**Project Title**

Teaching and Learning Spaces

**Authors and Responsibilities**

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**Introduction and Background**

Teaching and learning spaces have been a recurring topic over the years, with renovations on the existing spaces and increasing number of students it has become clear through departmental reports that there are some issues that need importantly addressing.

**Aims**

- To assess how students currently feel about learning and teaching spaces.
- To compare issues to see if they are departmental or across board.
- To identify what spaces need urgent attention.
- To follow up from last year's report about the library and report what the students think about the renovations.

**Methodology**

A variety of methods were used to gain feedback:
- 110 Students/Staff spoken to directly when entering the library asking them what they thought was good and bad about the library space.
- 719 Students participated in a large survey completed by a variety of students.
- 70 students spoken to directly in the Design department.
- An interview with a Student Ambassador.
- 45 Music Students responded to questions asked in their facebook group.
- 27 Students spoken to directly in the Music department.
- Around 20 students were interviewed one-on-one, with additional responses culled from previous department only surveys.
- 6 Staff members (Lecturers) spoken to directly at the postgraduate learning & teaching committee.
- 53 Postgraduate psychology students participated in a group survey.
- 2 staff members (Lecturer & head of Psychology) in the psychology department were spoken to directly.
- A conversation was had with the IT technician and staff at the Graduate department office.
- Carmel- how many students (Drama) and how?
- 40 students completed a survey, on paper and online.
- All postgraduate Computing students were contacted by email, and I spoke directly to a number of classes to gather feedback.

