

University of South Wales



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Interview with Becky Grant, Leann Thomas & Mike Bessell

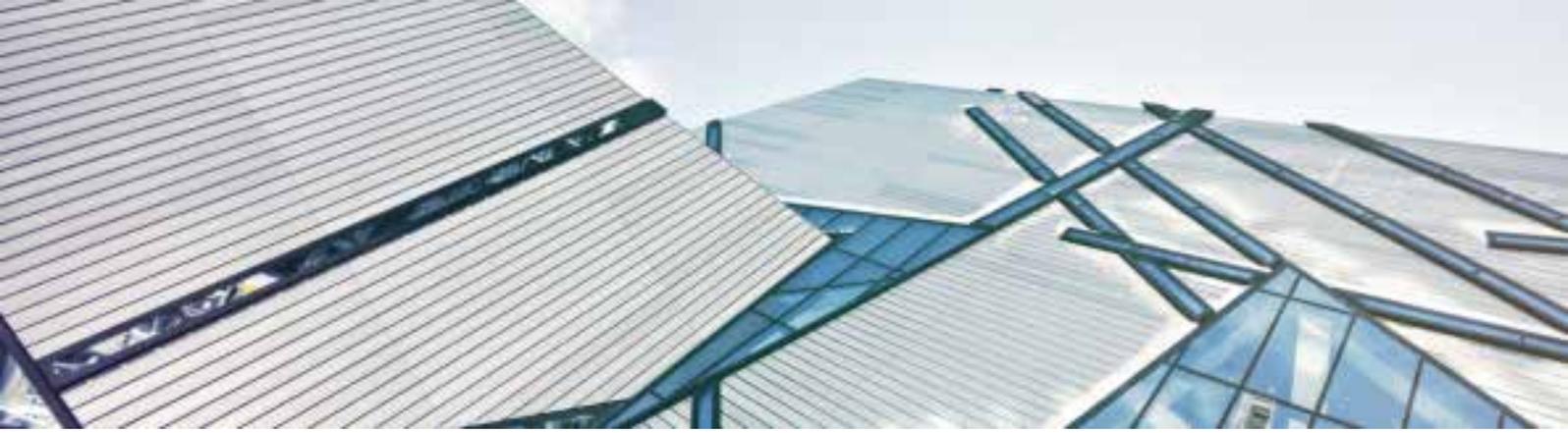
We sat down for an interview with Becky Grant, Leann Thomas & Mike Bessell of the University of South Wales. We discussed their vision on the campus of the future, enhancing the student experience and the role that data and technology play.

What is the USW vision on the campus of the future?

Becky Grant, Leann Thomas & Mike Bessell - "In terms of our campus of the future, we're looking closely at reducing the number of square meters and the amount of buildings we have. So essentially, less square meters, but with more quality per square meter. Moreover, we're looking to improve the efficiency of our operations. And I don't think this has changed much with the pandemic, it's just been slowed down a bit. We're optimistic though as many things are slowly starting up again now. If the pandemic has changed anything then it's undoubtedly the changed approach to staff workspace, and that's affecting organizations across the board, not just us.

Another one that stands out to us is how we approach learning and especially blended learning. Through the pandemic it has become apparent that humans are longing for social interaction and remote learning isn't necessarily what students signed up for - they want that physical experience. So we are looking at how virtual learning environments can provide an equivalent high quality experience to the physical experience, and we believe students should have the appropriate insights to be involved in the decision making processes of how and where they learn going forward.

In the end, our vision for the estates is a vibrant state that is highly utilized by our students, staff and people from outside the university. Our utilization currently is not as efficient as it should be, so we need to dramatically improve that. And when we have a vibrant and well utilized estate that allows us to invest more into real estate which will ultimately improve the student experience. That is the direction we're looking to head towards."



What roles do technology and data play in this vision?

