October 2026 SVR meeting: Digital learning experiences

Introduction

Our first formal meeting for Student Voice Reps of 2026-27 was held cross-campus, and its main discussion topic was students' **digital learning experiences**. 30 SVRs from eight academic partners or centres and several different subject areas participated.

The HISA website's SVR meetings page explains more about how we organise SVR meetings, including how we use the sparqs Student Learning Experience model to frame discussions at meetings. This month's theme of digital learning experiences fits mainly within the SLE model's building block of **Resources, Environment and Technologies**.

Format

The format of the main topic was open discussion, with use of Mentimeter and the meeting chatbox to gather written contributions. This was also supplemented by discussion in our SVR Teams space.

Various SVRs also conducted their own research. One example of this is in the Appendix, as an example of what SVRs can learn by consulting their classmates on their views.

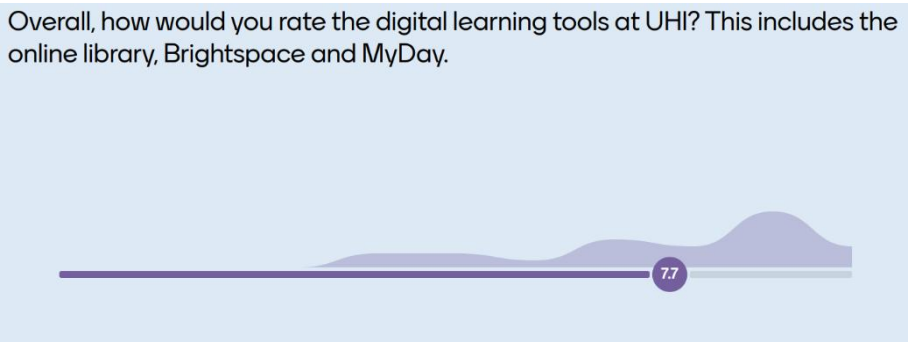


What follows is a summary of the key points made by SVRs on the topic of digital learning experiences. Where programme-specific feedback was received, this is being taken up directly. All feedback is being used to shape HISA's work.

Introductory discussion

An scene-setting question sought SVRs' views of the tools of digital learning, on a 10-point scale. Scores were broadly positive with none below 3.

- 4: 9%
- 5: 9%
- 6: 4%
- 7: 17%
- 8: 13%
- 9: 35%
- 10: 13%



Key themes

Within substantive discussion, a number of themes arose, mostly relating to UHI's virtual learning environment Brightspace.

The biggest of these were **technical problems and difficulties in navigation within Brightspace**. Many aspects were reported here, including basic issues around broken links and confusing layouts which do not aid students to find what they are looking for. This is particularly a problem for students who report class meeting links changing. "*It feels like a deep dive to find any information*," said one SVR, and another called it a "*rabbit warren*".

There are also examples of conflicting terminology. To quote one SVR: "*what appears in the assessment calendar is different in the assignments tab when being uploaded. This has caused some confusion*."

Further work being done through UHI's ongoing redevelopment of Brightspace could very usefully involve more action learning from SVRs about their experiences of navigating Brightspace and their suggestions for improved layout.

Another major point was **inconsistency of practice among staff** across and even within programmes. A common refrain was some staff seemingly being more skilled with Teams and Brightspace than others, raising comments about support and training for staff and a concern that staff were spending considerable time on sorting issues with technology.

While not specifically relating to digital tools, one SVR also noted that teaching practice in using PowerPoint varied considerably in terms of prior upload to enable reading, depth of information in materials, references or the clarity of connection between reading materials and the corresponding learning objectives, with some staff even just reading out their slides.

A third cluster of points related to **a desire for more digital skills training for students**, in particular the use and navigation of Brightspace. Variance in students' capabilities was noted where students might have been out of learning for some time or, in one example, students articulating into a course from other colleges having differing skillsets and confidence levels. One SVR noted there was an online tutorial about Brightspace but it was hard to ask questions. Another SVR opinted out that they were shown Brightspace at the start of their course but this was "quick and dirty" and hard to learn in-class, and recommended a digital skills session later. Many SVRs felt a walkthrough video, tutorial or welcome page would be a good idea.

