Essential Student Skills: Quick start guide to Brightspace

Welcome to this quick start guide to Brightspace

This workbook has been designed to help all students who are new to Brightspace, the university's virtual learning environment (VLE).

In this resource, you will find some information on what a VLE is as well as how to navigate Brightspace. You will also find a list of useful resources about tools your instructor might use in Brightspace.

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A quick note about using this quick start guide

All of the images and screenshots in this quick start guide are responsive. This means that when you click on an image, this image will be enlarged on the screen. To get back to the resource, simply click anywhere on the screen.

You can navigate this quick start guide either by using the table of contents on the left-hand side or by using the arrows in the top right-hand corner. Subheadings will become visible when you click on the main heading.

What is a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)?

A virtual learning environment (VLE) is an online platform that can be used by lecturers to provide you with readings, lecture notes, recordings, PowerPoint presentations and other types of content. It can also be used to set up activities and assessments for you. Activities and assessments include discussion boards, quizzes with different types of questions (Multiple Choice, True/False, Short Answer, Written Answer, etc.) and assignment folders where you can submit documents, etc.

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The VLE used at the University of the Highlands and Islands is called **Brightspace**. Activities in a VLE can either be **synchronous** (happen in real time, e.g. online tutorial) or **asynchronous** (time-flexible such as quizzes, discussion boards and assignments, as well as any readings and other learning materials, which can be completed in your own time).

Continue to the next section to learn more about **logging in and navigating around Brightspace**.

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Brightspace basics

In this part of the quick start guide, you will find information on how to log into and navigate around Brightspace as well as how to complete your profile, how you will be notified about changes in your course and how you can communicate with teaching staff and your fellow students.

Continue to the next page to find out more about **logging into Brightspace.**

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In the rest of this section you will find information on how to navigate the VLE. You will also find out more about how to complete your profile (this will help you have a presence on Brightspace when you need to communicate and work remotely with classmates).

Logging into Brightspace

All browsers will run Brightspace however **Safari, Chrome or Firefox** are recommended.

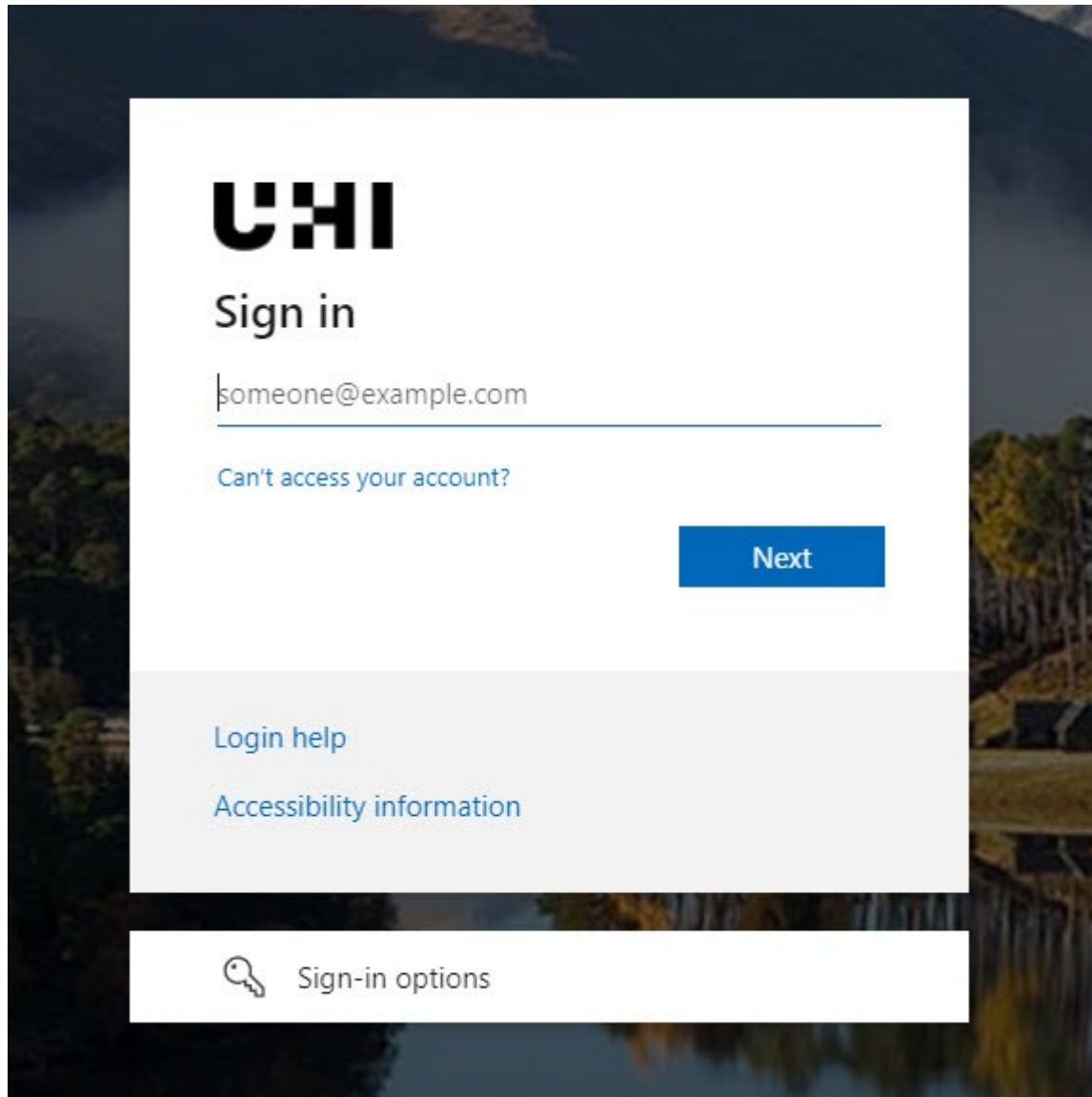To log into Brightspace, simply enter your student ID and UHI password (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Brightspace login page

Once logged in, you will see, in the top left-hand corner of your page, the UHI logo. This is your **home button** and will always take you back to your 'My Courses' page (Figure 2).

