



Scotland's Student Learning Experience model: Building partnership in quality in a tertiary context

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ABSTRACT

Since 2003, student engagement in shaping learning has been a key pillar of Scotland's higher education Quality Enhancement Framework, through which Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), Scotland's pioneering student engagement agency, was founded. A key tool underpinning this has been sparqs' Student Learning Experience (SLE) model, created in 2006 from Scotland's quality arrangements for colleges and placed at the heart of sparqs' course rep training.

The SLE model is designed to support conversations between students and staff to identify priorities to enhance the quality of learning. In 2021, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) announced the development of a new tertiary quality framework which would aim to put the experiences of students at the centre of the sector's approach. sparqs identified the potential of the SLE model to fulfill this purpose and in 2021 was commissioned by the SFC to redevelop and embed the model in Scotland's forthcoming tertiary quality arrangements.

A distinctive aspect of the redeveloped SLE model is that the building blocks, lenses and reflective questions are founded upon the views of students across Scotland about what makes an excellent quality learning experience. Throughout 2022 and 2023, sparqs worked with over 300 students, alongside staff from students' associations, institutions and sector agencies, to develop the SLE model.

This article introduces the SLE model, explores how conceptualisation of the student learning experience has evolved in policy, practice and literature, and explains the methodology behind the creation of the new model. It then describes applications of the model for practice in academic development, course-level student-staff partnership, and strategies for quality enhancement. The article concludes with next steps in the future of tertiary quality, in which students can be full, active partners in shaping their learning.

Keywords: student engagement, student learning experience, tertiary quality, Scottish context, student partnership

Introduction

The move to a new tertiary quality framework in Scotland has arguably been the most significant transformation in university and college quality since the shared principles and activities introduced in

2006's Joint Quality Review Group (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007). It is the first such major shift since 2006, and the first time college and university quality has been so closely aligned. The roots of this transformation lie in the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)'s Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability (Scottish Funding Council, 2020) which, among many seminal recommendations, began a journey towards a shared approach to quality for colleges and universities. The SFC developed a plan to co-create this common approach alongside sector agencies and institutions, with a series of workstreams identified and commissioned. One involved updating the longstanding Student Learning Experience (SLE) model created by Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), Scotland's national agency for student engagement, and used in its course representative training provision and student partnership development across the tertiary sector.

This article's aim is to introduce the SLE model, describe its development so far and point to its future application in the enhancement of learning. We, the authors, have long experience of student engagement in quality in Scotland's sector, both working for sparqs (to the present day and to November 2023 respectively) and leading the agency's contributions to the model's redevelopment.

We begin this article by explaining the background and context to the model, firstly looking at how the expression of the concept of the student learning experience has evolved in policy, practice and literature, and secondly highlighting key points in the history of Scotland's approach to quality and student engagement which have informed the new SLE model. The methodology for creating this model is then outlined, emphasising the strong student-led and tertiary features of the process and the research which underpinned it. A subsequent section explains the application of the model and the opportunities it presents in three areas: practice in academic development, staff-student conversations, and synergy with quality arrangements. These three facets then inform conclusions about next steps in the future of tertiary quality.

Background and context

The evolution of the SLE model

The student learning experience is often seen as an amorphous and hard to define concept, defined as early as 2008 by Ertl and Wright (2008, p. 196) as "a highly diverse research base which has become complex and, arguably, unwieldy." Many other authors have presented frameworks, studies or literature reviews about the student learning experience, for instance relating it to student feedback and surveys (Rientes et al., 2015) (Zerihun et al., 2012).

Other articulations of the student learning experience have developed out of the processes of scrutinising and reviewing the quality of that learning. Indeed, the origins of sparqs' SLE model lie in the quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges nearly twenty years ago (Scottish Further Education Funding Council and HM Inspectorate of Education, 2004). These arrangements were underpinned by three key concepts: 'Learner Progress and Outcomes', 'Leadership and Quality Management' and 'Learning and Teaching Progress'. In addition, Part B of those arrangements presented a series of headings to explore and evaluate learning:

- Educational leadership, direction and management

- Access and inclusion
- Guidance and support
- Resources and services to support the learner
- Staff
- Quality assurance
- Quality improvement

sparqs adapted and incorporated these concepts and headings into its programme of training for course reps across Scotland (Figure 1), because connecting the questions by which colleges' learning provision was reviewed and scrutinised with the questions representatives should ask of students provided a more cohesive approach to quality.

