Organisation and physical environment at university

Knowledge and inspiration for management and administration

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1.

Introduction

How can university programmes promote learning outcomes, well-being and completion? This is the big question that EVA has set out to answer with a series of studies of students' experiences of attending university as well as a series of three knowledge briefs based on research points and knowledge about the social environments of teaching and the organisation and physical environment of university education.

The work on learning, well-being and increased completion is particularly relevant, as in recent years universities have welcomed increasing numbers of students from diverse backgrounds. When about one in four young people is admitted to university, the students also have several different academic and personal prerequisites for starting a university programme. How, then, can universities ensure a high academic level and get all students involved so that they thrive while studying and ultimately complete their programme?

EVA's study of students' learning outcomes, well-being and completion shows that there are four factors that are particularly closely related to both grades, well-being and drop-out rates at universities. In Danish, we call them the FEST factors, and they cover Academic engagement (F), Self-efficacy (E), Collaboration (S) and the sense of Belonging (T) in the programme. The results suggest that the four FEST factors are of great importance to how students perform.

This highlights the importance of universities prioritising teaching, organisation, the study environment and the physical environment in ways that provide the FEST factors with the best possible conditions. Many educational institutions are already engaged in efforts to strengthen the study environment that support learning outcomes, well-being and completion – including in relation to an increasingly diverse student population. However, experience of these initiatives is rarely systematically examined.

The goal of the three knowledge briefs is to gather and present existing knowledge and research on the ways in which universities and study programmes can enhance students' learning and development, well-being and completion through initiatives related to the study environment and teaching and bring this into discussions within the programmes while highlighting particular considerations and points of attention.

Content of the brief

This brief is about the organisation and planning of university programmes and about the physical environment within which teaching and the study environment unfold. The organisation of programmes is particularly in focus in the event of curriculum changes or the start-up of new programmes, but can also be considered on an ongoing basis. Within the limits of the law, there is room for various ways to organise academic bachelor programmes, and while some aspects of the programme are determined in the curriculum and thus are negotiable only in the event of revision processes, other changes can be accommodated within existing curricula.

Structure of the brief

The brief is divided into two parts. The first part is about the organisation and planning of programmes, and the second part is about the physical environment of the programme. Research pointing to certain forms of organisation rather than others is sparse and therefore, this brief should be seen as a discussion paper for local consideration. As a university, you can work systematically with organisation to support motivation, a sense of belonging, academic engagement etc. In the same way, the university's physical environment, such as rooms, outdoor spaces and hallways, can be used in ways that, to a greater or lesser extent, support the students' sense of belonging and opportunities to learn, collaborate and thrive while studying. The brief contains boxes with questions for reflection that can be used for joint consideration.

The goal of the three knowledge briefs is to gather and present existing knowledge and research on the ways in which universities and study programmes can enhance students' learning and development, well-being and completion through initiatives related to the study environment and teaching.

Basis of the brief

The literature forming the basis of this brief comes from a literature search, which is based on several complementary approaches to ensure a broad and systematic knowledge base. The selection of literature is qualified and supported by recommendations from an expert group that has identified both specific researchers and key publications.

The FEST Factors

EVA's analyses show that four factors are closely associated with academic achievement, well-being, and completion.

The four factors are:

F **Academic Engagement**
Academic engagement concerns students' interest in the academic content, whether they perceive it as relevant and useful, and the extent to which they actively work with the material.

E **Efficacy (self-efficacy)**
Efficacy refers to students' belief in their own abilities and their expectation of succeeding academically.

S **Collaboration**
Collaboration concerns students' experience of the general level of academic collaboration within their programme.

T **Belonging**
Belonging refers to students' experience of feeling that they belong in their programme and that they are part of a broader academic community.

Read more about the FEST factors in:
Hvad fremmer fagligt udbytte, trivsel og gennemførelse på universiteter?
(EVA, 2026)

2.

Organisation and planning

Organisation of the programme



In Denmark, the universities' bachelor programmes are organised within the framework defined by the national qualifications framework for higher education, the Danish University Act (universitetsloven) and the Danish University Programme Order (uddannelsesbekendtgørelsen).

For the individual bachelor programme, the curriculum is the central document that establishes the programme's learning objectives, elements, forms of assessment etc. Therefore, in connection with the development of curricula for new programmes or the revision of existing curricula, university management has the opportunity to look more closely at how the framework set out in the curriculum can support learning, well-being and completion for the students.

Coherence and progression of the programme

In connection with the organisation of the academic elements of the programme, it is a key task to address coherence and progression in the programme.

Coherence in the programme means that the academic elements, i.e. the syllabus and the activities in the different courses and modules, complement each other in a way that creates good conditions for students to achieve the learning objectives of the programme.

Progression in the programme is about the content, composition and sequence of courses and modules being organised in a way that supports the development of the students' understanding, knowledge and competences. Progression means that the complexity and difficulty of the academic content and working methods as well as the criteria for achieving the learning objectives, increase the longer the students are in the programme (Andersen, 2008; Brabrand & Dahl, 2009).

Curriculum – a key document

The University Programme Order designates the curriculum as a central document in which the university lays down the detailed rules for each programme. The University Programme Order pre-scribes a number of requirements for the curriculum.

Hence, the curriculum must, among other things, describe:

- **The academic profile of the programme,** including the purpose, subjects and objectives of learning outcomes.
- **Modules, subject elements and elective subjects in the programme,** including
  - learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and competences
  - duration and composition expressed in ECTS points
  - teaching and working methods
  - chronology and
  - prerequisites for participation (e.g. progression requirements).

The curriculum must also contain information about exam requirements, examination form etc., cf. the Danish Examination Order (eksamensbekendtgørelsen).

SOURCE:
https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2021/2285.

HEAD OF STUDIES:

We now prioritise introducing new medical students to the medical profession from the beginning

When, as a new medical student, you turn up for your first day, you will be introduced to the subject Medical life (Lægeliv) from the autumn of 2024. The objective of this new subject is to create a strong common academic identity from the start, says Head of Studies Torben Lykke.

What have you changed in the first semester of the medical programme?

In short, we have chosen to restructure the subjects in the first semester. Traditionally, the first semester has started off with the subject Introduction to human biology and thus started the entire programme for the new students. But from the autumn of 2024, the new students have instead been introduced to the subject Medical life during the first 14 days of the programme. Here, doctors from different jobs across the country share how they work. In this way, we prioritise introducing the students to the actual medical profession first thing when they start.

Why should students start with a different subject than prescribed by tradition?

Several students found that the subject Introduction to human biology was far from the core academic standards and was an academically difficult and heavy subject. At the same time, the great focus on chemistry in the body meant that the interest in medicine, which gets many students started on the programme, was not met at the beginning of the programme. To get into medicine, you must have chemistry at B level, but in this particular subject, having chemistry at A level is a clear advantage. This gave a great inequality from the start and meant that many students felt that they were not as skilled as their fellow students who had chemistry at A level – and because it was the first subject of the programme, it gave them the impression that they were therefore not skilled enough to study medicine either. Last but not least, our students shared the subject with dental students and students from molecular biomedicine. This further reduced the sense of a common academic identity.

What has the change required of you as a study board?

Well, it is not something you just do. First of all, changes in the curriculum require adjustments in schedules and exam plan. And in the work of the teachers. The study board has worked on a comprehensive revision of the curriculum, including the involvement of teachers and working groups. The collaboration has involved many people, but even though it is slow, I believe that the extensive collaboration ultimately leads to better results, also because we have rooted the change in both teachers and other stakeholders.

What did the new start to the programme mean to the students?

We have created a basis for a stronger academic identity in the year group as well as strengthened the sense of what the programme may lead to in the future and hopefully also drawn a line from the students' expectations to what they actually experience. We have received very good feedback through evaluations among the students. But when you move something, of course, you always have to adjust later. For example, some of the challenges involve some students experiencing a lack of knowledge about the body's chemistry when they reach the second semester. And that two demanding subjects now run simultaneously in the first semester and can create a new time pressure. But we are working on the solutions, and so far it seems that the positive feedback far exceeds the negative.

> We have created a basis for a stronger academic identity in the year group as well as strengthened the sense of what the programme may lead to in the future and hopefully also drawn a line from the students' expectations to what they actually experience.

TORBEN LYKKE



WE ASKED:
Torben Lykke. Head of Study, professor, chief physician, Doctor of Medical Science. Medical Programme, University of Copenhagen.

Introduction to the context of the programme

It is important that the thoughts behind the structure of the programme and the composition of subjects, exam requirements and academic purpose are continuously articulated and made visible to the students so that they can see the meaning of it. A clear connection between the academic elements and the programme as a whole plays an important role in supporting students' academic engagement and motivation (Ulriksen & Gregersen, 2022), but it is not always easy for students to understand the complexity of their own programme and how the individual parts of the programme are related (Ulriksen et al., 2017).

The tradition of introducing academic content to new students varies between programmes and subjects. In some programmes, much of the content in the first years of study consists of ancillary subjects, which only later enable students work to engage with the core content of the programme. If the individual courses and modules are presented to students as separate units, it is up to the individual student to create a connection between the teaching content, the programme and the subject discipline as a whole. This can be a challenge, especially for first-year students. For example, if first-year students in a subject-based programme only meet the basic subjects of the programme as separate modules, without getting an early introduction to the overall subject discipline, it may weaken their engagement and motivation. This is because the teaching content initially does not necessarily reflect their expectations of the programme and the academic field they have applied for (Ulriksen et al., 2017, pp. 430-431; Ulriksen, 2021, p. 66).

