Learning Spaces in UK HE 2016

A HeLF Survey Report

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ABOUT THE HEADS OF E-LEARNING FORUM (HELF)

HeLF was established in 2003 as a UK 'network of senior staff in institutions engaged in promoting, supporting and developing technology enhanced learning' (HeLF, 2016). Each UK Higher Education institution can nominate one representative to HeLF which now has over 130 institutional members.

HeLF has three face-to-face meetings each year on a topical eLearning theme. It also has an active mailing list which is restricted to HeLF members in order to provide a closed forum for debate on current issues.

HeLF acts as 'an advisory body for national and governmental organisations' such as the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) and JISC, on 'issues relating to eLearning institutional strategy and implementation'. It is 'proactive in soliciting responses from such bodies and promoting the views of its membership'.

Enabling collaboration on 'the strategic implications of developing and implementing eLearning', HeLF supports 'the processes by which eLearning strategy can be effectively created, and implemented, including advice, support and co-operation between members' (HeLF, 2016).

More information about HeLF and its activities is available at http://www.helf.ac.uk/

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the analysis of the Heads of eLearning Forum (HeLF) survey on Learning Spaces (LS) UK Higher Education (HE) in 2016. The key findings from the 53 responses (40% response rate) are:

- Current situation
  - The majority, 55%, of universities is considering a policy, strategy or comprehensive plan for a university-wide approach to learning spaces. Just over a quarter, 28%, already have one in place.
  - Over a third, 37%, of universities are focusing LS developments in formal spaces and nearly a half, 46%, in both formal and informal spaces.
- Implementation
  - There are a lot of planned or recently built learning spaces for both formal and informal learning. Some universities in the middle of implementing 3 or 5 year institutional wide developments and some have annual reviews of spaces.
  - The main barrier is funding and the main enabler is student expectations.
  - It is easier to change informal LS compared to formal
  - Generally, there is a division between pedagogical and technical support for academics to help them make the best use of new designs of LS.
- Technology in formal spaces
  - The vast majority, 91%, has mainly standard IT equipment across the university.
  - About 4/5th of Heads of eLearning are involved in setting the standard of IT equipment. Nearly a quarter, 25%, are leading on it.
  - The focus for the majority, 57%, of technology developments is to raise the consistent standard. However, nearly 30%, are still bring the technology developments up to a consistent standard.
  - Video projectors or plasma screens, 98%, PC and PowerPoint, 100%, and wifi, 98%, are available in nearly all or most formal spaces. The use of other technologies is more diverse.
- Heads of eLearning
  - A high majority, 90%, of Heads of eLearning are greatly involved or have some involvement with LS.
  - The majority, 56%, of Heads of eLearning are OK with their current level of involvement in LS. However, 40% would like more involvement.
  - All the Heads of eLearning are aware of the JISC Learning Spaces guidelines (JISC, 2016) and a high majority, 82%, is aware of the UCISA UK HE Learning Space Toolkit (UCISA, 2016). However, only 40% are aware of the Educause Learning Space Rating System (LSRS)

INTRODUCTION

Learning Spaces (LS) are a topic of current interest in UK HE as universities are implementing or planning new designs to enable more active and collaborative learning. There have been both national and international developments on LS design such as the JISC Learning Spaces guidelines (JISC, 2015), the UCISA UK HE Learning Space Toolkit (UCISA, 2016) and the Educause Learning Space Rating System (LSRS) (Educause, 2016)

The aim of this HeLF report is to gain a better understanding of the current situation regarding LS in UK HE. It offers a snapshot of the sector from the perspective of institutional Heads of eLearning and attempts to understand the focus and responsibilities for developments and the impact on the Heads of eLearning.

The survey included both formal and informal learning spaces. It was about centrally managed spaces and not spaces managed by departments. The following definitions were used in the survey for clarity:

- Formal eg lecture theatre, seminar room (excluding laboratory, computer classroom)
- Informal eg café, library, open space

This report is the sixth in a series of surveys of HeLF members that aim to understand and track the changing digital landscape in UK Higher Education and its impact on Heads of eLearning. Four earlier surveys on Learning Analytics in 2015, Tablet Technologies in 2014 and the Electronic Management of Assessment (EMA) 2011 to 2013 are available on the HeLF website at: http://www.helf.ac.uk

METHODOLOGY

This research on the UK HE levels of implementation and development of learning spaces (LS) draws upon the perceptions of HeLF members on the situation in their own institution. HeLF members have an overview of eLearning strategy, policy and practice in their institution.

The HeLF membership was surveyed online during May/June 2016. The survey was developed by the author in consultation with other members of the HeLF Steering Group. All the data has been held anonymously and securely. The results have been analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods.

RESULTS

There were 53 responses from separate institutions, resulting in a response rate of 40% of the total HeLF membership. The results to each question are given below.

