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In touch with all the latest

SCHOMS' growing influence on the world of learning spaces and audiovisual technology in HE was reflected at its record 2014 conference at the University of Exeter.

63 delegates from 48 UK institutions heard of the latest international initiatives, student collaborations and professional developments from a body of partners and associates.

The international contingent included keynote speaker Dr Gordon Howell, Associate Director of Learning Environments at Queensland University of Technology; David Labuskes, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of InfoComm International; and representatives of CCUMC and AETM – SCHOMS' equivalent organisations in the USA and Australia respectively.

The increasingly important student perspective was provided by Alex Louch of the Students' Guild at Exeter with strong supporting messages from both the Vice-Chancellor Professor Steve Smith and Head of Learning Spaces, Elaine Cordy.

Professional developments included a tour of Exeter's flagship £48m student services building, The Forum.

Delegates experienced the latest touch-table collaborative learning for themselves - page 8

infoComm
INTERNATIONAL®

A breakthrough agreement was heralded under which all SCHOMS UK institutions become members of InfoComm International - page 6

Suppliers and buyers joined an important debate about procurement - page 12

Listen in full **Presentations reported in this issue were recorded and links will be sent directly to members via email. If you're not a member, please contact the SCHOMS office to obtain the links.**

schoms14 in pictures

On the steps of The Forum. . . record-breaking number of SCHOMS delegates line up for a team photo.

Paul takes over as Chair

SHAKE on it. . . Paul Wood (left), Deputy Director of IT services at Bangor University, took over as Chair from Simon Birkett during the AGM at SCHOMS14.

Paul praised Simon's contribution during his two-year term. "SCHOMS has benefited greatly from the skills and experience that Simon brought to the role," he said.

Simon, Technology Enhanced Learning Manager at the University of Derby, said that helping to raise the profile of SCHOMS nationally and internationally counted

among the highlights of his tenure.

He singled out working with other UK professional bodies such as UCISA and AUDE in relation to a strategic toolkit for learning space design and SCHOMS' recent involvement with JISC scoping support needs for the digital student.

He also pointed to

InfoComm membership for all, the delivery of a new website and a membership that now stands at 93 institutions made up of 225 individual members.

Adding his own tribute, Simon said: "Everything is very much a team effort involving the whole Exec – which is a tremendous group of people to work with."

Leeds Met to host 2015 conference

ATTENTION is now turning to the SCHOMS '15 conference.

Leeds Metropolitan University has been chosen as the venue from 15-18 June 2015.

Leeds Met is one of only three universities in the UK to hold the Customer Service Excellence Award.

A number of its buildings have received design awards, including the Carnegie Pavilion, a multi-use building in partnership with Yorkshire County Cricket Club; Carnegie Village, the on-campus student accommodation and The Rose Bowl, home of the Business School.

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Challenges of 'the £9k era'

In his welcoming remarks, Prof Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Exeter, identified what he saw as the challenges facing everyone in higher education.

PROFESSIONAL services matter as much as academic performance when it comes to delivering the experience that students expect and need in the new education marketplace, Prof Sir Steve Smith told SCHOMS14.

"What happens academically matters, but also what happens within professional services matters enormously to student satisfaction," he said.

"I cannot over-emphasise the importance of networks like yours and events like this. We're all facing similar challenges and I support people talking about it."

Prof Smith said the modern-day student expected more in what he termed "the £9k era."

"The campus has got to look £9k, technology has to be £9k, coffee has to be £9k. Across all services it has to look as if it's funded for the new environment. It's not just teaching – it's the rooms, heating, gardens, AV systems, lighting."

He spoke of two main themes emerging in HE – public policy/spending and application trends – as "the elephants in the room."

Between 2009-2016, the University of Exeter would have spent 39 times as much as it cost John Lewis to open recently in Exeter city centre.

"All universities are going to expand and investment in learning spaces, infrastructure and technology is accelerating away to meet the demands of the new market," Prof Smith said. "But public spending is limited in number of key ways.

"We're preparing our students for jobs that have not yet been created in industries that have not yet been conceived. The future of the UK has to be as a knowledge economy but we don't spend much on it.

"Fees and income look fixed.

// We're preparing students for jobs that have not been created in industries that have not yet been conceived //

Whoever wins the next election, we are facing enormous fiscal restriction, cuts are coming in the budget. There are a lot of threats to funding. Where do we get the capital for buildings, for learning resources?"

