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SCOTTISH  
FUTURES  
TRUST

# Shared Learning Event

*Connecting Learning  
Environments with  
Learner Experiences -  
Lessons Learnt*

## Summary Report

26th June 2023

# Introduction

## Attendees

Aberdeenshire Council  
Aberdeen City Council  
Angus Council  
Architecture & Design Scotland  
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar  
Dumfries and Galloway Council  
Dundee City Council  
East Ayrshire Council  
East Dunbartonshire Council  
East Lothian Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Falkirk Council  
Fife Council  
Glasgow City Council  
Inverclyde Council  
Midlothian Council  
Moray Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
Orkney Islands Council  
Perth & Kinross Council  
Renfrewshire Council  
Scottish Borders Council  
Scottish Futures Trust  
Shetland Islands Council  
South Lanarkshire Council  
Stirling Council  
West Dunbartonshire Council  
West Lothian Council

## Presenters

Ollie Bray  
Gordon Laidlaw  
Duncan Myers  
Lynn Taylor  
Claire Reid  
Lesley Munro  
Alan Garland

Education Scotland  
Dundee City Council  
Dundee City Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
Scottish Borders Council  
Stallan-Brand

## Context

This Shared Learning Event was the first of 2023, and as with previous events, was designed to promote discussion and sharing of best practice.

The theme for this event was Lessons Learnt in the context of Learning Environments, and it was about getting back to basics in some respects.

“There are so many issues that we’re all wrestling with: we’ve had huge amounts of disruption due to Covid; we’ve had open windows; we’ve had ventilation issues; the Net Zero agenda, which is obviously very important but it can drive us down a very particular route; the cost of buildings themselves – in terms of both getting them constructed but also in keeping them in good condition, the maintenance, the operation; all of these things are incredibly important and take up a lot of peoples headspace but what we thought would be useful, and what had been fed back to us, was that we really mustn’t forget that this is about learner experiences and that’s what matters. It’s the learners and the teachers who are helping them – the environments that are created are really just a backdrop to those learner experiences. Each of the contributors today is about them looking back to look forwards in a more informed way”  
Stephen Long

As with previous events, it was hosted and facilitated by Scottish Futures Trust’s (SFT) Learning Estate Infrastructure Team, alongside Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS). The event was open to all Local Authorities across Scotland to provide an open forum to discuss initiatives and share ideas, best practice and challenges.

## Event

The event was held online on Monday 26th June 2023 and brought together 75 delegates from Local Authorities across Scotland.

It included presentations from:

- Education Scotland
- Dundee City Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Scottish Borders Council with Stallan-Brand

There was also a discussion slot where delegates were invited to bring forward any comments or questions they had.

# Setting the scene for Learning Environments

**Ollie Bray**

Education Scotland

Ollie Bray is Strategic Director at Education Scotland with strategic responsibility for work around the curriculum, digital learning and teaching, and also professional leadership.

We are currently going into a period of Education Reform, and this has come about due to an external commission from the OECD which was published in June 2021. The OECD made 12 recommendations for Scottish Education which are in the process of being actioned.

There are 3 reports that have just been released which Ollie referred to as the 'Big 3 for Scottish Education' and will start to form the recommendations for this significant period of reform. These are:

- **National Discussion (on Education)** to define the purpose and vision of Scottish Education. Thinking about education over the next 20-30 years
- **Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape**
- **Independent Review of Assessment and Qualifications**

Ollie commented that one of the challenges faced when working in policy is that we sometimes only look at the most recent document produced rather than some of the good work that went before that as well, and made particular reference to the following important policy documents:

- **Angela Morgan's review of ASN**
- **The Promise**
- **The UNCRC**

Scottish Government have committed to looking at the totality of all these reports and independent recommendations before developing the action plan for what comes next, which is likely to result in the most significant period of education reform than we've ever

had before because it's about changes to the whole delivery landscape as well as to the curriculum.

There are important messages coming through these reports that we can take into account when we think about school design and learning space design.

## National Discussion

Learning space design wasn't a common theme that came through strongly from the National Discussion. This could be interpreted in two ways, one being that perhaps teachers and young people weren't asked questions about this specifically and therefore they didn't have an opportunity to comment on it. Or a more positive view could be that the majority of our school estate is ok.

There were a number of comments about learning experiences needing to be accessible and throughout the report the importance of 'safe spaces' for children and young people was clear. In addition, having facilities that are 'fit for purpose' was also noted, and Ollie suggested that the big question for those involved in Learning Space design is "what do we actually mean in terms of fit for purpose?" adding that we need to make sure buildings are complementing the curriculum and learning and teaching assessment.