DOES YOUR UNIVERSITY HAVE A POLICY, STRATEGY OR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONSIDERING A UNIVERSITY-WIDE APPROACH TO LEARNING SPACES?
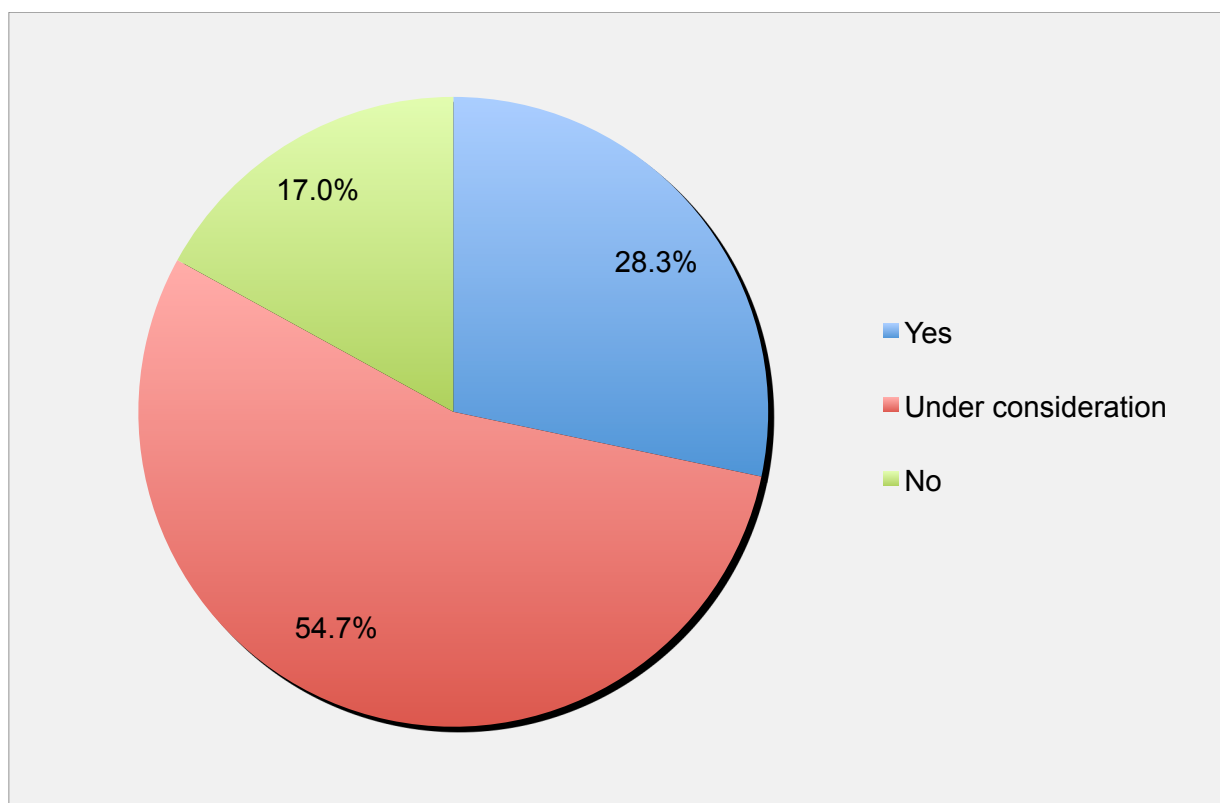
Figure 1: Does your university have a policy, strategy or comprehensive plan considering a University-wide approach to learning spaces?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Yes	28.3%	15
Under consideration	54.7%	29
No	17.0%	9
	Answered question	53

The majority, 55%, of universities are considering a policy, strategy or comprehensive plan for a university-wide approach to learning spaces. Just over a quarter, 28%, already have one in place. This shows that learning space developments are currently of interest in the sector.

Figure 2: Are your learning space developments?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Mainly in formal spaces	36.5%	19
Mainly in informal spaces	11.5%	6
Equally in both	46.2%	24
In neither	5.8%	3
	Answered question	52

Over a third, 37%, of universities are focusing LS developments in formal spaces and nearly a half, 46%, in both formal and informal spaces.

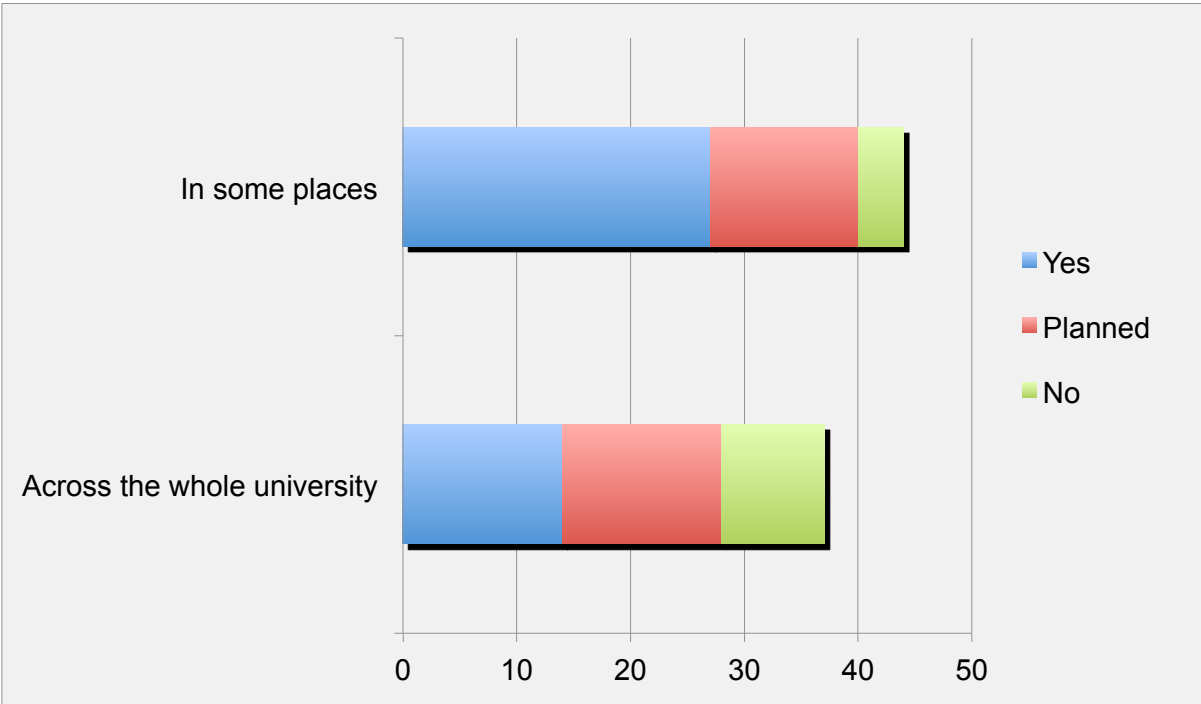## HAVE THERE BEEN/ARE PLANNED TO BE ANY NEW DESIGNS OF LEARNING SPACES?