These comments suggest a diversity of needs and, unsurprisingly, a diversity of potential solutions. It is recommended that deeper ongoing work is undertaken with SVRs to co-create digital skills training with interested SVRs.

Finally among the negative comments, a number of SVRs talked about **the impact on the wider student experience from poor communication in Brightspace**. These included references to the cost of living including increased fuel costs which SVRs did not feel they always needed to incur given timetabling and communication issues. Examples of impacts included travelling to campus for hybrid classes to discover they could have just as easily have been joined at home had this been explained by staff in advance on Brightspace, and poor advance notice on the calendar in Brightspace of the shape of days overall to inform prior decisions to travel.

Another wider dimension of feedback about digital learning experiences were SVRs seeking to enable **in-person gatherings to build community and communication**. Often this is self-organised, and in some cases there are course-led residentials. Allied to this is HISA's desire to support online students to come to campus together to access facilities or meet each other. These include SVRs in the online BA Applied Music degree gaining access to UHI Perth music performance spaces, HISA's pilot of Humanities Hubs at UHI Perth over the first semester of this academic year, our Digital Students' Network, and various student societies being formed within online courses such as UHI Scribblers (formed by BA Creative Writing students), the Sustainable Development Society and most recently the Theology and Philosophy Society.

This links to wider discussions to root the student experience, and that of online students who might visit campuses, in strategic discussions about transformation of physical spaces for students. Discussions are ongoing about how HISA can manage more such facilities, such as the AyePod at UHI Moray where societies including Community Outward aim to engage all students, both those taught in-person and online, in meaningful community building.

We continue to work with students and SVRs keen to organise in this way, and with teaching staff who have a key role in supporting and motivating students to take advantage of such opportunities.

It is therefore important to consider how students who learn predominantly online or through digital learning tools can be encouraged to meet in person where feasible, and to make use of their local campus. It is also important when designing the online learning experience to consider how campuses can be strategically co-created with such students to be welcoming and impactful places for all students including those whose teaching is entirely digital.

On the other hand, many comments from SVRs suggested that there have been **improvements and responsiveness to feedback on digital learning tools**. Several examples were given of issues being resolved once brought to the attention of teaching staff, on issues such as updated materials in Brightspace or in one case a new tile relating to self-study tasks.

Relatedly, there was also discussion of questions created jointly with UHI staff involved in the **Brightspace development project**, relating to the programme template. We also asked about whether Brightspace should be developed to create **discussions within subjects, campuses or even across UHI**, to enhance a broader sense of belonging at UHI.

One SVR suggested that using Brightspace to facilitate discussion beyond the programme could "*could allow people to find more people with shared interests, and could help build the student community. Which is valuable for everyone, but particularly useful for those who may feel more isolated within their studies, such as remote learners, and people who maybe are struggling to make friends in their class*." Another SVR pointed out such broader networking would benefit those who move between UHI colleges, as many students do, so they can meet new people in advance.

It is clear that SVRs have the capacity to contribute to improvements where they feel able to suggest them, and that there is appetite for using Brightspace to bring students together not just within their programmes. Given the current and forthcoming developments in Brightspace, it is important that SVRs have continuing open opportunities to engage constructively with strategic decisions around Brightspace, drawing on their and classmates' experiences, so they can see their ideas manifested in enhancements to the platform.

Finally, a substantial number of comments praised **the positives in UHI's digital learning experience**. It is also worth noting that many of the suggestions in this report have related to Brightspace. Other dimensions to digital learning, such as the online library services, internet connectivity and hybrid delivery, were mentioned briefly but broadly positively.