The National Discussion responses concerning digital futures highlight:

- Investment in digital learning is a critical issue for the education system in Scotland. Without large-scale investment, over time, learners in Scotland will find themselves disadvantaged and disenfranchised, in a future world of work.
- Digital learning must be at the core of Scottish education so that all learners in Scotland have choice, opportunity, and security in their lives, both now and in the future.



## The Big 3



**Purpose & Vision**  
[Harris and Campbell]



**Skills**  
[Withers]



**Assessment & Qualifications**  
[Hayward]

*“how do learning spaces enable all young people to be successful, responsible, confident and effective or how do the spaces we design sometimes put barriers on children and young people rather than encouraging them to thrive in these environments as well” Ollie Bray*

# An ongoing challenge...

## Curriculum Areas

- Expressive arts.
- Health and wellbeing.
- Languages (including English, Gaidhlig, Gaelic learners and modern languages)
- Mathematics.
- Religious and moral education.
- Sciences.
- Social studies.
- Technologies.

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## Where the jobs are in Scotland...

- Food & Drink (including agriculture & fisheries)
- Creative Industries (including digital)
- Sustainable Tourism.
- Energy (including renewables)
- Financial & Business Services.
- Life Sciences.
- [+ local employability options]

If we're making the assumption that increasingly young people will learn in a structured online way, particularly in the senior phase – a blend of face to face and digital skills – Ollie posed the question “how do we design our spaces to support this?”, adding that this isn't something we're great at achieving in school environments, but there is interesting practice going on throughout Scotland and lessons we can learn from further and higher education for blended learning environments – movable furniture, good sound system, microphones all the way around the room, movable teachers desk, dual screen etc.

## Skills Delivery Landscape

This is about the importance of future skills and Ollie suggested an interesting question for us to think about, when thinking about learning space design is:

*“how do the places and spaces that we build help us develop these future skills? or do the places and spaces we build act as a barrier to things like curiosity, collaboration, initiative?”*

Additionally, the other thing we need to think about is how do we provide more 'multipurpose by design', so how are we making sure we are making use of all spaces within our local community to encourage skills development in a progressive way from 3 to 18 and beyond.

This report also highlighted the conflict between academic and vocational qualifications and highlighted a call for action to find integration of academic and vocational work within schools.

*“There are challenges in terms of the curriculum, but there are also other challenges in terms of how do we design spaces in schools which can encourage young people to enter into some of these growth industries?”*

## Independent Review of Assessment & Qualifications

One of the interesting things being proposed is the 'Scottish Diploma of Achievement' which is made up of 3 components:

- 'Programmes of Learning' - Core subject studies with an emphasis on academic and vocational qualifications
- Opportunities to study a 'Personal Pathway' to get formal recognition for things they do which aren't subject areas both inside and outside of school; being a young carer, volunteering, being part of the Scouts, Guides, Sea Cadets etc.
- 'Project Learning' – Project based learning or interdisciplinary learning being formally assessed.

It is important when we design our learning spaces that these are set up for interdisciplinary learning or project based learning to thrive rather than designing spaces which can be a barrier to all of these things. Ollie noted that we also need to consider the pedagogy which is associated with that space to make sure that teachers and other key adults in schools have got the pedagogical practice to go with the space, to make sure they are both able to teach the disciplines and also encourage young people to learn in an interdisciplinary way.

*“I believe good learning design matters. I think we need to be taking a forward thinking look and making sure that we are trying to align learning space design with the curriculum and our aspirations for the curriculum. I think it's really important we are designing spaces that support the purpose of Scottish education but also the individual values of the school and the local community as well. I also think we should be using space as much as possible to try and influence behaviour, to encourage positive learning environments as well”*





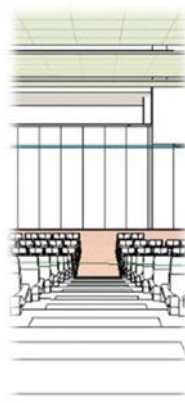
# Case Study 01

## East End Community Campus

### Lessons learned



Hellerup



Auditorium



Balustrade Design



ASN / Inclusion



Dundee City Council

### Hellerup

Proposed for EECC



Dundee City Council

Gordon Laidlaw & Duncan Myers

Dundee City Council

Dundee City Council's (DCC) East End Community Campus will be located on the former site of St Saviours High School in Dundee and sits equidistant in a site related to two schools – Braeview Academy and Craigie High School. Both of these schools are almost at end-of-life condition and suitability. Craigie HS is running out of accommodation in terms of ratios of number of young people and square metreage, particularly in relation to accommodating young people with additional support needs. Braeview Academy has a whole series of portacabins due to a large part of the school building being devastated by fire in 2018 to the extent that it was no longer in a position to be repaired. This aligned with DCC's aspirations for LEIP 2 funding and consequently that combined bid for replacing both schools with the East End Community Campus.