Figure 3: Have there been/are planned to be any new designs of learning spaces?

	Yes	Planned	No	Response - Count
Across the whole university	14	14	9	37
In some places	27	13	4	44
			Answered question	50

There were 37 brief descriptions of planned or new designs of learning spaces. There are a lot of planned or recently built learning spaces for both formal and informal learning. Some universities in the middle of implementing 3 or 5 year institutional wide developments and some have annual reviews of spaces. There are university-wide as well as centrally funded but departmentally focused developments. There is a lot of development in library spaces. Lecture theatres are being built both with new collaborative tiers and in the traditional style. Often the development of a new building is including consideration of new designs based on pedagogic principles.

IS THE IT EQUIPMENT IN FORMAL SPACES MAINLY STANDARD ACROSS YOUR INSTITUTION?

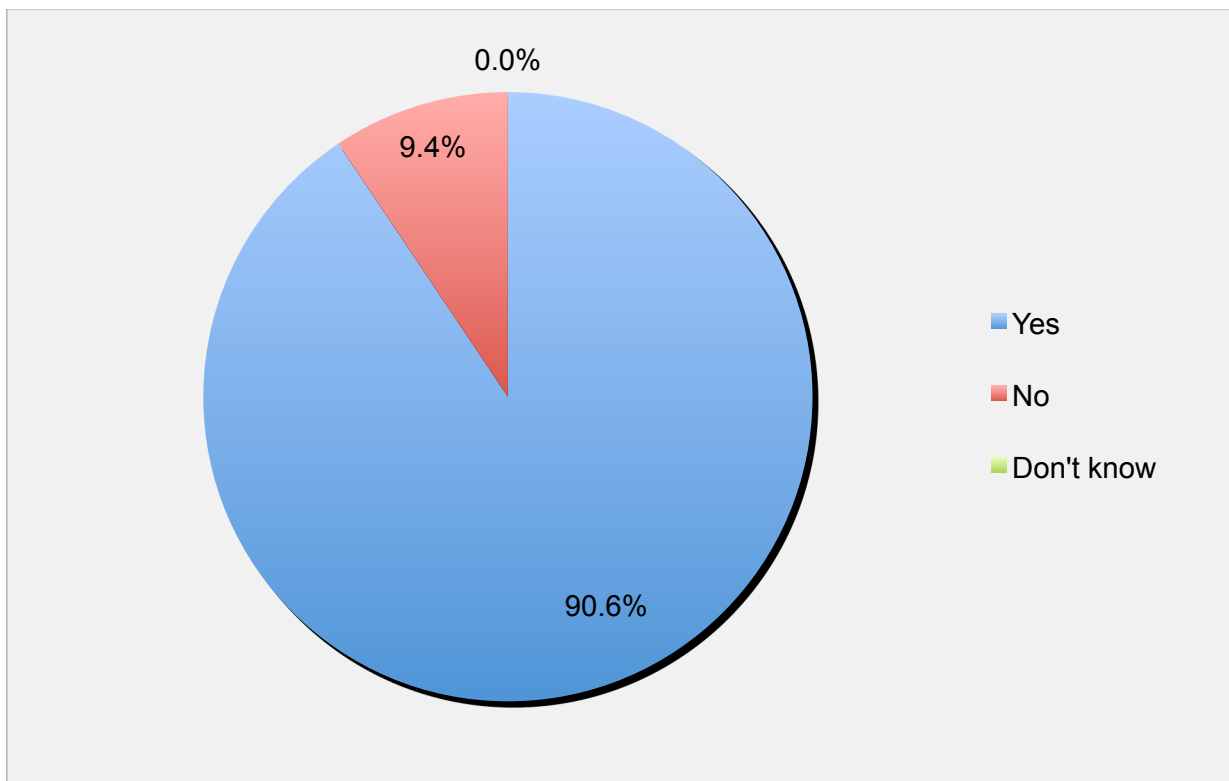**Figure 4: Is the IT equipment in formal spaces mainly standard across your institution?**

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Yes	90.6%	48
No	9.4%	5
Don't know	0.0%	0
	Answered question	53

The vast majority, 91%, has mainly standard IT equipment in formal spaces across the university.

