

Rethinking the Future of Large Learning Spaces

UDF Research Group 2026

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UDF Research Group

Our Research Group's primary focus is to champion positive design outcomes that enhance the experiences of building users and explore the success of completed built environment projects in use.

Participation in our endeavours is open to all members who share a keen interest in research, promoting a diverse mix of representatives from higher education institutions, as well as design and construction consultancies.

Years of UDF Research

- 2025 Social learning at University
Student voices: building a campus that reflects student priorities
Student accommodation: challenging the norm (updated)
- 2023 Student accommodation: challenging the norm
Innovation districts and collaborative spaces
Campus spaces and places: Impact on student outcomes
- 2021 Student life
HEDQF/AUDE Student life survey
Sustainable campuses
- 2019 The future of learning environments – Learning space compass
The future of learning environments
Social learning spaces
- 2016 Future Campus – Design quality in university buildings
- 2013 Estates matter!
- 2011 Small budget big impact
- 2010 Learning landscapes in Higher Education
Better communications = better projects
- 2009 Re-solution
More for less
- 2007 Distinction by design
- 2006 Guide to post occupancy evaluation
- 2000 Post occupancy review of buildings



2025 Creating a Sense of Belonging for Students through Social Learning & Living - the 360 degree student experience



2025 Social Learning at University



2025 Student Voices: Building a campus that reflects student priorities



2025 Student Accommodation: Challenging the Norm (updated)



2023 Student Accommodation: Challenging the Norm

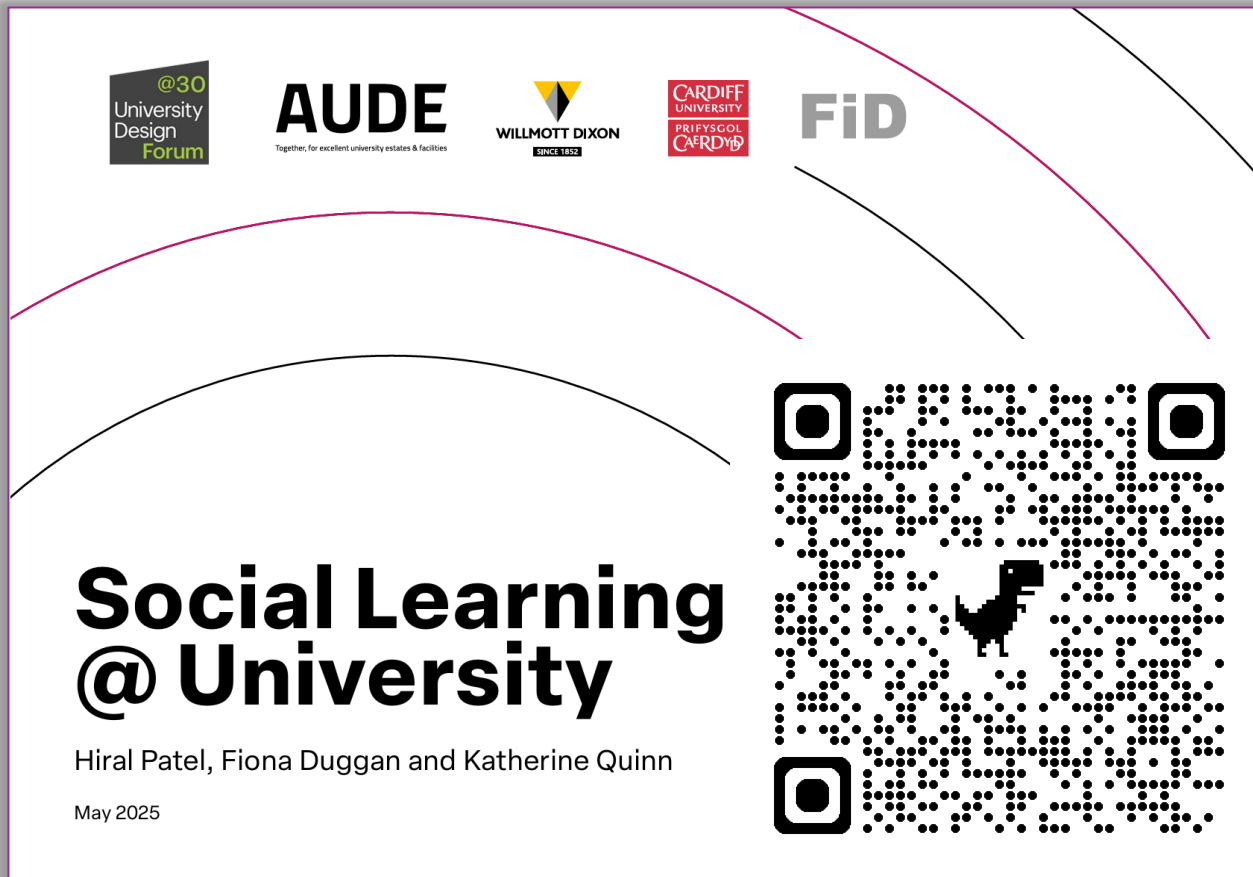


2023 Innovation Districts and Collaborative Spaces



Social Learning @ University

April 2025



- Long-term research into Social Learning began in 2021. Final report published in April 2025.
- Aims to understand the diverse nature of social learning in higher education
- Explores how the design, use and management of campus spaces support social learning
- Identifies the conditions needed to support social learning effectively
- Introduces the concept of a C-Space: a campus-wide spatial strategy that supports informal, self-directed learning, student connection, and personal agency
