A Toolkit for Living in a New Building:
a visual post-occupancy evaluation of Bristol Business School

Research in partnership with:
Stride Treglown, ISG, UWE Bristol

UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

Bristol Business School

isg

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Glossary

BDAS   **Bristol Distinguished Address Series**

CPD   **Continued Professional Development**

FBL   **Faculty of Business and Law**

GVPA   **Grounding Visual Pattern Analysis**

HEFCE   **Higher Education Funding Council for England**

MBA   **Master of Business Administration**

POE   **Post-occupancy evaluation**

UWE   **University of the West of England**

Executive Summary

The Bristol Business School building – that houses both Bristol Business School and Bristol Law School – is situated on the University of the West of England (UWE) Bristol Frenchay campus, and has been occupied since April 2017. It is a flagship space that aims to attract international, EU and home students, facilitate links with businesses and foster a collaborative space for staff to work together. The strategic aim of the building was that it should be 'generative' (Clegg and Kornberger 2004) and was designed to link with the faculty strategic vision and mission: a building to support a community that is professionally engaged, vocationally relevant, internationally connected and academically strong. Translated into architecture, this means considerable open, shared space not formally designated for particular activities. Walls and partitions are largely glass, with space arranged around a full height atrium, and central staircase affording expansive views through the building and the activities going on within it. Staff, students and visitors can access, and work from, the majority of the building, which is technologically enabled to support location-independent working and learning.

Methodology

This report delivers findings and recommendations from an in-depth, user-centred, qualitative and sensory post-occupancy evaluation (POE) of this flagship building, carried out between 2018 – 2019. Its aim was to investigate how the ethos of the building has impacted on user experiences of working, studying and visiting it. How does a transparent, collaborative, flexible and open building affect working and studying practices? What influence does it have on users' perceptions of the university and is the building operating as predicted? (for example, has it been differently understood and/or experienced by users?). Traditional POE instruments do not gather this kind of information and so a secondary aim of the research was to experiment with visual and qualitative methodologies as effective vehicles for POE: What can we learn from this research that can help us develop and design buildings in the future? Only about 10% of our findings replicate areas covered by traditional POE, suggesting there is great utility in employing more qualitative approaches in line with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) POE Guide – Investigative Level Review (see Capita 2017 p.3): *A more thorough investigation using rigorous research techniques to produce more robust data. In this type of review representative samples of staff are given questionnaires backed up by focus group reviews and interviews to tease out more information.*

Using innovative visual methods including Instagram, participant-led and participant-directed photography, alongside image-led discussion groups, data was collected over a full year cycle with over 250 participants contributing to the study; 30% staff, 60% students and 10% visitors. Building users were asked to submit photographs and captions of their spatial experiences in the building that addressed two simple questions:

How do you feel about the building?

How are you using the building?

The majority of users submitted their photographs and captions to the project team individually, either by uploading to Instagram using a dedicated hashtag **#myuwebbsview** or by sending them to a dedicated project email address. Over 740 photographs were received in total. Email submission was generally preferred over Instagram which is surprising given today's culture of visual social media. In addition, the project team invited a selection of users to attend discussion groups where users' photographs acted as prompts for conversations about the same two questions stated above.

Findings

Analysis of these data was undertaken using a combination of Grounded Visual Pattern Analysis (GVPA, Shortt and Warren 2019) and text-based thematic analysis, which generated nine key findings. These often-presented paradoxical love/hate relationships with the space between and within individual users. We were surprised that despite being significant drivers in the design of new academic buildings, technology and sustainability did not feature prominently in the findings.

- **The 'Wow' of the Building:** This is produced when entering the building; first impressions are vital. Space that affords grand, panoramic views is particularly impressive and this communicates to users that the building is professional. An iconic artefact, visible from everywhere, is essential to produce the 'Wow' effect, but unexpected uses of the building also contribute to the 'Wow'.

- **Visibility and Transparency:** Open spaces and expansive views afforded by glass are welcomed, but there is a need to balance visibility against individuals' privacy when designing academic buildings of this kind. There are unintended effects of making academic work and education visible, and psychological and cultural implications arise from having bodies on display. Users displayed a strong preference for formalising ambiguous spaces and were uncomfortable with the uncertainty of some shared spaces.

- **Identification with the Organisation:** The materials used in the building lend it a futuristic air that imparts an impressive, positive view of the space and by extension, the organisation. This is especially so in the official, formal public spaces, but the small near-distance details convey the organisation's identity as much as the grand features. However, there is a tension between the impressive organisation and the potential alienation of a large empty space to dwell in. Finally, the more impressive the space, the more important it is to keep it clean and well maintained.

- **Ways and Means of Studying in the Building:** The blurring of boundaries between learning and 'the professional' are welcomed by students and in particular spaces where 'the professional' can be imagined or simulated. Shared spaces for postgraduate research and interaction could be problematic, and there is a preference for peer to peer interaction in informal spaces but not yet any evidence of staff-student collaboration envisaged by the building's aims. This is because public and semi-public spaces shared by academic staff and students need sensitive and ongoing management.

- **Working Life:** Attention to personal, domestic, mundane and human matters is vital for worker satisfaction and all the variations of academic work need to be accommodated, not just the visible and/or social dimensions. Solitary working and privacy are important considerations, for reasons of productivity and wellbeing. Ambiguous spaces need active management to avoid detrimental effects on staff's productivity, self-worth and professional identity.

- **Wayfinding and Sustainability:** Not knowing where to go is a frustrating source of anxiety for users. Alongside this, being sustainable when using the building is important however, this is mainly manifested in the building and users' relationship with the environment, and with recycling points. The building, nature and organic elements contribute to the organisational identity even when they are outside the building.

- **The Unexpected:** There is a quirkiness and apparent joy in seeing objects and watching activities that seem out of place and unexpected in a Business School building which positively impact users' experiences. These surprising things are often everyday objects and activities. There is a tension between the familiar and the strange, but this also provides users with moments of joy and pleasure.

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Health and wellbeing experiences are polarised – either good or bad. Outside experiences are very important to people's enjoyment of the building, but some design choices can cause physical discomfort and pain. Privacy has to be created in very open, public spaces which causes problems and non-public relaxing spaces and objects are important in people's sense of wellbeing.

- **Food and Drink:** Eating and drinking in the building is both a social and a solitary activity. There is a lack of green and healthy-looking food – food appears to be snack food, sugar rich and not representative of a nourishing meal. Space is appropriated by users and colonised in order to create more domestic looking settings in which to eat, drink and share food and this is a manifestation of resistance (conscious or not) to the rather utilitarian spaces in the building.

Recommendations from these findings, along with a Stakeholder Value Matrix are summarised at the end of this report on p. 63 as part of Section 4: A Toolkit for Living in a New Building. These include reflections on the utility of user-driven visual methods for future post-occupancy evaluations of new academic buildings.

Background to the Research

Both core funders of this POE research project, ISG plc (construction) and Stride Treglown (architects) identified a need to undertake a POE of the building in order to explore the *user experience* and *use* of the new space using a creative and innovative approach. Whilst more traditional POE approaches focus predominantly on the technical and functional performance of a building – e.g. how it responds to user needs – they rarely gather detailed, subjective, in-depth data based on the user *experience* of the building. This POE research project aims to fill this gap. This project provides a nuanced, personal, emotional and sensory exploration of this flagship building on the UWE Bristol Frenchay campus, using innovative visual methods: through the use of Instagram and participant-led/directed photography.

The broad aims of this collaborative research project were to learn more about user experiences of buildings and engage a wide variety of people who use the building in the POE process. For example, the ethos of the building is to be as transparent, collaborative, flexible, and open as possible, so how has this impacted working practices? Is this working as predicted? Has it been differently understood and/or experienced by users? What can we learn from this research that can help us develop and design buildings in the future?

Research aims:

A creative, engaging approach to POE for all users of the building, that offers something different to the traditional POE survey.

An in-depth exploration into how the building is being used and experienced by the users and inhabitants.

An in-depth exploration into how users' working practices have changed.

Understand how images/photographs can play an important role in evidencing how the building is being used/how people feel about the building.

In-depth learning and recommendations that will feed into further design/construction projects/industry best practice.

Research Design

Visual Methods: Participant-led Photography and Instagram

Photographs communicate our experiences in ways words can't. They can express emotion, sensations and show where we are situated when we capture the scene. They are 'trajectories' that provide an emotional, sensory way of virtually retracing steps (Pink 2013). 'Capturing' an image is not an objective process, but one full of unconscious beliefs about what is important and aspirations about how we want our experiences to be seen - this conditions how we stage the shot and frame the subject and puts the photographer in control of what they wish to represent (Warren 2005). For these reasons, a central methodology for this study was participant-led photography, enacted in two ways.

1. **User-generated images and captions** were gathered using Instagram as a convenient repository and sharing tool, and e-mail for those who preferred not to use Instagram. We chose Instagram because it is already embedded in the visual, socio-cultural practices of a large proportion of building users, e.g. students, however an interesting finding from the research was that users preferred to submit images to us via email rather than contaminate the curation of their Instagram feed (Shortt and Warren 2020). Whether delivered to the project analysis via Instagram or email, users were asked to submit a caption or short statement that gave their reasons for taking the picture. These captions were then used to theme the images, before undertaking a 'GVPA' of the content and aesthetic features of the images (Shortt and Warren 2019). This approach mines the attributed meanings given by the participants and the visual content of photographs themselves, including composition, lighting, effects, angle and point-of-view as well as cataloguing the scenes and objects depicted.

2. **Image-led discussion groups** were held with representatives of key user groups participating in each: students, academic staff and non-academic staff from FBL, and staff from other UWE departments. A further discussion group was held with the architects, to reflect on the emerging themes, after the data collection was completed. Members of the groups were requested to contribute photographs of the building in advance of the sessions and these images were discussed during the sessions, an established method in managing change (Buchanan 2001). This involved a more in-depth, dialogical sense making of users' photographic representations of building space than in the method described above, and also drew upon discussion group members' wider experiences of dwelling in the building. Analysis of the transcribed texts of the discussions was undertaken using thematic analysis to generate findings, in line with established protocols for qualitative research.

Sample: who contributed to the project?

User group (% of sample)	Role
30% Staff	Academics, Learning and Teaching technologists, Executive Team, Professional Services colleagues, Service staff including: Café staff, Cleaning Services, Security and Reception.
60% Students	Undergraduate, Postgraduate MBA, CPD and PhD.
10% Visitors	Open days, Alumni events, External Business Engagement networks – regional and national external organisations, conference attendees, BDAS attendees, faculty Advisory Board members.

Ensuring ethical conduct

A key concern in our project was to maintain the anonymity and privacy of participants and we worked closely with the university ethics committee to develop the final guidance. More information can be found on the disclaimer pages of our project website www.myuwebbsview.co.uk (see Figure 1).

Using social media, promotional postcards (see Figure 2), a project website (see Figure 1) and other modes of communication, we recruited participants by asking them to take pictures of their spatial experiences in the building that addressed two simple questions:
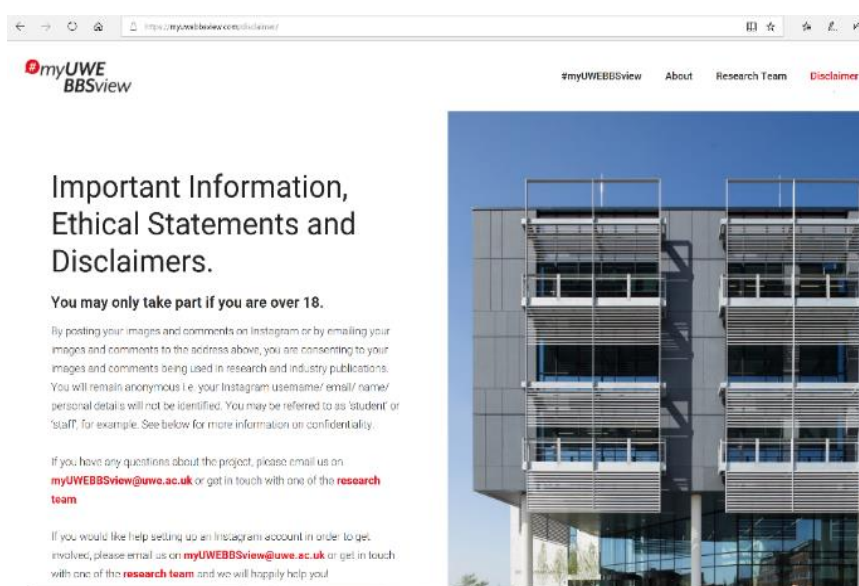
Figure 1: Ethical information on the project website.

