



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Moray House School of  
Education and Sport



Shared  
Learning  
Spaces



Woodmill High School

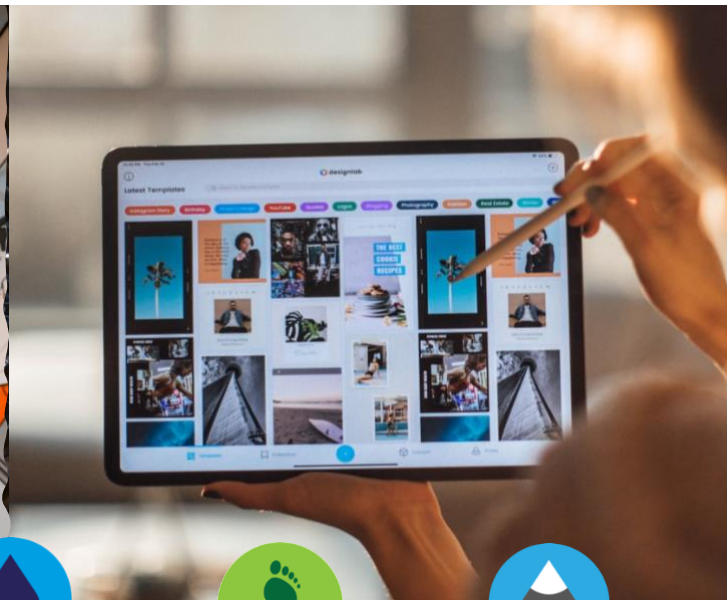
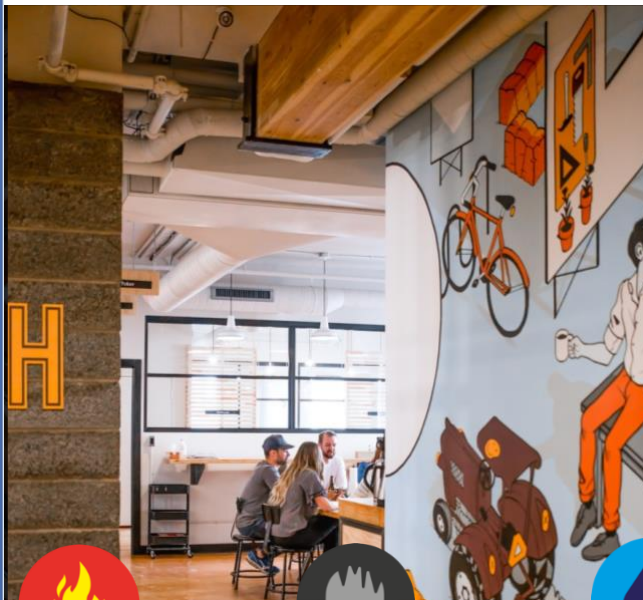


Fife College

# Inspiring Spaces, Inspiring Learning

## Regional Skills Shared Learning Spaces Pilot

### Project Summary



*Exploring the potential of a  
research collaborative  
involving Fife College, St  
Columba's RC High School,  
Woodmill High School, and  
The University of Edinburgh*

