

Test Bed Report

University of Central Lancashire



Winter 2018

Test Bed Report

Introduction

It is intended that this short report will capture and analyse some of the main aspects of the Test Bed project with the view of sharing the findings with the Capital Project team and the University, so it can inform the actions to be taken in the future to enable a successfully managed and curated public squares and other spaces.



Background

Test Bed was commissioned by the Capital Projects team at UCLan as part of the public art programme for the Student Building and Squares. The concept for the Test Bed initially was developed out of conversation at the Public Art Steering group. The aim of the project was to engage with the communities of the city and the university to create events and artworks while exploring and examining what could happen in the public spaces of the Student Building and Squares. The artist/designer David Boulton of Bread Art was commissioned to be the artist in residence for a four-month period September to December 2018, supported by local artist Ben Rutherford. The converted shipping containers and the public space were designed by Ian Banks of Atoll and presented a temporary coherent architectural installation, mirroring the building and future square in miniature.

Test Bed Outcomes

Engaging UCLan Communities

Engaging the UCLan community of staff to lead projects while working with students was our most successful approach. Charles Quick presented to the School of Art Design and Fashion at an away day in July 2018. The PowerPoint was latter emailed to all the staff in the whole school. Ian Banks spoke to specific UCLan staff about the opportunities test bed presented during the summer term. This undoubtable sowed the seeds for latter follow up and gave a realistic amount of time for staff to think of proposals. This was re-enforced up by notices on outlook and canvassing parties who we thought might be interested.

David Knight the course leader for the Art and Design Foundation Course responded with a request to carry out a big draw event, which would be led by his students, also enable members of the wider university cohort and members of the public to join in. The use of music activated the space and encouraged others to enter and participate.



Art and Design Foundation Big Draw

Others were encouraged to respond and engage once they saw the Test Bed installed and could then think of proposals. David Boulton worked with the director of Moor Music Loz Kaye and Jon Aveyard of the Worldwide Samba Drummers based at UCLan who collaborated on a new piece for the Test Bed, Boom Box curating

dancing drumming and lighting. They had several rehearsal workshops, one of which was on site, before performing it live in the early evening. Their presence and the sound attracted a passing audience and others in the vicinity to come and see what was taking place. Out of all the events these were the best attended. Most of the staff and students that led events were from the faculty of Culture and Creative Industries mainly because there were more established relationships of trust already formed.



Boom Box World Wise Samba 2

Engaging communities from outside the university

Over all, the project spoke to 58 individuals and groups from across the university and the city this resulted in 17 different events of different sizes and time scales. 25 of the people contacted were from UCLan with the remaining 33, artists or community organisations from across the city. However, this broke down in terms of events as 4 events from the city and 13 from UCLan. Some of this was down to lead in time and other feedback we received was that there needed to be a much longer time to build relationships of trust before communities would feel confident to undertake events outside they own bases and locations.





Windmill Factory English Martyrs Primary School

A good example of that was the two windmill workshops with pupils from English Martyrs Primary School, this built on an already strong working relationship that the University had developed over many years. Several other organisations contacted the project as it ended, as a result the Test Bed having a higher profile by then.



Lauren Sagar MA Fine student Art pop up exhibition The March of the Artists

One aspect that did emerge, that we had not predicted was that artists/staff from UCLan and the city saw the containers as exhibition, workshop and meeting spaces. Some saw it as a neutral space between city and UCLan others saw it as an opportunity to test ideas and present artwork in pop up gallery situations.



Jayne Simpson Life Drawing Class



Ashley Hardman Passer By Portraits

They seemed to be a real need for this type of temporary space and it was very popular. By the end of the project we still receiving requests to use it.

Lead in time

As the project developed it became apparent that the lead in time from advertising the opportunity, meeting response, assessing their proposals, advertising the event and then facilitating it, need to be much longer than we had allowed for, particularly for larger events. Large events usually have lead in times of about 12 months



