



Workshop 1 notes: Understanding the student learning experience

Introductory guidance

This is part of a series of six workshop templates introduced in a separate guide: [Exploring student engagement with academic staff: user guidance](#). Please refer to that document for general introductory guidance on organising these discussion workshops, including steps to take before and after the event.

About this workshop

The aim of this workshop is to gather information on the changing nature of the learning experience of students, including the impact of COVID-19. In addition to contributing to this understanding, a second facet of the workshop could be to develop possible solutions to address some of the issues raised.

Each section is outlined in the paragraphs that follow, and can be adapted according to context and requirements.

Preparation in advance

Understand the SLE diagram

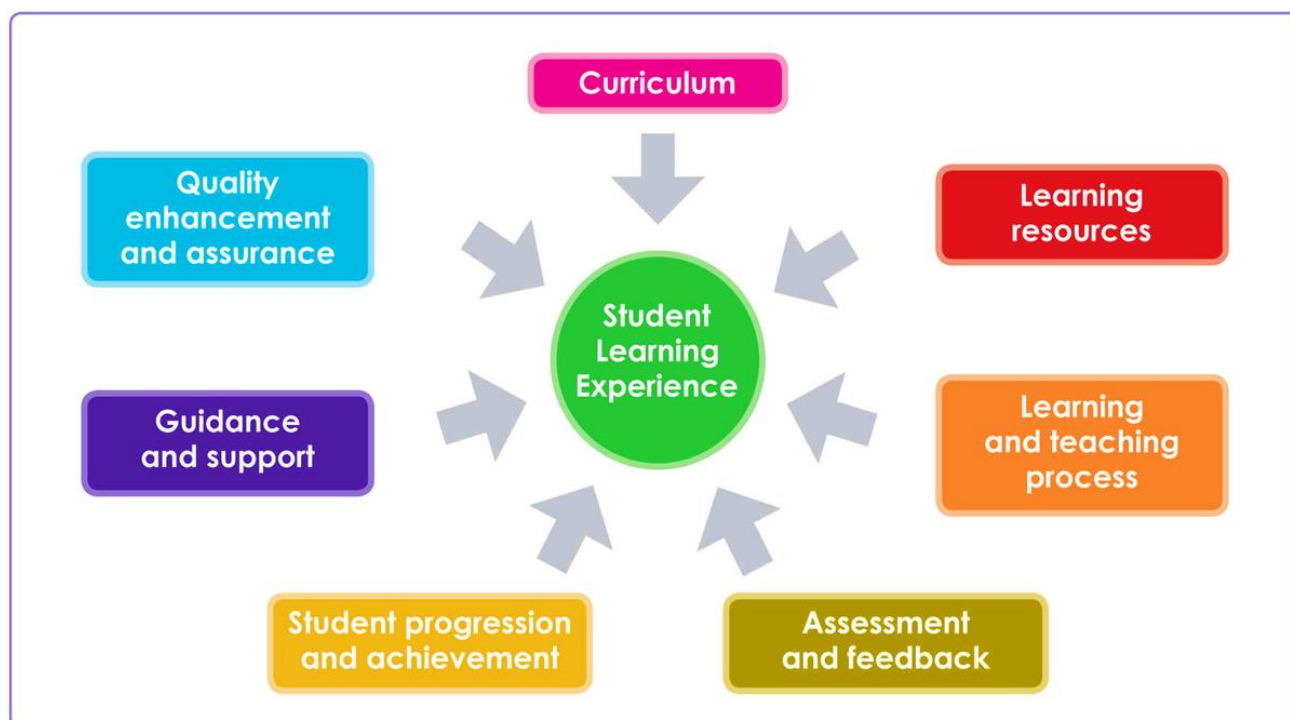


Diagram: The SLE Model (Student Learning Experience).



[The SLE diagram](#) (above) was created by sparqs to help staff and students explore seven different elements, and forms a core part of our [course rep training](#). It is a helpful tool for gathering and reflecting on feedback from students, whether you are staff or a student representative.

Before hosting or attending a workshop relating to learning experience of students, it is helpful for both students and staff to have a basic understanding of the SLE model.

sparqs has produced a set of [suggested questions under these seven headings for course reps to explore the impact of COVID-19](#). It begins with a brief introduction to the SLE, and then continues with sections for the seven SLE aspects, each of which includes:

- A description of some of the impacts of COVID-19 on the learning experience of students.
- Some suggested questions that can help students to speak about their experience of learning.