HOW ARE YOU AS HEAD OF ELEARNING INVOLVED IN SETTING THE STANDARD?
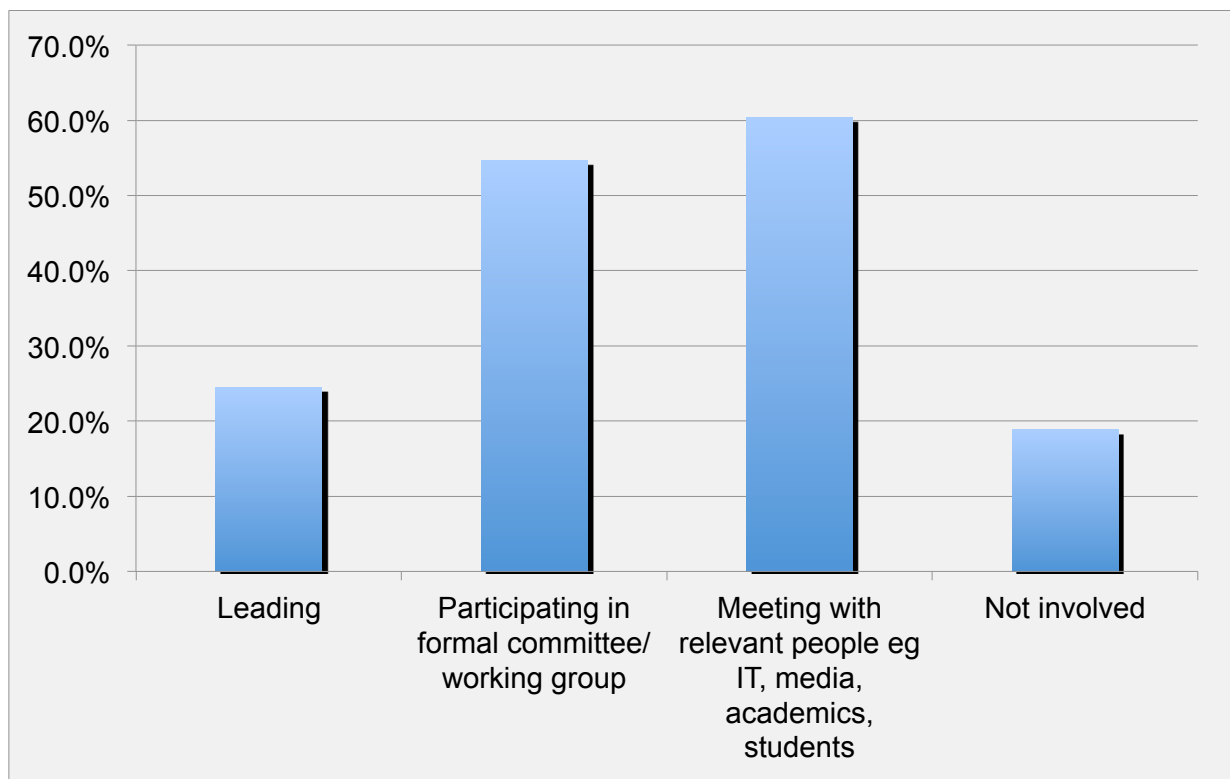
Figure 5: How are you as Head of eLearning involved in setting the standard?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Leading	24.5%	13
Participating in formal committee/working group	54.7%	29
Meeting with relevant people eg IT, media, academics, students	60.4%	32
Not involved	18.9%	10
	Answered question	53

About 4/5th, 81%, of Heads of eLearning are involved in setting the standard of IT equipment in formal spaces. Nearly a quarter, 25%, are leading on it so this is a significant role for a Head of eLearning. Over a half, 55%, are participating in formal committees and working groups and 60% are meeting with relevant people such as IT and media professionals, academics and students.

