

UCL Laws Bentham House

Moot Court Alterations | Design and Access Statement | September 2018



Introduction

This report has been prepared by Levitt Bernstein on behalf of University College London to describe alterations to the Moot Court, a room within their Faculty of Laws. It is proposed that an existing desk and bulkhead are altered in order to accommodate AV equipment more effectively, supporting the room's current function as a teaching venue.

The Faculty of Laws occupies Bentham House and the adjacent Gideon Schreier Wing. Bentham House is a Grade II listed building. Both buildings were subject to a planning and Listed Building Consent permission granted in 2014 for their extension, refurbishment and modernisation (reference 2014/5034/P, 2014/5044/L).

Four subsequent permissions have also been granted:

- Consent for a new inset dormer window at roof level of the Gideon Schreier Wing (reference 2016/2131/P) was granted in July 2016.
- Consent for work within new areas of Bentham House together with other, minor alterations to the 2014 scheme (reference 2016/3298/P, 2016/3807/L) was granted in August 2016.
- Consent for additional roof plant and related acoustic screen (reference 2017/3785/P, 2017/4263/L) was granted in October 2017
- Consent for external signage (reference 2017/5671/P, 2017/4832/L, 2017/4537/A was granted in November 2017)

Construction of all of these consented works has recently completed. Attention is now focused on the Moot Court, an existing room previously outside our scope of works, where the AV provision now falls below what is being provided elsewhere. The following proposals seek to redress this.

Background

Bentham House, formerly Thorne House, was previously identified as contributing positively to the character of the conservation area and is now Grade II Listed. Opened in 1957, it has been occupied by the Faculty of Laws since 1965.

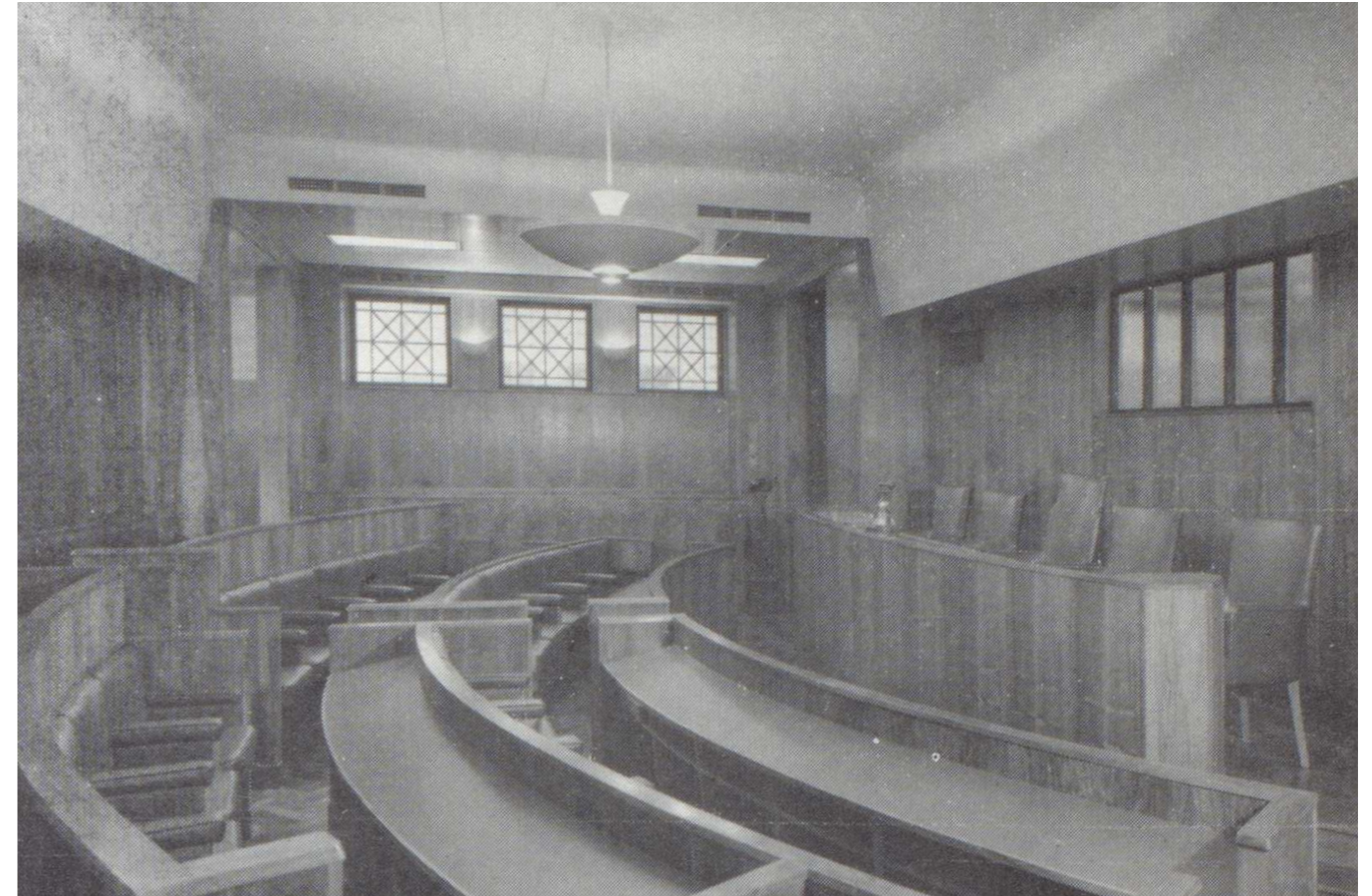
Bentham House was purpose-built for the National Union of General and Municipal Workers to a design by H. and H. Martin Lidbetter. The Moot Court room, formerly the union debating chamber and now used for mock trial exercises, has held an important role for both occupants of the building. It is also significant in terms of the architectural quality of the building, identified by Historic England in their reason for designation:

'Interior survival: little-altered throughout, the principal interior interest lies in the handsomely fitted main entrance lobbies, stair towers, and the moot court (formerly the council chamber).'

The room is almost fully lined with flush panelling, has a woodblock floor, and retains its original built-in curved benches and desks. The original ceiling however has been altered over time. A raised central section has been lost, with a new tiled ceiling replacing the original at the level of what were two side 'wings'.

The only remnants of the earlier ceiling arrangement are two bulkheads, one front and one rear, that once related to the higher central section. The wooden cornice detail from the head of the veneered panels has been extended across these, presumably in order to rationalise the new junction. Furthermore, the front bulkhead has been adjusted to form a recess which houses a projection screen. It should be noted that the location of this screen is not ideal, as it conflicts with the seating below.

Audio visual equipment has been installed in the new tiled ceiling and in the front podium desk. These would benefit from being rationalised in terms of appearance and operation.



Moot Court at time of construction and following more recent alterations



Proposals

Design

New AV equipment is proposed on the ceiling, front desk, and the front wall, behind the speakers. In all cases, the intention is to minimise the impact on existing fabric, limiting works to original features, making changes which can be reversed, and working with elements which have already been changed since their original construction.

Ceiling mounted speakers, screens, microphones and cameras will be mounted in the existing tiles, which are not original and can be relocated or replaced as necessary.

The desk will contain new equipment including microphones, writing surfaces and computers. These are all incorporated as neatly and naturally as possible, affecting only the leather lined top surface and not the more visible sides and front. The large elements (computers, including screens and keyboard) are mounted below the desk. Holes will be cut for flush glass work surfaces, with screens visible through the desk top and keyboards pulled out on sliding supports. The desk surface is then relined with leather (or similar substitute), so that the new alterations - and any previous alterations - are concealed. Other, smaller equipment is mounted more conventionally on the desk, taking care to keep this behind the veneered cladding as much as possible.

Behind the desk, a new LED screen will replace the previous projector screen. This is to be mounted over the existing internal window, replacing the current screen which overhangs the speakers' chairs. To improve sight lines to the screen, the existing bulkhead recess is made larger, effectively removing the bulkhead entirely and leaving in its place white painted walls (above the retained veneered linings) that indicate clearly where the bulkhead once was.