Original Student Learning Experience model

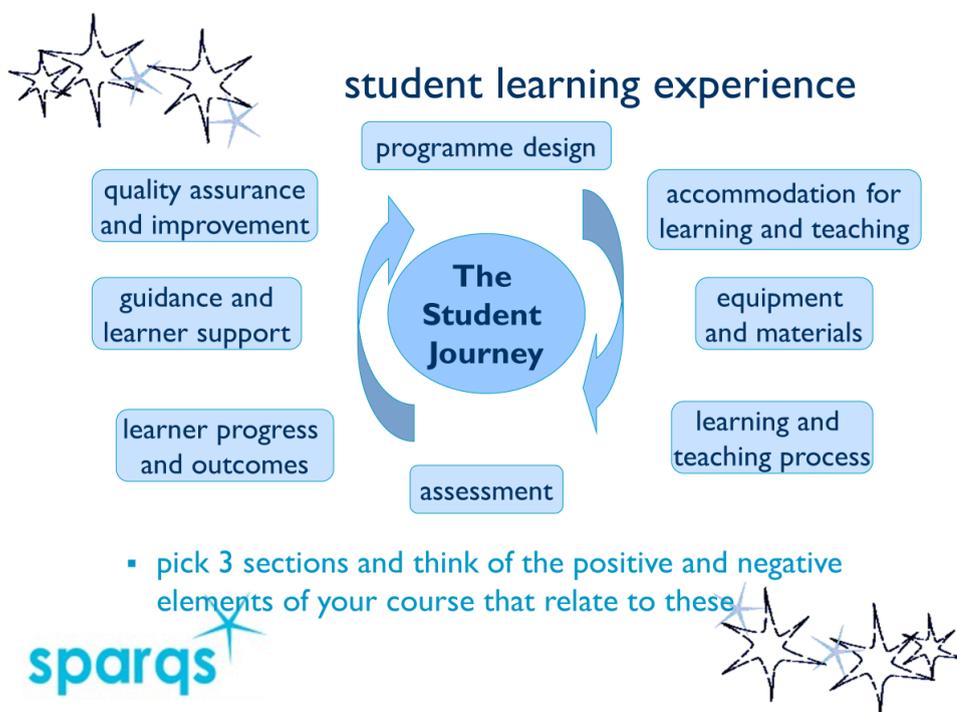


Figure 1 Original student learning experience (2006)

In 2011 the SLE model was refined and updated to become the version in Figure 2 (sparqs, n.d.a.) which was in use from then until the work outlined in this article. It included some evolutions including the use of the phrase 'quality enhancement' to build on the original terms of quality assurance and improvement, reflecting the enhancement agenda of the higher education, and increasingly further education, sector. That model has been accompanied by various adaptations and modifications such as questions under each heading to assist course reps' research among their peers, including a set of questions specifically designed to reflect on the shift to online learning at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (sparqs, 2020). sparqs has

also created versions of the model to reflect the terminology of taught postgraduate and apprentice learning experiences, and has translated the model for use in Scotland's Gaelic-medium delivery (sparqs, n.d.b.). The model has in addition been incorporated into sparqs' programmes to promote staff understanding of student engagement, demystifying the course rep training and allowing staff to constructively engage with and respond to course reps' research. Further, the headings have been widely used across the sector by staff and course reps as a basis for gathering evidence on the student experience, and as headings or prompts for course-level or course rep meetings, surveys and focus groups.

Student Learning Experience model (2011 – 2024)

