The Evolution of Learning Spaces at Victoria: Discussion Paper
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Introduction
The spaces universities use for learning and teaching have a profound effect on the experience of students and staff. The term lecturer immediately conveys ideas of the role of the academic staff member, their pedagogical strategy, the involvement of students and the space where education occurs. In reality, the range of experiences students have in their study at Victoria goes well beyond the stereotypical lecture. Consequently Victoria has invested in a range of spaces able to support this educational diversity, and is continuing to evolve the campus facilities to do so in the future.

Technology is a significant contributor to the experience of learning at the University, but it is important to emphasise that it does not of itself define the evolution of that experience. Online experiences are an essential part of modern education, but it is abundantly clear students value and benefit from a face to face engagement with academics and their peers. We need to ensure that technology is used in a way that enhances the campus experience and supports a model of learning and teaching characterised by “effective use of digital technologies for learning and teaching.” (Victoria Strategic Plan Primary Strategy 3).

Other factors influencing Victoria’s learning and teaching environment include:

- Continuous improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the educational experiences provided in our courses and programmes;
- The need to expand Victoria’s reach beyond the immediate Wellington region;
- Maximising the educational impact of the limited physical space available in our physical campuses;
- Changing student demographics, including the likely shift over time to a greater proportion of students at postgraduate level, more international, Māori and Pasifika students, and an aging population needing access to education, supporting shifts in their employment;
- Responding to the expectation from students and other key stakeholders for flexibility of time and place where learning occurs, including support for a growing diversity of learning approaches and the need to build stronger linkages to key external groups.

Inherent in these factors are the inevitable pressures on the University to grow the scale and scope of its operations. Decreasing funding from public sources is likely to continue for the foreseeable future so any investment in facilities needs to provide substantial benefits and be able to respond to unpredictable change in the future demands made upon the University. These pressures fall heavily upon individual staff, both academic and general, who need to be actively engaged in shaping the consequent changes.

Educationally, technology offers the potential for enhancing the effectiveness of face to face teaching by extending formal class time into learning activities conducted on campus or online outside of the class. This approach, a form of hybrid distance and face to face learning is commonly referred to as “blended learning” where a blend of approaches and tools are used to support student learning.

The Victoria Digital Vision for Learning and Teaching is anchored on the presumption that the experience of study at Victoria for the majority of programmes will be built on high quality and effective face to face engagement with staff and other students. Increasingly we are planning to extend the reach of the University to offer programmes in multiple locations and also more extensively online.
Digital technology supports a range of pedagogical strategies that transfer some face to face activities (particularly those associated with gaining access to knowledge) online, with academics thus able to use face to face time to engage with students collectively, motivate and stimulate their engagement with the online resources, help students engage deeply with content\(^1\) and to provide a structure to students’ learning. Potentially this can drive efficiency gains through the reduction in scheduled face to face sessions in some classes, with content delivery sessions moved online, for example through the use of pre-recorded video resources. Strategies such as Scale-Up\(^2\), Peer Instruction\(^3\) or the Flipped Classroom\(^4\) provide models for using technology to engage students and provide a potentially more effective educational experience. Transitioning to these approaches means that we need to start shifting our spaces from a focus on the teacher to spaces that enable discussion and interaction.

The remainder of this paper presents a summary of ongoing and upcoming projects, educational challenges facing Victoria and a draft framework for exploring the implications of these factors on the evolution of the campus infrastructure for learning and teaching. Nothing in this document should be seen as formal policy of the University; these are ideas intended to support a thoughtful and collegial engagement with options for ongoing investment in the University infrastructure. In particular, a key objective of this work is to sustain the excellence and diversity of learning and teaching experience arising from the range of subjects and disciplines comprising the University, and to ensure that academic and general staff are able to engage effectively with the continuous process of change at Victoria.

**Current Space Initiatives**

Victoria has a number of projects already underway or looming in the near future. These respond to a number of practical and strategic issues:

- **The Gateway building project** on the Kelburn Campus will provide modern and safe teaching and research facilities enabling the University to move Science teaching to a single location. New facilities include a 220 seat lecture theatre and several smaller flat-floor spaces including two rooms with space for 60 and 80 students able to support ‘scale-up’ or active learning approaches.

- **The Rutherford House extension** is adding much needed teaching spaces and allows the University to withdraw from the Railway premises. The resulting space will have many of the benefits apparent in the Kelburn hub space and is framed by the same approach of moving student services and learning and teaching spaces into the foreground.

- The University has created a small campus in central **Auckland**. Consisting currently of three teaching rooms and a small number of offices this facility provides the University with the ability to engage with students directly in Auckland and to deliver courses using a blend of technologies and pedagogies simultaneously in Auckland and Wellington.

- **The Faculty of Education** is moving onto the Kelburn campus. This will see increased pressure on Kelburn facilities but also means that new options for the Karori campus can be considered.