The data collected from surveys was analysed and presented in charts where answers were optional. The open ended comments on surveys and in person has been grouped and summarised in paragraphs ranging from specific departmental issues to general issues.
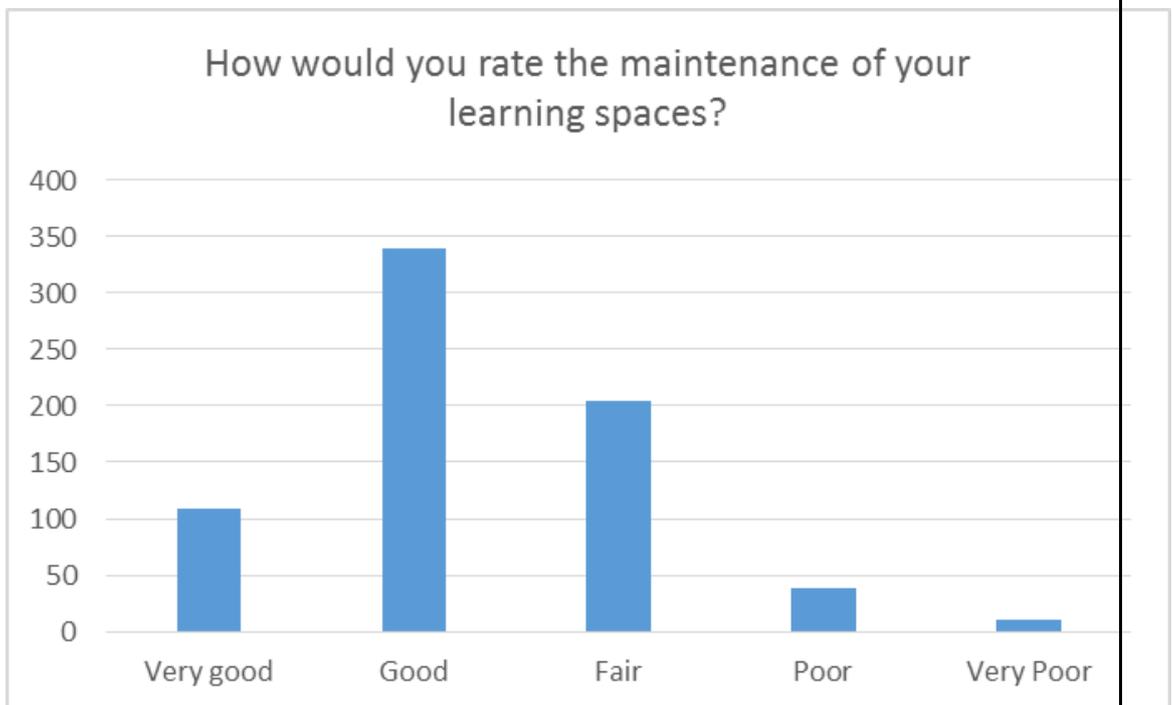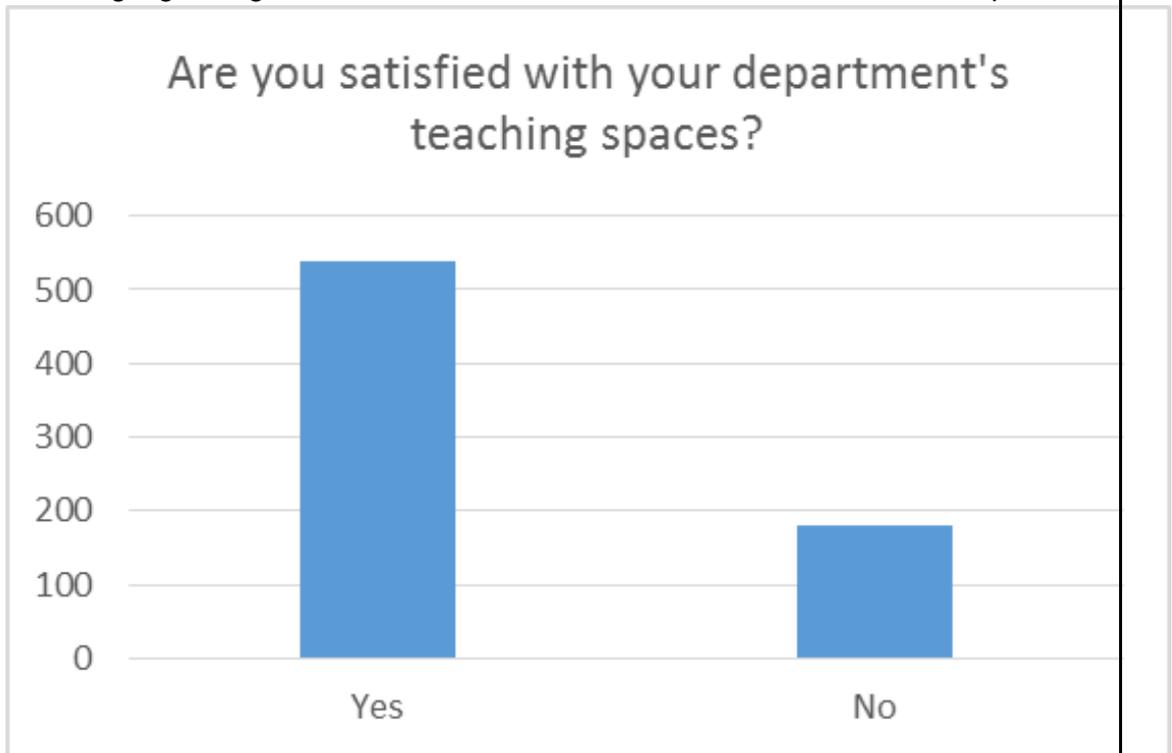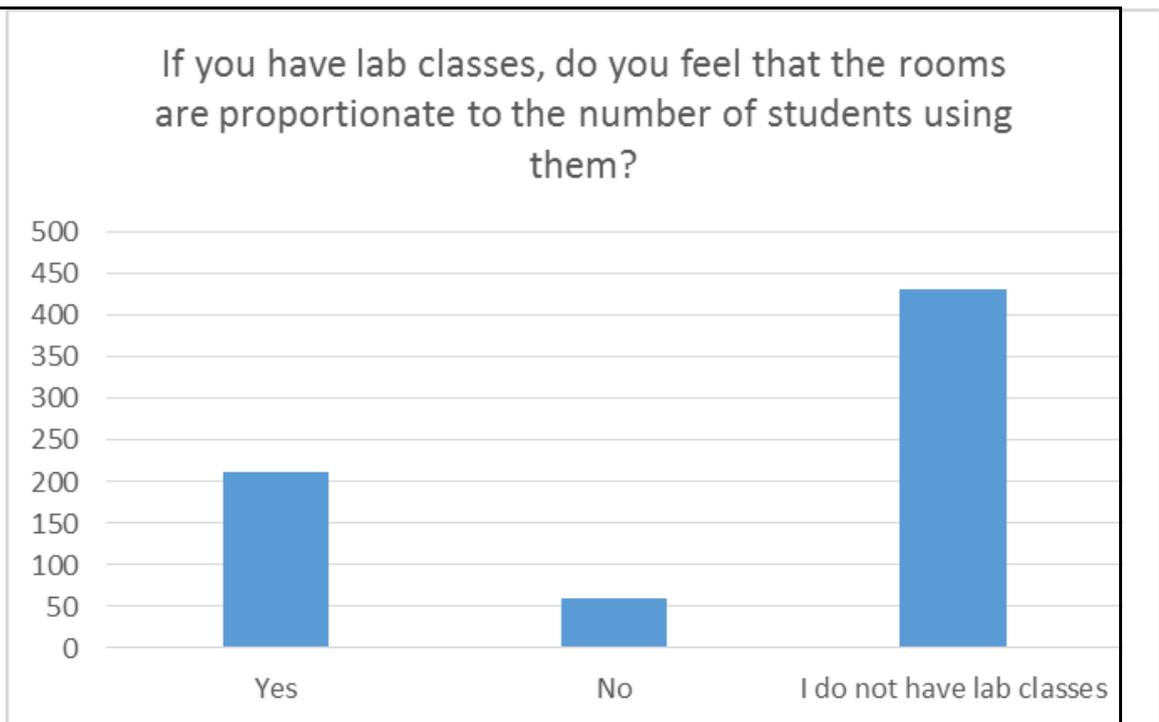
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**Results and findings**