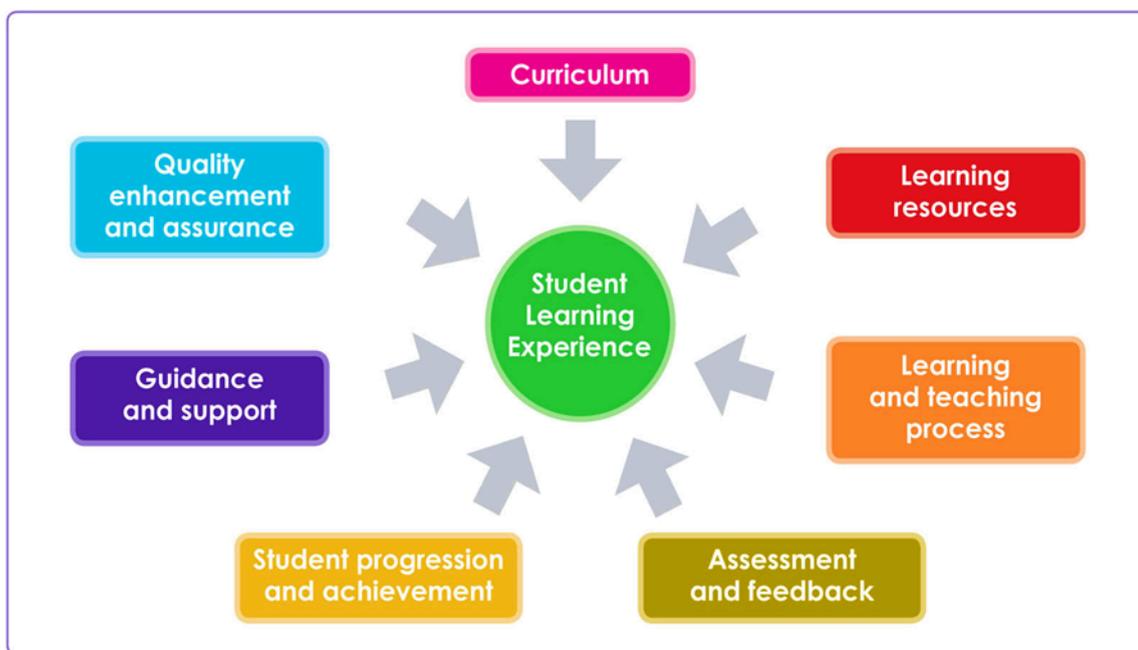


Figure 2 sparqs' SLE model from 2011 to 2024

Scottish Funding Council review

The SFC's Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability (Scottish Funding Council, 2020) provided the sector with an opportunity to reflect on learning, teaching and quality in the light of many major challenges such as COVID, Brexit, and wider changes in society, technology and the economy. In the review's final report in June 2021, it recommended the development of

a single framework for quality for colleges and universities, to uphold academic standards and secure enhancement of the learning experience of students. This framework should have at its heart making Scotland the best place to be a student within a college or university and sharing good practice across tertiary education. (Scottish Funding Council, 2021, p. 13)

The new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF (Scottish Funding Council, n.d.) seeks to put the experiences of students at the centre of the sector's approach to quality. To ensure that students are

co-creating decisions and not merely the topic of discussion, this necessitates a dialogue with students around learning and teaching and the range of professional services that support it.

sparqs identified the potential of its SLE model as a way to facilitate this dialogue. We saw the value of a redeveloped model to provide a shared understanding of learning and teaching across Scotland and to further embed an enhancement-focused and student-led approach to our quality system. In addition, we were mindful of the changing landscape of the tertiary sector since 2011, including the increased focus on digital learning, employability and flexible pathways, and the need for the SLE model to reflect developments in the experiences and expectations of students. sparqs therefore proposed to SFC that we create a shared sector reference point, building upon the existing SLE model outlined above, and in 2022 SFC commissioned sparqs to undertake this work. The model will sit alongside Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership (sparqs, 2024), which will support institutions to reflect on their partnership practices and develop students as partners within the new quality arrangements.

Methodology

To develop the new SLE model, we created a project plan and timeline, which was guided by various practical requirements and policy contexts. It was integral to the project's delivery that student engagement must be embedded in the creation of the model, alongside the need for staff to be consulted too, ensuring the model's strong sector ownership. The model needed to work across all levels of study within the tertiary sector (with only postgraduate researchers (PGRs) not in scope, as an alternative SLE model is in development for this cohort); all modes of study, such as online and in-person delivery; and for all student groups and demographics. Finally, the project required the final draft of the model to be delivered by May 2023 to allow space for the development of the new quality arrangements prior to their application in academic year 2024-25.

The methodology therefore involved three key stages, outlined in appendix 1:

1. Identifying the draft building blocks: desk research, investigating existing sector reference points that explore the student learning experience.
2. Developing the building blocks and accompanying principles: a series of workshops with students studying at colleges and universities in Scotland to identify the principles that underpin a good student learning experience. Thematic analysis of the principles undertaken to identify an initial longlist.
3. Consulting the sector: draft principles and building blocks consulted upon and workshopped with students and staff across the sector at several national committees and events. Establishment of a student and staff consultative group to develop the model and accompanying reflective questions in more detail.

Stage 1: Analysis of sector reference points

sparqs began with desk research, investigating a range of existing sector reference points that explore the student learning experience and break down this wider concept into topics or areas. These included the UK Quality Code (Quality Assurance Agency, n.d.); Our Best Future (Education Scotland); a range of student surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS), Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES),

and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES); The NUS Comprehensive Guide to Learning and Teaching (National Union of Students, 2015); professional standards for teaching staff in both universities (Advance HE, n.d.) and colleges (College Development Network, n.d.); and European Standards and Guidelines (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, n.d.).

Although these varied in nature from quality regulations to surveys to professional standards frameworks, and included resources from the college and university sectors and from Scottish, UK and international levels of activity, the reference points shared an articulation of the nature of learning and teaching in order to measure and enhance the outcomes for the student learning experience.

