



Student Centre and University Square Post Occupancy Review

AMA Alexi Marmot Associates
17 North End London NW3 7HR
T +44 (0)20 7284 5888
mail@aleximarmot.com
www.aleximarmot.com



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Key

- Bus routes
- Bus stops
- Cafes
- Cash machine
- Cycle parking
- Dental Clinic
- Electric vehicle charging point
- Entrance to buildings
- Eye Clinic
- Gender neutral toilets
- Mailroom
- Main reception
- Medical Centre
- Motorcycle shelters (covered)
- Parenting room
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy Clinic
- Prayer Room
- Public car parks
- Security Control Centre
- Social Space
- Student Support
- Under construction

+44 (0) 1772 201 201 | uclan.ac.uk

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prepared by
AMA Alexi Marmot Associates



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Executive summary

The Student Centre and University Square was the final major project in the implementation of UCLan's £200 million Estates Masterplan 2015 – 2022. Much of the project construction was undertaken during Covid 19 lockdown and disrupted periods, causing unusual problems. An earlier project was the Engineering Innovation Centre, the subject of a parallel review.

We thank all who participated or helped to provide information, organise meetings and interviews for this Post Occupancy Evaluation.

Post Occupancy Evaluations (POEs) are an important part of the way in which universities seek to make the most of their buildings throughout their lives. The POE for the Student Centre and University Square (SCUS) was undertaken at the same time as that for the Engineering Innovation Centre. There are some general points that emerge in such studies that are summarised below for general information as they will always be relevant in POEs. The list does not imply that these actions were not taken in this project, but is provided as a convenient checklist to act as a reminder of good practice for future readers of this report in new or different circumstances .

- Start the briefing process very early, involve all relevant stakeholders;
- When possible, conduct utilisation studies before deciding on change;
- Plan enough handover time if stakeholder participants move elsewhere;
- Expect the building to need adaptation during its lifetime;
- Select a design team that understands the university;
- Use an independent 'critical friend' to oversee the design development;
- Keep stakeholder representatives involved at all design stages;
- During design, involve those who will manage and maintain the building;
- Make sure all involved are given time to participate effectively;
- Employ a client manager to confirm sign off on completed work;
- Allow time to test and manage building systems before occupation;
- Create a user group to keep the building performing at its best;
- Undertake regular, monitored utilisation studies for a wide range of internal and external spaces.

This project, now known as SCUS, formed a key part of the masterplan for 2015-2020 to support the vision to create a world-class campus in Preston and stronger links with the local community. The building and the square within which it is located are both therefore considered here.

The author was unable to locate a full business case for the project. However overall the project has succeeded in many of its objectives as listed in the brief (see 2.1) or has set the foundations for future successes. There are some lessons to be learnt from examining the project and its outcome, many of which have already been taken on board by the Estates and Campus Services team.

The highways aspect of the project was of great importance and involved rerouting and managing traffic movements that have been successfully integrated on the site. Despite very extensive consultation some associated pedestrian movement routes are possibly less intuitive for new users: the main



pedestrian crossing does not land at the foot of the main stair to the square, and the ramped route could have been focused on the entrance to the building rather than running parallel to the road. The city highways department placed constraints on some options. These are, however, minor issues that will not present a problem to those familiar with SCUS.

It was beneficial to the implementation of the design that Hawkins Brown were novated to the project, enabling the project to maintain the original design intentions.

Several problems have emerged after occupation that have taken time to resolve, and while by now generally rectified, some still require resolution with the contractor. The architectural team and the UCLan project manager have both suggested some lessons, mainly relating to the governance of the project. Changes in how Estates now manage such projects are in the process of being implemented.

Generally the building is performing well and is liked by those using it. There are nonetheless ways in which the building could have been even more effective from the viewpoint of the university as a whole, which are described as 'quick wins'.

Aspects of the process that could have been beneficial if conducted before occupation include gathering utilisation data prior to move in to ensure that rooms unlikely to be in continuous use by building occupants are made available to others. Though many efforts have, and are being made to work with the city to plan a series of events of the university square to enhance UCLan's profile and connection with Preston, there is still work to be done.

