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# UNIVERSITY BUSINESS

The Business of Higher Education



Sheffield's world-class £81 million Diamond Building stands tall as a leading university learning space

SHINE  
BRIGHT  
LIKE A  
DIAMOND

*As innovative design and architecture of learning spaces continues to push boundaries Alice Savage explores what it means for your university*

# Room to GROW



The collection of unique buildings that make up many university campuses and estates across the UK contribute greatly to an overall feel of the university. As each space reflects its own zeitgeist, the collection represents and reflects the time in which each asset was conceived. In recent years, many universities have invested in modern and iconic buildings that also reflect the ever-changing approach to the use of space in learning. The idea that space can enhance the learning

## **ABOVE: The University of Sheffield's Diamond building**

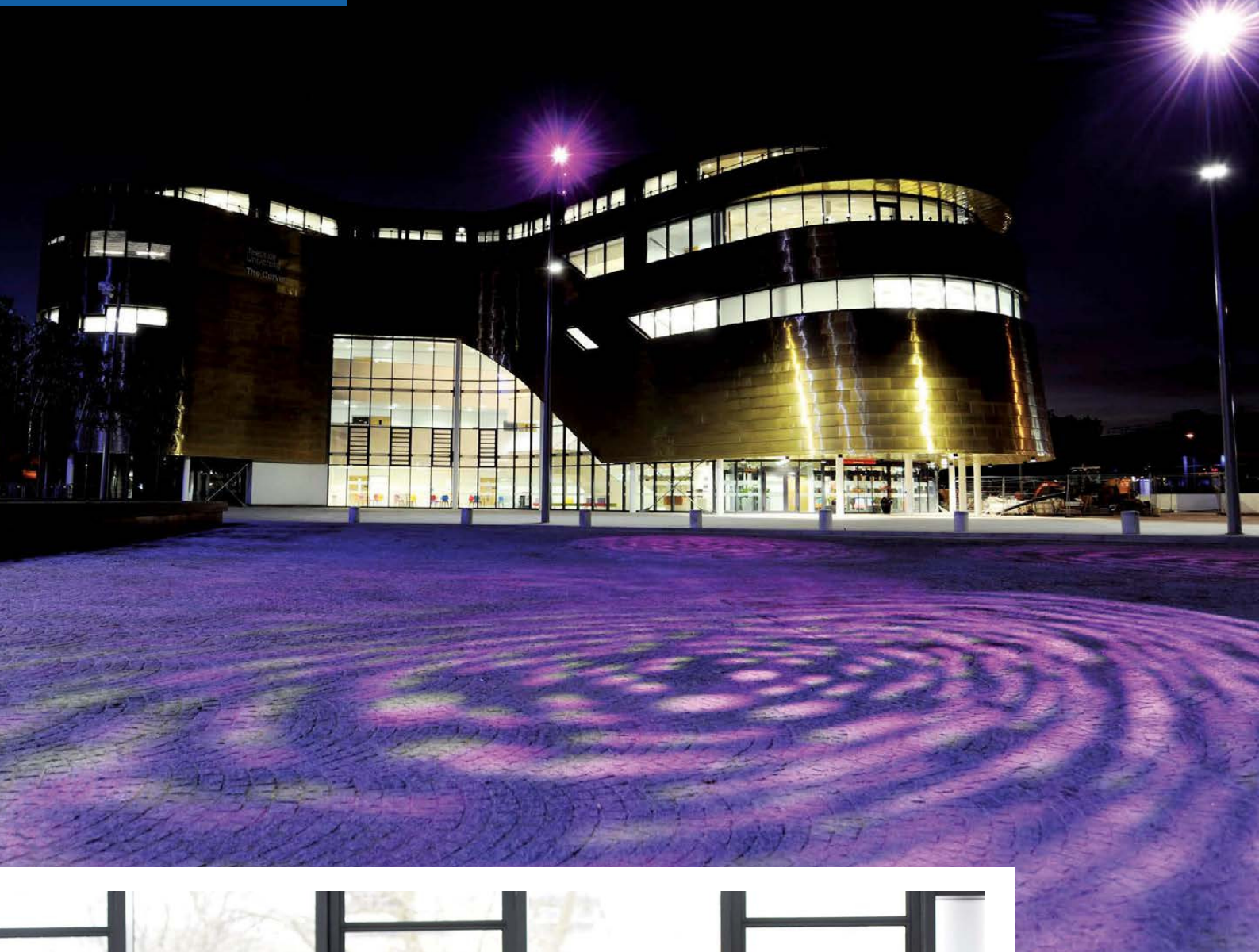
experience is not a new one but it has been slowly gathering steam in recent years, with top institutions investing millions into cutting edge facilities.