Prof Smith suggested the further development of public/private partnerships and 'massive' savings in procurement would be be looked at.

"In 2011, only 11% of capital spend was financed by universities. This year it has risen to 73%, so we are having to pay for this development and we have to adjust to what the student wants."

The University of Exeter placed "extraordinary emphasis" on its relationship with students. Their representative body The Guild of Students was involved in decisions made by the Budget Scrutiny Committee.

"The relationship is strong because we can't become the university we want to be without listening to the student voice," he said.

Another common challenge was to adjust the work patterns of staff to the needs of learning.

"Our Forum building is busier at 1am than it is at 1pm. Work is handed in electronically and the most popular two-hour slot for this is 1am-3am. Do we adjust staffing hours to deal with that?"

Prof Smith also warned universities to be sure of their market position. "If you read their websites, there are 48 universities in the top 20," he said. "If you don't know your strengths and weaknesses, if you don't know what your alumni or staff think, you are living on mythology about where you are. 'One size fits all' doesn't work."

// All universities are going to expand and investment in learning spaces, infrastructure and technology is accelerating away to meet the demands of the new market. But public spending is limited in number of key ways //

'It's a learning environments job. There's no AV/IT distinction now'

SERVICING new collaborative learning methods and spaces – such as 'flat floor' classrooms at Queensland University and wet labs with 250 all-in-one touch screens for students at Sydney University – revealed confusing differences in cultures of the separate AV and IT teams, Gordon Howell told SCHOMS14.

Faced with the constant questions at his own institution of 'is it an AV or an IT set up?' and 'if you have a fault, who do you call?' Gordon merged the support staff and told them: "It's a learning environments job. There's no distinction now.

"If we're going to survive, we're going to have to come up with a value proposition –what is the data, what is the service cost – and try to create a shared vision.

"It's not enough any more to say 'AV guys just do OHPs and projectors', the world's not like that. We've got to work out where we're going. There

Professionalising the AV/IT workforce – and its convergence with technology - was the main theme of keynote speaker Dr Gordon Howell, Associate Director, Learning Environments and Technology Services, Queensland University of Technology.

are going to be more and more student personal devices. Whatever comes our way, it's time for a combined AV/IT technology team to support whatever it is and think differently about our role.

"I have 68 technology support officers among my 100 staff, all have the same workload classification and range of diverse skills. I can move them where they need to be. It clears out a lot of peaks and troughs. There's a common language amongst all our staff, ITIL training is given to AV or IT professionals, it's part of bringing convergence together."

Gordon Howell said professionals were 'deluding themselves' if they thought they were simply in the business of providing technology.

"Students and academic staff are bringing their own devices, most bring two or three devices a day, and will use university devices as well. Faculties are buying all sorts of packages and apps over which they have no control.

"We're using more and more technology and I tell support officers that we support technology. If we don't care who owns the kit and we can help them anyway, let's simply support them.

"If you think you're supporting PCs, you're not going to have a job in 10 years. There are not going to be PCs in 10 years, students will have all their own. If you narrowly define the job, it's going to change, but the reality for staff is that technology is going to continue. If we support whatever technology comes up next, we'll have a bright future and staff will have jobs for a very long time to come."

QUT was saying to all staff that they had to look to the future.

"We've often provided support for what we've always done. We have supported classrooms, OHPs, document cameras, rather than asking 'what do university or academics and students need it for?' We need to change.

"We have started to tell students that we have a preferred range of machines but it doesn't matter, they can bring any machine, whether it's managed by us or not. Students expect to use the software in computer labs so we're using VDIs and building virtual images. They expect to pull it into any classroom, so there is now no distinction between AV and IT or

> ❝ If you think you're supporting PCs, you're not going to have a job in 10 years. . . if we support whatever technology comes up next, we'll have a bright future and staff will have jobs for a very long time to come. ❞

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campus and non-campus."

It was a challenge to change staff and services to align with that journey. "Our staff now work whenever they need to work," he said. "We pay unsociable hours, such as more than half a shift after 4pm. Sessional professionals get timetabled to lecture in the evenings. We now provide technology support to lecture rooms until 10pm to cover the same span of hours that we lecture.

"Our campus is full from 8am with people who also use their own devices. The network has more unique users than we have students and staff. Passersby connect to it. We support them at all times of day and night."