August 2021



## Summary

### The aims:

- We wanted to create opportunities for young people at different stages of their educational journey to meet each other, work together and share their experiences. Our goal was to **invest in young people as pioneers**, to understand how they themselves can develop the skills and thinking which can improve the design of learning environments.
- The catalyst for the project was the development of a new £180 million community 'Super Campus,' that will bring together the Fife College Campus and two schools, Woodmill High School and St Columba's RC High School on one site. With a projected finish date for the 2024-25 academic year, our project offered an important opportunity for the learners themselves to influence the design of the new campus.
- Our aim was to give young people a platform to design their own learning spaces that are agile, sustainable, and owned by learners; in other words, **spaces that are integral to their own learning**. We were also looking to provide opportunities for young people to develop a range of skills relevant to the dynamic nature of employment and life skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, such as criticality, resilience, and dealing with uncertainty.
- The project took place in a period of unprecedented change. Of particular significance was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on **how we view space** in educational sites and other settings.
- Volunteers from the two schools took on the role of '**Responsible Activists**' developing designs and considering how best to communicate their ideas to a range of audiences. Volunteers from Fife College acted as '**Agile Consultants**,' forming consultancy teams to support and offer advice and expertise to the Activists. They used a Toolkit, with symbols representing the conceptual, physical and agile elements of learning space design, as a guide and reference.
- The Consultants and Activists worked together in a series of online workshops to refine the designs before a final presentation to stakeholders in June, with representatives present from Fife Council, Scottish Futures Trust, Fife College, and the University of Edinburgh.

### The Outcomes:

- The Responsible Activists from the two schools, supported by the Agile Consultants, presented their final designs; Woodmill High School presented their design of **a communal learning space**, and St Columba's presented their designs for **a communal 'Quad' area and an Art classroom**.
- Common themes across the designs included **agile, flexible, and adaptable learning spaces**, which could support different types of learning, including areas for: collaboration, independent learning, sharing and discussion, experimentation, and celebrating achievements. The designs also prioritised natural light and nature (bringing the outside in and inside out) and acoustics.
- A key consideration for the Activists and Consultants was that the **learning spaces needed to be inclusive and accessible for all learners**. They drew on and championed the wider experiences of learners at their school and College and considered how the designs would enable everyone to feel equal and included.

- The [Learning Space Design Toolkit](#) was found to be very useful in driving the discussion between Consultants and Activists, and for developing awareness of the impact of space on learning.

### The Impact:

- The Activists felt that it was **crucial that young people be consulted in the design of their learning spaces**. They wanted to use the platform they had been given to help create sustainable learning environments that would benefit future generations, even if they might not directly experience the new campus themselves.
- The Activists from Woodmill High, where the school building had burned down in 2019, also had the experience of learning in several different sites as the school was repaired. As well as drawing on this knowledge for the designs, they communicated **the importance of having learning environments in which pupils feel a sense of ownership and belonging**.
- The Agile Consultants from Fife College valued the opportunity to work with young people in the schools and mentors from the University of Edinburgh and felt the project had benefited their educational progress. The Consultants came from a variety of different subject areas, including Design, Education, Care, and Radio. This helped in facilitating **cross-disciplinary learning and broadening skills**, helping them to identify their own strengths and knowledge.
- All the Consultants involved in the project felt they had developed a variety of skills, including teamwork and collaboration, communication, and criticality, and believed that the experience had increased their future job prospects. It was also noted that the challenges associated with holding the project completely online had helped to develop problem-solving skills, build up resilience, and experience alternative ways of collaborating.
- Some suggestions for how the initiative could be improved included exploring different ways for improving online communication and linking up the Responsible Activists and Agile Consultants at an earlier stage to help build up a relationship prior to the workshops.
- The nature of the **teacher and learner 'power dynamic'** was picked up by several Agile Consultants, as they discussed how this might be deconstructed to create a more equal space for collaboration. They also explored how the Activists might have been encouraged to go further beyond the *physical* considerations of learning space design to investigate how social and cognitive spaces impact on learning.
- The project has been nominated for the Fife College Students Association's **Campaign of the Year award**, which recognises initiatives which have made a difference to students at Fife College. The winners of award will be announced in October 2021.