### SMART building

The University of Sheffield is proud to invest in its learning spaces. In the last five years the University has devoted £5m in refurbishing and renovating its existing

estate in addition to adding to its already vibrant campus with the world-class engineering building, The Diamond, costing an eye-watering £81m. The purpose-built hub contains around 2,700 learning spaces, with nine lecture theatres, extensive custom-fitted laboratories, four large flexible teaching rooms and over 30 group study rooms – with library access around the clock. Alongside these spaces, The Diamond is classed as a SMART building, as 250 building management system sensors track how the building is performing. This data will also be made available to the building's engineering students via a mobile app – effectively turning the entire build, which covers 200,000 square feet, into a dynamic learning space. When asked if universities were moving away from the traditional ➔

**“Traditional lecture theatres with chalkboards are still not dead – our mathematicians love them – but if you go to engineering, you can watch 3D animation in our 400-seat lecture theatre”**



ABOVE AND LEFT: The Curve at Teesside University

lecture theatre model Keith Lilley, Director of Estates and Facilities Management at the University, said: “To say that there are opportunities to improve learning through appropriate spaces I’m sure is true, and I think [The University of] Sheffield is doing an awful lot of that. Traditional lecture theatres with chalkboards are still not dead – our mathematicians love them – but if you go to engineering, you can watch 3D animation in our 400-seat lecture theatre – which isn’t very traditional at all. It’s not just about the seating arrangement. It’s about how you use the space.”

Driving students towards a more collaborative learning experience has been a top priority for many institutions. Helping universities achieve this vision is Steelcase, who specialise in innovative furniture design. By focusing on enabling schools, and universities to create effective and inspiring active learning environments, Steelcase work to meet the evolving needs of students and educators. Dr Lennie Scott-Webber, Director of Education Environments at Steelcase Education, says: “What we’re trying to understand is how can the environment help, – not only the educators but the students, understand that the environment is really part of their learning process.”

### Active learning

The key to Steelcase’s ethos is active learning. Whether through integration of technology or furniture that can be easily moved around for group work, Steelcase design aims to promote learning that is engaged and dynamic. Dr Scott-Webber wants to promote good pedagogy by moving away from the traditional row-by-column floorplan, which she feels conditions students to behave in a passive way, and promote active learning. “We’re trying to break those conditions down. If it continues to be row by column seating with shoulder-to-shoulder learning there’s no activity there.”

Also investing in flexible teaching space is Teesside University which will celebrate the opening of its new, flagship learning and teaching building, The Curve, after the summer break. Aiming to perform as a multi-functional asset to the University’s estate The Curve will incorporate round-table group learning as well as traditional lectures. Sitting as the focus point for a newly pedestrianised campus Teesside University hopes to bring together many elements of the student experience by blurring the lines between formal and social learning spaces. The Curve makes use of innovative furniture that can change the



## “The Curve will signal an exciting new chapter in Teesside University’s illustrious history and will provide an environment for students, stakeholders and the whole community to be proud of”

purpose of a space in a matter of moments. The Vice-Chancellor of Teesside University said: “The Curve will signal an exciting new chapter in Teesside University’s illustrious history and will provide an environment for students, stakeholders and the whole community to be proud of.”

Interior design can have as much of an impact on the student learning experience as external considerations. The University of Sheffield’s Keith Lilley, said: “We’ve got to keep it dynamic and fresh and every time we look at different spaces we don’t want it all to be the same uniform colour. You’ll find the colour palette in each of our teaching rooms is different, or maybe we’ll use a different carpet. It makes the room slightly more interesting and makes students feel more relaxed. It’s a personal touch.”