IS THE CURRENT FOCUS OF TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS IN LEARNING SPACES ACROSS YOUR UNIVERSITY MAINLY ABOUT?
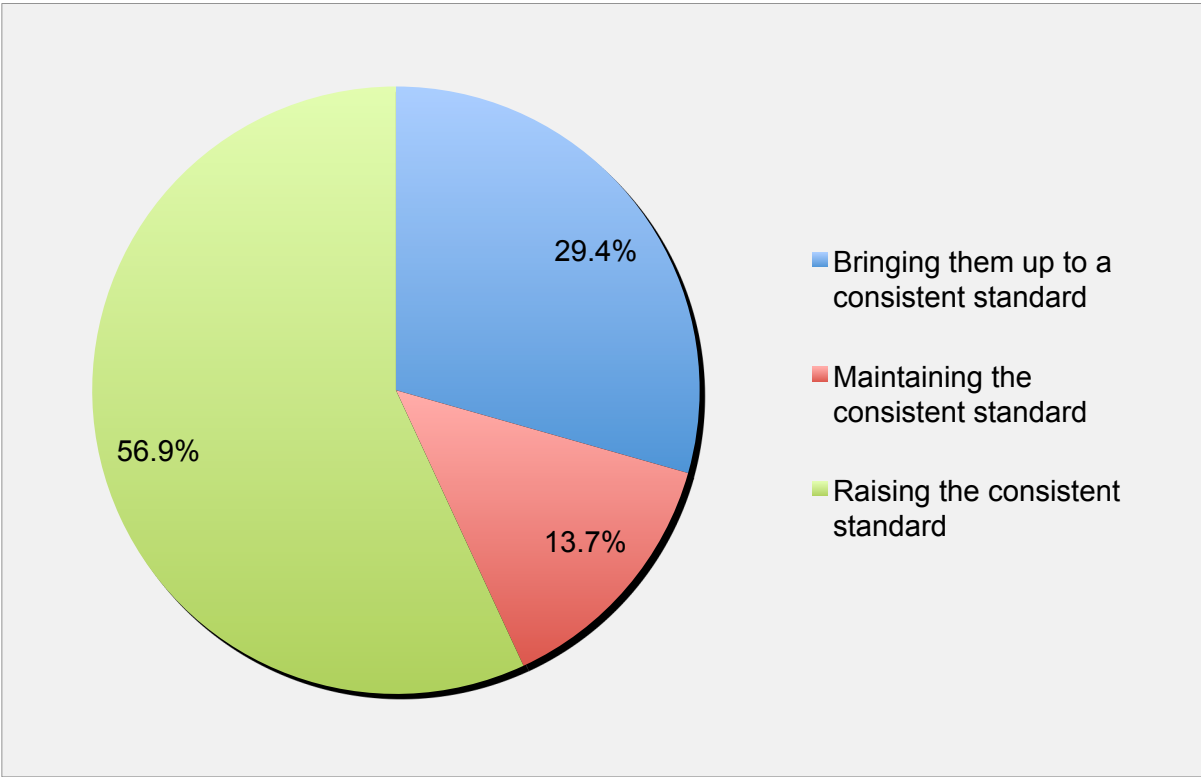
Figure 6: Is the current focus of technology developments in learning spaces mainly about?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Bringing them up to a consistent standard	29.4%	15
Maintaining the consistent standard	13.7%	7
Raising the consistent standard	56.9%	29
	Answered question	51

The focus for the majority, 57%, of technology developments in LS in universities is to raise the consistent standard. However, nearly 30% are still bringing the technology developments up to a consistent standard.

Figure 7: What IT equipment and software is available in formal spaces?

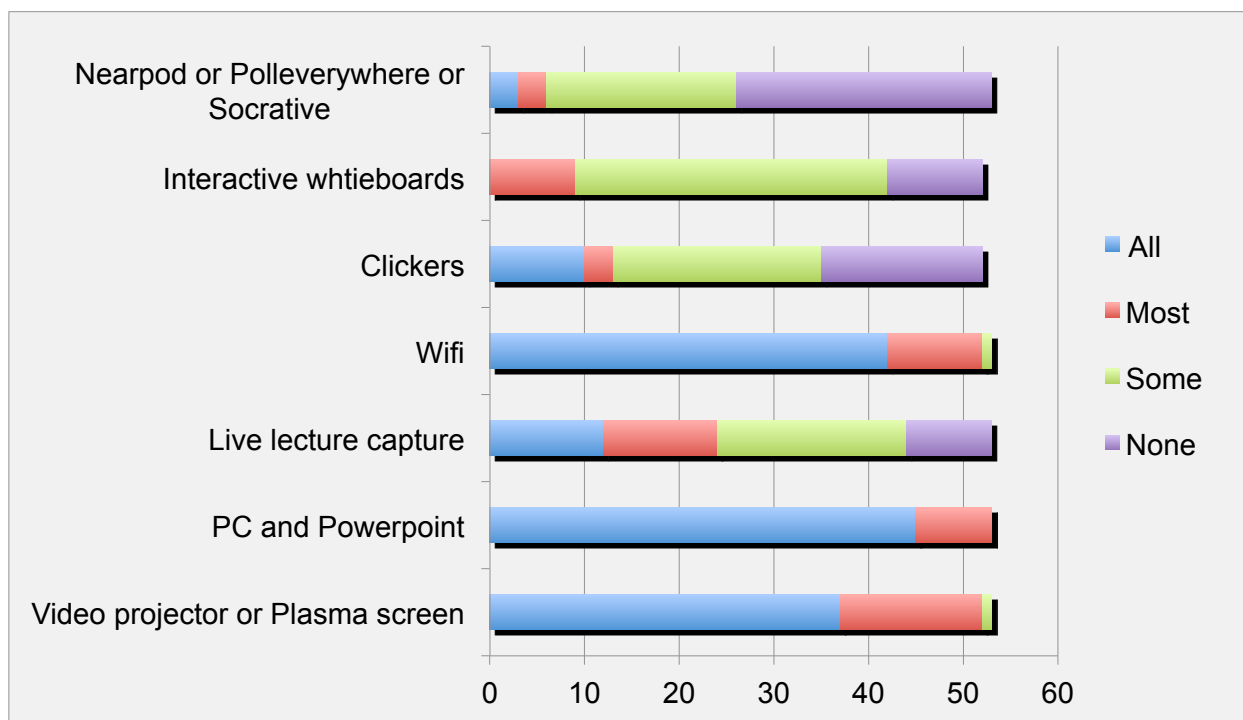|	All	Most	Some	None	Response Count
Video projector or Plasma screen	37	15	1	0	53
PC and PowerPoint	45	8	0	0	53
Live lecture capture	12	12	20	9	53
Wifi	42	10	1	0	53
Clickers	10	3	22	17	52
Interactive whiteboards	0	9	33	10	52
Nearpod or Polleverywhere or Socrative	3	3	20	27	53

Video projectors or plasma screens, 98%, PC and PowerPoint, 100%, and wifi, 98%, are available in nearly all or most formal spaces. The use of live lecture capture is more diverse with 23% in all formal spaces in some universities compared to 17% in no spaces in others and the majority over a third, 38%, in some spaces. The use of clickers is also more widely spread with nearly a fifth,19%, in all compared to nearly a third, 33%, in none and 42% in some. Interactive whiteboards are in some places in about 2/3rds of universities with a contrast of similar percentages in most, 17% and none, 19%. No universities have them in all formal spaces. Nearpod or Polleverywhere or Socrative is least used with about half, 51%, in no spaces but with over a third, 38%, in some.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS/ENABLERS TO CHANGING LEARNING SPACES?