Several aspects of building management could still be improved particularly catering provision, room allocation and use of the roof terrace. Some design issues could be considered to enhance the building: improving phone reception, renaming the entrance floor, and mitigating glare, maybe considering relocating non-student facing professional services teams to give more space to students. In addition, consideration could be given to eventually incorporating the Board Room from the EIC within the VCG area.

The building admirably fulfils its intended role of bringing all student services together in one place. Some but not all of the issues discussed in section 4 can be addressed now or in the near future. Some other general lessons for all buildings could, and some are already, being built into estate processes.

Increased participation by members of the Facilities Management team during the design stage, and discussion of *Soft Landings* with the project board and delivery team are recommended as ways of demonstrating to stakeholders the importance of seeing the handover of a building as the **start** of its real life not as the **end** of the design and build process.



1 Introduction

1.1 UCLan in Preston

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) has a long history in delivering education in Preston. It has evolved since its inception in 1828 and has been educating students for nearly 200 years. In 1992 it became a University and now has around 39,000 students. Numbers have increased in the last 10 years by about 5,000 overall though there was a slight dip after Brexit. The number of non-EU international students has grown from around 2,000 in 2014-15 to over 6,000 in 2021-22.

Students today face the double problem of sharply rising costs at a time of reduced availability and relative value of maintenance loans, yet have increasing expectations for a quality, flexible and supportive learning environment. UCLan is generally considered to be good value financially, but student expectations must be taken into account when making estate changes.

Fig 1 UCLan's history

- **1828** – Founded as the '**Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge**'.
- **1882** – Following a substantial donation from the Trustees of Edmund Robert Harris, we changed our name to the '**Harris Institute**'.
- **1956** – Following a government re-organisation of technical education, our name changed to the '**Harris College**'.
- **1973** – The Harris College was designated by Central Government as a polytechnic and became '**Preston Polytechnic**'.
- **1984** – Preston Polytechnic changed its name to '**Lancashire Polytechnic**'.
- **1992** – Lancashire Polytechnic became the '**University of Central Lancashire**' after the Government bestowed degree-awarding powers to polytechnics.
- **2007** – New logo to emphasise the abbreviation 'UCLan'.
- **2015** – £200M master plan for the Estate was prepared
- **2020** – In September 2020, the University launched its **new brand**, with a new logo and colour scheme to emphasise its position as a place of learning, where opportunity creates success.

Source: [UCLan.ac.uk/home/About us/history](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/home/About-us/history)

The 2015 Masterplan 'vision was to create a state-of-the-art, sustainable campus which would enable all our students to enjoy the best possible University experience as well as strengthening our ability to make a positive contribution to local communities and the regional economy. We also aspired to bring together the city and the University like never before, building on our close ties with the people of Preston and Lancashire, and creating brand new opportunities for individuals to realise their potential and to transform their lives.'

A large part of the masterplan was rationalisation of connectivity across UCLan sites and clarity of routes between the parts of the campus and towards the city of Preston. This played a large part in the planning of the Student Centre with a new square, University Square, incorporated as part of the project. It involved extensive work with Preston's highways to manage traffic flows in the area.



The masterplan called for :-

- Engineering Innovation Centre (EIC)
- Student Centre and University Square
- Highways improvements to encircle and complement Student Centre and University Square
- Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre
- New Social Spaces in Foster and Harrington Buildings

1.2 The Student Centre and University Square project

This project, now known as SCUS, formed a key part of the masterplan for 2015-2020 to support the vision to create a world-class campus in Preston and stronger links with the local community. The building and the square within which it is located are both therefore considered here.

Fig 2 The new ‘gateway’ to UCLan showing the Engineering Innovation Centre and Student Centre and University Square



Source: 9747_Student_Centre_Brochure .pdf

1.3 Objectives of this review

AMA has been asked to conduct a review of the Student Centre and University Square (SCUS) project in line with Estates and Capital Services Directorate policy to learn from its estate projects and make the most of the University’s built environment. It is to be commended that the university engages in review of completed buildings as this is one of the best ways to ensure that all projects provide the best outcomes for the university and that lessons learned from one are passed on for the benefit of other projects. The following objectives have been considered

1. How the project meets the stated brief/objectives
2. Issues that may prevent achieving the desired outcome;
3. Observations on how space is used to fulfill the university vision
4. Recommendations to improve future projects for new and refurbished buildings by identifying useful data for adapting to inevitable change.



