Areas for Further Study

Reliability and Usability of In-Room Audiovisual (AV) and Connectivity Technology:

Why research further: Participants consistently report issues with Wi-Fi connectivity, projector and screen functionality (e.g., projectors going to sleep, HDMI issues, second screens not connecting, display quality not suitable for specific disciplines like photography), and sound system reliability (e.g., inconsistent audio output, lack of intuitive volume controls, sync issues, need for external speakers/microphones). There's a general lack of trust in the technology working seamlessly.

Research methods: Conduct usability testing sessions in a variety of teaching rooms, observing lecturers and students attempting common tasks like connecting laptops, using projectors/screens, adjusting sound, and sharing files. Follow up with interviews to delve into the specific points of frustration, the impact of these issues on teaching effectiveness and student engagement, and current workarounds.

Optimising Room Layouts and Furniture Flexibility for Diverse Pedagogical Needs:

Why research further: The current "Victorian education system" style rows of desks are widely criticised for hindering collaborative work, group discussions, and active learning. Existing furniture (e.g., collapsible tables) is often described as difficult to move and store, leading to rooms being "mangled" by previous users. There's a strong desire for more flexible layouts (e.g., circular, open-plan, areas for floor-based activities) and furniture that genuinely supports easy reconfiguration.

Research methods: Organise participatory design workshops with teaching staff to envision and prototype ideal room layouts for different teaching activities (e.g., workshops, critiques, lectures, group work, practical demos). Complement this with usability testing of various furniture types (e.g., wheelie chairs, genuinely stackable tables) to assess their practicality and ease of use in diverse setups.

Impact of Environmental Controls and Aesthetics on Comfort and Learning:

Why research further: Participants frequently cite problems with inconsistent and harsh lighting (lack of dimmers, ineffective blackout blinds), unregulated temperatures (overheating pipes, no airflow, non-openable windows), and poor acoustics (noise bleed between rooms, difficulty hearing lecturer in large spaces). These factors significantly impact student comfort, concentration, and the overall learning atmosphere. Furthermore, the "clinical," "unloved," or "office-y" aesthetic of some rooms is seen as uninspiring and a deterrent to creativity and a sense of belonging.

Research methods: Conduct interviews with staff and students to gather detailed accounts of how specific environmental conditions affect their experience and ability to teach/learn. Pair this with on-site observations in different rooms to identify recurring issues. Explore perceptions of space aesthetics through interviews or visual preference studies to understand what makes a space feel "loved" or inspiring for creative disciplines, and how it impacts student engagement and collaboration.

Efficiency and Integration of Digital Learning Workflows and Support Systems:

Why research further: Current digital workflows, such as file sharing (e.g., "clunky" Moodle upload/download vs. Airdrop), and lecture capture (often non-existent or dysfunctional with poor audio), are significant pain points. There are concerns about staff digital literacy and the effectiveness of current training methods. While IT/AV support is generally responsive, the frequent need for "rapid response" highlights a need for more proactive, preventative solutions.

Research methods: Perform usability testing on existing file-sharing methods and any available lecture capture systems to identify specific points of friction. Conduct interviews with staff across different departments to understand their current digital "hacks", their preferred methods for delivering and accessing content, and the most effective formats for digital literacy training (e.g., course-specific collective training). Interviews with both teaching staff and support teams could explore the "tension" between different IT/specialist support teams and how to improve integration and proactive maintenance.

Facilitating Community, Identity, and Independent Student Practice in Shared Spaces:

Why research further: The shift away from dedicated "base rooms" is a major concern, as these spaces are seen as crucial for fostering a sense of community, course identity, and independent, self-directed study. The constant use and rapid turnover of shared spaces mean they are often not maintained or set up appropriately for the next user. There is a need for transparent and efficient space booking and management systems. The desire for spaces that encourage informal peer-to-peer learning and creative exploration beyond taught sessions is evident.

Research methods: Conduct interviews with students and staff across different courses to understand the perceived value and challenges of dedicated vs. shared spaces, particularly for fostering community and

independent work. Explore current practices for maintaining shared spaces through interviews with staff and observation. Run usability tests and interviews on existing space booking systems to identify pain points and gather ideas for more transparent and user-friendly booking processes, potentially involving an app-based solution.

Audio-Visual Technology

1. Implement a seamless, uniform, plug-and-play system for connecting staff and guest laptops to screens, projectors, and sound systems across all teaching spaces

The current system is described as makeshift, varying by room, and requiring workarounds like carrying adapters

2. Address the reliability and consistency issues with AV technology across different rooms and buildings

Problems such as screens not working, sound issues, or projectors going to sleep disrupt teaching and require significant setup/troubleshooting time.

3. Provide a reliable, high-quality, seamlessly embedded sound system with easy connection methods

This system should be capable of playing sound from laptops and online sources without issues.

4. Address specific problems like poor audio from certain screens or difficulty controlling audio levels for screening student work

Several participants reported long-term technology issues that the support team are aware of but have not been fixed

5. Ensure sufficient, large, and high-quality screens are installed to provide adequate visibility for all students in a room

For larger spaces, ensure dual screens are functional and connect/mirror easily to improve visibility, particularly when teaching software. Screens should accurately represent image quality and color for courses like photography and design.

