Northumbria University

Driving technology in learning.

SUMMARY

With 31,000 students and 3,000 staff members, Northumbria University is among the country's largest and most diverse organisations. Its vision is to be one of the world's leading learning and teaching universities, renowned for excellence in student experience, innovative research-based practice and high quality enterprise. In the heart of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, the award-winning City Campus east and the newly developed City Campus west together create superb, state-of-the-art facilities for students, staff and the local community.

At the core of this ongoing investment is an innovative, award-winning IT infrastructure which has seen Northumbria University named as the "UK's most IT-enabled organisation" at the prestigious Computing awards for excellence in 2006. The University faced stiff competition from leading organisations throughout the UK for this sought-after award, including the Honda Formula 1 team and the International Development Agency. "We're very proud of the fact that we're driving the use of technology in higher education," says Joe Evans, Technical Services Manager, IT Services, whose centralised team looks after IT for the University's nine schools across two campuses. "The innovative IT infrastructure we've created is designed to underpin and enhance every aspect of university life by improving communication and interaction - and at the same time, making us more efficient as an organisation."

SOLUTION

This commitment to technological innovation extends to a passion for the latest learning technologies - with TurningPoint playing an increasingly important role in student learning. TurningPoint makes Microsoft PowerPoint presentations interactive by allowing the lecturer to create questions for students to answer via their individual ResponseCards.

Part of the IT Services Team's role is to maintain and renew equipment on a rolling basis, and when the time came to look at replacing the University's aging voting systems, Joe discovered TurningPoint. "We had some old, unreliable equipment that was difficult to install, and because of its problems, the technology was only used by a small number of staff members," he says. "That's why I was so impressed when I saw a demonstration of TurningPoint which addressed all of our needs."

OUTCOMES

As the University's diverse teaching staff receives training and becomes more proficient in the use of TurningPoint, it is proving to be an increasingly popular learning tool throughout the University. The main departments using TurningPoint are the Business School and the School of Law, where the feedback has been excellent. "I personally use TurningPoint in both large lecture theatres and in small group lessons," says Michael Stockdale, Principal Lecturer in the School of Law. "Being able to ask questions as we go along helps to keep students engaged, and the instant feedback helps me determine which issues they've understood and which we need to go over again."

"Other colleagues agree that because TurningPoint works through PowerPoint, it is incredibly user friendly and easy to learn," adds Joe. "As well as helping them to gauge their students' understanding, they find it very useful in stimulating group discussions before taking a vote. Some departments have started using TurningPoint in staff meetings, and we've found that when it's used in anonymous mode, the results can be quite different!"

One of the key success factors in the University's IT strategy has been its policy of standardising on leading technologies, and TurningPoint is now the voting system of choice across the whole campus. ResponseCards are kept permanently in larger lecture theatres, and compact portable sets are available for use in smaller rooms.

"It's important that whenever a member of the teaching staff walks into a room they're instantly familiar and comfortable with the technology," he explains. "We've now deployed TurningPoint software across the majority of our teaching rooms to make it a true 'plug and play' system, and it's now making a real difference to teaching and learning at the University."

TURNING technologies