Gordon Howell said that everything the university offered students was now going towards blended learning,

"Everything is online," he said. "The lectures are streamed live – and recorded so students can watch them online. Their course material, be it

Blackboard or Moodle, is online. I would love fewer computer labs because of the cost, but students are using them more each year."

He said it was a common complaint that more computers were needed but surveys on how technology was being used had shown that students were

really saying 'we want more computers in spaces we want to be'.

"Even at the busiest times of the day in QUT, I have 1,000 machines sitting idle. We don't need more machines, they're in the wrong place. Students want central computers not faculty computers."

Aim to make spaces 'pedagogically neutral'

THE academic definition of collaboration space did not always mean technology, according to Gordon Howell.

The aim at QUT was to make rooms 'pedagogically neutral'.

The key ingredients of this were:
● mobile technology - panels on trolleys and touchscreens that were managed like a computer lab
● comfortable tables and seats – "so important"
● power and wireless – "the most important bit of technology we can give is wi-fi everywhere," he said. "Students expect it everywhere, whether they are in class or the lunchroom."
● a standard lectern, colour-coded to match with mobile computers on wheels so they could be returned to the correct rooms if they went astray.

"We have the same basic kit in every room to make it easier for staff, academics and students," he said. "A flat floor classroom can be fitted with anything they need."

Gordon Howell said it was important 'not to reinvent the wheel' when it came to learning spaces. He felt that spaces had to be agile, so they could be changed from one mode to another 'without ripping the walls down'.

Cost was an important issue, he added. The space needed to be scaleable and affordable.

"We provide a lectern if it's wanted, remove it if it's not, put in data points, run it wirelessly, enabling people to teach how they want to teach," he said. "The rooms

are flexible, they don't need a builder or bobcat to come back, they can evolve over time.

"We use the data network for all video support, software runs on the front PC and is switched across the existing network. It's a low incremental cost to delivering technology."

QUT undertook interviews with students and staff to determine what a space needed to be for students.

"You could summarise it down to 'what would you want to sit on and work in all day' and students want exactly the same," he said. "If you want to sit on a hard plastic chair with no wheels all day, fine, give it to the students. But the reality is, you don't. So what students and all other surveys have said is you should give the students what you would have, it's about respect."

The building of large lecture theatres was also being questioned. "It is said that students don't learn in large theatres but 60% of student activity still happens in traditional lectures.

"When we build new theatres, we can get more in-depth learning if we can get students to engage with the content and the lecturer.

"We can build rooms that make engagement easy and allows collaboration to occur – double stack, enough room between rows so tutor can walk around, radio mikes instead of lectern mikes, high density wireless. We are trying to make spaces pedagogically neutral."

Call to make most of new InfoComm link-up

A BREAKTHROUGH agreement was heralded at the conference under which all SCHOMS UK institutions become members of InfoComm International, the leading trade association for the professional audiovisual industry worldwide.

The group membership offers:

● A structured programme of online courses and exams, free with the exception of CTS exam (£250).

● Access to webinars, classroom courses and CTS certification, including CTSD for design and CTSI for installation.

Treasurer Jim Sheach urged delegates to register their staff to get the best out of the agreement, which runs for an initial two years.

"It's up to you and your staff to use it," he said. "It's not just department staff who are members, it's anyone who works for your institution.

"Make use of InfoComm's training resources and contribute to the debate over what kind of courses you would like at what time of year."

Speaking to SCHOMS delegates by video link from Las Vegas - where InfoComm was staging its own 2014 conference and trade show - InfoComm director and CEO David Labuskes said: "Online training provides flexibility but we will do as much in-person training as you can support.

"We're dedicated to providing value to AV professionals."

SCHOMS signed up to the membership scheme on 1 January 2014 – with an option to extend it into a third year at similar discounted rate.

"We wanted to do it over a significant period of time so people could develop and use the facilities," Jim Sheach said.

"This time next year, we need to review effectiveness, because it is a significant financial investment."

The agreement means InfoComm International gains 75 new members from SCHOMS.

Focus on technology manager role

PLANS are being drawn up by InfoComm to analyse and evaluate the role of the technology manager.

David Labuskes told SCHOMS14 delegates that the job would be put under the spotlight using the Develop A Curriculum (DACUM) system – an innovative approach to occupational analysis that provides a picture of what the manager does in terms of duties, tasks, knowledge and skills.

"A focus group will look at what needs to be taught in order for people to become a technology manager – such what is the job, what is a typical day, what types of skills and abilities are required, what else do potential managers need to bring, what attitudes they have to working with other people and what they see as future trends.

