

# I have a Dream

(Catherine, not Martin Luther King)

## THE DREAM

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By Easter Term 2026, to have dedicated examination space on the ground floor of the CUPA building<sup>1</sup> that will accommodate various modes of assessment, including digital assessment and provide space for most students with examination adjustments<sup>2</sup>.

Having secured this space for examinations (including digital assessment), then to consider the additional opportunities and efficiencies created as a result.

## BACKGROUND

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For further details on pressures related to education spaces, refer to the following documents:

- [‘Review of Central Education Space: a critical moment’](#) discussed at the Programme Board for Education Space (February 2023)
- [‘Education Space and Examinations’](#) discussed at the Programme Board for Education Space (January 2024) and the General Board’s Education Committee (January 2024).

## CONTENTS

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The Dream .....	1
Background .....	1
Executive summary .....	2
Key Issues – the need .....	2
Current Risks associated with inadequate exam space .....	3
Risk mitigation – but also additional opportunities .....	3
Significant risks are mitigated .....	3
Significant benefits and opportunities arise.....	4
Realising the Dream: .....	5
First step – the key – secure CUPA for examinations.....	5
Delivering CUPA ready for use.....	6
Future Considerations, When CUPA is in use .....	7

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<sup>1</sup> This is separate to the space highlighted for UIS and Hamilton Kerr Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Complex cases might still require accommodation in College.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## KEY ISSUES – THE NEED

1. **Lack of dedicated examination space within the University:** Causes uncertainty and scheduling challenges; provides differing conditions and experiences; scatters examinations across the estate and into external venues all resulting in suboptimal experiences. Increasing student numbers and diversification in assessment, including the desire for more digital assessment, exacerbate space constraints.
2. **Age and limitations of existing spaces:** Most examinations occur in teaching spaces built in the previous century, which are not designed for modern assessments, especially digital formats. Raked lecture theatres are utilised out of necessity rather than choice. There is no consistency in the space standards and closure of key spaces like Mill Lane Lecture Theatres and the New Museum's Site Examination Halls has further reduced availability.
3. **Scheduling Conflicts:** Examination venues are often required for teaching, leading to clashes and last-minute relocations. To minimise noise disruption caused by candidates leaving the room, examinations of the same length are scheduled in a single room. This requires more space.
4. **Financial and operational challenges:** Insufficient University education space has resulted in ongoing hiring and use of third-party space. Lack of dedicated examination storage space means items are scattered across the estate, often in poor and inadequate conditions. Typically, ~£288k is spent on room hire and associated courier costs. Colleges currently absorb additional costs for in-College examinations, including space and invigilation.
5. **Insufficient space to deliver digital assessments:** Data modelling of space by EventMap in February 2005 indicates a developing acute deficit that could prevent the future roll-out of digital assessment. The report recommends *'that the University of Cambridge consider the identification and development of a large-scale venue with 1000 or more seats capacity to position for developing future needs. Additionally, consideration may be provided to which existing venues could support digital delivery to ensure optimum capacity'*.<sup>3</sup>
6. **Inadequate support of examination adjustments:** Rising number of students with examination adjustments (e.g., additional time, rest breaks, low-density spaces) overwhelm University and College resources. Complex cases often default to College spaces, adding to their financial and operational burden.
7. **Safety and noise disruptions:** Some venues, located on the public highway, pose safety concerns for students and the public. Noise disruption can lead to complaints and requests for allowances. Post exam exuberance leads to complaints and financial compensation.
8. **Reshaping the Estate ambitions:** Reliance on certain centrally managed and departmental spaces inhibits Reshaping the Estate Candidate Plans (e.g., development of the University Centre, decant accommodation on the New Museums Site). The Candidate Plans have not fully considered the examination load and therefore, more space is likely to be required.