Students may experience a major shift in the academic level from upper secondary school to university and from bachelor to master's. At the same time, it can be difficult to transfer previously acquired knowledge and competences to new contexts.

Programme start and transitions

Transitions can be particularly challenging for students, both academically and socially (Donche et al., 2017). For bachelor programmes in particular, the start of the programme and thus the transition from youth education to university is relevant, but similar considerations may apply when transitioning from bachelor to master's, when changing programmes and in situations where students take ancillary subjects in other programmes. Students' motivation and learning outcomes can be supported by organising the programme with a soft learning curve at transitions (Brabrand & Dahl, 2009; Felby & Stoksted, 2024). By “soft learning curve” we mean that the difficulty, complexity and pace of the academic content increases slowly (Andersen, 2008, pp. 12-13), so that the students get a sense of being able to master the new material early on.

Students may experience a major shift in the academic level from upper secondary school to university and from bachelor to master's. At the same time, it can be difficult to transfer previously acquired knowledge and competences to new contexts (Andersen, 2008, p. 13). Therefore, it is a good idea that the learning curve is not too steep at these transitions, and that there is time to work on maintaining the students' competences so that they can translate them into the new context.

The fact that the learning curve must be soft at transitions does not mean that the students must not face challenges, which can also be instructive and motivating for the students. But it is important to ensure that students work with the academic content a level where they can also experience mastering the academic content to strengthen their academic confidence. In addition, the organisational framework must also provide a good basis for the students to meet the learning objectives. For example, if a large share of the students find it difficult to pass one of the courses early in the programme in the first attempt, it may be worth considering how to improve the conditions for students to achieve the learning objectives. This involves considering whether the course should be scheduled later on in the programme, whether the taxonomic level of the course should be lowered, whether the framework of the course should be clearer, or whether the students should have better opportunities to take a competency-developing and academically preparatory ancillary course.

Exam and assessment



The exam is a key element of the programme and serves partly as an evaluation of the students' acquisition of knowledge and competences, and partly as an important factor in the students' motivation and academic engagement in the programme (Bjælde et al., 2017, p. 3). The examination conditions are therefore of great importance for the students' learning and academic development. This applies to both the form and content of the exam and practical matters such as exam timings and the number of exams. Universities have quite a lot of freedom to organise exams in the individual curriculum, including whether exams are individual or group-based, and whether exams are graded or passed/failed.

Overall, the exams must constitute an assessment of whether students achieve the objectives of the programme. This means that across subjects, examinations must cover the programme's overall competence profile, i.e. reflect whether the students have the requisite abilities when they have completed the entire programme.

Assessment and motivation

Exams also have an impact on how students work with the academic material. Students largely design their study strategy based on their image of the assessment format and its requirements. Many students look to the exams when prioritising the academic content and will to a greater extent train competences and skills they experience as relevant to the exams. For example, a written on-site test without preparation time and access to reference materials will signal to students that it is important to practice knowing the material by heart. Thus, the exam format influences teaching. This is referred to as the "backwash effect". The backwash effect can motivate both desired and undesired study strategies (Biggs, 1999). An intended backwash effect may, for example, be that a portfolio exam motivates the students to work with the course content throughout the semester and not just during the exam period. An undesired backwash effect may be if a free written assignment with a syllabus of their own choice motivates the students to read only a selection of the subject's entire syllabus thoroughly or to turn up only to the classes where the chosen syllabus is discussed. Examination and assessment formats thus have an impact on the skills and competences that are promoted in the students (Baartman et al., 2006; Troelsen & Dohn, 2014).

High-stakes and low-stakes exams

Exams may have different meanings for the students, depending on how much is at stake in the specific test. A distinction is made between socalled high-stakes and low-stakes exams. In high-stakes exams, the result has significant consequences for the student's further opportunities, for example because the grade may be decisive for access to later programmes or have significance in a future working life. This typically applies to grading exams, where the performance has direct, individual significance (Bukh et al., 2022). In low-stakes exams, however, the consequences are limited. Examples include mock exams or tests assessed on a pass/fail basis, where the purpose is primarily to support learning and progression rather than assessment.

Prioritisation of academic material

The inclusion of high-stakes and low-stakes exams in programmes has an impact on the students' motivation and academic confidence. This may warrant including as many low-stakes exams as possible early in the programme in order to give students the opportunity to test requirements and work forms without significant consequences.

At the same time, the programme signals to the students what is expected to be prioritised in a semester. This can be done, among other things, through assessment formats and academic weighting. For example, if a semester contains both a passed/failed course and a grading course, or if the courses are assigned different ECTS weights, it may affect the students' sense of which courses

> Due to concerns about AI, we have reintroduced traditional on-site written exams. My course is one of the first. This has meant that all students have attended every class. Since they are only allowed to bring their own notes to the exam, they need to produce solid notes. You can hear students saying to one another, "Shall we prepare notes together?" – and that is truly uplifting. They prepare thoroughly for every session; Students ask questions like, "On page 69 it says xxx, and I don't understand it – can you explain it?" And I respond, "Bring it on!"

LECTURER ON HOW EXAM FORMATS INFLUENCE STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND MOTIVATION

are most important to prioritise. The stakes of the exams and the formal weight of the subject can thus become indicative of how the students prioritise their efforts in the programme.

Exams and generative AI

The use of generative AI has become a key condition in the organisation of examination formats in the programmes. The technology can be incorporated into students' work in ways that affect both their work process and the assessment of their performance. This applies especially to written homework assignments and other assessment formats where the students work without direct supervision, and where AI can change the conditions of the work and thus also the framework for assessing independence and level of competence. This places new demands on both assignment design and assessment criteria. It may be relevant to consider either how the examination format can be arranged with a transparent use of AI as an academic tool, or how the assessment format can otherwise support an independent assessment of the students' competences, for example through on-site or oral tests.



Questions for reflection

- Are the assessment formats designed to motivate students to engage in continuous academic immersion throughout the semester, rather than encouraging strategic prioritisation only in the run-up to exams?
- Are the placement and weighting of high- and low-stakes assessments organised in ways that support students' motivation, academic self-confidence, and progression throughout their programme?
- Are the assessment formats designed to address the use of generative AI explicitly and transparently, while at the same time ensuring an independent and fair assessment of students' competences?

PROFESSOR:

Grade-free assessment may create motivation and allow space for social life

An experiment at CBS shows that students who are not graded in the first year of study focus on learning and make more room for social life. However, ambivalent feelings can arise when grades start to appear at the end of the year, says Annemette Kjærgaard, Professor MSO at CBS.

What is the purpose of your grade-free assessment experiment?

Our experiment at B.Sc/Econ. (Psych.) started with the year group that started in 2018. Since then, the first year of this programme has been grade-free. Other programmes at CBS are grade-free, but only B.Sc/Econ. (Psych.) has an entire first year free of grades. In return, the programme's teachers were given more hours to give feedback focusing on the further learning process, so that the students can still see room for improvement.

Why did you choose to try a grade-free first year?

The motivation for introducing the grade-free year was to prioritise well-being and learning over competition and performance. The background was the increased focus on lack of well-being and performance pressure among young Danish people, which really took off a few years ago, but also a specific desire from the Study Board at B.Sc/Econ. (Psych.) to do something about the study environment, which had become more competitive and less socially

→



WE ASKED:
Annemette Kjærgaard, Professor MSO at the Department of Management, Society and Communication at CBS. She was associate dean for teaching when the experiment with a grade-free year at B. Sc/Econ. (Psych.) was initiated. Since the experiment with a grade-free first year is also part of a research project, students' experiences and grades during and after the experiment have been closely followed in the form of, among other things, qualitative interviews, surveys and analysis of data on grades. Annemette Kjærgaard has researched grade-free assessment together with her two colleagues Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen and Julie Buhl-Wiggers.

oriented. I was associate dean for education at CBS at the time, when I and a number of colleagues decided to examine what we as a university could do to promote well-being and thus create better conditions for learning. We eventually chose to introduce a grade-free first year to give the students the opportunity to get started with the programme focusing on learning and academic interest – not grades.

What have you done specifically to implement and collect experience from the experiment?

Students at Danish universities must be awarded grades for two thirds of their exams, and the study board is free to decide when the grades should be given. This enabled us to make the entire first year grade-free. To gain a more in-depth understanding of what grade-free assessments actually meant for our students, we decided to make part of the experiment a research project. In collaboration with the Study Board at B.Sc/Econ. (Psych.), I and two colleagues planned to follow two bachelor programme year groups and examine their experiences. Students from an earlier year group served as a control group. We have collected both qualitative data through interviews and quantitative data through questionnaires, measuring differences in the students' sense of stress and motivation as well as their approach to learning.

How does the arrangement affect student learning and motivation?

If you compare the grades later in the programme of the students with a grade-free year with those of the control group, you can see that the students who have had a grade-free first year achieve a slightly higher grade average in the third semester, i.e. the semester immediately after their grade-free year. By the time they reach bachelor level, however, their grades have gone down a bit and they are in line with the previous year groups. In the interviews, students say that they become less strategically focused and instead spend their time on things they find exciting, instead of trying to get through the entire syllabus. This is also supported by the quantitative data.

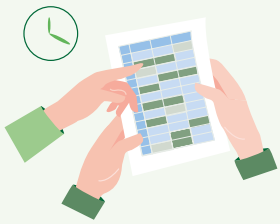
How did the experiment impact student well-being?