This desk research identified many commonalities across existing sector reference points, which in turn informed a longlist of draft building blocks for the new Student Learning Experience model:

- Curriculum
- Learning resources, environment and technologies
- Learning, teaching and research process/approaches/pedagogy
- Assessment and feedback
- Progression and attainment/learner journey/transitions/pathways
- Academic and pastoral support and guidance
- Quality enhancement and assurance/monitoring and evaluation
- Student voice/engagement/partnership
- Learning/academic/research community
- Personal and professional skills development
- Organisation and management
- Equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing

This longlist formed the basis of a workshop developed by sparqs to explore the key principles that constitute an excellent student learning experience. The workshop, outlined in 'Stage 2' below, was designed in line with sparqs' and the SFC's intention to ensure that this model was fully centred on the views of students studying across the tertiary sector.

Stage 2: Workshop series

Over summer 2022, sparqs designed and piloted a workshop which was delivered at three of its practitioner network and training events. These pilot workshops served a dual purpose – to begin the data gathering exercise to shape the new SLE model, and to gather initial feedback from experienced staff and students on the workshop itself and how we could most effectively deliver it across Scotland over the following months. The pilot workshops led to an institutional SLE workshop series, which we subsequently delivered across the Autumn/Winter term of the 2022/23 academic year.

We arranged sessions with students' associations and institutions to run workshops with their students. The purpose of these workshops was to get students' views on what makes a good student learning experience, in order to ensure that the final model was shaped by students currently studying in Scotland. In the workshops, attendees first had the opportunity to share what they liked about their courses and what could have been better. This was an activity intended to be completed individually, in order to ensure all participants had the chance to contribute from the beginning of the workshop. Attendees then added these reflections to the 12 building block areas identified in the desk research (see Stage 1 above). In small groups, attendees next selected one of the building blocks and, using the feedback from their fellow

participants, identified 6-8 'principles' under this building block which would contribute to a good student experience.

These workshops took place in both in-person and online formats and with a range of participants, depending on institutional and students' association priorities and preferences. For instance, some workshops were organised to involve course reps, some were open to all students, and some were specifically designed for particular groups such as apprentice cohorts and an LGBT+ student society. In total, 20 institutional workshops were delivered across 18 of Scotland's colleges and universities, alongside one cross-institutional event open to students from any institution. Attendees represented a broad demographic and pedagogic diversity of the student population. Highlights of the workshop composition included:

- 10 in colleges, 10 in universities and 1 cross-institutional event
- 9 specifically for students in representative roles, including course and other academic reps
- 3 with apprentices (including modern and graduate apprentices)
- 1 with taught postgraduate students
- 1 with a university's team of Student Champions
- 1 with a cohort that was predominantly, though not entirely, students in supported education
- 1 with international students
- 1 with students from a widening access background
- 1 with senior phase school pupils studying at college
- 1 with a college's LGBT+ Society

In addition to the 18 institutions who hosted their own workshops, students and/or student officers from a further 18 institutions contributed to this phase of the project through our national event pilot workshops. In total, 301 students engaged in the workshop series from 36 institutions.

In this workshop series, we wanted to ensure that we were hearing from a diverse range of students from different demographics and levels of study, to ensure that the model works for all students however and wherever they learn and acknowledging the importance of diverse voices to effective practice in student engagement and the barriers some students might face (Lowe & Lowe, 2023). In addition to the focus on targeted engagement with a diverse range of institutions and cohorts, as illustrated above, all participants were asked to complete a diversity questionnaire, to ensure the workshops as a whole heard from a diverse range of participants and to identify any gaps in engagement from specific groups or demographics. Our intention was to run additional targeted workshops where we identified any demographic areas which were unrepresented in the workshop series, but an analysis of the data midway through the process did not identify any such gaps, and indeed the final analysis revealed a tremendous diversity among participants by cohort and demographic areas, as illustrated in appendix 2.

Key development points from the workshops included the following.

- Students expressed a familiarity with the existing building blocks of 'Curriculum', 'Assessment and Feedback', and 'Learning and Teaching Delivery'. Although as a sector we often define 'curriculum' as wider than just the course content, students found it useful to have separate categories in order to consider each element in more detail. This also reflected our earlier sector benchmarking, where many existing tools and frameworks break down the concept of 'curriculum' further.

- Although students did have several reflections on personal and professional skills development, it wasn't always a category they intuitively understood. This building block was therefore subsumed across the other categories (predominantly 'Curriculum', 'Assessment and Feedback', and 'Progression and Achievement').
- Students expressed a desire for an expanded remit for the building block formally called 'Learning Resources'. The newly named block – 'Learning Resources, Environment and Technologies' captures the increased expectation from students for the use of digital tools and the support to use these effectively.
- In the existing SLE model, the topic of student voice is included within the quality enhancement building block. For the workshops, we separated these two topics out, but students struggled to comment on 'quality' without the student voice element included. The decision was made to bring these two categories together under the name of 'Student Partnership', to show the commitment from the Scottish sector to meaningful student engagement. Students also expressed that this language was more familiar and intuitive to them than language related to quality assurance and enhancement.

