1. Physical Space Challenges

Interviewees frequently described physical spaces that presented significant challenges, impacting their ability to teach effectively and students' learning experience.

Restrictive Layouts and Inflexible Furniture:

Many teaching spaces, particularly computer rooms, are described as being set out in fixed rows, reminiscent of a "Victorian education system". This layout is seen as hindering collaborative work and student engagement. Furniture, such as large, difficult-to-move tables, further limits the ability to reconfigure rooms for different activities.

> "The room is set out like Victorian education system in rows. Yeah. And I just didn't think in 2025 that this was the way that we would be teaching, but here we are and I don't really understand that."

> "Trying to develop group discussion is relatively impossible because how do you organize those groups apart from pairs? And I think that pairs for some topics aren't enough people to be able to fully engage with the complexity of particular questions."

Poor Environmental Controls:

Issues with lighting, heating, airflow, and soundproofing were commonly reported, creating uncomfortable and sometimes disruptive learning environments. Rooms could be too hot or too cold, lacking natural light or proper blackout blinds, and noise from adjacent spaces could interfere with teaching.

"Soundproofing, light, air, the arrangement of the desks, the. I think even things like how the door works for people coming in late."

"The first thing is that in the room that we're in... The lighting is like a constant. It's quite harsh... No dimmer switch. Can't dim the light when you're projecting."

"If you have a class of 25 people making sure that the people at the back of the room are able to hear what you play at a reasonable volume requires, you know, reasonable volume. And there is a recording studio right next door to my classroom. And it's not been only one time that someone's come in to politely inquire whether I could stop making so much noise."
"Also, we can't open a lot of the windows. So when it's hot, it's really hot."

2. Technology Challenges

Reliability and usability issues with audio-visual and IT equipment were a major source of frustration for teaching staff.

Unreliable and Inconsistent AV Systems:

Projectors, screens, and audio systems were frequently reported as not working correctly or consistently across different rooms. Teachers often couldn't rely on the technology functioning as expected, leading to delays and disruption.

> "it's just often it's the reliability of, you know, which is the issue. Sometimes it's, you know, you get it set, go away for five minutes and something, the sound's not working, which powers itself off, whatever it is, you know. So it's just consistency sometimes is a bit of an issue in the different rooms."

> "It's like it's hit and miss. So a lot of times it's fine. But there's other times when it doesn't work sound."

Connectivity and File Sharing Issues:

Problems with Wi-Fi connectivity were highlighted as debilitating, especially when relying on online tools or sharing files. Methods for transferring files between computers were described as clunky.

> "Wi fi is a real issue. It just doesn't seem to work for 50% of the time I'm in my classroom and because I use a lot of interactive online virtual whiteboards again to help people contribute, when that goes down, that's debilitating."

> "sharing data is difficult and by data I mean files... The ability to airdrop stuff between computers is just so much easier than the current system that we have, which is to upload things to Moodle and then download things from Moodle. And this whole process is clunky and I think that works not particularly great."

Outdated and Problematic AV Systems:

Some existing systems were considered outdated, lacked essential features (like dimmers or easy audio control), or were installed in ways that created new problems (like cameras facing away from students).

> "I don't think they're the best. They're not the best in terms of display... for on a photography program you want higher quality screens so that you're representing images well"

> "The other big issue which I think has not been resolved in here is lecture capture. That's a big thing."

> "Unfortunately, the. In the installation, the camera is here. So if you're having a session with someone who's on the screen, everyone is looking over there at the screen, but the person who's on the screen can only see the backs of their heads."

Compatibility Issues:

Problems were encountered when trying to open files across different computers or connecting personal laptops due to varying ports or necessary adapters14....

> "I have had some issues where there's been compatibility issues between different computers which should be working the same, but somehow don't work the same."

> "Sometimes it seems like it gets very confusing because they've got a team set up as well... it's meant to just be able to plug in and out, but doesn't always work. So that can be quite disruptive just trying to set up to start with."

3. Impact on Teaching and Learning

These challenges directly influenced teaching methods, increased teacher workload, and affected the student experience.

Limitations on Pedagogical Approaches:

Teachers felt restricted in the types of activities they could implement, such as collaborative work, demonstrations, or dynamic presentations, due to fixed layouts, insufficient space, or unreliable technology.

"I don't think my teaching at UAL has been the same as teaching at other institutions, primarily because of that [room layout]. And I think that that is not the way that I would choose to teach."

Reduced Student Engagement and Comfort:

Uncomfortable environmental conditions, difficulty seeing or hearing, and distractions from technology or the environment could lead to decreased student focus and engagement.

> "if it's after lunch and it's a bit warm, the learning environment's not ideal. So students might doze off"

> "I think I'm getting tired just thinking, yeah, it's making me want to have a nap. I kind of thought because as soon as want to engage and they're like, okay, they're really into it but you could just see they're struggling."