Contrary to our expectations, we do not observe a direct effect on the average stress levels as measured on the stress scale in the questionnaire. We attribute this to concerns towards the end of the grade-free year, when grading is about to be reintroduced. However, we do see several positives: Students who participated in the experiment say that grade-free assessment gave them peace of mind for academic socialisation, that is, getting used to being university students. In addition, they reported that they prioritised social life while studying even more than they would have done if they had been graded. And they told us that more social space during the first year may be good for their well-being – even later on.

Is there anything you need to adjust?

Our research shows that many people experience ambivalent emotions because the grade-free assessment is only a break from the grades they have been used to getting and which they know will come back later. Towards the end of the year, concerns about the academic level begin to appear as grading is about to be reintroduced. Students may then doubt whether they have learned what they were supposed to and whether they are good enough. Our next challenge is therefore to ensure that students can handle the resumption of grading after the grade-free year. Also, we face an administrative challenge, because foreign universities need grades to be able to admit our students for exchange. We have solved this for the affected year groups, but it is something we also need to look at in order to make it easier for other programmes to have grade-free first years.

Modules and building blocks of the programme



A university programme is composed of modules or academic building blocks that together form the framework for the students' learning process. These building blocks can be understood as the specific units and structures that shape everyday academic life: How the academic year is divided, how subjects and modules are scheduled and delivered and the rhythms and requirements this brings for the students. The organisation and location of these building blocks influence the programme's academic progression, the students' opportunities for immersion and their sense of coherence within the programme. The structure of the programme can create different rhythms, ranging from concentrated, intensive periods of study to more parallel and distributed learning processes. It can also support different forms of participation in teaching and student life, depending on how teaching methods, scheduled activities and examination periods are aligned with the module structure.

Structure and rhythm of the academic year

The periodic structure of the programme is important for students' study experience and study strategies (Jansen, 2004; Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023). A full-time university programme comprises 60 ECTS points per academic year, which are distributed across modules. Some programmes divide the academic year into two semesters of 30 ECTS points each, while others organise the year into blocks, typically four blocks of 15 ECTS points. Traditionally, most university programmes in Denmark have been structured around semesters, but in recent decades several programmes – particularly in the natural sciences – have adopted a block structure. Whether a programme follows a semester or block structure has a significant impact on student life and its rhythm, and both models present opportunities as well as constraints in supporting students' learning and well-being. In both structures, a key point of attention is the timing of exams and holidays, including whether mandatory breaks are built into the academic year.

Block structure – advantages and disadvantages

A block typically consists of nine or ten weeks, including seven or eight weeks of teaching followed by a two-week examination period with no scheduled classes (Horst & Winsløw, n.d.; Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023). For programmes organised in blocks, new students often encounter a sharper contrast with upper secondary education, which is structured around a full school year and is therefore more comparable to a semester structure. Within a block structure, students must adjust to a new rhythm in which examination periods occur four times a year instead of once. This can represent a major transition for the students.

One of the aims of the block structure is to allow the students to engage with academic material over a shorter, more intensive period, after which they are assessed relatively quickly (Horst & Winsløw, n.d., p. 3). Some students find that dividing the academic year into blocks helps them maintain an overview and break the programme into manageable units that they can prioritise between (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023; Jansen, 2004). Other students experience the compressed form with frequent exams as a barrier to immersion in the academic content, because they constantly have to consider the next exam (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023). If students experience the education as rushed, they are more likely to develop an approach to learning where they focus on passing the exam rather than engaging in gaining a deeper understanding of the academic material.

The structure can also have an impact on the social environment of the education. In the periods between blocks or semesters without scheduled teaching, such as during exam periods, the social and academic activities that normally take place on campus will often be on hold (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023, pp. 1907-1908).

Optional and mandatory elements of the programme

Most programmes contain both mandatory and optional academic elements. In the organisation of the programme, it is a key task to find a balance in how many ECTS points are awarded to mandatory and optional courses and modules, respectively, and where in the programme course they should be scheduled. Mandatory and optional elements each hold their own possibilities and limitations and affect students' study experience differently (Ulriksen et al., 2017).

Mandatory subjects and modules are central from both an academic and a social perspective. Academically, the common mandatory elements create a common direction and an academic frame of reference for students in the same programme and introduce them to basic knowledge and competences in the subject or discipline (Felby & Stoksted, 2024). Socially, mandatory courses mean that students from the same year group follow each other for many hours a week, which promotes the possibility for building academic and social relations with each other (Ulriksen & Gregersen, 2022). For this reason, the first year of the programme often includes many mandatory elements or basic courses that enable students to get to know one another and the programme. During basic courses and in mandatory subjects, on the other hand, students do not have the same opportunity to pursue their academic interests and shape their own academic profile as they do in the optional elements (Movchan & Zarishniak, 2017). For some students, this may weaken their motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). If a basic course is framed in a way that only sets the stage for pursuing one type of career path, for example in research, it may weaken the motivation of students who cannot see them-selves as researchers (Ulriksen et al., 2017).

More classes do not necessarily lead to more learning; much also depends on the quality of the teaching and how students experience it.

Optional elements of the programme, which allow students to put together their own academic profile, can support the students' motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, it may seem overwhelming for some students to choose elective courses and subjects and specialisations that to a greater or lesser extent may have an impact on their future studies and careers (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023, pp. 1912-1913).

Distribution of courses over semesters or blocks

Regardless of whether a programme is structured in blocks or semesters, there may be several small or large modules and exams within each period. The more modules there are within the same study period, the greater the demands on students in terms of time management, prioritisation of assignments and navigating different academic subjects and expectations. This could lead students to focus their efforts towards, for example, courses with a high ECTS weighting or courses with graded assessments, while other courses are given lower priority during the period. When students have several courses at the same time, it also requires greater coordination of practical matters such as the time of teaching, meetings in study groups, deadlines and exams.

The relative scheduling of courses in a programme can also have a great impact on student motivation (Jansen, 2004). If several academically demanding courses are scheduled in the same semester or in the same block, it can increase the sense of an insurmountable workload. Conversely, motivation may weaken if a semester or block is dominated by a single large and demanding subject without the presence of more clearly defined or manageable courses to provide variation. The organisation of courses therefore concerns not only overall workload, but also the balance between academic intensity and variation within a given study period.

Research suggests that structuring programmes around one – or at most two – modules at a time can benefit students' learning outcomes and academic engagement, as it affords better opportunities for immersion (Goode et al., 2023; Jansen, 2004; Vaughan & Carlson, 1992; Weldon et al., 2023). In addition, research shows that programmes structured around one exam at a time rather than many exams at the same time, promote students' learning outcomes (Jansen, 2004). A clear division of the academic elements of the programme with few modules at a time

can help students form an overview of the programme but on the other hand, there is a risk that the modules are perceived as isolated and fragmented elements (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023; Ulriksen et al., 2017). Even with few modules within a study period, it is therefore important that the modules' relation to the programme as a whole is clarified to the students.

Deadlines

The timing of teaching, exams and other academic activities may have an impact on students' learning. This applies both to when in the semester activities take place and to the time of day.

Exams and other deadlines should preferably be distributed so that students have a reasonable opportunity to concentrate up to an exam or deadline before they have to think about the next assignment or exam. This requires teachers and exam planners to coordinate with each other. In addition, it may be considered whether all exams should be held within certain, limited periods, e.g. January and June, or whether some subjects should be completed during the semester.

It varies from person to person at what time of day they have the highest level of activity, i.e. when they perform best mentally and physically and are therefore also able to concentrate and learn most effectively (Beşoluk et al., 2011; Wile & Shouppe, 2011).

Research indicates that scheduled academic activities benefit most students' activity levels if they are between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Diette & Raghav, 2017). If physical as well as online teaching is outside this time period, it can thus have a negative effect on students' ability to concentrate and on their learning outcomes. Very early or late teaching hours can also challenge the everyday lives of students who, for example, have small children or who live far away from the educational institution.

Deadlines may affect the students' work patterns, well-being, and academic achievement (Smith, 2025; Castro et al., 2022). Since most assignments in the programmes are submitted digitally, students can be working on an assignment right up to the deadline. Midnight deadlines seem to be the most prevalent, possibly as a result of this being the default in many exam-supporting IT systems. This can contribute to a practice where part of the students' work is placed late in the day and close to the deadline, with possible consequences for sleep and academic performance (Castro et al., 2022, pp. 9-10). An earlier deadline, for example in the late afternoon, may mitigate this issue so that students do not work late into the evening or at night, but may at the same time lead to less flexibility and a greater sense of stress among the students (Smith, 2025, p. 339).

Number and scheduling of hours

The number of scheduled teaching and supervision hours offered to students varies between programmes. The Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science has defined that students in a full-time study programme are expected to spend 43 hours per week on the programme outside the holiday periods.[1] These hours include both scheduled classes, i.e. classes where students meet one or more teachers physically or virtually for lectures, classroom teaching, tutoring or practical exercises and independent studies, i.e. hours when the students work independently in groups or on their own. The amount of scheduled teaching in the programmes varies. In addition, the number of teaching classes also varies between the semesters of the individual programme, with typically more classes at the beginning of the programme and fewer later in the programme.

