Smarter connects students on campus and at home

To minimize disruption to students' education in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Plymouth's School of Psychology looked to complement in-person teaching with digital learning.

With a new blended learning study space powered by Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub Gen 2 for Zoom Rooms, students can work together to complete groupwork—whether they are on campus or at home.
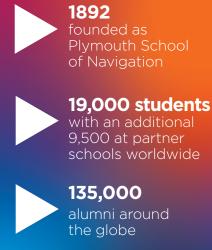
The University of Plymouth is an award-winning university based in Plymouth, UK, renowned globally for the high quality of its teaching, research, and innovation. With roots dating back to the foundation of the Plymouth School of Navigation in 1862, the university is a leader in marine and maritime studies, as well as medicine, cybersecurity, and psychology. With over 19,000 students, a further 9,500 studying for a Plymouth degree at partner institutions in the UK and around the world, and over 135,000 alumni pursuing their chosen careers globally, the university has a truly international presence.

Navigating the new normal

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on teaching and learning. In early 2020, schools, colleges, and universities around the world were required to shut their doors to prevent the spread of the virus, and education was forced to move online. The University of Plymouth was no exception.

Professor Jeremy Goslin, Deputy Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Plymouth, begins: "Pre-pandemic, all my courses were classroom-based with face-to-face teaching. During the first COVID lockdown, we managed to move to 100% online learning in just two weeks."

Following the lifting of restrictions, the University of Plymouth was able to reopen its campus and welcome students back for the

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

1892
founded as Plymouth School of Navigation

19,000 students
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Smarter technology for all

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2021/22 academic year. But, with the pandemic ongoing, the university aimed to enable a blended learning model—supplementing in-person teaching with digital resources.

"The courses I teach involve a lot of practical groupwork, and I wanted students to be able to participate both in person and virtually," says Professor Goslin. "I approached the IT team about upgrading our experiential teaching lab to support blended learning, enabling students who needed to self-isolate or study remotely to seamlessly join those attending in person. To turn the concept into a reality, we looked for a virtual meeting room solution."

Designing a blended learning space

After evaluating several potential solutions, the University of Plymouth selected Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub Gen 2 for Zoom Rooms—an all-in-one meeting room device that is easy to use, easy to deploy, and easy to manage.

Alex Israel, Solution Architect, Technology & Information Services, comments: "Of all the solutions we considered, the Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub had the simplest user interface, which was a key consideration. We wanted the solution to be as intuitive and easy as possible for staff and students to use. What's more, Lenovo is our preferred vendor for laptops, desktops, and workstations, so the ThinkSmart Hub fits seamlessly into our existing technology portfolio."

Working with Getech, a Lenovo Platinum PC Partner and Gold Data Center Partner, the University of Plymouth deployed Lenovo ThinkSmart devices in the psychology lab, creating a blended learning space for in-person and virtual collaboration.

Each six-person desk is equipped with one Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub along with a 180° HD camera, so that students dialing in remotely can clearly see everybody seated at the table. Installed in the middle of the desk, anybody can reach out and take control with the rotatable touchscreen display. Pre-loaded with Zoom Rooms—the university's preferred video conferencing platform for teaching—users can start a meeting in just one click.

Professor Goslin confirms: "Students are very happy interacting with the Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub. It's easy to start a Zoom call, and to adjust the microphone volume and audio settings. It just works."

Dave Burrell, Deployment Team Leader, IT Customer Services, Technology & Information Services, recalls: "Getting the devices set up was very straightforward; the Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub is almost a plug-and-play solution. We simply adjusted the microphone and speaker settings, and they were ready to go."

Device management is simple, too. The IT team uses Lenovo ThinkSmart Manager software to look after the fleet from a single point of control. "We use Lenovo ThinkSmart Manager to keep track of Windows and Zoom updates, ensuring that the devices are up to date and protected," says Alex Israel.

Keeping education on track

With its new blended learning study space powered by Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub Gen 2 for Zoom Rooms, the University of Plymouth can offer psychology students a truly hybrid learning experience. Students can work together to complete assignments, regardless of whether they are physically in the room or working remotely.

"Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub empowers students to come together to collaborate—wherever they are," says Professor Goslin. "No matter where they are,

students can complete group activities with the same people each week, allowing work to progress. For example, if someone is self-isolating, they can seamlessly join from home and work on the project with their groupmates without missing anything or holding projects back."

Feedback from students has been very positive, and other departments are exploring how to incorporate Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub devices in blended learning spaces of their own. Despite students returning to campus, the university sees that digital learning is here to stay.

Professor Goslin concludes: "We always strive to give our students the best possible education experience. Right now, that means complementing in-person teaching with the flexibility and convenience of online learning, with help from Lenovo."

In the University of Plymouth's blended learning spaces, the **ThinkSmart Hub for Zoom Rooms** creates effortless conversations that facilitate learning — no matter where students work.

The Smarter Solution

The right tools for seamless learning
ThinkSmart Hub features an intuitive user interface that empowers students to collaborate on assignments, whether they work on campus or at home.

A single point of control
The University's IT team uses Lenovo ThinkSmart Manger software to easily manage blended learning spaces, each of which includes a Hub, a 180° HD camera, and a rotatable touchscreen display.

One-click classroom
The overhauled psychology lab means that class starts as soon as students click "launch" — and Lenovo premium support means access to assistance should problems arise.

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