Given that our participant group was potentially so large, we had to consider how best to communicate this participant information and our ethical guidelines and permissions.

How do you feel about the building?
How are you using the building?

We asked participants to add a short caption explaining their reasons for taking the photograph, then post their images to Instagram using a dedicated project hashtag: #myuwebbsview. Captions in participant-generated visual research ensure the image can be coded according to the meaning it has for the participant.

Figure 2: One of the promotional postcards used for the research project (with further information about the project detailed on the reverse).

Section 1 | Findings | Aesthetics and Design

Theme 1.   The 'Wow' of the Building

The 'Wow' factor was envisaged as the key design feature of the building from the very early stages of the planning process, to unequivocally present UWE as a world class institution with values and vision of being innovative, transparent and open, providing a professional business feel as well as a sense of community for its multiple users. Users recognised that this has been achieved. Indeed, all the originally conceived wow design features were commented on by users of the building: the glass cladding, the huge open space in the atrium, the magnificent staircase, the Bloomberg trading room and the Team Entrepreneurship Hub.

The immediate impact, as people enter the Bristol Business School building was described as 'Wow'. The impression was instant and expressed in the photo-captions using words like '*impressive*', '*inspiring*', and '*futuristic*'. But while the wow is instant, immediate and impresses, it also appears to be an engagement with the surfaces of things; users tend to survey the building as a work of art rather than a functional space. What people seemed to find impressive were often features of the building that are plain, presented in muted tones and simple.

The first impression of the building by the majority of participating users has been – **'it is beautiful'** (visitor)**; 'I can't believe this building – it's amazing!'**(student) These comments accompany images exclusively taken from inside the building - mainly, the atrium (looking up, looking down and looking across) and the staircase and spacious social learning areas – these being wide, panoramic shots.

Key insights raised by this theme include:

The 'Wow' effect:
- o is produced when entering the building, first impressions are vital;
- o is constructed in perspective using grand, panoramic views;
- o contributes to the impression that the building is professional.

An iconic artefact, visible from everywhere, is essential to produce the 'Wow' effect.

Unexpected uses of the building also contribute to the 'Wow' effect.

What does the 'Wow' look like?

The style of photographs that communicated the wow of the building were taken at a distance. There are almost no close-up shots and often the photographer was in the entrance to the building, just after crossing the doors into the atrium, and looking up from the ground floor or down from the higher ones. This gives an impression of grandeur, of being dwarfed by the space and the large and lofty air of the building is seductive – rather like a place of worship or reverence. In contemporary life, we often find tall airy atriums in consumption and leisure spaces, such as shopping malls and high-rise hotels or airports (Ritzer 2000, 2017) and now it seems these elements are seductive in learning and workspaces too.

The glass-rich façade, the spacious atrium and the iconic staircase are variously experienced as *'grand'* (visitor); *'the sky is our limit'* (PhD student); *'the building is spacious and full of light - just like FBL students - bright and open minded'*(student); *'this is a professional building'* (visitor; student).

MBA students from both Executive and International cohorts who started in the old Business School premises and moved to the new building to finish their studies, expressed their views with the same word: *'professional', 'a space to professionally behave, like a bank or an insurance company'*. Sometimes, though, these wow features were experienced as a façade hiding some unfriendly spaces behind for example, as some participants described - *'boring, impersonal corridors', 'lifeless back-staircases and lifts'.*

The following montage shows people's photographs of the entrance and atrium, but also of corners, empty spaces and views outside the building. The photographs are often characterised by angular, abstract shapes.

Views to the outside are particularly prized simply for their own sake. This is just what we would expect from an aesthetic engagement with the space, and it is valuable, as we will see below (Warren 2013). The wow of the building led to assumptions and judgements being made about the identity of UWE itself and the extent to which building users identified with it.

Iconic artefacts

During discussion groups, there was an agreement that the stairway from the ground floor to the 6th floor is the iconic artefact of the building. Icon is an interesting word to use here, because it has several connotations. Firstly, icons are instantly recognisable – they are famous and often take on celebrity status. They are also considered to stand as representations, are traditionally associated with religion and treasured by the devout. Finally, icons stand for something else – they are surrogates of meaning and values, carrying something much bigger and harder to put into words (Betts 2015). The staircase as an iconic feature, is much more than simply an aesthetically pleasing route to higher floors.

In contrast, other spaces, like the open terrace depicted below, were suggested as missed opportunities for the wow factor:

'I think it's a shame that we haven't used it, because it's got a good view. It's overseeing some of the prettier areas of the campus, and it's just not utilised efficiently'
(non-academic staff)

For the majority of participants, the terrace seems to be either an unexpected, or surprise feature of the building, or it is invisible. For those who have discovered it and are using it, it is a wow feature allowing a *'long range view on a sunny day'* *(academic staff)* which also helps *'me actually forget I am at the university.'**(student)*

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The staircase

All users who participated in the study agreed the staircase is the iconic feature of the building. The staircase is a stand-out feature of the building and along with the materials it is made from and the lighting along the steps from the atrium all the way to the 6th floor it represents the ambition and the energy of the faculty. Indeed, many students in the study commented that the stairs made them feel *'the sky is the limit'; 'your vision is not limited when you stand on those stairs'; 'quite cool'; 'inspiring us to go up'*.

Theme 2. Visibility and Transparency

The openness, light and visibility in the design of the building corresponds to the statements of Bristol Business School ethos, vision and values. It created multiple, often paradoxical lived experiences for users.

Bristol Business School was commissioned as a generative building (Clegg and Kornberger 2004), with the explicit aim of facilitating collaboration and sharing of everyday action and ideas, and the architects interpreted this by designing a building for visibility, with lots of open, ambiguous space. Indeed, the university's leadership team drew up their business case for the new building specifically with visibility in mind – core to their vision was the ability for users to be connected, foster collaboration, and work in communal spaces (Harrington 2013). The key rationale was to celebrate everything that the faculty does by making it visually accessible and on display to everyone, whilst blurring boundaries between staff (academic work) and students (learning). This was enacted primarily through permitting everyone – including visitors – to access almost anywhere in the building. A lot of the building is made of glass, with open seating areas and kitchens, shared offices and much less of the private/individual space more normally seen in other workplaces and/or university buildings.

Key insights raised by this theme include:

The need to balance visibility against individual privacy.

There are unintended effects of making academic work and education visible.

Psychological and cultural implications arise from having bodies on display.

There is an apparent need for formalising ambiguous spaces.

Picturing visibility

Visibility was a strong but complex theme in the photographs, the captions that accompanied them and conversations in the discussion groups with staff and students. We were presented with lots of images of glass, reflections, walkways, informal meetings in open spaces, communal areas and long-shot views inside the building. These photographs were not staged or artistically composed but were instead, 'snapshot' style as if the user had just casually captured a scene in front of their eyes. There are no close-ups taken to represent this theme, with all the images being internal views into the distance almost as if they were in the style of a landscape painter. The photographer is high up, and away. People do not feature strongly in the image-set for visibility – they take a back seat to the space, so it's possible to question what it is that is actually visible in this building built for visibility. The overall effect of the images when viewed together is ironically rather dehumanised, despite the grandeur and beauty of the building's design which also came through strongly as discussed above (the 'Wow' of the Building).
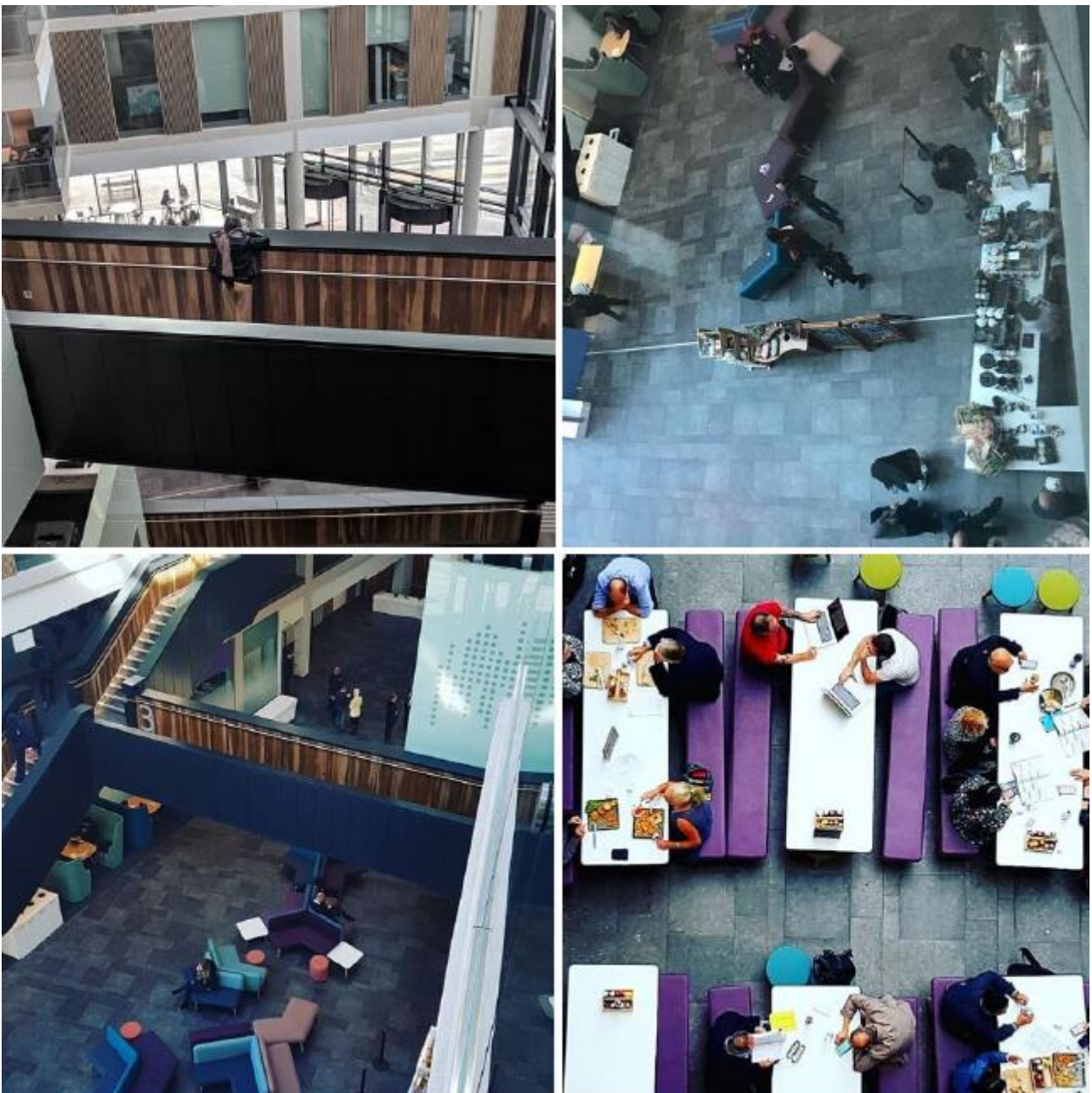
The pleasures and pains of looking: dolls houses and shame

On the one hand there was pleasure in the voyeurism that the building allows. Playful terms such as 'a dolls house', 'curiosity', 'excitement', and 'entertainment' were used to describe looking down from the walkways onto the atrium and into rooms on the floors below, watching people unawares.