The importance of scheduled classes

In addition to any didactic reasons to prioritise more or fewer classes, it is important to be aware that the number of scheduled classes has an impact on students' experience of the programme and the requirements and expectations they meet (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023; Ulriksen, 2002; Ulriksen et al., 2017). Many scheduled classes can create a clear framework and reduce the need for students to organise their academic work independently. On the other hand, a high number of scheduled classes can

[1] According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Science's Committee for Quality and Relevance in Higher Education, a full-time study programme consists of 43 hours per week, because students typically have longer holiday periods than the labour market. https://ufm.dk/ministeriet/raad-naevn-udvalg-og-fonde/tidligere-raad-naevn-udvalg-og-fonde/udvalg-om-bedre-universitetsuddannelser/udvalgets-rapport-og-anbefalinger/

reduce flexibility in everyday life, for example for students who need to combine their studies with a student job or other obligations. Few scheduled hours can, on the other hand, increase flexibility, but place greater demands on the students' own structure, priorities and efforts.

Some students may, on the other hand, experience many scheduled classes as an obstacle to immersing themselves in the academic content (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023). Classes are characterised by having a higher degree of teacher control of the content and pace of work with the academic material (Ulriksen, 2004, pp. 53-54). When students work independently in groups and on their own, they have greater opportunity to regulate both the content and the pace of their work, fostering a stronger sense of ownership over their learning process.

More classes do not necessarily lead to more learning; much also depends on the quality of the teaching and how students experience it. Some students may opt out of teaching in favour of working with the material independently if they feel the teaching does not support their academic development and learning – for example, if they cannot keep up with the pace or cannot see the relevance of the teaching to their programme (Jansen, 2004; Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023; Ulriksen & Gregersen, 2022, p. 206). Conversely, some of the students who consider teaching as a substitute for their own preparation will choose to spend less time on preparation and independent studies if the number of classes is increased (Herrmann et al., 2015). Thus, more classes do not automatically increase students' learning and study intensity, understood as the total time the students spend on teaching and independent studies (Herrmann et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to articulate how the students are expected to spend their study years on teaching and independent studies, respectively.

In addition to the amount of scheduled classes, it is also worth looking at when they are scheduled, including whether they are grouped or spread over the day and week. Especially for students who live far away or for financial reasons need to have a job in addition to their studies, it may be important that the classes are grouped as much as possible.

Questions for reflection

- ? Does the structure of the academic year and the modular organisation support academic immersion, progression, and a clear coherence between the elements of the programme?
- ? Are the organisation and scheduling of teaching designed in ways that support the development of both academic and social communities?
- ? Are teaching, examinations, and submission deadlines coordinated in ways that promote a sustainable workload and realistic opportunities for preparation?

Scheduled classes and academic communities

As the formalised meeting place, teaching is an important focal point for the academic community while studying, where students can meet and interact with each other and the teacher about academic aspects (Ulriksen & Gregersen, 2022). In addition to its academic purpose, teaching also serves a social and relational purpose. Particularly in programmes with few classes, it is therefore important that the students are given the opportunity to form academic communities in other ways. Scheduling can support this, for example, through a principle that no teaching is scheduled between noon and 1 p.m. This can support the development of voluntary communities, because it encourages the students who have classes before and after to stay at the educational institution during the lunch break, where there is time for informal conversations as well as, for example, meetings in study groups, associations, committees etc. Student-driven academic communities can have a positive impact on students' social connection to the programme, but it is also a good idea for the programme to offer formalised academic communities alongside the teaching, e.g. in the form of support for study groups or academic events such as research seminars, where students and employees can meet.

Classes and groups as the basis of academic learning communities



Teaching in university programmes typically takes place as a combination of lectures, where an entire year group are taught by a teacher at the same time, and classroom teaching in smaller classes. In addition, there are different kinds of workshop, clinic and laboratory training, which also typically takes place in smaller classes. Finally, it is common at Danish universities that students are expected to work together in groups both in and outside the actual classes, and at some universities, project work in groups constitutes a significant part of the programme ECTS (EVA, 2022b).

The students' classes and groups play a central role as the primary arenas for both academic and social interactions between the students and are for many their first experience of being part of an academic community. Also, here, most students experience the primary connection that may help carry them through difficult times while studying. Therefore, it is important to be aware of how classes and groups are divided and supported (Tinto, 1997; EVA, 2022a; EVA, 2022b).

Size, stability and composition of classes

In terms of classes, the programme can consider conditions such as class size, composition, stability and division. These decisions have a practical dimension, in that class sizes must be aligned with the programme's physical environment and available resources and be coherent with the configuration of its academic components, as outlined in the previous section.

The size of the class has an impact on the educational framework for the teaching. A number of researchers highlight that the benefits of smaller classes of 20 to 40 students are that the teacher can better involve the students, increase participation opportunities for a diverse student population and provide individualised feedback or facilitate peer feedback (Beattie & Thiele Strong, 2016; Cuseo, 2007; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Tinto, 1997). In large classes of over 40 students, you will often find that one-way communication or lectures dominate, and that the opportunities for interaction, dialogue and ongoing feedback are reduced. Reduced interaction can increase anonymity and active student participation and make it more difficult to build student communities. Large programmes may therefore have a special need to create smaller student communities.

In small classes, students and the teacher are more likely to get to know each other better, and the classes are therefore often perceived as less anonymous, which strengthens both the academic community and student engagement in teaching. Small classes provide better conditions for interaction and the development of a safe learning space (Beattie & Thiele Strong, 2016; Cuseo, 2007; Lazear, 2001; Madsen, 2011; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Tinto, 1997).

The students' classes and groups play a central role as the primary arenas for both academic and social interactions between the students.

Class stability refers to how long students study together in the same class. For example, do classes remain stable across subjects, so that students are taught in the same class in all subjects/modules within in a semester? And do they remain stable across different blocks/semesters, or are they reformed at the beginning of each new period? Relationships develop over time and through shared experience and practice. When students remain in the same class over a semester or more, they get the opportunity to build a common experience and knowledge of a specific academic aspect of the programme (Tinto, 2003). The common building of experience and the interactions based on academic aspects are important for students to form personal relationships with each other and with the teacher and feel part of an academic community (Barnett et al., 2000; Dyrberg et al., 2015; Maher, 2005; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). A personal relationship means that you know each other, for example by name, and create a mutual relationship of trust with shared responsibility for learning (Tinto, 2003). This means that students show an interest in supporting each other in and outside the classroom, or that students feel safe in seeking out and engaging in dialogue with a teacher. In addition, the academic engagement becomes self-reinforcing in stable classes, as the development of personal relationships creates a safe learning space that increases students' motivation to participate in the teaching. Teaching in stable classes is especially important at the beginning of the programme, when the students are in the process of forming social and academic ties to the new programme (Hansen & Elving, 2020; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010).

Class composition can be approached in different ways. The simplest way to assign students to classes randomly. This will result in classes that roughly reflect the composition of students in the programme. However, for some programmes, it may also be relevant to consider an intentional composition of the classes based on certain characteristics. These may be practical matters, such as students with children or long transport time grouped in classes with no scheduled teaching in lessons in the early or late time slots. It may also be about increasing the likelihood that the students can relate to each other, for example by grouping the underrepresented gender in one or a few classes in a programme with a large predominance of one gender, so that you will not be the only man or woman in the class. Similar considerations may be relevant in relation to groups of students with different ages or backgrounds, for example in programmes, where many have previous relevant work experience.

Organisation of group work

In Danish university programmes, group work is widely used, but there is great variation in the format and purpose of group work (EVA, 2022b). Group work can be designed very differently, depending on the didactic purpose of the group work and which principles and educational models inspire the group work. The variation covers everything from ad hoc groups, where students, for example, in a lecture are asked to sum up in pairs or small groups over a reflection question from the teacher, to project groups that are set up at the start of the semester and perform a whole semester's study activities together in order to finally submit a joint product for assessment in the form of a project assignment or the like. Between these two extremes lies a wide range of intermediate models. Group work is thus a key student competence, as significant parts of the students' study activity take place in groups, both in classes and at the exam. Furthermore, for many, the study group is the primary social community and a source of mutual support in the programme. Thus, students' competences in terms of establishing and maintaining effective group collaborations become highly significant, both for their learning outcomes and for their social well-being. It cannot be assumed that all students are equally competent at the start of their studies. Therefore, it is important that programmes equip students for, and continuously support them in, the forms of group work they are expected to engage in across different subjects.

If the group work's potential is to be realised, it calls for didactic considerations both in the setting up of the groups and in the framework for and the ongoing support of the group work.

If there is one common group, it will be easier for students to coordinate calendars and schedule meetings etc., but on the other hand, the students will be more vulnerable if the group does not work.

Potentials and pitfalls of group work

The potential of group work is supported by research. In general, research emphasises collaboration with and sense of belonging to fellow students as essential for both well-being, learning out-come and completion (EVA, 2022b). Specifically, a number of studies show that group work in higher education has the potential to strengthen students' learning outcomes, support active and understanding-based learning strategies and promote social well-being. EVA's study of the use of group work in higher education shows that the programmes work with three rationales in relation to using study groups in their work to create good study environments (EVA, 2022b). First, study groups are used as a tool to strengthen students' collaboration and communication skills. Second, study groups are used to support students' acquisition of academic knowledge and third, to strengthen students' well-being.

However, group work also has pitfalls, as the literature also points out, and poorly functioning study groups can affect students' academic development and social well-being in a negative direction (EVA, 2022a; EVA, 2022b). Therefore, if the group work's potential is to be realised, it calls for didactic considerations both in the setting up of the groups and in the framework for and the ongoing support of the group work.