Figure 2: UHI logo in the top left-hand corner of the Brightspace homepage

Continue to the next page to find out more about **how to navigate around Brightspace**.

Navigating Brightspace

When you log in, you should see the My Courses area. Here, you should see any modules/units/courses you are enrolled on (Figure 3).
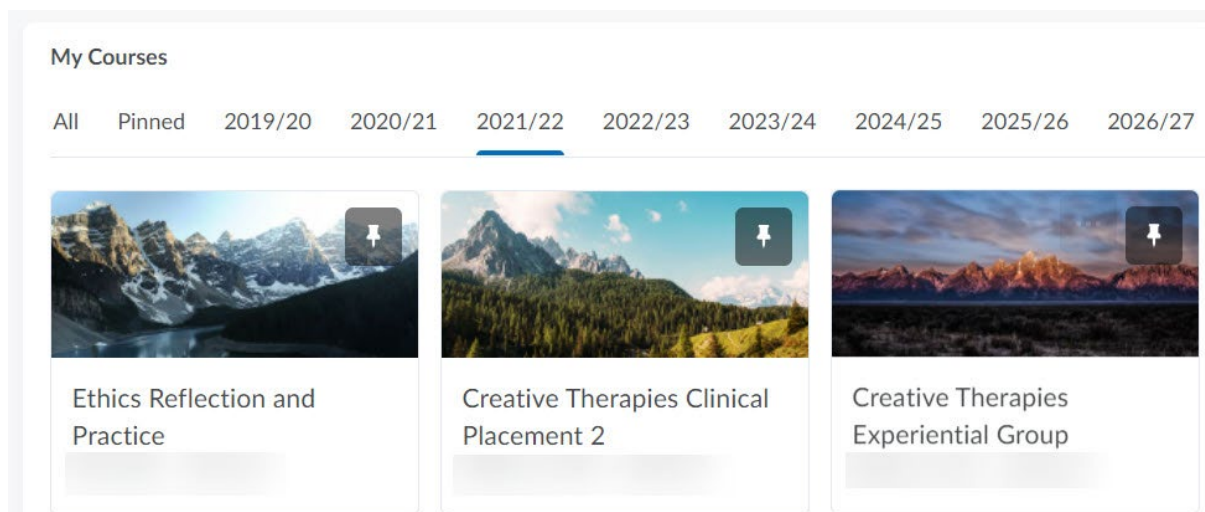
Figure 3: Brightspace homepage

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More information about the Minibar

The Minibar (Figure 4) can be found on
the top right of your Brightspace
homepage.

Figure 4: Minibar

The Minibar provides quick access to a
number of day to day items you may wish to use in Brightspace.

The Minibar provides access to the **messages** (Figure 5), **subscription** (Figure 6)
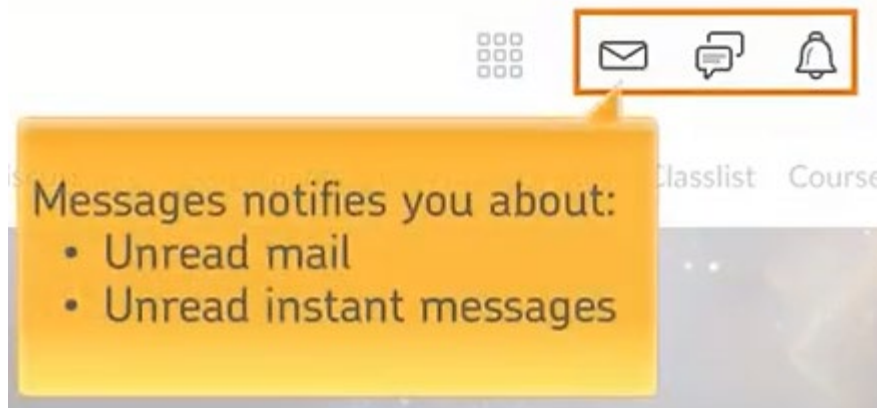and **notification** (Figure 7) tools in Brightspace.

Messages notifies you about:
- Unread mail
- Unread instant messages

Figure 5: Messages

Subscriptions notifies you about:
- New blog posts
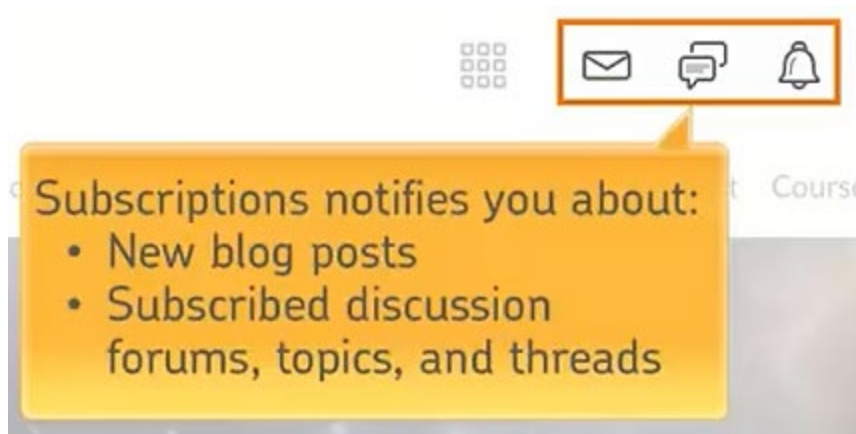- Subscribed discussion forums, topics, and threads

