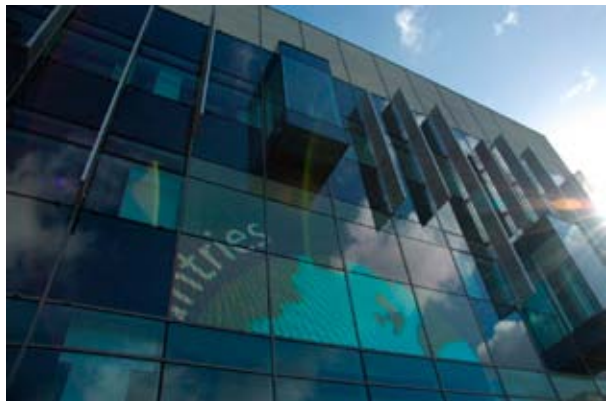

Alan Gilbert Learning Commons University of Manchester

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The Alan Gilbert Learning Commons, which opened in October 2012, is already proving a really popular space with University of Manchester students and staff. Over 60,000 people entered the building in the first month of opening, proving its instant popularity at the university. The building has more than 1000 flexible study spaces and an inspiring range of equipment and furnishings designed for individual and group study. Students have access to 400 pcs, laptop-charging lockers, thirty bookable group study rooms, a Skype area and media screens for presentation and group work. The wifi available throughout the building extends to the space outside and to the ground-floor café, which is open to the public.

All the signage in the Learning Commons is digital and includes interactive screens featuring an interactive campus map, computer- and group-room availability, background about the Learning Commons, live news and social media. There is an external screen on the building; this overlooks a pleasant open space that is used for streaming graduation ceremonies and for conveying messages to the students. Both can be seen in action at <http://mnetwork.com/case-studies/uom-screens/>





Feedback from early tours was really positive, with many comments about the space and the design, and an eagerness on the part of students to spend time studying there. Numerous responses displayed a pride in the building and recognition of the university's investment in the student experience. Comments – many through social media – continue to be favourable, although some suggestions for improvements are beginning to emerge. Some changes have already been made in response, including exchanging a number of low coffee tables for higher work tables, reducing lift announcement noise and introducing a 'text me' scheme.



The building also celebrates the University of Manchester's rich heritage of achievement and innovation. To provide inspiration for everybody studying and working in the Learning Commons, students have created designs reflective of the Manchester experience; these are printed onto the walls, doors and glass panelling of the learning spaces for everyone to see. There are 25 chairs showing the names and achievements of the university's 25 Nobel prize-winners. Names of distinguished alumni are etched into tiles in the foyer of the building. There are also inspirational quotations carved into the oak-panelled walls in the café area from people associated with the university.



Because of its central location, the Learning Commons is a natural hub for students and staff. An academic, transferable and employability skills training programme is now being developed; it is designed to support students during their time at the university and allow them to transfer the skills they learn at Manchester into the context of the wider working world. There will be opportunities for students who are struggling with a skill and for those who are interested in increasing their expertise; there will also be sessions to help students to identify the skills they already possess.

A broad programme of skills provision is being developed by the Learning Commons in collaboration with other partners at the university; this allows students and staff to find workshops and training easily when they need them, and to become active participants in suggesting new developments. The training will bridge the divide between formal and informal learning and help deliver the appropriate tools at the correct time, encouraging students to become effective and independent learners and self-advocates, with a greater understanding of both what is expected and what is possible.

By partnering with other parts of the university, including the award-winning careers service,

the Learning Commons helps with student awareness and uptake of all the provision available across the university and encourages students and staff to innovate and use the technological and other resources available at the Learning Commons. Participants in the training will come from all parts of the university, and the workshops will encourage interdisciplinary networking and discovery, allowing students and staff to come into contact with best practices and ideas and flexible and innovative delivery formats using content taken from across the university.

Further developments are in the pipeline, including the creation of a space which provides access to technologies that staff can use in curriculum development and innovation and where they can review them in collaboration with students. For anyone interested in visiting the Alan Gilbert Learning Commons scheduled tour dates will be available shortly; they can be booked at <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/>. Further images of the building can be seen at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jrul/sets/72157627551201795/>