"It's a structured process ending with a curriculum aimed at providing the knowledge and capabilities to be a technology manager."

Outlining industry trends uncovered by a recent Marketing Definition and Strategy survey, David said that AV was no longer considered 'nice to have', it was becoming 'need to have'.

InfoComm director and CEO David Labuskes spoke to the conference by video link from Las Vegas, where the association was staging the InfoComm 2014 trade show.

He said the key words to have come out of the survey were quality standards, certification and training.

Outside of Scandinavia, the UK was one of the fastest-growing markets and its continued growth over the next two years would slightly outpace the European market.

He said the growth was driven by new technologies such as tablets, IP-based conferencing, wireless and interactive flat panel displays.

Spending had begun to increase within the UK pro-AV market, "AV is everywhere in the UK," he said.

The top three items for UK spending were displays, projectors and 'AV acquisition and delivery'. By 2016, AV acquisition would become the top spending item.

Other notable trends included:

● increased focus on energy usage and related cost savings

● investment in interactive technology

● high demand for live events to bring these to the end customer in his or her location, such as conferences at home.

Site promotes best of learning space design

Former CCUMC president Mark McCallister introduced delegates to the potential of The Flexible Learning Environments eXchange (FLEXspace) – a growing online database of high resolution images and related information about learning spaces across the world. Mark is Associate Director of the Office of Academic Technology at the University of Florida.

A NEW online resource is helping technology professionals gain inspiration from worldwide examples of innovative learning space design.

Mark McCallister told delegates FLEXspace is being developed to give professionals the opportunity to share and monitor best practices, to see new facilities as they came online and to give Estates and Facilities departments a better idea of proposals before work started on new buildings.

He explained that, after logging in to open an account, users can search pages of images, create their own groups of favourites and share links with colleagues.

"It's a free, searchable service open to anyone in HE with images shown on screen but searching through the metadata is the most useful feature.

"There was Flickr and a number of other online groups before FLEXspace but none had the controlled taxonomy of description of learning spaces."

Information on FLEXspace is provided in a range of categories –

including active learning classrooms, conference rooms, lecture theatres and individual institutions.

Mark said the project also had potential synergies with initiatives such as the Learning Space Rating System and Learning Space Toolkits.

The database currently sits on servers provided by the not-for-profit art organization Artstor.

"None of us wanted to be in the business of owning or managing the site so we looked at alternatives Artstor had a shared shelf product – a way for individual institutions to put their database on the server."

There were negotiations to adopt flexspace.org as the site but for the time being, it could be found at http://suny.edu/flexspace

The idea grew out of The State University of New York and attracted sponsors such as CCUMC, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) and the Educause Learning Initiative (ELI).

"If any SCHOMS person would like to participate in the project, we would be very interested in talking to you," he said.

MARK also guided delegates through how to use the Learning Space Rating System – a scoring system that helps to indicate how well a classroom's design serves the goal of active learning.

He explained that the system allowed institutions to benchmark their environments against best practices. Learning spaces were rated in six categories – integration with campus context; planning and design process; support and operations; environmental quality; information about layouts and furnishings; and technology and tools – and scoresheets were downloadable at:
www.educause.edu/eli/initiatives/learning-space-rating-system

Pros and cons of running a MOOC

KNOW your technology – that was one of the key messages from Dr Sandra Miller, President of CCUMC, as she shared her experiences of running a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).

Sandra said it was not a case of simply moving material she had already created to her MOOC on online pedagogy.

"I had to learn to go from Blackboard to Canvas, I had to re-do everything, realign the syllabus and think about copyrighted content," she said.

Canvas did not offer conferencing, so she chose Blackboard Collaborate for synchronous sessions. She also had to look at other technology within the MOOC platform when she discovered her plan to share documents using Google Docs restricted her to 50 people – 459 people enrolled.

In asking all her students to create an online syllabus, Sandra set up 10 discussion forms – "a major way to know whether the student is understanding it or not.

"I was reading every post. I was not responding to it all, it's not good practice to step in all the time. At the end of each day, I'd go in and pick up on the best stuff.

"You can't do online what you can do with face-to-face students. It's a different paradigm."

Other implications included the need to maintain commitment among the learning community – about 40 people completed her MOOC – and issues surrounding credentials and accreditation.

"MOOCs are here to stay," said Sandra. "They're very good for lifelong learners and first-time students but institutions must ask themselves what they want to accomplish with them."