Figure 6: Subscriptions

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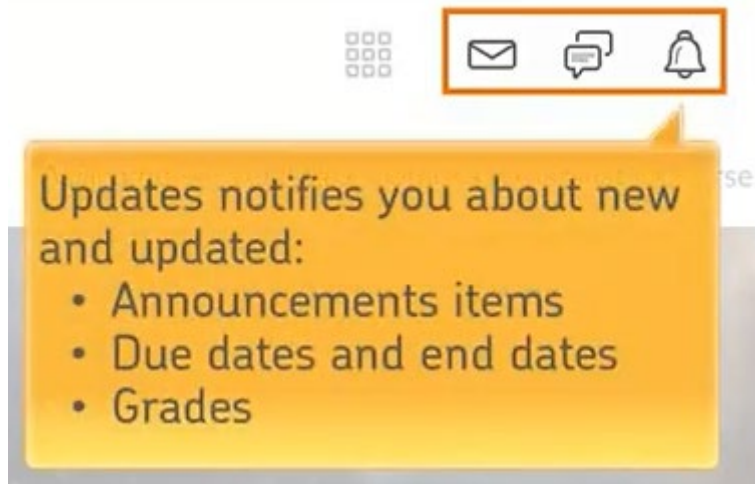

Figure 7: Notifications

Next to the messages, subscription and notification tools in Brightspace, you will see a waffle icon (Figure 8). Selecting this enables you to toggle between the modules/units/courses you are enrolled on

Figure 8: Minibar with waffle icon

More information about pinning and unpinning modules/units/courses

Locate and select the waffle icon (Figure 9). This will provide a list of all your modules/units/courses you have access to.

Figure 9: Minibar with Waffle icon

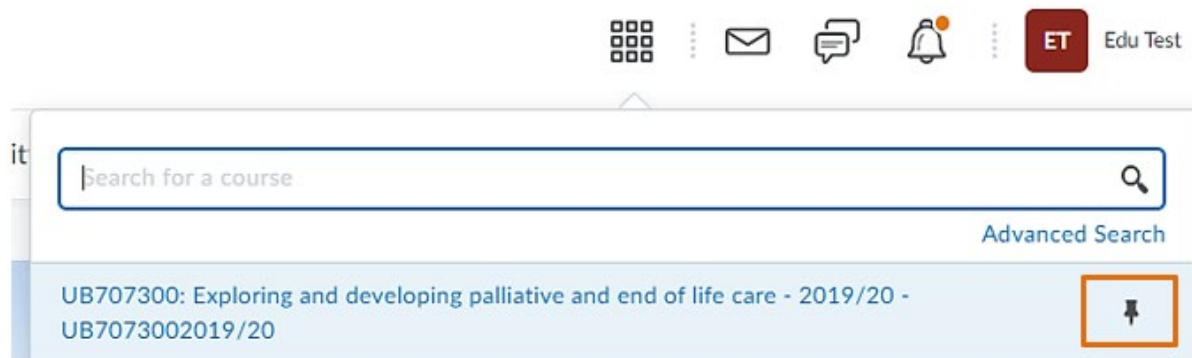Select the 'pin' icon next to any given module/unit/course to pin the module/unit/course (Figure 10).

Figure 10: List of courses with pins

A solid pin indicates that the module/unit/course is already pinned. Clicking on the pin again will unpin the course, and you will see an "empty" pin (Figure 11).

This feature can help you prioritise which modules/units/courses you would like to see highest up on the list of courses in the waffle icon drop-down or on your homepage. If you want to completely change the order in which your courses are displayed, unpin all of them and then pin them in reverse order as the most recently pinned course will always appear in the first (top) position.

Figure 11: Solid and "empty" pin

More information about your module/unit/course homepage
When you first enter a module/unit/course homepage, you will see something similar to Figure 12 on the right. This is the module/unit/course homepage which has the following elements:

1. UHI logo: click on the logo to go back to the My Courses area/Brightspace homepage.
2. Module/unit/course title: click on the title to return to this odule/unit/course homepage no matter where you are in the module/unit/course.
3. Minibar: edit your profile or your notification settings; access messages and notifications.
4. Navbar: quick access to a number of useful shortcuts for day-to-day learning.
5. Slim Announcements tool: quick access to any announcements, your instructor might post about the module/unit/course.
6. Visual Table of Contents/Visual TOC: this is a shortcut to your content in Brightspace.
7. Teaching Staff widget: quick access to information about your instructor.
8. Calendar: quick information about due dates and other important dates.

