

Sheffield Students' Union Maps New Direction with Student Belonging at Its Core

The University of Sheffield Students' Union (SU), long recognised as the UK's top student unions, is launching [a new strategic direction which puts 'Belonging' at the heart](#) of the student experience.

As part of this shift, SUSU has implemented an in-building digital mapping solution that's now live and already shaping how students interact with their physical and social environment.

With over 31,000 members and a complex, six-story building that houses everything from a cinema and nightclubs to student services and community spaces, the SU sought a way to make its spaces easier to navigate, particularly for students who are new to the university, or who face mobility or language-related barriers.



Students gather outside the University of Sheffield Students' Union, a space at the heart of campus life, now easier to navigate thanks to recent digital wayfinding improvements.

“A lot of our work is about making students feel like this is *their* space,” said Richard Copley, the project lead at The University of Sheffield Students' Union. “We've built a

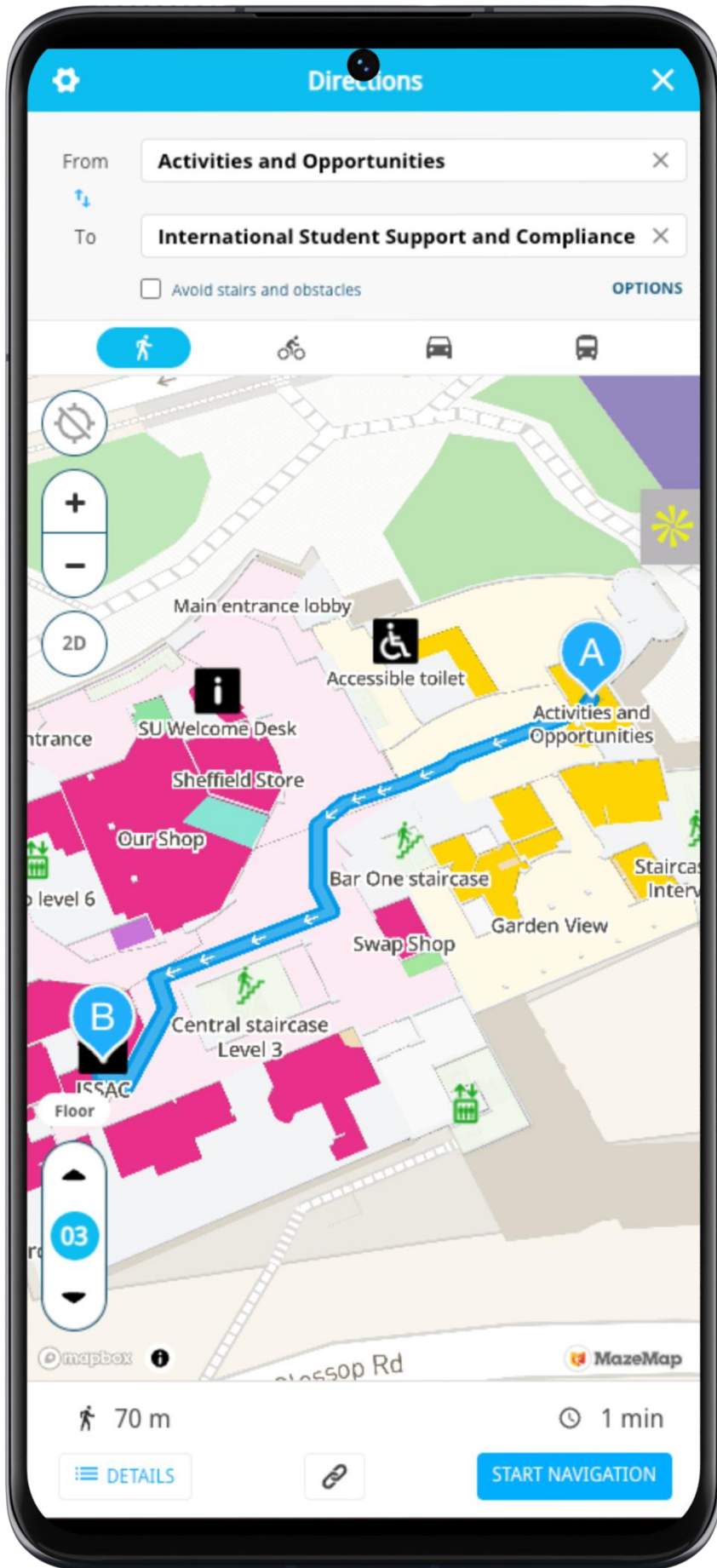
Students' Union that's busy and vibrant, but also a bit of a maze, so we wanted to make it more accessible, more discoverable, and more welcoming to everyone."

Digital Wayfinding Meets Real-World Impact

Part of this effort is the integration of [MazeMap](#), a digital indoor mapping system that is now fully operational within the Union. Students can use the tool to find step-free routes, navigate between venues and services, and access information in multiple languages, especially important for Sheffield's international student population, which includes over 10,000 students from around the world.

The project has already yielded insights with real-world implications. For example, testing the platform uncovered that the most direct route between two of the SU's busiest venues involved stairs, with no alternative internal path. This prompted an internal review and laid the groundwork for discussions about improving physical accessibility in future building works.

"MazeMap helped us see the building through students' eyes," said Copley. "It's already making our spaces more usable, and in some cases, revealing barriers we hadn't noticed."