There were 49 responses about barriers and enablers.

Barriers

Not surprisingly, the most common barrier is funding! Other major barriers are gaining access to the learning space to change it and timetabling academics willing to engage with the new design to the appropriate spaces. Another problem is the general lack of physical space in some universities and this is becoming more problematic due to increasing student numbers. It means there is little incentive or possibility for change if the change would result in fewer students in the learning space. There are also the problems inherent in some old buildings. There may also be a large gap between the visions for change and the reality of requirement of physical spaces in which to teach large student numbers.

Some barriers to change are similar to those found in many developments such as lack of leadership and lack of academic engagement and confidence to innovate. For example, some academics are too busy or reluctant to engage in professional development about pedagogical approaches for the new spaces and so use new spaces in the traditional way. There is also the problem of reaching agreement between various stakeholders, such as estates, IT and academics in the design of the learning space.

There are technological barriers such as insufficient wifi to cope with the increasing demand and use in interactive teaching.

Enablers

There were many more barriers than enablers. The main enablers are student expectations of spaces and the desire to recruit and retain students and the opportunities provided by new buildings. Informal spaces are easier to implement.

Technological enablers include the increasing use of mobile devices.

HOW ARE ACADEMICS SUPPORTED TO HELP THEM MAKE BEST USE OF NEW DESIGNS IN LEARNING SPACES?

There were 46 responses about how academics are supported to help them make the best use of new designs in LS. These responses showed that there was generally a division between pedagogical and technical support with some overlap of roles. The pedagogical support is provided by learning technologists and the technical support by AV technicians. The need for technical support is reduced by standardized equipment that is easy and intuitive to use.

The range of support provision includes face to face workshops and one to one training as well as online support materials which may be text or videos. There may also be an emergency support on call. One pedagogical approach is to provide case studies about how the room could be arranged and who you could teach in it. Another support model is running best practice sharing sessions.

A few universities offer a space containing a range of technologies so that academics can familiarize themselves with them.

Nearly a fifth of respondents commented that academics were poorly supported to make best use of new designs of LS.

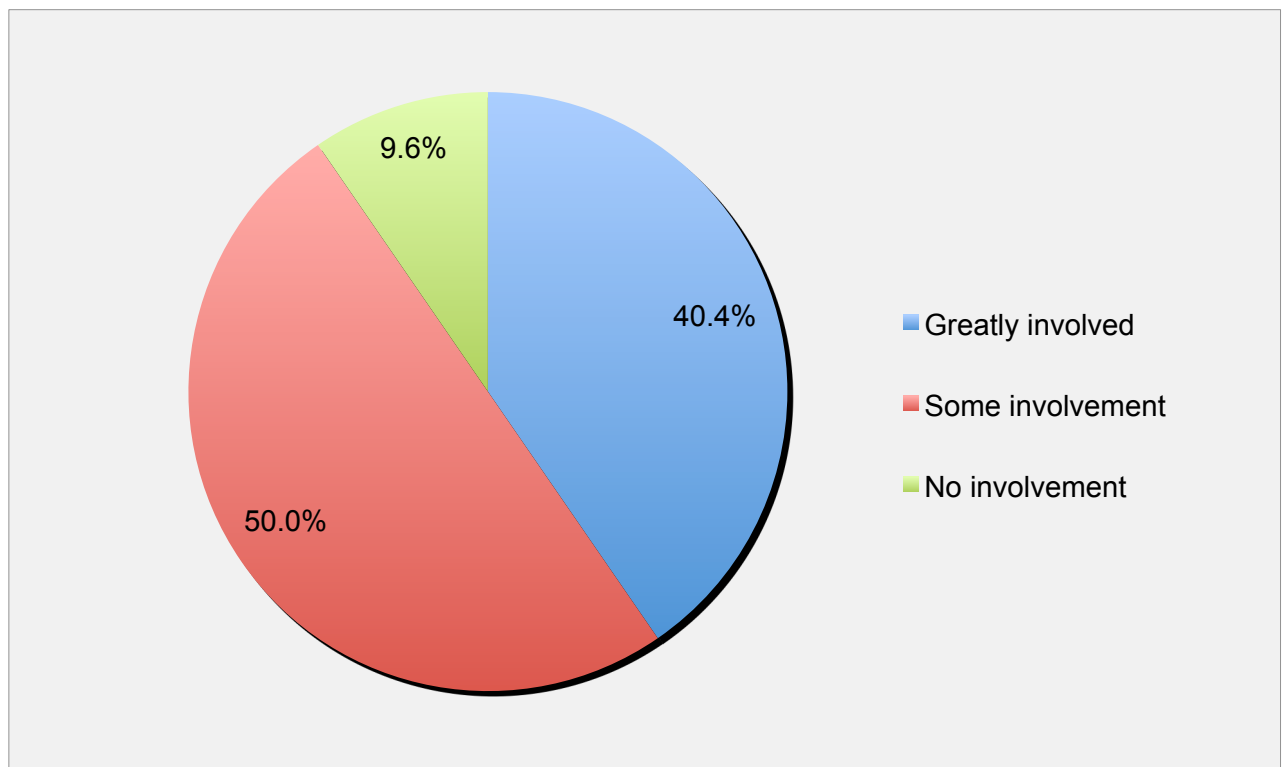**Figure 8: What is your level of involvement as Head of eLearning?**