Setting up groups

When students are divided into groups, the programme must first and foremost decide on the purpose and duration of the groups, including whether students should be part of one group that transcends subjects and activities, or several groups – for example, a reading group where students help each other understand theoretical concepts and difficult texts, and a project group where students jointly prepare a product. If there is one common group, it will be easier for students to coordinate calendars and schedule meetings etc., but on the other hand, the students will be more vulnerable if the group does not work. One possible solution is to work with groups over shorter periods of time, such as a block or half a semester, after which the groups are reset or new groups can be formed.

The programme must also decide whether the students themselves should form groups, or whether the groups should be formed administratively. In many programmes, it is common practice to form groups administratively at the start of the programme and then leave the group formation to the students themselves, but when this happens and how much the group formation is supported by teachers or other employees at different times varies greatly.

Administratively, groups can be formed randomly or based on objective criteria such as gender, age and background of experience, as also discussed during class formation earlier. Some programmes also form groups based on the students' preferred work and study strategies, expected work effort or the like. These are typically measured via standardised or self-developed questionnaires.

If students are to form groups themselves, the process can be supported to a greater or lesser extent by teachers, typically through a process in which students jointly develop and clarify the problem formulations they need to work on in their groups. This can be done in a single class or over several days, depending on the scope of the group work.

The teacher's support for the group work

Regardless of how the groups are formed and how long they will work together, most students will at some point experience major or minor challenges in the group work. The more you depend on each other in the group, for example if you have to take the exam together or prepare a project together in the group, the more space such dis-

Especially at the beginning of the programme, it is important to clearly frame the group work and equip students with tools to handle work processes and conflicts.

crepancies can take up. Especially at the beginning of the programme, it is important to clearly frame the group work and equip students with tools to handle work processes and conflicts. This can be done through presentations, time allocated in the classes for, for example, alignment of expectations or ongoing process evaluation and/or through visibility of resources in the form of offers of guidance in group processes with either teachers or student counsellors.

Information and communication for students

Clear communication is important to help students navigate the programme's offerings, requirements and systems (cf. EVA, 2015; Felby & Stoksted, 2024, p. 33). This applies to both communication and information to the students before and during the programme on the academic and social aspects, including which communities students can find while studying, and practical and physical aspects, such as accessibility for students with special needs (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Felby & Stoksted, 2024; Moos, 1979).

Much communication takes place in classes between the teacher and the students, but programmes also communicate directly or indirectly with the students through other channels such as intranet, e-mail, learning platforms, IT screens and bulletin boards. Clear communication means that there is congruence in the information given to the students through the different channels.

Read more about group work here:

Experiences from Aarhus University on the significance of group composition for dropout and student dropout and studenter retention: https://ced.au.dk/vis/artikel/hvordan-sammensaetter-man-den-perfekte-studiegruppe

Petersen, E. B., & Sørensen, K. A. (2019). *Projektgruppen – hvordan gør vi?*: En håndbog til universitetsstuderende. Samfundslitteratur.

The Student Counselling Service's leaflet for students on group work: https://srg.dk/studieliv/gruppearbejde/

The Student Counselling Service's services for study programmes: https://srg.dk/til-uddannelsesinstitutioner/studieliv/gruppearbejde/

Research literature on groups:
Tuckman, Bruce W (1965). *"Developmental sequence in small groups".* Psychological Bulletin. 63 (6): 384–399.

Lencioni, P. M. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable.* Jossey-Bass.

Laloux, F. (2014) *Reinventing Organizations*. A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness. Nelson Parker, Brussels, Belgium

Questions for reflection

Reflection questions on class organisation

- Are there clear principles for class sizes and are they aligned with the educational ambitions of the programme (e.g. interaction, feedback and safe learning spaces)?
- Have decisions been made on class stability, especially in the first years of study, so that students have the opportunity to build academic and social relationships over time?
- Is the class formation organised so that large programmes are divided into smaller communities that counteract anonymity?
- Are students' life circumstances and representation taken into account in the organisation of classes, so that no student risks standing alone academically or socially?

Reflection questions on group work

- Is there a common framework for the purpose and duration of group work in the programme, so that groups are not only understood as a local didactic choice in single subjects?
- Has a decision been made as to when groups are formed administratively and when the students form groups themselves – and with what support?
- Will the students be prepared for group work as a competence, e.g. through introduction, alignment of expectations and procedural tools?
- Are the support structures clear if the group work does not work (e.g. access to counselling, conflict support or possibility of adjustment)?

The Danish University Act and the Danish University Programme Order

In Denmark, the academic bachelor programmes are governed by the University Act and the University Programme Order.

The University Act stipulates that the individual university determines which research-based programmes to offer in Denmark within its academic fields, subject to detailed requirements for quality assurance, pre-qualification and approval (Section 3), and that the university can offer bachelor programmes for 180 ECTS points as research-based full-time programmes, i.e. independent, complete study programmes (Section 4).

The University Programme Order includes the following:

Definition of academic bachelor programmes: Bachelor programmes are independent, complete research-based study programmes awarding a specified number of ECTS points, which qualify students to work independently in a professional capacity by providing them with competences and methodological skills in one or more subject areas, including the humanities, theology, social sciences, natural sciences, health sciences or technical sciences. (Section 1).

Description of the objective of bachelor programmes, namely to:

1. introduce the student to scientific disciplines in one or more subject areas, including the theory and methodology of the subject area(s) in question, in order to provide the student with broad academic knowledge and skills
2. provide the student with the necessary academic knowledge and theoretical and methodological qualifications and competences to independently identify, formulate and solve complex issues within the relevant components of the subject area(s) of the programme; and
3. provide the student with the necessary foundation for working in a professional capacity and for qualifying for admission to a master's programme. (Section 2).

Rules for the organisation of bachelor programmes, including provisions on:

- **Duration:** Bachelor programmes must be organised so that the student can complete the programme in 34 months when starting the programme in the autumn semester. When starting the programme in the spring semester, it must be completed in 36 months. (Section 6).
- **Maximum duration and number of exam attempts:** In the curriculum for bachelor programmes, academic supplementary programmes and master's programmes, the university may lay down rules for when the student must have completed the programme at the latest after the student has commenced the individual programme (maximum completion time). When setting maximum completion times, the university must ensure that the student has the opportunity for three exam attempts when organising the programme. (Section 9).
- **Module structure:** The bachelor and master's programmes are made up of a number of modules. A module is a subject element or a group of subject elements that aims to provide the student with a whole set of academic qualifications and competences within a specified time frame specified in ECTS points, and which ends with one or more examinations within specific exam terms specified and delimited in the curriculum. (Section 10).
- **Progression and optional elements:** The bachelor programme must be a complete programme based on the level attained by the student in their qualifying studies. The university must structure the study programme so as to ensure its academic coherence and progression. In the curriculum for the individual bachelor programme, the university specifies the following:

  1. Constituent subject elements fundamental to the general academic competences and identity of the programme and other mandatory subject elements, including ancillary courses, corresponding to a minimum of 120 ECTS points. The constituent subject elements must account for a minimum of 90 ECTS points and must include the theory of knowledge relevant to the subject or subject area as well as a bachelor project equivalent to a minimum of 10 ECTS points and a maximum of 20 ECTS points.

  2. Elective subjects equivalent to a minimum of 10 ECTS points. The bachelor project is placed in the third year of the programme and must demonstrate the student's ability, in a qualified manner, to formulate, analyse and work with issues within a narrowly defined topic. The university approves the defined topic and also stipulates a deadline for submission of the project. (Section 19).

SOURCE: THE DANISH UNIVERSITY ACT

https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/391#id202e8e79-ab02-44ef-9840-b8ecf1b77d39

https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2021/2285



Attention points for organising programmes

1. **Joint work on coherence and progression**
   A central point of attention is how the subjects, modules and assessment formats of the programme together support a meaningful progression in academic level, working methods and expectations. This can usefully be discussed across subjects and semesters with the involvement of both teachers and students.

2. **Visibility of the academic logic of the programme**
   The structure of the programme, including the order of subjects, examination formats and academic purposes, can usefully be the subject of continuous joint reflection, so that students have a better opportunity to understand the connections in their programme.

3. **Attention to programme start and key transitions**
   Transitions in education – especially the start of the programme and the shift between education levels – can be seen as common educational attention points, where dialogue about academic requirements, pace and expectations can help create more sustainable learning processes for students.

4. **Examination formats as part of the overall educational theory and practice**
   Examination and assessment formats can usefully be considered across the programme and be included in academic discussions about which study strategies, competences and forms of engagement the programme wishes to support.

5. **Rhythm and overall workload**
   The organisation of the academic year, including module structure, exam scheduling and submission deadlines, can usefully be discussed, taking into consideration how rhythm, work pressure and the opportunity for immersion are experienced by the students in practice.

6. **Frameworks for participation, flexibility and communities**
   The number and timing of scheduled activities as well as the balance between teaching and independent studies can be included in joint considerations on how the programme best supports both academic immersion, flexibility in student life and the development of academic and social communities.

Organisation and planning – in brief



The organisation and planning of the programme has an impact on students' experience of their study life, their motivation and their ability to achieve the learning goals of the programme. Coherence, progression and clear frameworks not only depend on the individual subject, but on how all the programme elements are experienced and practised by the students. Key points from the chapter are summarised below, and questions for reflection are asked, which can form the basis for joint discussions in the programme.

1.