- Research was qualitative and collaborative, based on fieldwork, interviews, panels, and case studies across UK universities

Large Learning Spaces

- Research project started 2024
- Development of research question and questionnaire for universities
- Call out for case studies
- Wider insights through conference engagement and survey
- Final report to be published in Autumn 2026



Research Group 013: Large Learning Spaces

UDF contributors

- *Research Team:*
- Carol Costello– Cullinan Studio
- Alex Grigull – Grimshaw Architects
- Dr Hiral Patel – University of Cardiff
- Stavros Pourikas – University of Nottingham
- Andrew Fifield- Architecture PLB
- David McNabb- Oberlanders
- Ben Monteagle- Levitt Bernstein

Research Aims

Universities are grappling with financial challenges, rising operational energy costs, and underutilised spaces. Consequently, many are considering downsizing their campuses, while many institutions are teaching large student cohorts.

In this context, the UDF Research Group is investigating the following research question:

“What are the design qualities of flat-floored large learning spaces that support student-centred pedagogical approaches such as active learning and problem-based learning?”

Survey questionnaire

Sent to a selection of UDF University members

Seeking 10-12 good case studies



- *What is the utilisation rate over the academic year?
How do you measure occupancy?*
- *Is the space in a good location within the context of your university?*
- *What is the teaching pedagogy experience?*
- *Would an increase in these types of spaces allow an increase in student enrolment?*

Successful Large Learning Spaces

Case study form
Version no. 5
Date: 23 March 2026

University Design Forum

Successful Large Learning Spaces

Does your campus have an example of a large learning space that is successful in delivering the institution's mission from you.

Research aims
Universities are grappling with underutilised spaces. Consequently, many institutions are investigating the role of large learning spaces in active learning and problem-solving, creating an understanding of developments focused on large learning spaces.

About this case study form
Through this case study form, large learning spaces. The form is designed for the University Design Forum (UDF). Data gathered will be synthesised in-depth research.