Most of the positive comments, however, were general references to the digital learning experience overall working well and delivering a good learning experience. To quote one SVR, "*the digital experience has been great for my class. All the classes has been brilliant. This is my second year and I have not had many issues yet!*"

We shall leave the final word to the SVR who described their digital learning experience as "*an edge of the seat, enticing, exciting adventure! Like Indiana Jones but on a computer!!*"

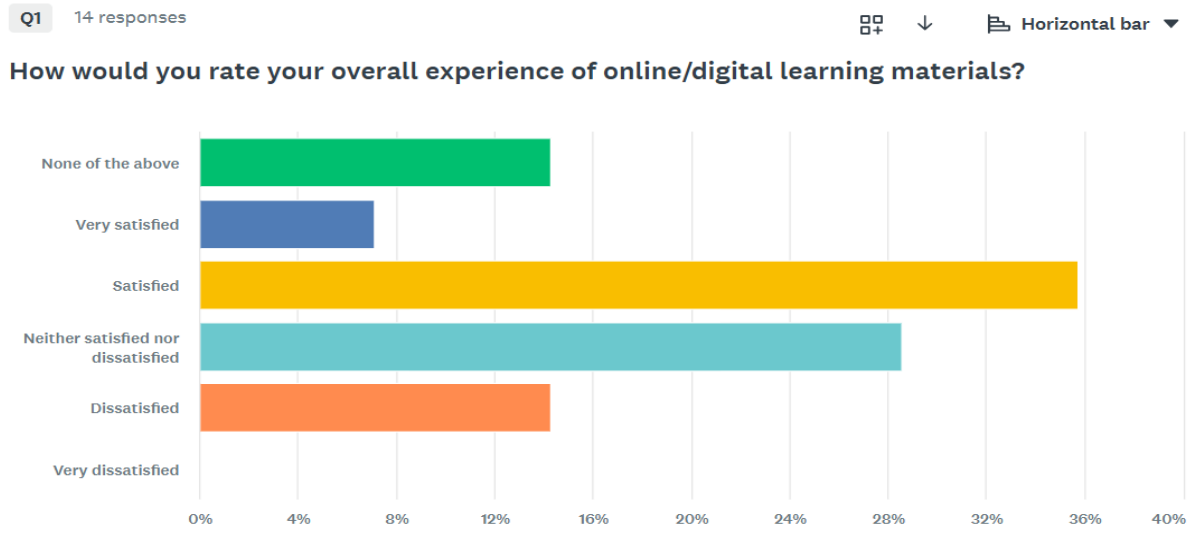
This report and outputs from all our SVR meetings are on HISA's SVR meetings webpage.

HISA
October 2026

Appendix: case study of SVR research

The following is a redacted report of two SVRs on a programme in UHI who conducted a survey to gain their classmates' views on digital learning and other experiences. It includes graphs and free text comments from the survey. The SVRs are taking forward these points with the teaching team on their programme.

It is a terrific example of the work that SVRs can do to understand what their fellow students are thinking and how they can contribute to the enhancement of learning.



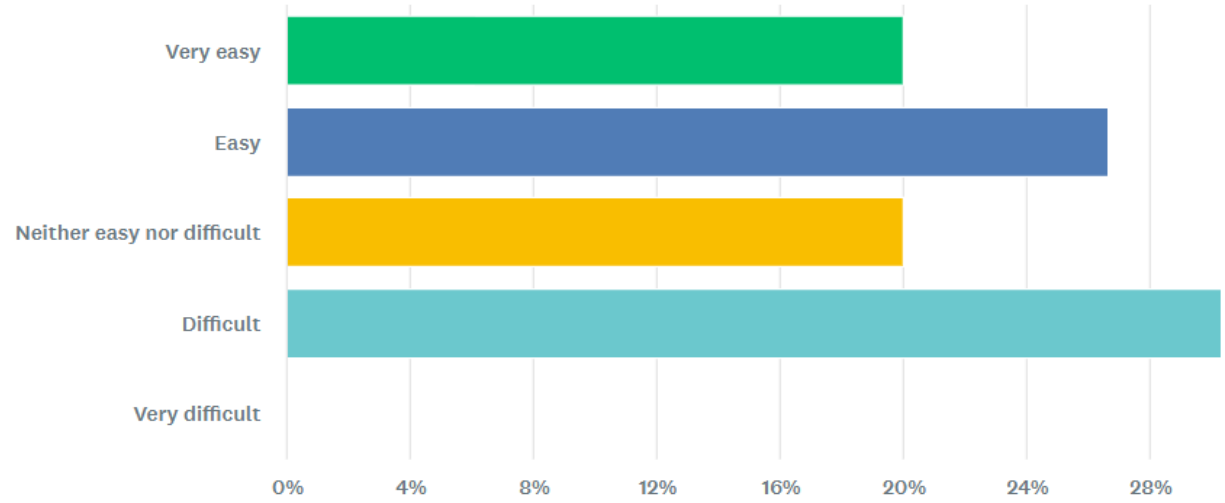
Comments:

- The [redacted] material seems excessive, contradictory and, in regards to the Harvard referencing rules not in line with the instructions on Brightspace.
- It varies with some materials well presented and some poorly.
- Still find brightspace v difficult to navigate and use
- There is far too many resources uploaded for psychopathology module, it's overwhelming and I'm not sure where to start.
- I feel some shells could be organised better, some have a lot of random information added all the time which can be confusing
- There is an inconsistency between units regarding how well the material presented on the slides are referenced/correctly referenced, some unit slides do not cite the material being presented at all. Considering how classmates continue to voice how they struggle with knowing how to properly source and cite references for written assignments, I would expect the class sides to properly model referencing as required by students for their written assignments consistently across all units.
- I rate my experience of the online/digital learning materials as satisfied over the units with the exception of the [redacted] unit, which I rate as dissatisfied.

Q2 15 responses

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How easy is it to access online learning materials?

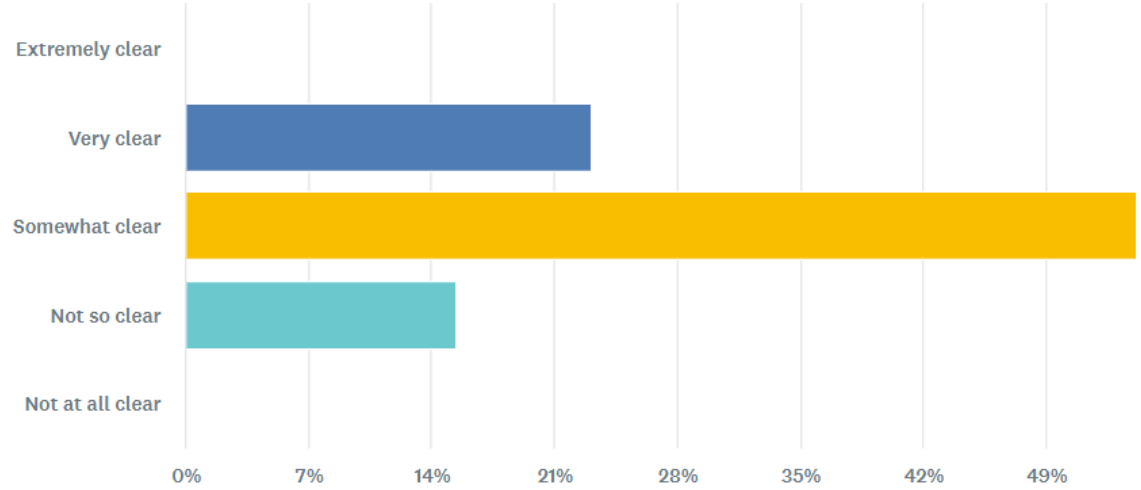


Comments:

- I experienced accessing all the online learning materials easily with exception of the [redacted] unit, where it took 10 days, after 2 lessons for me to be given access permission to the unit, which I understand was actioned by another department member who was alerted to the situation. My email request to the tutor and to the IT department were unanswered. The tutor explained they were unable to grant permission to access the shells and appeared to take no responsibility for ensuring all their students had access to the unit.
- So much info, impossible to remember where it's been found. Not quick easy access
- Brightspace can be really difficult to navigate and it is sometimes very difficult to find what you need. You can't just easily put your hands on things.

Q3 13 responses Horizontal bar

How clear do you find the online learning materials?