This describes how those who are able to gaze upon others with or without their knowledge gain a sense of power, even if that power is only a sense of reassurance that they have mastery over the landscape and who/what might be approaching (Lacan 1998). This is why wealthy Victorian landowners built tall follies to survey far into the distance and why fortresses were usually built on the top of hills (Warren 2013). Sometimes voyeurism was also recounted to us as productively useful, for example being able to look down to the café queue to judge how much time might be wasted waiting for lunch or seeing at a glance if a staff member was in their office. But other observers reported feeling uncomfortable and often ashamed of being able to see the bodies and particularly certain parts of others' body publicly exposed as they sit at their, desks or in class. *'Should I be looking or not?', 'Am I actually being invited to look?!'.'*
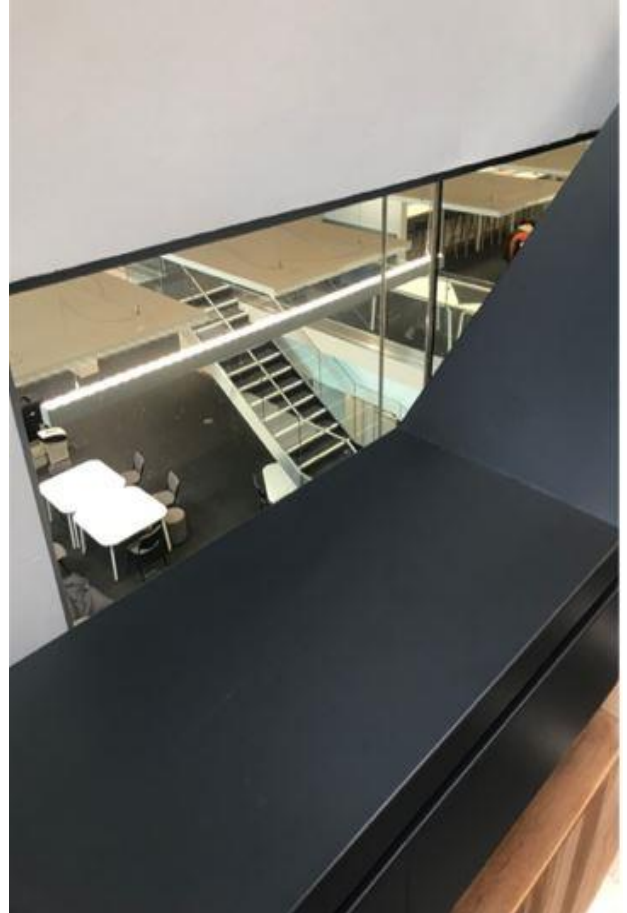
'Everyone can see me if I'm doing a presentation in a lecture, makes it so uncomfortable'(student)

'[This] awkward seating area waiting for student support, makes you feel exposed'(student)

'It is hard to overstate how those big glass walls have been detrimental to our capacity to work. You can't do deep thinking if you fear being interrupted and in those glass enclosures, you don't just fear being interrupted, you know you will be' (academic staff)

'I would not like to work in an office where my body is almost fully on display. As a visitor, I've almost had to shy away from looking directly into these offices as I feel I was intruding.' (visitor)

On being seen: of goldfish bowls and window shopping

However, we also heard reports that being in the building for work or study was detrimental to effectiveness and wellbeing and these users felt powerless. Interestingly, these were sometimes the same people who also enjoyed looking at others. The 'observed' students and lecturers reported major concerns to us during the discussion groups without exception (Kim and de Dear 2013) using analogies such as being in a fish-tank or goldfish-bowl or feeling they were being window-shopped. Importantly for a workplace, there were also concerns that what might be glimpsed by an onlooker could be interpreted out of context.

Reclaiming privacy

Looking at this more closely in the content of the photographs we can see both subtle and strong manifestations of how people are organically managing their lack of privacy and the ambiguity of their spaces. There are no open doors in the image-set generated for this theme suggesting, for example, that where barriers can be put up, they are used. Likewise, the photograph, in the spotlight section below, of a makeshift blind taped to a classroom window shows the need to hide oneself and one's activities from view.

We also saw photos of instructional signs on how to use the space which shows how rules and reminders seem to be necessary to reassure building users of their roles within ambiguous spaces, as we discuss further below. What emerges from this study is not the melting pot of a myriad of activities productively co-existing against and within one another, but that, by and large, people prefer order.

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The use of glass

The use of glass for offices and teaching spaces are experienced differently by users. There we see the juxtaposition between the positive feelings of watching and seeing others (looking into the room below) and the negative feelings of being watched or seen by others (the makeshift blind taped to a classroom window).

Theme 3.   Identification with the Organisation

Bristol Business School was built to impress and, like all architectural design, it is hoped that the impressive features of the building will positively reflect on people's perceptions of the organisation that inhabits it (Dale and Burrell 2008). This was certainly the case in this POE research, although it was not straightforward as the insights below summarise.

Key insights raised by this theme include:

The materials used in the building lend it a futuristic air that imparts an impressive, positive view of the space and by extension, the organisation.

The official, formal public spaces evoke positive identification.

The small, near-distance details impart the organisation's identity as much as the grand features.

There is a tension between the 'impressive' organisation and the potential alienation of a large empty space to dwell in.

The more impressive the space, the more important it is to keep it clean and well maintained.

Building identification

Elements of the building inspired feelings for users that they attributed to their association with the university and faculty. These ranged from pride in being part of an inspiring institution, embodied in such a cool, impressive building; through to embarrassment and shame of poorly maintained areas reflecting badly on individuals' sense of professionalism. These two sentiments are summed up in the following two images.

Despite seeming to be opposite, they both show the importance of the physical environment in generating a sense of identification between organisational members and their institution. The embarrassment at soiled girders and windows comes from the same place as the sense of inspiration generated by the skyward view in the atrium – people have chosen to dedicate their time to their organisation and they want to be in spaces that reflect positive elements of it.

A designer's-eye view

Many of the photographs taken to communicate users' perceptions of the organisation are stylised 'arty' shots taken on an angle, or in some way represent the building as a work of art, rather than the more everyday snapshots we have seen elsewhere. They are generally photographs of the formal public spaces that were designed by the architects to impress. It is clear from these images, and the discussion groups, that they have just this effect (see also the 'Wow' of the Building theme), albeit in a way that doesn't readily identify the organisation's purpose as 'a university'. This is captured in the following quote:

> *'the ubiquity of the design - could be anything, anywhere: a hospital, a university, an airport, an insurance building, a hotel …'* (academic staff)

Given the pervasive visual culture of the time, we were expecting to see these rehearsed shots that reproduce cultural aesthetics around how we view and represent spaces. However, the choice and juxtaposition of materials at a smaller scale was also presented to us as something conveying a favourable impression of the faculty and the university – wood, metal, lighting, giving off a sense of chic and cool. The main focus for this was the atrium and the main staircase, however small details were also singled out. See the spotlight section below for an example.

Alone in a collaborative space?

Users reported their experiences paradoxically – both visually and in words. Such a big, impressive, open space was beautiful but also alienating and at times overwhelming.

Bristol Business School is seen as somewhere one is inspired to reach one's potential, or beyond. Enabling looking up and out 'into the future', the building communicates the power of learning and education materially for many of the users who took part in this project. Yet despite this, the experience for those who study and work there can potentially also be one of loneliness and a sense of feeling dwarfed by its proportions.
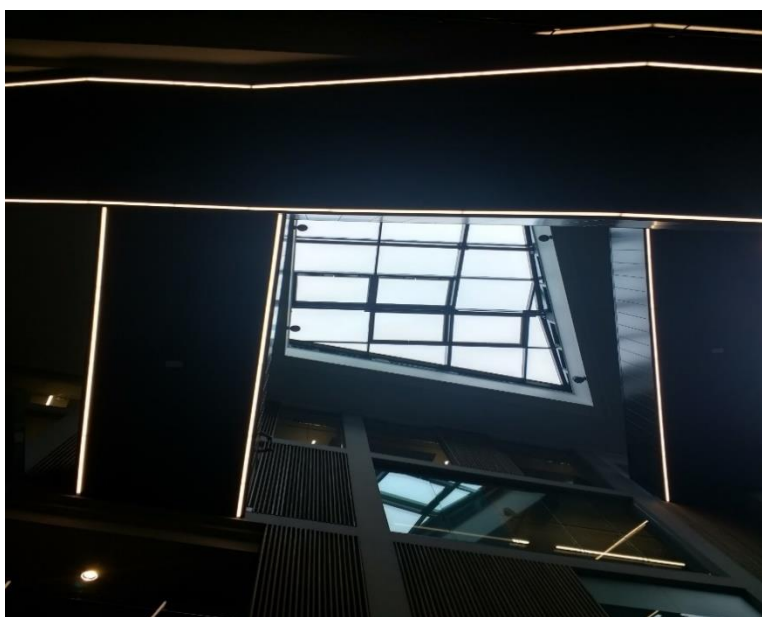
Nature and the organic

The few living things that were photographed and associated with the identity of the organisation, were animals and plants. The mess left by pigeons on the girders and windows communicated users' embarrassment. Ironically, this was regarded as extra noticeable because of the impressiveness of the building. Positive associations were also recounted in the discussion groups through comments on images of green areas outside the building, geese, and flowers that represented a fusing of the natural world with the task of learning. The fact that all these organic traces were non-human and *outside* the building is interesting and potentially significant, given we know the positive impact of greenery and nature on levels of workplace stress, for example (Lottrup et al. 2013).
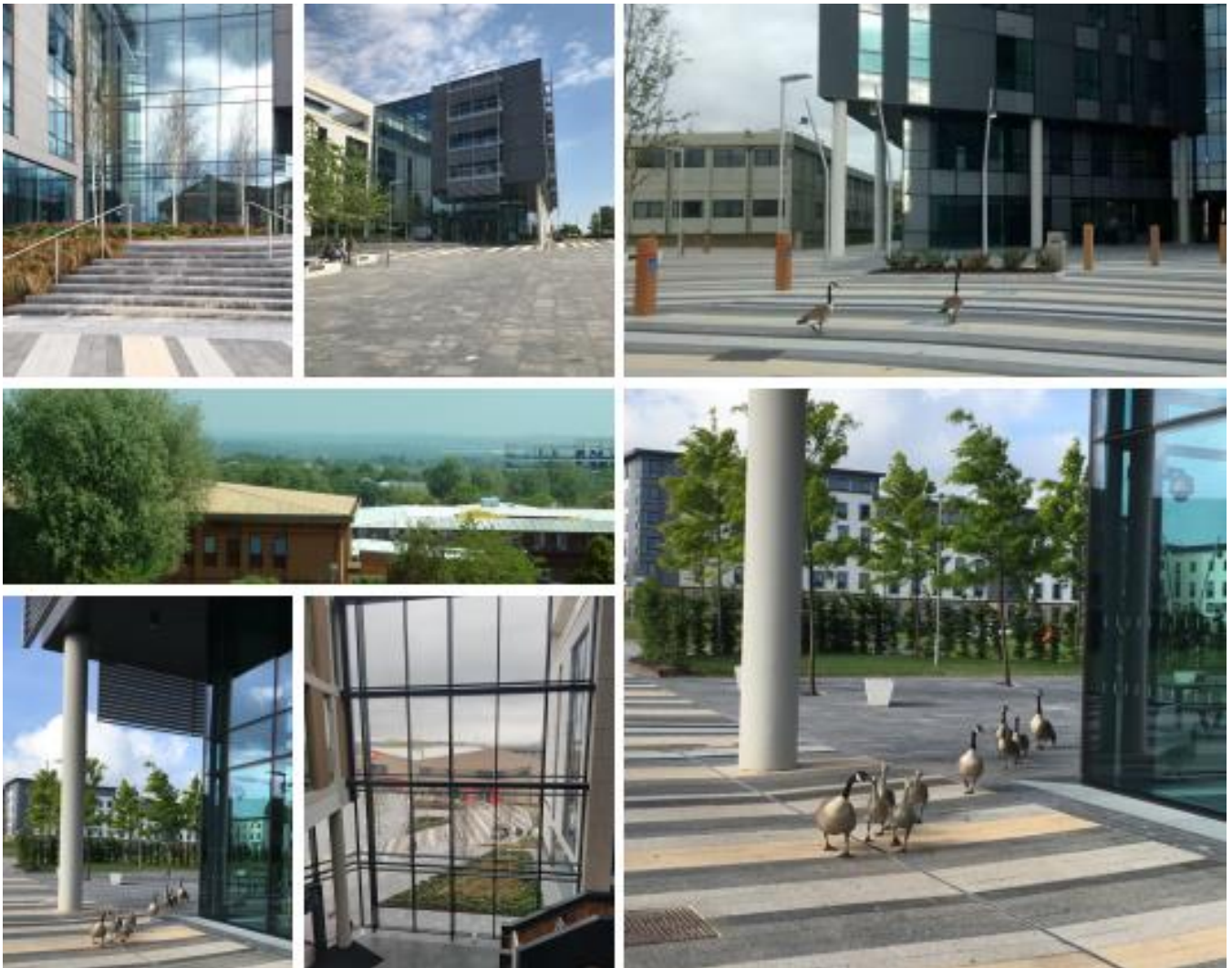
A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The stairs

The small details of a building matter. These up close and personal shots remind us that as people move through the building, it is often the small, near-distance details that impact them as much as the grand sweeping views.

