

# The Bicentenary Project of the Royal Society of Medicine

The Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) is one of the main providers of continuing professional development for the medical, dental and veterinary professions in the UK, with one of the best postgraduate medical libraries in Europe.

To ensure that the RSM continues to fulfil the professional and social needs of its fellows and members as well as providing users of its educational facilities with the most up-to-date and appropriate facilities, the society's council agreed unanimously at a meeting in July 2001 to proceed with the society's Bicentenary Project. The RSM's building in London, built in 1912, will undergo major refurbishment, including the fellow's facilities on the ground floor, the domus medica and the library, which is expected to be completed by 2004. The decision to advance with the Bicentenary Project followed a unanimous vote in the RSM's academic board, which gave strong support to the refurbishment plans.

In coming to its decision, the society's council reviewed all consultations that have taken place since the project was first discussed in 1998, taking into account the views and concerns of fellows both from specific meetings, particularly the Annual Meeting of Fellows in July 2001, and from responses to articles in *RSM News* and to letters from the society's president, Dame Deirdre Hine. The most important factors during the consultation process were as follows:

■ During a major survey of the RSM building, it was discovered that the loading for both library floors is appropriate for domestic use only, which means that its current use requires reinforcement of both floors to fulfil the required structural standards for library reading rooms. Some fellows have suggested moving the books to a different location and using only electronic media, however, even this would require

reinforcements to the library's floors. It is fortunate that these inadequacies have been discovered at this early stage, as there is now enough time to address these problems effectively.

■ The required reinforcements of the library's floors as well as the general structure of the building affect the development of the ground floor. Several of the society's sections and conferences voiced demand for a larger lecture theatre, with the Barnes Hall having been suggested as its site. The plans now provide for a 300-seat lecture theatre in the area currently occupied by the Porritt Suite.

■ It has been suggested by some fellows that the RSM should buy a large conference venue off-site. This has been rejected, as fellows using this facility would not be content with off-site accommodation, and, indeed, it would be difficult to find an appropriate and affordable site within easy distance of the RSM. Although circa 5000 fellows are presently affected by the current constraints, acquiring an off-site conference venue could lead to the society losing some of its larger sections.

■ There were also a number of misunderstandings about the refurbishment. First, the conservatory will not disappear. On the contrary, the space will be enhanced in order to continue to be the focal point for society activities. Second, in terms of fellows' facilities, the common room is presently the only space that is specifically reserved for fellows. According to the new plans, the areas of the Barnes Hall, the West Hall and the Foundation Foyer will be converted into a light airy space with high ceilings by opening up currently covered windows and the original door from Henrietta Place. Thus, the fellows-only facilities will occupy a considerably larger space than is presently available.

■ The projected cost of the Bicentenary Project is £11 million. This includes all the work to the library, including the reinforcement of its floors and the creation of a room for rare books, as well as the costs for the new fellows' area, for the 300-seat lecture theatre and all associated academic and educational areas on the ground floor and for the refurbishment of the domus medica. So far, the RSM has raised £3 million, and the society's fundraising committee has put in place a programme of activity to raise the remaining £8 million from trusts, companies and individual donors, including the fellowship.

The society will continue to consult with its fellows on a regular basis. Apart from articles in *RSM News* and information posted on the notice board in the RSM, sections and fora will be consulted with through the academic sub-committee. The library sub-committee will continue to consult fellows and library section representatives. Equally, the club and accommodation sub-committee will continue its consultations with fellows on the new enhanced fellows' facilities.

Change is not always welcome or easy to manage but often necessary in order to make progress, as it was in 1912 when the RSM moved into its current building, as it was in 1953 when the Wellcome floor in the library was opened, as it was in 1965 when an additional story was built on the top of the RSM and as it was in 1985 when the last major refurbishment occurred. The implementation of the Bicentenary Project will enable the RSM to address the needs of all current and future fellows, allowing it to progress confidently in the just beginning 21st century. **HM**

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