Coherence and progression in the programme

The programme's courses, modules and assessment formats constitute an integrated learning process in which coherence and progression are significant for students' understanding of the programme's academic structure. When students are able to recognise how academic components complement one another, and how requirements and expectations develop over time, their engagement is strengthened, as is their capacity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

? Questions for reflection:

How do we work on the programme to create coherence and progression across subjects, modules and semesters? How can dialogue and collaboration between teachers contribute to students meeting a clear and recognisable academic context?

2.

Programme start and transitions

Students may find the start of the programme and other transitions in the programme to be academically and socially demanding. An awareness of pace, complexity and expectations – and how these are introduced and practised – can support students' motivation and sense of competence, especially early in the process.

? Questions for reflection:

What transitions in our education are experienced as particularly vulnerable by students? How can we work together to create more coherent and supportive transitions – also for students who change classes, are delayed or are otherwise in a challenging study situation?

Decisions regarding class size, stability, and the organisation of group work influence students' opportunities for participation, relationships, and academic development, and therefore require clear frameworks and ongoing attention.

3.

Exams, assessment and study strategies

Examination and assessment formats affect students' priorities, study strategies and academic confidence. It may therefore be relevant to review all assessments across the programme and discuss what types of learning, engagement and academic development they support in practice.

? Questions for reflection:

How does our overall portfolio of assessment formats support the competences and learning styles we want the students to develop?
How can dialogue about tests and learning objectives contribute to more appropriate study strategies among students?

4.

Classes, class formation and study groups

Classes and study groups constitute an important framework for both academic and social community in the programme. Choices about class size, stability and organisation of group work affect students' opportunities for participation, relationships and academic development and call for a clear framework and ongoing attention.

? Questions for reflection:

How does our current organisation of classes and groups support students' ability to engage in stable and inclusive academic communities?
Where can adjustments in frameworks or practices make the biggest difference to participation and well-being?

3.

The physical environment

The importance of the physical environment



The physical environment provided for students' everyday life at university is inextricably linked to teaching, learning processes and the social and academic relationships in which they participate. In the course of their day-to-day studies, students move between teaching, group work, independent study and social activities. The physical environment at university provides the framework for students' everyday lives.

Research shows that the quality and design of the physical environment, such as classrooms, libraries, social areas and group spaces, have a direct impact on students' well-being and experience of their programme. A *strong infrastructure* is important i.e. a connection between the design of teaching and learning rooms and the research, teaching and learning practice that takes place (Lillejord et al., 2017). For example, there must be rooms available for group work in programmes where students are expected to work extensively in groups.

In addition to the classrooms themselves, the students want informal learning environments with comfortable seating and opportunities for social interactions and group work, as well as individual and digital study (Lillejord et al., 2017). Based on selected research literature in the field, we zoom in on the importance of the environment in this brief.

Overall, there is broad agreement in the research literature that the physical environment has a significant impact on students' learning, well-being and completion. The physical learning environment plays a role in relation to both the individual student's well-being and motivation and the overall learning environment. A review from 2022 stresses the importance of the physical environment seen in a post-pandemic light as during the pandemic, it was not possible for students to meet physically with their teacher and fellow students over an extended period of time (Leijon et al., 2022). The experience from a period when the use of online teaching and virtual learning spaces really took off has partly paved the way for hybrid learning spaces and partly shown that the physical learning environment with the opportunity to meet face to face with teachers and fellow students is very important for a good study environment.

The Danish Educational Environment Act

The Danish Educational Environment Act (Lov om elevers og studerendes undervisningsmiljø) establishes the framework for a safe and healthy educational environment in Denmark. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that pupils and students are entitled to a safe and healthy educational environment that supports learning and development, including the psychological and aesthetic environment.

The educational institutions' management is responsible for meeting the requirements of the Act, and it is stipulated that they must involve the students in creating good physical conditions.

All educational institutions must prepare a written educational environment assessment describing physical, mental and aesthetic conditions. This assessment must be reviewed at least every three years and representatives of pupils and students must be involved in the process.

SOURCE: The Danish Educational Environment Act: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2017/316

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Universal design

The physical environment has a special importance for students with physical disabilities. *The universal design philosophy* has a particular focus on how equal access can be ensured for everyone, seen from this perspective. Among other things, this means that architecture, frameworks and environment must be designed to take diversity into account. It is also about practical and aesthetic conditions that support inclusion among the students across individual differences and, for example, disabilities.

Read more about universal design here:

DANISH ARCHITECTURE CENTER:
https://dac.dk/viden/artikler/universelt-design

RUMSANS:
https://www.rumsans.dk/artikler/introduktion-til-universelt-design

DEPARTMENT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, AAU:
https://www.build.aau.dk/forskning/universelt-design

Students with physical disabilities

The physical environment plays a crucial role for students with physical disabilities in higher education. Accessibility is fundamental to ensuring that these students have equal opportunities to participate actively in both teaching and campus social life.

Appropriately designed buildings, inclusive classrooms and adapted facilities can help remove barriers and foster a more inclusive learning environment. Moreover, physical accessibility sends a strong signal that the educational institutions value diversity and inclusion, thereby promoting a positive study environment for everyone.

This brief does not examine in depth the research on the significance of physical environments for students with physical disabilities. Readers with a particular interest may find inspiration for further reading in the study prepared by the think tank Tænketanken Perspektiv on the conditions for students with disabilities in long and medium-term higher education programmes here:

https://sumh.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Noedvendigt-for-nogle-godt-for-alle-rapport.pdf

THE DANISH KNOWLEDGE CENTRE ON DISABILITY:
https://videnomhandicap.dk/handicap-uddannelse/universelt design for læring

The classroom



Classrooms and learning spaces at universities

TYPE OF ROOM	USE
Auditoriums	Lectures, presentations for large groups of students
Classrooms	Classes, exercises and group work for small classes
Group spaces	Physical collaboration in small groups
Reading rooms/small rooms	Independent studies, individual or paired work
Informal learning arenas such as open spaces, auditoriums, cafés etc.	Individual or small group work as well as social and student activities, both physical and virtual

SOURCE: Lillejord et al., 2017

Research indicates that the physical environment in auditoriums and rooms for classroom teaching may have an impact on how students and teachers experience the programme and the study environment (Leijon et al., 2022). The physical environment can influence not only the academic learning environment but also students' motivation and social interactions. Some of the factors that contribute to an attractive learning environment include size, layout and flexibility.

The layout of the room

Classrooms vary in size and layout to accommodate different group sizes and educational activities. The design of the rooms affects both individual student learning and the interaction between teacher and students as well as between the students themselves. Small rooms create closer contact, but can limit the opportunities for group work, while large rooms can provide a feeling of isolation and increased distance from the teacher. The distance between teacher and students is of great importance for the interaction and movement in the room, which is important for creating meaning in the individual student's learning process and the academic community in classes (Montgomery, 2008; Falkenberg & Lind, 2023).

Flexibility and variation in the classroom

Flexible rooms can support variation and different forms and approaches to teaching. A dynamic learning space can be adapted to the content and activities of a class so that it supports the purpose of the teaching and the diverse needs of students (Rienecker et al., 2015; Montgomery, 2008). Flexible layout that can be adapted to varied forms of work and learning methods can be an effective approach to creating good opportunities for participation for all students in the physical learning environment (Leijon et al., 2022; Lillejord et al., 2017).

In particular, four essential aspects of learning environments that promote interaction and collaboration among students can be identified:

1. Flexibility: Teachers and students can move furniture and walls, for example by using folding walls, which can make a room larger or smaller, so that the layout can be adapted to different needs for learning, interaction and problem solving. Classrooms vary in their flexibility. Auditoriums often have fixed furniture, while small classrooms typically offer more flexibility.

2. Overview/proximity: Students can see and get in touch with the teacher and fellow students by sitting close to each other and can easily use technology in collaboration and discussions.

3. Technology: The room enables the use of technology for collaboration and problem-solving in group work, for example by allowing screen sharing and by integrating microphones and cameras into worktables or walls.

4. Environmentally adapted infrastructure: All rooms, small and large, are designed for collaboration, by providing the opportunity to adjust the light and regulate the temperature and by taking acoustics into account, for example in rooms where several conversations take place simultaneously (Lamb & Shraiky in Lillejord et al., 2017).

Location of the students in the room

The arrangement of tables and chairs in a classroom is important for student-teacher interaction and for students' engagement and involvement in the class. The most appropriate layout depends on the purpose of the teaching that takes place. For example, a traditional table arrangement with chairs and tables in rows facilitates interaction between students in a classroom to a lesser extent, because everyone is facing the same direction towards the teacher, while a horseshoe table arrangement can better support an academic discussion in plenary, and group tables can be an advantage when working in small groups (Rienecker et al., 2015).

Rooms that can be easily rearranged, as mentioned above with, for example, removable furniture, allow teachers to change table arrangements and positions in the room depending on the needs of their teaching, such as lectures, group work or individual studies. If the classroom allows for movement and flexible use of space, this can help break down barriers between students and the teacher and strengthen learning dynamics by supporting students' engagement and active participation (Montgomery, 2008).

Relationship between table arrangement and participation

One study found that a group of teachers experienced that a rectangular table arrangement can lead to lower overall engagement in teaching, because some students are seated more centrally than others. Students seated in outer positions have less opportunity to interact with the teacher and may therefore be less likely to participate actively (Montgomery, 2008). This aligns with the findings of another study examining the correlation between students' seating in an auditorium and their engagement, attitudes, experience of teaching and performance. The study found that this significant correlation was significant, and that the further to the front of the room the students were seated, the more engaged they were in the teaching. Similarly, students seated at the front of the room reported a more positive experience of the teaching. Those seated at the back reported being more easily distracted than their fellow students (Shernoff et al. in Lillejord et al., 2017). Other studies find that students have different preferences for where they are seated in the classrooms, depending on their need for concentration and opportunities to take breaks (Falkenberg & Lind, 2023), and that the students' seating choices in a room are often not random, but may reflect a desire to gain some control over their learning environment (Leijon et al., 2022).

