

In Focus: Entrepreneurial seat of learning



Andrew May is director of estates at University of Hertfordshire

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Last month, Office & General (O&G) was announced as new facilities services provider for the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield in a contract worth in excess of £55 million.

O&G, part of the Tenon Group of companies, secured the deal to deliver a full facilities service following a seven-month competitive procurement process. The contract supersedes and expands upon the previous agreement between O&G and the university, which was worth around £1.8 million annually.

The university's two main campuses, College Lane and de Havilland, are less than a kilometre apart. The new deal, which, encompasses the entirety of this estate, includes planned and reactive maintenance, statutory compliance work and services ranging from grounds maintenance and cleaning to hygiene, pest control, and help desk services.

Business activities

The new contract, which has a ten year term, involved a process by which O&G had to agree up front with key elements of the university's corporate strategy and values. Says May: "What we have achieved is an outcome-driven partnership rather than a traditional FM contract."

Indeed, the deal does have an interesting additional element to it. More than £1 million of investment into the contract from O&G will support a range of outcomes set to be delivered over the lifespan of the partnership. These will include the establishment of a bespoke customer services training centre; new technology and equipment; a dedicated CAFM system, an MBA and training placement programme, and investment in student-led business ventures – to name but a few.

Andrew May, director of estates at the University of Hertfordshire, told FM World: “If you stand back from everything that’s happening in higher education regarding political and financial changes and the results of all policy changes that are coming about such as the trebling of fees, lifting of the student number cap, tuition fee income not increasing by inflation – all these things are going on at a macro level.”

All universities are dealing with these issues, says May, and “must respond” to these circumstances. The contract with O&G is the University of Hertfordshire’s response to this current climate.

According to May, the University of Hertfordshire is at an advantage as it is already carries out activities that “differentiate us from lots of other universities”.

The university, he says, is more business-oriented than many in the country.

“What does that mean in reality? It means we have a turnover of £250 million a year – with about a quarter of that income coming from businesses that we operate.”

By example, May cites the university’s Uno bus company which runs all over the county as well as to and from London. Uno turns over £10 million a year from 11 million passengers – and it’s a venture that May describes as “very successful”.

The university also runs its own property company as well as other businesses through which, says May, “we have aspirations to become internationally renowned.”

The move to stand out beyond the confines of the UK is supported by its position in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2015-2016. The University of Hertfordshire features in the top 20 per cent for its ‘international outlook’, perhaps literally aided by its track record of providing the aerospace industry with engineers - fitting in a town associated with aircraft design and manufacture.

Entrepreneurial spirit

The university also has plans to inject some of its burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit into the 25,000-strong student body spread over its 10 schools, making it an integral part of the curriculum. May’s role in estates and hospitality includes finding places where efficiencies and savings can be made, especially in those areas that, through its collaboration with its FM service provider, can help build its international profile.

“We’ve decided not to have a traditional boring facilities contract where somebody is doing cleaning and another doing security,” concludes May.

“What we want is a facilities approach that is going to improve services while being efficient and helping improve our business situation.”