LEARNING SPACES
STRATEGY 2017-22

1   WHO WE ARE AND WILL BE…

The University of Leicester is committed to excellence in both its physical and digital environments:

> *We will support the development of a physical estate that supports student learning in the 21st century with a mix of formal, informal, flexible, social and common spaces to best suit our approaches to teaching and learning and to foster the engagement of students with their disciplines, with each other and with staff.*

(University of Leicester Learning Strategy 2016-20)

We are committed to delivering the best education and experience we can imagine. Our graduates will be active and informed global citizens, resourceful and resilient, with practical experience in modern collaborative and communicative activities. This requires us to change not only in what, but also how and where we engage our learners. Contemporary higher education in all disciplines is diversifying from traditional lecture-seminar based delivery methods to active learning methods such as project, peer-group and scenario-based, authentic and enquiry-based educational approaches.

Adopting these approaches will enable us to deliver the University's discovery-led and discovery-enabling aspirations but they will necessitate a change in our teaching and learning estate. Learning is at the heart of what we do and we recognise that formal learning is not bounded by the physical campus but extends into community and partnership settings, and into the digital and research environments. Increasingly we understand that this is reflected not just in our educational provision but in the whole of our organisation:

> *Rather than consisting of discrete locations where learning is constrained in time and space, we start to think of the whole campus as a place where a continuous flow of formal and informal learning can take place.[1]*

The development of the University's estate presents an opportunity to consider future needs in this light; to assess the suitability of the current facilities and to adapt or replace them with well-designed, future-proofed spaces that will serve the University community for at least the next 20 years. We are embarking on a bold plan of improvement and growth in our campus spaces. We will ensure that this will serve not only our teaching, learning and research activities in the UK and internationally, but also our community engagement and the role we play in the City of Leicester and our wider community.

The principles, commitments and priorities in this strategy relate to all University space regardless of current ownership conventions, (ie. University or departmental).

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[1] UK Higher Education: Learning Space Toolkit: a SCHOMS, AUDE and UCISA collaboration, p. 9.

2 OUR COMMITMENTS

2.1 Enhancing our academic experience

- We will take a principle-led approach to the design of learning spaces. An education at the University of Leicester enables students to discover, transition, progress and succeed. We will design learning spaces for diverse pedagogic approaches but with a clear focus on enabling participatory and collaborative activities that support our students' journey, raise the quality of their educational experience and nurture lifelong skills for learning and working.

- Our learning spaces will foster a sense of belonging to a shared academic endeavour in which individuals and groups have opportunities to engage in academic, research and scientific discourse, experimentation and learning in a safe and intellectually stimulating environment.

- We recognise that creating new types of learning spaces may afford new approaches to teaching practice; we will encourage, support, develop and mentor our staff and students to make the best use of learning spaces for directed, guided and independent study, and to maximise the potential of innovative and informal spaces.

2.2 Welcoming, accessible, adaptable

- Learning spaces will be intuitive to use for students and for teachers, allowing seamless integration between spaces; formal and informal; group and individual; digital and physical.

- Learning spaces on our campuses, in the UK and internationally, will be welcoming and inclusive to our diverse students and staff and take account of physical needs; sustainability and mental well-being; safety and security.

- Where desirable, they will be open to members of our local communities and beyond.

- Our learning spaces will be designed and managed to enable learning and study beyond core teaching hours, in safe, fit-for purpose environments for groups and individuals.

- Designs for learning spaces will be flexible enough to support different purposes and enable different uses at different times of the day and at different times throughout the year, facilitating use by various stakeholders.

- Spaces will offer a comfortable working environment with attention given to access, natural lighting, ventilation, heating, sightlines, acoustics, furniture, writing surfaces, IT, AV and the availability of food and drink.

2.3 Connected

- We will design spaces in partnership with stakeholders, including students, staff and specialist experts. We will seek to stimulate creative thinking and creative solutions; planning for new projects will connect strategic, interdisciplinary and pedagogic principles through practical and intuitive solutions with an understanding of the learners and teachers who will ultimately use the spaces created.

- Spaces for learning, collaboration and discovery will be designed together; attention will be given to building flow and to the connections between formal and informal, indoor and outdoor spaces, generating a sense of academic community.

- Digital innovation will be encouraged and facilitated.[2] Students and staff will be connected virtually in learning spaces with each other and with other communities. Learning spaces will be future-proofed as far as possible for future digital demand

- We have a strong commitment to making digital technologies a key feature of our teaching, research and enterprise. We will ensure that our physical learning spaces reflect this commitment and likewise our design of digital learning spaces will be mindful of physical spaces. Our learning spaces will enable and support the use of digital technologies, whether they are provided for students and teachers or whether they are accessed via personal devices.