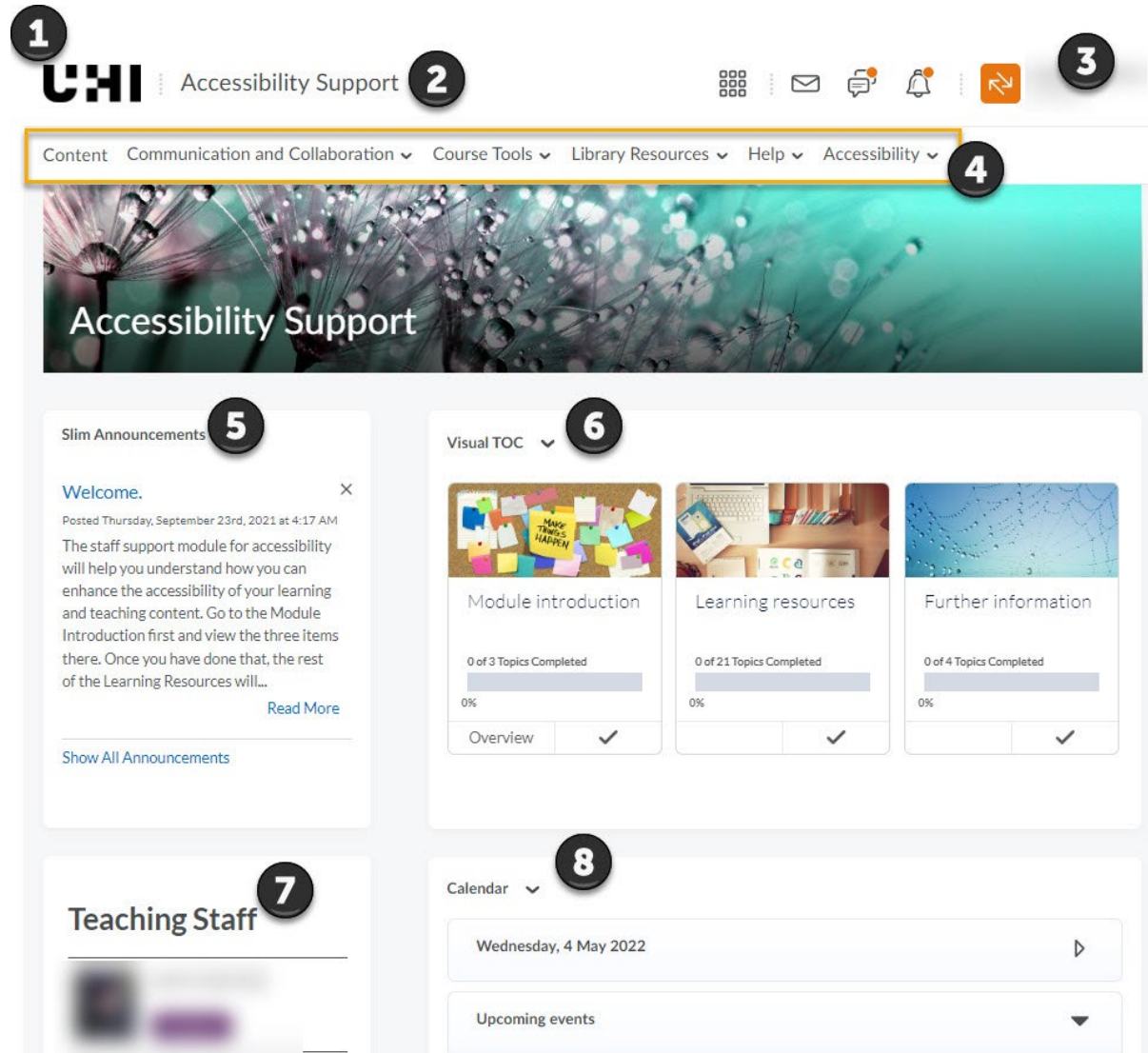Essential Student Skills: Quick start guide to Brightspace

Figure 12: Module/unit/course homepage

More information about your module/unit/course Navbar

As mentioned above, the Navbar can be found in any of your module/unit spaces just above the banner (Figure 13). It allows you to navigate to the various module tools available to you in each of your modules/units in Brightspace. It provides quick access to:

1. The content area: quick access to your learning materials and activities.
2. The communication and collaboration tools: quick access to announcements, blog, classlist, discussions, ePortfolio, groups, virtual classroom and the chat.
3. Other course tools: quick access to awards, assignments, checklist, class progress, grades, and quizzes.
4. Library resources: quick access to module reading lists, library homepage, LibGuides, referencing guides, eResources.

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5. Help resources:quick access to Essential Student Skills pages, student support, HISA, system check, UHI Servicedesk.
6. Accessibility: quick access to a resource showcasing Brightspace's accessibility features, UHI's accessibility statement and a support resource 'Disability matters'

Figure 13: Module/unit/course navbar

Continue to the next page to find out more about **completing your profile**. This will help you have a presence on Brightspace when you need to communicate and work remotely with your instructor and fellow students.

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Completing your profile

One place in Brightspace where you can provide brief information about yourself, and a picture, is the profile area which can be accessed via the minibar (Figure 19 below). This information will be available throughout Brightspace.

More information about completing your profile
We would recommend completing your profile to give other students and your instructor:

Step 1:
From the Brightspace home page, navigate to the Minibar and click on your name (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Name in the Minibar

Step 2:
From here, select Profile (Figure 15).

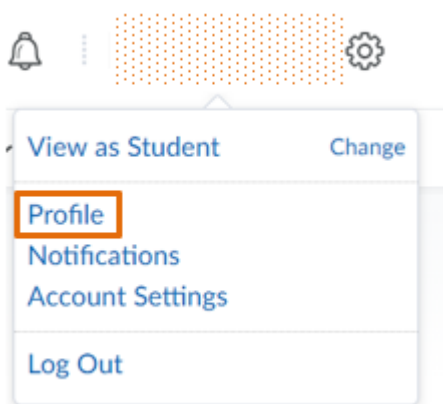*Figure 15: Drop-down menu under name*

Step 3:
Next, select Change Picture (Figure 16).