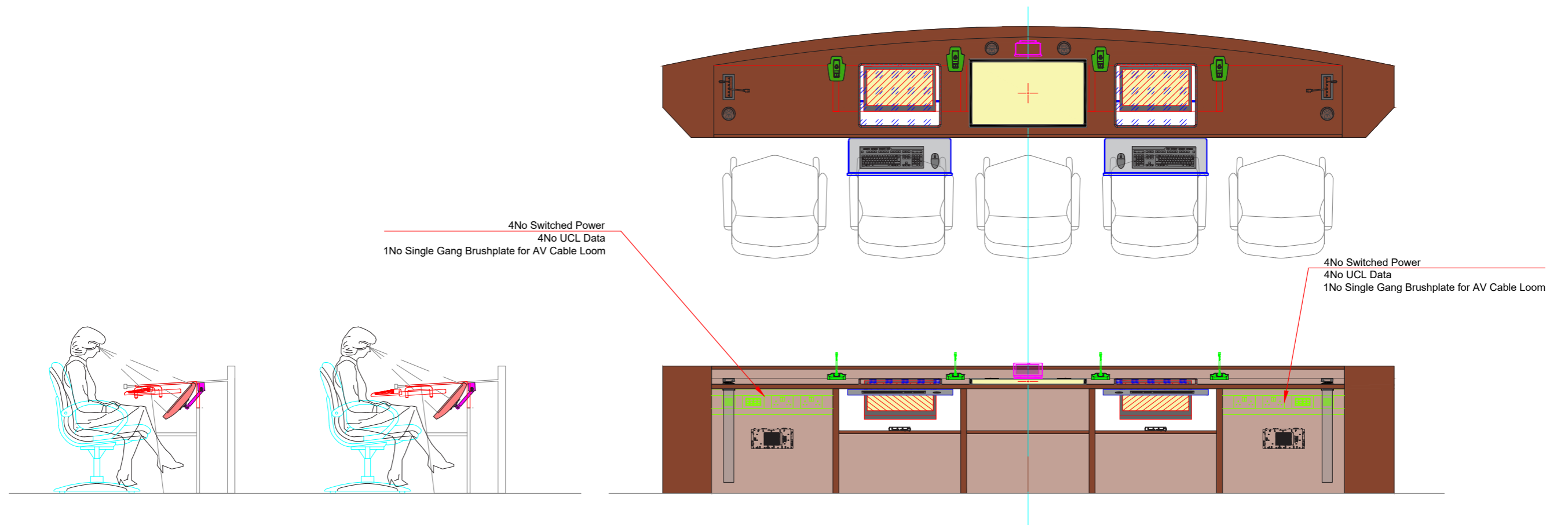
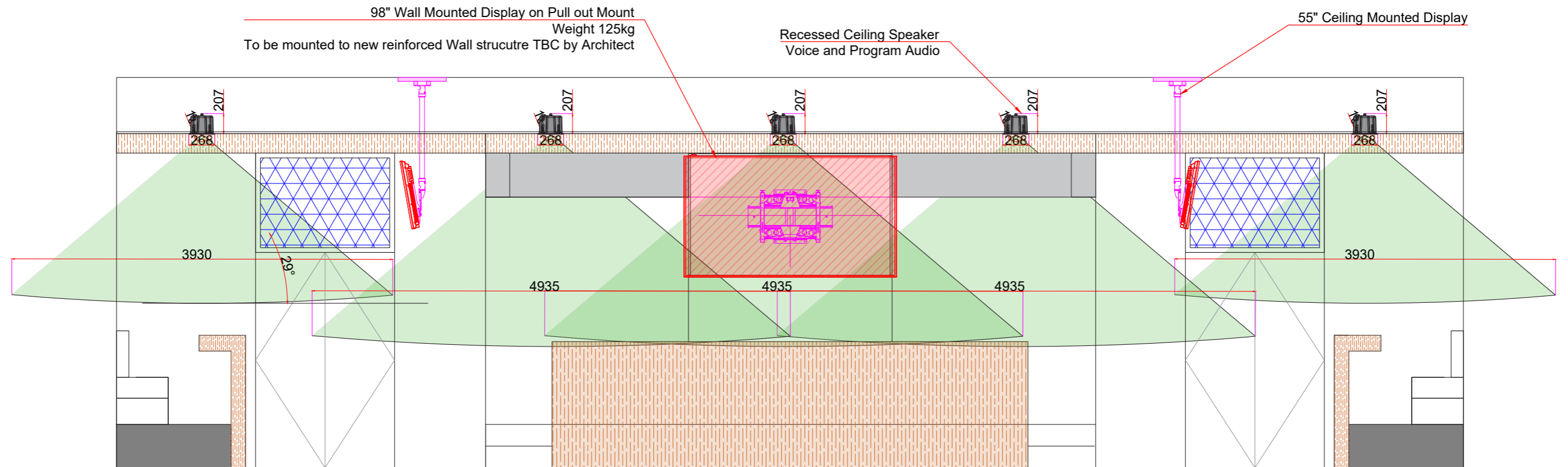
The LED screen will be mounted on a new infill panel over the existing internal window. This is to provide a robust enough substrate for the heavy screen. It will be veneered on the room side, to blend with the walls, and will be disguised from the corridor side by lining the glass with translucent film.

Access

The proposed works are fully internal, so do not affect access to or around the building. Once inside, the improved AV equipment will improve inclusive use of the room through better sound, sightlines and screen quality. Replacing the projector screen above the speakers seats with the new screen at the rear will also improve physical movement around the stage area.



Bulkhead and desk, before works





Window and bulkhead proposals seen from inside Moot Court. Existing (right) and proposed (left)

levittbernstein.co.uk

London

1 Kingsland Passage
London E8 2BB

+44 (0)20 7275 7676

Manchester

3rd Floor HQ Building
2 Atherton Street
Manchester M3 3GS

+44 (0)161 669 8740