

Republic

Reimagining the 21st-century campus

THE Connect 

Republic

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Why creating a new type of place is essential for universities' future success

The Republic workspace at East India Dock is a pioneering model for the 21st-century campus to develop work-ready graduates for the jobs of tomorrow

Republic at East India Dock is a project borne out of a search for the talent of the future. It has transformed East India Dock, turning an unloved piece of real estate into high-quality, low-cost workspaces used by a variety of occupiers, including higher education institutions, social enterprises and entrepreneurs. But Trilogy Real Estate developed the space with the intention to transform lives.

Robert Wolstenholme founded Trilogy in 2015 with the objective of creating innovation hubs across the UK that could attract and develop talent, becoming engines of economic growth in their local communities. East India Dock, in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, was the first site to attract his attention. It is only a 10-minute walk from Canary Wharf and the local area has one of the fastest-growing, youngest and most diverse populations in the UK.

"The demographics of the area were really interesting," Wolstenholme says. "Sadly, it was the borough with the highest rate of child deprivation in the whole of Britain, and that got me thinking how the talent of the future could well come from the communities that are already based in places like Tower Hamlets. The provocation when I started there was, 'how can you create jobs that will be real for locals?'"

Wolstenholme describes Republic's cohort as independent thinkers – "the collar-free brigade" – and educators and employers like what they are seeing. "We have created a campus based on the realisation that the place you will find the talent of the future is the meeting point between education and commerce," Wolstenholme says. "We have made massive efforts to give it humanity and make it a place that is inviting to people."

Jonathan Burroughs, CEO of Creative Places, says Republic is future-proofing higher education and creating a learning environment that is "highly relevant" to student needs. "There is an environment in which they can get easier access to the workplace," Burroughs says. "The full breadth of the workplace, not just work placements into big corporates, but the opportunity to get exposure to the culture and processes and the successes of innovation and enterprise."

For occupiers such as the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), Republic

allows them to attract a diverse range of students from the local community and internationally. UWS teaches students from more 80 different countries at Republic. Lucie Pollard, director of UWS' London campus, says Republic actively supports collaboration between universities and business, enhancing civic engagement and the development of work-ready graduates.

"We are preparing graduates for jobs that haven't been created yet. Nobody fully understands what the world of work is going to be like in a few years' time," Pollard says. "It is just amazing that we have such a huge pool of talent on campus. One of the things that Republic is working with us to achieve is to create a student talent portal that can allow students to sell their expertise, and local businesses can tap into that." ●

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Extending and diversifying the student journey with collaborative spaces

Universities are taking the campus into collaborative spaces and using closer links with industry to offer their students a unique learning experience

The student journey has been transformed in recent years. Seizing the opportunities presented by technology, universities are offering students more flexible and accessible hybrid modes of teaching. Skills are at the forefront of newly designed curricula, preparing students for the uncertainties of a workplace disrupted by automation. And as higher education evolves to keep pace with these changes, so too is the idea of the campus.

Higher education institutions are focusing on collaborative spaces as a new model for the 21st-century campus. In September 2020, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) moved its London campus to the Import Building at Republic. There, UWS and other education providers are using collaborative spaces as a launchpad for innovation, fostering close ties with local industry and each other, and providing new learning opportunities for students.

Lucie Pollard, director of UWS' London campus, believes that the collaborative space at Republic is enhancing her institution's reach, allowing for a student journey that could not necessarily be replicated in a traditional campus space. "The fact that we are attracting such a high level of student interest is because we are providing a great blend of great courses and a fantastic learning environment," Pollard says. "That

is what Republic is offering us. They support us by linking us with the business world, and really want to work with the universities and education providers on-site to provide a unique experience for students."

With UWS attracting students from 80 countries, Pollard believes the location is vital to its students settling in London, and says Republic's plan to build student accommodation is a positive step towards building a multiversity student village. She sees the community-focused model at Republic giving UWS students a stronger sense of civic engagement, creating a sense of belonging and boosting student satisfaction.

"The health and well-being of our students is also key to what Republic does," Pollard says. "There are lots of breakout spaces. There are lots of opportunities for students to work in collaborative spaces inside our campus, but also outside within the Republic building. We are not confined to what could be an office building; it is a much stronger community-based space. I think it allows students to network better because they can mix in different groupings that they probably wouldn't be able to on a normal campus."

A collaborative campus also allows higher education providers to serve a more diverse cohort. Republic was established to find and develop talent among the diverse population

of Tower Hamlets, supporting students who might not ordinarily see their future in academia. With Republic presenting an atypical model of the campus – a shared space with educators, employers and social initiatives among the occupiers – Ray Lloyd, CEO of Global Banking School (GBS), says it is a more welcoming environment for his cohort, who are typically mature students and come exclusively from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

"The median age of our undergraduate students is 37," Lloyd says. "Our students' kids could be at university. They don't feel comfortable in a normal university space full of 18-year-olds. They don't feel like that is for them. They come to us for that, and the Republic space helps because it doesn't feel like a university."