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[2] See also University of Leicester Digital Strategy 2016-2020

3 OUR PRIORITIES 2017-2020

3.1 Enhancing academic experience

Priority 1: Adopting a principle-led approach

To inform the next phase of campus development set out in the Physical Environment Strategy, we will take a principle-led approach to the design of new and refurbished learning spaces based on these commitments.

> *"The application of different styles of pedagogy and the technologies that support this are what ultimately lead to differentiated, engaging and inspiring spaces […] This is why design principles are so important and why inspiring and motivating students (should be) a core aim. We need to delight as well as be functional." [3]*

Alongside the architectural principle of '**long life, loose fit, low energy'**, we will adopt the following design principles. Learning spaces should**:**

- **Enhance** and raise the quality of educational experience and the levels of student satisfaction, energising and inspiring learners and teachers;
- **Engage** and enable active learning, encouraging contact between staff and students and between students and their peers;
- **Be adaptable** to support current and emerging pedagogies and different purposes, enabling different uses at different times of the day and through the year;
- **Be connected** ensuring learning spaces are holistic, connected and integrated across the campus, reflecting the understanding that learning is not bound by time or place**;**
- **Be future-proofed** and re-configurable to accommodate new demands and requirements with high levels of digital connectivity within spaces and with other communities;
- **Be accessible** enabling study beyond core teaching hours and capable of accommodating physical, emotional and psychological needs of users;
- **Open, discoverable, bookable,** enabling students, researchers and staff to reserve available spaces, including classrooms and study spaces;
- **Managed**: to ensure that users are supported and the quality and integrity of spaces is maintained and developed.

Taken and implemented together these principles will ensure we have learning spaces which enable us to deliver our timetabled teaching; spaces which enable us to deliver our broader curriculum aims and learning outcomes; learning spaces for students, researchers, teachers, professional services - and the wider community; and spaces which wrap around these which stakeholders frequent, assemble, and move through as part of our community of learners.

Priority 2: Defining learning spaces

We will apply these design principles and develop University of Leicester design standards for the development of new learning spaces in the capital programme, in international campus developments and in ongoing programmes to re-fit, repurpose or refurbish existing spaces.

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[3] The UK HE Learning Space Toolkit: a SCHOMS, AUDE and UCISA collaboration.
https://www.ucisa.ac.uk/publications/learningspaces

Typically new learning spaces will comprise the following:

i) Out-of-class and informal spaces: an essential requirement for all UK universities which enable students to develop and practice independent study skills and which help to build cultural identity. They may be departmental public spaces or central campus hubs such as a Library. Both are important in developing an active, engaged academic community and both encourage students' sense of belonging to the University. These informal spaces may also be used for community and research engagement activities. Typically new out of class and informal spaces will comprise:

- **Learning Commons:** campus hub and communal space with pervasive technology enabling secure anywhere, anytime work; available 24/5 and/or 24/7 and spaces to acquire knowledge through a mix of reading, talking, listening and watching;
- **Small informal, study and learning spaces:** open areas on campus and in student residences with comfortable, informal seating, including furnishing and/or seating that affords a degree of privacy and access to writing surfaces; booths with and without collaborative digital solutions; small tutorial or bookable rooms; open air spaces for individuals and groups, with weather protection to encourage outdoor learning and discovery.
- **Exhibition spaces**; both larger and smaller places to celebrate achievements and demonstrate learning. In the spirit of raising scholarship in education as well as research, these will meet high demands for the display of student and staff output to ensure that our academic undertakings are open to peer review and public exposure.

ii) Teaching spaces: alongside evolving pedagogies, employers are demanding graduates with practical experience in modern collaborative, communicative and problem-based activities. Within the curriculum this can be delivered by means of authentic and activity-based practices that will demand flexible and adaptable teaching spaces. Lecture and seminar based teaching is, however, likely to continue alongside new practices and teaching spaces should be therefore be capable of accommodating whole cohorts. Whole cohort teaching will continue to be important: it builds a sense of community and fosters the sense of belonging; it is an efficient mechanism to deliver key messages to a whole group and to gather whole group responses. Adaptable teaching spaces, particularly those prominent and near to the front of buildings will be available for community engagement activities when not in use for teaching.

