

# THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS PEOPLE

**A project's success usually boils down to how well people work together; this Pathfinder project was no exception.**

By **Charissa Snijders**, Charissa Snijders Architect Ltd, Auckland, for Constructing Excellence NZ

**T**he merging of Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic with Universal College of Learning (UCOL) in 2002 allowed for the development of a new integrated campus for the Whanganui region. After careful deliberation, the client chose to build within Wanganui's 'old town conservation overlay zone'. The outcome was the construction of a new 3-storey teaching and administration block, upgrade of three other existing buildings, a 4-storey historical building requiring major structural strengthening and refurbishment, plus linkways and bridges between the buildings.

The client demanded a fast-track process, a reputable contractor had to be found in a boom market, plus there were resource consent issues around building within a heritage precinct, resulting in subsequent sensitive navigation of the zone's controls to ensure no delays. However, the project was achieved because of everyone's willingness to communicate, plan and work together as a team. Hence, this Pathfinder project is another example of an extraordinary achievement under difficult circumstances.

## Building in sensitive heritage zone

Eighteen months before design began, UCOL developed an in-depth education plan and heritage study that addressed demographic and community needs in terms of education and the site planned for development. This, plus a project design description, ensured a clear understanding of UCOL's objectives.

The architectural team had strong knowledge of the local district council systems and a partnership was created early in the design phase. This was important, particularly in light of the tightly controlled heritage zone. The council employed a heritage architect to oversee and be part of this process from the start, so, at resource consent, there were no surprises and the buildings could proceed non-notified.

## Value management workshop

Holding an early value management workshop was significantly important at many levels by:

- challenging every aspect of the design and materials whilst still holding to the key objectives
- providing an opportunity for the client and consultants to work as a team
- allowing UCOL to change its view on its contractual position.

Given the boom market conditions at the time, contractors were unwilling to enter the original litigious contractual position. After advice from consultants, UCOL moved towards a fairer contract, gaining Lockwood Naylor as the contractor for the project.

## Staying ahead of the game on project planning

The client acknowledged the tremendous pressure they placed on the project team and were committed to their part in making decisions in a timely manner. In turn, the team realised the pressure that they would be under to meet the contract obligations and took extra care with planning the project. The project programmer who worked for the contractor also programmed

Project	UCOL (Universal College of Learning) Wanganui Converge
Client	UCOL (Jule Einhorn, client project director)
Architects	Designgroup Stapleton Elliott (Brian Elliott, principal consultant and lead architect) and DLA Architects
Contractor	Lockwood Naylor (Paul Booth, project manager)
Region	Whanganui
Sector	Education
Construction value	\$25 million
Project value	\$36 million
Preliminary investigations and preparation of client brief	2004 (18 months)
Concept design (including land purchase)	Late 2005 to early 2006
Resource consent	May 2006
Tender	P&G plus margins
Construction start (foundations)	December 2006
Completion of majority of work	February 2008
Completion of heritage building	April 2008
Form of contract	NZIA SCC1 with special conditions



the documentation delivery dates. Thus, the contractor was able to highlight potential issues and resolve them before they became problems.

In July 2007, the contractor foresaw that the original timeframe could not be fully met. A meeting was called to find a way to expedite the construction process. Realising that the project team was doing its utmost to meet the deadline, and that there would be minimal disturbance to their teaching, the client agreed to two completion dates. They further agreed materials changes and additional costs/resources to help meet the deadline.

Another outcome of the meeting was the introduction of Last Planner. As part of setting up Last Planner, a one-day workshop was run with all key trades to highlight significant goals and milestones for planning the construction sequence. Weekly meetings were then held to address work in detail for the upcoming week, projected out to the next 5 weeks. This helped subcontractors keep to time, and gave them a greater understanding of how they fitted within the project as a whole. With up to 200 tradespeople sometimes on site at once, Last Planner helped coordinate them all more smoothly.

### Teamwork and regular meetings

Because of the integrated nature of the work, there weren't many errors. For the few that did arise, there was a 'no blame understanding', and people worked together to find a solution.

Brian Elliott, lead consultant for the project, said that the communication was the best he had ever experienced. 'It was novel not to experience the traditional idea of the contractor being on one side and the consultant on the other, but for all of us to really be a team.' The positive outcome of this teamwork was excellent workmanship.

Regular meetings supported the culture of operating in an open and honest manner. Project manager Paul Booth said everyone was able to communicate freely. Constant dialogue was encouraged at fortnightly project control group meetings. After the introduction of Last Planner, weekly meetings were also held with subcontractors and consultants. All meetings were recorded and notes circulated to the project team and relevant subcontractors.

### Always keeping one step ahead

One of the project coordinator's roles was to provide a risk analysis that was updated at the fortnightly meetings. The initial risk analysis was done in conjunction with UCOL and was then opened to input from the rest of the project team.



The project's fast-track nature meant keeping one pace ahead. 'While one part was going for consent and work started on another part, developed design was being completed for another stage,' said Jule Einhorn. Overall, there were 12 building consents for this project!

An advantage of the fast tracking was that the architects could discuss details with the contractor. Project manager Paul Booth remarked, 'The architects were prepared to listen and implement certain suggestions. We were not afraid to offer solutions as we knew they would work with us to find them.'

### People the key to success

Because of the goodwill and excellent relationships established, the project came together under exceptionally trying circumstances. Everyone involved agreed that the people were the key to success. 'If people are reasonable and respect each other's roles then you will get a good result,' said Brian Elliott. As Jule Einhorn confirmed, 'Trust was developed very quickly, and from our point of view we had confidence in the team.'

On reflection, echoes of a Maori proverb come to mind:

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people!

It is people!

*A more detailed report is available at [www.constructing.co.nz](http://www.constructing.co.nz), see Pathfinder projects. ■*