Running a variety of undergraduate and master's programmes at Republic, GBS is also looking to expand its provision of financial services training to support reskilling and upskilling initiatives. "Those programmes are the sorts of things we will start to re-engage with and run out of Republic," Lloyd says.

GBS has grown dramatically in the past 12 months, from an organisation of 103 staff members and 3,500 students, to 480 staff and 10,000 students. Lloyd is open to many possibilities for its Republic campus but foresees using the space to expand its

undergraduate programmes with other higher education partners, bringing in guest lecturers, hosting events and running entrepreneurial initiatives alongside its teaching. Students who enrol at GBS typically have a job or run their own business, and are looking to develop their skills.

Adam Sage, business development manager at City Gateway – a charity providing training for disadvantaged young people in Tower Hamlets – is an advocate of such approaches. He argues that the linear model of the student journey has been upended by a disrupted employment market, and the traditional academic route is not relevant for many students.

"It sets a certain camp of learner up to fail," Sage says. "For those learners with vocational skills who want to go into trades – things like media, construction, care – rather than the academic route, there is not the space, opportunity or mechanism for them to explore their options." Students enrolled with the education providers at Republic have that space. Sage says the collaborative initiatives undertaken by employers and educators give students the chance to explore different career paths and gain the agency to change their lives with "a transferable toolkit of commercial skills".

"What Republic has helped do is give those students the skills and space to explore that future career path," Sage says. "The whole Republic ethos and space lends itself for us to teach in a way that gives learners that toolkit, that gives them those key skills that all employers in all sectors want, so that wherever they go, whichever job role they do, they will need those skills."

But inspiration isn't just drawn from a workspace and its ethos. UWS' Pollard says the Republic model facilitates deeper understanding through on-the-job learning. Whether students take part in placements at large corporations in nearby Canary Wharf or with local entrepreneurs, Republic allows them to be inspired by and learn from industry role models. "Those opportunities for students are very rare," she says. "Industry can really help contextualise that learning. There is only so much you can do by reading about it in a book." ●

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How a location encourages entrepreneurship and university ventures

By collaborating on incubators and skills-based teaching programmes, higher education and industry can harness the creative potential of shared workspaces to help new businesses grow

Digital tools might be augmenting the workspace and allowing remote collaboration to flourish, but when it comes to developing a student's entrepreneurship skills and supporting ventures, the physical space matters. Location matters.

For entrepreneurs, low-cost shared workspaces facilitate collaboration with peers, offer greater access to business support and provide the opportunity to embed a start-up business in the community it serves. Jessica Roper, chief operating officer at The Trampery, a social enterprise that specialises in providing such environments, says shared-space co-working models can be vital for a fledgling business' survival, particularly in a high-rent city such as London.

The Trampery works in partnership with Trilogy at Republic, located at London's East India Dock, to provide local start-ups with the space and support to grow. "We provide that first stage for local entrepreneurs and start-ups to be able to keep their businesses in Tower Hamlets by providing them desk space and business support," Roper says. "That is thanks to Republic for being able to provide such a commercial building but with a focus on local entrepreneurs. Without that focus, something like The Trampery would not be able to operate in a building like Republic. And without The Trampery being able to operate in a building like Republic, hyper-local entrepreneurs would be just constantly overlooked, and have no space to start businesses."

The Trampery works with fellow Republic occupiers on a number of initiatives, and the entrepreneurs who operate within The Trampery's space are encouraged to work together. Roper says The Trampery's curated collaborations gather like-minded, "purpose-led" entrepreneurs under one roof, all with a shared focus on sustainability and the social and environmental impact of their businesses. Initiatives such as the Evo Pioneers programme offer businesses six months of desk space in a co-working environment, with support and mentorship from peers, postgraduate students and established businesses.

"If they were in an office building by themselves, struggling, they would either

burn out, give up, or just not get anywhere," Roper says. "Whereas here they have 30 other people, other businesses going through the same things. They have others who have already been through that challenge and can coach them through. It is about them all having a collaborative environment for tackling challenges surrounding the starting up of a business."

At the University of the West of Scotland's (UWS) London campus, which is situated within Republic, partnerships with organisations such as The Trampery allow it to run programmes that support its students through the first stages of entrepreneurship. UWS, Republic and The Trampery have developed an incubator that UWS students, staff, alumni and local businesses can access.

"UWS wanted to do an incubator in which their students could apply what they had been taught in business," Roper says. "The university did not want to just provide them with education but with the space to be able to grow those ideas into businesses. We have got a university with amazing students who are entrepreneurial; then we have got ourselves – The Trampery – with our expertise in collaborative environment, upskilling and supporting entrepreneurs; and then we have got Trilogy, who have this vision and an amazing building that is just ripe for collaboration and ideas."