The design for the East End Community Campus is informed by learning from the delivery of DCC's recently completed Baldragon Academy (opened 2018), Harris Academy (opened 2016) and North East Campus (opened 2018) particularly with regards to hellerup stairs and flexible learning spaces.

The hellerup stairs installed at Harris Academy and Baldragon Academy were designed in the same style, and the advantages of this design approach included the socialising and informal teaching that they offered, and the fact their location offered a good overspill facility for a relaxed dining experience, particularly for those with packed lunches. However, some negative feedback was received, notably that the comfort levels could be improved, particularly for school shows and staff in-service days, and also the acoustic issues resulting from the fact that these spaces were designed adjacent to some of the teaching spaces.

When designing their North East Campus (opened 2018) DCC decided to split the hellerup to create

'assembly stairs' which was an informal social space which could be used for performances, and they also took the opportunity to put in a small raised stage to give the formality of giving school assemblies which proved to be very successful. This has also helped to inform the design at East End Community Campus, where the proposals are to create an informal hellerup which will be used as social space, with the addition of a flexible stand-alone auditorium.

"We've looked at providing a stand-alone performance space which can be flexible, gives good access at most times during the day to the community while meeting the needs of the school. And we've also tried to provide the relaxed breakout space offered by the hellerup stairs to build on the success of that type of function to meet both the educational and social benefits that come with that"

The flexible stand-alone auditorium can accommodate 450 seats with retractable seating which the school can then use as an exam space and which can also be used by the community for community events.

Learning from previous projects has also extended to balustrade design supporting dysregulated behaviour. The original design of the balustrade had a slope on the top to prevent young people peering over or sitting on the ledge. However, unfortunately some young people when they are heightened in their behaviour managed to pull themselves up on the balustrade and sit on it so DCC were very conscious there was a considerable safety risk associated to this. As a result, DCC reviewed the design and added safety glazing to the upper portion of the balustrade, increasing the overall height to 1500, taking away the opportunity for people to sit on top and pull themselves up onto the balustrade. This retains the openness of the building which was very important to DCC but helped facilitate and support risk management.

# Case Study 02

## Montgomerie Park Primary School

**Lynn Taylor & Claire Reid**

North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire Council's (NAC) Montgomery Park Primary School is a new primary and early years school in a growth area of Irvine on the West Coast, and is a LEIP Phase 2 project. With a budget of £23m, the capacity of the school is 342 + 30 and it is an entirely new school serving a new catchment area.

Because it is a brand new school, NAC didn't have an existing school community to consult with. As a result, NAC created a community 'ask' for participation in the form of a community stakeholder reference group. This consisted of residents from the existing housing developments and parent council representatives of the two schools that serve the catchment area currently. This proved to be really successful, with the stakeholders being very engaged and collaborative.

NAC identified five strategic outcomes that summarise what they are looking to achieve through this particular development:

- Create identity and strengthen cohesion
- Strengthen health and wellbeing
- Nurture resilient growth
- Best use of resources
- Lifelong learning

These measures that NAC have put in place will be validated throughout the lifetime of the project, with NAC balancing their progress against these measures to make sure that they are still on that track and ultimately do something about it if they find they're not.

NAC undertook a piece of work with the architects that they've labelled 'design philosophy'. This involved questioning what they would do in the spaces they were creating and developing a typology so that the users could be creative in their use of spaces when the building is opened.

"the architecture of the delivery of the curriculum is just as, if not more so, important than the build, than the design and build of the space.....the non construction part of the project is just as important to us as what the build is itself"

NAC are keen to incorporate available community space into their developments and for this particular project they have a Country Park on the doorstep of the new provision which will be invaluable in terms of offering pupils of 'choices to explore'.

Previous projects have shown NAC the benefits of hellerup stairs in terms of social interaction and allowing young people to engage with each other and learn, offering 'choices to engage'.

Young people will also be offered 'choices to learn', with the inclusion of bespoke specialist project spaces such as home economic type areas, a STEM and a number of flexible spaces around the building for the school and community use as well.

The facility also includes transition spaces between early years and primary stage of the school which is multi use and can be used by early years as a group, by primary as a group or importantly both as they get to that stage of transition, in order to strengthen 'choices to transition'.

"More and more we're seeing young people with such a wide range of supporting needs and therefore if you design a building or a space with their needs in mind it's suitable for everyone.....it provides a blueprint not just for now but it's about the future use of these spaces and that school we'll certainly take that as a learning point of view and use on other non LEIP projects as well."

