Set within 320 acres of parkland close to the centre of Norwich, the University of East Anglia (UEA) teaches over 15,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students each year across four on-campus faculties - Arts & Humanities, Medicine & Health, Science and Social Sciences.

The university is named in the respected Times Higher Education (THE) Top 100 universities rankings, and was rated sixth of all UK universities for student experience in the THE Student Experience Survey 2015.

Its diverse and ground-breaking research base underpins all activity and is embedded in its teaching. The university is a leading member of the Norwich Research Park, which boasts one of Europe's largest concentrations of researchers in the field of environment, health and plant science.

Coupled with the investment UEA is making in its campus, the university's drive is to help students to be brilliant. Its teaching and learning strategy embraces the possibilities of online and blended delivery models to create time and space for engaging, active lectures for students. Delivering this strategy involves increasing the use of media content within teaching and learning across the university as a whole, and the learning technology team was keen to ensure there was a system in place that could support this anticipated growth in media content creation and sharing.

Meeting specific requirements

With significant growth in online delivered content predicted in a number of areas, the UEA learning technology team wanted a robust and scalable central mechanism for delivering online content that would make it as easy as possible for the university’s academic teaching staff and students to create and share media content.

The team was looking for a solution that would support the growth in flipped and blended learning and maximise the ability to deliver live broadcasts and TV and radio recordings outside the university thanks to Educational Recording Agency licence changes. They also wanted a system that could support the delivery of the anticipated increase in student generated content, student video essays and screen casts whilst also helping to underpin the development of video-based assessment across the university as a whole.

Planet eStream ‘ticked every box’

Head of Learning Technology Alicia McConnell joined UEA in November 2014. One of her first jobs was to review the university's existing video on demand system. Alongside the requirements above, key priorities included having a system in place that could deliver full and reliable integration with the university's Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), along with the ability to stream media to students and accommodate the full diversity of devices and hardware they use.

Alicia discovered that the limitations of the university's existing video on demand system were preventing teaching staff from delivering genuinely flipped learning and meet its drive to fully engage students through online and blended teaching delivery methods. She began her search for an alternative and invited the Planet eStream team to show her team what the system can deliver. She says:

“The team clearly demonstrated that Planet eStream has the ability to support active teaching. It’s socially constructive, built for enhanced teaching and learning and feels as though it has been created on the assumption that users will play videos, use them and watch them. We could tell from the outset that Planet eStream is innovative and - importantly - that it would develop and evolve, which fit perfectly with our interactive, flipped and blended learning strategies to deliver more active student engagement.

“We needed a solution to meet our requirements for lecture capture, media streaming, digital signage and video on demand. It had to be easy to use and able to fully integrate with our Blackboard VLE, with good live streaming capabilities. Planet eStream ticked every box.”
A smooth, straightforward migration
Alicia says that Planet DV made the system migration very straightforward: “Moving to a new system is a huge commitment. You have to be sure that the benefits outweigh the risks. Planet DV gave us the confidence to make the move.

“The biggest risk to us was losing existing content. Planet DV took care of everything, and made the transition a very smooth one. The transfer took place over a weekend to minimise the impact on teaching, after which our existing content was successfully fed through from the old system. The Planet eStream team was so helpful, and the one-to-one support they gave us to get everything up and running was outstanding.”

Early benefits
A few months after the switchover, university teaching staff and students were already seeing the benefits of using Planet eStream. In December 2015, Alicia said:

“Planet eStream’s campus-wide deployment is starting to have a real impact on our teaching and our students’ learning. Before eStream, we did not have a reliable Blackboard-integrated platform to stream media to students that could accommodate the full diversity of devices and hardware they employed. Now we have Planet eStream we are seeing an explosion of creativity from our lecturers as they expand their delivery online and use the time freed to really engage with their students in face-to-face time.”
Creating ‘a new normal’ for learning and teaching

Alicia says that, for UEA students, Planet eStream is very much part of the norm: “Future students will not want to sit in lecture theatres having content delivered to them. They will want to participate actively, and so our means of measuring student satisfaction have shifted along with our teaching methods. We now ask them how active their lectures are, how they would rate their learning experience and what kind of blend they feel they are getting between online and offline content.

Our ideal is that the technology essentially disappears into the background, and this way of learning is the norm for our students. It’s a great position to be in, and Planet eStream is enabling us to achieve it.”

Supporting online learning

Alicia says that the university has developed online courses and used Planet eStream to embed video content.

“Our Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Older People online course in the Faculty of Medicine uses a combination of video content with text describing and introducing the course. It allows students to meet the team via Planet eStream, watch course related video content and take part in activities without physically being on campus.