The review process that was adopted includes:

- Review of background documents provided by members of UCLan staff;
- Familiarisation with the building in use by walkthrough;
- Discussions with many stakeholders including Estates, Facility Management and project leaders, conducted either face to face, or by telephone.

The review could not have been conducted without the help and support of building users, Estates and Campus Services staff and many others in the university. A list of people interviewed can be found in the appendix. To all who participated or helped to provide information, organise meetings, interviews and questionnaires, we extend our special thanks.



2.0 Overview

2.1 Objectives of the development

The brief was presented in a document for an RIBA competition that can be summarised as seeking a building to:

- Provide a new landmark and gateway building for UCLan's £200m masterplan;
- Inspire learning and positively impact the lives of building users and the public;
- Strengthen and celebrate the connection between the university and Preston;
- Bring together all student support services;
- Provide informal social learning spaces;
- Create a new, open and inclusive public realm;
- Provide enhanced environmental performance.

Figure 3 shows pages of the briefing document issued to invited competitors in 2016. They indicate the type of development and priorities sought in the new Student Centre and New Square (SC and NS, later renamed SCUS). The illustration was incorporated in the Masterplan for 2015-2020 and the development was a key part of meeting the objectives of the masterplan. The first chapter headings of the document set out principal objectives, subsequently focussing on transformation of vehicle movement.

Fig 3 UCLan briefing document for SC and NS, April 2016

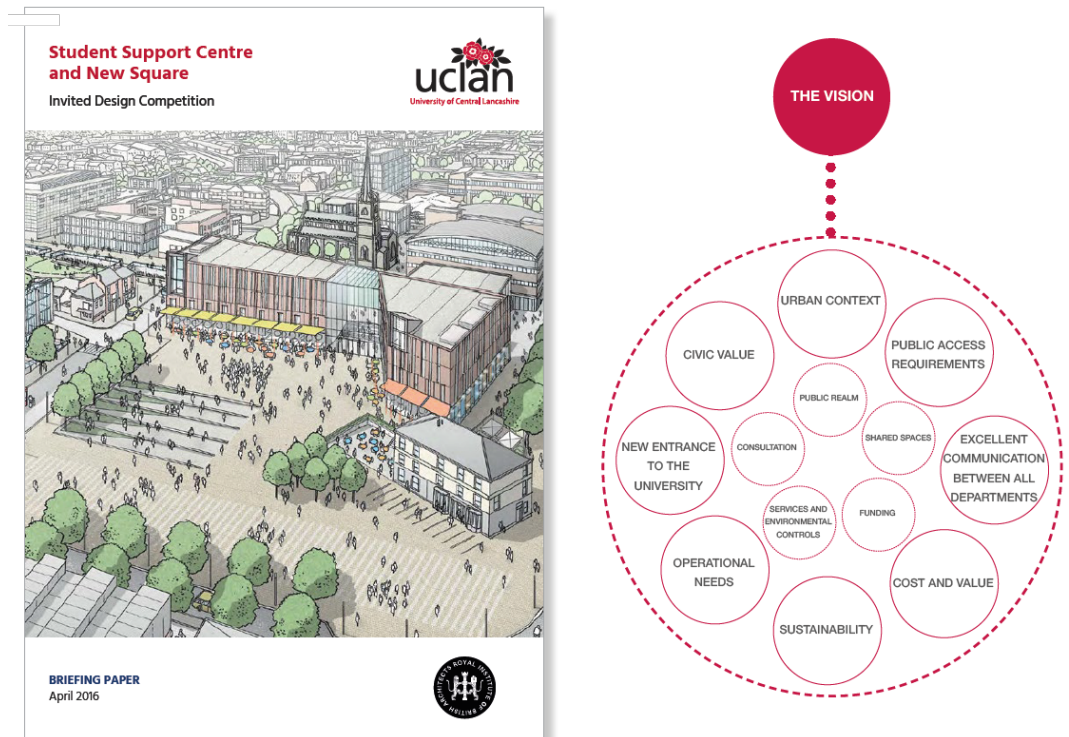




Fig 4 Briefing Document for SC and NS : chapter headings

1. The University campus is an integral part of Preston’s city life
2. Improving the gateways to the campus will strengthen the relationship with the city
3. Creating an attractive and inviting world class campus for the future of UCLan in line with the University’s status as one of the UK’s largest Universities
4. The creation of a new heart for UCLan will showcase its key principles of openness, transparency and accessibility

