Online and blended learning: reflective questions for students and staff

The tertiary enhancement topic was a two-year project running from academic year 2022-23 to 2023-24 and taken forward by four Scottish quality agencies: QAA Scotland, sparqs, College Development Network and Education Scotland. It was commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council on the topic of online and blended learning. As part of the project outcomes, sparqs was tasked to ensure the learner voice was present in the research carried out and the resources developed.

This resource is housed on a dedicated QAA Scotland hub providing sector practitioners and students with valuable information about online and blended learning delivery.

Reflective questions for students and staff

This resource is based on the sparqs **Student Learning Experience (SLE) model**. The model was developed by students in partnership with staff across the sector, in order to be focused on what matters most to our students. The model is designed to sit at the heart of conversations with students, enabling students and staff to work together to identify priorities to enhance the quality of learning.

It is comprised of 9 building blocks that make up the learning experience. Each building block has an accompanying set of 10 reflective questions**.** On the following page you can find **a selection of these reflective questions, divided by building block, which focus on aspects of online and blended learning** and how the learning experience may differ depending on the mode of course delivery.
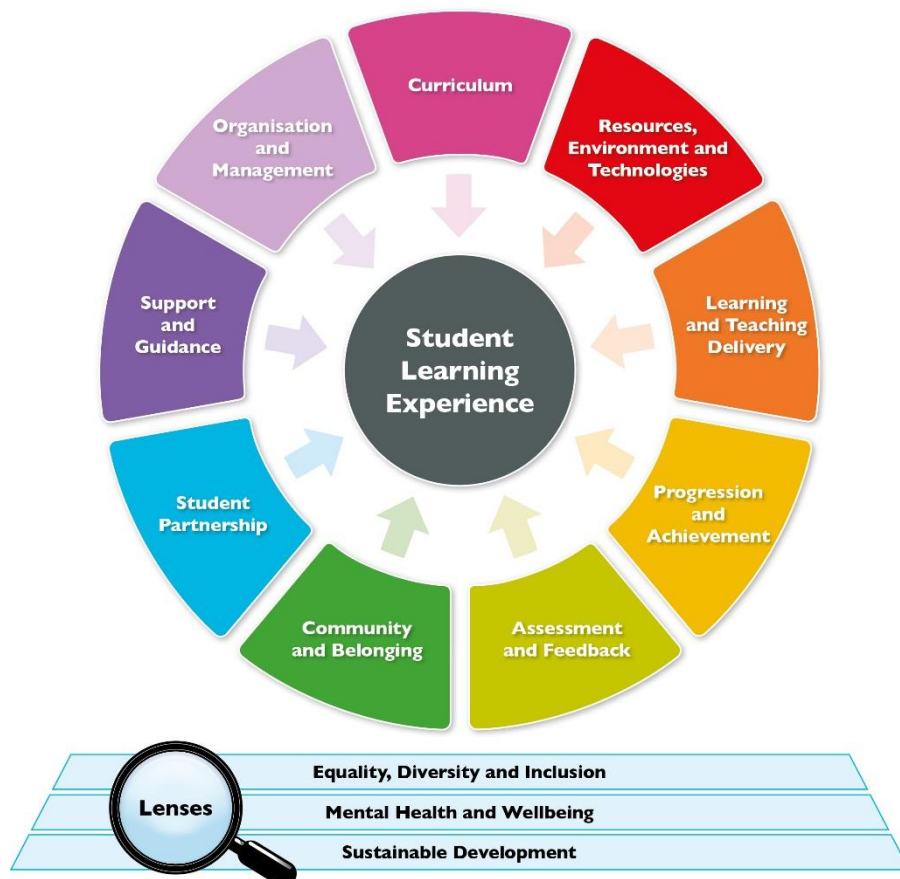
You can use the questions overleaf to support dialogue between students and staff on various aspects of the building blocks, on the topic of online learning. They will help develop an understanding between students and staff of strengths within the student experience, as well as areas for development.

See the sparqs' website for more information about the SLE Model.

Curriculum

A. To what extent does the **course design** involve **student input** and in what ways do students have the opportunity to work in partnership with staff to amend and enhance the curriculum?

H. Is course content **reviewed regularly** to ensure it remains up to date and accurate?

Resources, Environment and Technologies

A. Are course materials **accessible** to all and provided in a **variety of formats** appropriate to the mode of study? Are **costs** associated with the course and wider student life communicated in advance to prospective students, such as the cost of field trips, materials, placements, and textbooks?

B. To what extent are learning and teaching resources, both physical and digital, kept **up to date**, relevant, and of industry/discipline standard?

C. How does the strategic development of learning and teaching resources take into account the **devices** students have available and prefer to use to access the course?

D. Do students have equity of access to **library** resources (both physical and digital), including sufficient subject-specific provision, within all levels of study and subject areas?

E. How are students and staff **supported and trained** to use learning resources and technologies effectively? To what extent is this support visible, regularly signposted, and provided consistently across all subject areas and levels of study?

H. Do students have access to **individual and group study spaces** and are spaces provided that promote community learning, both online and in person?

J. In what ways is the **virtual learning environment** effective and accessible for all? Is the layout and structure of the VLE consistent across courses and services so that online resources are simple to find?

Learning and Teaching Delivery

A. Do staff use a variety of different **methods of teaching** and explain to students the benefits of each for their learning?

B. To what extent is consideration given to the **mode of study** of the module (e.g. in-person, online, hybrid), including what level of flexibility can be given to the student to engage?

F. In what ways is teaching delivery designed to be **engaging**, with opportunities for **interactive** learning?

Progression and Achievement

B. Are all students provided with a comprehensive and supportive **induction** to the institution and the course, including students joining the institution at a later stage in the course?

Assessment and Feedback

C. Are a **range of assessment methods** offered across the course which accommodate the diverse needs of the student body? Do assessments allow **accommodations** for those with additional needs for learning?

Community and Belonging

A. In what ways do all students have the opportunity to participate in social and academic communities, and to feel **included** and that they **belong**?

B. What opportunities do students and staff have to collaborate as part of a **learning community** within their course and subject area?

E. How are students studying **at a distance** included in institutional and students' association communities? Are dedicated **online spaces** established to build community and belonging, such as forums, online chat platforms, and video conferencing spaces?

Student Partnership

B. How do staff work with students to design, deliver, and analyse a **variety of methods** for understanding the student learning experience? Are there **multiple opportunities** for students to share their views and ideas throughout the course?

Support and Guidance

A. To what extent are **support services**, including disability services and services to support students' mental health and wellbeing, **available**, **visible**, and **joined up**? Are services **accessible** to all learners, including online and for those with a wide range of access requirements?

Organisation and Management

D. In what ways does the institution have a strategic approach to **student communications**, which allows for relevant, accurate and timely information-sharing?

E. What systems and procedures are in place to provide alternative access to learning and teaching during **emergency circumstances**.

I. When planning teaching and learning, how does the institution take into account **logistical considerations** such as transport options, time to travel between classes, and students' needs and circumstances?

J. Does the institution have a strategic approach to the development of their **size and shape**, considering related factors such as availability of accommodation, sufficient access to services and resources, and impact on class sizes?