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<sup>3</sup> Digital Exam Capacity Model, February 2025, produced by David Reaney of EventMap

## CURRENT RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH INADEQUATE EXAM SPACE

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**Risks arising from the lack of dedicated examination space align with the University Risk Register, including:**

**Risk 2:** Failure to develop, maintain and protect our estate as fit-for purpose, now and for the future.

**Risk 3:** Failure to meet the contemporary needs and expectations of our digital technology users.

**Risk 11:** Failure to maintain and enhance educational excellence.

**Specific risks:**

- a. Failure to meet legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010.
- b. Failure to provide the education ambitions for assessment, including digital assessment.
- c. Failure to accommodate students with examination adjustments in University spaces.
- d. Failure to maintain integrity of the examinations, due to lack of dedicated and appropriate storage.
- e. Increasing operational costs.

## RISK MITIGATION – BUT ALSO ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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**SIGNIFICANT RISKS ARE MITIGATED**

**9. Addresses the specific risks noted above:**

- a. Facilitates part of our legal obligation to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for disabled students.
- b. Offers the potential to accommodate all modes of assessment (subject to modelling).
- c. With appropriate scheduling, provides the facilities for all digital assessments, including professional body examinations (e.g., Clinical School).
- d. With careful design and scheduling, accommodates many more student with examination adjustments in a University space.
- e. Maintains integrity and provides the necessary storage facilities through careful design.
- f. More predictable operational costs, leading to better budgeting.

**10. Supports Delivery of Diverse Assessment Modes and Needs:**

- a. Accommodates various formats, including traditional and digital assessments, and most students with examination adjustments.
- b. Zoning allows accommodation of examinations of varying lengths.
- c. Co-location with the UIS allows collaboration and support for digital assessments.

**11. Enhances the Student Experience:**

- a. Provides dedicated facility for all students sitting examinations, including those on the Foundation Year and for many students with examination adjustments.
- b. Delivers purpose-built space that will standardise the provision and support available (which is currently diluted over 30+ sites and most Colleges).

- c. Distinctly provides specialist designed space for students with examination adjustments.
- d. Offers students a consistent and familiar environment for each exam and throughout each year of study.

## SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISE

### **12. Alleviates pressure on University spaces:**

- a. Removes reliance on education spaces required also for teaching, thus removing clashes, and enabling their optimal use.
- b. Reduces reliance on centrally managed and departmental spaces.
- c. Returns some venues to their original purpose (e.g., the Sports Hall).
- d. Consolidates storage into one venue, releasing space across the estate (e.g., Lords Bridge, Parsons Court, Central Store etc).
- e. Enables greater flexibility in the Reshaping the Estate Candidate Plans and further development of the University estate, for example allowing some contingency for decant.

### **13. Reduces the burden on Colleges:**

- a. Alleviates the documented pressures on Colleges by providing dedicated, specialist and supported space for most students with examination adjustments.
- b. Allows Colleges to accommodate students with the most complex needs.

### **14. Meets strategic ambitions endorsed by the General Board:**

- a. Recent reviews (the Teaching Review, Disability Review and Review of the University's approach to Examination and Assessment Adjustments, Allowances and Mitigation) require changes to education space, including:
  - i. Delivering standard set of reasonable examination adjustments.
  - ii. Absorbing more assessments in University space.
  - iii. Removing Saturday lectures, which might heighten demand on education space Monday to Friday.
- b. The University's Access and Participation Plan has ambitions for better inclusion and achievements, which this facility would support.

### **15. Achieves some cost savings:**

- a. Eliminates annual venue hire costs and associated expenditure, which totalled **£287,773.32** in 2024-25. This is typical of a standard year.
- b. The total included:
  - i. Room hire: £243,866.00.  
Of this, £89,012 covered the costs of the Sports Hall and Studio and £154,854.00 was spent on external hire costs.
  - ii. Exam courier costs: £35,535.72
  - iii. Courier and carpet costs for the Sports Hall: £8,371.60

**16. Streamlines operations:**

- a. Reduces operational inefficiencies and logistical complexities.
- b. Improves oversight and environment for examination casual staff.
- c. Efficiencies and benefits secured through shared reception and facilities management.

**17. Builds in resilience:**

- a. Ensures the University can meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse student population.
- b. Allows continuity of provision and substantially reduces the reliance on other venues. (In 2027 the external hire venues - the Corn Exchange and the Guildhall - will be unavailable. There is no identified alternative space).