### Key Design Considerations

- Quality
- Outdoor learning
- Accessibility
- Inclusive
- Navigation
- Natural light
- Sustainability



### What Lessons Did We Learn?

- Design with supporting needs in mind (seating, lighting, self-regulation, flexibility of space, SLT Locations)
- Anchor for new development
- Communication is key
- The 'Non Construction' Project is as important as the build
- A "new"new-build requires more thought
- Design Philosophy provides a blueprint for the future.....whatever that may look like





# Case Study 03

## Galashiels Academy & Peebles High School

**Lesley Munro & Alan Garland**

Scottish Borders Council & Stallan-Brand

Peebles and Galashiels

### Collegiate Culture

An environment where responsibility and authority is shared equally by colleagues.

Students work everywhere—park benches, soft seating, stairwells, hallways, wide-open areas, noisy environments, quiet confines.

Primary Spaces vs Tertiary Spaces

Central building and core spaces are the primary collaboration, communication and interaction spaces found within collegiate buildings.

Technology is an integral and seamless part of students' work styles.

Work/study and social interactions/technology occur simultaneously.

Lobbies, circulation spaces and corridors are all used to support student work styles. They are not merely corridors between individual workspaces.

Exterior spaces are maximized and utilised for work/study.

Less structured departmental timetable

No bell!



Scottish Borders Council (SBC) school estate strategy is a critical element of their council wide transformation strategy and agenda, and their approach to their education estate is that it sits at the heart of community-led placemaking approaches. When taking learning into Galashiels Academy (GA) and Peebles High School (PHS), they started by looking at prior knowledge, experience and learning from the recently completed Jedburgh Grammar Campus (JGC).

SBC set out with the high-level vision of a space for education that is for everyone at every stage of their life, where talents, abilities and skills of everyone in the community is brought together for the benefit of all. JGC is a 2 to 18 community campus which came on the back of SBC having delivered a new high school in Kelso which was driven from a suite of accommodation schedules.

Design response to vision and the briefing process for JGC became much looser and was based around articulating the experience of the learners and the outcomes that the community would have from the investment that SBC were making.

Stallan Brand commented that SBC have a slightly different approach to what they have experienced with other authorities, and that essentially there is no project brief to start with. Therefore they start with generating a conversation about what outcomes they want to achieve with a project, identifying needs in the community and then making outcomes specific to the place.

Galashiels Academy is a 950 pupil high school incorporating a full leisure swimming pool, building on the community aspect like JGC. Whereas Peebles High School is a 1400 pupil high school, which was damaged by a fire that had a significant impact on the education offering within there.

"Some of the challenges that we didn't anticipate at the design stage for Jedburgh were things like changes in young people's behaviour, the impact of COVID, the ability for young people to all have suitable learning space under a more in focused agenda around neurodiversity and getting that balance of spaces. One lesson we've definitely learned is about making sure there is that balance of spaces, taking account of staff and pupils views."

JGC has demonstrated opportunities to test different ways of teaching. There is the traditional aspect of education or the teaching methodology that the teachers are initially comfortable with, and then there is space to grow into other spaces and Stallan Brand note that this has been a learning process for them and the lessons they've learned from this is being taken into the next phase of projects.

Another lesson learned is that there's real benefit in open (spaces) but there's also benefits in closed as well and finding the right balance between each to create those contexts. For example, they have a more traditional enclosed teaching space but this is supported by an adjacent breakout space for more project based learning.

JGC has also facilitated excellent school community collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, and the teachers talk positively about is the ability to learn from each other.

"We deliver that context for learning by trying to really deliver that variety, how each of the spaces can provide opportunities for the teachings for the teachers and the educationalists to try and evolve and develop different and more invitation to ultimately engage with young people..... It's finding that balance between the way of teaching now and giving them the opportunities for the future."

Peebles and Galashiels

Learning Environment..... Like this.....variety, engaging, collaborative, flexible, challenging



# Further Support

As well as a forum for Local Authorities to join together, the Shared Learning Events are designed to complement support that is available on any aspect of the LEIP, from SFT's Learning Estate Infrastructure Team and wider stakeholders as appropriate. For relevant contacts at SFT and A&DS please see below;

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## Useful Resources

Please click on the below for relevant links;

- **[National Discussion \(on Education\)](#)**
- **[Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#)**
- **[Independent Review of Assessment and Qualifications](#)**
- **[Angela Morgan's review of ASN](#)**
- **[The Promise](#)**
- **[The UNCRC](#)**
- **[twitter.com/olliebray](https://twitter.com/olliebray)**
- **[Shared Learning Toolkit](#)**
- **[SFT Publications](#)**

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