 3 : The interaction effects between different decisions were sometimes difficult to anticipate and could cause much angst.
- 4 : 'Human factors' were a very significant factor, in that different departments and individuals responded very differently. Constant communication with staff and students, as well as contractors, the press and other parties was crucial. Repeated use of different, multiple communication channels was essential.
- 5 : Of the total likely measurable cost of the disaster – in excess of £10 million – a surprisingly large proportion will have been expended on finding new temporary accommodation.
- 6 : Our insurance policy was generally highly satisfactory but one important change has subsequently been made to it relating to insurance of books.
- 7 : It was a huge benefit that much teaching, research and administrative material in the fire-affected area was held in computer form; the Department of Computing's data recovery scheme was particularly effective. Had the fire occurred in some other parts of the University, the loss of information stored on computers would have been much worse and could easily have crippled departmental activities (see 13 below and appendix 3).

- 8 : Given the vulnerability of paper documentation, the case for preparing and properly maintaining *all* University teaching material in electronic form is very strong. In addition, communication links ensured that some staff were able to do productive work at home while temporary accommodation arrangements were being made. The interim office-sharing arrangements required of all Computing (and other) staff forced a re-examination of objectives and priorities in that department. More generally, this prompted a consideration of space norms and space utilisation across the University.
- 9 : The publicity effects of the fire were instantaneous and misleading and the worldwide impact on our business could have been huge if not tackled aggressively through instant rebuttal and advertising
- 10 : Stress on staff and students caused, in part at least, by the fire did arise but is difficult to measure. Only a very small number of people saw the (separate) counselling services for staff and students, despite widespread advertising of these services and their totally confidential nature.
- 11 : Despite the many problems caused by the fire, matters could have been much worse. Partly this was due to luck, part was due to good preparations and staff adherence to procedures.
- 12 : Our adversity brought out many genuine offers of help from colleagues in other organisations. More important still, it brought out the best in many University staff. Decision-making (often necessary under much uncertainty) was speedy and 'empowered', flexibility of response was commonplace whilst good teamwork was standard. There are other advantages: we will be able to re-build the inside of part of College Building in a way better-suited to contemporary needs; and the event forced us to recover and re-furbish a building leased to tenants and re-examine space use. But the price of these advantages was high.
- 13 : With the exception of some human factor matters, the operational side of the fire and its aftermath was handled well. But in two important strategic respects we were deficient. The first of these is that we had no Business Continuity Plan; such a plan will not solve all problems but would have helped us to prepare for major events. The second strategic failure was that our information infrastructure was not resilient so far as custodianship of data on local PCs is concerned, nor is it easy to replicate the multiplicity of local configurations. Both these matters are now being tackled. The fire also served as a 'wake up call': the shortage of staff and teaching space has led to a need to handle more room allocations centrally using computerised allocation systems to get more out of 'the plant'.
- 14 : Such an event could happen at any time. A single individual or incident has the capacity to disrupt or even destroy the activities and reputation of a University. Such institutions are by nature more open than many others, and there is typically little if any spare capacity in terms of staffing or space. This places a high premium on risk assessment and management.

Investigating a fire alarm triggered at 7.47pm on 21 May, a Security Officer found smoke billowing from the open letter box of a room on the top floor of the University's College Building (see figures 1 (map) and 2 (pre-fire photo)). He discharged six fire extinguishers on the flames visible through the letter box. He also called the main security desk and the staff on duty called the London Fire Brigade (LFB). Fire tenders arrived at 7.52pm. Meanwhile, other staff halted an exam in the Great Hall in College Building and 250 students from there and elsewhere in College Building were evacuated safely and the building searched for other occupants. The fire raged along the fifth floor of College Building (figure 3), the fire-fighters seeking to limit its spread to avoid the destruction of the clock tower and the section of the building along Wyclif Street (see map, figure 1). At the height of the blaze, some 13 fire appliances were on site, plus a helicopter hovering overhead and beaming down infra red images of the fire scene to the Fire Control Unit to show 'hot spots' despite the smoke. Massive amounts of water were poured on to the top floor and much cascaded through the Victorian building.

Senior staff were contacted by the Head of Security and began to arrive on-site from 8.30pm onwards. The University's Press Officer primed a small number of University spokespersons and co-ordinated the numerous interviews sought by local and national newspapers and TV; reports and images of the fire were broadcast by *BBC Newsnight*, on the *ITV News at Ten* and by *CNN worldwide*. The *London Evening Standard* led its next day front page with the headline 'Fire destroys City University' (figure 6).

By midnight, the fire was largely under control, though LFB staff remained on-site for 24 hours to damp down any renewals. At this point most University staff left for home. The result of the fire was that some 100 staff were without a space to work, some had their bases and working materials incinerated, and a number of teaching spaces were rendered unusable for the foreseeable future. Much of the Department of Computing was destroyed, a part of the School of Social and Human Sciences was wrecked and the Music Department was partially flooded, including its music studios. Many computer rooms were either destroyed or the equipment rendered unusable by smoke. The Personnel Department rooms were devastated by water damage, with ceilings collapsed; the Vice-Chancellor's and the University Secretary's offices and those of their immediate staff were in a similar state. Offices of other administrative staff were damaged to various degrees. In addition, knowledge of the true state of affairs was very limited: the entirety of the University's largest building was off-bounds to all staff until a damage assessment was carried out, and some part of it was manifestly in a dangerous condition (figure 5).

At 7.30am on 22 May the first meeting of an Emergency Management Team was held and actions began to be implemented immediately. This paper summarises the background to the fire, how the University's immediate activities were continued, what steps were necessary to minimise misconceptions inside

and outside the University, the longer term issues and the lessons we learned from the whole event. The last of these may have some relevance for other higher and further education institutions; for that reason, it has been compiled even before all of the damage arising from the fire has been corrected – but after something akin to normal operations in a new academic year had restarted. To be helpful, we have tried to avoid 20/20 hindsight and the re-writing of history. Some of the actions taken may now seem unusual but necessarily reflect our knowledge of the situation at that time.

The impact of the fire and the remedial actions taken were influenced by a number of factors that are briefly summarised below. City University is located on three main sites in Islington and the City of London. As ‘the University for Business and the Professions’, it has a strong focus on certain subject areas and nearly three quarters of its students achieve professional accreditation as well as degrees from us. They (rightly) expect highly professional and up-to-date teaching.

#### CONDITIONS ON THE NIGHT OF 21 MAY

The night was dry and relatively calm. The light wind was from the east, a factor which mitigated the spread of the flames along Wyclif Street (where many hundreds of exam papers were stored). Visibility was good, other than from the smoke generated, and the fire could be seen from high buildings for miles around. There was no other major fire in the central/east sector of London that evening, which ensured that the fire crews were drafted in from as far afield as Bethnal Green and beyond; more locally, the initial rapid response of the London Fire Brigade was aided by their fire station being only about 500 metres away.