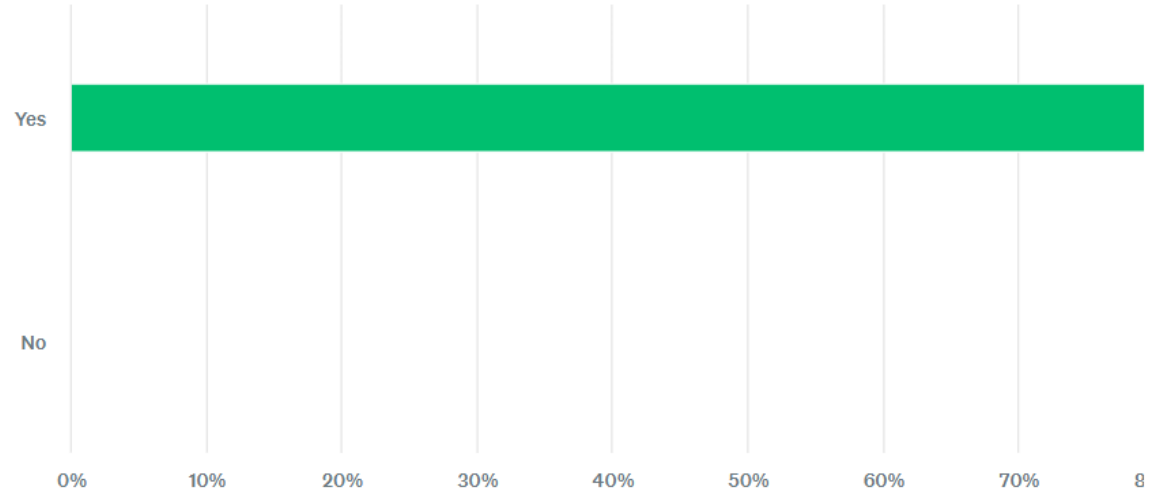
Comments:

- This is unit specific dependent on the teacher responsible for teaching the course content. Some teachers provide clear 'learning maps' demonstrating how each class lesson links with the [redacted] learning outcomes, linking the recommended reading for the unit to the material being covered within each lesson which helps to support a wide range of learning needs; however, this is not consistent across the units being taught, with other teachers providing the minimal amount of information required, with slides and other materials full of errors which have caused confusion for students.
- Clear across the units with exception of the [redacted] unit which I experience as not at all clear. After 5 weeks I have discovered that there is Tutor Materials in the shell, and that I am actually not required, nor need to study the mass of information to pass the unit assessment, whilst the Tutor materials more clearly align with the outcomes and essay questions so I am beginning to understand what I need to study and learn.
- Clear [redacted] ones aside.
- Some lecturers are confident and competent in adding materials this way others struggle
- assignment questions are not always very clear and can be misleading
- All other modules are clear to follow, psychopathology unit is not clear at all

Q4 12 responses

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Do you find the learning materials help support your understanding of the topics being taught?



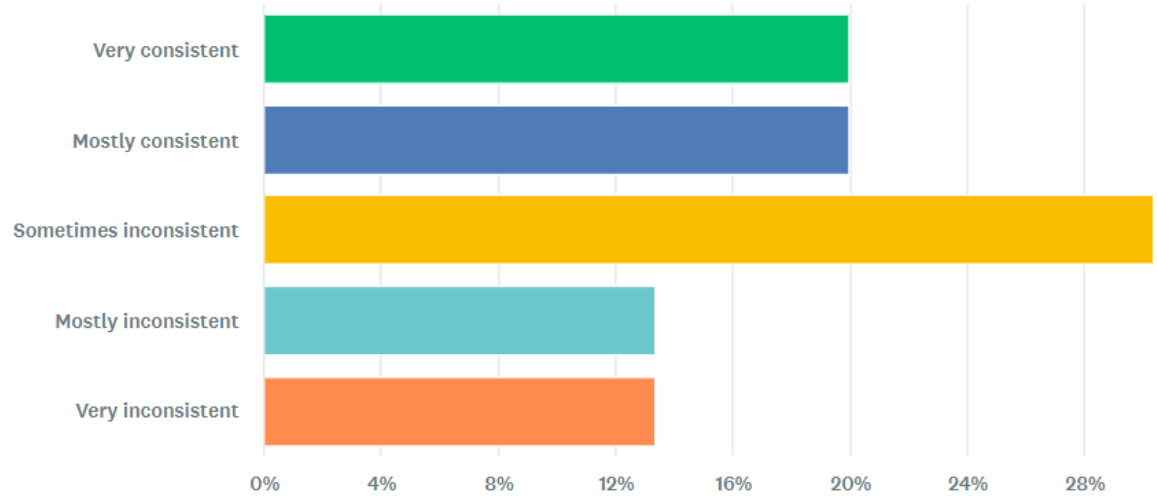
Comments:

- Yes for all units but [redacted], where it has taken 5 weeks to start to find the support to my understanding.
- Yes, [redacted] ones aside.
- average
- Seems class time could be spent differently, and slides self learning be used to be more efficient
- Mostly
- This is dependent on the unit and the teacher responsible for presenting the materials.

Q5 15 responses

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How consistent do you find the information provided across the different modules you are studying?



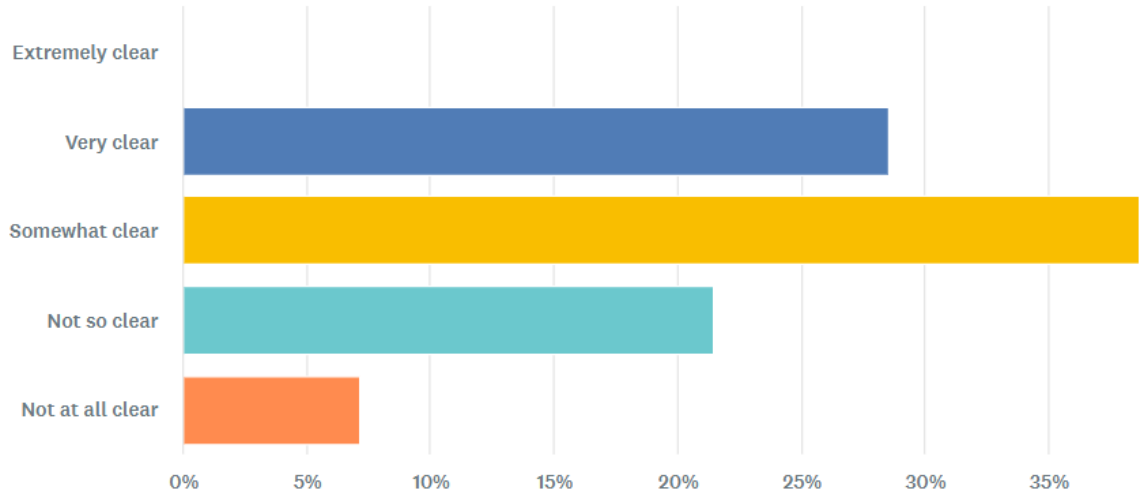
Comments:

- The [redacted], [redacted], and [redacted] modules all seem consistent with one another and often interconnected. The [redacted] unit is [redacted] and appears to stand alone by its nature but seems to sit consistently with the other units.
- Some materials are excellent others very basic and don't enhance class in person teaching from lecturer
- The units are easy to follow and the teaching covers what is expected except [redacted] unit. I know it's a different tutor but there is SUCH a difference experience

Q6 14 responses

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How clear are the instructions for tasks, independent study and preparation?