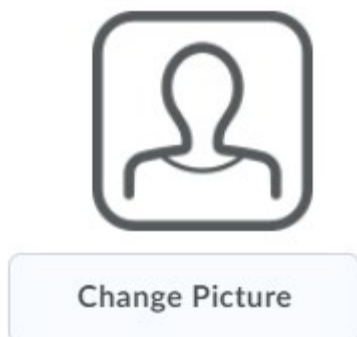*Figure 16: Change Picture area in the Profile*

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Step 4:
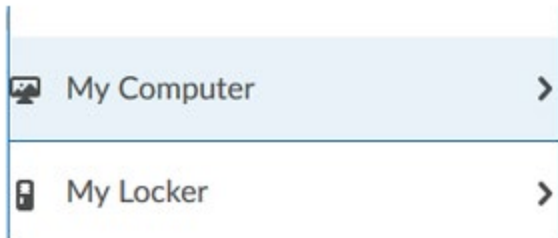This will open a pop-up window. Select My Computer to upload a profile picture from your computer (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Upload pop-up window

Step 5:
Next, drag and drop your new profile picture, or select Upload to browse for an image (Figure 18).
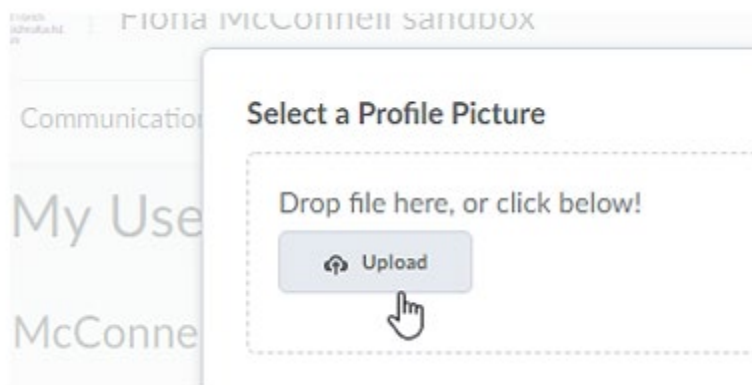
Figure 18: Drag and drop pop-up window

Step 6:
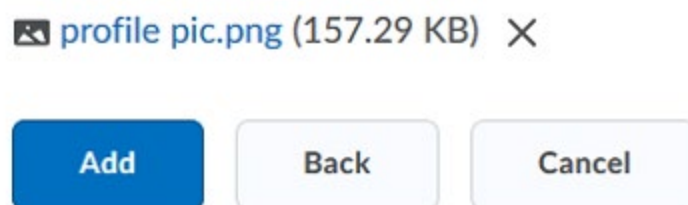When the picture has been uploaded, click on the blue Add button (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Blue add button to add image

Step 7:
Underneath your new profile picture, select Tagline. Here you can enter in any relevant information that relates to you. Below that, in the Interests/Hobbies area,

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you can choose to provide any other information you might want fellow students to have. Once completed select Save and Close to update any changes (Figure 20).

Tagline

[ ]

Interests/Hobbies

[ ]

[Save and Close]   [Save]   [Close]

Figure 20: Tagline and Interests/Hobbies boxes in the Profile

Continue to the next page to find out more about **notifications**. Notifications can help you stay up-to-date on what is happening in your module/unit/course.

Notifications

In Brightspace you can set up how (and how often) you would like to be notified of course activity. To customise the Notifications function, follow these steps:

Start by clicking on your name at the top right of the screen; and from the dropdown list select Notifications (Figure 21).
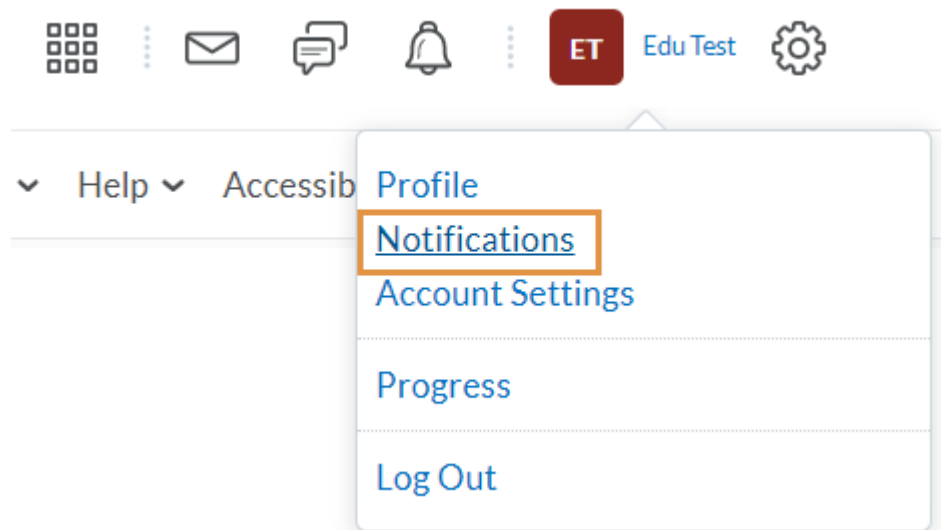
Figure 21: Notifications link