On the other hand, this was a Monday evening with little other news; there was considerable media boredom with the lead-up to the General Election of 7 June and City is close to many newspapers’ offices and TV stations. As a result, there was great media interest in the events and this in turn had considerable implications for the business continuity of the University (see next section). Finally, this was the height of the exam season for some students in City University and many exams were taken in College Building (indeed, one exam was in progress in the Great Hall on the night of the fire). At the same time, teaching was still continuing for other students, though the demands on space were diminishing towards the summer period.

#### RESTRUCTURING OF THE SENIOR STAFF AND THE ORGANISATION

The Vice-Chancellor had announced in late 2000 that he wished to implement a change in structure amongst senior staff, to be implemented in stages over the period between the retirement of the University Secretary (the chief administrator) on 3 May 2001 and that of the Academic Registrar in December of that year. In essence, overall responsibility for all academic operations, as well as for governance, would be assumed by the new University Secretary but responsibility for finance, property and facilities would be assumed by the Director of Finance and Business. The two main university planning committees, reporting to the governing body (Council) and to Senate, were being merged, with the Deans – who have strong executive responsibility in City for their school plans, expenditure and achievement of targets – becoming much more intimately involved in strategy formation.

At the time of the fire, the University was without a University Secretary: the new appointee was scheduled to begin work in late July and was then based in Australia. Following the Secretary’s retirement, there was inadequate experience

in handling property matters at senior management level, though advertisements for a Director of Estates and Facilities had been placed (the successful incumbent started work in September). And the Director of Personnel had just taken early retirement on health grounds. In short, the University was temporarily under-staffed with key personnel for a short period – exactly at the time the fire occurred.

#### RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The University has long had crisis management plans. These had recently been reviewed by the Southern Universities Management Services company. In the event, they worked well. Beyond that, City has been a pioneer in seeking to identify, rate and manage risks to all aspects of its business – from changing student interests and market pressures as much as from disasters. Recognising this, the Funding Council asked the Director of Finance and Business to be a member of the group which commissioned the recently published best practice document on Risk Management. In reality, the University actually paused implementing its own plans while this work took place but is now well down the road to complying with the Turnbull Committee's recommendations. A corporate risk register, split into business domains, has been established and each risk that is relevant to one of the University's strategies has been scored as to its likelihood of occurrence and the impact it would have. Where a risk has scored high on both counts in respect of any strategy, the business domain manager is assessing the controls surrounding that risk to assess the extent to which that risk can be better managed. A similar exercise is imminent at School level, although many Schools are already incorporating some risk analysis in their School plans. Finally, the University also takes care to ensure that its insurance against insurable events is in good order: Finance and General Purpose Committee reviews the cover every two years.

Despite all this work on risk, the University had no corporate Business Continuity Plan to cope with major disasters.

#### THE UNIVERSITY'S SPACE AVAILABILITY AND NEEDS

A revised Estate Strategy was agreed by Council in March 2001. It highlighted the shortfall in University accommodation on conventional criteria and the poor condition of some of the existing spaces. No less than 50 per cent of the University property was judged as being in categories C and D (the two worst HEFCE categories) though the new building for the Business School was expected to improve the situation somewhat. In addition, the University's Strategic Plan set out our aspiration to grow the University's activities and business, both in volume and quality over the next few years. As a result, the consultants forecast a growing shortfall from the current 19 per cent in University spaces to 27 per cent by 2010 if the plan was followed and no additional spaces were created.

Space in Clerkenwell is expensive. Rates to lease office accommodation in mid-2001 were around £35 per square foot. That said, the University resided

almost entirely in property whose freehold it owned as a consequence of a decade-long implementation of policy. It also had potential development space in the form of a derelict Chemistry building and some other areas ripe for re-development – though clearly none of this could be achieved in the short term. One other nearby building owned by the University (the Innovation Centre) was leased out to commercial tenants, the leases expiring in 2003.

College Building, where the fire occurred, was opened in 1896. It is a Grade II listed building, strongly constructed of brick with concrete floors and a mansard roof which is hung with slate tiles (replaced in the late 1980s). Over the years, its internal spaces had been progressively sub-divided. At the time of the fire, it was home to the academic departments of Computing, Continuing Education, Economics, Information Science, Journalism, Psychology, Music and Sociology and the administrative departments of the Vice-Chancellor, the University Secretary, Academic Registrar, Human Resources, Finance, and the contracted-out property maintenance facility.

#### THE POLICIES AND PRACTICE OF THE UNIVERSITY

A university has some distinctive characteristics. By its very nature, it has a shifting population of staff and students who migrate around the University to rooms where teaching, practical classes, laboratories and social interaction goes on. In addition to the 'normal' 1200+ staff of City University, we enjoy the contributions of many part-time colleagues. They bring in their professional expertise to support particular areas of teaching and research: as 'the University for business and the professions' we actively seek high quality contributions of this kind. With around 9000 full-time equivalent students and a total student body (including extra mural classes) in excess of 14,000, key University buildings are often thronged with large numbers migrating as groups. In addition, there are hundreds of visitors to the University every day. Though security staff are on duty at all entrances and exits at all times and inspection of security cards is routine, military-style security is impossible and undesirable given the ethos of the University as a place of learning and interaction.

City University first adopted a no smoking policy – after much debate – in 1993. This was later extended to the prohibition of smoking in all parts of the University, except for specifically designated areas. This was primarily justified on health grounds, rather than safety ones. In the light of evidence gained after the fire, it was clear that smoking was still practised in rooms of some staff and this was regarded by the people concerned and by some colleagues as *de facto* sanctioned by management. The Occupational Health Service in the University periodically ran campaigns to encourage staff and students to give up smoking, the most recent being in March 2001.

In addition, City has had an active and successful health and safety policy and practice. Weekly fire alarm tests and unannounced simulations of fires are carried out periodically – much to the frustration of all staff, students and visitors affected.

## Putting it right after the fire

Aside from dealing with immediate and pressing issues (eg for students expecting to take exams at 9am on 22 May in College Building), we formulated our objectives at the earliest stage as being to:

- continue to operate in all the academic and support units directly affected by the fire
- get the 100 people affected back into decent accommodation as soon as possible and create the necessary teaching spaces in time for the new session beginning in late September
- support the individuals affected as well as possible
- identify the cause of the fire and take any appropriate management action to minimise risk of its re-occurrence
- minimise media-induced fallout and turn it to advantage wherever possible
- obtain the entirety of the insurance entitlement to cover the damage
- maintain control of the entire operation, document it and learn from the experience
- restore College Building, albeit not necessarily in the same internal arrangements.

### THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TEAM

The first meeting of a newly-constituted Emergency Management Team was held at 7.30am on 22 May, with a second meeting at 3.30pm the same day. Meetings were then held daily for several days, then every two or three days and finally approximately every week until the EMT was disbanded in August, all its activities then being managed through normal operational management lines. Even thereafter, however, monthly reports were made to the University's Senior Management Executive meetings. The initial membership of the EMT is shown in appendix 1; its membership was progressively reduced as time went on so as to minimise waste of time. All meetings of this group were minuted and actioned, copies of the minutes being sent to all affected senior managers. An archive of actions and problems arising was created, including photographs, videos and other documentary evidence on all aspects of the fire and decisions taken.

The simple principle under which we operated was that we agreed actions to be taken and those responsible brought about the desired action (though progress was chased by the minute taker). These actions were necessarily more speedy than is usual in a university and led to some complaints about lack of consultation. It proved extremely valuable to hold EMT meetings, for the interaction effects between different actions were not always predictable just by those concerned and the group acted in a mutually supportive – yet critical when necessary – way. Appendix 2 includes the headings of the issues dealt with in the first meetings. Many of these were to continue to figure in the following weeks.

### IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TAKEN ON 22 MAY

Appendix 2 sets out the main items carried out on the first three days of the fire and selected items thereafter. In general, however, the most pressing needs were to:

- **re-arrange all the affected examinations**, appropriating space as necessary, and inform students through notices, a help desk and word of mouth about the new arrangements. Thanks to the support of the University Librarian, a large reading area of the Library was immediately made available and, together with other areas, proved sufficient to replace the use of the Great Hall and other rooms.
- **secure enough teaching space for lectures** which were to have been held in College Building on 22 May. In the event, and because of the lack of any centralised record of the use of all rooms (some lectures and meetings are organised by departments within rooms over which they have jurisdiction), this proved impossible that day and all lectures in College Building were cancelled on 22 May. From 23 May, however, all were run elsewhere.
- **ensure that all dangerous parts of the site were made safe**. In particular, responsibility for the unsupported gable end was passed to the Borough Surveyor immediately and he called in his specialist experts.
- **relocate groups of staff** in temporary premises elsewhere in the University, usually sharing computers and seats with other staff. Thus the Vice-Chancellor plus his deputy and their staff, the University Secretary's staff and Personnel staff shared rooms and computers with other staff for four weeks in open plan offices, then moved twice more in the following five months. As a matter of principle, these staff were almost the last to be relocated into refurbished premises. Department of Computing academic staff shared rooms with colleagues elsewhere in the School of Informatics. Some of the Continuing Education staff were found space two kilometres away in the Business School. Music staff doubled up in rooms, since only part of their accommodation was flooded.
- **inform our insurers of the fire**, meet with their insurance adjustors who appeared on-site the next morning and appoint experienced, professional insurance assessors to act on the University's behalf. The latter's experience was invaluable eg they took immediate videos of all the damaged areas which later served as evidence in some disputes and advised on the salvage process.
- **recover and restore, where necessary, information held in computer or paper files** (eg the entire set of confidential personnel files).
- **ensure that the extent of the fire was not exaggerated in the media** and a 'business as usual' message was propagated both externally and internally, including briefing of the University's governing body. Substantial use of the website was made for this purpose and heavy use of email proved helpful (eg by the Journalism Department to its media contacts). In addition, a special edition of the University's staff newsletter, *Citynews*, was published on 24 May, some 60 hours after the fire. This was sent to all staff and copies were made available throughout

the University in halls of residence, foyers, departments, etc and sent to members of Council and all who had communicated their concern and support. The 'business as usual' message was propagated externally by advertisements in the *Evening Standard*, *Guardian* and *Economist* (twice – see figure 7); these were funded by the insurers to minimise the loss of revenue from students believing there was no longer any University to attend (we received calls on this score from around the world).

- **ensure that the quality of teaching and learning was not compromised by the effects of the fire** (see below).
- **manage the fears and expectations of staff in the affected areas.** This was initially handled less effectively than desirable, especially in regard to the 'business as usual' message, which caused much angst amongst those who had lost their rooms – though the message was correct for a large proportion of the University's staff and students. Many staff felt bereft without access to their computers and files; students in Computing could not retrieve paper material for their PhD theses for some weeks because of a chain of factors, including discovery of a small asbestos panel.
- **manage the logistics** of dealing with people and materials. For instance, several hundred crates of salvaged materials had frequently to be moved from one repository to another as higher priority needs for space occurred and other space was made available by actions elsewhere in the Northampton Square site. Space for the salvage agents to clean computers etc was required. A very substantial amount of equipment was salvaged by dint of good advice and quick action to clean it; failure to do this may well have led to the University having to meet the bills for new equipment.

#### THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE DAMAGE

Figures 8a to 8e show the areas within the College Building as categorised in terms of their damage and accessibility. After suitable inspections, agreement with Health and Safety colleagues and construction of 'no go' areas, it was possible to allow supervised access on the following dates:

orange areas:	29 May
blue areas:	1 June
green areas:	6 June

#### SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the succeeding weeks, many matters were dealt with by various staff, operating under the guidance of the EMT. These included the following:

- Establishing the extent of lost space and its implications for teaching etc.

- Defining the loss of equipment, furniture etc in conjunction with the loss adjusters and contractors brought in by the insurers. This was a matter for some dispute. Some equipment could be cleaned and returned to operations; leaving computer equipment without cleaning for a short period was liable to lead to later faults.
- Retrieving material stored on computer media. The daily back-up tapes created by the Informatics School were retrieved from their fire safe and restored but the material held on numerous PCs which had not been backed up by their users required more individual examination of the hard disks (successful in all cases where fire damage was not great).
- Publicising arrangements for and counselling of staff and students affected by the fire; a number of students already suffering from exam-related stress were seen soon afterwards.
- Meetings between senior staff and all the affected groups to tell them face-to-face about the situation, actions being taken and predicted out-turns
- Stabilising the College Building eg clearing debris, felting the 5th floor as a temporary roof etc.
- Securing and refurbishment of space to replace the 3000 square metres lost. This involved a parallel search carried out by Messrs Healey and Baker in the local neighbourhood and attempts to find space within the University curtilage. The former finally found one vacant floor (600 square metres) of a building within a 300 metre distance of College Building; this was leased for a 10 year let with a five year break clause and almost all the senior management staff were relocated into the one open-plan space. The latter found some space temporarily vacant within two departments and highlighted the benefits of extracting University tenants from the Innovation Centre (across St John Street from College Building). These tenants held multiple leases until mid-2003. In the event, a number of these were bought out and 1000 square metres created by October. The Staff Common Room (300 square metres) was converted into two computer laboratories and one teaching space. New music studios were created from 'flat packs' in the basement of Engineering and five Portakabins were brought on-site to act as small meeting or class rooms. A particular problem was the need to recreate one research space identical to its previous form, size and colour in order not to disrupt long-running research.
- Postponement of the scheduled QAA Subject Reviews to be undergone by the Departments of Computing and Sociology.
- Recognition of the contributions of all staff and others involved. This was achieved through various mechanisms eg the use of modest honoraria, stories in the staff magazine and the holding of a party for all staff involved in the hall of the Worshipful Company of Saddlers, plus formal letters of thanks to the London Fire Brigade, Police and Local Authority.

