How user feedback shaped hybrid teaching

The goal of the Learn Foundations project is to make Learn better for the staff and students who use it. Crucial to achieving this aim is an evidence-led, user-centred service design approach, supported by a robust programme of quantitative and qualitative user research.

The latest phase of Learn Foundations began in 2020, at a time when the pandemic had taken hold, and there was an urgent need to move from campus-based teaching and learning to hybrid. Schools turned to Learn Foundations to help them make the transition, with 20 out of 24 Schools choosing to adopt the Learn Foundations approach.

User research was crucial in this latest phase to understand teaching and learning in the new hybrid context. Mixed-method quantitative and qualitative research was planned and designed to achieve the following aims:

- Build a rich and detailed picture of how students and staff need to use Learn to support hybrid teaching and learning.
- Understand how the shift to hybrid had changed things for staff and students, by comparing findings from current research to those from research carried out pre-hybrid.
- Assess whether key Learn Foundations elements such as templates and terminology developed pre-Covid-19 were still valid in the new hybrid environment.

Latest quantitative user research included a top tasks survey with staff and students and a card sort with students

Top tasks survey

The top tasks survey technique is designed to discover what really matters to the people using a service by asking them to vote for items they deem most important. Staff and students were shown a list of approximately 50 tasks they could carry out in the context of using Learn to access, upload and create learning materials online, and were asked to prioritise their top five. The survey was completed by 330 students and 131 staff. Results were compared to a similar survey carried out pre-Covid-19, to see if and how priorities had changed.

Findings from the top tasks survey

**The priorities of students stayed the same while those of staff changed**
Comparing the top eight tasks voted for by students from 2020 to 2021 (hybrid) with the top eight from 2018 to 2019 (pre-hybrid), seven out of the original eight tasks remained a priority for students. Staff, however, identified different tasks as being important, reflecting how their priorities had changed, and how they had adapted their thinking to deliver teaching in the new context.

**Student and staff priorities in Learn have changed differently**
Comparing the tasks students voted for with those staff voted for across the two surveys revealed staff and students' priorities are less aligned in the hybrid era than they were pre-hybrid. This was further illustration that while staff had changed their thinking, students' priorities remained constant.

The charts below illustrate the tasks staff and students prioritised pre-hybrid compared with those they deemed important during hybrid. The tasks are shown on the vertical axis, with percentage of votes on the horizontal axis.