Note: The first thing you will see on the Notifications screen is an advert for the Brightspace Pulse App (Figure 22). It is a good idea for you to download this app (available for Android and IOS). Pulse will help you to keep informed about announcements and changes in your course sites.
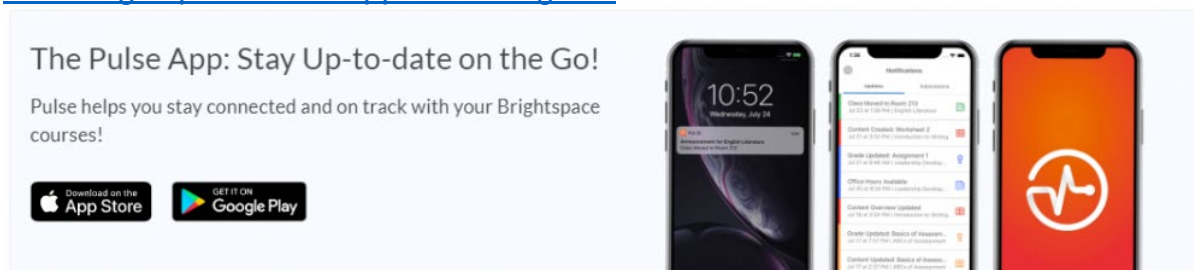
EDU Brightspace Pulse app: Student guide

Figure 22: Pulse app advert

The rest of the screen is divided into five headings. First, let's look at Contact methods.

In **Contact methods** you will see the email address that Brightspace will use to contact you. (Figure 23)

Note: You cannot switch or add an alternative email address to this but if the address you see is wrong in any way, please contact your lecturer.

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Contact Methods

Email Address

Send email notifications to: **edu@uhi.ac.uk** 🗑
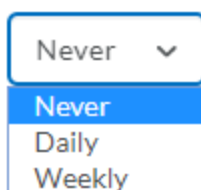
Change your email settings

Figure 23: Contact methods

In **Summary of activity**, you can choose how often you want a summary of activity for each of your courses (units or modules). The choices are: Never, Daily, and Weekly (Figure 24).

Summary of Activity

Email me a summary of activity for each of my courses.

How often?

Never ⌄

| Never |
| Daily |
| Weekly |

Figure 24: Summary of activity

Next there is a long list of tick boxes: **Instant notifications**. A tick in a box means that you will receive an email when that condition (e.g. a new announcement is available) is met (Figure 25).

Instant Notifications	Email
Activity Feed - new comments from others on a post	☐
Activity Feed - new posts created by others	☐
Announcements - announcement updated	☐
Announcements - new announcement available	☑
Assignments - assignment feedback released	☑

Figure 25: Instant notifications

In **Customize notifications** you can choose to include grade values in Grades notifications and/or allow future courses to send you notifications (Figure 26).

Customise Notifications

☑ Include my grade value in notifications from Grades

☐ Allow future courses to send me notifications

Figure 26: Customise notifications

Finally, in **Exclude some courses** you can, by clicking on Manage my course exclusions, exclude some of your units and modules from your notifications settings. When finished, click **Save**. (Figure 27)

Exclude Some Courses

You currently have no courses excluded. Manage my course exclusions

Save Cancel

Figure 27: Exclude some courses

Continue to the next section to find out more about **communication tools in Brightspace**.

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Communication

In this part of the quick start guide, you will find information on how to communicate with fellow students via instant messages, and the chat tool, as well as seeing how lecturers may communicate with you, through announcements. Continue to the next page to learn more about **using instant messages and the chat tool**.
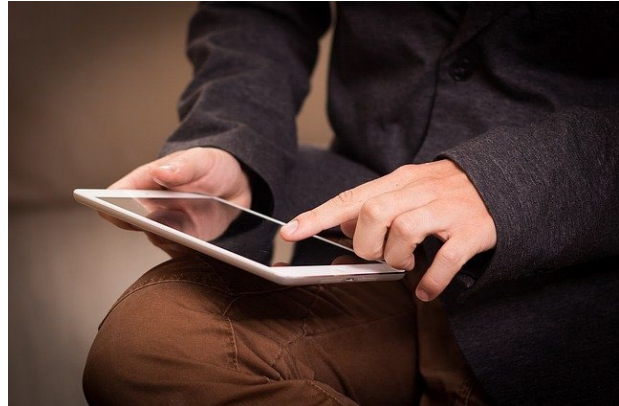

Pixabay / CC0 1.0

Brightspace Instant Messages and Chats

In Brightspace you can use the Instant Messages tool to send messages to fellow students.

More information about Instant Messages in Brightspace

The easiest way to send an instant message to fellow students in Brightspace is to go via the Classlist.

To get to the Classlist, click on the **Communication and Collaboration** drop-down menu in the navbar and select **Classlist**. (Figure 28).
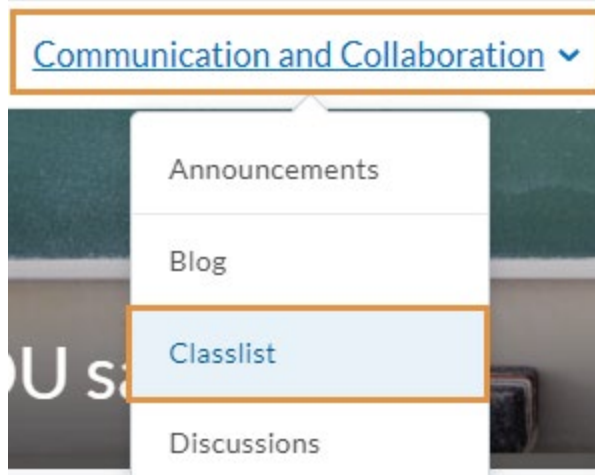
Figure 28: Communication and Collaboration drop-down menu

Once you are in the Classlist, you can select either all, a few or just one student.

