THE FUTURE OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

HEDQF

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This document is authored by Hiral Patel. Many thanks to Caroline Paradise for her valuable feedback and constructive discussions throughout the project.

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The Higher Education Design Quality Forum is an independent organisation which exists to promote high quality design quality across university campuses, buildings and facilities, in the knowledge that this enhances teaching, learning, research and public engagement.

Research is a core component of the charity's activities, supporting the higher education sector to create, maintain and deliver high quality environments through greater understanding and knowledge of how they affect the people that use them. Supporting early career researchers within institutions across UK & Europe to deliver research projects that address relevant issues relating to design of the built environment within the sector is an important component part of our long term strategy.

This study is a part of an ongoing exploration of the design and impact of learning environments within the Higher Education sector, focusing on the connection between curriculum and the physical learning space. Working with Hiral Patel from University of Reading/Exigo Consultancy has allowed us to examine this relationship from the perspective of the different stakeholders and we look forward to seeing how this project develops as we work through a series of pilot studies. Many thanks to Hiral and the wider HEDQF Research Group for the effort and enthusiasm for this project.

Dr Caroline Paradise
Co-chair HEDQF Research Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was commissioned by HEDQF in order to:

- **identify key themes for research into future learning environments in university estates and**
- **devise a research methodology which can be adopted by HEDQF to explore similar research topics**

The work was carried out by means of workshops, discussions and written submissions involving an advisory group and a literature review.

KEY THEMES

Six topics were identified as being of importance. The topics, and indicative issues for further research, are:

1. **Higher education models in the UK** - critique of the UK model; international comparisons; space implications of learning models such as new apprenticeships and online learning.
2. **Impact of AI and robotics on learning methods and learning spaces** - curriculum implications of labour market, digital capability needs and learner exposure to immersive environments from an early age.
3. **Shifting focus from teaching to learning** - implications for design of, and access to, space where students are partners in a learning community and co-creators of knowledge.
4. **Learning modes and methods** - learning as a continuum across formal/informal spaces both on and off campus; underlying principles of designing learning activities and their space implications.
5. **Diversity within the HE sector** – difference relating to nature of the academic institution or discipline; how students' personal characteristics affect their experience of the learning journey.
6. **Valuing higher education and its physical environments** - more holistic understanding of success and value in relation to how space is experienced and how it impacts wider communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The 'engaged scholarship' methodology has been developed for this project. The rationale for this methodolgy was threefold: to shape the research in relevance to its audiences, to bring multiple perspectives and frameworks into the discussion, and to make the research process a co-learning experience.

'Learning-space compass' is a framework and toolkit devised with the purpose of articulating the relationship between learning activities and learning spaces. It aims to provide a shared vocabulary to help diverse stakeholders understand and discuss learning needs. An accompanying report describes the framework and provides guidance on how to integrate it into the different stages of learning space project.

This framework addresses a fundamental and overarching theme of articulating the relationship between learning activities and learning spaces. In turn, the framework addresses the issues raised in following research themes identified in this project: Learning modes and methods (4), Shifting focus from teaching to learning (3) and Impact of AI and robotics on learning methods and learning spaces (2).Valuing higher education and its physical environments (6)

NEXT STEPS

We are seeking pilot projects to test out the 'learning-space compass'. Lessons learned from the pilots will be fed back into the development of the framework/toolkit as part of a continuous learning process. We will organise an annual learning event to share findings from pilot projects and scope themes for further research.

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SECTION 1 ABOUT THE PROJECT

HEDQF COMMISSIONED A RESEARCH PROJECT TO SCOPE KEY RESEARCH THEMES PERTAINING TO THE FUTURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN UNIVERSITY ESTATES.