- Managing the publicity about the fire in so far as this was possible. The Press Office was dedicated to this activity for several weeks. Staff therein set out to create positive stories for the ‘business as usual’ message, put out accurate reports about progress and deal with media inquiries. The local media, notably the *Evening Standard*, followed the story for some weeks, and the situation was complicated by rumour and inflammatory comments to the press by a disgruntled former member of staff. Communications to support student recruitment were put in place – essential to protect future income. These included national advertising, plus letters to all students holding offers to undergraduate places, to prospective postgraduate students and to schools and colleges. The City website was updated daily for the first few weeks with news for staff, students and external visitors: it was clearly the most effective communication channel for most people (see <http://www.city.ac.uk/news/fire>). It was also used to acknowledge and publicise the many condolences and offers of support received; messages of support were made publicly available from alumni, the Minister for Universities, Vice-Chancellors in London and abroad, the Corporation of the City of London and others.

The fire has severely damaged, or at least delayed, some activities, notably research of staff in a few departments. It has certainly caused a huge amount of extra – and often invisible – work for many staff. In part this was due to the moment at which it occurred when we were temporarily without adequate staffing in relation to building expertise. The consequence was that we called in external experts wherever appropriate and a number of City staff set off on a steep learning curve.

The total direct cost of the fire is certain to exceed £10 million. The great bulk of this will be met by the insurers but some will have to be picked up by the University, reducing our capacity to invest in other areas.

Dealing with the insurers, Royal Sun Alliance, was a matter of high importance. In practical terms, we worked through their loss adjusters, GAB Robins. Understanding their role and immediate requirements, agreeing their assessment of damage and immediate repair works, getting approval from them (usually verbally) of expenditure, managing the general claim strategy and other requirements, all placed significant immediate demand on management time. The University appointed Thompson and Bryan as our loss assessors to provide us with experienced and practical insurance advice immediately. Their role was to protect our interests and provide the loss adjusters with the necessary information needed for their preliminary report and general updating of insurers, help us with accommodation options and temporary facilities and much more. Apart from their particular expertise, the loss assessors reduced the burden of meetings on insurance matters, leaving management to undertake other important tasks requiring immediate attention. Our experience was that the demands on our time in this initial period were very heavy and inappropriate decisions could easily have been made under pressure – hence the importance of obtaining professional advice. It was also important to appoint a co-ordinator with a small key support team and channel all major decisions through them.

It is deeply irritating that we have been unable unambiguously to identify the cause of the fire. We know precisely where and when it began – in the room of one member of staff. Investigations by the London Fire Brigade Accident Investigation Team found no evidence of ‘natural causes’ like electrical faults or the use of any fire accelerants. Investigations, including interviewing of staff and visitors, by the Islington CID had not reached any conclusion by the time of writing. The management response has included the reiteration of the University policy banning smoking from all rooms and internal spaces; a smoking shelter has been erected for smokers and the support of the Occupational Health facility for those seeking to give up smoking has been widely publicised. Other steps will include close consideration of fire-prevention facilities when College Building is re-built and a review of plans for such facilities in all new buildings.

There is still a long way to go to return to normality. It is expected that it will be sometime in 2002/3 before we are able to use all of the Grade II-Listed College Building again. We anticipate interesting discussions with English Heritage and the local authority about some aspects of its refurbishment.

We have however, survived as a functioning University and business. Despite the bad publicity, we have met our student target numbers. Thanks to the efforts of those involved, we have even prospered in some respects. Assuming the availability of finance, we will have the ability to re-configure College Building to suit our future needs. The return of the Innovation Centre to University use loses us income in the longer term but makes our estate planning for future expansion of numbers somewhat easier.

Finally, the camaraderie and creativity generated by the fire was extraordinary. In the first week especially, more was achieved than seemed conceivable and lateral thinking and mutual support were commonplace. In addition, many staff seem to have come to accept the need for change to be an on-going process as we seek to reevaluate processes, culture and infrastructure at the same time. That all said, there have to be better ways of achieving these gains! The opportunity costs involved have been large but unquantifiable.

- 1 : The *ad hoc* Emergency Management Team was a successful innovation, drawing as it did on staff from different functions and the academics affected. It was also advantageous to have periodic contributions to this team from external professionals. The contributions of these professionals were crucial at various stages, so rapid identification of appropriate people was essential. We may be wise to build longer term relationships with them. Winding EMT up after three months and reverting to standard management channels was appropriate.
- 2 : Close monitoring of all activities is essential. For instance, we – as is commonplace in major disasters like bombings in the City of London – suffered pilfering of personal effects carried out by some staff of contractors. Immediate action was taken to remove the firm from site.
- 3 : Solving most problems on an individual basis is easy: it is the interaction effects that are most difficult. For instance, the ‘business as usual’ message which was necessarily and widely propagated was anathema to those who had lost their rooms and materials. In addition, the unexpected is certain to happen: as one example, the discovery of one decorative panel containing asbestos damaged by firemen led to several days delay in obtaining access to certain fire-damaged areas.
- 4 : The human factors were a very significant factor. Departments and individuals responded very differently to the situation. Unsurprisingly, for instance, completing PhD students who were unable to retrieve much of their material for a significant period from their structurally unsafe room were highly stressed. We expended a huge amount of effort on communication but even that was not enough. One manifestation is that we did not respond quickly enough to the staff concerns about insurance of their lost books (see below). A number of staff who were not immediately affected by the fire took a little time to be convinced that the immediate appropriation of space for the exams etc and the conversion of the Staff Common Room into teaching and computing space ready for the next year were essential. The need for consistent, frequent messages delivered to all staff by a variety of means – no one channel works – was repeatedly evident. Face-to-face communication involving the most senior staff has to play a large part. For the departments most affected, continuous person-to-person communication was an all-consuming and sometimes stressful task for some weeks after the event, particularly for those in pivotal positions between those most seriously affected and those deciding what should be done. Departments also responded very differently to appeals for release of space: the Business School, Law, Maths, Optometry and Visual Science and the Development Office were enormously helpful.
- 5 : The measurable costs of recovering from the fire can only be quantified after reconstruction of College Building is complete. It seems certain however to be in excess of £10 million (see above). A surprisingly large proportion of this has not resulted from the reconstruction but from meeting the immediate costs of finding temporary accommodation.