The campus area



In this section, we look at the importance of the campus area for students' well-being and learning during their studies. The campus area and the physical facilities in an educational institution greatly contribute to setting the framework for student life.

Indoor and outdoor spaces on campus

Campus areas vary greatly in their design and location. Some campuses are centrally located in urban areas, while others are more rural or remote. The geographical location both impacts what the campus area can offer and the needs that the campus facilities must cover. Welcoming indoor and outdoor spaces are also an essential part of students' experience and assessment of the physical environment. The outdoor campus environment helps support academic and social communities and the study environment. Green spaces can be used for relaxation, lunch breaks and outdoor study groups. Indoors, it is important to have facilities such as group spaces, café areas, libraries and open spaces where students can meet and where academic and social activities can take place side by side.

Access and availability at the campus area

Important factors in a well-functioning campus area include easy access to key facilities, good infrastructure and good access routes around campus. Making it easy to find your way around campus and its buildings can also contribute to students' well-being. In fact, many students point to good and clear signposting as one of the most important factors in relation to the importance of the physical environment (Lillejord et al., 2017). Signposting and communication on campus serve both informative and inclusive purposes by helping all students, including international and new students, feel welcome and accommodated. Visual icons can support written signage, and it is important to consider whether signs should be provided in languages other than Danish in programmes with many international students. Factors such as opening hours and availability are also important, e.g. whether students have access to campus in the evening (Harrop & Turpin in Lillejord et al., 2017). Access to facilities outside normal opening hours can be especially important for students who do not have living conditions that support studying from home.

Key facilities

The campus area is the framework for a coherent student life, supporting learning, social life and well-being. In addition to classrooms and auditoriums, a campus area typically consists of study and group spaces, library/reading room, canteen/eating areas, laboratories and workshops, common areas and student association rooms. Some campuses also have sports and leisure facilities such as gyms, playing fields and outdoor exercise facilities. Many also offer accommodation in the form of residence halls and flats for the students on or near campus.

If you enter a campus area, you will find that in most places, students occupy **common areas** such as living areas and open spaces as informal learning arenas. Here they can interact with each other, relax, read and study in

It should be easy and easily accessible for students to seek help and get relevant information, and therefore it is useful with a central and visible location of student services.

a more relaxed environment. Living areas and open spaces should have a welcoming atmosphere, be spacious, well-maintained and equipped with furniture that can be adapted to students' different needs (Herrmann et al., 2012; Rienecker et al., 2015). Functioning as both social areas and informal learning spaces, these areas are particularly important for students' sense of belonging and identity (Lillejord et al., 2017). Many universities also offer student-controlled rooms, where students have the primary responsibility for the layout and decoration, such as student-run cafés or bars that serve as central meeting places and focal points for social life.

Group spaces, where students can work in groups or work more in-depth in academic communities, are also an essential part of the campus area. An appropriate number of group spaces for students is crucial in enabling students to collaborate in groups or work in greater depth with academic assignments. A suitable number of spaces in relation to the need has both practical and inclusive implications. Students identify group spaces as one of the most important factors contributing to their sense of community in the programme (Wilson & Cotgrave in Lillejord et al., 2017). Here too, it is an advantage if the furniture is flexible so that the spaces can easily be adapted to different group structures and activities, and the different needs of the students can be accommodated.

The **library** offers access to books, digital resources and reading/study spaces and is a central resource that greatly contributes to the academic learning environment and the individual student's learning and engagement through access to relevant, high-quality knowledge and information resources (Kuh & Gonyea, 2003; Hanssen & Solvoll, 2015). The library is perceived as an important informal learning space and an important meeting space for the students who often use it to work together or individually (Lillejord et al., 2017). The library is also seen as a neutral and inclusive space that can be used for other activities than purely academic ones. It can serve as a "third space" for students, where they can find support from the staff without feeling stigmatised (Brewster & Cox, 2023).

Study spaces are often located in proximity to the libraries and provide students with opportunities for individual concentration and immersion. Advances in technology now enable students to work from virtually anywhere, leading some to view their homes, cafés and similar environments as equally attractive study spaces. Nevertheless, library-based study spaces remain a valued resource where students can access a distinctive atmosphere of quiet, focus and immersion – particularly sought after during examination periods. With regard to both libraries and study spaces, access and availability are significant determinants of whether students make use of these resources. Opening hours and sufficient study spaces carry both practical and inclusive implications. This is especially important for students who live far from campus or lack suitable conditions for quiet and immersion at home. Where feasible, study spaces should be distributed across multiple campus locations to ensure that students are not required to travel long distances to find a quiet place to study.

Students do not visit the **cafeteria** solely in search of food and beverages. It is also a venue for academic and social interactions. A study actually concludes that the café area on a newly built university campus is the most used area in the building (Manahasa & Özoy in Lillejord et al., 2017). Cafeterias, café areas and student bars are generally highlighted as particularly important spaces that strengthen students' sense of community by providing settings for both social and academic activities. These activities and networks are important for students' sense of belonging in their programme (Herrmann et al., 2012). Cafeterias, café areas and libraries can also serve as key meeting points enabling students to interact with teaching staff outside of formal classrooms, provided that the teachers use the same spaces and do not have separate facilities. At the same time, the layout and access arrangements of buildings can signal hierarchical distinctions between staff and students – for example, when there are separate eating areas or restrooms or spaces to which students do not have access.

Cafeterias, café areas and student bars are generally highlighted as particularly important spaces that strengthen students' sense of community by providing settings for both social and academic activities.

Questions for reflection

- How are students, teachers and other staff involved in dialogue about the use of classrooms, common areas and informal learning spaces and how they are experienced daily?
- What opportunities do students have to dispose of or leave their mark on certain spaces, such as student spaces, common areas or group spaces, which they themselves are responsible for laying out and using?
- To what extent are teaching and study activities geographically grouped on campus to create clear academic environments where both students and staff come and go on a daily basis?
- How can scheduling, room distribution and location of teaching support a more visible and coherent campus presence?
- What opportunities do students and staff have to jointly contribute to decorations and visual expressions in common areas, for example through posters, projects, exhibitions or other academic indications that signal the identity of the programme?
- How can the physical environment support informal meetings and academic conversations between students, teachers and other staff outside the teaching situation, for example through common areas, café areas or open work zones?
- How can experience and ideas from both students and teachers be gathered and brought into play on an ongoing basis, e.g. through dialogue forums, student representatives, joint workshops or testing of temporary solutions in the physical environment?

RESEARCHER:

Campus can strengthen students' sense of belonging

We can become even better at using our outdoor spaces and other areas on campus that are not designed for specific educational purposes, says Line Nielsen, researcher in mental health promotion and project manager of "The ABCs of Mental Health at the University".

How does the physical environment affect the study environment?

Classrooms, learning spaces such as libraries and group rooms, and outdoor areas all shape students' and staff's experience of campus I pay particular attention to outdoor spaces. Research shows that green surroundings and fresh air contribute to well-being and mental health. For this reason, it is important to consider outdoor areas where students can take breaks, move around, sit together in groups and also retreat and relax, for example benches and small green spaces. During the winter months, it is also important to identify alternative indoor spaces for retreat and relaxation – for example by making better use of corners, rooms and areas that are not specifically designed for teaching or other formal purposes. The physical spaces on campus help shape both learning and social activities, and they can strengthen students' sense of belonging to their programme. For example, I have found that having a dedicated room that students can furnish and use as they wish provides a strong basis for fostering a sense of belonging.

How can heads of study and teachers work actively with the physical environment?

It is important to involve the students in the development of the physical environment, as they are best positioned to assess what supports their well-being and learning. As part of a research project, my colleagues and I asked a group of students to photograph locations and features on campus that they felt promoted their mental health. The photographs were subsequently displayed as an outdoor exhibition on campus. While this may sound elaborate, it can easily be implemented on a smaller scale. The purpose was to initiate a dialogue with students about which physical spaces work for them and what they feel is lacking. This knowledge can, for example, inspire heads of study to guide the layout of educational institutions.

> The physical spaces on campus help shape both learning and social activities, and they can strengthen students' sense of belonging to their programme.

LINE NIELSEN

What can the teachers do to improve the physical study environment?

The options actually available to teachers vary considerably. Even when resources and the ability to move furniture are limited, small adjustments and variations can make a difference. In my experience, a good starting point during the first classes is to use name tags or other aids that make it easier for students to get to know one another. A simple strategy is to have students stand in a circle during introductions and name rounds, rather than remaining seated at benches or tables. This way, everyone in the room is on equal footing, and they can make eye contact while speaking. If the classroom is too small, moving the activity outdoors can be a useful alternative. It may also be beneficial to in-corporate outdoor spaces for walk-and-talks whenever possible.

What is your favourite examples of well laid out physical environments?

An illustrative example is from a visit I paid to Dansk Firmaidræt. They laid out their rooms for different purposes: For example, they have a room for decision meetings, where you can only stand around a table. Here, racing stripes are painted on the floor to create a mood of quick decisions. Conversely, they also have a space that promotes reflection and immersion with soft furniture and calm earth tones. When designing the campus, it is important to find the balance between flexibility and the possibility of special features. Most universities need the premises to be flexible so they can be used for different purposes during a semester and an exam period, and at the same time it often works well when each room has unique opportunities that can be utilised for different types of teaching, learning or social initiatives.