Typically, teaching spaces which meet these combined needs will comprise:

- **Large flat spaces** accommodating up to 120 students, in clusters of 8-10 with sufficient circulation space for the teacher to easily move around, sufficient power and wifi provision for both students and staff; presentation screens on at least 3 walls capable of being driven by mobile technologies.
- **Medium flat spaces** accommodating up to 40-80 students, in clusters of 6-8 usually at circular or plectrum-shaped tables with sufficient circulation space for the teacher to move around, sufficient power and wifi provision for both students and staff; presentation screens on at least 3 walls capable of being driven by mobile technologies.
- **Small flat spaces** accommodating up to 15-40 students for seminars and group tutorials with tables in cluster or horse-shoe arrangement, with sufficient circulation space, sufficient power and wifi provision for both students and staff; and presentation screens on at least 2 walls capable of being driven by mobile technologies . These rooms may also provide group study facilities when not in use for teaching.
- **Extra small flat spaces** accommodating up to 15 students with sufficient power and wifi provision for both students and staff; and presentation screens on at least 2 walls capable of being driven by mobile technologies . These rooms may also provide group study facilities when not in use for teaching.

- **Large tiered lecture theatre** accommodating up to 600 students adaptable to both interactive and performative intent with comfortable seating in a fanned arrangement with off-set seats for clear sightlines, frequent aisles and platforms enabling staff and student access and circulation, accessible power, at least two presentation screens, lighting control and excellent acoustics.
- **Medium tiered lecture theatre** accommodating 150- 250 students, as above.
- **Small tiered lecture theatre** accommodating up to 150 students, as above.
- **A large computer facility and exam/assessment centre** for a minimum of 120 students in a cluster arrangement of workstations, so that students can easily collaborate or work individually, either at fixed workstations or at flexibly-managed workstations, enabling wired and non-wired devices to be used and with loan equipment available. The large facility needs to allow for re-design and repurposing of the space should a fixed computing facility no longer be required for teaching and/or exam purposes.
- **A medium computer facility and exam centre** for 40-80 students for taught sessions that include a significant element of IT or e examinations **and** for self-directed work outside timetabled use, as above.
- **Touch-down spaces** for IT enabled study with table surfaces, power and wifi.
- **Laboratory space (wet and dry)** each for up to 100 students, equipped to support core teaching, with display screens on the walls and tablets on the worktop, capable of being driven by mobile technologies. Collections and stores to be co-located.
- **Specialist teaching spaces and scenario-based environments,** likely to be locally determined to support practice in professional and scientific fields such as law, psychology, business and medicine.

Assessment practices, whether digitally enabled, practical or conventional written examinations, will be facilitated in the spaces noted above, although in some instances alternative furniture will be required in these spaces.

Priority 3: Embedding principles in our work

Learning spaces designed on the principles outlined above may necessitate the honing of new or different teaching and learning support practices for staff and students. We will support staff and students by:

- Developing a sustained professional development programme to
  a. raise confidence in adopting collaborative and enquiry-led pedagogies and developing expertise in supporting such practices effectively;
  b. strengthen staff and student engagement with existing pedagogic practices in new spaces and
  c. develop leaders in teaching who inspire and raise teaching excellence in their fields;
- Developing a framework and guidance for group work that will support both staff and students and enable effective outcomes.
- Ensuring that these principles are evident in open day experiences and in pre-arrival induction resources.
- Fostering an understanding of and appreciation for new roles and responsibilities for technical and support staff associated with new spaces.

3.2   Welcoming, accessible, adaptable

Priority 4: Current and future learning space requirements

We will review and model learning space demand, utilisation and occupancy in order to determine the optimum volume and mix of spaces across campus. We will audit and assess the attributes and characteristics of existing learning spaces against the principles, the design standards and evidenced demands for use. We will seek opportunities to experiment and collect data on small scale projects in order to test and finesse new approaches. We will incorporate equality impact assessments in this audit activity.

Priority 5: Creating new learning spaces

We will use these principles and definitions to shape the development of our Estate, ensuring that they inform projects in the capital programme as well as all projects to refurbish, re-fit or re-purpose existing central or departmental spaces. New learning spaces will be evaluated post-occupancy and there will be resources set aside to modify the designs to improve the functioning of these spaces through an early-life enhancement programme.

