

7 Change management and transition



THIS SECTION AT A GLANCE

- we review approaches to change management and identify those that may be effective in a learning space project;
- we consider the kind of changes that may be necessary to effectively manage new learning spaces in the longer term;
- we look at the support both staff and students may need to make effective use of the new space.

Expectations from reading this section

One of the key messages from the contributors to this Toolkit who talked to us about project management and stakeholder engagement was that learning space projects are change projects. In this section we try to identify the types of change that may invoke a deeply personal and emotional response from stakeholders and which can lead to resistance if not handled effectively.

In particular we suggest that:

- you should not underestimate the time and resources that need to go into change management activities;
- you should not expect a project manager with a background in construction (whether they are internal or external to your organisation) to be a specialist in change management: they will need expert support;
- effective change is participatory but it needs to be led. Senior management leadership and support should be robust and visible.

Creating new types of learning space can demand a major exercise in change management to ensure that the stakeholders are able to make effective use of the space. In Section 2, Working in partnership, we discuss creating the right conditions for stakeholder participation so that all relevant views can be heard and taken into account. It is to be hoped that a highly participatory approach to developing the vision for a new learning space in the first place will be successful in getting many stakeholders on



“[Some] universities share a legacy of trying to reflect new pedagogic approaches with lots of resistance to change.” Toolkit contributor

board from an early stage. Nonetheless, in a long and complex project, stakeholders will come and go throughout the life of the project and the amount of people directly involved in consultation may still represent only a small number of the overall users of the space.

Making the best use of a new type of space might involve a significant number of people in developing new working practices, delivering services in a new way, and/or changing their notions of ownership and control.

Much has been written about change management in higher education. The Jisc guide¹⁷⁹ on the subject discusses a common model that identifies five different strategies to effect change:

1. **Directive strategies** — this approach highlights the manager's right to manage change and the use of authority to impose change with little or no involvement of other people.
2. **Expert strategies** — this approach sees the management of change as a problem solving process that needs to be resolved by an expert.
3. **Negotiating strategies** — this approach highlights the willingness on the part of senior managers to negotiate and bargain in order to effect change.
4. **Educative strategies** — this approach involves changing people's values and beliefs by a mixture of persuasion, education and training.
5. **Participative strategies** — this approach stresses the full involvement of all of those involved in, and affected by, the anticipated changes. The views of all will be taken into account before changes are made. Outside consultants and experts can be used to facilitate the process but they will not make any decisions as to the outcomes.

Given a highly participatory approach to the development phase of the project, it is expected that a continued emphasis on participation along with educative strategies is the approach that most universities will take.

7.1 Resistance to change

There is also a significant amount of research into change management that identifies transition as distinct from change and suggests that it is often the pain of transition rather than the actual change itself that people tend to resist. This may be particularly prevalent in a learning space context where people are giving up space that has been *their own* for a long time or where they are going through the upheaval of lengthy and disruptive construction work going on around them.

This process has been likened, psychologically, to the grieving process and everyone deals with such major changes in their own way. Each stage in the process needs to be recognised and responded to accordingly. For example, it is no good expecting grudging acceptance when staff are still in shock that their old building is to be demolished.

Change, particularly in areas such as teaching or administrative practice, can also be seen by some people as devaluing their previous experience. This may explain why younger staff, who may have invested less time and effort in learning the old ways, can find it easier to adapt to the new.

It is important to think where the resistance is – is it individuals or the structures and systems they are within that resist change? We need to avoid the simplistic understanding that tends to position teachers as either barriers or agents of change. (See Priestley, 2011)¹⁸⁰.