Stage 3: Sector consultation and development

Following the workshop series, sparqs began an initial thematic analysis of the principles data gathered in the workshops. From this analysis, sparqs identified a longlist of draft principles under each of the building blocks. These principles, and the wider phrasing and structure of the building blocks themselves, were consulted upon and workshoped with students and staff across the sector at several national committees and events to ensure that there was consensus at a sector-level on the model. These included sector-level quality committees and national practitioners' conferences and events, including those focused on widening access, educational development, and senior leadership, as well as sparqs' own staff and student officer networks.

Alongside this sector consultation activity, sparqs established a student and staff consultative group. This group comprised volunteers from our existing networks (our Joint Advisory Group, National Education Officer Network and Student Engagement Staff Network) as well as sector colleagues with specific areas of expertise such as EDI, careers, and online learning. This group developed sections of the model in more detail, refining the building blocks and principles and ensuring that the model works for all levels and modes of study.

Key decisions on the model made by the consultative group included the following.

- The principles were changed into reflective questions. sparqs was clear throughout the development process that the principles should be prompts for conversation, rather than become a checklist and a 'tick-box' activity, and the group agreed that by changing the format of the principles from statements to questions, this would encourage this intended constructive dialogue.
- Students had a great deal of contributions to make on the 'equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing' block. It was also a prominent theme throughout students' contributions to all of the other building blocks. The group made the decision to remove this category as a building block and to turn it into two lenses – 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' and 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' - to

recognise that these are elements of the student experience that apply across each of the building blocks in the model and to avoid duplication across the reflective questions.

- During this consultation stage, a third underpinning lens of 'Sustainability' was suggested to accompany the EDI and Mental Health lenses already identified. The group welcomed this addition but felt that the title was ambiguous in its meaning. The group therefore decided that the lens should be renamed 'Sustainable Development' and accompanying guidance for the model should specifically signpost to the definitions set out in Advance HE and QAA's guidance on Education for Sustainable Development (Quality Assurance Agency and Advance HE, 2021).

Further stages of development

There are two further stages in the development of the model which are ongoing at time of writing.

Stage 4: Ongoing activity to embed the new model within the new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework and updated course rep training; the creation of appropriate supporting resources for the sector, including the use of the SLE model to support activity within Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) [cite] and within Self Evaluation and Action Plans [cite]; and development of the model's 3 underpinning lenses (Figure 3).

Stage 5: Monitoring and evaluation of the model's operation and impact within the quality framework from 2024-25 onwards.

Introducing the model

Following completion of the process outlined above and final consultation with SFC, we published the model in October 2023 (sparqs, 2023).