“We have also embedded Planet eStream in a British Heritage and Archaeology course for Japanese students at the University of Tokyo. This allowed students to work on course materials online, as well as providing text and viewing materials to support the course. Our academics found the system very straightforward to use, and it has allowed us to make this unique connection with the University of Tokyo with great ease.”
Making flipped learning an everyday reality

Juliet Harrison is a lecturer in Paramedic Science who has embraced Planet eStream’s flipped learning capabilities. Juliet works on one of the most actively used Blackboard sites at UEA, and says:

“Planet eStream supports flipped learning by giving students bite-sized chunks of information to look at ahead of lectures. Students find the information easier to digest in this way, and also find it beneficial to be able to revisit the content as many times as they like, via whichever device they choose, to clarify and help embed learning.

“Creating video content is very easy. I tend to write a script, deliver it to autocue in our recording suite and then upload the videos. A good example is our anatomy and physiology lectures, where there is a lot of detail to get through. Ahead of a three-hour lecture, students are given the tailored video content to review in advance, in a setting of their choice. It gives them the flexibility to come back to the material and hone in on parts which they may be struggling to take in.

“We also find it very useful to be able to access relevant video content from other courses. The Medicine course, for example, has content that also applies to our Paramedicine students. Sharing content in this way is hugely beneficial to learning, but it also saves academics valuable preparation time by avoiding duplication of efforts.”

Cementing international relations

Sean Thompson, Studio Technical Team Leader at UEA, recently organised a keynote lecture at a conference in New Orleans, USA, using Planet eStream’s live streaming function. Says Sean:

“We regularly use live streaming. We find it very easy to use, and also like the new Planet eStream interface. The streaming functionality has proved particularly useful to us when lecturers are required to deliver presentations abroad but don’t have the time to commit to travelling.

“A great example recently was a climate change conference in New Orleans. Planet eStream helped us practise what we preach in front of a delegation of 4,000 people, where we streamed the inaugural lecture from our Professor of Climate Change Science and Policy, Corinne Le Quere, live to conference delegates in the USA via our TV studio on campus in Norwich.”
“Testament to the quality of the broadcast is the fact that a member of the audience in the US tweeted about the event, assuming that Corinne was there in the room! Visibly saving the carbon impact of real-time travel was a feather in our cap, too, particularly as the conference was about reducing carbon footprints.

“We are currently planning to stream an inaugural biochemistry lecture live on our website, and there will no doubt be many more to follow.”

**Communicating with staff and students**

UEA have also been making the most of Planet eStream’s in-built digital signage functionality to provide a communication tool for key messaging across the estate. Paul Wright, Digital Learning Designer Team Leader says:

"We are currently using Planet eSign on 50 screens across campus to provide news and information for both students and staff. Both static content and video feeds are being used to present information. We are also currently experimenting with using Planet eStream digital signage on the relatively new four screen video wall in our Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning which is proving very positive indeed."

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**Getting the most from Planet eStream**

UEA hosted a Planet eStream masterclass in November 2015, to support the launch of its new Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning. The event attracted over 100 delegates from more than 30 different organisations, including UEA academics and other members of the Planet eStream user community.

Planet eStream provided CPD training sessions to help delegates get the most out of the system, and the event also gave delegates the opportunity to meet with other Planet eStream users to share experiences and best practice.

The sessions were streamed live to the university’s brand new video wall using Planet eStream’s digital signage and live streaming functionality. Alicia says:

“The event was very successful. It really helped to cement our understanding of Planet eStream’s benefits and applications. In fact, we are still hearing from people who attended saying that they were inspired by the event, which shows its impact.”
A strong partnership

“The Planet eStream team is extremely innovative and takes a true partnership approach to delivery, guiding us through every step along the way,” says Alicia. “They have been very supportive of our strategy for implementing new teaching methods, and the system has given us different ways to teach and also to assess work.

“We still have a learning curve to navigate, but we are delighted with Planet eStream’s ease of use and just how approachable and responsive to enquiries the team has been. Their knowledge and experience of working in higher education is impressive and has been a key part of Planet eStream’s successful rollout at UEA.”

The future and innovation at UEA

“Before using Planet eStream, we were asking lecturers to think about different ways of teaching flipped content, but not providing them with an easy way of producing and streaming media. Planet eStream gives them that capability, and there is a very positive feeling amongst the academics about the system. It is being widely used by teaching staff for video assessment; whereby they set video essays, students produce videos and upload them to the VLE using the Blackboard mashup tool for viewing and feedback.

“I very much see video assessment as a growth area at the university and I would really like for the markers to be able to give real time comments by embedding in-line comments and use that for feedback, which they will be able to do in future releases of Planet eStream.

“Planet eStream has certainly opened our eyes and we are learning all the time about new ways in which it can continue to support the evolution of our teaching and learning over the coming years.”

Alicia McConnell
Head of Learning Technology
Planet eStream is actively supporting the following learning methods at UEA

- Flipped learning
- Blended learning
- Distance learning
- Active learning
- Mobile learning
- eLearning
- Virtual learning