“Most of us can “read space” and draw an impression of what may or may not be permissible in a particular room. Old style and unattractive classrooms with a rigid or fixed layout excludes ad hoc use by students, on the other hand modern spaces invite students in.” Toni Kelly

179 Jisc (updated 2014) *Change management, The theory, methodologies and techniques to help manage change effectively*: www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management

180 Priestley, M. (2011) *Schools, teachers, and curriculum change: A balancing act?* *Journal of Educational Change* 12:1-23: <http://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/2522#.VjO9sDZdGHs>

These are some of the things the Toolkit contributors told us about change:

- Academics are sometimes very uncomfortable about moving away from serried ranks: they don't have the skills required to teach in the new spaces.
- Some people are very set in the mind set of having people in rows and think they can't teach any other way.
- A tutor who hates the room can have a poisoning effect on students.
- You even need counselling skills as a lot of time is spent giving reassurance and walking people through change.
- *"You need a strong forehead to withstand brick walls."*
- You need to have a vision, to pick your battles and to have a passion for the job to carry you through the barriers.
- People don't like change so you need to build a positive, persuasive case and to be persistent.
- Schools are very protective of *their own* spaces although some of them are no longer relevant to their needs and don't support current learning and teaching requirements.
- Projects can be very long and needs do change, but change is bureaucratic and it is easier not to deviate from the original plan.

Jisc has identified some conditions that are more likely to cause people to embrace and welcome change¹⁸¹:

- We propose the change;
- We are involved in the design of the change;
- We feel that our opinions and views are heard, and contribute to the new reality;
- We benefit from the change;
- The organisation benefits from the change;
- The students benefit from the change;
- The wider community benefits from the change;
- We dislike the present status quo;
- We are confident about our competence in the new context;
- We trust/respect/like the person/group proposing the change;
- We can see the big picture and how the change contributes to it;
- We are given support and time to adjust to the changes;
- We are not expected to change too many things at the same time;
- Change is spaced;
- We understand the reasons for the change;
- We believe the change is important;
- We believe the change is necessary.

¹⁸¹ Jisc (updated 2014) *Change management, The theory, methodologies and techniques to help manage change effectively*: www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management/resistance-to-change

7.2 Professional development

We have talked in previous sections about the need for the institution to have shared values about the types of pedagogy it wants to encourage and the need to design new spaces that are highly intuitive for users. In spite of this it is not sufficient simply to create the spaces and leave people to *get on with it*. Some form of support is likely to be necessary in any innovative development: this does not necessarily imply an extensive training programme, it may be as simple as pointing people to sources of inspiration about the new possibilities.

Academic staff who have been used to a didactic form of teaching delivery may need time and support to adapt to techniques such as active and problem based learning. They may want to see evidence that this form of learning is effective elsewhere and/or they may lack confidence in their own abilities to adapt their teaching style. The idea of teaching in a space that does not have a defined *front* does represent a significant cultural shift. A common complaint is that lecturers do not like students having their backs to them in group spaces. Similarly, staff who have been trying alternative approaches in inappropriate space will also need time to hone their developing practices in new space.

We discuss issues relating to timetabling elsewhere in this section. A significant factor in determining whether it is worth academics investing time and effort in trying new teaching styles and learning to use new technology is whether or not they have access to the new spaces sufficiently often to make it worth their while adapting.

In some cases the barriers to using new technologies are fairly easily overcome. Aberystwyth University stopped using the term *visualisers* and renamed the devices digital overhead projectors. This resulted in an increase in usage because lecturers suddenly understood what they were for.

Peer encouragement, support and mentoring are effective ways of changing academic practice. The University of Derby built its first experimental classroom in 2011 and the academic staff who did the trials on that project went on to become *critical friends* for other learning spaces projects. They were a self-selecting group and tended to be people who were more digitally capable and happy to take risks.

James Rutherford and Matt Sherlock at the University of Birmingham also emphasised to us the value in sharing academic practice as a means of change management:

“Going and seeing what other people are doing is key. Horizon scanning and looking outside is also useful. Ideally you want to take representative academics on visits to see that other high ranking universities are doing things differently (although seeing what other people get wrong is useful as well). Sharing best practice with other academics is very important”.

Customer service teams in all of the professional services also have a vital role to play to support and encourage the use of technology and flexible learning spaces. Their role is evolving to go beyond functional support to promoting change to pedagogy and providing encouragement, enthusiasm and passion for new approaches.