Note: You can also select Lecturer/s, so be careful which boxes you tick!
To send an instant message, click on the Instant Message link above the classlist. (Figure 29)

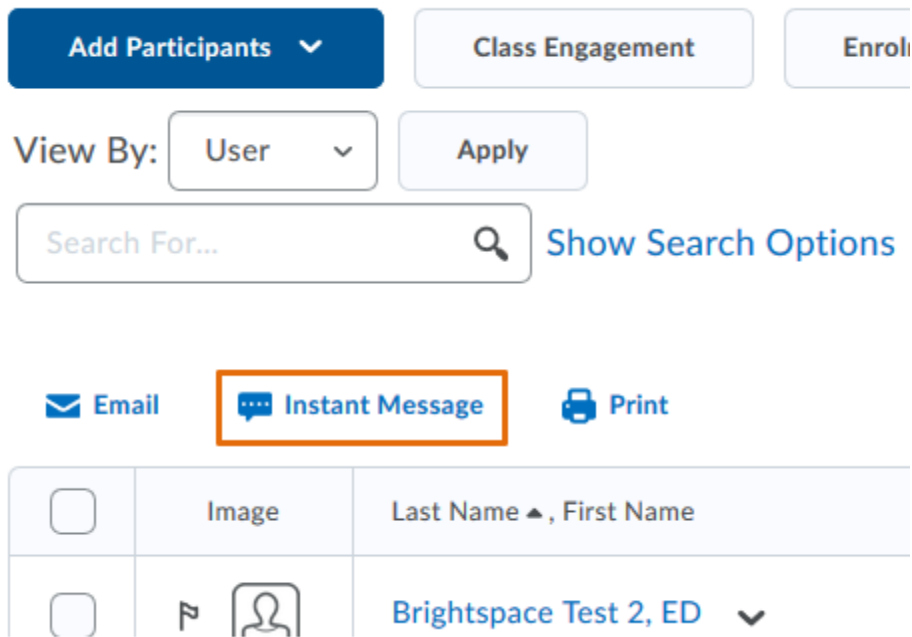Essential Student Skills: Quick start guide to Brightspace

Figure 29: Classlist with Instant Messages option above the classlist

A pop-up window will open. Here you will see the recipients you selected and can compose the instant message. The box is small but will expand as you write (you can also pull the bottom right corner to expand the popup). When you are done, click on the blue **Send** button. (Figure 30)

Figure 30: Compose Instant message pop-up window

Anyone you sent an instant message to will be able to see them when they click on the envelope (Messages) in the Minibar (Figure 31).
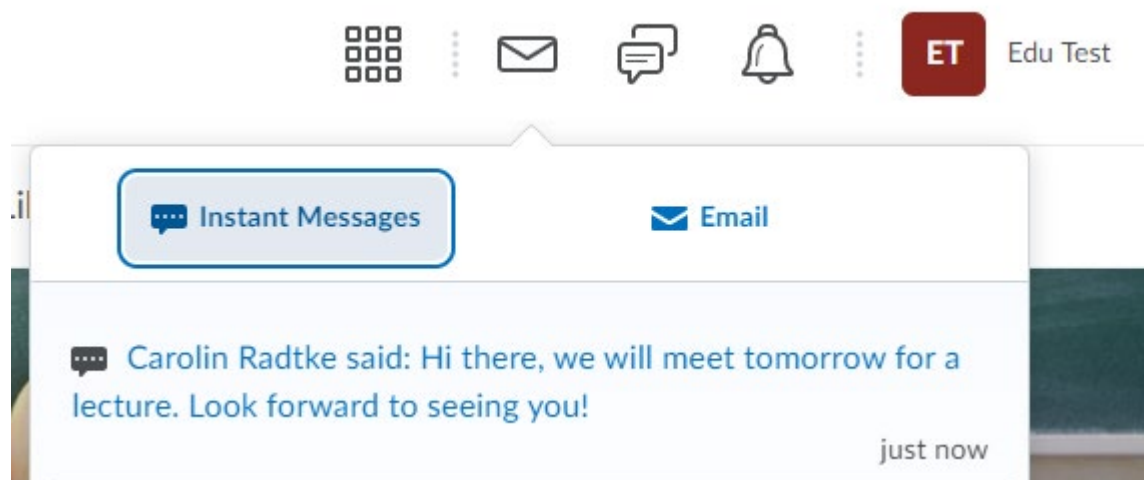
Figure 31: Envelope (Messages) in the Minibar

Your lecturer might also choose to set up chats for either all students or groups of students.

The Chat tool

The Chat tool is a real-time, text-based collaboration tool. It can be used to brainstorm ideas, ask questions as a group, have a discussion, or just catch up. As opposed to other collaboration tools, such as Discussions, Chat conversations occur in real-time.

You access the Chat tool via Communication and Collaboration in the navbar (Figure 32).

There are two types of chats: **Personal** and **General**.
Your lecturer may set up specific personal (e.g. for assignment feedback) and general chats
Personal chats are private and visible only to users who have been added to the chat's participants list (by a lecturer). They can include any number of people and are ideal for group work activities and communicating with your lecturer.

General chats are open to everyone enrolled on your unit or module. Again, your lecturer can set these up in advance and give them specific names and purposes.