Section 2 | Findings | Practices

Theme 1.   Ways and Means of Studying in the Building

Studying and performing in a professional business-like environment have been understood from the beginning of the project as essential preconceived (academic) practices that the building should be able to accommodate, e.g. teaching, meetings, talking. Simultaneously with openness and flexibility, the building was understood as a space to be as optimal as possible to accommodate users' everyday practices and especially those of students.

Key insights resulting from this theme include:

Blurring of boundaries between learning and the professional are welcomed by students.

Spaces where the professional can be imagined or simulated are enjoyable.

Shared spaces for postgraduate research and interaction could be problematic.

There is a preference for interaction in informal spaces.

Public and semi-public spaces shared by academic staff and students need sensitive and ongoing management.

The happy corners: spaces of informal studying

Photos capturing corner pods and booths, kitchenettes and social learning spaces in the building were detail-focused images rather than the 'long-shots' more usually seen in the visual data in this project. This closeness dovetails with the accompanying commentaries that expressed feelings, emotions and describing studying practices in a more embedded, atmospheric, symbolic and engaged way.
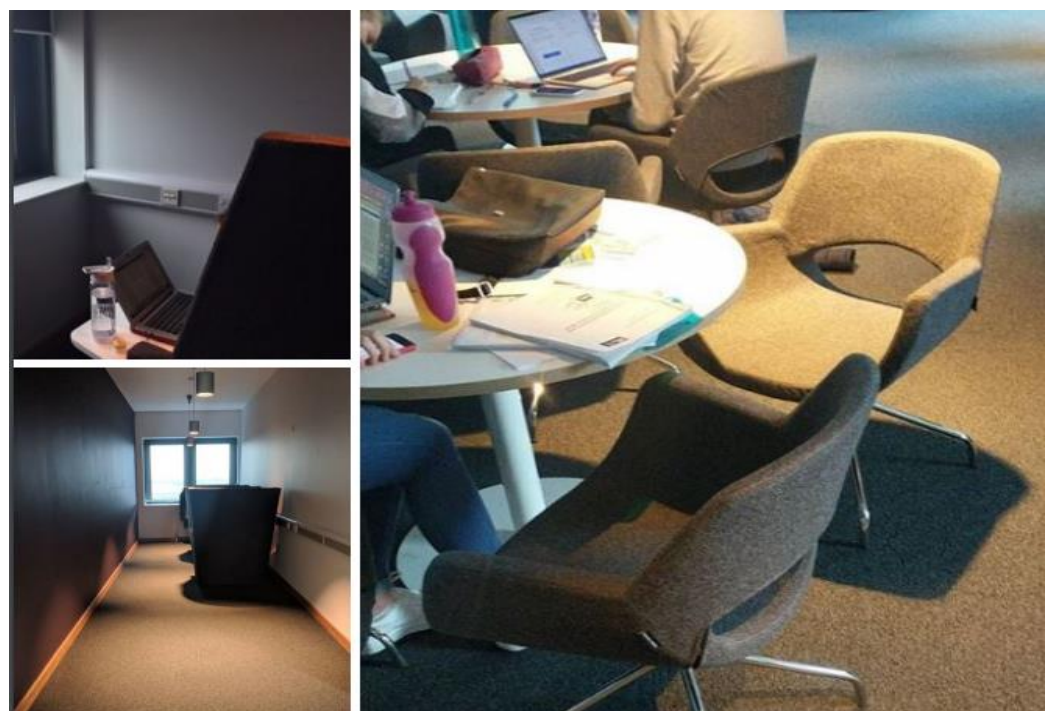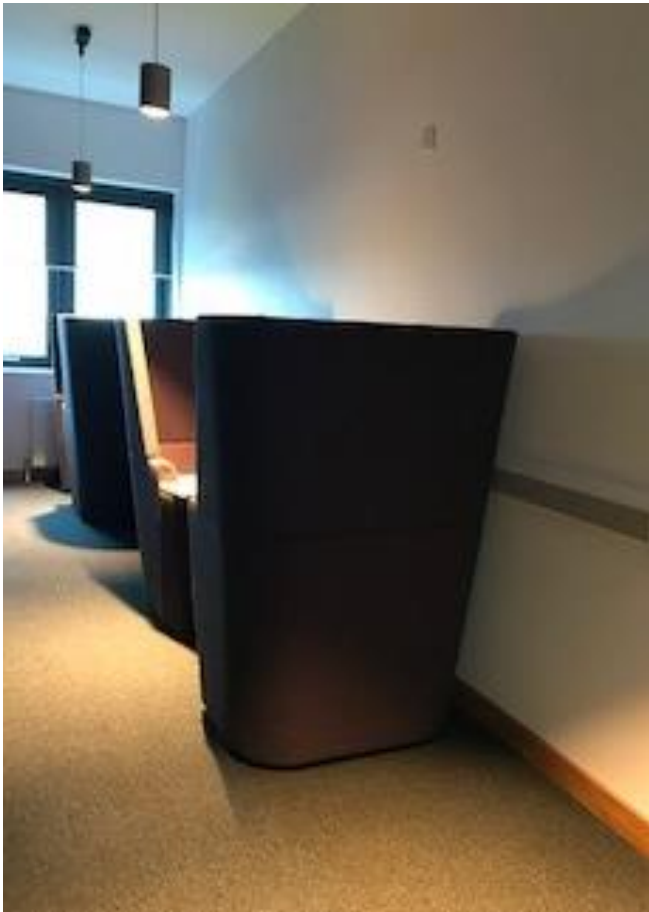
Interestingly they were explained to us by students as *'homely', 'cosy'* and *'safe'*; but within a controlled environment: *'**we are like young farm chicks under the lamp'*** which we took to mean to grow and learn, but protected by the institutional framework. The mix of work/homely non-work space, as well as their open yet private nature was underlined with both visual and text-based testimonies:

'…safe and private but still connected'
(student)

'Yes…this building is very transparent, but there are lots of nooks and crannies. That, for me, is the little nook and cranny where anyone can go to escape the transparency of this building, almost' (non-academic staff)

'This little spot, my private corner…makes me feel separated enough but not isolated'
(student – with reference to a high-backed pod chair tucked away down a side corridor)

However, enjoying their own enclosed 'fortress', meant student space available in the pods/booths was not always efficiently utilised, particularly at busy times of term. Fortresses are built to keep others out, so it is common in the building to find single occupancy of a 4-6-seater pod. Users did not feel comfortable approaching a lone occupant of a booth to ask if they could share it with them. Despite the promise of these social learning spaces, this means there are limits to how far the design features of the building can encourage a sense of community and enhance communication because cultural and social norms about how and where bodies come into contact with one another will always take precedence.
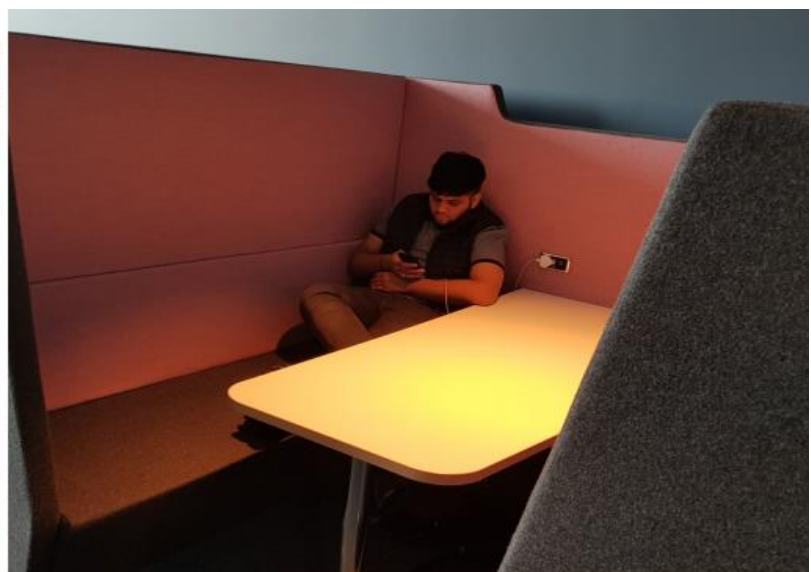
Other spaces where students enjoy creating their temporary territories are in and around the kitchenette spaces which are in close proximity to staff offices. They experience these spaces as both formal and informal/public and private (Shortt 2015), enjoying both the relaxed and professional feeling of studying here (Hancock and Spicer 2011). For example, the student pictured in the photograph below said:

'I feel like I am in my mum's kitchen only more serious. All the professionals around me makes me do more work. The chair is uncomfortable but I'm willing to put up with it because of what I can get out of being here'
(Student)

Like the pods with not enough suitable space for larger group-work, the kitchenette seats with benches proved highly popular and in scarce supply (note the effect of this on staff experiences under the theme 'Working Life' below). The only viable alternative for larger group working is the use of tables in the café, but students then reported feeling tempted or obliged to purchase food and drinks while there, and that they had to put up with noise, which they saw as a compromise.

Spaces of simulation: The Law Courts

Students and staff took pictures of, and referred extensively to, the Law Courts in positive terms. Visual and text-based emphasis were used to express the capacity of the Law Courts to effectively simulate professional life and the 'real world'. This was also expressed by Team Entrepreneurship students about their dedicated space demonstrating how buildings can construct aspirational identities and evoke a particular 'ethic' (Hancock and Spicer 2011).

The Law Courts were seen as one of the most impressive spaces in the building. This was especially so during open days. As such it connects with our earlier discussion of pride and embarrassment in identifying with the university as an organisation. For those who referred to these spaces, the Law Court rooms give a clear impression of *'what we do here, what FBL is all about' (academic staff).* As such, spaces of simulation, such as the Law Courts dilute the boundaries between studying and working, studying and practicing a profession, and are important and welcome in preparing students for their future careers; 'spaces remind us of social settings…which set expectations: how to act…' (Bligh 2019, p.11).

Shared spaces for postgraduate research and interaction

Originally envisaged as having a clear, fully see-through glass wall and as such exposed to outsiders' 'gaze' and uninvited curiosity, offices for doctoral and postgraduate researchers were now perceived as one of the more successful features of the open and transparent building. This is largely because the original glass-wall design was changed to partially frosted in response to the students' feedback following their visit to the building while it was under construction.

"I think, for me – and I get the impression my colleagues feel the same – it's quite nice for us to have somewhere where we work together. You can see the edge of the table there, where we can actually have discussions and break out a bit from our desks. I think it's a great space for PhD students. I think, in some ways, it's just nice that we were thought of in terms of the planning, because I think in the old building it felt like we were more of an afterthought." (PhD student)

However, as conditions for successfully completing PhD research include the need for privacy, to work quietly, undistracted and not constantly being tempted to engage in chit-chat, some users expressed concerns on the impact of the space in their practices with some nostalgia of their past offices:

"I am missing my old office, which was also shared but the individual desks were panelled off." (PhD student)

This resonates strongly with findings from staff on their working practices discussed in the theme 'Working Life' below.

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

_____

The booths

The booths are 'happy corners' for students, but also underutilised. Here we see students using and enjoying the high-back booth seating across the building. Yet at the same time, these are often described as spaces to do alone and once occupied by one student, others find it awkward to approach and ask to share.

Theme 2.   Working Life

The everyday life of carrying out the business of a university is apparent in this theme. Here, there are less photos of the grand, open, anonymous-yet-impressive spaces of the building and instead users have zoomed in on closer, personal details.

Living at work

The photographs in this theme are quite a contrast to others we have discussed, with considerably more objects, people and personal possessions depicted. The photographs have been taken differently too, with many more 'point of view' shots taken at close quarters that impart a strong sense of being in the space the user is describing. Taken together, these strongly suggest that it is small scale, personal issues that most readily spring to mind when users recount experiences of work rather than their more aesthetic or symbolic perceptions of the building (Shortt 2015; Warren 2006).

Key insights from this include:

Attention to personal, domestic, mundane and human matters is vital for worker satisfaction.

All the variations of academic work need to be accommodated, not just the visible and/or social dimensions.

Solitary working and privacy are important considerations in workplace design.

Ambiguous spaces need active management to avoid detrimental effects on staff's productivity, self-worth and professional identity.