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Greatly involved	40.4%	21
Some involvement	50.0%	26
No involvement	9.6%	5
	Answered question	52

A high majority, 90%, of Heads of eLearning are greatly involved or have some involvement with LS. This is very similar to the percentage, 87%, of Heads of eLearning who stated they were greatly involved or had some involvement with Learning Analytics (LA) in 2015. (Newland, Martin & Ringan, 2015). More Heads of eLearning are greatly involved with LS, 40%, compared with LA in 2015, 26%.

Developments in LS and LA have a bigger impact on the roles of the Head of eLearning that tablet technologies had in the past. In 2014, 68% stated that tablet technologies had minimal impact. The reasons for this appeared to be that:

- Tablets are mainly used for administration rather than learning and teaching

- Purchasing and lending occurs more in IT Services than the eLearning team"
  (Newland, Martin & Ringan, 2014).
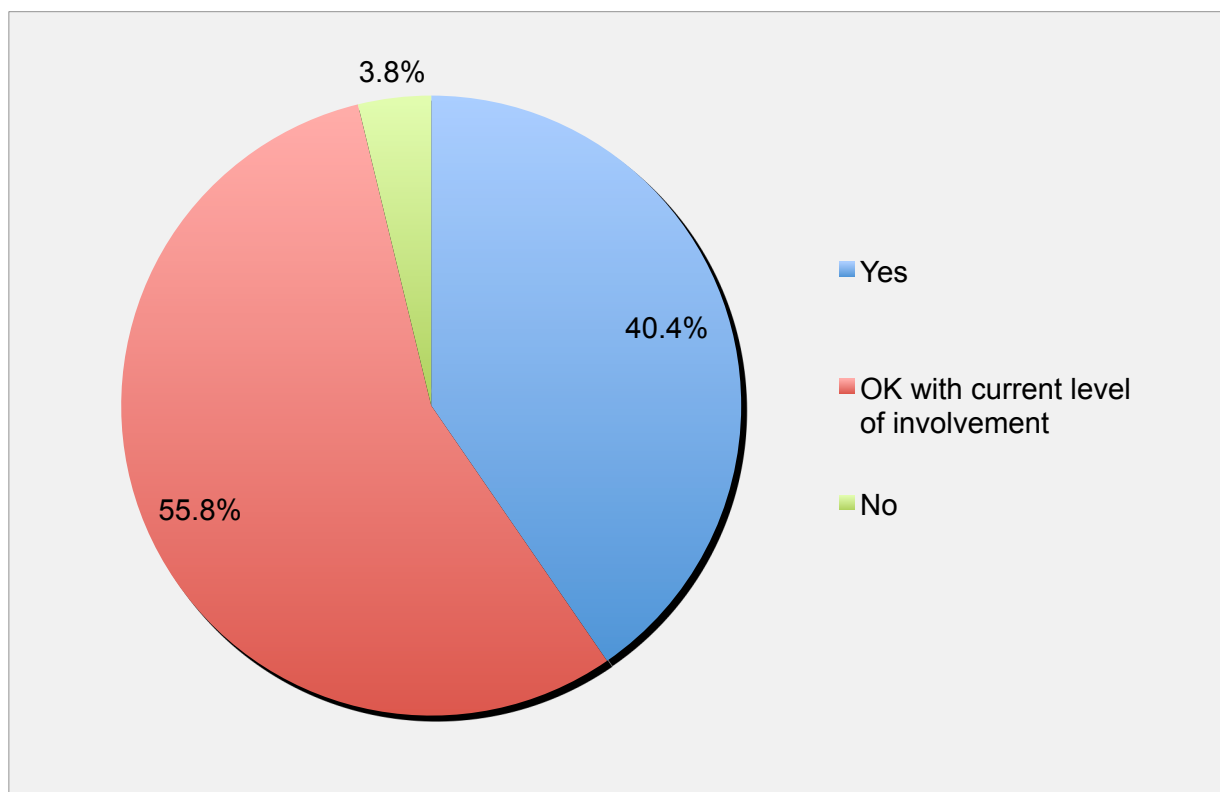
WOULD YOU LIKE MORE INVOLVEMENT?