- 6 : Our insurance policy was generally highly satisfactory. This is unsurprising since Finance and General Purpose Committee (F&GP) have reviewed it every two years. Its coverage was adequate, and our immediate action to bring in our own loss assessors to negotiate with the insurer's loss adjustors proved wise. But in one respect there was a major problem. Staff who lost their books regarded these as something which should be claimable on the University policy. The administration took the view that items bought from staff's own pocket were personal and should be claimed on their own policy unless that policy did not cover them – and that this was made clear in the Financial Regulations available on the University website. Staff rejoined that they were subsidising the University in purchasing the books from post-tax income and then using them in teaching and research. The situation was resolved by the allocation of an interim budget to cover immediate replacement of essential academic materials. A modest increase in premium for the University policy ensured that this situation will not recur. We also learnt, a little belatedly, that limited expenditure on *ex gratia* payments to those who lost everything in the fire would demonstrate clearly that the University does care for its employees.
- 7 : It was a huge benefit that much material in College Building as a whole – and especially in the Department of Computing – was held in computer form. The School of Informatics had its own technical support staff who had implemented back-up systems which were successfully tested, literally to destruction. Whilst much historical documentation on paper was lost, it is clear that we would have suffered a great deal more in an equivalent fire five years earlier. The School of Informatics' facilities were better than those for the University as a whole – but were not perfect, for the fire safe containing back-up copies of files was not sufficiently far from the School's servers and was engulfed in the fire (which it survived). This has led us to institute a University-wide review our data management, storage and business continuity plans to mitigate possible future disasters. The key findings of the information services-related review, carried out by the newly-arrived Head of Computer Services, are summarised in appendix 3: it is clear to all that we need to act quickly to make data storage much more robust and corporate (see 13 below).
- 8 : The major academic challenge was clearly to maintain high quality services to students, initially by ensuring that examinations took place on time and that teaching resumed with an absolutely minimal delay. Both of these were achieved by dint of having highly flexible staff – who re-organised teaching programmes to meet exigencies – and sympathetic and supportive students. Having done this, it was necessary to concentrate attention on the essential tasks demanded by the academic calendar, in particular, all the preparations necessary for examination boards and then those for the new academic year. Again we were lucky that the summer break provided some leeway, although only just sufficient to prepare and implement organisational changes, for example, to course structures. Any direct impact on teaching will remain uncertain until the new academic year is well under way; procedures are in place to monitor this potential impact. Given the

vulnerability of paper documentation, however, the case for preparing and properly maintaining *all* teaching material in electronic form is very strong. Ironically, whilst some researchers suffered very badly, both through loss of personal materials and through the need to support similarly affected research students, communication links ensured that other staff were able to do productive work at home while temporary accommodation arrangements were being made. Some interesting ideas have also arisen as a result of the interim office sharing arrangements required of all Computing staff.

- 9 : The publicity effects of the fire were instantaneous and misleading. The location of the fire, its timing and the appearance and drama of it led the press (eg see figure 6) to exaggerate its magnitude. Large swathes of the University, including the Schools of Business and of Nursing and Midwifery, are housed in separate buildings and were physically unaffected. Many other departments on the Northampton Square site were also physically unaffected, other than by having to accommodate colleagues and by the loss of access to teaching rooms in College Building etc. But the world-wide nature of the reporting – notably on CNN – led to calls from students and parents from as far afield as the Australia, Latin America, South East Asia and the USA, who believed that nothing remained of the University. A vigorous programme to counter this misperception was necessary and included mailings and advertising. The importance of all key staff having mobile telephones – and lists of each others' numbers – can not be over-stated in facilitating all manner of communications.
- 10 : Stress on staff and students, caused in part at least by the fire, is difficult to measure. There is anecdotal evidence in the form of anger and impatience on the part of some staff but only a very small number of people saw the (separate) counselling services for staff and students, despite widespread advertising of these services and their totally confidential nature. A remarkably small number of staff were 'signed off' from work for reasons attributable to the fire. For the academic staff, this may have been because the summer period allowed them to take time off without having to explain it to colleagues – but this is simply surmise. What caused the greatest angst amongst staff was any suspicion that 'the University' (typically described in those terms) did not care about their welfare or ability to work, uncertainty about the future in general and the insurance issue described earlier.
- 11 : The adversity evoked many and genuine offers of help from colleagues in other organisations. Most importantly, it brought out the best in many University staff, both individually and collectively: decisions were taken speedily by individuals in an empowered environment and the teamwork which took place was often outstanding.
- 12 : Despite the problems caused by the fire, we were lucky. Matters could easily have been much worse: lives could have been lost, the loss of rooms, materials and exam papers (only eight were lost) could have been much greater if the wind had been stronger and from another direction. The time of the year facilitated our recovery, in that fewer students were around and fewer teaching resources were needed than

at any other period of the year. The impact of the fire on departmental and individual's data could have been much worse had it occurred elsewhere in the University. That said, a significant factor in our success went beyond luck. We were in a reasonable state of preparation – the emergency plans worked well, the fire alarms installed (over some academic objections on cost grounds) some years earlier were crucially beneficial, the fire doors and other infrastructure worked well and our risk assessment had alerted us to some of the factors to be tackled.

- 13 : With the exception of some human factor matters, the operational side of the fire and its aftermath was handled well. But in two important strategic respects we were deficient and were fortunate not to incur many more problems. The first of these is that we had no Business Continuity Plan and, in effect, created one by our actions in the first two days. Any such plan will not solve all problems but would have helped us to prepare for major events. In a (typical) university situation where space is at a premium, where activities can not be closed down for long, and where finances and human resources for management are in short supply, creating and testing any Business Continuity Plan will not be trivial. It may be that some formal arrangements with nearby HE or other bodies will be necessary to achieve that – in effect, universities and colleges agree mutual support in advance of any catastrophe. The second strategic failure was that our information infrastructure was not resilient so far as custodianship of data on local PCs is concerned, nor is it easy to replicate the multiplicity of local configurations. This is a serious matter arising from 'Topsy-like' growth of systems over the years and under-investment in ICT. In both respects, the fire provided a 'wake-up call'. The fire also served in this capacity with regard to space: the shortage of staff and teaching space has led to a need to handle more room allocations centrally, using computerised allocation systems to get more out of 'the plant'.
- 14 : Such an event could happen at any time. A single individual or incident has the capacity to disrupt or even destroy the activities and reputation of a university. In a community where openness to the wider community, collegiality, individuality, determination to succeed and high aspirations are all parts of the ethos, rendering the risks at an appropriately low level is non-trivial. We need to re-think our policies and practice, and our responsibilities to each other in the light of the potential for disaster. As one obvious example, we may need to adopt the common US university practice of fire marshals inspecting every room and having the right to require staff to resolve any problems.

Membership varied – in general reducing throughout the three-month period to minimise work commitments and create a small but focused team. In the first instance, it was essential to ensure we did not miss any factor and to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise about the University held by these individuals. Other people (eg HR Manager, Business Manager of the School of Informatics) attended by invitation.

