Exploring the SLE model at SVR meetings: Resources, Environment & Technologies (February)

About our February SVR meetings

Our Student Learning Experience theme for our February 2026 Student Voice Representative meetings was **Resources, Environment and Technologies**. Background information about the SLE model is on the sparqs website.

The HISA website's SVR meetings page explains more about how we use the SLE model to contribute to the enhancement of learning.

The building block Resources, Environment and Technology was chosen for February's meetings because of the significant volume of feedback received from students about the tools for learning that students use.

Our meetings in February were scheduled across Academic Partners by our local teams as follows – and minutes of these can be found on our SVR meetings page:
- UHI Inverness: Monday 2nd February, 12.00 - 1.00 (in-person).
- UHI Orkney: Tuesday 3rd February, 2.00 - 3.00 (online).
- UHI Argyll: Wednesday 4th February, 12.00 - 1.00 (online).
- UHI Moray: Wednesday 4th February, 12.00 - 1.00 (in-person).
- UHI Shetland: Wednesday 4th February 12.30 - 1.30 (hybrid).
- UHI Perth: Thursday 5th February, 12.30 - 1.30 (in-person).
- UHI Inverness: Monday 9th February, 12.00 - 1.00 (online).
- UHI North, West and Hebrides: Monday 9th February, 1.00 - 2.00 (online).
- SAMS: Thursday 12th February, 12.30 - 1.30 (in-person).
- UHI North, West and Hebrides: Thursday 12th February, 4.00 - 5.00 (online).

A total of 87 SVRs attended these meetings.

Discussion was generated both at those meetings and in the SVR Teams space, around three questions. These were chosen as they reflect current priorities for HISA and the themes in wider student feedback we are receiving, and they help shape our approach to the future of learning and teaching through UHI Transformation and other strategic conversations.
1. What do your classmates tell you about how they find Brightspace?
2. How useful are physical learning spaces at your nearest campus?
3. How do staff help you and your classmates to use resources and technology in learning?

The following is a summary of comments and discussions.

1. What do your classmates tell you about how they find Brightspace?

Unsurprisingly, there was a wide range of comments about Brightspace – from the positive to the negative and many nuanced points in between.

One of the biggest themes was about **navigation and usability of the interface**, which was found to be very difficult for some: words like "*tricky*", "*clunky*", "*messy*" and "*not pleasingly aesthetic*" came up in the comments. Many suggestions pointed to functions or content that were apparently duplication or redundant (such as shells no longer needed that cannot be removed), missing (such as a search bar) or put in the wrong place or mislabelled. Some referred to Brightspace being difficult to use on smartphones. Others shared experiences of getting lost trying to find one's way around (especially when new or self-defining as technologically illiterate). A number of comments referred to PowerPoint not working well in Brightspace, or slides being uploaded as pdfs making layers or transitions impossible to identify.

Not all comments on this question were negative: various SVRs referred to Brightspace's ease of use, the lack of reported issues, and its ability to keep everything together.

A second theme was about **scope for more training and support for students**. SVRs argued that much more support was required to help navigate Brightspace, with some asking for more of an introduction at the start of their learning, and possibly information about it in the student handbook. One pointed to the value of IT support in resolving difficulty, while another highlighted the role of peer support in finding things or SVRs reminding fellow students when classes were taking place due to reported difficulties accessing and logging into Brightspace. Another pointed out that their fellow students "*find it a lot better now than what they did at the start*".

Thirdly, many SVRs reflected on **Brightspace in the context of their wider learning experience**. For instance those who studied predominantly or entirely online depended on Brightspace (for one, it thankfully worked well for them), and felt value in having information put on Brightspace in advance.

The richness of data in these first three themes would suggest that some focus groups or one to one testing with SVRs would generate hugely valuable understanding of students' individual experiences of Brightspace, especially comparing (mostly or entirely) online study with campus-based learning, and could create insights into technical and pedagogic opportunities for enhancement. This was also a recommendation in our December SVR meeting when feedback was gathered on online delivery.

As a fourth and final theme, SVRs reported **variable approaches across courses**. Many SVRs praised lecturers by name for responsiveness, such as responding to feedback on Brightspace, showing students around Brightspace and functions such as reading lists and Turnitin, writing step by step instructions, or demonstrating their own individual templates.

However, most comments in this area pointed out variations in approach depending on module, level/year of study or individual lecturer. This variation had the effect of causing confusion due to perceived disorganisation, things being put in the wrong place, or variations in

approaches to navigation. SVRs also pointed out the problems this caused if students missed classes, or where materials were not uploaded in plenty time before a class or indeed not until after it.

> This theme in the feedback points to scope for SVRs to take further steps to praise staff for successful use of Brightspace (for instance through the HISA Awards or other more routine channels). It might also suggest value in regular informal discussions between SVRs and teaching staff (and perhaps learning technologists) about best practice in supporting learning through Brightspace.

Perhaps we can leave the last word on this question to the SVR who reported that Brightspace "*works fine, nothing special but gets the job done!!*"

2. How useful are physical learning spaces at your nearest campus?

As is frequently the case in wider discussions at SVR meetings, **general facilities and estates issues** were a substantial focus – with comments often relating to cleanliness and litter, accessibility, heating and soundproofing, repairs and car parking.

