

University of Plymouth University Partnerships Programme

Home from Home

A research and design collaboration

Introduction

The Spatial and Interior Designer course at the University of Plymouth is set up to give students the opportunity to explore and develop both their creative practice and professional skills with the aim of equipping them to successfully develop their design career.

The collaboration between the University of Plymouth and University Partnerships Programme, (UPP) now in its fifth year, explores the student experience through a series of live design projects.

Live projects, where students work with real clients and real buildings, provide an invaluable learning experience. The students benefit from the expertise that professionals working within the student accommodation sector can share and the real-life context unlocks a greater understanding of the issues and design opportunities.

This collaboration has been developed by Jonathan Forster, Award Leader of the Spatial and Interior Designer course and David Cartwright-Lomax and Duncan Cressell of UPP.

The project has been supported throughout by Willmore Iles Architects who specialise in the design of student living spaces. Director Paula Willmore and Associate Simon Baker attended briefings and presentations giving valuable insight and feedback.

Willmore Iles set up studio visits and work placements for the participating students.



What do students want from their accommodation?

If students designed their own living space from scratch, what would it look like?

And what can we learn from their ideas?

To understand and develop their projects, the students used mainly qualitative research methods. They interviewed friends and colleagues, carried out analyses of the use of existing spaces, talked to people at UPP who operated the accommodation and interpreted the results through the lens of their own expectations and experience. Students also carried out research into the current state of university accommodation across the UK.

During the development of their ideas, the team from Willmore Iles Architects and UPP held a series of workshops with the students to discuss proposals and input external advice.

Tackling the big issues. Clear themes for student accommodation design

Right from the start of the projects it became clear that students wanted to tackle the big issues around living and learning at university. They were keen to consider how their designs could be developed to help facilitate a positive university experience. The final projects they produced, whilst varied in their detail, provided clear recurrent themes for designers of student accommodation schemes. Each year the focus was on different aspects of the student experience.

Our first two projects in 2015 and 2016 had an open brief. Students developed their own proposals with themes ranging from the re-design of the student bedroom and the importance of plug sockets to rooftop living and the dilemma of where to have a cigarette.

In 2017 the project was focussed on a real site on Campus with a brief to reimagine communal living combined with the challenge of refurbishing existing space. In 2018 the focus shifted to recreation with a brief to explore socialising, eating and studying together.



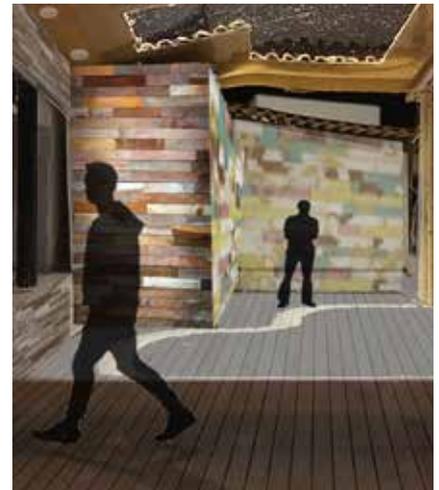
Rooftop garden space from the 2015 cohort

Throughout the projects clear themes and issues emerged;

- Establishing an Identity
- Making friends
- The balance between private and social spaces
- Wellbeing

Moving to university is an important stage in the development of a young persons identity and self confidence. Students recognise the importance of social interaction and are acutely conscious of both the opportunities and the barriers to making friends.

Student designs for communal spaces tackled the issue head on with spaces designed to encourage students to feel part of something bigger and to make the effort to socialise.



“I had the opportunity to develop skills and ideas that I had never really exercised before.”



Spaces to work and socialise from the 2016 cohort

“I found the experience really useful. It was good having a site and real client to talk to”



Social spaces utilising the Gillwell Hall space from the 2017 cohort



THE PLACE TO BE

**RELAX
REFRESH
EXPRESS**



Projects exploring identity and place from the 2018 cohort

Impact

This collaboration has provided the students with a unique opportunity to learn and gain experience of the real world. The students have presented their ideas to the UPP board in London, contributing to the debate on the future of student accommodation directly with those shaping it.

The experience has developed a greater understanding of the potential of student collaborations with industry. The insights that the student perspective have brings new ideas to the problems and issues of student life. These ideas and the themes that evolve from their research will resonate for all involved in the provision and use of student accommodation.

The student insight provides a refreshing perspective that can influence and inform the next generation of student spaces in a way that established design teams and accommodation providers find hard to emulate.