Vice Chancellor (Chair)

Academic Registrar

Director of Finance and Business

Director of Student and Support Services

University Medical Officer and Head of the Occupational Health Centre

Director for Information

Head of Estate Maintenance and Minor Works

Administration Manager, Business School (seconded to lead on space planning)

Operational Services (including security) Manager

Safety Officer

Acting Dean of School of Informatics

Head of Department of Computing

Head of External Relations

Media Relations Manager

Corporate Accountant (in charge of insurance matters)

Secretary: Director of Development

## Appendix 2 : A diary of the main events during and following the fire

This chronicles the main events during the earlier stages of the aftermath of the fire; a few events are shown for the period after the first three days. The following information has been compiled from various sources, including interviews with City University staff and minutes of meetings held by senior University staff. In addition to what is recorded below, many normal functions had to run in parallel: for instance, the responses to HEFCE invitations to bid for funding (eg Human Resources Strategy) were achieved; the management of the £40 million plus new building for the Business School continued successfully; new catering contracts were made; refurbishment of three large parts of the building adjacent to College Building occurred; and the great bulk of City staff carried on with their teaching, administration and research.

MONDAY 21 MAY 2001

- 19.47 : Fire Warning System sensor activated in corridor outside rooms A522/A523 in College Building. Security Officer (SO) leaves security box three floors below to investigate.
- 19.49 : SO arrives on the scene and immediately contacts the main desk in Northampton Square, instructing them to call the Fire Brigade. Main desk radio back to confirm they have received the message and the Fire Brigade is called. SO attempts to extinguish the fire with six foam extinguishers, believing it to be isolated in room A523.
- 19.49 : Head of Security Services (HSS) leads the security team in the evacuation of the whole College Building.
- 19.53 : Fire Brigade arrives on-site.
- 20.00 : Evacuation completed safely, including 90 students in the Great Hall.
- 20.07 : Police called by Fire Brigade.
- 20.10 : HSS, following emergency procedures, contacts the Vice-Chancellor (VC), Academic Registrar, Head of Estates and Director of Student and Support Services.
- 20.30 : Vice-Chancellor and senior members of staff arrive at site. The Pro-Chancellor, Sir Paul Newall, is contacted.
- 20.45 : First calls from press to Media Relations Manager (MRM) from *Guardian* and *Sky News*.
- 20.45-22.00 : MRM and VC give statements to the press. MRM gives statements to Press Association and also speaks to *Sky News*, *London Live*, *The Evening Standard*, *ITN*, and journalism students. VC speaks to *The Times*.
- 22.30 (approx) : Fire Brigade brings fire under control.
  - 22.30 : Report of fire broadcast on *BBC TV Newsroom South East*, *Newsnight*, *ITV News* and *CNN*.
- 23.30-00.00 : Senior members of staff leave site.

TUESDAY 22 MAY 2001

- 00.30 : HSS breaks into the Personnel Office with a member of the Fire Brigade to retrieve the home contact number of one staff member who was (erroneously) feared to be in his incinerated office.
- 01.30 : Remaining members of the University security team leave the site.
- 04.00 : Fire Brigade staff and HSS operate on-site solving, access and electrical problems until 06.30.
- 06.00 : Newspaper reports of fire published in *The Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sun*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times* and the *Independent*.
- 07.30 : Emergency Management Meeting No 1 held. VC Chairs steering committee, decides that the Director of Student and Support Services will lead the clear-up operations and the Director of Business and Finance will lead on re-establishing space, dealing with insurance etc. Agenda items were: situation report; examinations; fire brigade update; staff issues; emergency management arrangements; and teaching arrangements.
- 08.30 : At University request, Islington Council brought in the Borough Surveyor to advise on making safe the structure of College Building, in particular the unsupported gable end on Wyclif Street. VC asks them immediately to bring in their specialist contractors to take responsibility for securing the gable end.
- 09.00 : *Evening Standard* reports fire as front page headline story – ‘Fire destroys City University’.
- 08.50 : Offers of help with temporary space begin to be received. Almost all are too far away to be practicable.
- 09.30 : Statement from VC issued via the staff and student website portals, handed out at the main Northampton Square entrance and in the Staff Common Room. The statement is also sent to all lay members of Council.
- 10.00 : Head of Personnel begins liaison with Computer Services staff to re-establish network services for Personnel Department.
- 11.00 : University website publishes up-to-date and accurate information on the fire and emergency arrangements for staff, students and the general public.
- 11.30 : Lord Mayor visits the site and does an interview with *BBC TV Newsroom South East*.
- 12.00 : Loss Adjustors arrive on site to view damage.
- 15.00-18.30 : Director of Finance and Business interviews Loss Assessors throughout the afternoon.

16.00 : Emergency Management Meeting No 2 held. Agenda items: situation report accommodation; gable end wall; personnel matters; appointment of loss assessors; communicating with Council.

16.25 : The gable end wall collapses into Wyclif Street, injuring three scaffolding contractors. All three are discharged from hospital next day.

WEDNESDAY 23 MAY 2001

08.00 : Emergency Management Meeting No 3 held. Agenda Items: situation report; future planning; publicity; building safety issues.

09.00-17.00 : VC meets informally throughout the day with senior members of staff. Leave planned for the half-term week of 28 May postponed for key staff to ensure the recovery process continues without pause.

09.00 : Director of Finance and Business appoints Thomson & Bryan as Loss Assessors.

10.00 : Network and e-mail connections for Personnel Department re-established by Computer Services.

10.15 : VC meets with Informatics staff.

12.00 : Risk assessment carried out on College Building.

14.00 : Staff from Personnel Department allowed into their offices for initial retrieval of their records. Due to the confidential nature of this material, it cannot be temporarily stored in the main storage area, the Great Hall, so a locked room is allocated for this purpose in the Department of Journalism.

14.00 : Timetabling Meeting held by Dr Seville and Mr Tibble.

17.00 : Emergency Management Meeting No 4 held. Agenda items: situation report; accommodation; external perceptions; dealing with the loss assessors and adjustors.

THURSDAY 24 MAY

10.00 : Personnel Department is temporarily relocated to E214.

11.00 : Pro-Chancellor (Chair of governing body) visits the scene in College Building.

12.30 : First copies of the special issue of *Citynews* on the fire are distributed to staff and students.

15.00 : Meeting with Deans and Heads of independent departments, regarding external perceptions of the fire and possible effects on recruitment etc.

16.30 : Emergency Meeting No 5 held. Agenda: situation report; accommodation; publicity; staff matters; examination progress.

FRIDAY 25 MAY

10.00 : Staff who require urgent access are allowed into College Building under supervision.

10.00 : Space Planning Group set up to define space needs and to propose ways of meeting them, led by Pam Smethurst on secondment from the Business School.

10.30 : Bishop of Stepney visits City, and tours the site of the fire with the University Chaplain.

12.00 : Director of Finance and Business meets with the members of the Space Planning Group to determine who has lost office space, and to begin analysis of where these members of staff can be temporarily housed for the next three months.