Your audience

This workshop will work well at a course level, with staff and course reps (or the wider student cohort) working together to explore the SLE. It may also be helpful at a faculty level.

Choose two aspects of the SLE for discussion

In most cases, it is best to restrict the workshop to a limited number of specific themes for discussion. Although it is possible to open an unrestricted discussion, this can become confusing and messy, not to mention time consuming! Therefore, a workshop can be more productive when the parameters for discussion are clearly communicated in advance. Here, we describe a workshop that discusses two elements – although you are free to vary this depending on the circumstances and need. These two could vary across a number of workshops within your institution or faculty, so all elements are covered. Staff and course reps within courses may have views on the elements they discuss. You could even discuss just one of these elements in a lecture, tutorial or other scheduled contact time with students, or use that contact time to revisit activities or discuss outcomes.

Further reading to aid your preparation

- Edström, K., Törnevik, J., Engström, M. and Wiklund, Å., 2003. Student involvement in principled change: Understanding the student experience. In *Proceedings of the 11th International Symposium Improving Student Learning, OCSLD, Oxford, England*. <https://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/loaled/docs/cdio2.pdf>
- Ertl, H., Hayward, G., Wright, S., Edwards, A., Lunt, I., Mills, D. and Yu, K., 2008. The student learning experience in higher education. *Literature review report for the Higher Education Academy*. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-learning-experience-higher-education>
- Hill, K. and Fitzgerald, R. (2020) Student Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Learning. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education* 12, (2), 1-9. <https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/459>
- Learning at Ulster: Student Learning Experience Principles. https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/250537/4_StudentExperiencePrinciples.pdf
- Kaivola, T., Salomäki, T. and Taina, J., 2012. In quest for better understanding of student learning experiences. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, pp.8-12. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S187704281201186X>
- Shaw, C., Humphrey, O., Atvars, T., & Sims, S. (2017). Systematic literature review of 'hard to reach' students and methods of inclusive engagement. <https://winchester.elsevierpure.com/en/publications/systematic-literature-review-of-hard-to-reach-students-and-method-2>



Activity A - Generating discussion

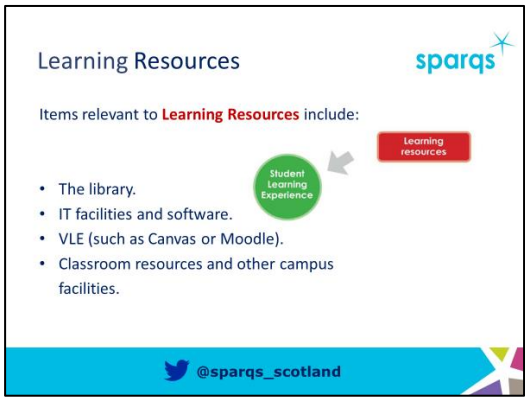

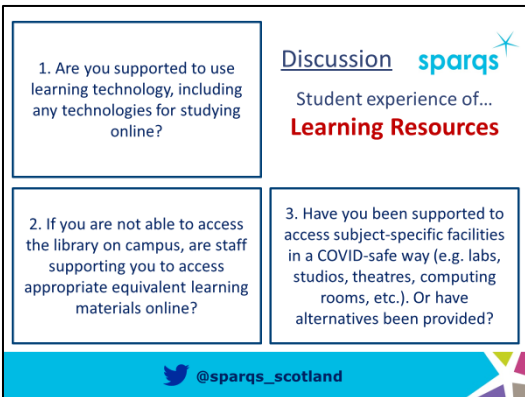

This is the first main activity of the workshop. This activity involves providing one or more questions to stimulate discussion around the chosen theme, and then giving time for feedback and discussion. This activity can take place as a whole group, or in breakout groups, depending on numbers attending.

The notes here are based on discussing three questions on two different aspects of the SLE (six questions in total) – clearly, these numbers can be varied as desired. The questions are inspired by the [suggested questions in the Student Learning Experience](#) linked earlier, but you should feel free to draw on others in that link and adapt them to your institutional and discipline terminology.