Figure 9: Would you like more involvement?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Yes	40.4%	21
OK with current level of involvement	55.8%	29
No	3.8%	2
	Answered question	52

The majority, 56%, of Heads of eLearning are OK with their current level of involvement in LS. However, 40% would like more involvement. This is very similar to the situation in 2015 with Learning Analytics (LA) when nearly 60% of Heads of eLearning were OK with their current level of involvement with LA and the same percentage, 40%, would like more involvement.
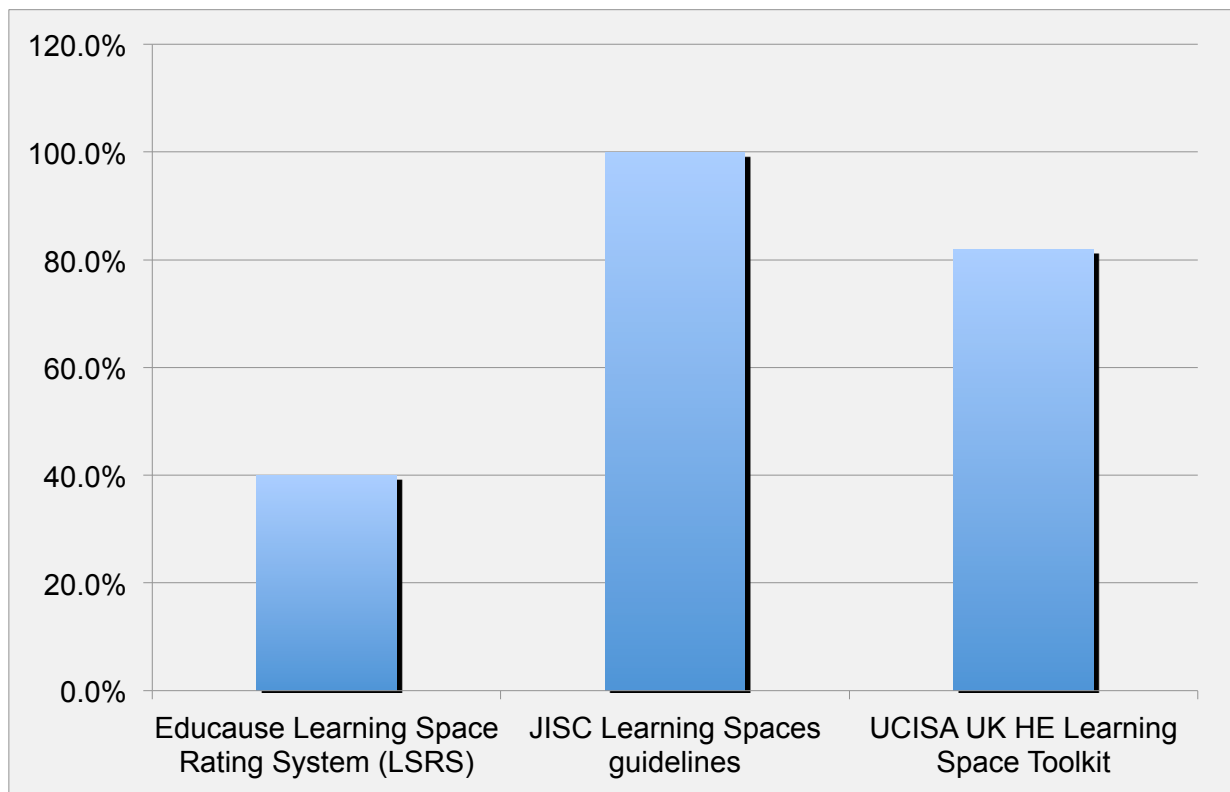
Figure 10: Are you aware of the following toolkits?

	Response – Percentage	Response - Count
Educause Learning Space Rating System (LSRS)	40.0%	20
JISC Learning Spaces guidelines	100.0%	50
UCISA UK HE Learning Space Toolkit	82.0%	41
	Answered question	50

All the Heads of eLearning are aware of the JISC Learning Spaces guidelines (JISC, 2016) and a high majority, 82%, is aware of the UCISA UK HE Learning Space Toolkit (UCISA, 2016). This contrasts sharply with the 63% who were not using, or planning to use, existing frameworks for Learning Analytics frameworks in 2015 (Newland, Martin & Ringan, 2015). However, the question in 2016 asks about awareness whereas the question in 2015 about usage. It is possible that the Heads of eLearning are aware of the guidelines and toolkit but are not using them.

Members were asked to provide further information or examples of good practice on learning space developments in their university. 16 responses were received.

Several responses emphasized the importance of collaboration:

"This engagement between the academic community and support services is vital to ensure that space usage and teaching and learning space design develop in parallel."

The development of flexible spaces enables the support of different pedagogical approaches:

"Effective teaching and learning spaces should be designed to support all styles of learning and teaching delivery."

New spaces need to be designed such that they enable future developments with rolling updates as technology changes quickly. There is also the need to ensure that current technology in LS is working as well as developing new LS.

"Feedback from teaching staff on what needs fixing is often not listened to, while large scale showy projects are often promoted"

The introduction of new technologies in formal spaces does not necessarily result in them being used. There is a request for more evidence about the impact on learning gain. However, informal collaborative learning spaces are very popular with students.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this HeLF report is to analyse the results of the HeLF survey on LS. It provides a snapshot of the current situation regarding the implementation and development of LS within the UK HE sector in 2016. The perceptions and views of Heads of eLearning across a range of institutions, representing 40% of the HeLF membership, offers a useful overview to support further developments. HeLF members are actively involved in this growing area of development and implementation.

The survey was focused on centrally managed formal and informal learning spaces. There are a lot of planned or recently built learning spaces for both formal and informal learning. The main barrier is funding and the main enabler is student expectations. It is easier to change informal LS compared to formal.

A high majority of Heads of eLearning is greatly involved or has some involvement with LS. Nearly a quarter are setting the standard of IT equipment in formal spaces so LS developments are an important part of the role of the Head of eLearning

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