- Upon completion of the Gateway project and move of the School of Biological Sciences, the University has the opportunity to refurbish or replace the **Kirk building** (and potentially the Old Kirk and Kirk Wing buildings). This essential work will see the University potentially lose the KK301 and KK303 lecture theatres for up to 3 years. The current plan for the space is to create a strongly learning focused environment with a variety of different learning spaces.

- Other future projects include the possible move of the School of Music, refurbishments of Laby and Easterfield, plans for using the new Terrace site purchased from the Council.

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Specific Educational Challenges Facing Victoria Affecting Space Planning

Some of the factors complicating space planning are educational and technological. These include:

- **Declining attendance at lectures throughout the trimester.** There is some variation in attendance across the faculties but in general attendance by first year students declines from 82% in week 3 to 54% in week 10. This is frustrating for staff and likely to result in lower levels of student retention and success if it leads to disengagement from the course.

- **Examinations and tests require large amounts of space to ensure adequate separation between students.** This has meant that they have to be scheduled in the evening, potentially compromising some students’ outcomes, and an extensive examination period means that there is little gap between the trimesters for staff to recover and plan, and for service units to maintain and upgrade facilities.

- **Increasing student device use in lectures is seen as disruptive by some staff and students, and essential by others.** The increasing use of online resources and tools means that lecture spaces need ever increasing amounts of networking infrastructure to perform reliably. Online tools including note taking software, content access, and interactivity are likely to be routine expectations in the near future. Other practical concerns include the provision of power and the need for desk space sufficient for the device and any other materials.

Framework for the Evolution of Learning Spaces

Evolution of the learning spaces needs to respond to some guiding principles. These are derived from the existing priorities, which are explicitly and implicitly apparent in the University’s strategic and operational plans, academic policies and practices.

**We need to invest in facilities that build on existing strengths and success.**

*The University needs physical spaces that are effective over decades, that are safe, that are efficient to operate, that enhance the experience of being on the campus, and that deliver the capability to engage in high quality learning, teaching and research. We have limited “green field space” to expand so we must maximise the impact of the spaces we have.*

*The Kelburn Campus Hub illustrates an approach that has successfully delivered a world-class environment. Student facilities and campus amenities are provided in a comfortable environment that contains a range of learning and teaching spaces, and which connects seamlessly to others, including the Maclaren lecture theatres, the MacDiarmid spaces, the Library and shortly the Gateway building. This success suggests that redevelopment of teaching and learning spaces that connect to the Hub should be prioritised over those that are less accessible. The Kirk buildings in particular are an important opportunity to develop new spaces and further connect spaces such as the Hunter courtyard and lecture theatres.*

**Technology needs to be integrated within physical spaces in a way that enhances the experience and simplifies the work of staff and students.**

*Technology is an essential component of effective learning spaces. Staff and students need to be able to easily move between different spaces while continuing to access the tools that they need to learn and teach. The infrastructure needs to scale to support the number of occupants and their multitude of devices.*

*Technology provides a mechanism for enhancing the experience within learning spaces, providing new opportunities for interaction and engagement that motivate students. Online content and interaction tools can provide information and support students grappling with new ideas. Students can then meet physically with each other, and in classes with academics and tutors to further develop their understanding and sustain their motivation.*
We need an infrastructure that responds to the increased scale, scope and reach of the University

Victoria intends to grow to support a population of 40,000 students and the staff complement needed to support their learning. Much of this growth will include international students, and courses operated in other contexts, including Auckland and elsewhere. Already we are experimenting with technologies that allow for classes to the linked online from multiple locations.

Learning and teaching spaces need to be flexible, just as our students and staff are becoming flexible in their approach to learning and teaching.

The principles described in this framework, if agreed, can support an ongoing lifecycle of development of teaching spaces, integrated into the teaching, planning, budgeting and implementation timetables of the University. At key points in this lifecycle, staff and students can provide their ideas and concerns, helping the service units and leadership of the University understand and implement the infrastructure needed for the world-class civic university Victoria aspires to be.
Questions for Reflection and Discussion

These questions are provided to start you thinking about space at Victoria and its role in your teaching. We’ll be using these to guide the discussion on Friday.

What are the strengths of the current Victoria learning environments that support your discipline and/or model of learning and teaching?

How could those strengths be sustained in a way that responds to the factors identified in the discussion paper? Are there additional pressures or factors that should also be responded to?

How could the learning and teaching infrastructure at Victoria be changed to significantly improve the educational outcomes for students and staff?

How could the University better support staff and students using the educational facilities?

What types of learning spaces should the University be planning to provide in its redevelopment of the Kirk building complex?

How can the University use new learning spaces to effectively support cross-disciplinary learning and teaching?

In what ways would a large lecture theatre (approximately 500 seats) strengthen the University, providing options for a range of future activities, including those that enhance research as well as education? How would it complement other spaces and benefit from ongoing technological and pedagogical developments?

What impact do you see arising from blended models of delivery at Victoria on your discipline and/or model of learning and teaching?