> HISA is exploring in some Academic Partners the creation of logging systems for facilities, so that SVRs can encourage students to report routine facilities snags, which can then be responded to quickly by estates teams. SVR meetings could then spend time being updated on themes and resolutions in this feedback.

A number of other comments were about **learning resources**, ranging from the usual complaints about PC and software availability (especially poor at some smaller campuses) to desires for other facilities such as more nooks and interactive whiteboards. There was feedback that some books are out of date (including in computing which is obviously a subject with a fast-moving literature) and that some books are available in some campuses and not others or resources are behind paywalls. Materials were described as so out of date in one course that a lecturer supposedly spent a large sum of their own money buying new materials. One SVR, though this was an isolated comment, said people were "sometimes intimidated and unaware of how to seek help" in libraries.

A third and substantial theme covered feedback on **learning spaces**, which many people rely on for in-person practical courses or for occasional visits to campus. There were many notes of praise for well-stocked lab facilities and useful library facilities, but a recurring strand of comments about noise levels and disruptive behaviour in libraries and learning resource centres, busyness at peak times in study areas, and a widespread desire for longer opening hours. An SVR in a creative arts subject stated that "*it is very hard to find any appropriate learning spaces, especially since a lot of our assessments require rehearsals.*"

There was a very strong sense in feedback that students would value more quiet spaces, with dedicated and protected quiet zones to enable individual study.

A large body of feedback was received on **social and communal spaces**, with calls across many campuses for more comfy seating, chill-out spaces, games areas, and places to eat food

and socialise with other students – including "*more individual armchairs where you can snooze*" and even access to facilities for a proposed baking club at one campus. One student even made the striking point that their campus was a chance to get out of their house where they would otherwise be studying on their own.

While much feedback suggested the value of social spaces, there was also a strand of thought that this has an academic benefit for study groups and informal academic collaboration including a call for pre-booked rooms for co-working.

> These points, including the desire for students to have more social spaces, chimes with other feedback HISA is acting on. We have been involved in a number of subject-specific conversations (for instance in music and Humanities) relating to how online students can be supported to access campus facilities and build their academic communities.
>
> More strategically, HISA is currently exploring with management at various campuses opportunities to create coherent and integrated HISA facilities that draw together the students' association's functions and offices with student-led facilities for clubs, societies and networks, support such as our Advice Service and shares/swaps for books, clothes and food, and simple places to socialise. Such facilities have the clear potential to add to community building, attract students to campuses, enhance retention and satisfaction, and respond to the frequently heard refrain by new students arriving at our larger campuses: "*where's the students' union?*"

It should be noted that a final body of feedback on these question related to students' lack of access to or need for campus facilities. Some SVRs reported that they and other students had not been to their nearest campus or only come in occasionally due to other commitments such as full-time work and a desire to study at home. However a number of such SVRs did report that they had heard good things about campuses from those who had been to them.

3. How do staff help you and your classmates to use resources and technology in learning?

An obvious collection of answers to this question described the **use of class time** to provide help, for instance through dedicated ICT classes, or time spent in lectures to cover available resources, explain technology and ensure all are up to speed. Praise was given to staff for using these opportunities patiently and carefully.

Further to that, SVRs testified to **staff being responsive to requests for help** with resources, including on a one-to-one level with students. This covers topics as wide as Brightspace, library resources, reading lists, assessments and software applications. Many comments commended individual circumstances, courses and staff members. There was a sense from some SVRs that this varied somewhat between departments and subjects, however, and there were some instances where some further support and reinforcement might be appreciated by students.

Staff are certainly making a difference on the ground, not just to students but to the wider environment: as one SVR put it, "*they help us if we are having difficulty with say, printing things off (I nearly accidently printed off 3924 pieces of paper on Tuesday)*"!

Another cluster of responses related to the **quality and provision of resources**, with a mixed bag of observations made about both the good quality and availability of resources (such as computers, printers and student support services) but also some perceived shortfalls in facilities and knowledge. One SVR on a smaller site noted that that staff did not have access to the same resources such as a physical library to support students as might be expected at larger sites.

Some comments related to **staff knowledge, skills and roles**, for instance in terms of variation in skills and practice between staff and students, and one SVR complained about PAT allocation changing too frequently. One SVR said that "in the nicest way possible, some of the staff might benefit from some training regarding the online resources". Two comments alluded to assumptions being made about technical literacy in class albeit that staff do gladly help if then asked. One SVR remarked with disappointment about staff suggesting use of AI for research work.

Finally, it was interesting to note that while the question was about staff support for resources and technology, many SVRs unprompted spoke about **the importance of peer support** in this area, referring to class messaging groups and SVRs themselves being a good source of help. One SVR said that this was done in the absence of any time set aside by teaching staff, while another noted mutual learning between staff and students as they helped each other. As one rep sadly noted: "*I found it really difficult to get help from staff at college. I got more help from my fellow students, but as a very mature student Brightspace made me feel I should just give up my course because of the lack of help and because I felt that I was spending more time trying to learn about Brightspace than learning my course work*."

Given the breath of comments in this question relating to staff and students, it would suggest that some partnership conversations could uncover useful shared understandings about the way forward for support for use of resources and technologies.

Where relevant, we are taking up individual comments with relevant staff in UHI/APs. All comments are also being taken on board to inform HISA's approaches and activities. Minutes of individual local meetings are on our SVR meetings page.

HISA
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