We will establish a rolling programme of works to improve learning space provision currently outside the major capital programmes. This will aim to maintain, enhance or transform existing spaces. Priorities will be informed by audit data and by evidenced-based demand and tested through stakeholder engagement. We will consider the improvement of existing spaces in relation to the development of new and planned spaces to ensure a coherent flow of space across the campus. We will instigate small-scale trials of new layouts and equipment to enable informed decisions over major installations. We will ring-fence a proportion of the teaching and learning spaces allocation of capital for the rolling programme, and enable departments or services to bid against these resources for the development and implementation of small scale improvements in line with these principles and standards.

Priority 6: Using learning spaces

We will establish benchmarks for utilisation and occupancy based on our assumptions of participatory and collaborative learning approaches. To ensure accessibility and comfort and to ensure the best balance between flexibility and adaptability, we will avoid where practicable furnishing space by default for maximum utilisation. A flexible timetabling system will be implemented, enabling improvement of space occupancy. Students, researchers and staff will be enabled and permitted to book available spaces, including departmental rooms, classrooms and study spaces. New or refurbished spaces will display and enable booking activity. Departmental and central rooms will be found and bookable on the same system. Space requirements for community engagement activities will be given careful and due consideration within booking procedures.

Priority 7: Managing learning spaces

There are considerable benefits for both students and staff in taking a collaborative and coherent approach to designing and managing learning spaces on a day to day basis. In order to support users, embed good practice, ensure that spaces are well used, safe and appropriately cared for, we will define departmental responsibilities for managing spaces and establish a senior management function embedded in the University Library and LLI division accountable for the learning

environment (both physical and digital). The post holder will hold the vision for the development and maintenance of learning spaces across campus in accordance with this strategy and will liaise closely with Estates, Campus Services, Departmental Administrators, ITS and Student and Academic Services in order to fulfil this function. We will encourage students and staff to make use of learning spaces (including spaces included on the timetable) by ensuring that they are open and staffed appropriately where there is evidenced demand. This may be during and beyond fixed office hours.

3.3 Connected

Priority 8: Working in partnership

The stakeholders in a learning space project (new build, refurbishment, re-fit or re-purpose) are likely to be many and varied and we will ensure that project boards and/or project managers adopt a participatory approach. This will mean engaging stakeholders who champion this strategic, principle-led approach, and will link it with the learning strategy, the digital strategy and the physical environment strategy; stakeholders who use their professional and technical expertise to design, build and equip spaces; and stakeholders who will ultimately use the space or deliver services in the space. Projects will always be informed by students' views: this may be through specific project-based consultation or through an evidenced understanding of their expressed views. Some projects may also include local community stakeholders. We will develop a participation framework and guide to support projects in adopting this partnership approach.

Priority 9: Digital technologies

Technology will be pervasive in learning spaces facilitating secure anywhere, anytime work and enabling collaboration, retrieval, projection, personal device use and charging. Wireless connectivity will be available as a utility and will support individual and class requirements reliably. University provided technologies for collaboration and sharing will, wherever possible, be independent of any particular vendor eco-system. We will consider how opportunities for digital education, learning, research, experimentation, creation, innovation and scholarship can be incorporated into new or refurbished learning spaces, so that staff and students have the ability to create and maintain digital artefacts and materials (see also the Digital Strategy). These may include "maker spaces", technology sandpits and presentation spaces. We will make provision for the use of mobile equipment, including storage, charging and loan facilities at various points on campus.

4   OUR MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Levels of student satisfaction with the quality of their teaching and learning experience (NSS)
- Levels of student satisfaction with learning spaces and resources (NSS)
- The provision of informal learning spaces as a proportion of total teaching spaces (1:3 teaching spaces) and/or in relation to student numbers (1:6FTE students).
- Learning space as a proportion of institutional space.
- Use of new or revised teaching spaces (% occupancy across different room types).

5   LINK TO OTHER STRATEGIES

This strategy has links to the Learning Strategy, the Physical Environment Strategy, the Digital Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy.

6   SOURCES OF FURTHER GUIDANCE

1. JISC www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/evaluating-and-designing-learning-spaces
2. Building for everyone http://universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Building-for-Everyone
3. The UK HE Learning Space Toolkit: a SCHOMS, AUDE and UCISA collaboration www.ucisa.ac.uk/publications/learningspaces
4. UCL Learning Spaces Guidelines www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/services/learning-teaching/elearning-staff/learning-spaces
5. Long, P.D. and Ehrmann, S.C. (2005) 'FUTURE OF THE LEARNING SPACE Breaking Out of the Box' Educause July/August 2005. Available at http://icampus.mit.edu/files/2011/11/PhilLong-Educause-JulAug05-Future.pdf