For students, this model blurs the line between education and the sort of personal development they might undertake in employment. Alan Murray, senior lecturer in enterprise at UWS, says enterprise education involves more than knowledge sharing; students must be coached so they can apply that knowledge in the workplace or in running their own business.

"As humans, we are predisposed to have a lot of these skills, but I think everything is on a spectrum," Murray says. "If you spend time with students and mentor them, and you coach them and are there for them, and if you can get that across in a way that they understand instead of using 'wizard speak', they move further along that spectrum."

In practice, that involves finding the balance between "talk and chalk" delivery, digital modes of learning and practical

work placements. Students recognise authenticity, Murray says. By having industry leaders deliver lectures, recruiting from industry and delivering practical and relevant teaching, as UWS does, institutions can help students buy in to the curriculum. "What we are trying to do is create people who are going to be good at things like innovation, creativity, leadership, management, hard digital skills and communication," Murray says. "We are quite good at that. Our employability rates are really good and the feedback from industry is that students can actually get the job done. That is quite UWS. That is part of our unique selling point."

Murray describes UWS' approach as "accelerated immersive education". It uses a hybrid model that blends the digital delivery of teaching with workplace-focused learning, creating a student journey designed to make graduates ready for employment. The trick is blending in-class enterprise modules with co-curricular activity that gives students the opportunity to master skills and tasks that have a value in the world of work.

At Republic, Murray sees the UWS cohort of business postgraduates seeding ventures in high-value sectors such as technology, manufacturing, construction, life sciences and "anything digital". Such programmes push students to think bigger. Murray underlines UWS' commitment to digital, with the institution an early adopter and advocate of blended learning that has invested heavily in digital platforms to deliver its teaching. But Murray maintains that it is the physical spaces, like its London incubator, that drive entrepreneurship and have a positive impact on society.

"We are hoping that the incubators are going to be the engine house of innovation," Murray says. "They really should be in these places where other entrepreneurial organisations like Republic and The Trampery are, so that you have that synergy." ●

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The future of university co-location

Collaborative spaces offer universities a new way of widening participation from all socio-economic backgrounds and enhancing graduate employability

Creating a community-centred learning environment on a campus shared with other education providers, local businesses and entrepreneurs allows universities to reach students who might otherwise be lost to higher education. Advocates of the shared workspace model believe it enhances accessibility and facilitates partnerships between education and industry, allowing educators to develop curricula that teach skills to enhance student employability.

Widening participation and access to higher education is one of the strategic goals of Trilogy's Republic building at East India Dock, in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. It has a diverse range of occupiers, with entrepreneurs, small businesses and social initiatives co-located and intermingling with higher education institutions such as the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and York St John University.

Louise Donaghy, director of York St John's London campus, believes the shared

workspace environment helps students adapt to the workplace. "That will help shape students' careers, help them understand more about the workplace and what the expectations are," Donaghy says. "It also gives them an opportunity to connect with employers, and employers to connect with the future talent of their organisation."

York St John is keen to involve industry at the earliest opportunity, consulting with industry advisory groups for input into curriculum design. Preparing students for a fast-evolving workplace through technological innovation places the focus on skills such as leadership, communication, critical thinking and problem-solving. To remain relevant to employers, the 21st-century degree programme needs to include a strong element of personal development.

"It is very difficult for students to get that job if you are teaching the learner a whole bunch of academic theory and employers say on day one, day two, 'no, they can't deal with my customers,'" says Adam Sage, business development manager at City Gateway. He



believes the Republic model is a "massive engine" for social mobility and change. While Republic and the organisations that occupy it started the processes, he sees young people now being empowered to take ownership of their own futures. Lucie Pollard, director of UWS' London campus, says entrepreneurship training and input from industry is key to students' development. "Embedding work experience or using local

businesses to provide data that students can play with and develop some real-life scenarios is actually really important," Pollard says. "It is not just textbook; it is actually doing it for real and learning that way."

Donaghy hopes that the community-based model established at Republic will create a virtuous circle, with York St John able

to tap into its alumni network to keep its curricula relevant to the workplace. Like UWS, York St John places strong emphasis on developing entrepreneurship. Whether students start their own businesses or enter employment, Donaghy believes that an entrepreneurial sensibility will serve them well. "We really look to develop their confidence, self-awareness, resilience and commercial awareness," Donaghy

says. "One of the really important things that we teach is for our students to take responsibility. That in itself is a huge employability life lesson." ●

To find out more about Republic, visit www.republic.london



Where Education Meets Innovation.

Republic is a multi-award winning campus where creativity, community and innovation thrive.

A place where budding entrepreneurs, SMEs and global businesses sit alongside the talent pools and faculties of celebrated universities. Collaboration and partnership between business and higher education are the bedrock of our community.

Experience first-hand the future of co-location.

Please contact us to arrange a tour or attend one of our Open Days.

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