



Title: **Flexible learning spaces**

Transition(s) the practice supports: This theme will be of benefit to students at all levels who undertake part or all of their study on campus. In terms of the transitions map, it is directly relevant to students transitioning into and through their studies.

Abstract: Recent years have seen universities invest heavily in flexible learning spaces. Also known as social learning spaces, or learning commons, these spaces facilitate blended learning. Students may work individually or in small groups, depending on the nature of the task, and commonly they will be using online learning resources at the same time. Flexible learning spaces are also core to developing essential graduate attributes, such as teamwork and communication. There is a need to better understand what factors are essential to the successful design of flexible learning spaces, to inform the development of new campus infrastructures to promote enhanced learning and the student experience.

Description: In common with other universities (such as Glasgow Caledonian University's Saltire Centre¹ and UCL's proposed new student centre), the University of Glasgow has set aside significant funding to develop a new Learning and Teaching Hub comprising a variety of flexible learning spaces and student learning support facilities. The University already has a small number of flexible learning spaces; for example in the main university library, and there are plans to develop more flexible learning spaces in the library, as the nature of learning and teaching – and the nature and role of the library itself – changes.

Flexible learning spaces have arisen on account of:

- an increased focus on student-centred learning approaches facilitating the development of essential graduate attributes² such as communication and teamwork in addition to discipline-specific knowledge
- a tendency towards Bring-Your-Own-Device, in terms of students bringing laptops and mobile devices to campus to support their studies in and out of formal teaching
- growing technological infrastructure capacity in terms of more reliable and scalable wi-fi connectivity, and the emergence of new cloud-based learning technologies (see theme 4)
- an increasingly diverse student population (as a result of the widening participation, internationalisation and lifelong learning agendas) which requires additional support
- pressure on universities to respond to student needs as a result of league tables and measures of student satisfaction such as the National Student Survey
- an overall move within UK higher education towards enabling flexibility through technology-enhanced learning³

Such spaces prove popular but little research has been conducted on their efficiency and effectiveness in terms of their use and the nature and quality of student learning. Therefore, this area of enquiry will:

- examine existing literature on best practice in relation to flexible learning spaces

¹ www.gcu.ac.uk/theuniversity/universityfacilities/thesaltirecentre/

² www.gla.ac.uk/students/attributes/

³ www.heacademy.ac.uk/flexible-pedagogies-technology-enhanced-learning

- engage in consultations with relevant stakeholders about existing traditional and innovative learning spaces to identify what works and what does not work so well, in terms of satisfying learner needs, particularly in regards to blended learning
- make use of data emerging from ongoing consultations with key stakeholders about the proposed Learning & Teaching Hub and new library space
- develop recommendations for the design of effective flexible learning spaces
- apply these recommendations to the design of new learning spaces
- evaluate stakeholder's experiences of the new flexible learning spaces

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