Ideas about 'shared space' are not shared: paradoxical uses of the kitchenettes

Often these issues centred on themes we have already discussed such as the lack of privacy in a building designed for transparency and space-sharing. The intention of the building was to break down divisions between different categories of user, mingling staff, students and visitors in the hope that chance interactions and greater opportunity to be in closer proximity would result in new relationships, ideas and creativity (Gaggiotti, Simpson and Cicmil 2017). However, this was experienced in quite disarming and extreme ways by users:

"When we moved into the building, I thought wow! We will work in a place we can finally be proud of. But I quickly realised that this space wasn't for us [academic staff]. *Every time I see students with their feet on the sofas, every time I see students rummaging through our fridge and making themselves some tea…I feel de-graded"* (academic staff)

"The complex nature of academic work - quiet reading, creative thinking; classroom teaching, consultations – has not been recognised. We should have some privacy when we need it. Like blinds on glass panels" (academic staff)

The above quote is an example of how the ambiguity of the space within the building produced tensions for staff, based on their expectations about divisions of labour, identity and professionalism. Although strongly worded, this staff member's view encapsulates a prevalent 'struggle', from both staff and students, to make sense of what they should (or should not) be doing in certain spaces – here, the kitchenettes (Hancock and Spicer 2011; Kim and de Dear 2013). For example, a student captured the image below and said:

'I'm not sure if we are allowed to use this space. It's confusing. So, we often go to the library instead – we know we're allowed there!'.
(student)

These signs were introduced as a faculty initiative several months after the move was completed. Although they stand in contrast to the idea of blurring the boundaries between different users of the building, along with the ideal of 'openness', they show how users shape the space as they settle in, creating rules and norms to reduce uncertainty because human beings are territorial in their dwelling practices.

"Given that the kitchenettes are generally understood to be open social spaces… as a student, I never know whether I should or not use it to make a cup of tea; whether I should acknowledge anyone or just leave …" (student)

"[This picture] is a bit of a bone of contention. The reason that I took that photo is because I think in our department it's the most common complaint about the building. The areas themselves are great – having a hot water tap, a microwave, fridge, all those things are really good – but … we never get to use those areas. We have no room to sit in them. There are just students everywhere. They don't often treat the spaces with respect, so you'll see them with their feet on tables and rubbish everywhere. They're very noisy." *(academic staff)*

Thus, originally envisaged as an extension of the kitchenette for staff only, but gradually an acceptance has arisen that the students can use these spaces as well, the origins for which are unclear but cause unease:

"They're not shared spaces. They are student areas outside staff offices" *(academic staff)*

Comments in the discussion group usually referred to students occupying these spaces 'en masse', while the staff, whose offices are nearby, are designed-out. In some cases, this means the staff go home to work. The project did not generate data suggesting there had been greater staff-student collaborations or ad-hoc learning opportunities (Kim and de Dear 2013).

The complex nature of academic work

There is a sense of human connection/togetherness in this theme, but not of the work itself (Gaggiotti, Simpson and Cicmil, 2017), despite the captions and discussions being about the building's impact on ways of working. Indeed, the data that was generated to tell us about the building's impact on working practices (particularly from academics) did not feature any scenes of teaching events at all. Instead, work has been depicted through scenes showing 'colonisation' of the corporate building, with objects that are intimate, personal and domestic (see photographs on p.36). The practice of working in the building seems a long way from the 'Wow' of the first impressions. As the quote in the previous section shows, and when people talk about what matters in their work lives, they take few pictures of the actual building. Their identification is not with the organisation or building but with the person, the personal and the people.

However, the analysis of the discussion group materials provided deeper insights into a range of ambiguities and complexities related to the assumptions made in the design of the new building about what academics actually do in fulfilling their role and duties 'at work'. Being an FBL academic implies a multifaceted portfolio of work - teaching, research, administration, mentoring, collaboration (to mention only a few) - each individual's profile reflecting a specific (but not necessarily static) combination of these activities at any point in time. Yet, each of these academic activities require a different kind of space in which it can be performed creatively and effectively. But, as insights from other sections of this report also illustrate, some of these have been compromised in the new building, e.g. transparent academic office walls invite unscheduled consultations or chats causing constant interruptions at times when deep concentration (such as marking) or intellectual 'thinking time' (such as research and writing) is needed. This is because 'being visible' is interpreted as 'being available' for students (as well as other academics) passing by. Some academics have started increasingly working from home to have space for uninterrupted deeper thinking, reading, writing and marking.

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The staff offices

Staff offices are an important space for personalisation and the colonisation of space. The ability to personalise office space is important to staff and includes being able to store and display books, hang artwork on the walls, and show personal items. In particular, these spaces are the only spaces in the building where we see a large quantity of greenery and plants. As we note in previous themes and ones below, the lack of organic, living matter is (negatively) noticed in the building but staff seem to respond to this by bringing in and cultivating their own cuttings and plants.
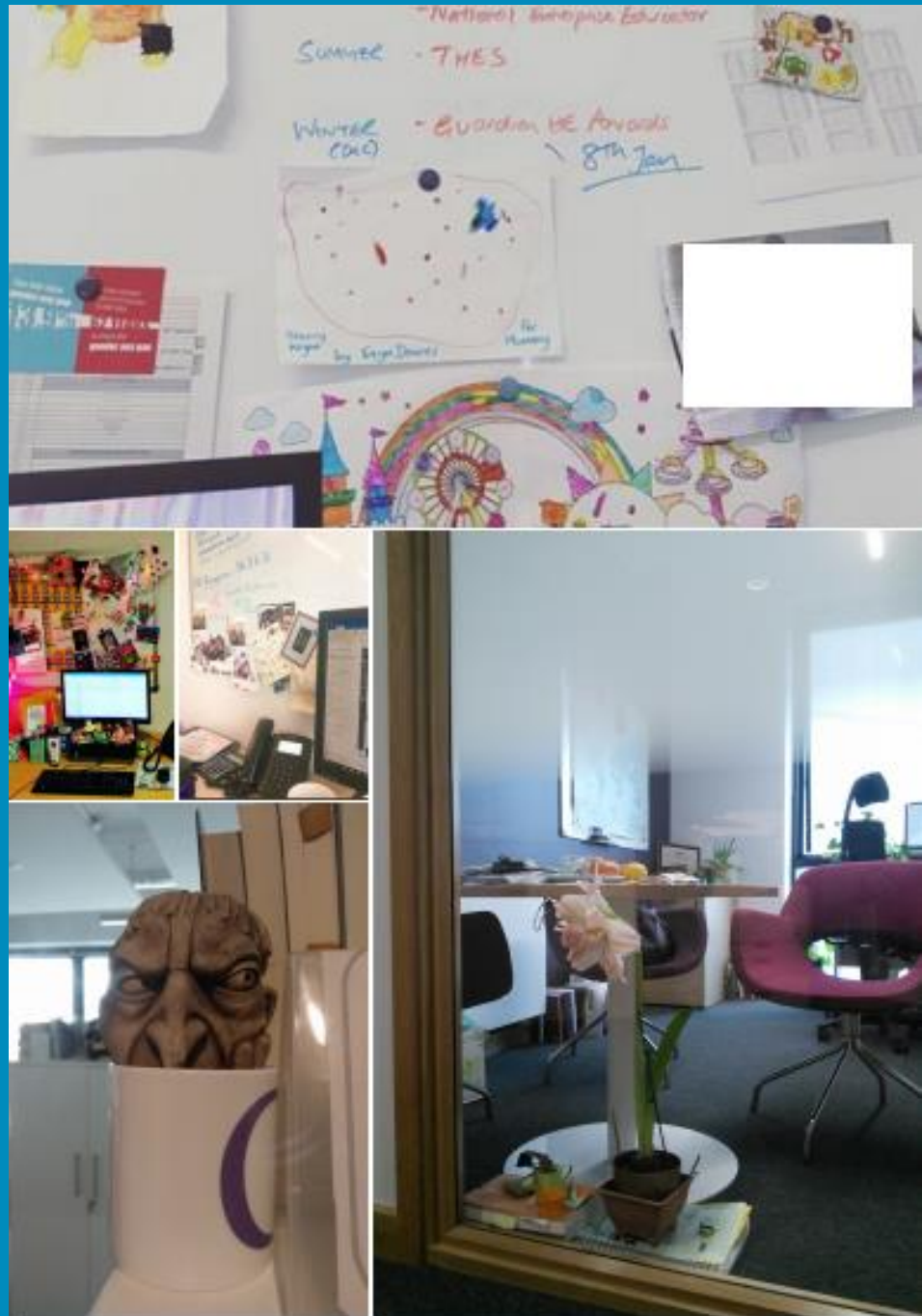
Theme 3. Wayfinding and Sustainability

Users liked being helped with navigating their way through the building rather than embarking on an adventure of discovering the building by themselves. The images and texts related to this theme reflect experiences with signs, instructions, information, fire exits, first aid - generally with the functioning of things rather than spaces. The images produced were accompanied by instrumental rather than symbolic reflections. This is the most traditional POE data we have produced (Capita 2017), but it only counts for a tenth of the entire data set.

People like things to work as expected and know how to navigate a building without hesitating, asking others or being lost. The examples of the main entrance circle-slice-doors, the LED lights along the edges of the main stairway, the air-conditioning, to mention only a few, were used as elements to build a visual and textual narrative of artefacts that have to work as expected - and when they don't this causes frustration.

Key insights raised by this theme include:

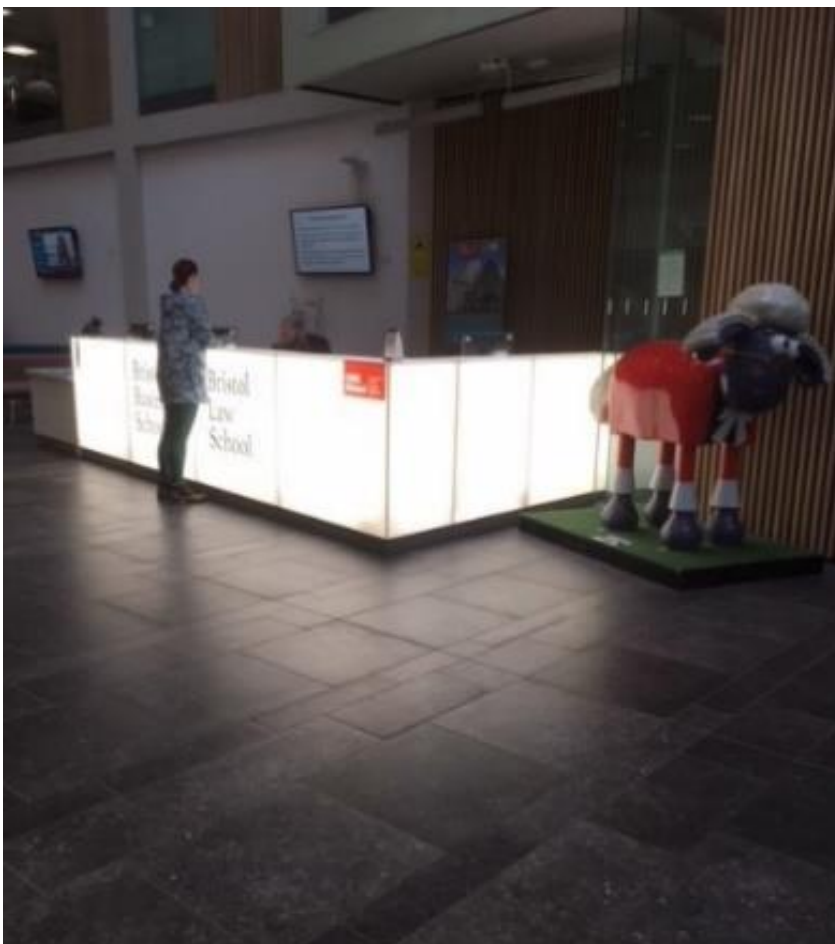Not knowing where to go is a frustrating source of anxiety for users.

Being sustainable when using the building.

Artificial versus natural space.

The building, nature and organic elements contribute to the organisational identity even when they are outside the building.

Not to be lost

The reception area was commented on and photographed by a number of users to reflect on the need for well trained and professional receptionists who pride themselves in being the guardians, 'curators' of the building.

Signposting and signage in the building was a frequently commented-on feature. This also includes the absence of signage and information - for example about the terrace, lifts, - as well as ambiguous signage - e.g. the use of spaces such as kitchenettes, the terrace, etc.

And as we saw in the 'Working Life' theme above, some students were confused about the tea point signs in the kitchenette spaces and who is able to use them – and as such, find themselves moving to the Library to work as *'we know we're allowed there!'* (student).

A number of participants reflected on the confusion about whether the access to the terrace is restricted and for whom:

'No, I think I was a bit unsure as to exactly who is either supposed or able to use it, and when. So, I haven't been out there since we first moved in really, and looked round. In the end, because it was locked for quite a while, we weren't really sure who the space was for, I guess' (academic staff).