General Feedback from the DSC survey- Ashlee
- <u>Heating</u> - It is clear that the system as it is, is clearly not working. It is un-acceptable for the school to not be taking into consideration the individual heating requirements of different departments - such as temperature requirements of performance spaces - where health and safety is a concern if a space is too cold - or the library where students should be able to sit comfortably for hours doing work without having to layer up. Likewise, studio spaces should be considered like office space where people work all day.  Even staff offices are being under heated. This is a minimum requirement of learning institutions, where students should find the basic requirements of study - quiet, resources and heating.  Other parts of the school (though significantly fewer) are being over heated, because of blanket solutions and automated systems. This should return to being the responsibility of individual building/departmental facilities managers.
- <u>Computers</u> - Easily half the feedback given was concerning a lack of computers, programs available on computers within labs and learning spaces such as the

library and their dysfunction.
- <u>Room sizes and Construction</u> - There are far too many programs with lecture rooms not being big enough to hold all the students, broken chairs and loud interruptions.

## Are you satisfied with your department's teaching spaces?

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|

(Bar chart: Yes ≈ 540, No ≈ 180; y-axis 0 to 600)

## How would you rate the maintenance of your learning spaces?

(Bar chart with categories: Very good ≈ 110, Good ≈ 340, Fair ≈ 205, Poor ≈ 40, Very Poor ≈ 10; y-axis 0 to 400)

**If you have lab classes, do you feel that the rooms are proportionate to the number of students using them?**

| Response | Count (approx.) |
|---|---|
| Yes | ~210 |
| No | ~60 |
| I do not have lab classes | ~430 |

Art Department Specific Research- Ashlee
- 43% of students surveyed feel that lab spaces are proportionate to the number of students that use them.
- Students rated departmental MFA and MFA Curating teaching spaces 3.5 out of 5.
- Students rated the maintenance of learning and teaching facilities (including bathrooms and labs) 3 out of 5.

Drama Department Specific Research- Carmel
- Cleanliness of the departments' spaces is something that is generally improving but requires more attention in specific areas.
- Communication between staff and students to access spaces required for rehearsals and project work is not running as smooth as it should considering a member of staff is specifically allocated to process the requests.