WE ASKED:
Line Nielsen, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen. Project manager of “The ABCs of Mental Health at the University”, a mental health project for students at the Faculty of Social Sciences. In 2022, “The ABCs of Mental Health at the University” was awarded the Public Health Award.

A well-functioning campus environment includes not only good physical learning spaces, but also easily accessible support functions that promote student well-being and programmes.

Student services support students in a variety of ways, both in terms of academic counselling and support and in relation to IT assistance, copying, printing and the like. It should be easy and easily accessible for students to seek help and get relevant information, and therefore it is useful with a central and visible location of student services and a layout that seems inviting, for example, with open doors and visible services via signposting etc. Student services must be easily accessible and offer support both academically and practically.

Other rooms and facilities that educational institutions can choose to establish may, for example, be quiet rooms. Several educational institutions also offer student sports programmes, providing students with the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities, from swimming and climbing to gymnastics and strength training. In addition, the facilities may include various student initiatives, such as a bike workshop, where students can borrow tools and help each other repair their bike, a vegetable garden for the students as well as rehearsal rooms for music activities such as choirs and bands.

Help and support for the students

A well-functioning campus environment includes not only good physical learning spaces, but also easily accessible support functions that promote student well-being and programmes. Important support functions on campus include student counselling, special educational support and uni-versity chaplains. Student counsellors play a central role in supporting students in choices, academic challenges and career planning. To ensure that the counselling is easy to access, counselling offices should be centrally located on campus, preferably close to study environments and common areas. Special educational support counsellors help students with special needs, such as dyslexia, mental health challenges or physical disabilities.

It is important that these features are clearly signposted and easy to find so that no student feels overlooked or has difficulty seeking help. University chaplains may also be available for students who need it, offering conversations about life's big questions, personal challenges and crisis situ-ations. A good location is one where students can seek support discreetly, while still being able to easily find information about the counsellor’s presence and availability. It may also be relevant to consider placing psychology services, career centres and mentoring schemes so that these are a natural part of the everyday student life on campus. A well thought out placement of all these important functions can contribute to an inclusive and supportive study environment where students always feel welcomed and helped during their studies.

Student influence

Students who have access to well-functioning and well-laid-out campus facilities generally feel comfortable in their programmes (Lillejord et al., 2017). Although students do not always consider the physical layout to have a direct impact on their well-being, research indicates that well-functioning facilities strengthen social and academic communities and students' sense of belonging to their programme. In particular, spaces where students can socialise and interact with teachers outside the classroom are important (Herrmann et al., 2012).

As the educational landscape changes, it is important to continuously evaluate and develop the physical environment on campus in order to create the best conditions for students. Here too, it is essential to involve students in the design and layout of the physical and learning environments. By giving them the opportunity to help determine how the facilities should be designed – from construction to furniture and layout – an environment can be created where students have a sense of ownership of their programme and place of study. When students participate actively in shaping the physical environment so that their perspectives and needs are heard and integrated, it leads to functional learning environments that meet their expectations – both academically and socially. This increases students' sense of being happy with their study (Leijon et al., 2022).

Points of attention for the physical environment

1. **Physical environment as an integral part of the learning environment**
   The physical environment can usefully be considered an active part of the programme's overall learning environment, where teaching, learning, social relations and well-being are closely linked to space, layout and access to facilities.

2. **Relationship between educational intentions and physical facilities**
   A central point of attention is how teaching methods, working methods and expectations of students are supported by the specific physical environment, including classrooms, group spaces and informal learning environments.

3. **Flexibility and variety in learning spaces**
   Variety in the layout and flexibility in the use of spaces can help create good opportunities for participation for students with different needs and learning preferences and support different forms of teaching and collaboration.

4. **Campus as a framework for both academic and social student life**
   The campus area contains both formal and informal learning spaces, which together provide the framework for everyday student life. The layout, accessibility and quality of common areas are important for students' sense of belonging, community and engagement.

5. **Accessibility, orientation and inclusion**
   Easy access to buildings, facilities and support functions as well as clear signposting and communication can support an inclusive study environment where all students – including new and international ones – can find their way around and feel welcome.

6. **Support functions as part of the physical study environment**
   The location and visibility of counselling, student services and other support functions can have an impact on whether students find it easy and legitimate to seek help in their everyday student life.

7. **Student involvement and ownership**
   Involving students in the development and layout of the physical environment can contribute to more functional learning environments and strengthen students' sense of ownership, attachment and satisfaction with their programme.

CAMPUS DIRECTOR:

We involve students in campus development

The physical environment should make students want to show up and be at the university, says Mogens Juul Møller, campus director at Aalborg University.

Why have you chosen such a great focus on the physical environment?

Over the years, our great focus on the study environment has become part of the university's DNA. Therefore, it is also a continuous process to create an environment where the students can thrive optimally. Our goal is to develop talented graduates, and the university's management and staff agree that high satisfaction with the physical environment often means that more students actually show up at the university and stay there for teaching, group work and social events. And this ultimately increases well-being and learning.

How do you set the direction for improving campus?

We involve students in campus development and draw inspiration from other universities. We gather feedback on an ongoing basis through evaluations, in which students also assess the study environment. Based on this feedback, we work in a more focused and strategic way. In recent years, we have addressed matters both large and small – from improving the layout of lecture rooms and indoor climate to ensuring access to power outlets, good acoustics and small areas, including out-door spaces, such as a sensory garden, where students can talk in small groups without being disturbed.



WE ASKED:
Mogens Juul Møller, Campus Director at Aalborg University. In recent years, the university has worked with more accessible spaces both inside and outside, with a special focus on the involvement of students and sustainability in the development of the campus.

How do you ensure sustainability when you have to continuously change the physical environment?

We are actively striving to recycle inventory and optimise areas. We move furniture around and use large green plants to create new living areas, and we prefer to use flexible furniture that can be used, for example, as both seating and writing spaces. In general, it is important that both rooms and campus areas serve multiple purposes at different times of the day and throughout the year, so that they can be used, for example, for seminars, group work, exam preparation and meetings – without the need to move large pieces of furniture or technological equipment.

Is there a certain room that you are particularly proud of?

We have focused on our canteen areas, which are also used as study spaces. It can be a challenge to ensure that they function both as study spaces and as areas for eating and breaks. In practical terms, we have implemented 24/7 catering, with refrigerators stocked with ready meals and microwaves that allow for self-service, even outside the canteen's opening hours. In this way, we respond directly students' wish to remain on campus until late. This enables students to work on their own terms and helps create a more inclusive and accessible study environment.

> In practical terms, we have implemented 24/7 catering, with refrigerators stocked with ready meals and microwaves that allow for self-service, even outside the canteen's opening hours.

MOGENS JUUL MØLLER

Physical environment – in brief

The physical environment on campus plays a central role in students' learning, well-being and sense of belonging to their programme. The layout of the rooms, access to facilities and the over-all design of the campus area have an impact on how teaching, collaboration, immersion and social relations unfold in practice. Key points from the chapter are summarised below, and questions for reflection are asked, which can form the basis for joint discussions in the programme.

1.

Physical environment supports learning activities when it can be adapted to different forms of work

Classrooms, furnishings and technical equipment have an impact on the types of learning activities that are possible in teaching. Flexible spaces can make it easier to switch between shared focus, dialogue, group work and more activity-based forms of teaching, thus creating better opportunities for more students to participate.

Questions for reflection:

To what extent do our class-rooms support the learning activities that take place in the room? What aspects of the room's layout does this support or limit?

2.

Layout and placement in the room are important for engagement and participation

The way tables, chairs and classrooms are organised can affect students' ability to participate actively in class. Some layouts can create distance and increase the risk of distraction, while others can support closeness, contact and dialogue between students and teachers.

Questions for reflection:

What patterns do we see in student seating in classrooms and how does this relate to participation and engagement? What framing strategies could be considered to strengthen participation in the room?

3.

Campus serves as a learning environment when academic and social activities are integrated

The campus area's common areas, open spaces, cafés and outdoor areas can serve as important settings for informal learning, academic meetings and social belonging when they are laid out and accessible in practice. These spaces can help make campus a vibrant study environment – even outside of class.

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Questions for reflection:

Does the campus area's physical environment support students' opportunities for both collaboration and immersion? Are the common areas laid out so that they actually invite students to stay and use them? Where is the potential for developing informal learning environments?

4.

Access to group spaces and study spaces is central to collaboration and immersion

The ability to work together in groups and immerse yourself individually depends largely on access to suitable spaces. Capacity, opening hours and allocation of spaces are of particular importance during periods of high work pressure and for students who do not have a good setup for studying at home.

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Questions for reflection:

What time of the year and for which groups of students is the pressure on group spaces and study spaces greatest? Where can adjustments in access, opening hours or distribution be most important?

5.

Physical environment can support inclusion and ownership when developed in dialogue

Accessibility, clear signposting and universal design can reduce barriers to participation. At the same time, continuous involvement of students in the development of the physical environment can contribute to improvements based on real needs and strengthen the sense of ownership and belonging.

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Questions for reflection:

How are students involved in dialogue about the development of the physical environment? Are there groups of students whose experience and needs are not sufficiently heard, such as commuters, parttime students, international students or students with disabilities?

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