

University of Sheffield – High tech dryers reach for the sky

A 21-storey tower at the heart of the University of Sheffield has been fitted out top-to-toe with Mitsubishi Jet Towel hand dryers as part of a refurbishment project to equip the Grade II* listed icon for the 21st Century.

The University has committed itself to the highest environmental standards within its built estate, so is reviewing the energy performance of all its buildings. This includes the original Victorian edifices, 1960s' modernist buildings and the cutting edge designs of its newest facilities.

Traditionally, the campus had used paper towels, but servicing the dispensers was expensive and disposing of the used towels was far from green. So Cleaning Manager Beatrice Taylor began to explore alternatives.

“We recognised the low energy usage of high speed blowers compared to hot air evaporative dryers and installed a couple on trial,” she recalls. “They proved the concept, but the make we had chosen has weaknesses in that they dripped water onto the floor and were quite difficult to keep clean.

“Then we came across the Mitsubishi Jet Towels, which seemed perfect so we trialled half a dozen of them. The test period went well and we are now fitting out the entire Arts Tower with nearly 40 Jet Towels.”

The Jet Towel hand dryer works on a completely different principle to the evaporative technique of hot air blowers. You run your hands into a slot in the top of unit, which activates a high speed jet of air. This runs over the hands pushing the water downward to the finger tips, from which it falls into the drain of the Jet Towel.

Typically this takes 10-12 seconds, a fraction of the time taken by a blower. In fact blowers are so slow, that most people give up and walk away with still wet hands, compromising hygiene as people may be left with bacteria on their hands which they

then transfer to door handles etc. With Jet Towel, bacteria go straight into the drain. In fact Jet Towel is completely non-contact in use, so bacterial transfer is virtually impossible and all its surfaces are impregnated in anti-microbial material.

Other advantages of Jet Towel include its low noise operation (max 59dB), ease of maintenance and the enhanced user experience. Running costs are lower than a hot air dryer, paper towels and roller towels.

The top eleven floors of the Arts Tower accommodate the Schools of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, where design and fitting out are subject to constant scrutiny. The basement houses nine lecture theatres which are used by all University Departments and Faculties, so their washrooms are heavily trafficked. The intervening 15 floors now house the university's professional services departments so are busy with staff and visitors.

Estates and Facilities Management Project Manager Paul Turner takes up the story: "There is a strong modernist design ethos throughout the building, with the washrooms being decorated in a white, black and grey colour scheme. We went for the silver and charcoal Jet Towels rather than the white ones as they complement the existing design, yet utilise current technology to provide a low maintenance and cost effective facility.

"We also went for the unheated version, as they use even less energy than the heated versions and I was delighted to find that their internal drain meant they did not have a drip problem— slip hazards can be a real worry in heavily trafficked public buildings like ours!"

Paul and his colleagues are delighted by the performance of the Jet Towels, as it seems so are the staff and students, many of whom have commented favourably on them. In fact the University is now considering installing more Jet Towels in one of its sports centres.

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