Source: UCLan briefing document, April 2016

Fig 5 Project timing

Date	Stage
May 2015'	Ground clearance
April 2016'	International design competition launched
August 2016'	Public review of 7 shortlisted designs
September 2016'	Hawkins Brown announced as winners
October 2016'	RIBA stage 1 completed
January 2017'	RIBA stage 2 completed
May 2017'	RIBA stage 3 completed
January 2018'	Planning permission granted
February 2018'	RIBA stage 3 revised
July 2018'	Utility works below ground started
May 2019'	Hawkins Brown novated
June 2019'	Contractors appointed - Bowner + Kirkland (B&K)
August 2019'	Construction starts
June 2020'	Highest point of structure reached
August 2020'	Practical completion
September 2020'	Time capsule set into the foundations
October 2020'	Grab & Go / Cafe fitout handover

2.2 Overall Outcome

This review conducted in Autumn 2023, three years after building occupation, examines how well SCUS has so far met its aims. Overall the project has succeeded in achieving many of its objectives, as described in section 2.1 extracted from the brief, and in the ‘Vision’ expressed in Fig 3, or at the least has set the foundations for future successes.

The final outturn cost of the project, including the building construction and the original external landscaping as well as VAT and fees, was £43.4m. The BREEAM target was ‘Excellent’ and the final tracker achieved ‘Excellent’. An interim certificate was submitted and accepted. The building has an A rating on its Energy Performance Certificate.

Many lessons learned from examining the project and its outcomes have already been taken on board by the Estates and Capital Services Directorate.



3.0 The process

Thought has already been given to the process of design and delivery of buildings at UCLan and changes are underway. Some specific points arising in this instance are mentioned in the rest of this section and in Section 4.

3.1 Decision on need and location

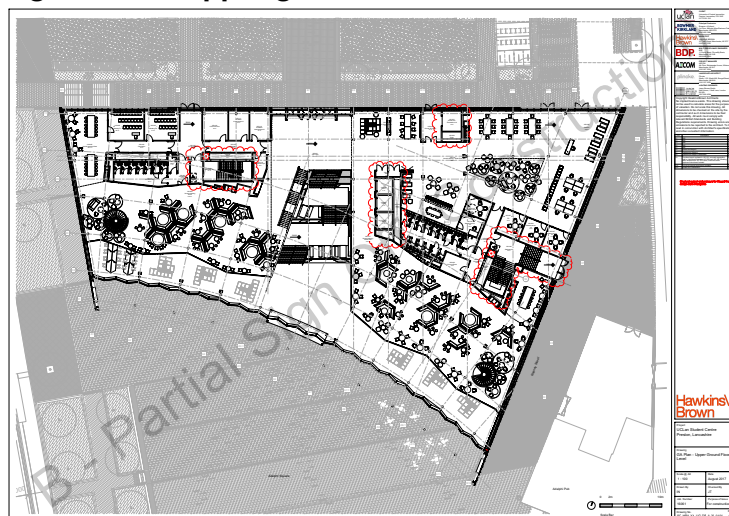
The concept for this building was key to the 2015 masterplan. Better links between UCLan buildings and a clearer campus layout was desired. As the front page of the masterplan document shows this was seen as a major opportunity, and this image was repeated in the briefing document to architects competing for the project.

Fig 6. The 2015 masterplan image



Source: uclan_masterplan_report_web.pdf

Fig 7 Plan of upper ground floor



Source: RIBA Stage 5 GA's compiled. Hawkins Brown



3.2 Assembling the right team and procurement process

The project team included the organisations listed below.

