

Thoughts on the Forestry Building by an Emeritus Professor

I don't know whether you've seen the plans for the building. It's hard to get the feel of the place.

The design breaks up the space into lots of rooms, including dozens of circular rooms, collabs and pods, and 'focus' rooms (perhaps for individuals to engage with on-line material). Most of the small rooms are too small for seminars and tutorials.

The largest teaching spaces are 1 large collab classroom, with 48 seats, and 6 medium collab classrooms, with 36 seats each. This means that there is no room big enough to bring together all the students in, say, the large first-year disciplines or indeed core units and popular options at 200 and 300 level. Is this wise or desirable?

Is the intention to make it impossible to return to face-to-face lectures, seminars and tutorials? Is it sensible to lock higher education in Tasmania into a model that closes off modes of teaching that have worked well here and remain the gold standard in leading universities around the world. The larger collabs are laid out for what looks like primary school teaching mode.

Was the architect's brief informed by the views and needs of the disciplines and teaching programmes that are actually being moved there?

The building is very crowded with lots of design constraints. It's hard to see that it can meet the basic needs of more than a small fraction of students in Arts (and in other programs to be housed there). It lacks space (and fresh air) for students to hang out, make friends, talk to fellow-students and staff, use the library and other resources, and develop a sense of belonging with the university.

One basic question is, in the brief for the building, what advice was given about the numbers of staff and students to be accommodated. In *The Mercury* last year (27 Oct), Nicholas Farrelly claimed that it was 'due to open in early 2026 for 3,000 students and 300 staff'! If reported correctly, this claim seems wholly disingenuous.

How could the building accommodate 3,300 people? My sense is that it would be uncomfortably crowded and possibly a health and safety risk if there were more than 300 people in the building. What is the maximum legal capacity of the building?

The claim seems disingenuous because the university appears committed to being an on-line operation and a functioning campus for staff and students.

What would be the impact of 3,300 people turning up in Melville St on the first day of term? It would be chaotic in Melville St even if a few hundred people arrived at 9am. I note that there are only 53 bike-racks!

Where will even a couple of hundred students go, what reception will they receive, what will they do in the limited space available.

Newcomers tend to hang around the entrance, feeling more and more self-conscious. My sense is they'll rapidly conclude that there's no place for them and that there is no campus. They'll go home and, if they don't withdraw, they'll work their way through their courses, making minimal contact with teachers and fellow-students.

Compare Melville St with where they've come from — all the Hobart schools and colleges have spacious and attractive campuses — and the campuses of sandstone universities on the mainland, where some of their friends have headed.

It might be asked what the expectations are for teaching staff and what facilities are being provided. I see around 24 standard offices, all internal and smaller than offices at Sandy Bay. Even if they are all for academic staff, there will be few available for teachers, once a dozen or so have been assigned to deans and heads of discipline. Presumably most teachers will be required to hot-desk. They will not be able to leave books or files anywhere. There was talk of lockers.

Meetings between staff or with students will need to be scheduled and rooms booked in advance. What will be the point of staff and students coming in at all, except for scheduled classes (which they will be presumably encouraged or required to conduct on-line)?

There appear to be 5 larger offices, 4 on the upper floor, including the vice-chancellor's office. I imagine that they will mainly be for senior admin staff. They include tables and other seats, presumably designed for occasional meetings rather than sharing.

The library concept seems pretty extraordinary. It is the size of a large class-room but there is no indication of how it would work. It is anticipated that books can be requested from the Morris Miller Library but will there be a reference collection etc. Incidentally, I can't see any photo-copying or printing services in the building.

I attach my listing of the rooms [**Attachment A**].

Some additional questions [in a further email]:

What provision is being made for PhD students? One attraction for candidates was the ability to offer them at least a shared office space. The lack of office space is going to be big negative in recruiting academic staff.

How much thought has been given to security issues. The Hedberg is dead and unwelcoming, perhaps necessarily so. The Forestry Building is especially vulnerable. Even small demonstrations at the entrance have the capacity to cause chaos. Again, is UTAS banking on not having students around?