Student Learning Experience model

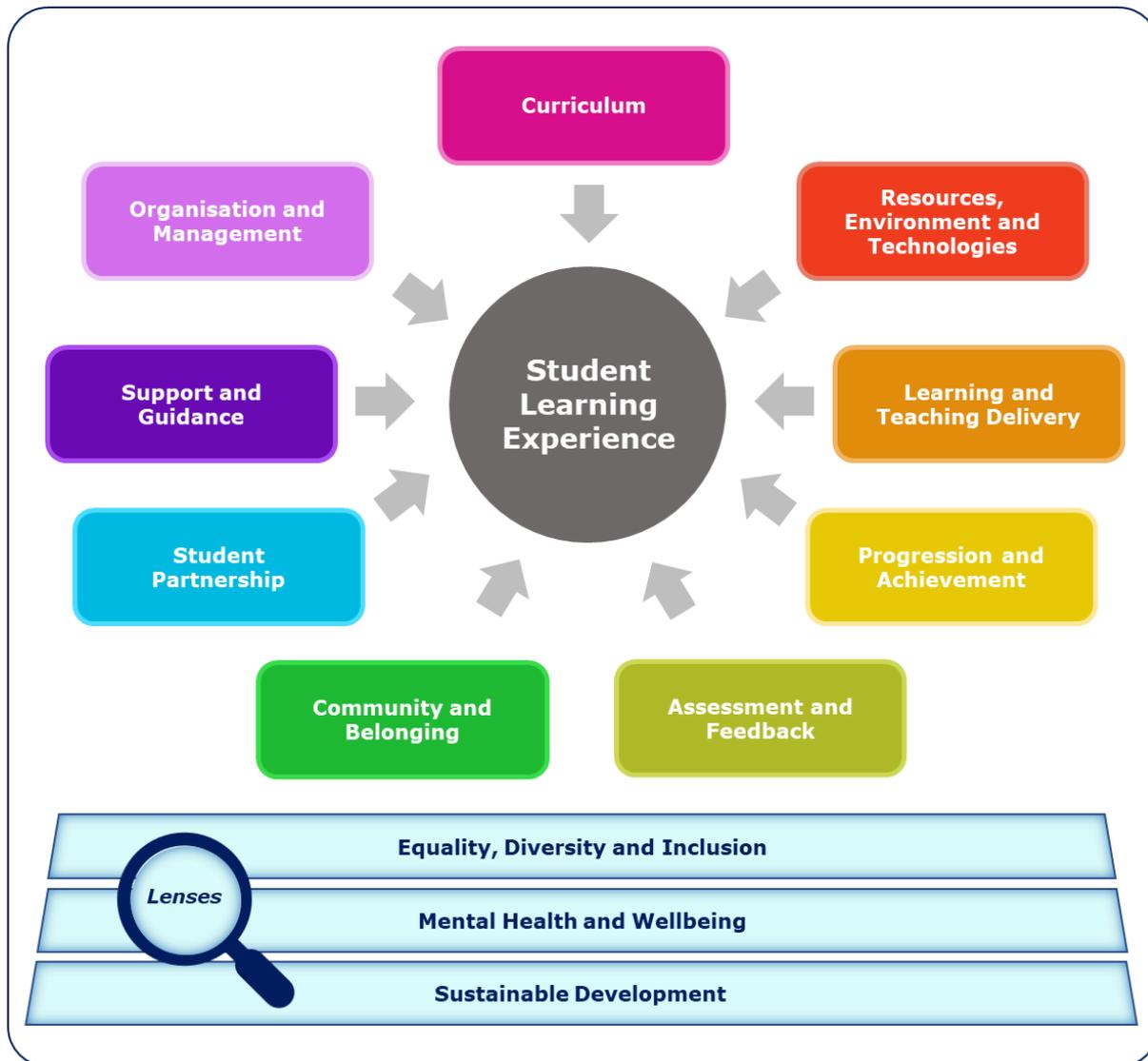


Figure 3 2024 Student Learning Experience model (sparqs, 2023)

There are 3 parts to the model:

Building Blocks: The SLE model comprises 9 building blocks. These are the key elements that make up the learning experience. They support students to consider the distinct aspects of their experience which come together to provide a high-quality student learning experience.

Lenses: The SLE model is underpinned by 3 lenses. These are areas of focus that can be applied to each of the 9 building blocks. Lenses are cross-cutting themes through which the student experience can be viewed, evaluated and enhanced.

Reflective Questions: Each building block has an accompanying set of 10 reflective questions. The questions support dialogue between students and staff on various aspects of the building blocks. They help develop an understanding between students and staff of strengths within the student experience, as well as areas for development (sparqs, 2023; Figure 4).

Example of Reflective Questions: Learning and Teaching Delivery

SLE Reflective Questions

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?
- C.** In what ways are approaches to learning and teaching **accessible and inclusive**? Are teaching methods suited to the diverse learning strategies of students and adapted to a wide range of learning profiles and preferences?
- D.** Are students supported to undertake **self-directed learning** and what opportunities are there to learn independently outside the classroom?
- E.** What opportunities do students have to take part in **group work** during their course, with clear learning outcomes and assessment methods communicated to students? Does the course include opportunities for **peer learning**?
- F.** In what ways is teaching delivery designed to be **engaging**, with opportunities for **interactive learning**?
- G.** What opportunities do courses contain to undertake learning in **realistic contexts**, such as through placements, fieldwork, lab-based work, and working on industry projects within the classroom?
- H.** Do students have sufficient **contact time** with staff to support effective learning? Do staff consider suitable methods of teaching to make the most productive use of contact time?
- I.** How are staff supported to enhance their teaching practice and support for the student learning experience through participation in continuous **professional development**?
- J.** In what ways do staff facilitate a **respectful, constructive and compassionate learning environment** and are they mindful of the **wider context** of students' lives, experiences and identities?

Figure 4 Reflective questions for Learning and Teaching Delivery (sparqs, 2023)

Using the model in practice

The fundamental purpose of the new SLE model (Figure 3; sparqs, 2023) is, as its predecessors before it, to enable students and staff to work in partnership to identify priorities to enhance the quality of learning and, ultimately, to improve the student learning experience for all. Students and staff will be equipped to use the questions in the SLE as starters for discussion and to prompt conversations on what is working well and what could be improved within the student experience.

We envisage the SLE model being used in a variety of different spaces and to support a range of activities. As with our previous SLE model, the new model will continue to form the basis of our course rep training for student reps across Scotland, supporting reps to gain wide-ranging feedback from their student cohort and to engage in meaningful dialogue with staff to make changes to the student experience. Course reps can use the reflective questions to ask specific, meaningful questions, ensuring that they are capturing feedback from across the entirety of the learning experience. The SLE model headings can also help course reps to organise their feedback and to filter out any issues which may not be relevant to their role and should instead be handled through a different mechanism. Over summer 2024, sparqs is developing supporting resources for student reps and the staff who support them, for use in the new arrangements from 2024/25 onwards.

