

# Acoustics for Inclusion Award

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## Mach Acoustics

*The Deaf Academy, Exmouth*

The Deaf Academy in Exmouth provides new living and teaching accommodation for the Royal Academy for Deaf Education, previously located in Exeter. The acoustic consultancy was provided from RIBA Stage 1 to completion, and they worked closely with the design team to ensure that acoustics was always considered within the architectural design, resulting in spaces such as the central Learning Forest that creates a comfortable open plan learning and common space with low reverberation time beyond BB93 requirements, due to a combination of slatted timber and suspended 'leaf' rafts that make up the forest.

From numerous workshops with the staff, an understanding was obtained of the unique requirements of the school, and through a large amount of testing of the existing Exeter teaching spaces, a benchmark of acoustic targets was set to establish where any improvements above BB93 were needed. The complex reverberation and internal noise requirements, in combination with passionate staff that have strong views on the quality of teaching space needed, made this a highly challenging project.

The challenge of keeping all the different interest groups happy when all those parties had some expertise and

understanding of the issues, is a distinctive element of this project. The staff were involved throughout and the workshops show good collaboration and modifications to the design as issues were identified. The design goes beyond the requirements for both the teaching areas and living accommodation. The judges liked the progressive acoustic treatment and gradual increase in reverberation times for communal living areas in the accommodation blocks for each year group, to prepare students for moving into the world outside. The central double height 'Learning Forest' atrium that acts as the hub of the new building is a distinctive feature with acoustic treatment squeezed in wherever possible. This project has rightly won other awards and the architect's, Stride Treglown, awareness of the importance of acoustic quality and close collaboration shows what can be achieved when acoustics is considered at an early stage.

