



University of Nottingham

Educating tomorrow's teachers

The University of Nottingham is the fifth largest university in the UK with over 33,000 students – and it's growing all the time. Over the last three years it has invested more than £100 million in buildings and equipment, creating an environment where study and research can thrive and where staff and students alike can get the most from their work and leisure time. A key element in the University's continuing success is its commitment to investing in the latest interactive learning technologies.

Interactive whiteboards, for instance, are becoming an increasingly important teaching aid throughout the University. "We're now standardising on the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard, as we've found it to be more user friendly and more interactive than other ones we've tried," says Ben Hadfield, an Audio Visual Technician with the University's Central Teaching Support team, which looks after the teaching equipment requirements of over 6,000 members of staff across four different campuses. "Part of my job is to convince lecturers of the benefits of SMART Boards by demonstrating how easy they are to use and how effective they are in making lessons more engaging. They're also an important element in our environmental strategy, as we ultimately want to get rid of flipcharts and OHP slides. There are 60 rooms on Jubilee Campus and every one has two flipcharts that are replenished every month – that's a lot of waste paper and a lot of wasted money! I reckon we could save over £1,000 a year on paper alone if we just used interactive technology."

Members of the 10-strong team can be moved to any campus depending on where they're needed, but Ben tends to spend most of his time on the superb Jubilee Campus. Built on the site of the old Raleigh bicycle factory, its state-of-the-art facilities house the Schools of Computer Science and Information Technology, and the Nottingham University Business School.

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SMART story

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Audio Visual Technician,
Central Teaching
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University of Nottingham



Quick facts

Location: Nottingham, UK

Student population: 33,000

Technology: SMART Board interactive whiteboards, Sympodium™, AirLiner™

Training: Steljes Train the Trainer course

Impact on learning: Improved student engagement from more interactive lectures

Appropriately for such a centre of learning excellence, it's also the home of the National College for School Leadership and the University's School of Education. Not surprisingly, the heaviest users of interactive learning technologies are the School of Education. The development of interactive whiteboard use in the School was funded through the ePioneers initiative, an innovative 'quick gain' programme designed to accelerate eLearning in the School into the mainstream. The programme has been a great influence on Ben's research and training on interactive whiteboards, and is making a growing contribution to enhancing the learning experience of the students. "As SMART Boards are used extensively in teaching, it makes sense to use them wherever possible to equip our future teachers with useful skills," says Ben. "A lot of our students go on placement to schools locally, and as the Local Authority has also standardised on SMART Boards they have an immediate advantage in the classroom as they know how to use the technology."

"The team and I have found the basic features of the SMART Board system intuitive and easy to learn," confirms Mark Simmons, a lecturer with the School's Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) team. "As a result we've been able to make our sessions more interactive, and the students are often really impressed with even the simpler features such as enlarging objects, revealing answers and importing shared photographs. I'm sure this is helping their learning."

As part of the University's standardisation policy, SMART Boards are installed in all new rooms of an appropriate size, and will continue to replace other interactive whiteboards at the end of their useful lives. "We have a mixture of room sizes, ranging from lecture theatres accommodating up to 500 people to smaller seminar rooms," Ben explains. "The room capacity will dictate the equipment requirements, but as a matter of policy we are trying to standardise on the same high quality equipment throughout so that lecturers get used to having the same technology wherever they're teaching."

For the largest rooms, alternative SMART technologies are employed, including Sympodium interactive pen displays linked to computers and projectors. "With Sympodium, the content on the lecturer's computer appears simultaneously on the interactive pen display and on the large presentation screen in the lecture theatre," explains Ben. "The lecturers like them because they can stay behind their lecterns, and students can see better as they offer much better quality and lighting than overhead projectors."

The School of Education is also active in researching the educational benefits of interactive technologies, and its Virtual Learning Lab (VLL) works closely with the Central Teaching Support team to assess the latest SMART products. "We've just been evaluating the AirLiner™ wireless slate, which enables lecturers to deliver interactive lessons from anywhere in the classroom or lecture hall," says Ben. "We've found it very useful, and are considering buying it. If everything goes to plan the VLL is having SMART Meeting Pro installed later this year, which will enable us to connect multiple computers and SMART Boards or displays in different locations."

Although they look at a broad range of interactive learning technologies in the marketplace, Ben explains why they return to SMART time and time again: "While other manufacturers have the occasional good idea, we find that SMART provide a continuous array of excellent products – and are developing their systems more quickly than anyone else. We find that standardising on SMART Technologies saves us time and money on training and support, as well as arming the teachers of the future with the technology skills they need in the classroom."

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