Fig 8 The main team members

Client, UCLan	Masterplan Capital Projects Team
Client, UCLan	Executive Director of Estates and Campus Services
Project/ Cost Management	AECOM
MEP, C&S,	BDP
Planning and wider technical support	BDP
Architects and Interior Designers	Hawkins Brown
Main Contractor	Bowmer & Kirkland
Highways Team	Balfour Beatty

The highways aspect of the project was of great importance and involved rerouting and managing traffic movements that have been successfully integrated on the site. Despite very extensive consultation some associated pedestrian movement routes may be less intuitive for new users: the main pedestrian crossing does not land at the foot of the main stair to the square, and the ramped route might have better been focused on the entrance to the building rather than running parallel to the road. The city highways department placed constraints on some options. These are minor issues that will not present a problem to those familiar with SCUS.

It was beneficial to the implementation of the design that Hawkins Brown were novated to the project, enabling it to maintain the original design intentions.

3.3 Significant defects

Several outstanding defects have been identified which the university is anxious to close out. These are being reviewed by external experts and will be concluded as soon as possible.

All buildings have some minor problems at handover time. Maybe some could have been avoided with closer monitoring of the construction process as it progressed, although many issues were indeed picked up and rectified during construction. The need for excellent, collaborative, shared and monitored project governance is indicated in the lessons below.

3.4 Lessons from the process

The architectural team and the UCLan project manager have both suggested some lessons. Generally speaking these relate to the governance of the project. Changes in how Estates and Campus Services now manage such projects are in the process of being implemented in the project for the Vet School building.

Lessons from the architect are summarised here

- A project champion for the university is important. After one was appointed to this project it proceeded more straightforwardly;



- A client monitoring team ensuring aspirations of the brief are met was helpful during construction;
- Modern Methods of Construction were used successfully;
- Main contactors' approach needed careful management to ensure that competent sub-contractors are used and design management is consistent;
- Input from artists was beneficial to the overall outcome.

The UCLan project manager in discussion emphasised project governance even more than the architect. Many of the issues raised by both are already being incorporated into UCLan's current project management.

Specific additional points that emerged during this review are noted here.

- Facilities management expertise is beneficial at all major design stage sign off points to ensure smooth hand over. For example the room designated for waste was not provided with suitable ventilation. It was initially not considered necessary. This might have been given more weight by an FM at the appropriate design stage;
- '*Soft Landings*' as a general approach can be used to help ensure that, when work is signed off as completed, it is reviewed in the light of subsequent use and management of the building fabric;
- In this building no cleaning team was in place when the doors opened. For a 24/7 student building this omission had an especially significant impact on management;
- There was no accessible baby changing facility.



4.0. Quick Wins

This review was conducted more than 3 years after full occupation of the building, based on discussions with users and potential users of the building and people involved in the building operation. COVID19 caused initial delays in ensuing full use of the facility, While it is now very actively used, the slow start may still be affecting a programme for more extensive use of the University Square.

Generally the building is performing well and is liked by those using it. There are, however, a number of ways in which the effectiveness of the building from could be improved from the point of view of the university as a whole. These are described below as 'quick wins'.

4.1 Process

The three points listed briefly below have already been mentioned above, and are currently being given due attention for other projects:

- Future users, representatives of the client, staff, and students should visit other sites before finalising brief;
- Project governance;
- Ensure basic facilities are in place before opening e.g. cleaning, waste;

Other aspects of the process that may have been beneficial if carried out before occupation are gathering utilisation data and events planning, described below.

- Gathering utilisation data

Although data on the use of many of the spaces have been collected in different ways, it would be valuable when making space allocation decisions to collect information on the actual use of spaces, whether bookable or not. Some of the data available show that there are times of day when some areas of the building are less used. This might suggest, for example, that some allocated spaces could be made available for other users, especially at low occupancy times. Solid data are beneficial to support the introduction of room changes since even rapidly created habits may be hard to change unless supported by evidence.