Users also referred to the lifts being 'hidden' from the sight of those entering the building through the main entrance. The staircase and the information panel are blocking the direct view of the reception and lift so *'…ironically, you need to look at it to find out how to get to the reception or lift which otherwise should be visible to the 'naked eye' straight away'*(visitor)

"I've been told recently that there are other lifts available in the building, but, because I'm not aware and there are no signposts to those other lifts, I've just been relying on the two main ones. The waiting for it has been a bit of a nightmare. It's made me late for a couple of meetings, and that's not good when you're going up to the seventh floor." (visitor from UWE Academic Services)

Environmental sustainability

This is a core area in the university's strategy (Cicmil, Gough and Hills 2017) and an important element of the design brief for the building. However, this theme was sparsely represented by building users in our datasets. Users produced a number of images of the set of three recycling bins taken in various places in the building accompanied by the caption *'good sustainability practices'* or similar, but there were no photographs that reflected user experiences or their practices of sustainability, or how the building enabled or constrained those.

However, photos and comments about the 'nature' surrounding the building were quite common. This is interesting because these elements are actually outside the building, but experienced as inside by inhabitants. Bringing the outside in is a theme that has featured in existing research on workplace design e.g. bringing in planting, large windows, inside/outside covered terraces etc. (Lottrup et al 2013; Warren 2007). We saw photographs of well-maintained green spaces as well as animals freely rummaging in the close proximity of the building as depicted in the spotlight section below and the reflective accounts on these images are sensory and warm, e.g. *'a UWE family of geese are our visitors'.*

Although, as we have already seen, nature was not universally welcomed. Pigeons were mentioned with regard to their droppings which left mess on the office windows and girders. This was a strong point of criticism as we explained previously as part of the findings on identification with the organisation.
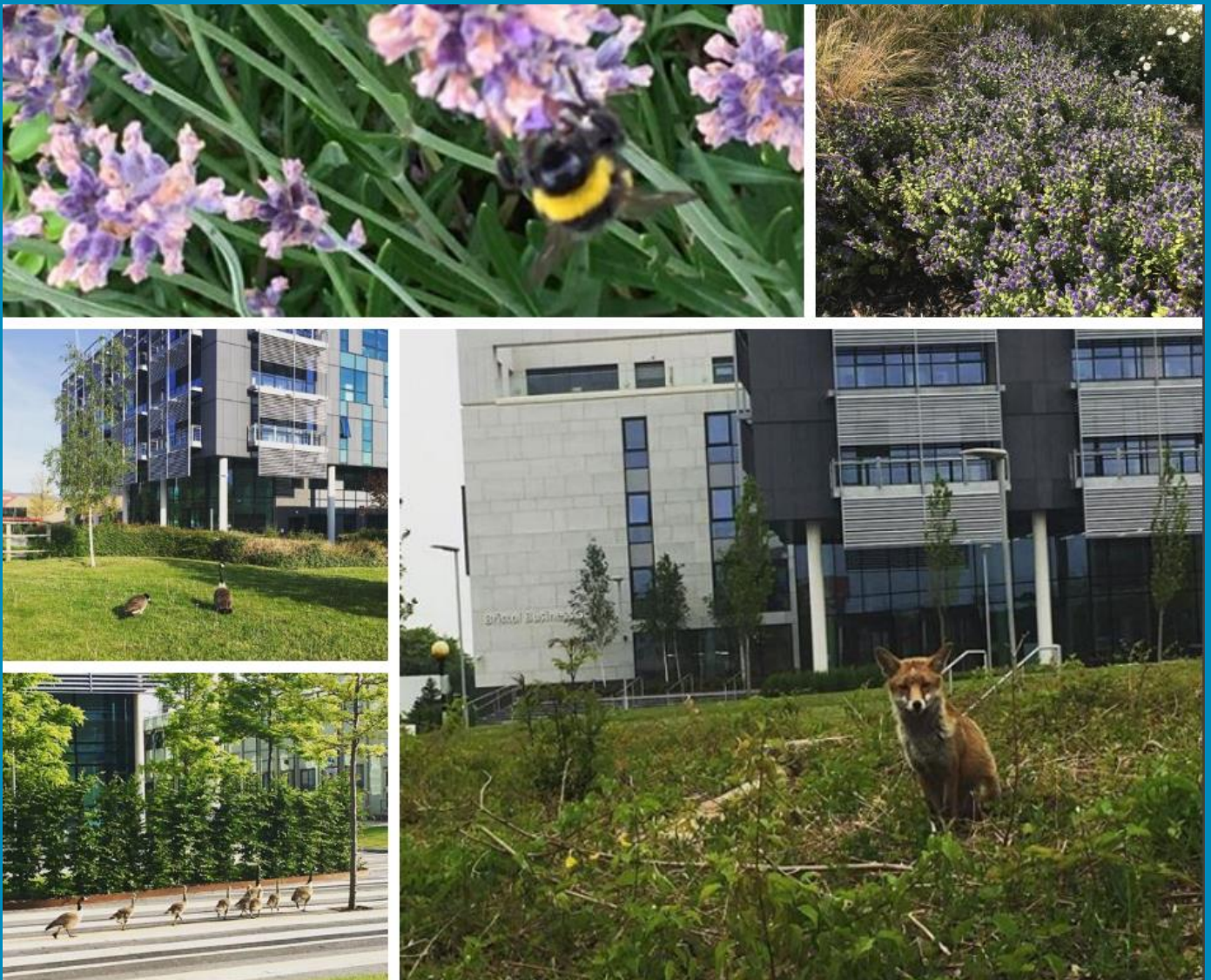
A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The green outside the building

Greenery, nature and a connection to wildlife is important to users, despite the fact that these elements are *outside* the building. There is a sense that users seek out green spaces for reflection and a break from work, as well as simply enjoying the experience of wildlife around the building.

Section 3 | Findings |
Living

Theme 1. The Unexpected

Building users took photographs of activities and objects that signified something unusual or surprising that went on within the building. As can be observed in the photographs across this theme, we see colour, people, and far less linearity than in other images in other themes. Objects and activities are at the centre of these photographs.

Key insights raised in this theme include:

There is a quirkiness and apparent joy in seeing objects and watching activities that seem out of place and unexpected in a Business School building.

These surprising things are often everyday objects and activities.

There is a tension between the familiar and the strange, but this also provides users with moments of joy and pleasure.

The important role of the 'unusual' in a building and how it can positively impact users' experiences.

The familiar and the strange

Activities and objects in the building were photographed by staff, students and visitors to show how surprised they were to see such goings-on in a Business School. They noted how unusual certain things were, particularly in a place of work. For example: images show how the thoroughfare of the atrium became a space for a concert and in other images, a site for sleeping. Numerous pictures of the formal front entrance of the Business School with the local campus geese walking past depicted users' surprise at such a space resembling a farmyard; a gift of sweets taped to an office door; a meeting room being used for a hair trial for a wedding; and empty corridor walls being used to display art. In turn this demonstrates how the meanings of spaces shift depending on how people use them (Shortt 2015; Bachelard 1994).

The strange and unusual are objects of fascination or mystery – they aren't supposed to be there. There is a tension between what is normal and familiar and what is alien in the world of a Business School building. When users know what a building is for –a place of work, learning, interaction and business collaboration - they are able to make sense of their environment – they know what to expect. But when they find themselves in a space that looks like the space they know and understand, but the objects and activities within it are unexpected, this space can take on quite a different feel.

This shows just how accustomed we can become to how spaces are *supposed* to be used and what 'should' go on within them. Even though what has been captured in these pictures is described as unexpected, they are largely everyday activities and objects that would not be out of place in a domestic setting or retail space perhaps. It is the context of the Business School that makes them unusual.

The joy of disruption

These 'strange things' offer something important to staff, students and visitors alike. They are all discussed and described in a positive light. In what is an otherwise formal, traditional, structured building these elements of human activity – singing, sleeping, sticking presents on doors – rehumanises the sensory and the lived experience of a building (Dale and Burrell 2008). To disrupt, or to see disruption in the order and rationality of everyday life in a Business School building, is humorous and enjoyable. When filled with human, organic activity, empty spaces afford happiness and joy, and positively impacting on users' sense of wellbeing. This in turn points towards the importance of personalisation and the ability for workers to engage in 'out of the ordinary' activities and people seemingly get as much pleasure from observing them as they do from engaging in them themselves.

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The atrium space

This large, ambiguous non-space has become informally colonised by people and groups: the atrium café and humorous signs, students sleeping, and impromptu and organised concerts. It has wide and varied uses! As such we might reflect on how crucial these spaces are and should be designed to be flexible, useable and allow for users to appropriate and live.

Theme 2. Health and Wellbeing

The benefits and detrimental effects of the building on users' wellbeing and health were recounted to the project team in various ways through individuals' images and during the group discussions. Once again feelings are mixed, as the following sections show.

This building impacts 'me'

The spatial practice of users is very apparent in this theme. Experiences while walking, doing, acting and standing were depicted in the photographs (Zimring et al. 2005). For example, climbing the main staircase was welcomed as an opportunity for cardiovascular exercise. Unlike other themes in this report, we get a feel for how the building impacts upon people's bodies, rather than their more cerebral, even abstract, opinions on the aesthetics or practicalities of its design and functionality. This highlights the value of a visual/sensory methodology over more 'disembodied' survey-based POE methods. Sensations such as freedom, breathing fresh air, and a pumping heart were all recounted within this theme, along with more negative experiences of nausea, vertigo and migraine as we discuss further below.

Key insights raised by this theme include:

Visual/sensory methodologies are useful ways to bring users' bodies into POE.

Health and wellbeing experiences are polarised – either good, or bad.

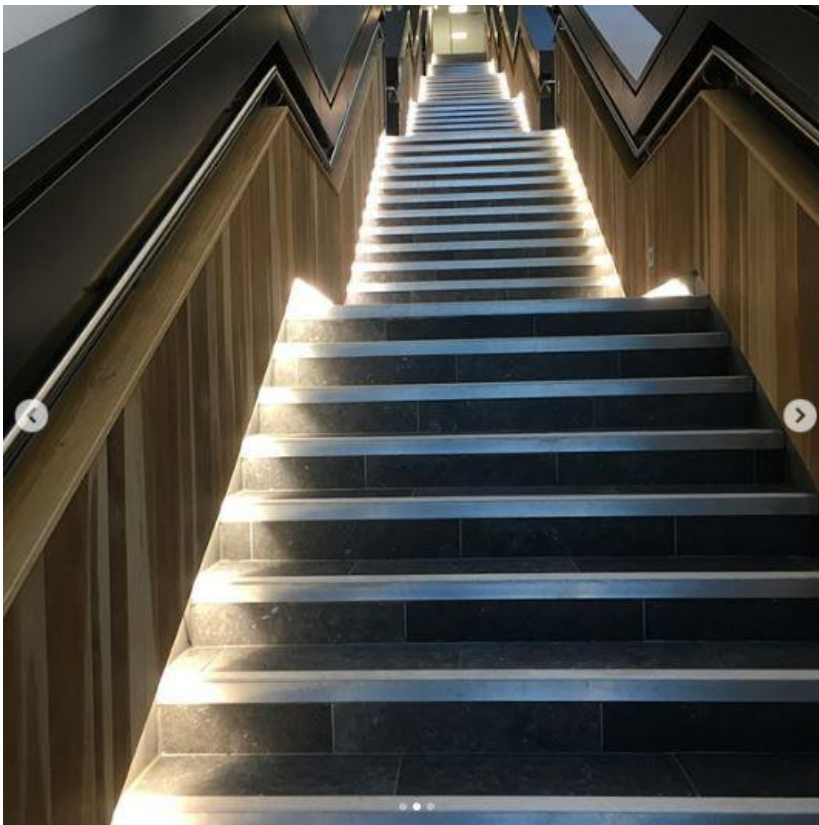Outside experiences are very important to people's enjoyment of the building.

Design choices can cause physical discomfort and pain.

Privacy has to be created in very open, public spaces.

'Non-relaxing' spaces and objects are important in people's sense of wellbeing.

Bringing the outside in

As we have previously noted, users of the building enjoy going outside it. The outside terrace on the 6th floor is a welcome area to enjoy views and fresh air, or even just to look out on – once people knew it was there as we have explained earlier.