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Turning to students for technology support

A major shift in learning strategy exposed a real challenge at Curtin University in Australia – how to close an increasing gap between technology environments and academics' ability to use them. Service Desk Standards Manager Ian Case explained how the university turned to its own students to provide training support.

CLASSROOM changes at Curtin University looked at reducing the traditional lecturer style with a model of traditional classes, flipped classrooms, technology enriched environments and distributed learning.

It included introducing Smart Board technology, multi-screen projection, mobile computers and video conferencing and refurbishing flat floor spaces with flexible furniture.

Ian Case pinpointed the drawbacks. "The new systems designs broke previous templates, were not production-ready because of compressed timeframe and had teething problems that extended into the teaching semester.

"It was a challenge for us and for the academics trying to use it. A large percentage of sessional staff was turning up with very little knowledge of the rooms."

The central service desk worked well but was not always getting the information to address support calls.

"The university's Centre for Teaching and Learning was very worried about how academics would perceive the change and was keen on 'over servicing' the component," said Ian. "It wanted someone to be with the academics at the start of every lecture, a big ask with 206 classrooms."

Ian's team found the answer with an 'Earn As You Learn' scheme for second and third year students.

Students were selected on how good they were at communicating, how well they knew the university and their technology backgrounds.

"We divided the campus into four sections with four students in each section in any four-hour shift period.

"We gave them each a mobile phone as their main communication device and a clipboard with sections and timetabling. They all wore support 'vests', making them easily identifiable for on-the-spot advice and training."

After being given three hours' training, they were asked to turn up 15 minutes before each class to offer help to the academics, explain how everything worked and get feedback. In between classes, they undertook 'venue auditing' – visiting rooms and lecture theatres and checking each had been left in useable condition for following classes.

"We received positive student and academic feedback. It was a very exciting journey to get us over the big change in classrooms, although it was very frenetic."

Ian said that teaching staff felt more at ease because immediate help became available, AV teams could concentrate on their specialist areas of hardware and fitting systems and the students benefited from being able to develop decision-making and leadership skills.

The 'Earn as You Learn' scheme was part of a multi-faceted approach that also included hands-on training, instructional colour coding of equipment and the provision of 'how-to' guides at each venue.

Toni's experiences as East meets West

FORMER SCHOMS Chair and latest international Associate Toni Kelly gave delegates a flavour of her new life at Hong Kong University.

She said Deans and Faculties were very powerful at the 'incredibly devolved' institution, where she is Associate Director, Learning Environments.

Faculty degree ceremonies were held instead of University degree ceremonies and teaching was 'very traditional' with lectures in serried ranks.

The university has 10 Faculties with a total of 15,000 undergraduates – 80% intake from Hong Kong, 10% mainland students and 10% international students drawn from 35 countries.

Students were taking to new forms of learning after formalised elearning was introduced across all of Hong Kong's eight universities in 2011.

"Online courses are new. We have MOOCs, SPOC (Simple Private Online Course), Moodle and Panopto. The professionals need training and the system needs standardising but everyone has a great 'can do' attitude."

Toni said that after the 'culture shock' of arriving and being told to 'get on with it' as a one-woman team, she now had a team of between 20 and 30 professionals.

Eight lecture theatres were being refurbished this summer with the Estates Department responsible for all aspects.

"This year I attended all the design meetings and the architect was astonished to see end-users involved," she said.

Toni led the AV specification and design process and selected furniture and colour schemes.

She has also created own version of AV guidelines.

Innovation award for 3G streaming service

Rob Hyde gave delegates an insight into his award-winning introduction of a new streaming service based on consumer 3G technology for graduation ceremonies and other events at The University of Bath.

ON his first day at the University of Bath – where graduation ceremonies are moved to Bath Abbey because campus halls are too small – AV service manager Rob Hyde was asked: "How can we include the university community in the ceremony?"

Within one year, he was picking up the Amber Miro Memorial Award for Innovation from the Universities & Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) for his response – believed to be the first example of mobile technology being used to stream higher education events using the public 3G network.

"A quarter of students are international students so the institution wanted a mechanism to cover it live," Rob told delegates. "Ceremonies were previously filmed, processed overnight and uploaded onto the website server the next day."

However, the project presented daunting challenges.

The Abbey sits in the centre of Bath, a World Heritage Site of exclusively listed buildings and two miles from campus. Not only that. "It's uphill with no line of sight," said Rob.