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Successful Large Learning Spaces

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University Design Forum

Question	Response
General information	
1. University name	
2. Space/Room name	
3. Building Name	
4. Provide a web link to any further information the space or any published reports	
5. The story of the space – narrative describing the space (optional)	
Location factors	
6. Is the space in a good location within the context of your university?	
7. Near the Campus heart?	
8. Near cafes?	
9. Near green spaces?	
10. Near toilet?	
11. Near the lockers?	
12. Other? Please describe?	
Accessibility	
13. Is the space fully accessible for differently abled people?	
Capacity and utilisation	
14. What is the utilisation rate over the academic year?	
15. What is the room capacity?	
16. What is the frequency of bookings that are at 50% capacity or less?	
17. How do you measure occupancy? Through booking data? Student access card? Occupancy sensors?	
18. What are the dimensions of the room? Is the room double-height or more?	
Actual room use	
19. Is the room used to deliver lectures?	
20. Is the room used for group teaching?	
21. Is the room used by students outside timetabled hours for student-led activities or self-study?	
22. Is the room used for exams?	
23. Is the room used for teaching/learning for specific subjects/courses? If so, which courses are they?	
24. Is the room rented out for other uses? If so, what type of use?	
25. What specific features support renting the space?	
Physical attributes	
26. Does it have a sloped floor with fixed seats?	
27. Does it have retractable raked seating?	
28. Is the furniture in need of modernisation or is it new?	
29. Does it have furniture that can be moved to different arrangements?	
30. Can the furniture be stacked, moved and stored?	
Technology attributes	
31. Are there porters who set up room furniture and AV equipment?	
32. Does the room have natural light?	
33. Does the room have blackout blinds?	
34. Does the room have attractive views of the outdoors?	
35. Does this room have dedicated storage space for furniture or other materials?	
36. Does this space have a folding partition which isolates another space?	
37. Does the room have good acoustic quality for its use, based on user feedback or your personal experience?	
38. Does the room have good thermal comfort and ventilation, based on user feedback or your personal experience?	
39. Highlight any atmospheric and/or aesthetic qualities of the space that contributes to its success	
Outcomes	
40. Can you describe the audio-visual equipment provided?	
41. Does the AV equipment allow for blended learning, with some students attending online?	
42. What is the teaching pedagogy experience?	
43. Do you have any data on attainment attributed to the learning environment?	
Summary	
44. Overall, what features make this space successful?	
45. Is there anything that would improve or enhance this room?	
46. Would an increase in these types of spaces allow an increase in student enrolment?	
47. Are there similar facilities/spaces provided on your campus, or is this the only provision?	
48. Can you name any other good examples you have seen on other campuses?	
49. Would you be happy to submit a case study for this space to the UDF for publication?	
50. Case study written by:	
Name and role	
51. Please share your email address if you are happy to be contacted for further details or discussion	
52. Please share any photos / floor plans of the room which we can use for publication. You can email them with this form, add them below in this file, or send us a link to download.	

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Case Study:

Monica Partridge Building, University of Nottingham



- large learning space for 60 supports a blended, flexible and predominantly active-learning pedagogy.
- its flat floor, movable furniture and distributed AV provision enable a shift towards student-centred approaches, including group-based and collaborative learning.
- The spatial layout encourages academics to move away from a single “front-facing” mode toward a facilitation role, interacting with multiple groups across the room.

Case Study:

Quad Building, Kings College University



- Modern engineering facility, large flat-floor teaching space for 150 students.
- Experimental research lab space, flexible for group project work, maker spaces fitted with equipment,
- Enables students to move from theory to problem solving to creating new products
- Actively used for faculty conferences and outreach programmes outside of teaching periods.
- Excellent location on Strand Campus with beneficial adjacencies.

Case Study:

Exhibition Hall, Bute Building, Cardiff University



- ‘One of the most sought-after spaces in the university’ Increasing demand for this space to host events.
- Sought after by organisations external to the university.
- Capacity: 154 seats for Lecture theatre layout and 80 seats for Cabaret style
- Easy access to the city centre, car parking, and access to public transport
- The ambience, décor, natural light are important distinguishing factors



For roundtable discussion!

1. What unique learning experiences could be provided at scale?
2. How could large learning spaces support active or collaborative learning where people will be working in small groups?
3. How might these spaces serve other civic, cultural or community purposes?
4. What design interventions could unlock new uses?
5. How could technology transform the role of large learning spaces?
6. How might these spaces better support belonging and collective identity?

Scan to take part in the survey



Thank you!