This resonates with data presented in the theme 'visibility and transparency' about the importance of views out of the building to the Welsh hills in the distance, of sunsets and so on, as the following excerpt from a discussion group shows (emphasis added):

'You've got that nice area with the tables and where you can chill out. You've got a view, which is really nice and relaxing. That's what I quite like about this building, is the little breakout pods. Then you could come over have a good view, sit down…' *(visitor from UWE Academic Services)*

While the terrace affords a physical opportunity to go outside, views through the glass walls positively impact on wellbeing in the form of allowing a form of mental escape. In this respect the expansive glass walls are a welcome feature. However, they also invoke a sense of vertigo in several participants particularly when used for internal partitioning or barriers.

'Horrible vertigo-inducing feeling.' (visitor)

The building causes me pain

Building users regularly reported how beautiful and impressive the building is and a large feature of this 'Wow' factor was the glass and the strong bisecting lines. But this was not without its drawbacks. Glare and reflections made teaching physically difficult for some, induced headaches in others.
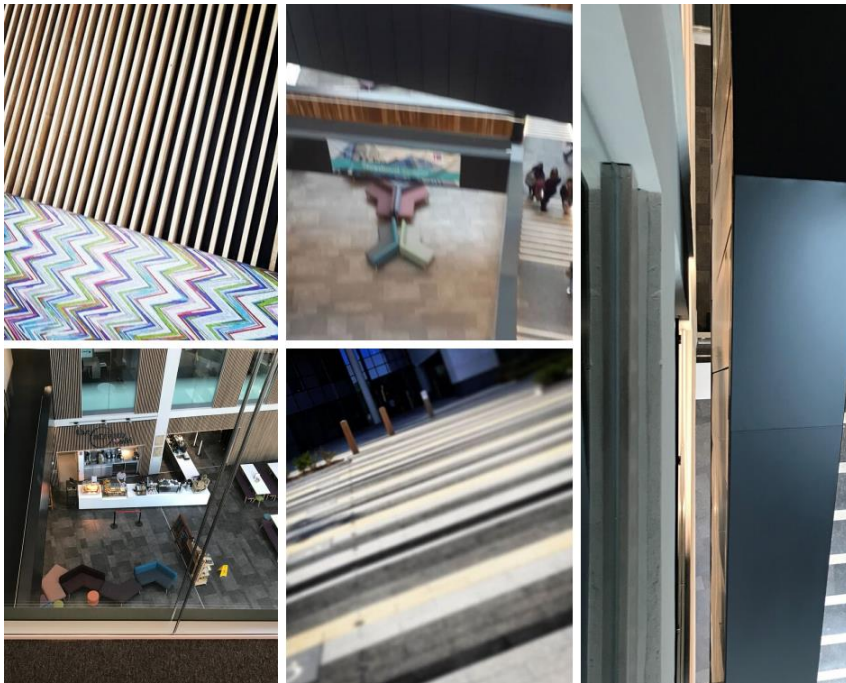
Vertigo was reported in the dataset on a number of occasions and in some cases was so severe as to affect the route the individual was able to take around the building. Another negative health consequence of the buildings' design features appears to be migraine induced by a combination of stripes on the walls and furniture of the atrium seating and the way the light bounces off these surfaces as the following quote from one of the group interview participant explains:

'So, the Atrium Café, with that stripy cladding, and because the sun really reflects on those panels, it can create some sort of visual illusion …it feels like it's moving… it has triggered one of my migraines previously; and can trigger epilepsy… (visitor)

Relatedly, the striped pavements outside the building also caused some users disorientation.

Finally, the experience of being cold in the atrium café, which was also noisy, was recounted to us as a negative impact on wellbeing within the building.

'[Although the atrium is an] impressive open space - almost cathedral like, it is indeed too open; in fact, it turns cold, actually, sometimes' (visitor)

The private in the public

As the building was designed to maximise opportunities for collaboration between staff, students and visitors it necessarily incorporates a lot of open, shared spaces with no clear designation. There is therefore very little in the way of private space which was reported to us as being particularly available for academic staff. We have included this data within this theme because the awkwardness of always being visible, and/or invading others' space are important triggers of anxiety.

Having boundaries, being able to be alone, hide away and own a territory has long been shown as important to human beings at work (Vischer 2008). Consequently, those seeking spaces to be alone and undisturbed often reported leaving the building all together. When seeking peace and quiet, academic staff work from home, *'well you've probably noticed, I don't come in any more, I just can't do certain types of work here – it's a shame because I just don't see people anymore'* (academic staff).

In addition, because the rules of spatial usage are more familiar to students, they often use the Library between classes, thus lowering the utilisation of the space and making the campus less 'sticky' (Robertson 2019). However, we were also shown images of very public spaces such as toilets, the showers, and stairs to recount positive feelings about personalised wellbeing and others showed us how they appropriate public spaces to create their own 'nests' (Shortt 2015). In fact one small group of students had practically 'moved in' to a tucked away corner of the building on level 7, claiming it for their own and refusing to take a photograph for this project or even divulge its location for fear that others may invade 'their' space!
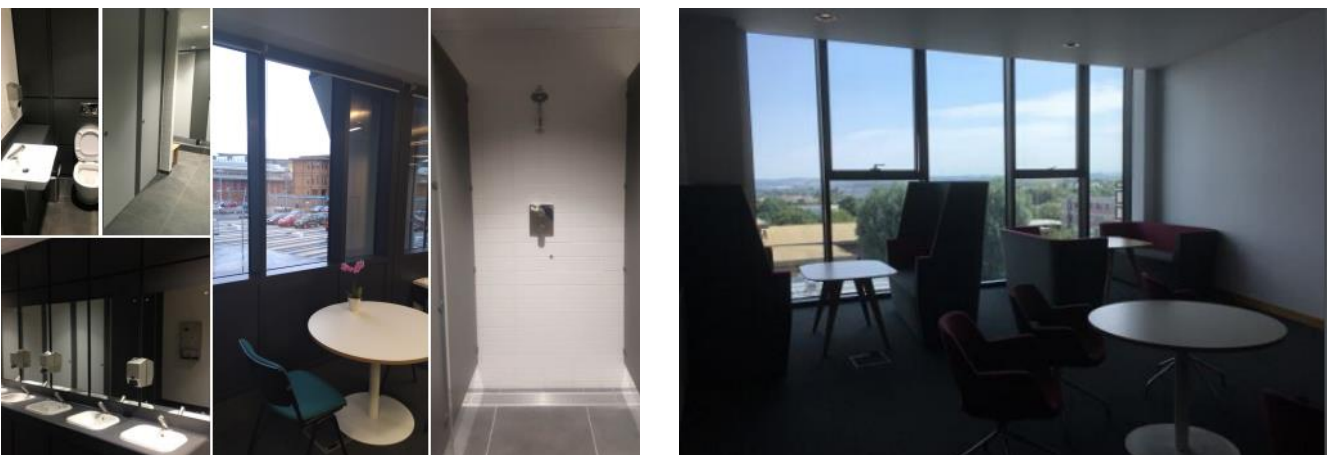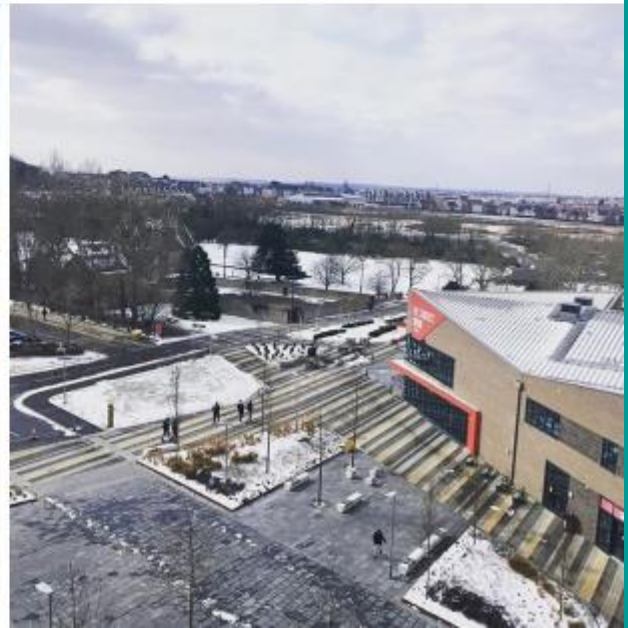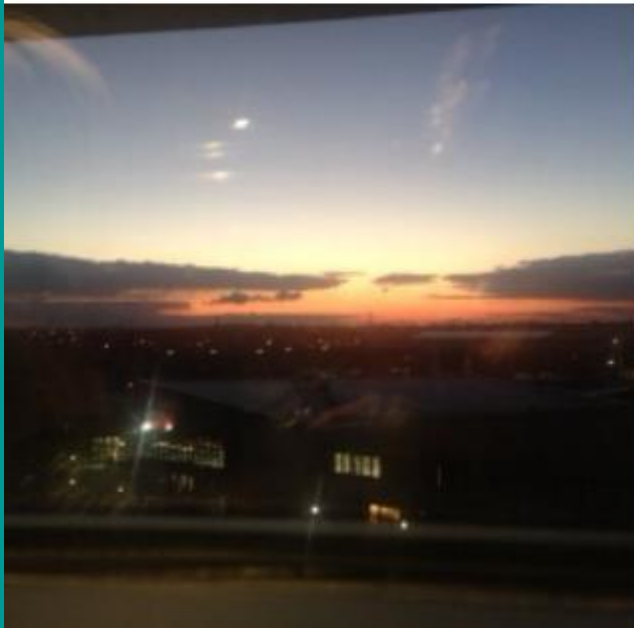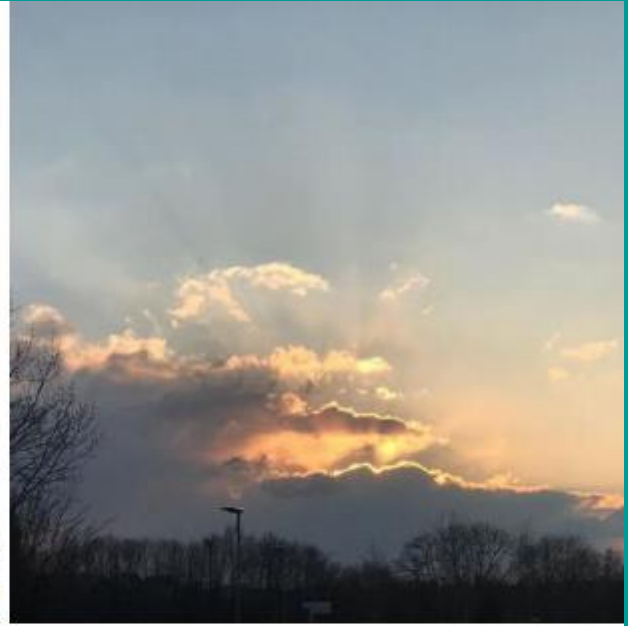
A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The landscape views

The landscape views from the building are vital for a sense of wellbeing, relaxation and for taking a moment to pause work and look up and out of the building. Sunsets, hills, green spaces, and even snowscapes – whatever the weather, the view from this building affords important moments in the everyday life of users living and working in the building.

Theme 3. Food and Drink

There is a personal and homely aesthetic to the images captured in this theme and to the staff and students who represented their feelings about food and drink in the building - the activity of drinking and eating is an important one. Most images were taken close up and most were posted on Instagram – which of course speaks to our contemporary visual culture of taking snaps of our food and publicly sharing them.

Eating cake and drinking tea

The elements of food and drink captured included a great deal of celebration food, like mince pies and Easter eggs, as well as ice lollies, pastries, biscuits and a lot of tea and coffee and were attributed to celebrating events together or documenting breakfasts or breaks alone in an office.

Key insights raised from this theme include:

Eating and drinking in the building is both social and a solitary activity.

There is a lack of green and healthy-looking food – food appears to be snack food, sugar rich, and not representative of a nourishing meal.

Space is appropriated by users and colonised in order to create more domestic looking settings in which to eat, drink and share food.

This is a manifestation of resistance (conscious or not) to the rather utilitarian spaces in the building.

There is sense of appreciating moments of calm and solace alone with a cup of tea or soup and a personal sense of being removed from the organisation. Indeed, the composition of these images is close up and intimate – the food or drink is in the hands of the photographer and held close to the body or taken from above as if to show the individual about to 'tuck in' to a snack or meal. These are personal mugs and other material objects that are not branded or corporate in any way. And across this data very little of the actual building can be seen – they could in fact have been taken anywhere – but participants often comment about what they can see or hear in the building as they eat and drink. Certain spaces in the building afford the opportunity to be alone whilst still feeling somehow connected to the goings on within the building (Shortt 2019).