> "It feels a bit clinical. The walls, you can't really put anything on the walls because of just. It's more what they're made out of and the texture and stuff that kind of doesn't allow for that... it feels like a more welcoming space to the students and it feels like a place where they can get inspired from by being surrounded by work on the walls or whatever it is."

Increased Teacher Preparation and Workload:

Teachers needed to arrive early to set up, troubleshoot, and prepare workarounds due to unreliable technology or difficult room configurations, adding significant time to their workload.

> "I normally like to get to the room quite early because there's always a fair amount of stuff to set up."

> "It's at least 40 minutes."

Hindrance to Collaboration and Group Work:

Fixed layouts and insufficient space made it difficult to organize students into effective groups for collaborative activities.

> "it encourages an individual learning journey. And trying to develop group discussion is relatively impossible because how do you organize those groups apart from pairs?"

> "So it's quite hard to fit everyone because it's 50 students, but we do. Do you have the whole cohort in one room at a time? We do, yes... So it's a room that works for like single delivery and then quiet working, but as soon as it becomes active it becomes a bit too much."

Difficulty Demonstrating Practical Skills:

Teaching subjects like photography or film production required demonstrating practical skills or showing visual work accurately, which was sometimes hindered by poor display quality, lack of appropriate setups (like live-streaming kits), or environmental factors like glare.

> "if you're trying to teach something that's a demo on a camera, what you are trying to actively avoid is have you know, a typical class size is around sort of like 15, 20 students. All you're Trying to avoid is like lots of students trying to look behind a single camera and it doesn't work."

> "like color grading workshops or the ability to show something that's true to life is quite frustrating because of the nature of the course."

4. Support and Maintenance

Experiences with technical support varied, and issues with equipment maintenance were noted.

Accessibility and Responsiveness of Support:

While some interviewees praised the AV support team as responsive and helpful -

> “But I do detect that there's been a lot of improvement in av. And I kind of, you know, they really. There's somebody there like Mr. Ben almost immediately. It's extraordinary. So generally that has really improved a lot in the years, even in the six years I've been there. You know, when I was first there, I'd ring the numbers, no one asked to read any of it, and then you bring the general number, we're back tomorrow, sort of thing. But now, now people are pretty good and arrive quite promptly or can actually help you on the phone sometimes, you know, So I certainly improved.”

- others found it difficult to locate technicians or noted delays in resolving issues:

> "You can contact AV support and the AV support team are very good and very nice and etc. But it does rely on you having got there 15 minutes early and then happening to be available and ready to race up to the tower block and not on something else."

Maintenance Issues:

Basic maintenance, such as replacing light bulbs or repairing blinds, was reported as slow, contributing to the poor functionality of the spaces3536.

"bulbs just go. And then it takes a good few months for anyone to replace it. So you're kind of presenting in darkness sometimes"

"Whenever you come to a space and you're like, something's broken, you're never surprised. Do you know what I mean? There is that thing of like, your expectation will definitely be that not all of these blinds will work."

5. Workarounds and Adaptations

Teaching staff and students developed numerous workarounds to mitigate the limitations of the spaces and technology.

Teacher Workarounds for AV/Connectivity:

Teachers carried adapters, used personal Bluetooth speakers, or downloaded content offline to circumvent unreliable university systems.

"Anywhere where I can, I'll take the system out of the equation. So I've just always got a Bluetooth speaker in my bag."

"Get a USB stick with all the files I need for that course that I can use. In the moments where Moodle is inaccessible and in moments where equipment doesn't work, which I have to say is fairly infrequent, then changing tasks to become more collaborative has been one of the kind of workarounds."

Student/Teacher Adaptations for Environmental Issues:

Students brought personal fans, and teachers brought in additional lighting to improve comfort levels in problematic rooms.

> "My solution to that is to bring lighting in. So I bring in photography lights. Put them in the back of the room... Bounce them off the ceiling. So they put a nice level of ambient light."

> "I think students have brought their own fans in. Yeah, because it's so hot. Plug in."

Creative Adaptations for Limited Spaces:

Teachers used innovative ways to utilize the available space, such as moving furniture (despite difficulty), encouraging students to use the floor for activities, or adapting teaching methods to fit the room layout.

> "sometimes we might then spend a bit of Time pushing all the tables out of the way. But sometimes we want people to sit in a circle, so it's like working out how to do that... we even do like performance workshops or like sort of more somatic learnings. So it's. We want to be on the floor, sitting on the floor."

6. Aspirations for Ideal Spaces

Interviewees shared visions for ideal teaching spaces, emphasizing flexibility, comfort, and integrated, reliable technology.

Flexible and Adaptable Layouts and Furniture:

The ability to easily reconfigure rooms for different teaching activities was highly desired, often involving movable furniture like tables and chairs on wheels.