7.3 Student support

In general students appear to have fewer difficulties than staff in adapting to new learning spaces and finding appropriate ways of working within them. There are however some important caveats here. Some types of student find some types of learning activity takes them out their comfort zone. It is particularly evident that international students from a number of parts of the world are used to a didactic mode of teaching and have difficulty initially in adapting to collaborative learning and hence in learning space evaluations they tend to rate the group spaces less highly than other students. The issues are not however related to a single cultural group as techniques such as peer review, which research has shown to be highly effective in enhancing deep learning, can be unpopular with a wide range of students who are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the approach.



“Building is the easy bit; the hard bit is in developing the staff skills to use the space effectively.” Simon Birkett



“There are interesting challenges around IT ownership in that technologies are issued to staff related to their status and grade so a Dean might get an iPad and a new lecturer be left with paper and pen. There is an interesting and strategic conversation to be had. If we expect staff to be digitally capable in the classroom then we need to give them the right tools.” Toolkit contributor

Addressing these issues is part of a wider agenda of learning literacies. We have suggested elsewhere in this Toolkit that those designing space should think about what kind of graduate outcomes they are looking to achieve and how particular pedagogic approaches and learning spaces can support this. The relevance of different learning approaches to graduate outcomes, the development of transferable skills and hence future employability, needs to be emphasised to students from an early stage to help them make the most of their time at university.

Students may need some support in understanding the kinds of things they can do in new learning spaces. As an example, the University of Derby created and evaluated a number of comparatively high tech *learning pods* for group work. In conducting the evaluation they employed a student to undertake observation of the activities going on and he identified that students were initially not using the full functionality available. Part of the reason for this was that it was not immediately obvious what you could do with the technology to support learning. As a result of the evaluation, a competition was held amongst the graphic design students to devise a *crib sheet* for each pod to indicate its potential uses to students.

A similar issue was encountered when Durham University opened its Techno-Café¹⁸² in 2005. This space consisted of some very high tech *learning pods* designed to support active and collaborative learning for computing students. The facility was first used by second year students. They liked the facility but, after sitting for a while, they would go back to the old style computing labs to individually work on parts of the projects and compare notes later. Later trials with first year students and schoolchildren found they were much more accepting of collaborative work and had more ideas about how they could potentially use the space. The issue seemed to be that the second year students had become indoctrinated into the old way in which they operated. They were used to working individually and only communicating when they had completed their individual tasks and it was very hard to encourage them to use any other approach to working.

7.4 Managing learning spaces

As well as taking a partnership approach to developing learning spaces, many universities are realising that there are considerable benefits in greater collaboration when it comes to designing the overall space envelope and looking at how that is managed on a day to day basis. This kind of approach can however also be a major exercise in change management. Many of our contributors have promoted the idea of developing a portfolio of learning spaces with teaching rooms of varying sizes that can be adapted to a range (but not an unlimited range) of teaching types.

One of the problems in implementing such an approach is simply knowing what teaching space the university has at its disposal. Most universities have some centrally managed space but the proportion that is *privately owned* by schools or departments can be quite significant in some cases. We heard of one example where, quite recently, only 4% of general purpose teaching spaces were managed centrally and we were told “*We know there are inconsistencies about the quality of space and the support for students*”. Another institution currently has around 50% centrally managed space but says that as for the rest “*We have no say in what the individual schools do, no understanding of what they have done and can’t get a look in the rooms to see*”.

This lack of transparency about devolved space has a direct impact on student support and the student experience. If central service managers cannot obtain information about the spaces then consider how much more difficult it is for students. We heard that students find it difficult to identify places where they can go to study, difficult to find out whether there are IT facilities available in the space and almost impossible to find out what software will be available on any computers that are provided and whether it is available to all students or *locked down* to users from particular subject areas.

These issues can be even more complicated where an institution has grown as a result of mergers and takeovers. In these cases component institutions are quite likely to continue to *do their own thing*. It will generally be a lengthy and costly process to standardise equipment and software. In the meantime students may struggle to find out what facilities are available to them and lecturers may struggle to adapt to new technologies. In some cases this may cause resentment where they have invested considerable time and effort in learning to use their previous tools.