- Events planning for the square to improve links with Preston

The square is an important part of the project that ideally needs to be used more intensively. Occasional use for graduation or a few special events does not create serious links to the city, yet Preston prides itself on being a 'city of squares'. More use should be made to give UCLan greater prominence and let Preston and its residents benefit more from this generous and well serviced square. Much thought was given to the handling of traffic and pedestrian movement around the square. Some additional signage could be considered to guide newcomers on accessing the space and the building, and to indicate the existence of an attractive route right through the building that is available to any member of the public.



4.2 Building management

Several aspects of building management could be improved.

- Catering

It is essential that a building specifically intended for students to access services and as a place for casual connection and relaxed work has an excellent, student friendly catering offer. A location for this is correctly established at the main entrance level. However the design of the 'grab and go' area, the scale of the operation, the food range on offer, the service, and the furniture, while well accepted by some users, could all be improved.

- Room allocation

A large number of rooms have been provided for confidential services intended for students to receive different types of support. Many appear, from signs on doors, to have been specifically allocated to particular service types and are thus not available for others to book. Without actual utilisation information it is unclear whether this is the best way to use the rooms. However, since small rapid meetings are usually in high demand in a university, there may be better ways to plan and encourage use of more of these rooms, more of the time.

- Roof terrace use

A very attractive feature of the building design is the roof terrace. Some of those commenting on the building suggested that not enough use is yet made of this space. It is to be hoped that more use could be made of it in future by understanding and then reducing or eliminating any perceived barriers.

- Non Student facing staff office

Consideration should be given to relocating the team occupying a first floor office that is not student facing and releasing space for student use.

4.3 Design

Some design issues may not be easy to remedy and are merely commented on here in case some changes are possible in the longer term.

- Improve mobile phone reception

In part due to the aluminium cladding and entirely inappropriately for a student centre, many people report great difficulty in getting good mobile phone reception. Many WAPs were installed but better connectivity is essential.

- Renaming the floors

It is disconcerting for most users, and especially for visitors, to enter the main entrance from the square - that is in fact elevated above the surrounding area - and find they are at 'lower ground level'. We suggest that the word 'lower' should be dropped, leaving the upper ground level as named. This is not an essential change but might in fact aid better linkage between the building and the square.

- Bin Store

The bin store is not fit for purpose; bins are located outside in an unmanaged way.



- **Narrow revolving doors**

The front revolving doors are narrow and awkward to use. As a result the adjacent door is often used allowing cold air in. Consideration should be given to installing larger revolving doors.

- **Glare**

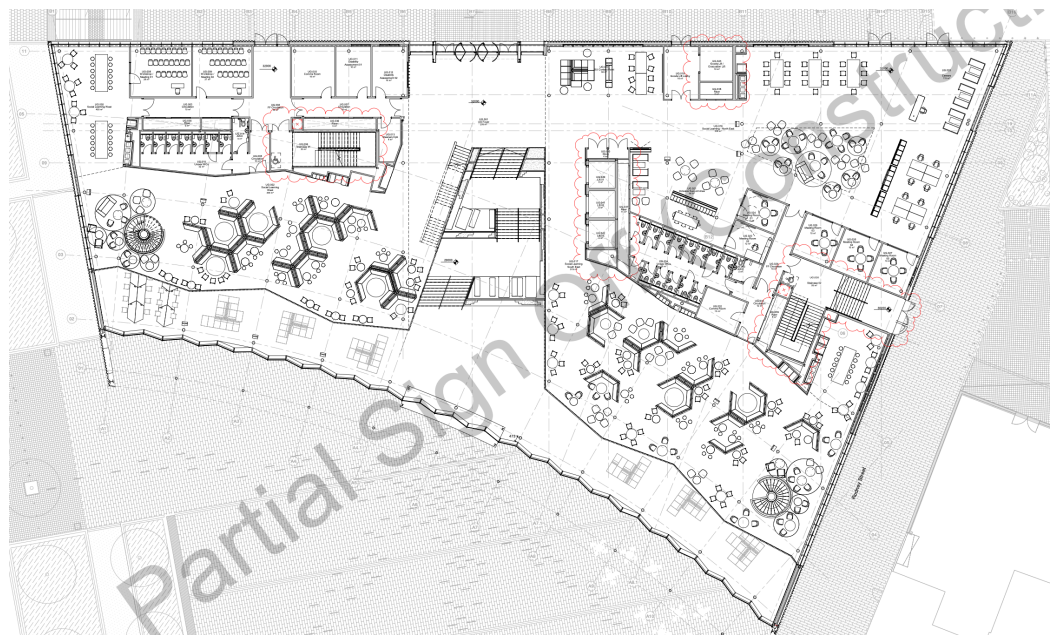
Although work was done at the design stage to mitigate glare, this is still a problem when near the expansive glass façade. A proposed solution has been suggested for adding blinds which could perhaps mitigate the problem. We support research on the most cost effective and suitable form of glare management on the different facades, before a solution is chosen.