Psychology Department Specific Research- Caroline
- Several rooms (WB208 and WB306) that used to be for Psychology students only were taken over by the university and made public to all students as more pc spaces were needed. WB306 in particular was a computer lab for postgraduate students, there is now not an adequate space for MSc students to practice using SPSS for statistical work or work their thesis.
- Generally for Psychology students, it was not clear what areas were available until bringing up in meetings with staff. Students were very unhappy to use the library as it is very cold and many computers are not working, so rather than adding to the volume of students trying to access the library they'd prefer a specific area for the department.
- Postgraduate students in particular were not informed of the Ben Pimlott building being a Psychology area (undergraduates have lectures there but postgraduates do

not). On further investigation, the only areas available were the kitchen area (just a round table) and WB400 (which seems like a quiet work space not appropriate for group work) and cannot accommodate the large numbers of students in the department.

- Staff mentioned that many students meet off-campus and use their own laptops, however it was not clear where this information was obtained or whether it was just a casual observation. Also, undergraduate students may live in halls of residence or housing nearby so easy for them to meet off-campus, but postgraduate students' living arrangements can be very different and meeting at university tends to be the most convenient option. Considering postgraduates pay a lot of money for just one year of academic study, it would be better to deal with the issue instead of suggesting that students meet off-site.

Graduate school feedback- Caroline

- Caroline raised the confusion with the use of the Graduate room with staff in the Psychology department as well as the Graduate school. Previously it had been only available for PhD students (whole university). However a point was made that several learning spaces have been taken from departments and given to the university as a whole, therefore limiting spaces for certain groups/cohorts of students.
- After getting feedback from Masters Students and debating with the staff, it has been agreed that the Graduate room can be used by all postgraduate students not just PhD, however PhD students have priority if the area is busy.
- Caroline has managed to get the IT staff to install SPSS and Adobe pdf reader on the computers in the Graduate space as they were not done after the migration of computers.
- There is ongoing debate over the ground rules for the use of the Graduate room as it has 3 parts, computer area, kitchen and sofas. Some people want it to be completely silent whereas others like to use it as a space to help each other with statistics work while on the computers (which is what WB306 was primarily used for but no longer available).

Media and Communications Specific Research- Chris

- Students from within Media and Comms are generally pleased about their new spaces within the Professor Stuart Hall Building, however a few comments have been made about both the Media Research building, and some of the spaces within PSH. One perspective relayed that most of their lecturers do not seem at ease with the workstation at the front of the classes, which often lead to many lectures being delayed due to technical issues, impeding learning. While the student was not specific on whether this was a issue with the workstations or with the lecturers, there does seem to be a disconnect between the two.
- All in all, students within Media & Comms seem very happy with their learning spaces, one of the biggest issues being adjusting to the new technology in the classroom.

Design Specific Research- Lucrecia

- People are generally satisfied with the design learning facilities, everyone is happy

to have a studio space.
- Students would like to have lecture rooms within the design department.
- There have been comments about the lockwood annexe's toilets which lack cleaning and are cold.
- Within the studios specific bins for material waste are required in order to make a better rubbish separation and recycling.
- The only lecture that design students have in the RHB is the room 137a in which several seats are in poor condition. Also, the doors in between the 137a and the one at the back should be soundproof since our lectures have been interrupted by the loud sound from the other lecture.
- In terms of lab spaces it is generally felt that the facilities are starting to get smaller giving that the number of students is increasing. This fact also is affecting the staffs teaching as the space is no longer big enough to deliver a good workshop experience. It has also been raised by the majority that the workshop should be open for longer hours given that because of timetabling is it not possible to have easy access to them because they close at 5, the same time that lectures finish.

Feedback from the SU Ambassadors who are checking rooms- Lucrecia
- There is a lack of organisation when telling the ambassadors what to do or where to go.
- Realistically it is not possible to achieve the set goal for each day while doing a thorough check in each room because of the tight time set. Therefore tasks are not achieved to its supposed standard.
- There is an online maintenance system where any student can upload problems that they found but students are not aware about this system. If we raise awareness about this system it could help student ambassadors to perform their tasks better because there would be a larger number of people reporting issues.