Staff and students' top tasks pre-hybrid
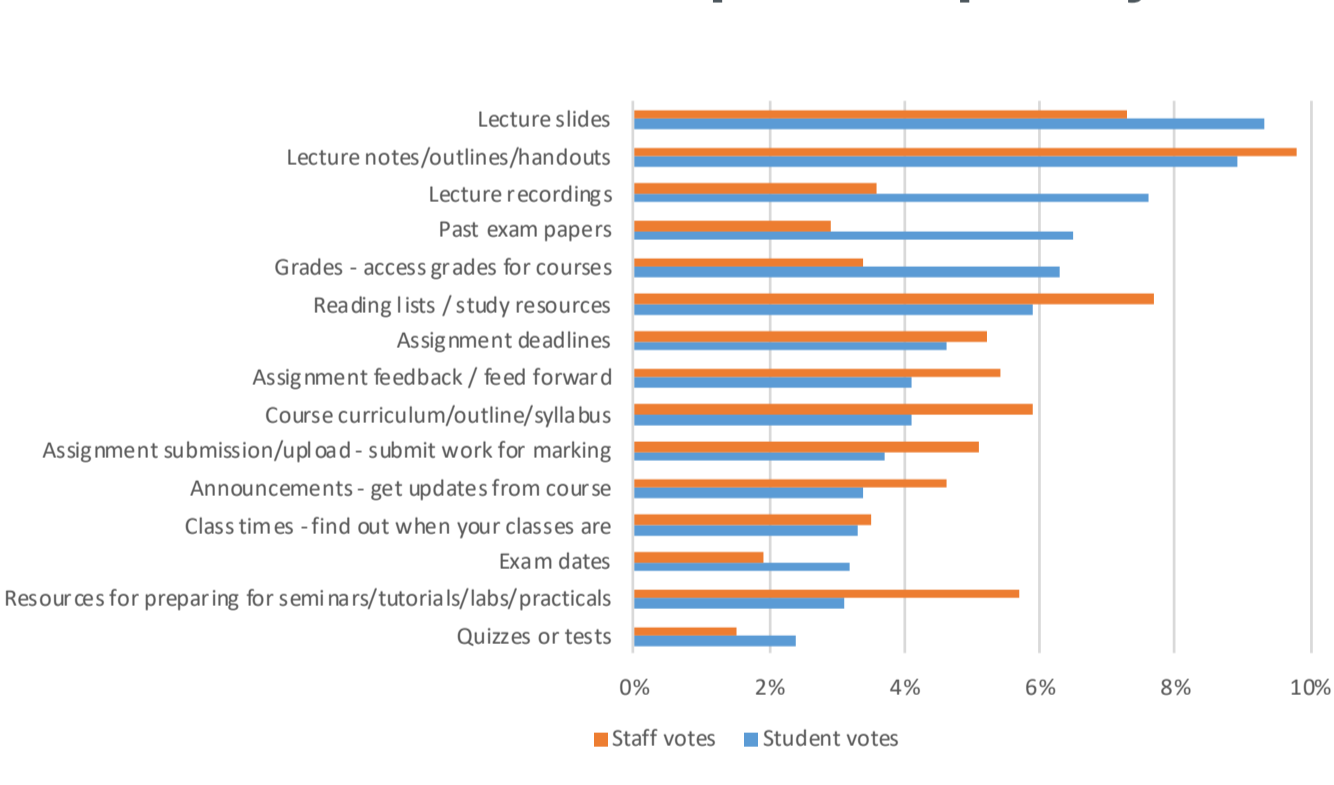
Staff and students' top tasks during hybrid
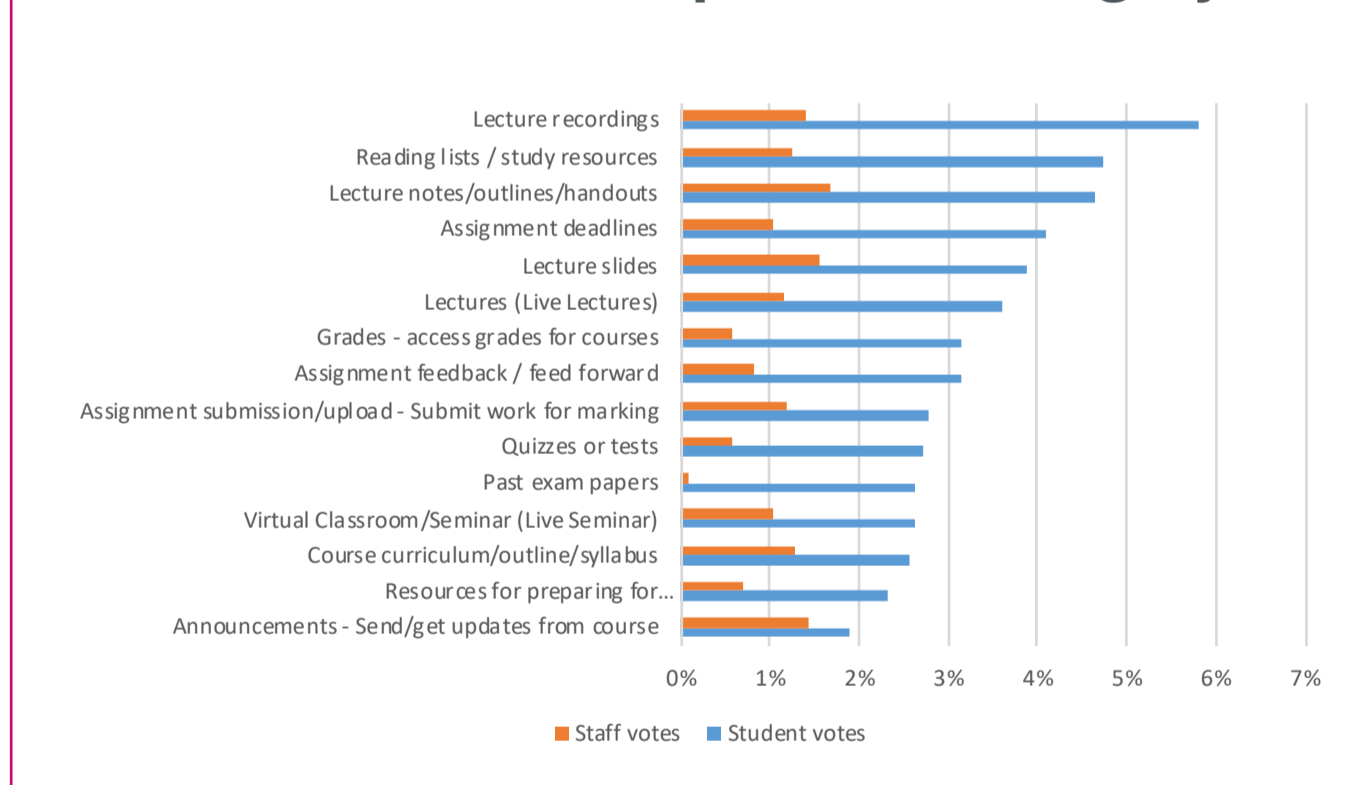
Card sort

A card sort is an activity designed to discover where users expect to find items within a site or service.

