Case Study

Turn and Learn
Aberystwyth University

TOP-TEC

Turn and Learn Rooms

An adaptive intelligent dual-purpose environment fit for both tutor-led
instruction and active-learning team work

The brief

"These are challenging times for Higher Education. In many ways, the rule book is being re-written, but there are important principles that are unchanged. The priorities for this University will remain the provision of excellent opportunities for learning and teaching, world leading student support, cutting edge research in a broad range of academic disciplines – in an environment which is second to none." April McMahon - Vice Chancellor

Traditional learning spaces were designed to fulfil one specific task; as a lecture theatre, seminar room or specialist laboratory, but modern teaching blends many styles. A short period of tutor instruction before breaking into teams is now commonplace. Previously this required students leaving the lecture theatre and moving to alternative spaces that support team work.
Having spaces that effectively support both tutor-led teaching and team-based learning has long been the holy grail of learning spaces specialists. Many previous attempts to reconcile these different tasks within a single space have resulted in designs that compromise at least one element and quite often both.

Nigel Thomas - Aberystwyth's Learning Spaces Design and Development Manager - knew it was possible to think differently and innovate a compelling solution to his challenging conundrum and chose TOP-TEC to help him accomplish one.

The solution

In creating a Turn and Learn Room at Aberystwyth, Nigel's design builds on attempts to create the perfect space that can be used effectively for both tutor-led instruction and team work. Evolving the concept to determine the optimum design took over 12 months with installation taking place during the summer of 2013 as part of a significant refurbishment project at Aberystwyth.
In the Turn and Learn Room all the students face the front with a solid table area for their technology and books. When it's time for team-work, half the students can swivel on their chairs and join their colleagues behind, utilising a much wider team-working surface. Also the table heights for each pair of tables increase from the front to the back of the room, creating a raked effect on a flat floor that provides students with a good line of sight to the front of the room for presentations or viewing projected images and videos.

The benefits

Students love the sociality and team spirit that active learning rooms generate. Students are equally supported for front-of-class teaching or team-based learning. Teaching staff can circulate throughout the room and support each group individually in their learning.

The outcome

Students instinctively know as soon as they enter the room that the experience is going to be better. Whilst tutors could still deliver a complete session in front-of-class lecture style, innovative spaces such as this raise expectations. Aberystwyth's improving teaching styles and learning spaces will help its students to achieve great things. Nigel's first Turn and Learn Room is already a great success, and there have been staff requests for more spaces like this across the campus.

Key features of the Turn and Learn Room

- Accommodates tutor-led teaching and team-based learning in a single space without compromise
- Ranked seating and tables on a flat floor to provide all students with a clear sight of presentations
- Enhances team working and tutor support for individual groups