6. Improve the system for HDMI connections, moving away from fixed cables that break easily and are hard to replace

Several participants reported ongoing, repeated issues with broken or missing cabling Consider a system of regular checks and replacements

7. Implement a reliable and easy-to-use lecture capture system that can record audio, video, and screen content with minimal effort

This system should quickly process recordings (e.g., to MP4) and make them easily available for students. The system should integrate with UAL's Learning Management System (currently Moodle) This is particularly important for accessibility, students who miss classes, international students, and for recording software demonstrations or guest speakers.

8. Streamline the integration of interactive online collaboration tools (such as Miro, Padlet, or virtual whiteboards) for use within the physical classroom

Making it easier to utilise these tools seamlessly for in-class activities like sharing files or student contributions.

9. Provide accessible guest Wi-Fi for visiting lecturers and guests to connect easily without needing personal hotspots

All 9 participants listed wifi as a major issue - especially for external guests

10. Evaluate the necessity of dedicated desktop computers in teaching rooms if most staff and students use their own laptops, potentially redirecting resources

Only 1 of the 9 participants said they use the in-build computers. Some participants said the in-room computers are not reliable

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Facilities

1. Implement improved flexible room layouts that can be easily and quickly reconfigured

e.g. to suit different teaching activities, including lectures, group work, workshops, discussions (e.g., in a circle), and activities requiring floor space Users / teachers should be able to reconfigure spaces without the help of support staff (this was mentioned as an issue by 3 of the 9 participants)

2. Provide furniture that is easy to move, reconfigure, and store efficiently, without taking up excessive space when stacked

4 of the 9 participants listed "non-stackable" furniture in existing UAL spaces as a hindrance to their ability to teach. Consider a variety of furniture types, including desks with wheels, options for standing desks, and comfortable seating for discussions or breakout areas.

3. Ensure adequate and consistent lighting throughout all teaching spaces, including sufficient natural light where possible.

All 9 participants listed lighting as very important to their ability to teach. 5 of the participants have their own hacks /workarounds to improve lighting in their own spaces. Install dimmer switches and potentially zoned lighting controls to allow tutors to adjust light levels for different activities (e.g., presentations, reading, practical work) and student needs.

4. Provide functional, uniform blackout blinds in rooms with natural light

to allow control of daylight for presentations, projections, or using the space as a studio.

5. Address underlying issues with heating, cooling, and ventilation to maintain a comfortable and consistent temperature in all rooms.

All 9 participants mentioned issues with temperature seriously affecting their ability to teach, and the happiness and concentration of their students Ensure functional windows for natural ventilation remove exposed heating pipes that act as uncontrolled radiators allow individual temperature control. Add the ability to temporarily disable noisy heating systems for sound-sensitive activities.

6. Improve soundproofing within teaching spaces

especially between adjacent rooms and near workshops or studios, to prevent noise bleed and distractions.

7. Provide wall surfaces suitable for easily displaying student work and materials

7 of the 9 participants said they WANT to be able to display student work, but the current rooms do not easily facilitate this using simple methods like pinning or sticking, encouraging a creative and inspiring environment.

8. Ensure sufficient and easily accessible storage is available within or near teaching spaces

for materials, equipment, course resources, and student belongings (including bags). This includes lockable storage for valuable or dangerous items.

9. Include dedicated, easily accessible quiet and private spaces for confidential conversations with students.

3 of the 9 participants reported finding it very difficult to have private conversations with students

10. Provide appropriate workshop spaces

Including areas with natural light and the ability to make a mess for practical activities. Consider adding dedicated workshop desks with tools and storage in communal areas to support practical work outside formal classes.

11. Address issues with divisible rooms

ensuring mechanisms work easily, soundproofing is effective, access/exits are not blocked when the divider is in use

12. Ensure doors function easily and quietly to minimise disruption from late arrivals

3 of the 9 participants reported "noisy doors" as being unnecessarily disruptive to teaching

13. Improve the overall aesthetics and design of teaching spaces

To be inspiring, welcoming, and reflect the college's design principles. Avoiding a clinical or unloved feel. Consider commissioning professional designers familiar with specific course needs. All 9 participants reported the aesthetics of existing spaces to be poor, and to have a negative effect on students

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Other

1. Improve the overall reliability and predictability of teaching spaces

by addressing recurring issues and ensuring rooms are left in a usable state by previous occupants. This unpredictability adds significant time to staff preparation

2. Streamline the process for booking rooms

Making space availability more transparent and enabling quicker, more agile booking for specific needs like smaller groups or last-minute tutorials.

3. Enhance staff computer literacy and familiarity with teaching technology and platforms

Potentially through improved training and resources. "Lack of training" on UAL's technology was mentioned as an issue by 5 of the 9 participants.

Consider implementing team-based training for better collective understanding and application

4. Ensure readily available and quickly responsive AV/IT support within teaching spaces, reducing delays when issues arise.

All 9 participants reported that current AV and IT support is generally very responsive and good

5. Acknowledge and support the specific needs of different courses

such as the need for dedicated studio spaces for practical, messy work and fostering a sense of ownership and community or the need for specific AV setups for film screenings.

6. Provide comprehensive software training for students

integrating internal resources (like Digital Space) and highlighting external options.

7. Ensure heating/environmental issues are consistently and effectively addressed

by the relevant support teams (e.g., Estates) when reported by staff or students.