Findings from the card sort

**Students expected to find items grouped in Learn in the same way**
205 students completed the card sort. Results are shown as a 'similarity matrix' (included below) where the cards (representing the different items) are shown on the diagonal axis. Each card is compared to every other card to illustrate the frequency they were grouped together. Darker blue areas of the matrix highlight items commonly grouped together.

Comparing the matrices from the study carried out pre-hybrid to the one carried out during hybrid showed that in both studies, although there were subtle differences between students from different Schools, students grouped most items into four main categories: Course materials, Assessment, Course information and Help and support.

Existing templates and terminology still valid
The labels used to name the categories in the latest study were similar to those in the original pre-hybrid study. Although there were slight differences between the terms used by first-year students compared to other students, terms like 'Assessment', 'Course edinformation' and 'Course content' were still widely used. Interestingly, there was no evidence to suggest the emergence of new terms specifically associated with the hybrid teaching and learning environment.

Card sort completed pre-hybrid
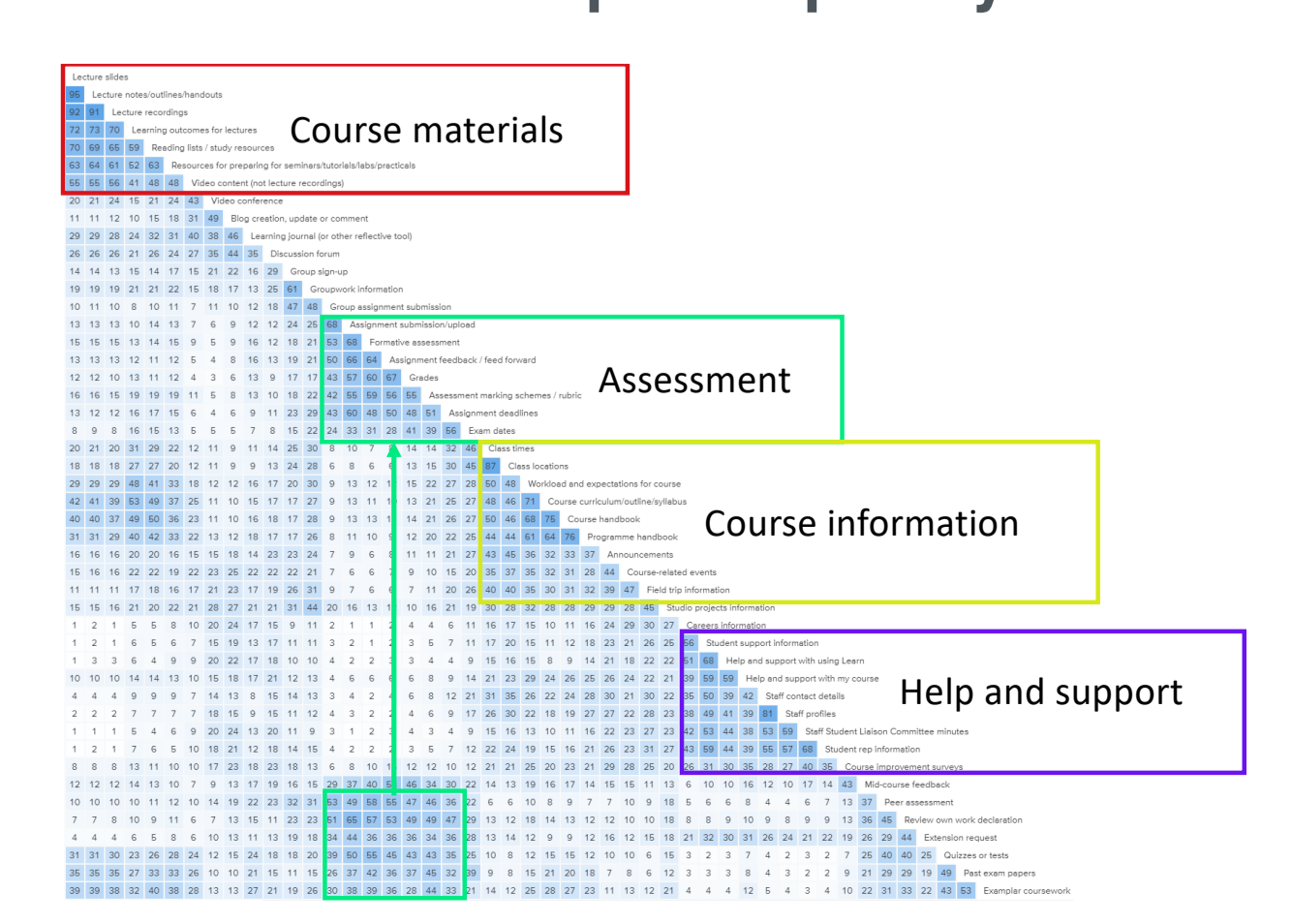
Card sort completed during hybrid
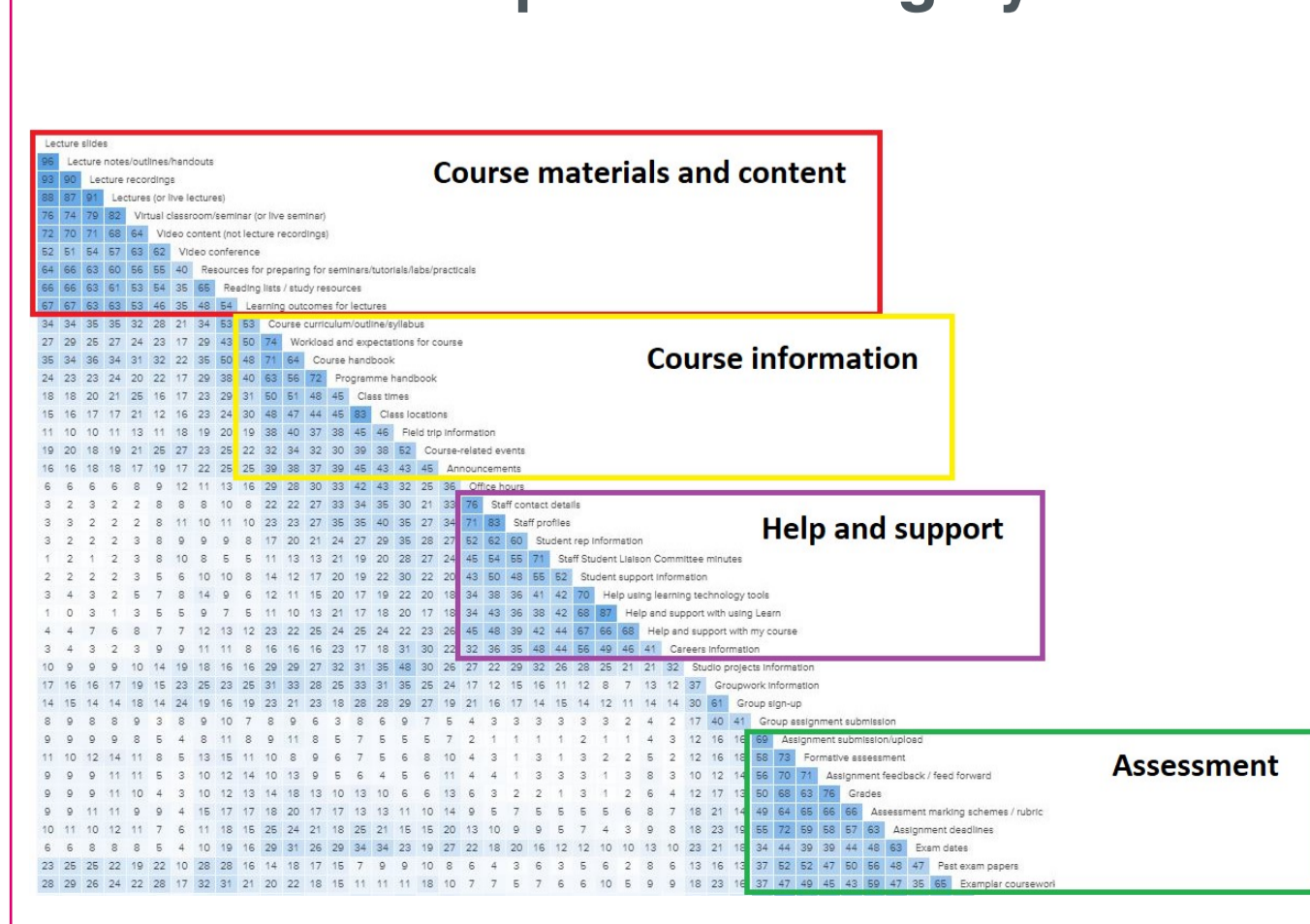
Latest qualitative user research included usability tests with staff and students and semi-structured interviews with staff and students