Specific feedback from the Library- Alexandra
- Students were pleased that the library is open 24/7.
- The new group areas downstairs have been reported as a good space that the students enjoy working in independently and as groups.
- Students are pleased that there is now a café but some feel that it is overpriced and that they would like to see it run by fellow students. They would also like a vending machine to go with the drinks ones for when the café is closed.
- The top floor of the library has a reported good view that many students enjoy to see when studying.
- Generally the atmosphere of the library has been reported as positive saying that the environment encourages students to study etc and feel comfortable when doing so.
- Students think there is a good variety of books and DVDs in the library but say there is not enough copies of books and would also like to see some bluerays.
- Many students like the variety of spaces with the quiet areas getting a positive response, in comparison to this though some students believe that the quiet area is not quiet enough where some students say it is too quiet.
- Students are happy that there is now a drinking water source to drink and refill bottles.

- A high amount of students reported that although they are pleased that there are now more plug sockets many do not work and although maintenance have been contacted numerous times the issue is still occurring to the frustration of students.
- Some students believe the reception staff next to security and some members of security are rude.
- Although the new toilets are an improvement, the old ones are still a disgrace, the female toilets apparently have no hot water and in the male toilets it has been reported that the hand dryers do not work.
- Although the students think the spaces in the library are good, it is clear that there is not enough space, group and silent study, some students would also like a comfortable space like to group area that is for silent study, like a silent study sofa.
- The temperature of the library was a big concern with students with many feeling it was too cold.
- PC's not working/enough was raised as an issue.
- The online catalogue has been reported as clunky, students have reported that they struggle to navigate the libraries books saying that some labels are not clear and that books are often not where they should be despite the online catalogue saying they are in the library.
- A high amount of students said that there was not enough space and that the library was too busy.
- Wifi was mentioned by a few students but does not appear to be as big of an issue as it was last year.
- The quality of the printers functioning and printing has been reported as poor.
- The maintenance of the library has been rated as poor in some places.

Specific feedback from postgraduate computing students- George
- Some of the students on the MA/MFA course agree that we are missing a communal space to work, discuss ideas, and hang out -- which previously was the GDS workshop room in Ben Pimlott building. This year however, lots of lectures are taking place in that room, and so we are not able to use it this way.
- Currently there is a lot of seemingly random stuff being stored in the GDS, and taking up a lot of space - space which we could perhaps share quietly whilst other lectures are going on.
- Students have been shown a possible room to use opposite where the MA Computer Games people hang out, but it's in Hatcham house -- away from the soldering irons, 3D printers, and studio equipment which they would like to use. So it could be okay for now, but is not the ideal situation.

Specific feedback from the music department- Liam
- Many lectures (particularly first year courses) are taking place in RHB 167, a room that doesn't have desks. The department has said it is the intention that this room is to be exclusively used as a performance space; however, a large number of lectures are still taking place here. This room should either be fully equipped with desks, or lectures should be moved to another room (possible RHB 267).
- Room RHB 268 has no blinds, which not only makes the room stuffy on hot days, but it is also very distracting and makes note taking very difficult.
- If music lectures are to continue taking place in room 137a, then it desperately

needs soundproofing. It adjoins to another room and currently, because there is no sound proofing, there have been a number of noise complaints aimed at music lectures which rely on the use of musical examples to illustrate a point.

- The heating issues which existed in term 1 (particularly in room RHB 267) have been greatly improved. Heating is no longer an issue in the music department.

## Conclusion and table of recommendations

- In conclusion Students overall seem to be satisfied with the general maintenance of the university. Some areas do need attention though; a thorough identification needs to be made of the rooms that currently do not meet students' standards. The ambassador scheme of students checking rooms in the morning was clearly not working; something which the university is already aware of and has taken action with a new scheme which will be reviewed in due course. In addition to this students are able to log their own maintenance reports but are understandably currently not aware of where or how to do this. The online footnotes page should be promoted and easily accessible by all staff and students, which at current is not being done.