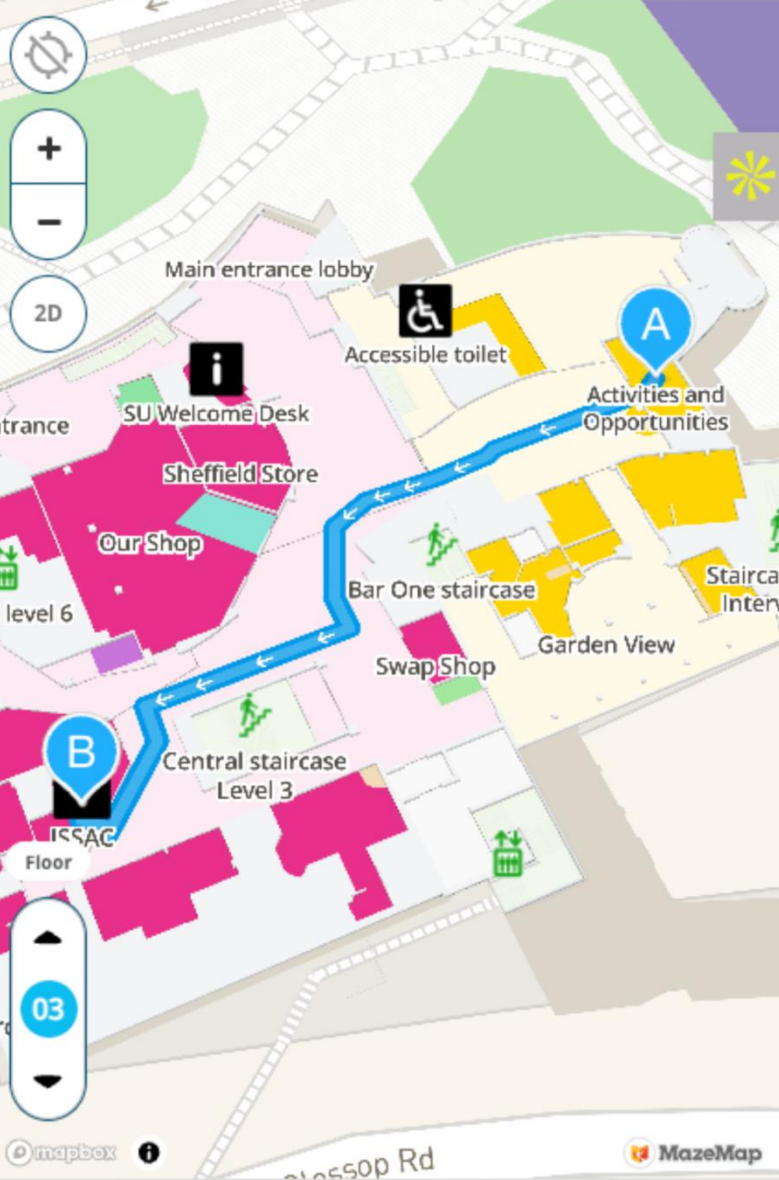
Directions



From **Activities and Opportunities**

To **International Student Support and Compliance**

Avoid stairs and obstacles **OPTIONS**



mapbox

MazeMap

70 m

1 min

DETAILS



START NAVIGATION

A screenshot of MazeMap in action at Sheffield SU, offering students clear, accessible directions between locations

Fostering Belonging, Before Students Even Arrive

The University of Sheffield Students' Union is now exploring how to extend these digital experiences to support students before they arrive on campus. Plans are in motion to incorporate digital orientation into *induction programs*, allowing incoming students to explore the Union virtually, find key services, and build a sense of familiarity in the weeks between receiving their placement and moving to Sheffield.

This is particularly meaningful in the UK's university system, where students typically receive their final confirmation in mid-August but don't begin university until late September. "It's a strange time when students are in limbo, waiting to come to Sheffield" said Copley. "We see it as a real opportunity to say: *We're ready for you. Here's your place. Take a look around.*"

Accessibility as Strategy, Not Afterthought

The integration of MazeMap wasn't just about navigation, it was a response to years of student feedback about the difficulty of moving through the building, especially for those with physical accessibility needs. By mapping the Union in detail and validating pathing, SUSU now has a clearer understanding of where improvements are needed, and is using that insight to guide operational and structural changes.

Students are also starting to use MazeMap to discover less-trafficked spaces and venues, a behaviour that the SU is keen to encourage. "There's huge potential to use this technology not just for orientation, but for community-building," said Copley. "If we can guide students to spaces they wouldn't otherwise find, and make them feel welcome there, we create opportunities for deeper engagement."

A Foundation for What Comes Next

While the Union's broader ambitions around well-being, sustainability, and digital engagement are still developing, the groundwork now in place offers a promising path forward. The focus remains on creating a student environment where everyone can feel included, informed, and empowered.

"We're not claiming to have solved everything," Copley noted. "But if even one student feels more confident, more connected, or more seen because of this work, that's a win for us."

As higher education adapts to a changing world, Sheffield Students' Union is showing how digital tools, accessibility, and a strong sense of mission can work together to reshape student life for the better.

For more information about Sheffield Students' Union and its initiatives, visit <https://su.sheffield.ac.uk/> or contact r.copley@sheffield.ac.uk

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