**18. Utilises otherwise redundant space:**

- a. Increases utilisation of a space, within a building of limited occupation.
- b. Guarantees use of a space that has no identified alternative use.
- c. Prevents mothballing a large space, especially when parts of the building will be operational.
- d. Offers potential to accommodate other activities, including income generating activities, when examinations are not scheduled.

**19. Offers potential for income generation:** initial ideas include:

- a. Running university admissions tests: The Joint tests that Cambridge and Imperial have developed with Pearson Vue are delivered digitally. Possible new test (the TARA) from UAT-UK. Venues in and around Cambridge are limited and need expanding.
- b. Providing an Exams Assessment Centre for Cambridge schools and colleges: noting likely clash in timetables this might be very limited, but CUPA might wish to use as a pilot test centre as the sector begins to go to trial GCSE digital assessments. (AQA and Pearson are in this space already).

**20. Offers potential for other uses:**

- a. Enables Widening Participation summer school: students to prepare for the online admissions test, particularly for subjects like Natural Sciences, Law, and Engineering.

**21. Philanthropy:** actively being pursued.**22. Reshaping the Estate:**

- a. This dream (if it releases the benefits for teaching space) will address much of the education space programme that is not only a key strand of Reshaping the Estate but, more importantly, a key concern of all Schools.

## REALISING THE DREAM:

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### FIRST STEP — THE KEY — SECURE CUPA FOR EXAMINATIONS

**23. Governance and Decision Making – and first steps:**

- a. The proposed Reshaping the Estate Candidate Plans considered education space within, not as a discrete matter. This proposes an alternative approach creating dedicated examination space.

- b. Urgently decide whether this is acceptable, assuming the costs are met by the capital fund and then how to proceed and not be delayed by decisions due on the Candidate Plans.
- c. If supported, require an urgent feasibility study.
- d. If supported, and to ensure delivery by Easter Term 2026, consider adopting the operational approach previously used so successfully to refurbish Sidgwick Lecture Block.

**24. Champion and Buy-in – as soon as possible:**

- a. Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Professor Bhaskar Vira and Professor Anna Philpott), Academic Lead, Professor John Dennis, and the Programme Board for Education Space to champion.
- b. Seek endorsement from all Schools and Colleges.
- c. Identify additional income potential and other uses.
- d. Pursue philanthropic donation(s).

**DELIVERING CUPA READY FOR USE**

**25. Examination Data – collect and analyse:**

- a. Obtain all examination data, including for students with examination adjustments, to inform the feasibility study and any subsequently design plans.
- b. Model the data to identify if the CUPA space is sufficient for all examinations or whether other space is still required.

**26. Teaching data – collect and analyse:**

- a. Need to understand the teaching demand as mostly use the same venues to deliver examinations.
- b. Model the data to:
  - i. Determine spaces no longer required for examinations and can focus on teaching provision.
  - ii. Identify any under utilised education space that accommodate teaching from less optimal locations (e.g., the University Centre).
  - iii. Identify any spaces that can be released (e.g., the University Centre), or returned to original purpose (e.g., the Sports Hall).

**27. Data Methodology and Systems:**

- a. Determine the data methodology, means and resource to collect and analyse. The means and frequency of data collection should be informed by, amongst other matters:
  - i. concerns about workload.
  - ii. short term or long-term solution (the latter achieving ongoing live information rather than random snap shots that will require repeated efforts to submit and analyse).
  - iii. work effort where data structure is not standard.
  - iv. resource and systems availability<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The University is considering a Course Management System that would hold information on teaching and provide the single source of information. Progress is slow.

- b. Secure buy-in from Faculties and Departments (together with the Heads of Schools and Departments).

## **FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS, WHEN CUPA IS IN USE**

### **28. Distribution of examinations:**

- a. Tripos Examination Governance: Chapter III Ordinances govern the timing and processes of Tripos examinations. If there was a desire to spread the distribution of examination, particularly in Easter Term, this would require buy-in from Schools and then a Report and approval by the members of the Regent House.

Prepared by Catherine Fage, 13 February 2025