The University of Strathclyde realised the risks posed by too much devolution in space management and underwent a major exercise in change management as a result of a fire that took 50 teaching rooms out of use for 18 months (see Viewpoints below).

Many universities are making use of virtual desktop technology to ensure that students have access to the same software facilities on any device they use whether at home, on campus or elsewhere.

¹⁸² www.dur.ac.uk/alice/technocafe/

7.5 Timetabling

Ask about the major operational issues in any university and, after car parking, the next most common answer is likely to be timetabling. The kind of portfolio approaches outlined above can be a big help in resolving timetabling issues but the timetable can nonetheless be a barrier to changing learning and teaching practice.

Whether we have ambitious ideas about flexible space or a pragmatic approach to limited adaptability, the timetable imposes constraints. A teaching hour can amount to anywhere between 45 and 60 minutes in different universities. Change over time is needed to allow students to move between rooms and also to allow for any reconfiguration of the room layout. In practice, even with the most flexible furniture, it is difficult to change a room layout without losing valuable class time.

Simon Birkett, IT and Learning Technology Manager, University of Staffordshire, has encouraged wider thinking to address this problem by designing bespoke furniture: all chairs are on wheels and all tables have two of their four sides on wheels. Locks on wheels have been removed, as moving a group of four tables together could mean undoing 12 locks to move the tables.

In some cases new learning spaces can be a source of discontent when academics try out the new spaces and like the opportunities they offer but then find they are not able to have the same facilities as often as they would like. It can be a challenge for somebody who has developed an active, group learning approach to find themselves back in a room with rows of desks facing the front. If you create only one of any type of space then you are setting yourself up for issues with managing expectations. Loughborough University experienced such problems with the creation of the innovative Design School lecture theatre. Once you have increased expectations, you need the physical resources to manage them. You need to be able to balance different styles of spaces from a timetabling perspective and the creation of fantastic new spaces will also highlight any inadequate learning spaces you may have.

Feedback from Toolkit contributors' learning space evaluations included a variety of opinions comments from: *"There have been a number of projects to look at timetabling in recent years but they haven't really got off the ground. There are probably too many cooks involved. We have quite a traditional approach."* to *"... the way our timetabling works, it's very hard to change a room. If you think on Monday, I'd really like to do that on Thursday, and you know it's going to be a battle, you're much more likely to think 'oh forget it'"* and *"It's difficult because I sat down and looked at the timetables for next year and tried to identify where I'd be able to use that room, and we were slightly held back by timetabling."*

Timetabling should be an enabler, rather than the barrier it is considered to be in some institutions. The more the timetabling team are embedded in and part of discussions about delivery developments, the more they will be able to translate individual (often changing) requirements to deliver the right space at the right time. Some timetabling teams use a student data-driven approach and to offer a greater degree of flexibility in course design (through module choices etc.); others capture requirements for future cohorts and forward model for new and existing flexible learning spaces that will be in use in three academic years' time.



Photo 16: A collaborative type of lecture theatre at Loughborough University Design School. It has been defined as a 'Harvard hybrid'.

© Loughborough University



"The creation of this style of space has positively challenged the way we teach. The layout enables students to be engaged in a more effective way".
Dr Julie Holland, Loughborough University¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Feedback from Dr Julie Holland, Director of the Glendonbrook Centre for Enterprise Education, on Loughborough University's new lecture space.