## Future Planning

As any pilot seeks to do, the goal of the SLS Team was to provide some clear pathways for investing in good ideas, making them concrete and applicable across all education establishments. The pilot built on a growing awareness of the impact of space on learning from multiple perspectives but especially focussing on the users – the learners, with their teachers and the students as experienced users – and the transferability of their experiences to develop life skills for employability. Uniting these communities to engage in shared learning involved truly collaborative, cross-sector pioneering work. The project:

- **Opened the door to potential:** facilitating genuine co-constructed learning and co-constructed learning space design with pupil designers and users at the core.
- **Provided evidence** to suggest that the experience which foregrounded pupil voice was instrumental in enabling learners to extend, reflect on and celebrate a dynamic skill set.
- **Created spaces** for the Activists to demonstrate maturity, depth of thinking and resourcefulness highlighting the importance of their active involvement in future planning and realisation of the new campus, reminding all stakeholders of importance of pupil involvement.
- **Worked though uncertainty:** due to COVID conditions, school visits were not possible, and finding alternative ways of working together was essential. However, the role of the teachers in this endeavour in partnership with the SLS Team remained ‘hidden.’ The informal planning meetings were essential.
- **Assured continued active work** with students and pupils so that they continue to be consulted on the development of the new Fife College campus.
- **Encouraged futures-thinking:** the FCSA are planning to recruit to student-led design agencies each year using the experience of the pilot to develop further the concept of ‘hack groups’ with a view to more structured and targeted student creation on all projects.
- **Broadened perspectives:** future projects will benefit from being offered to students who aren’t envisaged as the ‘target’ group. For example, this project would seem to suit the Interior Design students due to the nature of the task, however the wider group drawing from other disciplines created stronger groups providing a rich range of viewpoints.
- **Extended skills:** cross disciplinary groups have helped to broaden student skills and helped to identify their own strengths and knowledge.
- **Activated steps to employability:** the design agencies are now part of the groups who are being consulted on what the new Fife College campus will look like.
- **Pioneered spaces for shared experiences to be disseminated:** the team from University of Edinburgh will be able to deliver similar set-ups at other education institutions to enable this learner to learner led collaboration.
- **Provided a clear pathway for further development,** building on the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

**Cross-sector inclusivity** is crucial to maximising economic and pedagogic sustainability. The pilot highlights cross-sector partnerships where stakeholder voices involve users (pupils, students) as active designers and researchers.

**Use pioneering initiatives**, as exemplified in this project, to activate lessons learned, disseminate inclusive thinking and build cross-sectional capacity.

**Futures thinking** and risk-taking are essential, and drawing on evidence of other initiatives on a global basis is a necessity.

Develop further a **shared language** needed to achieve common goals and workshop briefs for dissemination and skills development.

**Define clear pathways** connecting designers to educators and learners, to communities and planners, so that design and pedagogic goals targeting health and well-being, employability and citizenship are sustainable and dynamic. Joined-up thinking is fundamental but not straight-forward.

This study is small-scale, yet its potential impact is extensive and ready for further development across more communities. Ecological, holistic and integrated ways forward emerge, which actively involve multiple communities and focus on agile, evidence-based learning space design.

There is an urgent need to continue to gather evidence about the **longer-term impact of spaces** for sustainable, fit-for-purpose, quality learning.

**Inclusivity** of context is at the core – this is about communities, their neighbourhoods and their learning spaces, existing or new. It is also about recognising what happens in classrooms and why, acknowledging that ‘space matters’ (Soja, 2009).

See the Full Report for further details on this initiative: <https://bit.ly/3gFU4dQ>



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## Project Team

**Woodmill Responsible Activists:** Andrew Morrison, Evie Welsh, Eilidh Fargie, Ewan Campbell

**St Columba's Responsible Activists:** Aimee Elliot, Kayleigh Devine, Reece Murphy, Kate Dowds, Andreas La Bella, Joe Potter, Euan McQuade

**Fife College Agile Consultants:** Ritchie Falmer, Ryan Awdry, Emma Wallace, Victor Arcas, Jade Stewart, Christina Paterson

**Woodmill Mentor:** Ms Hamilton

**St Columba's Mentor:** Ms Armour

**Fife College Mentors:** Craig Walker, Lauren Rosenbaum

**Shared Learning Spaces Team, University of Edinburgh:** Professor Do Coyle, Jonathan Hancock, Ramone Al Bishawi