> "I think something around the edge which de centers the position of the lecturer, which enables easy access to everybody... I think that these things are really important and they're the kind of the areas that I would really like to see change in a new building"

> "The room would be relatively large to enable people to move around and to form groups, probably through using wheelie chairs so that the space can be kind of traversed."

Improved Environmental Controls:

Desired improvements included better control over lighting (dimmable, balanced light), temperature, airflow (ability to open windows), and effective soundproofing.

> "The first thing I would do is I'd deal with lighting. The lighting should be daylight balanced and should be dimmable. So that'd be the first thing."

> "I think having fresh air circulating is really important. So I would like the ability to open windows, have fresh air circulate"

Integrated and Reliable Technology:

An ideal space would feature seamlessly integrated AV systems that are reliable, easy to use, and offer consistent functionality across all rooms, including large screens, quality sound systems, and easy laptop connectivity.

> "I suppose it would be circular. I think that projecting onto the whiteboard would go. And it Would be from the teaching computers, something that goes onto the students computers immediately, which is also kind of interactive space where the slides become possible to be amended or questions asked by students onto that so that you can kind of utilize that space."

> "seamlessly embedded into the room. So whether that's ceiling mounted, kind of speakers that flush or whether they're on the wall, but just kind of. That looks quite clunky, to be honest. You know, we're at the stage where you can have sound kind of integrated into a room and then the connection to that sound should be really straightforward."

Spaces Fostering Creativity and Community:

Beyond functional requirements, teachers desired spaces that felt welcoming, inspiring, and actively supported creative work and interaction, including areas for displaying student work and informal gathering.

> "I think there is something really important and it might. Again, it might be unique to our course, but we are quite like a makey course. So it feels like if we were like, this space is fine to come, teach, leave, but this. That wouldn't work for us because, like, it works sometimes, but then we're making stuff, we're engaging, and the students stay after the class to kind of finish and keep working."

> "It feels a bit clinical... I kind of want to get away from that a little bit... making sure that the rest of the space... feels like a more welcoming space to the students and it feels like a place where they can get inspired from by being surrounded by work on the walls or whatever it is."

7. Dedicated vs. Shared Spaces

The conversation included discussion about the current model of dedicated course spaces ("base rooms") and the potential shift towards more shared rooms in a new building.

Benefits of Dedicated "Base Rooms":

Dedicated rooms were highly valued for fostering a sense of community, supporting self-directed study, and ensuring familiarity and a level of care for the space and its equipment.

> "we try and have part of the session that's in front of computers... But also I like to have a space away from the computer so students can actually be thinking without just staring at screen."

"I do think we have a system at the moment of base runs which I do think is very desirable... You own the room. And the advantageous thing about that is obviously we... have a space that students can come to and do that self directed study, really, really valuable."

"when it's your room, you know it and you look after it and you make sure the students don't pull out the thing and go away with the HDMI cable because you own the space and you know you're going to have to be using it."

Challenges of Shared/Bookable Spaces:

Relying on booking shared spaces could lead to difficulties securing appropriate rooms, encountering inconsistent or messed-up setups left by previous users, and a lack of ownership or care for the environment.

"because of competition for space, we can't always get necessarily in the best places for us."

"Sometimes if you're going to play through your laptop the audio, you obviously need to make sure that the sort of audio jack is plugged into your computer as well through the headphone socket. Otherwise you won't get any audio out the speaker speakers. So it's little things like that trip up KL's when they go in. It's like, why is there any sound? But you've got to get to take the audio out of the headphone jack in the desktop to put it in your laptop to get the audio to come out."

8. Specific Technologies

Several specific technologies were discussed in terms of their use and challenges.

Moodle:

The university's online learning platform was generally seen as reliable and functional for managing course materials and communication, although it had quirks and its interface could be improved for accessibility and ease of use.
Teacher and student familiarity played a significant role in its perceived usability.

> "I think that is pretty reliable. There are quirks to it that I've found over the years... But yeah, I think generally it does what it needs to do. It's not Flash and fancy. I like that about it. It does a very utilitarian job."

> "Our modle is the cheap version of Moodle... I've seen more advanced versions of Moodle where they just. You can, I suppose you can pay For a kind of like open source version, which is like sort of like at the low end. And you can pay to have it like more customized to your own particular experience. You can also pay for it to be far more like. You pay for the user experience to be far more intuitive. Ours isn't on both ends on the kind of like user end."

Lecture Capture:

The lack of a reliable and easy-to-use lecture capture system was a significant concern, particularly for supporting students with different learning needs or those unable to attend sessions in person58.... Existing attempts were seen as non-functional or too complicated12....

> "The other big issue which I think has not been resolved in here is lecture capture. That's a big thing. The ability to kind of record either the audio from the lecture or kind of have some kind of, you know, cameras or devices where you can really kind of easily and almost just as a secondary thought... one click, lecture captures on and then we can go."