Leann Thomas & Mike Bessell - "Prior to implementing HubStars solutions a lot of our decision making was simply based on individual's knowledge or perceptions on an area in the university. With the pandemic we faced problems that we never had to contemplate before. We're of course always thinking about what issues can happen in our day to day workplace, but there were many things that were new to us. Examples are having to reduce the capacity of our classrooms or ensuring one way traffic in our corridors. Luckily HubStar's technology is helping us master these problems. In fact, we're now trying to create an environment of estates where we're far more data driven in our decision making, and that's where solutions like HubStar are becoming valuable. They allow it to be based on data and facts, rather than on what we anticipate to be the case. And I think there's that drive amongst many higher education institutions to begin to use space utilization insights for their smart campuses.

I suppose another important factor is the idea of integrating different smart systems we have across our campuses with each other. Getting the optimum usage out of each system is again a big selling point for us and utilisation data technologies help with that.



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Becky Grant - "We have systems that contain similar information, but they don't necessarily talk to each other. And that's been an issue. For example when timetabling and estates happen to talk to each other, but have very different information you often end up with immense miscommunication. But through having space utilization data that is accessible throughout the whole university we can start making sure that we're making the right decisions with the right information. With the HubStar data, we can see how many people are doing what and when, or for that matter when they're not doing something. So it's all about the data in the end."

Can you give concrete examples of practical use cases you would like to tackle with your smart campus initiative?

Becky Grant - "The main driver for us to implement space utilization technology was to increase our space utilization across our campuses. The last time we measured it which was before the pandemic, we saw that on average only roughly 18% of our teaching space gets used at any one time. And that's been pretty consistent over the last few years. These utilization surveys were carried out over a duration of one week per year, so evidently this didn't give us a full picture of how our estate's are being used all the time, but with the HubStar technology we now have the opportunity to see how it's being used all the time. This has allowed us to make better and faster decisions to, for example, identify which areas we can potentially relinquish or refurbish to reduce or improve our estate."



Mike Bessell/Becky Grant - "To slightly clarify our situation, we constantly receive requests for new teaching spaces and social areas for our students, and having the utilization data gives us a chance to consider whether additional spaces are required or where existing spaces could be used better. So not only can we improve our efficiency with space utilization data, but we actually have lower spend on capital projects.

For example, we currently have various transformation projects looking at how we work and teach going forward, online working and delivery of courses has been a success in a lot of areas and we expect to see some areas continue to work and teach remotely. This means less space required but it also means that the space we do have needs to be looked at differently. We expect both classroom and office spaces to become more collaborative and group work focused, in fact we already have an objective to change all of our general teaching spaces into collaborative formats (groups of tables as opposed to rows).

We are also looking to align our utilization with our energy consumption and our facility costs. Currently, we are spending many millions of pounds a year across our estate on energy and facility costs, similarly to many other organizations. And this hasn't really changed with Covid-19. Even with really low occupancy levels throughout our estates, we still have to manage our estates in the same way as before. So linking HubStar solutions to our plans can bring us fantastic efficiencies, which is what we are striving for."

What are the reasons for why you selected the HubStar solution? And what are you aiming to achieve with it?

Mike Bessell/Leann Thomas/Becky Grant - "We currently have roughly 150,000 square meters of space, with high utility costs and very low efficiencies. And implementing HubStar's technology is helping us drive up that efficiency. Not only in terms of lowering cost, but also in terms of creating a sense of vibrancy in our estates, which then again helps us enhance our student experience.

I think one of the main drivers for us in implementing HubStar's solutions was the fact that there isn't a need for physical infrastructure. In fact most of the needed infrastructure we already had in place. So it is much more of a behind the scenes setup.

Additionally, the seamless integration with our timetabling software and HubStar's API's linking extremely well to our other systems was a key deciding factor for us, which was highly unique amongst the different suppliers we analyzed. We also believe in HubStar's potential in further development of their product and what it could do for us in the future. In the end, the main focus will always be in using HubStar data to create high quality learning environments."



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