One of the model's key functions is to act as a sector reference point within the newly developed Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) (Scottish Funding Council, n.d.). At the time of writing, sparqs is working alongside sector agencies and institutions to consider how the model can most effectively support students, staff and reviewers within quality arrangements. For example, the model could be used by institutions to collate data and evidence on the SLE at a course, institutional and national level, in order to support institutions in self-evaluative activity and enhancement planning. This self-evaluative activity could in turn form part of the basis of institution's internal and external quality reporting. The model could also act as a key sector reference point within external review.

The model is designed to function across the entirety of the tertiary sector (with the exception of PGR students, as noted above). This includes all levels and modes of study and all subject areas. In our methodology above, we outline the steps we took to ensure that we were developing the model with a diverse group of students and staff from different levels of study, types of institutions, subject areas, and demographic groups, in order to capture the diverse experiences of being a student in Scotland's colleges and universities in the current context.

Applications of the model for students and staff

The new SLE model will be incorporated into Scotland's quality arrangements in academic year 2024-25. It is useful to consider its application and relevance for those involved in the development of academic practice, and the value of creating a synergy between this new strategic approach to quality enhancement and the implications for the work of learning and teaching practitioners (College Development Network, n.d.) (Advance HE, n.d.). Three applications of the new SLE model are proposed, which reflect the inherent nature of academic practice and its links to student views of quality and the formal approaches to quality of which the SLE model will form a part.

Firstly, on a most immediate level, the model presents scope for incorporation into individual and institutional approaches to academic development. While academic practice has never existed in isolation from the student learning experience (McAlpine et al., 2008; Cahill et al., 2010) and the link is clear in professional standards frameworks (College Development Network, n.d.; Advance HE, n.d.), the model's rooting within quality arrangements presents an opportunity for this connection to be even richer and more practical. Academic staff can now reflect on their individual practice not only in using the SLE model as a tool of course rep training but as a formal, sector-agreed framework for understanding the learning

experience they support. For example, academic and professional development units could map the building blocks in the SLE model to their strategies, programmes and activities for supporting staff, such as Postgraduate Certificates in Academic Practice (PgCAPs), Teaching Qualifications in Further Education (TQFEs), fellowship applications, annual performance reviews and other formal professional development activities. sparqs' own staff development toolkit (sparqs, n.d.c.) contains a chapter that introduces the SLE model for use in these contexts.

Secondly, the SLE model presents an obvious basis for synergy between students' and student representatives' comments on the quality of learning, and staff reflection on the feedback they receive from students. The previous SLE model (Figure 2) similarly served this connective purpose, and played an equally central role in course rep training throughout the Scottish sector as the current model will now do. However, the new model's (Figure 3) strengths lie in it having been updated to reflect developments in learning and teaching such as digital learning (Guppy et al., 2022) and the increased emphasis on mental health and wellbeing (Mulvogue et al., 2023). Furthermore, the model was substantially built by students through the methodology described earlier, with new building blocks (such as 'community and belonging' and 'organisation and management') based on students' expressions of what is important in their learning. Moreover, the reflective questions under each building block present a very practical basis for student-staff discussions that can be translated to enhancement within courses, and could be linked to professional development activities or action research undertaken by individual staff into their own practice and support for learning. The examples in Figure 4, from the building block on learning and teaching delivery, provide a very practical list of topics under which staff could gather student feedback, perhaps in conjunction with their course representatives, identify areas for enhancement, and consider opportunities for development.

Thirdly, and building on the above applications, the model's rooting in the quality arrangements means that the evidence gathered through student-staff conversations and reflections under the building blocks and principles will be directly tied to formal enhancement activity at course, faculty and institutional level. An impactful application would be departments' use of the SLE model in their student-staff liaison committees (or equivalent) to capture the evidence students share of the areas of good practice and areas for improvement within the student learning experience. This information can then be shared with quality teams using the same SLE model and principles and the data collected thematically under the same building block categories. One of the impacts of this more joined up approach is that issues raised by students should more easily move their way through the institution to the level where they can be most practically addressed. At a department and institutional level, the use of a shared reference point operating at all levels and within all subject areas of the institution allows for quality practitioners to more easily and thematically analyse qualitative data and evidence from students, and identify strategic enhancement priorities for use in internal and external quality processes.