- With some areas reporting an improvement others are still not satisfactory when it comes to levels of temperature. There is a definite inconsistency between not only buildings but rooms within, students in the library, who are often there for extended periods of time should not be in a cold environment. With different parts of the university ranging in age and structure having a regulated "one system heating" program is unfeasible to heat the whole university to satisfactory level. Each room needs to be assessed and adjusted accordingly, or at least have a system that is adjustable by each room so it can be adjusted by staff and students if needed.

- Although space in general is an issue, computer labs are becoming a stretched resource; students are finding it hard to find a lab to work in, or a lab which has fully working computers with the correct software needed on. Irrespective of the area a computer is in, all university available software should be accessible on all computers as a basic level of requirement. It has been made obvious that there is inconsistency to the level of technical operation in lecture rooms with many lecturers and visiting staff struggling to operate in some rooms. Although the new system of ensuring rooms are adequate and working should aid this, a scheme to overhaul the whole system has been reported by maintenance to take place. It will be a multimillion pound project that will ensure all the lecture rooms are identical, meaning that one system for all will operate. With this positive outcome in mind the disruption this may cause must be well articulated and communicated to both staff and students with regular updates- something which when the renovations occurred was lacking in.

- Students being in inadequate spaces to their size or needs is something that generally resides in timetabling, specifically though all music spaces should be ensured that they are adequately sound proofed, a basic requirement that should be addressed immediately.

- It is clear that students are finding spaces cramped and overcrowded, before an increase in enrolment occurs, space should be addressed, a larger library area needs to be addressed, not only for space for books but also for areas to study. Students would like to see a comfortable quiet area, more computers and more private silent study areas rather than large open desks where any small sound ends

up being amplified. Even small divides would suffice in providing adequate sectioning off. How to access the locked rooms should be articulated more as often these rooms are empty whist other areas cramped.

- Postgraduate spaces seem to surround some confusion, with poor articulation to whom may use them and where they are. The space that exists clearly needs to be assessed for its required needs and adjusted accordingly to please both postgraduate and PHD students.
- With spaces being opened up from specifically departmental and accessible to other students the repercussions of these actions must be considered. With students feeling that a space which was once a quiet space to study now finding it noisy and cramped something needs to be done to find a compromise, with rules being established or alternatives made.
- Design would like benefit from being provided bins for different materials.
- Maintenance have reported that they are still improving the toilets across board, with some issues being due to over use rather than general upkeep it is clear that some toilets are being used more than others due to students not knowing where toilets are positioned and will tend to go out of their way to use one which they know how to get to and back from. Toilets need to be well signed to see if this improves things. With a new map being introduced this may aid to resolving the overuse- especially as we are to expect even more students needing to use facilities.
- Overall the feedback has been positive from the library with people loving the atmosphere and that it is open 24/7. There are some concerns though, students feel that the system used to find books is outdated and 'clunky', time is often wasted spending time looking for books that are not there. A specific review of the library catalogue system needs to take place to identify specifically where the issues reside. Plug sockets need to be fixed ASAP. Space is definitely something that needs to be properly assessed in relation to the library's capacity in comparison to its current use with an emphasis on lab space that is available 24/7.
- Learning and teaching spaces is a huge project and should be one that is ongoing to strive for improvements. We propose that there should be a dedicated teaching and learning spaces officer (like the educational officer) that can support students when making a complaint etc, who can follow up and ensure things are being done, they can also make sure the students best interests are being met with renovations and adjustments of spaces, ie campaigning and supporting students who have recently had dedicated spaces made available to all students so are now struggling to find a suitable place to work in. There is a lot of miss-communication between different areas of spaces (ie IT and maintenance) a dedicated officer would be able to dedicate all their time and efforts to ensure things are being done and on time, they can also aid to communications to the students about renovations and changes, - something which at the moment is not being done very well, especially with the delayed building works. A further example are the plug sockets in the library, with students feeling lost about who to complain to after numerous discussions with librarians and mixed messages about what is being done there has been clear miscommunication meaning that the situation has not been resolved as quickly as could have been.