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Ramsden, Bryony

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SCONUL 2010 Conference



Learning Space: What difference does it make?

Learning Space: What difference does it make?

- How does learning space impact on the learning behaviour of it's users?
- How do students use our spaces?
- What does this mean for the staff who support them?

A history of learning space research

Research concentrates on technical and physical issues, or learning within a virtual space, NOT learning behaviour.

“Where is the research on physical space impacting on learning behaviour?”

What's the difference with our research?

We have focussed on:

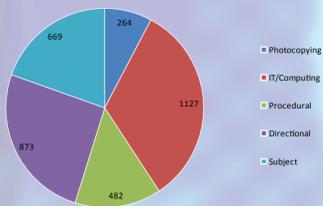
- Learning spaces, specifically in the library, and how students relate to it
- Staff feedback on the impact of space on their work and support

How we gathered data

- Reflective logs and quantitative monitoring of desk enquiries (staff)
- Surveys, learning logs, monitoring space occupancy, and interviews (students)

Discoveries - Impact on staff support

Subject team staff have experienced an increase in enquiries since refurbishment, and now primarily deal with IT enquiries.



Discoveries - How students view spaces

Study goals are simplistic, to finish what they are working on.

They do know that they like particular types of library space for specific reasons. Frequently these are practical e.g. near resources, silent or group studying.

Students find the library spaces conducive to learning, as it is “the place to get work done”, or where others study.

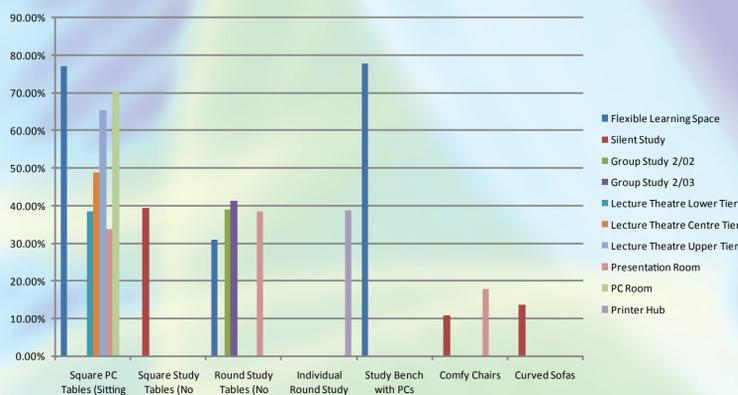
Space and furniture preferences

Area type	Used Area (%)	Favourite Area (%)
Silent	64.9	34.3
Group	53.6	26.5
Individual	79.6	39.2

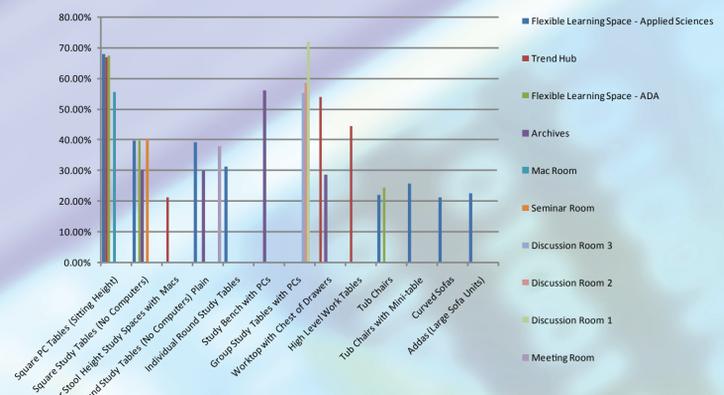
Individual and silent areas are still the most popular, but how they are used may not reflect the space purpose!
Some students were observed selecting silent or individual areas and then conducting conversations (both study related and for socialising), and would

view other students in the area doing the same as behaving inappropriately. Others commented that they preferred to be near other people, regardless of their space preference, as it created a working atmosphere and made them feel more comfortable. Does unexpected or ‘inappropriate’ behaviour stem from the way the space is designed, students’ educational history, or should we totally re-think the way our learning space operates?

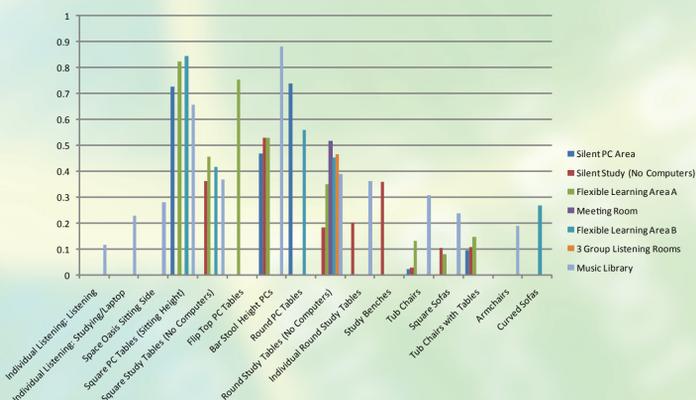
Floor 2 Furniture Occupancy



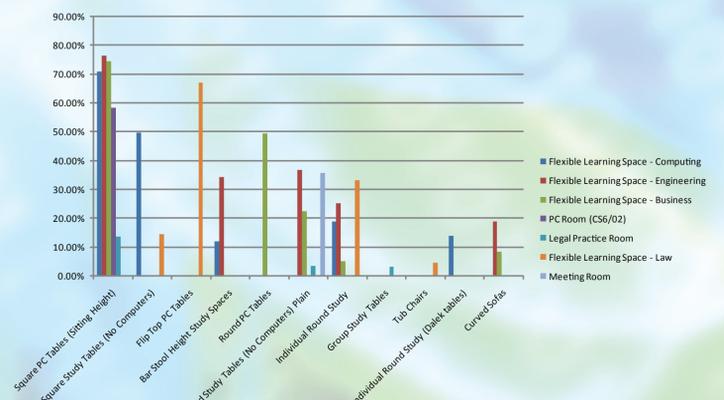
Floor 3 Furniture Occupancy



Floor 5 Furniture Occupancy



Floor 6 Furniture Occupancy



Furniture Occupancy

- Soft furniture i.e. armchairs, sofas, largely unpopular (4 to 31%)
- Computers most popular, but occupancy still varies from 14 to 88%, depending on location and furniture provision (e.g. high bench computers are used as a last resort)
- Desk without computers still needed, but vary between 12 and 52% occupancy

Project recommendations

- Re-evaluate what student needs are for support
- Encourage independent learning
- Revise staffing and modify the subject team format
- Play with our spaces more! Experiment with furniture configuration
- Reconsider our own expectations of spaces and student interpretation

Plans for the future

We want to:

- Conduct more research into whether our data matches other universities in this country
- Embed our research methods into the curriculum to discover more habits across a wider variety of space types
- Continue evaluation of our learning spaces



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