"There are a lot of restricted views within the Abbey and large screens relayed the camera feed. All rigging is contracted out and we could only work on one side of the Abbey, squashed underneath the organ into a 6ft box for all mixing, lighting and sound. It's all we could use and it's not easy to wire, the walls more than 5ft thick."

The Audio Visual team, part of the University's Computing Services department, considered five options.

Using a satellite truck or fitting a new network link were both hampered by world heritage regulations requiring nine months' notice for permission to adapt the buildings. A microwave link was affected by the lack of a line of sight and using the existing network wasn't really an option.

"We thought we might be able to use the mobile phone network because all masts in Bath had just been upgraded to 3G," said Rob.

The team opted for a £3,000 Terradeck cube and bond which encoded video signal from the event and split it over six 3G transmitters from different network operators. These were then recombined and decoded back at the University before entering the University's streaming infrastructure.

"We tested it on a peak day of the tourist season beforehand and on the day, we did 10 hours' worth of streaming using 12 gigs of data in good quality SD. We lost the odd mobile network but that was why we covered ourselves with different operators

"We managed to deliver it on time and under budget."

The system is now part of the team's core service plan and has been used for the installation ceremony for a new Chancellor, summer and winter degree ceremonies and the opening of a new teaching building.

"We're also negotiating with the students' union to cover sports matches, possibly also arts and alumni events," said Rob.

How spaces help active learning

OUTCOMES of research into collaborative learning spaces was shared by James Rutherford, learning spaces specialist at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts.

James gained a Masters in Advanced Educational Practice at the Institute of Education, University of London, for his focus on the impact of new spaces, furniture arrangements and technology on collaborative and active learning.

He evaluated spaces – and carried out focus groups with students and staff – at both Loughborough University and the University of Derby.

James said some outcomes seemed very simple – the comfort of seats, the temperature of the room and whether students could see a screen or hear the speaker – but had a great impact on learning.

"Rooms don't have to be expensively fitted out," he said. The most valuable technical resources included a writing surface, bigger screens, differently shaped tables and shared wireless technology.

Students felt the learning experience in collaborative spaces helped them to be relaxed and creative and they preferred to be actively working in groups.

"If students remembered a room, they could remember what went on in the room and they said they took confidence from these rooms into other classes."

Space to move around was important – and how furniture was left between classes was 'a real configuration issue.'

Academics said they acted more as facilitators in collaborative spaces and it helped them develop their own practises.

'Powerful' space changes students' learning experience

Matt Newcombe

DELEGATES experienced computer-supported collaborative learning for themselves with an interactive workshop in one of the new exploration labs within the University of Exeter's £48m Forum development.

They were split up into teams and set a mapping task using the 10 'touch tables' – large horizontal computers about the size of a pool table with multi-touch interfaces that can support many different interactions at the same time.

Each table is height adjustable and colour coded, with the colour relating to a wall monitor which mirrors each table's display. Through these monitors, different groups can share what they're working on with other groups in the room in real time.

Matt Newcombe, Head of E-Learning Development, Educational Quality and Enhancement (EQE), described the exploration lab as a powerful space that changed the way students were taught.

"Students normally sit and follow instructions but in the lab they are brought around the tables in group work exercises. They understand how to work as a team, how to work on the tables and how to use technology."

He said that the labs had been developed over a two-and-a-half year period in which the tables did not exist. The steering group had looked at best practices around the world before introducing the tables, which were 'completely updateable'.

"The return on our investment is the student experience and we hope to get to the point of distributing the tables to colleges and other student spaces."

Dr Damian Mansell, Lecturer in Physical Geography, College of Life & Environmental Sciences, guided delegates through the exercises with the help of EQE education technologist Rob Coffey.

Partnership can make big difference

Students played an influential part in the development of the Forum at the University of Exeter. Alex Louch of the Students' Guild gave an insight into how and why they are heavily involved in decisions across the board.

CREATING learning spaces is a partnership between students and the learning community, according to Alex Louch. "If we are on the same page as senior staff, it can make a big difference.

"When the Forum at Exeter was being created, I led the programme from the student viewpoint. I sat with budget holders and planners and asked the tough questions."

Alex said students were looking for value for their £9k fees. "Learning spaces must account for that statement. We will want to know why a wall is not painted, why technology doesn't work, where is my library.

"It's an experience we share with whole academic community. It's only going to increase in the coming years and it's becoming easier to complain."