Questions for student discussion

Slides are provided for all seven SLE aspects – identify the slides required for the two aspects that have been selected for discussion. There are two slides for each aspect:

1. A slide for each aspect (Curriculum, Learning Resources and so on), with examples of what that aspect covers.
2. A second slide giving three suggested discussion questions for that aspect. These questions have been designed to enable students to give feedback on their experience of that aspect of the SLE, including the impact of COVID-19.

First slide – examples of what is covered by this aspect of the SLE.	Second slide - three suggested discussion questions for that aspect.
 <p>Learning Resources sparqs</p> <p>Items relevant to Learning Resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The library. • IT facilities and software. • VLE (such as Canvas or Moodle). • Classroom resources and other campus facilities. <p><i>(Diagram: A green circle labeled 'Student Learning Experience' has an arrow pointing to a red box labeled 'Learning resources'.)</i></p> <p> @sparqs_scotland</p>	 <p>Discussion sparqs</p> <p>Student experience of... Learning Resources</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are you supported to use learning technology, including any technologies for studying online? 2. If you are not able to access the library on campus, are staff supporting you to access appropriate equivalent learning materials online? 3. Have you been supported to access subject-specific facilities in a COVID-safe way (e.g. labs, studios, theatres, computing rooms, etc.). Or have alternatives been provided? <p> @sparqs_scotland</p>

The idea of the activity is to generate discussion and feedback from students. So, introduce each question in turn, and give adequate time to generate feedback and discussion on each question. In most cases, questions should be taken in turn, not all together.

The three questions are taken from this sparqs resource, mentioned earlier: [Suggested questions for course reps COVID-19 edition](#)

This document contains a range of alternative questions for each aspect of the SLE. If you need additional or alternative discussion questions for the workshop, you will find several valuable suggestions in this document.

We recommend that the choice of questions is made by students and staff in partnership – for example by the course teacher and course rep working together in advance of the workshop.



Activity B - Sorting responses

In some cases, Activity A alone may be sufficient, and this could be the end of the workshop. But in many cases, it will be informative to engage with the responses that have been given. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the changing nature of the learning experience of students, and may help to define more precisely the nature of any difficulties that students may be having.

Reviewing the feedback collected

A simple way to engage with the feedback is to ask someone to summarise what has been written. They would read the feedback as it emerges during the meeting and present a short verbal summary of the points made, at the end of the activity. A member of staff or a student (or both) could be nominated in advance for this role.

Sorting the feedback

A longer, more in-depth, and more participatory way of reviewing the feedback is to set up a sorting activity. Participants can work together to identify any themes and commonalities in the feedback, and accordingly to organise the feedback statements into appropriate groups.

For example, in the case of Assessment and Feedback, participants may identify that the feedback falls into categories such as these:

- a) Assessment methods (advantages, disadvantages, suitability for online and remote setting).
- b) Assessment timing (scheduling assessments, time of day, synchronous or asynchronous methods).
- c) Timing and quality of feedback provided.
- d) Factors that constrain student performance (childcare, digital constraints, access to learning resources).

One way to arrange this as an online activity is to use a collaborative document for Activity A (such as Google Docs) and for participants to type their feedback onto sticky notes (these are text boxes that can be moved within the document). In this scenario, participants would pick up the sticky notes and place them onto the page or slide for that category.

Having finished sorting, it can be informative to ask different participants to summarise the main themes of the responses in each of the categories.

Activity C - Co-creating solutions

In some cases, Activities A and B may be sufficient, and the workshop could end at this point. However, a valuable further activity (either within the workshop or at a separate time) is for students and staff to work together in partnership to co-create possible solutions to some of the difficulties raised.

Where this is included as Activity C of the same workshop, this step involves considering the feedback for each category in turn, and:

- i. Seeking further information, clarification or examples relating to the issue, including an assessment of scale (is this an isolated problem, or widespread?).
- ii. Inviting creative suggestions for how things could be done differently. As mentioned before, avoid judging or evaluating the ideas at first, but instead welcome all proposals – however wild or unrealistic they might initially appear. Working out the practical steps of how a proposal might actually be implemented can come later.

Where this is included as a separate activity or meeting, it is good to consider:

- i. Which students and staff should be invited?
- ii. What information do they need in advance (e.g. a summary of the work produced in Activity A and Activity B, above)?
- iii. What is the scope of the discussion for co-creation – which specific points are to be addressed?