7.6 Changing working practices

New learning spaces may encourage or demand new ways of working. Here are some examples:

- Simon Birkett, IT and Learning Technology Manager, University of Staffordshire, was surprised to find that in an institution he worked in previously, teaching staff were using their learning pods (areas designed for collaborative work by small groups of up to ten students) for seminars. The academic staff liked the space and found it more convenient than having to timetable a room.
- Some universities are realising that the need to teach very large cohorts only occurs for a short periods during the year. An example is large teacher training cohorts who are together for a short time at the start and then spend most of their time out on placement. One university has calculated that it has a requirement to teach these huge classes for only about 35 hours in the year. Rather than building large lecture theatres to meet this type of infrequent need, other options can be considered. For example it may be appropriate to hire a large external venue (if one is available nearby), or to arrange streaming of lectures between adjacent rooms, to change the course delivery strategy to include more online sessions, or simply to break the cohort down and repeat the teaching in separate rooms. Repeating the classes, of course, may be unpopular with the lecturers.
- Glasgow Caledonian University implemented a one stop shop for student support in the Saltire Centre. Administrative and support services were colocated in an open plan area on the ground floor of the learning resource centre. The service desks had coloured lighting built in to signal whether they were in use by staff or vacant and available for student use. The configuration was changed, using cupboards to enclose the rear of the service desks, due to staff concerns about data protection when computer screens were visible in the open plan space.
- The University of Strathclyde IT Services department has found that increasing room utilisation means it is harder to find times when you can fit in maintenance. Their solution has been to change working patterns so that some staff now start at 7 am and use the 7-9 am window for maintenance.



VIEWPOINT

Bruce Rodger, Head of Infrastructure, Information Services, University of Strathclyde, is very much in favour of a portfolio approach to designing and managing teaching rooms. He is clear that a one size fits all approach won't work and that you need a selection of types and sizes but he points out that *"The matrix should never be so big that you have unique rooms"*.

At Strathclyde the university has been taking steps to bring the private departmental space into the central family to help with this kind of portfolio management. One of the key drivers for this was a fire in 2012 which took 50 teaching rooms out of use for a period of 18 months. The fire made Bruce realise that university disaster recovery plans tend not to think seriously about learning spaces. Existing plans focus very heavily on business continuity and IT but, even in a city centre location, where can you find 50 classrooms in a hurry?

At one point immediately after the fire, the university was teaching in cafes and in a cinema. The cost of hiring a 600 seat cinema in the morning was surprisingly cheap, and the projection facilities were very good, although extra lighting had to be brought in so students could take notes and external wifi was needed. Students liked the novelty of the approach and there was a bit of a *Dunkirk spirit* about the whole experience which meant that the university did not suffer in the NSS as a consequence of the disaster. It did however give the university a different perspective on both disaster planning and how it needed to manage its teaching space.

Bruce says *"I wouldn't recommend having a fire as a catalyst for change but it certainly worked for us"*.



VIEWPOINT

Sally Jorjani, Head of Academic and Business Liaison, Edinburgh Napier University, found that a project to create social learning spaces in a number of reception areas was in itself an exercise in change management. Fortunately she had robust evaluation evidence (see Section 6, Evaluation) to demonstrate student need. She did however experience the well known project management conundrum that a benefit for one type of stakeholder may be a *disbenefit* for another. In this case, the fact that the reception areas had been furnished and effectively given over to student control reduced flexibility for professional services departments that had previously been able to book out the space and make use of it for certain activities at particular times of year. Key to ensuring the success of the project was working closely with the services and demonstrating the overall value in terms of benefit to students and thinking about the space as multifunctional e.g. considering how furniture could be reconfigured to meet regular but less frequent needs.



VIEWPOINT

Paul Burt, Learning Spaces Service Owner, University College London (UCL), told us that UCL had started an initiative called *meet and greet* to help lecturing staff make best use of the facilities available in each classroom. For the first two weeks of term an experienced member of staff, who knows how the equipment in that particular room works, is present in every teaching room for the first 10 minutes of every class. This helps lecturers who are either new in post or new to teaching in a particular space to iron out any teething problems with the equipment. This initiative has been very well received because this is the busiest and most stressful period of the year when almost all of the students turn up to classes and many lecturers are teaching in rooms that are unfamiliar to them.

Resources

- The UCISA Project and Change Management Group has a mailing list and variety of publications¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁴ The UCISA Project and Change Management Group: www.ucisa.ac.uk/groups/pcmg