Usability testing

Usability testing is a technique used to reveal how participants interact with a site or service to complete tasks. The tests are traditionally carried out with small numbers of participants, as each test typically reveals the same issues with the site or service.
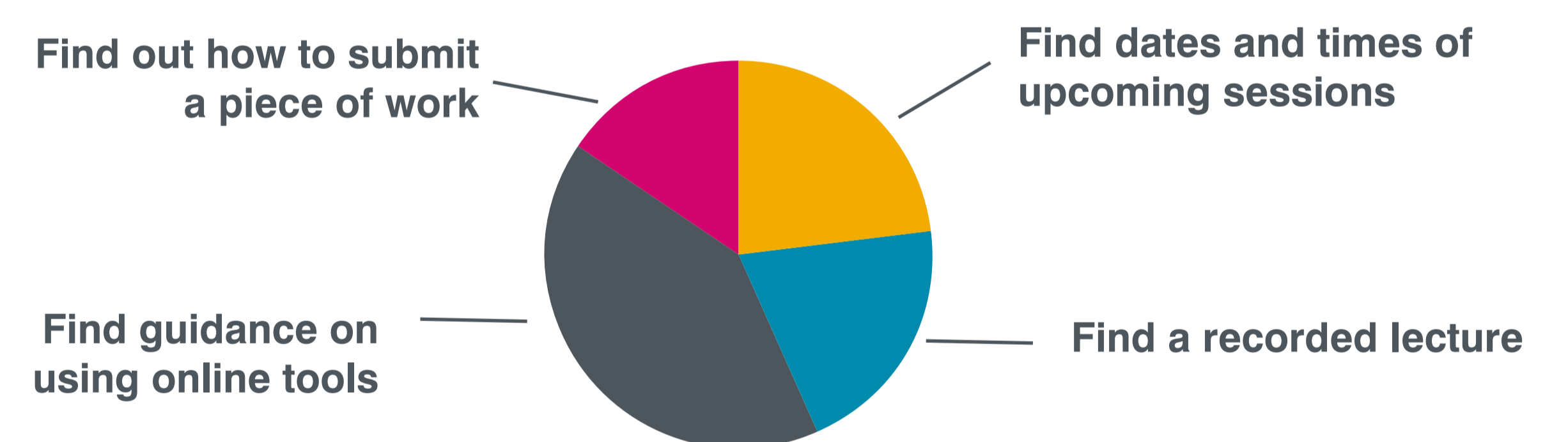
Different types of usability test were carried out with students, academic staff and administrative staff in the latest research. The different sorts of test were designed to help understand varied aspects of the hybrid teaching and learning environment, to build a full picture of how students and staff were interacting with Learn, and to show how Learn was supporting them in different scenarios.

Findings from the usability tests

- Staff and students were able to complete all the tasks, with staff experiencing fewer difficulties than students
- Academic staff used the 'Announcements' tool for various purposes
- The Learn Foundations template successfully supported staff and students in the hybrid context
- Students took several attempts at tasks requiring them to find information

Attempts to complete each task (students)
The chart illustrates the relative number of attempts made by students to complete the different 'information-finding' tasks.

Find out how to submit a piece of work
Find dates and times of upcoming sessions
Find guidance on using online tools
Find a recorded lecture

Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to understand more detail about staff and students' experiences of using Learn in the hybrid teaching and learning environment, to build a richer picture of this context and help inform ongoing development of Learn Foundations.

Findings from the interviews

"… Working digitally … kind of decoupled the timetable a bit – there were things that students could do … certain things they could do anytime" [Staff member]

"It's just nicer if things are structured consistently … sometimes I feel like I wish all courses did arrange their folders and things in the same way." [Student]

"..this is my problem with tutorials . Most people don't turn their cameras on. And I feel really frustrated for the other people in the group and the tutor. Lately I've just been turning my video on ..because I know that talking to a black screen the whole day is a bit sad" [Student]

Creative approaches to group work opened up new possibilities

Students appreciated structure in Learn but wanted uniformity

Technical set-up and type of activity affected the degree of student engagement

"… if I was in person, I probably wouldn't have used any of the technology. I know you can do these kinds of things in Learn, but I just wasn't sure how to do it " [Staff member]

"… a big assumption of the planning was … we are concerned about engagement … we need to keep them busy … and this means we need to have students doing something all the time and that turned out not to be the case" [Staff member]

Staff made use of previously under-used features of Learn to deliver teaching activities

"…having so many videos that all belong to the same lecture … that's when it gets confusing for me" [Student]

Keeping students engaged while not overwhelming them was a fine balance

Students liked recorded lectures divided into chunks, provided they were easy to follow