A domestic setting

The rather more social images depict the appropriation of kitchenette spaces by staff and students, in order to gather together and users tune in to the familial parts of the design. For example, one student described the kitchenette area as being **'…like an Ikea show home'** and another student, who captured the image to the right – a kitchen area with the island style bench and two stools – said, *'meals and friendships are made here!'*

What is noticeable here are the domestic elements of the spaces and how homely elements of eating and drinking together have been created. The use of bunting, teas cups and saucers and tablecloths – these all transform an otherwise utilitarian space into one that users feel excited about using for celebratory events, as we have described earlier in this section under the theme of 'The Unexpected'. There is almost a manifestation of resistance here (consciously or not) to the cold, rather minimalist space we have seen captured and discussed in other themes. Bright bunting and chequered tablecloths and domestic activities are enjoyed and rehumanise the building (Warren 2006).
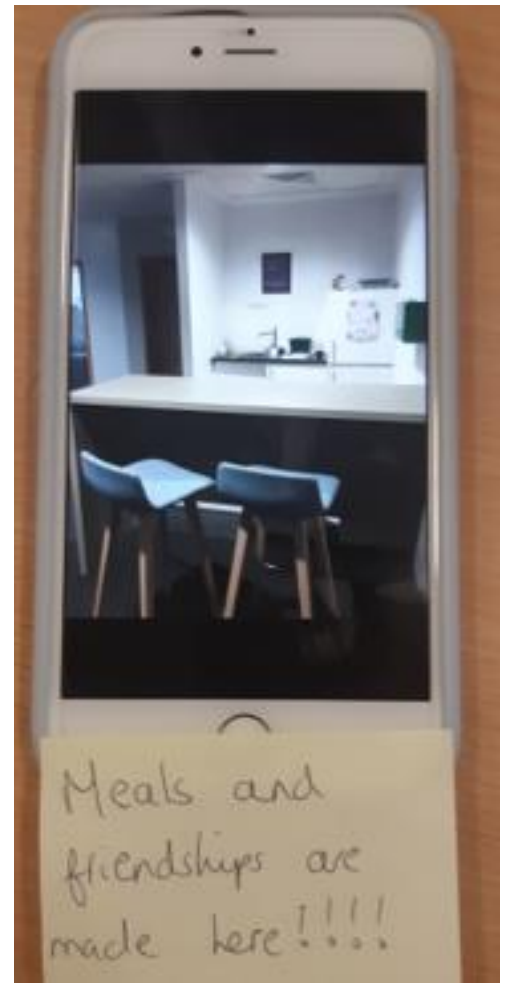
Relatedly data analysis reveals how the small group meetings and seemingly informal, impromptu working groups occurred in spaces where the body's natural rhythms were supported – comfortable seating areas near kitchens and where food and drink was available. The image-sets show very few groups of people in the open, visible, pre-designed spaces suggesting the importance of home comforts in the organisation of informality and sociability.

A SPOTLIGHT ON:

The Atrium Café

The Atrium Café was one of the most photographed spaces and feelings towards it are mixed. Positive feelings include; the choice of food, the large seating areas for meetings and socialising, and the fact that it provides sounds of hubbub and life in the building. Negative feelings included; the lack of cleanliness in and around the café and the cold and stark feeling of the eating/seating spaces.

Section 4 | A Toolkit for Living in a New Building

A Toolkit for Living in a New Building

Summarising the key insights from the above findings, we offer the following recommendations for future workspace design in Higher Education and potentially in other office-based 'knowledge work' settings. The recommendations are arranged according to which stage of the new build process they are most relevant to. In addition, the table on p.63 maps the benefit of each recommendation and is intended for use with commissioning stakeholders during design phases, and/or consultation (e.g. Deans, project boards, budget holders).

1. Briefing and design

1.1. Consider the balance between open, shared space and staff private areas not only for concentrated work or private consultations with students, but to accommodate factors linked to mental health and wellbeing, e.g. letting off steam, eating lunch alone and resting unobserved.

1.2. Include spaces for larger groups to work together on tasks.

1.3. Consider utilising larger booths that users find easier to approach to ask the occupant if they mind sharing.

1.4. Include more one-person spaces and angle seats away from each other to avoid the intimacy of sitting opposite a stranger.

1.5. In order to maximise the impressiveness of the building, include an iconic artefact as part of the design, but also pay attention to the detail.

1.6. Keep design simple and minimal if the building is intended to communicate a traditional 'business professional' feel.

1.7. Take serious note of the impact of visual design on health issues, such as vertigo and migraine.

1.8. Pay attention to first impressions, but also create more interest 'behind the scenes' to avoid feelings of superficiality, which negatively impacts on users' sense of belonging in the space.

1.9. Design in flexibility for users to manage their privacy in glass sided rooms, or consider frosted glass, in order to balance the fun of being able to see others, with the right not to be seen.

1.10. Combining a functional study environment with that which simulates the 'real world' is highly valued by students.

2. Influencing project decision makers

2.1. Investing in private spaces is a long-term strategy connected to ensuring the wellbeing and mental health of staff.

2.1.1. Reduction in stress and sickness absences.

2.1.2. Staff stay in the building longer, maximising opportunities for innovation through physical co-presence.

2.1.3. Important for recruitment of high-quality staff.

2.2. Elements such as frosted glass or blinds should not be optional expenditure, given their importance in enabling users' privacy. This has particular consequences for accommodating users of different religions and cultures.

2.3. There is a considerable return on investment for iconic 'flagship' elements of the building, in terms of impressiveness to visitors, particularly prospective students and their parents.

2.4. Not all benefits of the building can be quantified, for example the aesthetic benefits of spaces are important in user satisfaction and delight, but are hard to measure.

2.5. Get the technology right, but don't expect this to be a 'Wow' factor with the student body. Millennials *expect* state-of-the-art technology and are unlikely to be impressed by all but the most cutting edge of facilities.

2.6. Nature and organic elements inside and outside should be budgeted for in new building design and maintenance.

3. User engagement

3.1. Consider undertaking a similar study in existing premises to find out patterns of usage in the *current* facilities in order to better design new buildings.

3.2. As well as top-down architect-user group consultation, engage in lateral consultations between user groups (e.g. staff with students, academic staff with professional staff etc.) about how space is intended to be used and what work looks like for everyone in the process.

3.3. Recognise what 'Wows' the project board will probably be 'ordinary', or even outdated to younger users of the building.

3.4. Guard against 'building feedback fatigue' in which user groups are asked to contribute opinions repeatedly.

3.5. Embrace and welcome, more critical views of the building and see them as an opportunity to refine design and build specifications.

3.6. Consider offering individuals, teams or departments a workspace 'stipend' to spend on their space(s) in order to allow for personalisation and ownership – this directly impacts a sense of positive wellbeing and connection to the organisation.

4. Moving in, handover and building induction

4.1. Allow users to do 'unexpected' things and use the space in unexpected ways. Use this as an opportunity to learn how the building can be developed to fit the needs of those using it.

4.2. Educate users about what is happening in and around the spaces they occupy, rather than just use signs to direct behaviour.

4.3. Encourage mundane 'domestic' activities in the space and do not prevent ad-hoc social rituals being undertaken.

4.4. It is unrealistic to expect staff-student collaboration will spontaneously occur once shared spaces are provided. Structured and meaningful events/activities need to be managed in these areas.

4.5. Ensure good quality navigational signage and that all users receive in-person induction and building tours.

5. Ongoing space management

5.1. Undertake sensory POE to understand lived experiences of new buildings.

5.2. Appoint a 'Custodian for Building Culture and Behaviour' within the building, separate from facilities management or health and safety.

    5.2.1. Regularly stage displays/events in large 'anonymous' spaces to avoid users feeling alienated.

    5.2.2. Ongoing mediation and education between different user groups

    5.2.3. Ongoing analysis of feedback on the building, so the building grows, develops and adapts to user's needs and experiences.

5.3. Plan for (or at least allow) individual modifications to space to suit local needs, particularly for privacy.

5.4. The more impressive the space, the more important it is kept clean and in good working order.

6. User-led visual/sensory post-occupancy evaluation

6.1. Only 10% of our data replicated traditional POE themes suggesting that considerable value-added can be obtained from utilising visual methodologies to understand how buildings support or detract from desired organisational cultures.

6.2. Extending beyond the remit of traditional POE is to be encouraged in line with HEFCE guidelines on effectively measuring return on investment from capital projects.

6.3. User engagement strategies need to be flexible in order to gain data where certain user groups are reluctant to participate (e.g. students and staff).

6.4. Use a dedicated platform or account to generate data using social media. Many people do not wish to use their personal profiles to contribute to other projects.

6.5. Ensure sufficient time and resources are available to support the research team.

Stakeholder Value Matrix: influencing university decision makers

Return on investment	Rationale based on recommendations
Student recruitment • Stronger basis for competition: higher numbers and quality of applicants = increased fee revenues. • Less reliance on clearing, greater certainty in planning process.	**1.5; 1.6; 1.8; 1.10; 2.3; 2.5** Iconic features, attention to detail (especially 'back stage'), spaces for simulated professional experience and minimal, but quality design contribute to positive student perceptions.
Brand management • Attractive offering to prospective staff and students. • Strong local, national and international presence. • Positive staff/student identification (leading to engagement, commitment etc.). • Strengthen organisational culture.	**1.5; 2.3; 2.4; 5.4** A flagship building is a valuable asset in constructing and communicating strong brand image. Iconic features, attention to 'non-quantifiable' aesthetics and good housekeeping and maintenance are important contributory factors.
Communications and engagement • Improved employment relations: reduced conflict and resistance to change. • More committed/engaged workforce and student body.	**3.1; 3.2; 4.2; 5.1; 5.2; 6.1; 6.3; 6.4** Qualitative and flexible consultation before design, during build, and after relocation greatly supports good quality relationships. Lateral communication between user groups important for shared understanding of space.
Employer of choice • Strong global reputation: higher calibre applicants. • Lower turnover. • Enhanced staff engagement/productivity through motivated workforce.	**2.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5** Staff-centred workspace with user control over its management, plus willingness to embrace critical views demonstrates a commitment to satisfying workforce needs that is attractive to prospective and current staff.
Health and Safety/ Facilities/Wellbeing • Exemplar for staff and student wellbeing though best practice. • Improved legal compliance (e.g. stress management). • More efficient building traffic flow.	**1.7; 3.2; 4.5; 5.2; 5.4** The right balance between shared areas and a need for private space, recognising the full range of academic tasks is paramount in ensuring employee wellbeing and maximising productivity. Health issues (e.g. vertigo/migraine) should be considered during design.
Space utilisation • 'Sticky campus' effect: Improved innovation/collaboration through co-presence, student attendance gains. • Improved Return on Investment (ROI) per sq. metre.	**1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 3.1; 3.2; 4.4; 5.2** Encouraging users to stay longer in the building increases the likelihood of chance encounters, collaboration and innovation and improves student attendance at timetabled sessions, thus improving ROI in the space.

• Dedicated 'cultural' custodian of the building post-occupancy cost-effective way to manage this.	
Student experience • Increased retention, higher NSS scores = improved league table position/TEF ratings. • Enhanced employability. • Improved attendance and engagement in learning.	**1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 2.5; 3.2; 3.3; 4.2** More flexible and availability of lone and group working space, increasing lateral communication/education to clarify expectations in shared space and recognition that cutting-edge technology.

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Stride Treglown

At Stride Treglown we pride ourselves in being architects that listen. We listen out of respect to our clients, the briefs they set and the time, effort and money they invest. We listen so that we can create successful and sustainable spaces for those who use and need them.

Meaningful research is essential to our own practice. We're constantly carrying out our own research to uncover genuine user feedback. Through photography and interviews, we build feedback stories from the true judges of the spaces and places we create. We call these stories 'Inhabitant'.

We are thrilled to have supported this deeper dive into user feedback. It aligns with our desire to design for people and their needs. The evidence reinforces the importance of both architectural design and cultural stewardship. Together they have the power to make a positive impact on the lives of people who use buildings. A huge thanks to the research team.

ISG

At ISG, we place people at the heart of everything we do. Delivering the places of tomorrow requires the ability to think big and collaborate effectively. But it also needs our core purpose to stay the same: creating smart, resilient places where people thrive.

This research has allowed us to take a meaningful look into how the building has been brought to life since its completion. The evidence has clearly shown how and why the staff and students choose to use the space. This insight will now help us to deliver smarter, future-proofed spaces.

We would like to thank the research team for all their hard work.

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