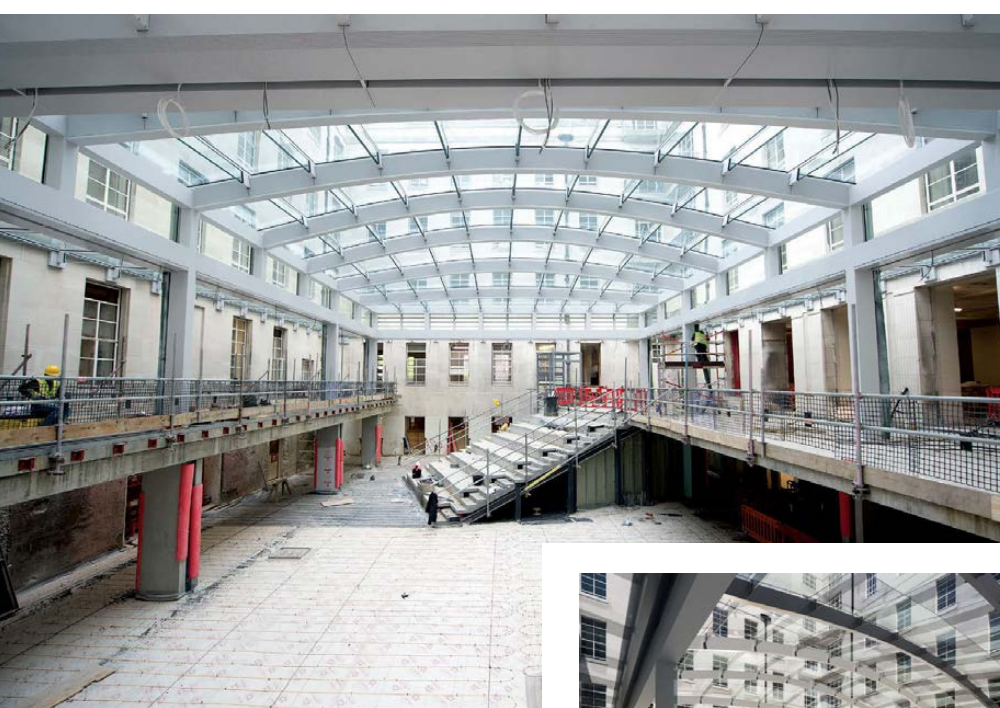
### Marrying interior and exterior

Another example of where interior and exterior design marry up can be seen at SOAS, University of London. SOAS is the only higher education institution in Europe specialising in the study of Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East. Their ambitious new redevelopment of the iconic Senate House aims to create a single unified campus. Undertaken by GRAHAM Construction and set to open in June, the multi-purpose space, housed under a free-standing glass-roofed atrium, will sit between the school’s existing Grade II-listed buildings creating an inspiring interior for both students and staff for formal and informal teaching and learning. The additional 1,000 sq m will be home to the new Student Hub which includes student finance, careers and enterprise services with a multi-purpose breakout area and café.

Making the most of the spaces you have is fundamental to flexible environments. Many universities opt for spaces that can be used in a variety of ways; the International Food Court in The University of Sheffield’s Student Union has a sprung floor and a state-of-the-art PA system, meaning that the furniture can be moved and the space used for dance and performing arts. SOAS, University of London’s Wolfson Lecture Theatre transforms itself with ‘L’-shaped seating centred around the lecturer. This Socratic layout means that the students will be closer to the lecturer. The seats are also configured into small ‘L’ shapes facing forwards to help facilitate group discussion if required, for a more interactive learning experience. Helping Birmingham City University create a flexible space for its professional services staff is global modular flooring manufacturer Interface. Moving from a cellular office plan to a communal, open-plan space meant that the flooring had to stand up to the increased footfall. Moreover, by careful selection of tiles, Interface were able to create a space that united the individual zones into a single office – encouraging the exchange of ideas and use of the space’s new social features such as an honesty coffee bar.

### Catering to all tastes

Universities are presented with an interesting challenge when providing creative and dynamic learning spaces as every student is different. The needs of each student, educator or department may in fact change. Some students prefer silent study spaces, whereas others prefer to study in more social settings and some tasks lend themselves to certain surroundings such



## Versatile learning spaces



In October 2015, the City of Glasgow College Riverside Campus opened its doors. Part of the largest education building project in the UK for 20 years, it's an excellent example of an innovative higher education learning environment built for the future. The importance of enabling spaces to be utilised for different applications is important as areas can be quickly transformed allowing learning spaces to be more versatile.

“It is important that architecture and furnishings are tailored to suit the specific, intended use of the space – neither building nor interior design can take a cookie-cutter approach. By providing as much flexibility today, educational institutions are in a way future-proofing their investments, creating spaces that will adapt to ever-evolving subject matter, teaching styles, content delivery and technology,” says Alison Mallett, National Sales Manager, Higher Education, KI Europe.

KI, the leading global provider of educational furniture, have provided a number of seating products for Glasgow College's learning spaces, the vast majority of which are on castors.

This shows the College's emphasis on creating dynamic, flexible spaces. A selection of rooms are furnished with KI's award-winning Learn2 chair with its highly versatile table arm, which eliminates the need for tables. Another room required further flexibility – it needed to provide tablet arms, but also needed to be able to transform quickly and create a large open space.

Meeting this requirement easily was KI's Torsion on the Go! chair, featuring a combination of an oversized foldable tablet arm, and the ability to nest neatly to the side of the room when not required.

as group projects or research. This challenge can, of course, be overcome by providing a wide range of facilities in multifunctional spaces. Having a central booking system is a good way to ensure that students can choose the space that best suits their individual needs. Sheffield's Keith Lilley said: “Our students need the best. You go into a lecture theatre and the lecturer knows how to use the IT because it's the same system in every lecture theatre in the University. The lecturer can then concentrate on delivering the learning experience. The facilities should be world-class here, and I think they are.”

By careful planning and with the help of industry experts universities can utilise the maximum potential of all of their learning spaces, not just in new builds but by taking a flexible approach to the existing estate. Bringing together social and learning spaces, in addition to more traditional provision can often have a positive effect on the whole student experience by encouraging them to spend less time isolated

ABOVE: The curved glass atrium at SOAS

in their study bedrooms and more out in the world developing the skills to make them successful not only in their academic endeavours but also for the future. In this way universities can also build on the positive effect given by the government's Building Schools for the Future programme which saw many classrooms across the country benefit from state-of-the-art, interactive facilities and furniture and investment in dynamic learning spaces. Through this continuity universities can drive forward new innovations in enhancing pedagogy through active and flexible learning spaces. 