Conclusion

The major opportunity presented by the tertiary quality enhancement framework lies in the enhancement activity that the SLE model can spark. As Scotland builds on its globally respected quality enhancement model, it is important to see the SLE model and its reflective questions not as a checklist for assurance purposes, but as an opportunity for staff and students to explore what is important to them. As Varwell (2021, p. 118) notes, "partnership is, if nothing else, a conversation". This, then, means that such conversations can take place in formal settings such as a course committees or informal spaces like focus groups; they could be prompts for student representative meetings, staff academic development spaces, or

shared partnership conversations; they could emerge organically or through analysis of surveys, and could happen at subject, faculty, institutional and even national level. Crucially, though, basing such questions on the SLE model's reflective questions enables a commonality, comparability and equivalence across our sector, meaning that students' ideas and suggestions can easily feed into decision-making and quality monitoring, and indeed that such decision-making can be themed in a widely recognisable and accessible way using the building blocks or lenses.

In addition, it is important to emphasise that the new quality framework in which the SLE model sits is truly tertiary: the model and the wider approach to enhancement and review will be applicable across universities and colleges, reflecting the increasingly converged quality landscape in Scotland. This has benefits for comparison of student engagement outcomes between the two types of institutions; for staff-student conversations at tertiary institutions; and for the development of learning experiences within the arenas of transition, articulation and widening access. That such comparison can take place both within quality review and collaborative enhancement activity means that tertiary sharing on student engagement will impact on both formal and informal processes.

Finally, what makes the SLE model notable is that it is student-led. As we have outlined, the workshops undertaken with students to build the reflective questions (stage 2 of the methodology) means that a central tool of quality in our sector has been designed *by* students, not merely *for* students. It demonstrates student-centredness in the sense of student not just as focus but as actor. Our scan of existing practice did not uncover any equivalent approach elsewhere of rooting student-led research and content in a quality framework or review process, meaning that Scotland retains and strengthens its unique, globally respected, approach to student engagement and enhancement. When quality monitoring and reflection takes place about learning, it will be based on ideas drafted by students themselves. Yet at the same time, the reflective questions are no idealistic wishlist: they are a set of suggested prompt questions, shaped through student-staff collaboration in stage 3 of the methodology into a practical and realistic tool.

The enhancement of learning is unquestionably at the heart of Scotland's sector, irrespective of our quality processes or the many challenges facing education and wider society. The launch of this new Student Learning Experience model means that academic development, student representative and quality enhancement activities can now share the same foundational interpretation of what excellent learning is today and can be in the future.

Appendix I: Stages of Development of the SLE Model

Stage	Date	Activity	Outcome
1	Mar 22	Desk research to investigate a range of existing sector reference points that explore the Student Learning Experience.	12 potential building blocks for the new model were created.
2	May - Aug 22	Pilot workshop designed and delivered at 3 events: at a joint meeting of sparqs' advisory groups and networks; to student officers and students' association staff at the 'That's Quality' 2022 Residential; and to student rep trainers at sparqs' Associate Trainer Residential	After testing through pilots, final version of workshop created for use with students in next stage of project.
	Nov 22 - Jan 23	21 workshops with students across Scotland's colleges and universities.	Data gathered from students on what makes a good student learning experience, in the format of principles.
3	Feb 23	Thematic analysis of the principles data gathered in workshops.	Initial longlist of draft principles identified under each of the building blocks.
	Feb - Mar 23	Longlist of principles, and the wider phrasing and structure of the building blocks themselves, consulted upon and workshopped with students and staff across the sector at several national committees and events.	Building blocks and longlist of principles shortened and refined.
	Feb - May 23	Consultative group comprised of students, students' association staff and staff from colleges and universities established to support an iterative process of development.	Building blocks and longlist of principles shortened and refined, and final draft model phrasing and design agreed.
	May 23	Draft SLE model and principles sent to SFC.	Draft SLE model sent to SFC for comment and sign off, following publication in October 2023.
	AY23/24	sparqs, quality agencies and SFC work together to embed the models within the new quality arrangements, including identification and development of required supporting resources.	Institutions and sector agencies are clear on the purpose of the model and feel prepared and equipped to use it in the new tertiary approach to quality.

Appendix 2: Stages of Development of the SLE Model

Outline of the diversity of workshop participants.

- 34% of respondents were over the age of 25
- Just over a quarter of respondents identified as having a disability
- 52% of respondents were women, 44% were men, and 2% were non-binary or used another term to describe their gender
- 3% of respondents were trans
- 20% of respondents were Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)
- A fifth of respondents described themselves with a term other than heterosexual/straight
- 14% of respondents were parents and 6% were carers
- 1 in 10 respondents were care-experienced
- 3% of respondents were sign-language users
- 1 in 5 respondents were studying part-time or studying their course while released from work
- 64% of respondents were Scottish, 22% were international students (non-EU), 8% were EU students, and 5% were from the rest of the UK
- 51% of respondents were in the first or only year of their course. 16% were in second year, 17% were in third year and 14% were in the fourth year or higher of their course.

Biographies

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