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De Boer case study – Delft University of Technology

When fire swept through part of the Netherlands' oldest technical university officials took less than a week to create emergency accommodation for students – thanks to the expertise and experience of De Boer Structures.

The blaze – described by the Dutch education minister as “a catastrophe” – completely destroyed a 13-storey building within Delft University of Technology's architecture faculty.

But as demolition experts removed the charred remains of the original building, students were back at work within six days, thanks to De Boer creating more than 4,000 square metres of temporary facilities in the grounds of the campus.

The company erected its versatile and fast-to-build A-frame and Walkway structures and even co-ordinated the work of a broad spectrum of sub-contractors, to ensure essential amenities such as electricity, water and temporary roadway were put in place.

Mical de Boer, De Boer's Business Continuity Director in the UK, said: “Delft is the oldest and most comprehensive technical university in the Netherlands, so it was essential that we enabled staff and students to get back to work as quickly as possible. Creating a permanent replacement for a 13-storey building is obviously a major undertaking for university officials but De Boer was able to have replacement facilities on site and fully operational within just six days of the fire.”

He added: “De Boer is the only company in the marketplace with the capabilities and the experience to tackle this kind of project. In the UK and across many countries, we have worked with private organisations, government bodies and international agencies which need solutions in place quickly and efficiently.”

Founded in 1842, Delft University remains the largest technical university in the Netherlands and enjoys an international reputation. It accommodates 13,000 students and more than 2,000 scientists, with faculties that include architecture, aerospace engineering, applied sciences, industrial design engineering and technology, policy & management.

The devastating fire is believed to have started on the sixth floor of the 13-storey architecture faculty during the morning of May 13, 2008. As many as 300 people were in the building at the time but all were evacuated without injury.

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However, only a proportion of the valuable contents of the faculty could be rescued, with tens of thousands of books and illustrated works – from as early as the 17th century – being lost. Dutch education minister Ronald Plasterk described the fire as the biggest catastrophe ever to befall the country's universities.

In the immediate aftermath of the blaze, students were asked to work from their homes nearby but it was essential to create emergency teaching accommodation as quickly as possible.

De Boer's solution involved the supply of five A-frame structures, linked by connecting Walkways. Working closely with the university – and acutely aware of the need to avoid adding to the ongoing disruption – the company provided more than 4,000 square metres of accommodation, which was created on sports pitches a short distance from the burnt-out building.

The company's structures were sub-divided to provide the university with a range of facilities including teaching areas, staff offices, recreation rooms and toilets. De Boer also sourced aluminium roadway and ensured that the structures were connected to power and water supplies.

Delft University spokesman said: "We are extremely happy with the De Boer response and speed all re-locatable structures were build. Even all our engineering and architect students were amazed by the whole project but most importantly we can finalise the semesters without any disruption!"

De Boer's work for the university was just the latest example of the company providing vital business continuity services following an emergency. Assignments in Holland have included the supply of temporary facilities for a range of retailers – including Ikea, which required replacement accommodation when a busy store in Amsterdam was severely damaged by flooding.

Elsewhere, De Boer has provided emergency retail and office space across Europe, with other assignments ranging from the creation of temporary stores in the UK for Toys R Us to the supply of emergency accommodation following a fire in Warwickshire, Hurricane Katrina in the United States and in the aftermath of the July 7 bombings in central London.

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