Executive summary

This Toolkit provides an overview of learning space design in a higher education context, from the point of view of the professional support services who play a key role in such projects.

Why should we be interested?

Learning, teaching, and indeed the entire context in which universities operate, has changed significantly during the course of the 21st century. Predictions that virtual learning would signal the death of the university campus have however been wide of the mark. We need look no further than the fact that Coursera, the world's largest MOOC provider, is creating physical learning hubs[1] for evidence that a sense of place remains an important part of the educational experience. Further, the 2014 UK Higher Education Estates Statistics Report notes that investment in the academic estate stood at over £2 billion (a rise of £170 million or 9% over the 2011/2012 figure)[2].

Universities have recognised the need for investment in both formal and informal learning spaces to support the student experience and this includes the requirement to balance innovative and collaborative spaces with traditional tiered lecture theatres, which are increasingly being adapted to new learning practices and continue to play a useful role in the teaching of large cohorts. We are moving away from desk and chair workspaces to providing a range of types of furnishing and deploying a variety of technologies. We are also seeing a shift in where these facilities are located with the development of more learning hubs and satellites.

This collaboration signals the importance of a cross-professional approach to learning space developments. Such developments, whether new build or refurbishment, are complex projects that tend to happen infrequently and represent a substantial financial investment with a significant lifespan. No one professional group has enough knowledge to make the best decisions alone. This Toolkit is intended to help professionals from these support services to work effectively together and with other stakeholders to deliver outcomes that have a significant transformational effect for their institutions.

Where does this guidance come from?

Two excellent international resources inspired the creation of the Toolkit. The first, the audio visual design guidelines from the Association for Audio Visual and Education Technology Management (AETM), Australia, contain a wealth of well researched material on integrating AV systems into learning spaces[3]. The second, FLEXspace (the Flexible Learning Environments eXchange), is an open access repository populated with examples of learning space images and related information from institutions worldwide[4].

1   http://blog.coursera.org/post/65596539008/introducing-coursera-learning-hubs-global
2   AUDE (2014) UK Higher Education Estates Statistics Report: www.aude.ac.uk/documents/aude-he-estates-statistics-report-2014/
3   www.aetm.org/av-design-guidelines
4   http://flexspace.org/

In turn, the UK HE Learning Space Toolkit explores pedagogical principles and their place in learning space design and considers how universities and colleges might take a truly holistic, institution-wide approach to the development of learning spaces.

The Toolkit has been developed as a collaborative effort by SCHOMS, AUDE and UCISA. The guidance in this Toolkit represents the combined wisdom of a group of core contributors from the three associations.

Most of the contributors have worked in a number of UK universities, and a few have crossed the boundaries of the different professional services. The Toolkit contributors were interviewed by the lead author during the summer of 2015, and also provided additional information and resources.

The Toolkit cites seminal works and reference sources for each of the topics covered. Rather than seek to abridge and synthesise these works, we have given most space to discussion of actual experiences. Thus, this Toolkit is firmly focused on the realities of designing and managing new types of learning space in the current UK higher education context, and on the challenges and rewards to be found in cross-professional working.

Who needs to read this?

The UK Higher Education Learning Space Toolkit is primarily aimed at **staff who will be the lead for their professional area in a learning space project** and at the **managers of those projects**. Although these staff will be familiar with much of the content for their own areas, learning space development requires a significant level of collaboration and the Toolkit serves to highlight the perspectives of other members of the team. In addition, members of the project team may wish to direct other stakeholders to the key messages and resources at appropriate points in the project.

Successful projects will involve **those responsible for supporting and using the space**. Section 3, Managing a learning space project, will give an idea of what types of decisions are taken at what stage so academics and support professionals can be advised of when their input is expected. Those in an academic or support role will want to understand what types of pedagogy/student activity are being supported. Academic staff may find Section 5, Learning technologies, provokes thought about how the new spaces can support learning practice, whereas central services staff may find that some of the resources in Section 2, Working in partnership, promote new ideas about understanding user needs and developing effective mechanisms to support users in these spaces.

It is important to understand how the design of physical space impacts the learning that happens in the space and the importance of reflecting your institution's educational principles in the build. Such strategic considerations are addressed in Section 1, Building a new pedagogy. The Toolkit encourages a holistic, connected view of the university campus as a place where a continuous flow of formal and informal learning can take place and a strategic steer is needed to ensure that new developments and small scale refurbishments reflect key principles and contribute to overall strategic goals. As mentioned above, learning space projects require a broad range of expertise; Section 2, Working in partnership, will help give an understanding of who needs to be involved in a learning space project and the importance of getting the right people to the table at an early stage. The resources on stimulating creativity will highlight the value to be gained in sometimes departing from established norms to deliver something different and Section 7, Change management and transition, will assist in planning a smooth transition to new ways of working.

Ideally the **strategic champion and project manager** will already have involved **those leading a particular functional area in defining the vision** using the above mentioned resources. Section 4, Effective learning by design, will help develop the detailed brief for the project. The section, in addition to giving guidance for each area of expertise and responsibility will also show how decisions about one aspect of the build can impact elsewhere in the project. With time and budget constraints there will inevitably be hard decisions to take at some points in the project, and understanding how your input fits with the bigger picture can give you confidence that you are taking well informed decisions. There is greater use of techniques such as benefits realisation to demonstrate the impact of project; Section 6, Evaluation, gives examples of how a new space may be assessed to ensure that expected benefits are delivered as well as practical responsibility for some aspects of Section 7, Change management and transition.

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