14.00 : Staff allowed access to parts of Level 3 of College Building under supervision.

16.30 : Emergency Management Meeting No 6 held. Agenda: report on recovery phase; rehousing staff; staff and student health; communication and marketing; personnel issues; teaching in the Department of Computing; Matters of concern to the Health and Safety Executive. Healey and Baker appointed to search for temporary accommodation.

TUESDAY 29 MAY

09.00 : Contractors begin work on College Building (Blue Zone).

09.00 : Staff move back into Orange Zone on Levels 3, 4 and 5 of College Building.

10.00 : Staff allowed access to Orange Zone on Levels 1 and 2 of College Building.

10.00 : Department of Computing back in operation (despite incineration of many staff rooms and inaccessibility of many others).

WEDNESDAY 30 MAY

10.00 : Students allowed access to permitted areas of College Building.

14.00 : Space Planning Meeting held. Construction managers appointed.

16.00 : Emergency Management Meeting No 7 held.

FRIDAY 1 JUNE

16.00 : Emergency Management Meeting No 8 held. Agenda: report on recovery of building; accommodation issues; marketing and communications; staff and student well being; insurance; report from loss assessor; report from building surveyor; IT equipment.

MONDAY 4 JUNE

- : Advertisement placed in the *Evening Standard* confirming that the University is 'open for business'.
- : The *Evening Standard* publishes a report on the effects of the fire two weeks on.
- : Demolition contractors appointed.

TUESDAY 5 JUNE

- : Advertisement placed in the *Guardian* confirming that the University is 'open for business'.

WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE

- 15.00 : Management Meeting No 9 held. Agenda: membership of the group; impression management; report on recovery of building: main staircase and entrance, great hall; PC salvage; fire investigation; performance of salvage contractors; staff and student well being; alternative accommodation – general and the Innovation Centre; insurance.
- : Letter sent out to all undergraduate students with offers of places in autumn 2001, reassuring them that all is well. Equivalent letters to all postgraduate students sent by departments in all schools.
- : The London Fire Brigade Accident Investigation Team passes on its findings to Islington CID. Detectives will review the investigation to date and carry out their own inquiries.

FRIDAY 8 JUNE

- : Planning supervisors appointed.

SATURDAY 9 JUNE

- : Advertisement placed in the *Economist* confirming that the University is open for business.

MONDAY 11 JUNE

- : Advertisement placed in the *Guardian* confirming that the University is 'open for business'.

TUESDAY 12 JUNE

- 09.30 : The St John Street entrance is re-opened. Wooden boards are erected to block access to the central staircase and south corridor which were affected by the fire.
- : Insurers agree funding for the University to use the Innovation Centre to re-house Informatics and Personnel. Use of building is subject to negotiations with tenants.

WEDNESDAY 13 JUNE

- : *Evening Standard* publishes (unfounded) claim from former (disgruntled) member of staff that the fire was a 'tragedy waiting to happen'.
- : Revised plans of College Building access areas have been published on staff website portal to help people working in and visiting the building to identify where access is permitted and where it is prohibited due to building works.
- : The University publishes information for staff who lost personal possessions in the fire. A letter outlines the insurance position and information and forms help staff make an insurance claim. A service has been created in the Finance Office to help people making insurance claims.

SATURDAY 16 JUNE

- : Second advertisement placed in the *Economist*.

MONDAY 18 JUNE

- : Article in *Financial Times* compares VC to Tony Blair in his 'business as usual' approach over City's fire.

MONDAY 2 JULY

- : Space Planning Group view six buildings for space for senior management of University and prioritise them: Paramount Building is best solution.

TUESDAY 17 JULY

- : Teaching and Learning/Quality Assessment staff set up a Fire Group that meets for the first time. Its terms of reference are:
  - to identify the impact of the fire on the quality and standards of teaching and learning at City University.
  - to support Schools and Departments in planning for their needs in the light of the fire.
  - to review action taken by schools and departments to manage the situation, with particular focus on the departments of Computing, Information Science, Music and Continuing Education.
  - to review, with Continuing Education, the impact on the Courses for Adults programme.
  - to report back to Quality Committee and Teaching and Learning Committee in the autumn term 2001-02.

MONDAY 30 JULY + 25 AUGUST

: Two contracts agreeing to hand back space in the Innovation Centre are signed by tenants.

FRIDAY 10 AUGUST

: Work commences on Level 5, converting the Staff Common Room and other space to provide computing laboratories for Informatics and teaching space from the start of the autumn term.

WEDNESDAY 15 AUGUST

: Final (18th) meeting of the Emergency Management Team held. Henceforth all fire-related matters to be dealt with through normal line management channels, with periodic report to the Senior Management Executive meeting.

FRIDAY 17 AUGUST

: Advertising to support clearing process appears in the national press and enhanced response centre opens for enquiries. All advertising is funded under the insurance policy.

TUESDAY 31 JULY

: Floor 1 and part of Floor 2 (13 August) of Innovation Centre returned to University occupancy. Stripping out and refurbishment begins.

MONDAY 20 AUGUST

: Five Portakabins installed on terrace space adjacent to College Building.

MONDAY 27 AUGUST

: Floor 3 of Innovation Centre returned to University occupancy after financial inducements. Stripping out and refurbishment begins.

MONDAY 3 SEPTEMBER

: Five 'flat pack' music studios arrive for assembly in Engineering basement area.

MONDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

: New Director of Estates and Facilities takes up post full-time – with much to do!

THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

: Contract to lease Paramount House ground floor on five year contract for occupation by senior management is signed.

MONDAY 1 OCTOBER

: First day of term.

FRIDAY 5 OCTOBER

: Personnel staff occupy second floor.

MONDAY 8 OCTOBER

: Informatics staff occupy lower parts of Innovation Centre; they occupy floor 3 three weeks later.

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER

: Senior management occupy Paramount House ground floor – all of them in open-plan accommodation as a matter of policy.

### Appendix 3 : Main findings from the review of the computing infrastructure and procedures in and after the fire

At the City University Information Services Committee meeting in June 2001 a commitment was made to review the events following the fire in College Building. This review was to be carried out from the wider information services perspective and to include suggestions for improvements to reduce the technology risks in the future. Information for this review has been obtained through one-to-one meetings with various staff across the University. The following summarises some of the key findings. Recommendations to ameliorate the suggestions, along with the costs of so doing, are being considered by the University.

#### SOME KEY FINDINGS

From an IT perspective, the University lost network connectivity in a number of locations: the School of Informatics server room; the Informatics SAP laboratory; a public access laboratory; plus a number of Informatics staff PC's and administration desktops (these mainly from water damage). IT departments and colleagues across the University were quick to help, offering equipment and liaising with data recovery and other service organisations. Network communications were restored within 48 hours and the Informatics team began to rebuild their servers using other machines fortuitously ordered for up-grades.

