Research proposal summary:  
**The influence of the higher education built   
environment on student outcomes**

**Introduction**To support AUDE Business Partnership objectives, Willmott Dixon has committed funding to deliver research into the influence of the higher education (HE) built environment on student outcomes.

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**Background and rationale**Universities continue to invest extensively in their estates in order to continue to deliver world-class education, research and student experience. AUDE’s Higher Education Estates Management Report 2018 reported that £3bn was spent on capital building during 2016/17, equating to 9.0% of the total sector income of £33.4bn.

It is widely considered that a modern, relevant HE built environment leads to better ‘student outcomes’ including but not limited to academic achievement, higher levels of student retention, enhanced graduate employability, improved health and wellbeing, and an enriched and inclusive student experience.

However, no cohesive body of evidence exists to demonstrate the link between the quality of the HE built environment and improved student outcomes. The proposed research will look at a number of HE built environment capital developments across the UK, and examine their impact on student outcomes.

**Research objectives**The scope and objectives of the research has not been fully determined. Rather, it is proposed that a focus group consisting of relevant stakeholders be formed to agree the most relevant research subjects, quantitative and qualitative measurements, and outcome formats.

Information and data to be researched could include, for example: the type and intended benefits of capital projects; university data including academic achievement, retention, National Student Survey (NSS) results, graduate employment data from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey; and other qualitative and quantitative data.

The research will identify trends linking changes to the HE built environment to changes in the agreed ‘student outcome’ data measurement sets, and report findings.

**Proposed working group**The core focus group is proposed to consist of individuals from the following key stakeholder groups:  
- University strategic planners and senior estates professionals;  
- Academic and research professionals undertaking the research, from one or more HE institutions;  
- Sector bodies including AUDE and the Higher Education Design Quality Forum (HEDQF);  
- Built environment organisations: consultants, architects and contractors;  
- Employers and funding organisations.

A call for interested parties will be announced during the launch of Willmott Dixon’s AUDE Business Partnership in September 2019.

**Funding**  
Alongside Willmott Dixon’s significant and committed funding for the research project, additional funding may be sourced from other private sector stakeholders. An application for Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) funding will also be made to UKRI Councils including Innovate UK, recognising the importance of HE to the future of the UK economy and maximising the depth and impact of the research.

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