Alex said it was 'absolutely critical' to use Twitter and Facebook in engaging students in developments.

"We achieved a wide reach by using Twitter, even live tweeting proposed designs during planning meetings to gauge responses, but the best way is to speak to students face-to-face.

"The Guild spoke to hundreds of students about the learning space. We realised students really care about designs and the look and feel of where they're going to spend a lot of time. Student media followed up with new space story and it all created quite a buzz.

"When students give feedback about learning spaces, it is beneficial in Exeter and it could be elsewhere as well."

But he added that, despite the exploration lab being a 'fantastic room' and the big money that can be spent, "sometimes a lot of small things matter, like every learning space needs a plug socket. This has happened with the clout we have got and if you solve issues for students, they think 'my institution cares about me.'"

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Engaging way to deliver learning spaces

Suitable learning spaces projects cannot be delivered if it's not known what the customer wants or how to improve student and user experience. That was the view of Elaine Cordy, Head of a new Learning Spaces team set up last year by the University of Exeter in response to a demand for consolidated services.

AS student numbers rose at the University of Exeter, so did staff and student dissatisfaction with the use of spaces.

The different teams involved in the service were brought together under Elaine Cordy – who took responsibility herself for timetabling, room booking and AV development, maintenance and support – and a 'project toolkit' of stakeholder engagement was put in place.

Since then, Exeter has moved up from 60th to 18th in terms of learning resources in the National Student Survey.

"There is greater innovation as we have collaborative lecture theatres and plectrum tables, fewer OHPs and more technology in other teaching rooms," Elaine told delegates.

"Engaging the facilities team has meant a reduction in the degradation of space and better fault reporting.

"We have also achieved fewer complaints from staff because the rooms are appropriate to their needs."

The programme of engagement sees Elaine attend all meetings of the Student Staff Liaison Committee and seek the views on potential projects from students, subject chairs, relevant teaching staff and professional services staff – "a broad range including learning spaces, facilities management, the education enhancement team and even the events team who may have to sell the space."

It is all done with the aim of 'deliverable must-haves' in a time when money is in short supply, she said. "We also want to innovate and the best way is to include staff in this process – for instance, getting rid of OHPs and chalk boards. If staff are involved, they are more likely to make it work.

"If the student community feels part of a project, it builds trust that the changes will be of benefit to them."

Learning Spaces starts stakeholder engagement with two annual surveys – a learning spaces survey, which picks up on elements such as furniture, design, ventilation, lighting, access and service level agreements; and an AV survey which looks at AV usage, trends and staff complaints.

"From this general overview, we do further stakeholder engagement on each single project including colour schemes, comfort and access."

Elaine guided delegates through the typical stages of consultation for a project. A 12-month cycle began with approval being sought through the Learning Spaces management group and three different budget scrutiny groups.

Three stakeholder meetings were then held before the final plans were communicated and a 'sense check' to confirm affordability.

On starting the project, updates were communicated, orientation events held to preview the spaces and, finally, a post-occupancy review took place.

Representatives from UK and international institutions discuss the issues raised at coffee time (above and below)

Organiser Jill Snelling (right) out and about during the exhibition.

Time out. . . massages proved popular in the Great Hall.

Suppliers and buyers discuss procurement

SCHOMS14 played host to the UK's largest suppliers exhibition with a single HE focus.

Twenty-five companies set up exhibition stands in the Great Hall, giving delegates the chance to have concentrated discussions about requirements.

Delegates and suppliers also came together for a 'Question Time' discussion on procurement with panel members representing SCHOMS, suppliers and university purchasing consortia.

Mike Baptista and Jim Sheach of SCHOMS were joined by Mark Hayter, Contracts Manager at North Eastern Universities Purchasing Consortium; Roland Dreesden, Managing Director of Reflex Ltd and Sheila Egan, Business Development Manager at Snelling Business Systems Ltd.

Together they discussed questions collected from delegates covering such issues as the workings of frameworks, single supplier contracts and whether universities could influence consortia.

Question Time host Simon Birkett told delegates that the session built on talking points that came out of the World Cafe at last year's conference.

"Procurement emerged as a major theme and is very important to SCHOMS," he said.

"It is a challenge for us all. It was good to hear a national perspective from Mark. Working in collaboration is valuable."

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Full coverage of the debate is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdrkOw7mH0k
Subscribe to the YouTube Schoms Info channel and look back at many of the other presentations as well.