- **Flexible furniture**

While the furniture provided has apparently been specially designed to be robust yet reconfigurable, it appears that rearrangements to accommodate more people or different groupings do not seem to be undertaken. Additions of some lighter weight, mobile and flexible furniture items may be needed. The areas used mainly for student casual work are popular and may need to be expanded, depending on future decisions for provision in the Library. Utilisation data will again help to understand and if necessary alter the area devoted to furniture suited to different activities.

The plan below shows the style of furniture although the drawing is no longer up to date.

Fig 9 Plan showing casual seating



Source RIBA stage 5 GAs.



5.0 Next steps

While there were some shortcomings in the design and delivery process of the Student Centre and University Square, these have largely already been addressed by the Estates and Campus Services team. The building admirably fulfils its intended role of bringing all student services together in one place. Some but not all of the Quick Wins (Section 4) should be addressed now or soon. Some additional next steps are also suggested here.

5.1 Focus projects on their long life in use

Increased participation by members of the Facilities Management team during the design stage, and discussion of *Soft Landings* with the project board and delivery team are ways to demonstrate to stakeholders the importance of seeing the handover of a building as the **start** of its real life not as the **end** of the design and build process.

5.2 Seek future adaptability in all projects

Visits to other similar projects with future users before finalising a brief can help identify ways to underline the importance of future adaptability. Urban contexts, the staff and student body, disciplines, pedagogy, IT, infrastructure, and finances change within universities over time. Regular reviews can continue to identify potential 'quick wins' and ways to adapt to evolving requirements.

5.3 Make utilisation surveys the basis for change

Such an approach is best based on utilisation surveys of all buildings and internal spaces, whether or not they are bookable, as well as on user feedback.

5.4 Base decisions for the Library on understanding SCUS use

This building for students offers some areas for collaborative study. This is key to the way in which libraries now function in universities. The brief for the UCLan Library should understand use patterns in SCUS and a decision is needed on whether that should change once there is a new Library layout and management. Consideration should be given to the specific design of the furniture which is a large part of the environment for the many different ways in which people learn and use information. The seating in SCUS may not be rearranged often though designed to be flexible. Students should be asked what they do and don't like and what they feel is missing in either building.

5.5. Upgrade Catering and improve IT

Food and connectivity are key for student life. There is a new catering strategy for UCLan and as it is developed the catering offer here can be coordinated with other provision in this part of campus. The type and amount of furniture and the style of any counter and 'grab and go' areas are part of the catering as well as the range of food, the cost and the times of availability.

Every effort is also needed to improve technology though this may be inhibited by the nature of the structure.

5.6. Make more use of the roof terrace and square

Plans should be developed to overcome any barriers there may be to increased use of the roof terrace, as well as to exploit the square to the full.



Appendix People consulted

The authors of this report are most grateful to those listed below who have generously contributed their time, knowledge and ideas.

Vanessa	Chew	Director of Student Services
Ruth	Connor	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Operations)
Thomas	Hamilton	Building Surveyor STC defects
Roger	Hawkins	Hawkins Brown Architects
Kathryn	Jones	Events
Trevor	Morgan	Building Manager FM
Charles	Quick	Professor Public Art Practice
Mike	Sheppard	Executive Director of Estates and Campus services
James	Thompson	Hawkins Brown Architects
Bob	Turner	Project Manager for SCUS
Brian	Whitehead	Engineering Surveyor STC defects
Stuart	Wilkinson	Student Services - Accommodation
Jason	Young	Building Manager FM