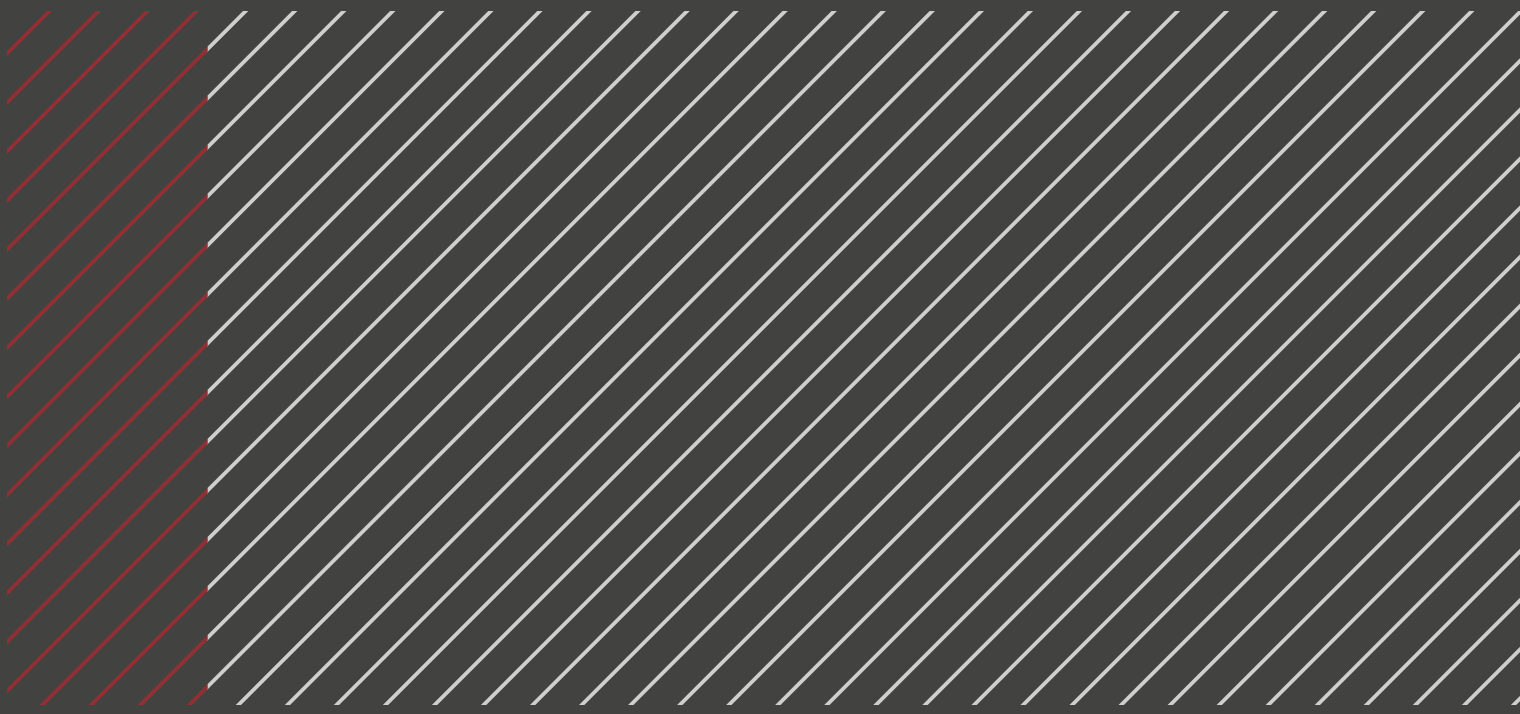
The project had two objectives. Firstly, the project aimed to identify pathways for further research including future empirical studies, which can be promoted by HEDQF. Secondly, the aim of this project was to devise a methodology, which can be adopted by HEDQF to explore similar research topics.

There are three outcomes of this project.

Firstly, six key themes pertaining to the future of learning environments have been identified for further research. These themes might be promoted by HEDQF as part of their research strategy.

Secondly, a participative methodology, based on the ideas of engaged scholarship, have been formulated and tested during this project. This methodology might be adopted for future research projects and enable to tackle challenges faced by the HE sector through engaging practitioners and academics.

The third outcome is the 'learning-space compass' framework and toolkit. Aligning curriculum and space has been the key focus during the latter part of this project. The 'learning-space compass' consists of a conceptual framework which links different modes of learning with physical space. A toolkit is also developed to assist in the practical implementation of this framework. The next step involves testing the framework through pilot projects.



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