Audience

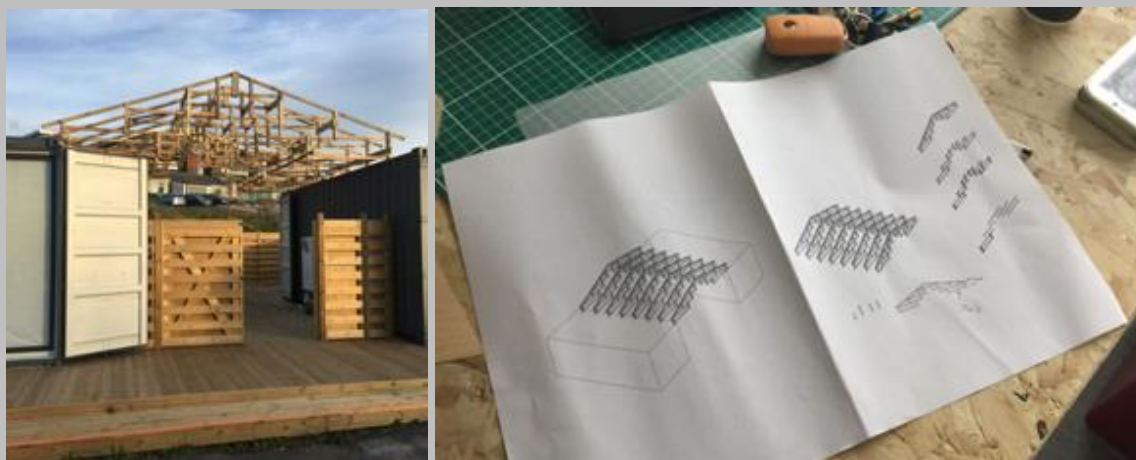
The focus for Test Bed with pop up projects was mainly a passing audience. There wasn't a long enough lead in time or high-level PR and marketing campaign to build a specific audience. However, it was interesting to assess which events attracted a passing crowd. Out of all the events the drumming performances had the largest impact with people crossing the road and slowing down in cars to view the performance in the early evening.



Final Year Architecture Technology students work shop.

Research Test Space

Some of the activities enabled academics to test out ideas and approaches. The Art and Design Foundation course's big draw was a seen as a successful way of testing an idea to take their big draw pop event to other venues for example feeder schools and colleges to the university <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/news/students-draw-on-their-talent-at-uclan.php>



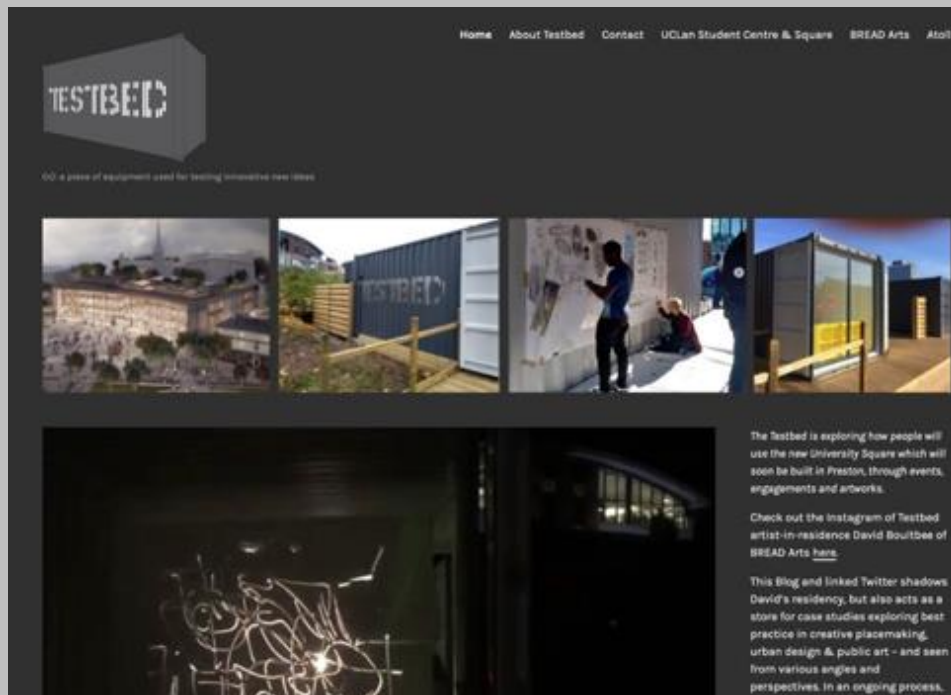
Lee Ivett and Architecture Technology Students temporary roof

Lee Ivett's temporary roof which was constructed by students from the Architecture Technology course was the first time that Lee had constructed such a low-cost roof. He is now discussing with a local community group [Lets Grow Preston](https://www.lets-grow-preston.org/) to see if it can be recycled as a part of a new outdoor kitchen which would then be used to run community Cook to Eat sessions. Lee has recently been shortlisted for a community architecture ward for a project he completed in the summer.

Square as an entirety

Using social media namely a blog post <https://thetestbed.info/> and Instagram account we explored how the square in the future could be an entirety. So, an audience might develop an interest in it through they would never visit it. This is a

very different type of activity than promoting it as a, space for events and utilises a different approach to the use of social media. It is an approach which can extend the places influence beyond its physical boundaries.