New laboratories have been established in the former Staff Common Room. Staff have replacement PC's and data has been recovered from lost hard drives. Informatics have recovered most of their intellectual investment and a new server room has been established in the Innovation Centre, allowing HR and other staff to begin moving into that building. Offices in the Paramount Building have also been fitted out with ICT for senior staff.

Achieving this has, however, been brought about at the expense of other works originally planned for summer 2001. Preparatory work for the new PC Service, initialisation of the Outlook/Exchange work, improvements to the existing student build processes, network improvements and support to application development activities have all been interrupted.

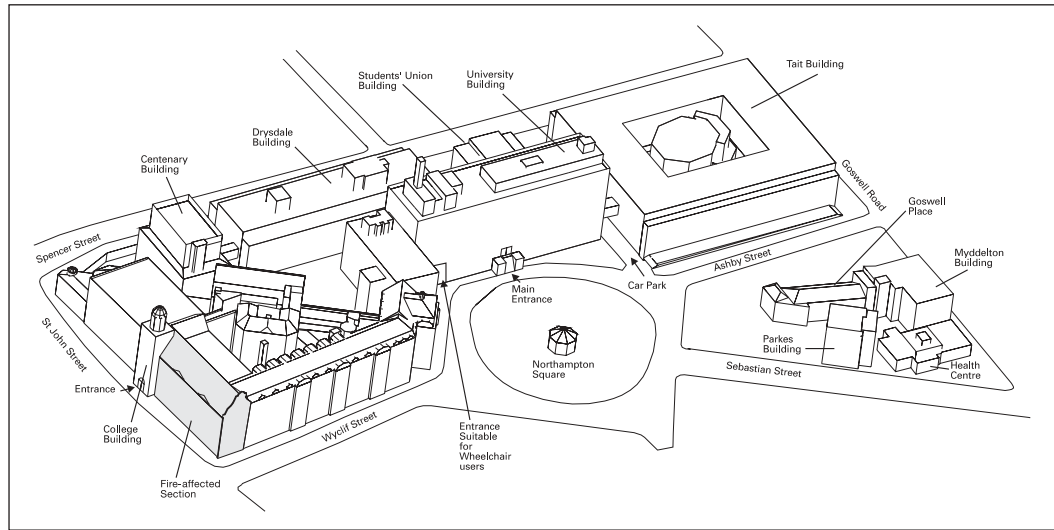
Critical lessons learnt included:

- IT and electronic information are both vital and critical to the business of the University.
- If the fire had happened in another building where most of the IT equipment is based, then the recovery would have been fundamentally more problematic.
- Restoring e-mail and web communications was seen as the highest priority, but there was no pre-defined priority order for the re-establishment of other applications.

- The policy decision by School of Informatics to insist on central storage of key data by staff ensured minimum loss of intellectual material for them. Equally, the School's policy decision to have central file store backup and restore made recovery easier.
- The central University server room lacked proper environmental controls or fire suppression systems.
- Not all back-up media was stored in a suitable location.
- Staff on the main campus outside of the School of Informatics were largely reliant on their own individual back-up regimes.
- It was not readily possible to relocate staff to other desks and allow them to continue working as each member of staff has a unique desktop, storing data on local hard drives. Consequently each necessitated individual rebuilds.
- There was insufficient information recorded about systems and server configurations, passwords etc to allow wider participation in system recovery: much reliance had to be placed on the memories of technicians.
- The absence of any immediately designated space to start recovering systems added to the stress of the recovery.
- Although suppliers were sympathetic to our needs, there were no robust arrangements for sourcing replacement equipment at short notice.
- The absence of any structured plan to aid recovery introduced additional levels of stress and discussion, possibly delaying the recovery timescales.
- Despite everything, the disaster invoked a 'Dunkirk spirit' and a genuine and visible willingness to work together. However, staff not involved at the 'coal face' do not always understand the enormity of the recovery processes and were wont to forget the situation when non-fire problems arose.

**Figures**

- 1 : Map of the College Building area, showing street names
- 2 : Pre-fire photo of College Building, St John Street entrance and above
- 3 : The fire in progress
- 4 : Aerial view after the fire
- 5a : The free-standing gable end after the fire
- 5b : The free-standing gable end after its fall



1



3



4



2



5a



5b

- Figures**
- 6 : The *Evening Standard* front page summary of the event
  - 7 : One example of our counter to press stories – an advert in the *Economist* of 9 and 16 June
  - 8a-e : Illustrations of each of the five levels of College Building showing access
  - 9 : Visit of the Chancellor of City University, the Lord Mayor of London, on the morning after the fire



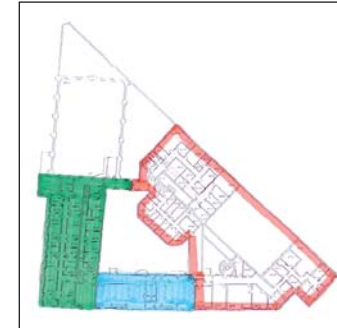
6

The advertisement is for City University London. It features a stack of various international newspapers on the left, including *The Daily Telegraph*, *Herald*, *JRC*, *FINANCIAL TIMES*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *CORRIERE*, *Kleine Anker*, *Le Monde*, *Die Welt*, *Voluntas*, and *Cumhuriyet*. The text on the right reads: "We are always making headlines". Below this, it says: "We're used to City's staff, students and graduates causing a stir. And in our leading journalism department we really teach our students to make the news." It then continues: "Now we've made the news in a less welcome way. Reports of the fire that damaged the upper floor of one of our buildings were turned into a blaze of global publicity that generated more heat than light. The damage is being put right and we are still open for business - and all our other top-rated subjects." It lists several subjects: business and law, health, engineering, IT and mathematics, social sciences, and creative and cultural subjects. Contact information is provided: "For undergraduate courses call 020 7040 6716", "For postgraduate courses call 020 7040 6014", "For executive education call 020 7040 6710", and "For evening courses call 020 7040 6266". The website [www.city.ac.uk](http://www.city.ac.uk) is also mentioned. The bottom of the ad says "The University for business and the professions".

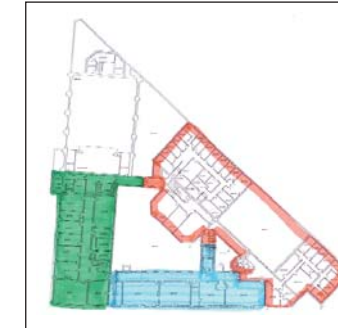
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9



8a Floor 5



8b Floor 4



8c Floor 3



8d Floor 2



8e Floor 1

- orange zone – full access
- blue zone – restricted access
- green zone – total exclusion zone

Designed by Crescent Lodge, London  
 Printed by Dexter Graphics  
 Cover photograph by Sarah Lee  
 Other photographs by Chris Dry and Madeleine Sugden

