# HubStar higher education seminar highlights growing importance of accurate campus data to meet financial and operational challenges

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With higher education institutions having to navigate an increasingly turbulent landscape of financial, political and operational pressures, a virtual seminar for higher education professionals and campus FM managers last week highlighted the growing importance of accurate campus occupancy data to help shape a more resilient estates strategy.

Hosted by leading workplace solutions provider HubStar, the virtual event also focused on ways to make the campus experience more appealing to the increasing number of students who now spend more time studying from home.

The event found that budget cuts and declining student enrolment numbers are now making new cost-cutting opportunities a top priority for higher education leaders. This also presents new challenges for facilities management (FM) professionals who specialise in managing campus buildings.

The discussions revealed that more higher education institutions are turning to technology such as occupancy sensors and WiFi location analytics. These tools provide a better and more accurate understanding of occupancy and space utilization rates across all areas of the campus.

Granular occupancy data can help to reduce operating costs by identifying patterns of underutilization and determining which campus spaces could be repurposed for other academic activities.

Bryn Thomas, Space Management Coordinator at the University of South Wales (USW) – one of the UK's largest universities – described how gathering accurate occupancy data helped to decide the fate of an old USW accommodation tower block that had been converted to offices.

Thomas said: "Our utilisation data for that tower block was really low. We found a lot of staff were working from home, while operating costs were through the roof because it was a really old building and quite tired. The data enabled us to make a decision to demolish that building and free up our operating budget."

Online attendees also heard how Radboud University in the Netherlands reduced costs by using accurate campus occupancy data to justify closing most buildings during the last four weeks of term, keeping only essential spaces open. Radboud is a leading research college with seven faculties and 41 campus buildings.

Max Popken of Radboud University's Space Management team said: "You have to have a business case to close buildings. We could look back at Christmas occupancy rates and summer data to show the low utilization justified temporary closures."

He added: "We're using less space overall, but the remaining space has to be used optimally."

Joe Harris, HubStar's Director of Business Development, said: "It became clear during the discussions that higher education institutions need to stop making space decisions based on assumptions. The most cost-effective approach is to start small with a pilot scheme in one building, gather three to six months of accurate occupancy data to prove ROI, and then roll it out campus-wide – setting clear and realistic utilization targets for different space types."

The virtual seminar also highlighted the growing importance of designing campus spaces for maximum appeal rather than maximum capacity. This is leading to the creation of more vibrant and flexible campus environments that offer valuable experiences students cannot find at home – such as collaboration, community, and social connection.

USW's Bryn Thomas explained how his university is transforming underutilized large lecture halls into smaller collaborative learning environments. "We found that 60-capacity classrooms weren't being filled," he said. "Students study more from home now. It's not the ideal scenario, but we have to adapt. The main way of tackling that is to provide enjoyable spaces for studying."