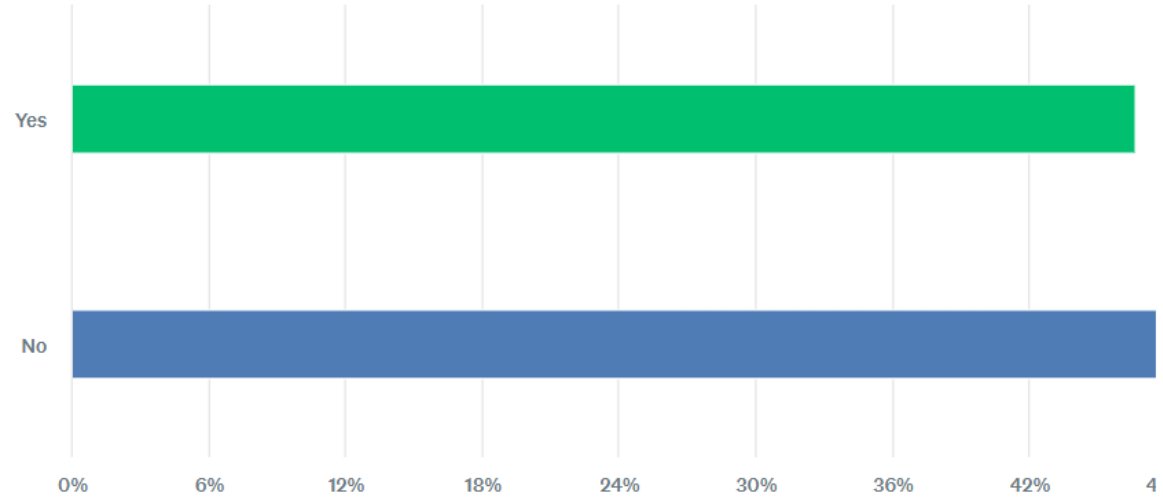
Comments:

- This is dependent on the unit and the teacher responsible for presenting the class information.
- Clear [redacted] ones aside.
- Add tags
- Varies enormously according to skill and experience of the lecturer
- No description of what's required/differences between portfolio/report/essay. No teaching in class around how to produce these
- As above

Q7 15 responses

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Anything else to share?



Comments:

- It is clear that some teachers are actively updating their slides, providing additional supportive materials such as chapter summaries for recommended reading etc, while others are not.
- I would like to make a request that the [redacted] group is given a larger room. The room we are presently allocated is too small for [redacted] students and a tutor and thus causes an uncomfortable and unhealthy learning environment. There is not enough room for personal space, and the format of circle learning is corrupted and dysfunctional because it is impossible to hold a true circle, and instead we are forced against the walls into a square, where all class members can not see one another and there is no clear exit from the circle unless through the centre. The rooms temperature also fluctuates significantly with the large number of people in an enclosed space, and the limited ventilation available.
- Significant improvement could be made, in my opinion, quite easily. Having listened to, and made, to suggestions for over a year, I have not seen any change or indication specific issues are taken on board with a timeline for implementation. To say it's better than it was says more about how bad it was to start with than convince anyone that there is genuine intent to inspire confidence to participate when doing so has no result. This includes this poll.
- Need for further training for lecturers at [redacted] level teaching. Lack of competence and confidence in using technology to teach impacts the learner experience. A need for lecturer skills to be increased to use a wider range of "online" technology to teach ie polls , interactive tools , surveys , wordle , mentimeter etc to increase impact of online learning. Many " in person" classes should be offered as either hybrid live format or totally live online, some "in person" class teaching consists of siting in a room for up to 6 hours of going through powerpoint slides and some discussion - all of which could be delivered online in an engaging manner saving travel cost, carbon footprint and human energy in travel to and from college

for no additional gain. The literature on the efficacy of well designed and competently delivered online, face to face teaching that makes best use of available technology clearly outlines the benefits. UHI has always been at the forefront of using technology to connect across a wide geographical area for the region and needs to keep this standard up through training staff to be competent, creative and confident users of technolgy. This enables more learners from a wider background to be able to access and commit to undertaking learning and the courses offered by reducing cost and time burden of travelling to sit in a room.

- If I was just grading [redacted] units these scores would be higher
- There needs to be attention paid to food and drink availability in the college, nearest shops not accessible during break, cost, and for those who may have limited provision at home, or limited finances.
- Love [redacted] subject I find it very clear and helpful
- I have reported that I do not feel that [redacted] unit is being taught during the class sessions. I have pushed the red button and I have fed this back to the tutor
- I feel some modules are very overwhelming with the amount of information that's not needed that's added to the shells, I feel there should be a folder named "extra information" for if people want to go in deeper etc, instead it feels like everything is just jumbled up which can be stressful