Test Bed blog

Observations from Test Bed to Consider

Curation

Public spaces and events are very rarely solo operations they require many different partners to be successful with one taking the lead. This is demonstrated well by the partnership which was developed to deliver test bed with the lead , In Certain Places – working in partnership with Atoll Architects, Bread Art, and Capital Projects followed by a list of all the participating groups. Though this was for a relatively small self-contained space, it still required a lot of input from all parties to create a programme which effectively ran over 2 months.

You only need to think of all the elements that are involved in putting one event on a year at the university i.e. the [Lancashire Science Festival](#), on for one long weekend, to understand the resource that would be needed to populate the new square on a regular basis. It is going to be important to work in partnership with many different organisations across the city, county and university, if a successful year long programme of activity is going to be created. With a large public square and ground floor space with public access it is going to require someone or an organisation that coordinates and curates what happens in that space.

Visibility

Test Bed was an outpost of the University. I remember when it was first installed we received many questions about what it was, what was it for. We also received reports of the compound being left open (when in fact it hadn't) You very quickly realised that because of the number of people that pass the site every day that there is the opportunity to judge the university purely on what they can see and what they perceive that they see or experience. This of course is going to be multiplied when there is a large space to view each day. People's perception of the square is in part going to form their view of the University It is going to act like a large shop window or front garden, which is very good if you manage to keep it as an activity and lively space.



Preston Art Forum meetings

Night Time Campus

As we were programming at the darkest part of the year it was interesting to observe the campus after 6.00 pm. There were very few people about, no sense of focus or safety in numbers, no real public visibility. There are in fact a lot of events happening after 6.00pm on the campus on any one night it is just that it is spread over many different locations. There is an opportunity with the new square and public spaces to re-address that on some evening.



Security

From day one we developed a relationship with the security of University. They had a set of keys and contact details. We notified them of any incidents (one) as well as informing them of our activities especially if it involved events late at night. This is just another example of the level of engagement that is required to manage a public event space.

Bridging Space

Bread Arts ambition for the test bed was for it to be a bridging space between the university and the city. In many ways it full filled this function as demonstrated by the different projects that took place and the way artists and staff from the city were so open to using the space. I think David Boultree's phrase could be the ambition of the finished square and student builds - bridging space

Public Square Brand

Public spaces and their surrounding architecture can become a place with their own identity within a larger city landscape. The New Square and Student Building has the potential to become a destination within Preston. It will be one of 4 significant public spaces in the city, each with their identities; Flag Market, Covered Market, Bus Station. It will be important to be aware of the programming of these other spaces. If the new square is going to going to become a destination, the audience it attracts will depend on what it is offering.



Instagram poster for events

[Granary Square](#) Kings Cross London is a commercial enterprise led by a developer. It is designed to promote the area. So, its offer is quite specific and relates to the values of the development. It is a good case study in the sense of using a public space to promote a much bigger organisation. There is potential for the new square to have a marketing value as well as a way of promoting the values of the university which will probably be different to Kings Cross.

There are international and European Prizes for new public spaces led by such organisations as [CCCB](#) which we might like to think about entering in the future, again adding marketing value.

Final Thoughts

- A visiting audience will not necessarily understand/perceive the interior public space of the Student Building as any different to the exterior space of the Square.
- Consideration should be given to managing/curating the new square and the public spaces of the Student Building as a whole, not as two separate spaces.
- With less than a two-year lead in time to the square and the building being open, the time line will soon become critical for a management structure to be in place in time for the opening.
- If it is intended to plan a programme containing large events a minimum of 12 months is needed.
- Thinking about how best to engage the cultural use of this shared public realm will need to be an ongoing reflective process.
- Event expenditure could be seen in terms of marketing, public engagement, profile and brand development.
- The architectural structure of the converted shipping containers was very versatile and adaptable, these spaces attracted many creative proposals. They could be an asset for the new square.



Lead Partners

In Certain Places – Charles Quick

Atoll Architects – Ian banks

Bread Art Collective David Boulton, Ben Rutherford

Capital Projects David Smith, Bob Turner

Construction

Universal Containers

Ashton Joinery

Participating artists, groups and staff

Roberta Cialfi, Ash Hardman, Lauren Saga, English Martyrs Primary School, Jayne Simpson, Jo Garrett, Ann Vanne, Mark Parkinson, David Knight, Steph Fletcher, Loz Kaye, Lee Ivett, Jon Aveyard, Kate Moran.

Charles Quick February 2019.