Frequently Asked Questions - The Braggs

1. What is happening?

The University of Adelaide is developing a new $77 million teaching and research building on the site previously occupied by Union Hall. The development will bring great scientific advances, top teaching and research facilities for students and staff and an estimated $230 million and 2000 jobs into the state economy.

This is the next step in the University of Adelaide's four-year $400 million building program to provide first-class research and teaching facilities for staff and students. The redevelopment of the old Union Hall site is expected to be complete in March 2012.

2. What will the new building be used for?

The new building will provide 8,200 square metres over seven levels of much-needed research and teaching space. It will house the University's Institute for Photonics and Advanced Sensing (IPAS), a new state-of-the-art 420-seat lecture theatre and other research and teaching facilities to help meet our rapidly growing student numbers and research activity. Students will benefit from the use of the first-rate teaching facilities, and the opportunity to work with great researchers, who will be attracted from around the world to this facility.

3. What is IPAS?

The Institute for Photonics and Advanced Sensing will allow our researchers to develop revolutionary technologies that will bring tremendous benefits to health, the environment, food and wine production and defence using some of the most sophisticated fibre optical laboratories found anywhere in the world.

4. Why was Union Hall chosen as the site for this redevelopment?

Union Hall's the only site that meets all the criteria for this development. It offers the best value for money in terms of more space at less cost, there is less redevelopment required and a shorter construction period and therefore less disruption to campus life. As a land locked University with little space to work with, the University needs to ensure all spaces are being fully utilised. This development allows the University to replace an ageing facility that was used primarily as a lecture theatre with a new building that provides up-to-date facilities for a range of teaching, learning and research purposes.

5. What about the loss of theatre space?

Union Hall wasn't used regularly as a full theatre venue for some years and not at all as a performance venue since 2007. Millions of dollars would have been required to meet occupational health and safety requirements and to refurbish it for continued use as a modern theatre and this would not meet the University's urgent need to develop more teaching and research facilities to accommodate rapid student growth. Union Hall was not used by Adelaide Festival since 2000, there was limited use in the last decade by Adelaide Fringe, and the University's Theatre Guild stopped its regular use 15 years ago.
6. What is happening with other theatre venues on campus?

The University is investing in a $1.5 million upgrade of Scott Theatre to enhance its suitability as an educational and performance space. The Festival will be using Scott Theatre in February. The Little Theatre continues to be the home of our Theatre Guild and each year it attracts thousands of people to performances. Elder Hall is another important venue for the performing arts. During the 2010 Adelaide Festival, there were 28 performances in Scott Theatre (20 performances by State Theatre Company) and Elder Hall (8 performances) - more performances than any other venue provider outside the Adelaide Festival Centre.

7. What about heritage listing?

Heritage listing Union Hall would not have helped the arts community with theatre space. The University of Adelaide already has 41 heritage-listed facilities and we are highly regarded for our work on heritage conservation. However, in the past few years we have spent more than $4.7 million on conservation of just three of our heritage-listed buildings, and we receive no ongoing funding for this.

8. What about the public interest?

This building was built in the 1950s and it's not equipped for 21st Century purposes. Contrary to what some people have said, Union Hall was originally built as a multipurpose facility - deliberately not called a theatre, but rather Union Hall. It was funded from a fundraising campaign. The biggest contribution to this campaign came from the University; the balance from a public appeal with input from the Adelaide University Union, which at the time was an association of staff and students. We want the best facility for the overall benefit of our students, staff and the community and we believe the redevelopment of this site will bring far greater benefits for them and for South Australia.

9. What alternative venues will replace the Union Hall lecture theatre?

Contingency planning was underway in 2009 to determine alternative lecture theatre space during construction and timetabling. The Scott Theatre lecture theatre underwent an upgrade and became available as an alternative venue for the 2010 academic year along with several other venues. The previous Union Hall lecture theatre will be replaced with a state-of-the-art 420-seat lecture theatre after the building’s completion in March 2012.

10. Union Hall had 499 seats. The new lecture theatre has 420 seats, are we losing 79 seats overall?

No. Union Hall was originally built with 499 seats but, for many years, had 415 seats. There will be 420 seats in the new lecture theatre. But this development is not about a lecture theatre alone. We are replacing a lecture theatre with a seven-level building with world-class science facilities, plus a lecture theatre of equivalent size, plus other much needed teaching and research space.

11. How can I find out more information about this building project?

Information and updates about this development will be provided on a dedicated webpage on the University’s website - www.adelaide.edu.au/infrastructure/projects/