In the top right of Figure 33 you will see a button called **Settings**. When you click on that you can make useful choices regarding the order of
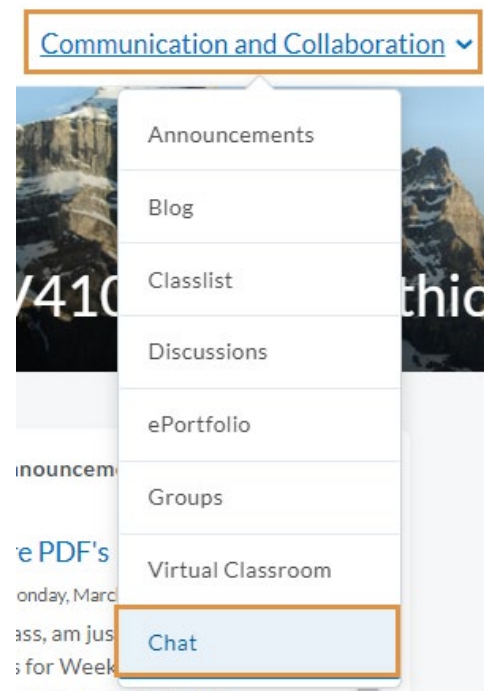

Figure 32: The Chat tool

messages and the notification sounds the system makes when someone joins, leaves or posts a message.
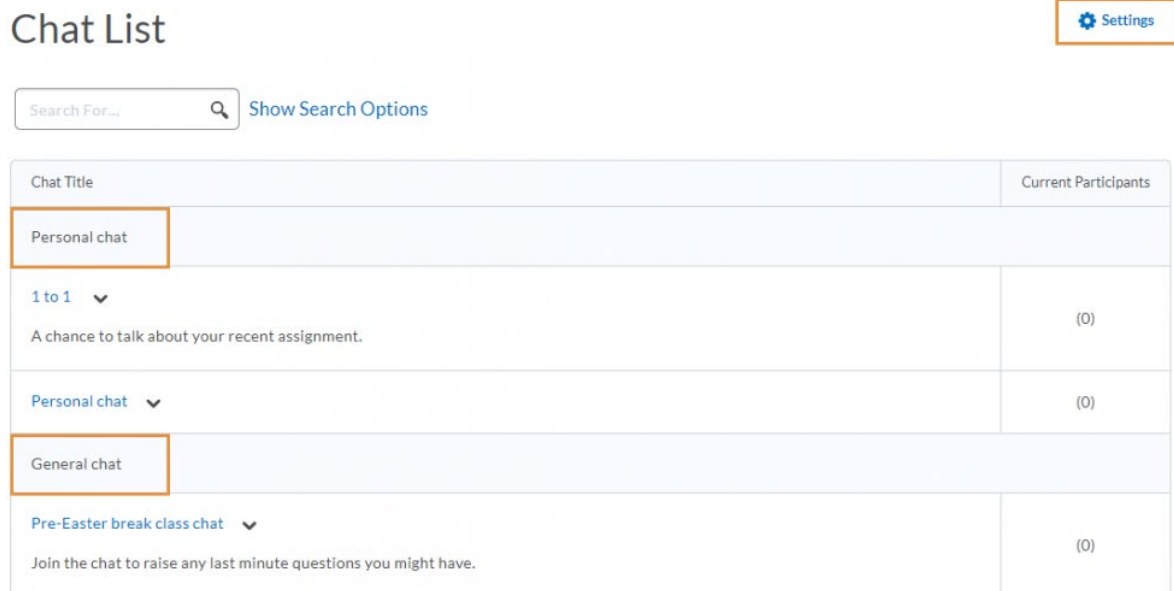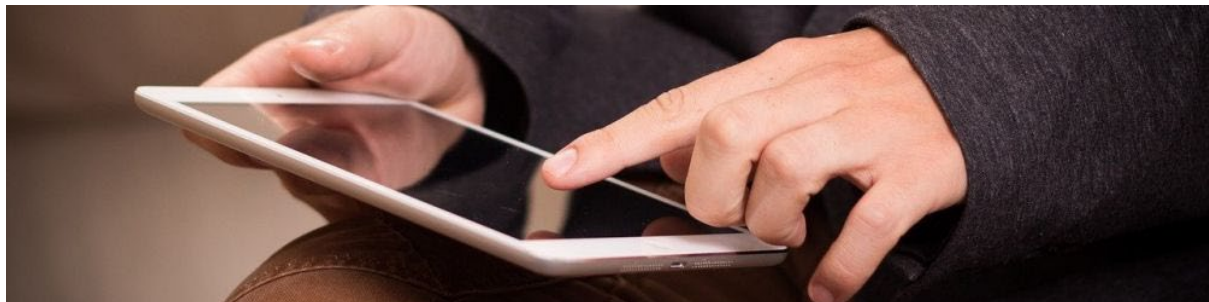

Figure 33: The Chat List

Continue to the next page to find out more about **Announcements in Brightspace**. Announcements are the most likely way that your lecturers will contact you with updates and information about your module/unit/course homepage.

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Announcements in Brightspace

When your lecturers create or edit content in your module/unit/course area, or they want to draw your attention to an important event that's coming up, they will probably communicate this with you by posting an announcement. It's important that you know where to look for announcements and how to make sure you receive notifications about them.

There are two places to view announcements in a Brightspace unit or module. The first is on the home page (Figure 34). When you first enter a unit or module, on the left-hand side of the screen you will see a heading: **Slim Announcements**. The slim announcement tool is designed to limit the amount of space taken up by

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announcements (approximately 60 words max). To see the full text, and any embedded images, of an announcement, click on the title of the announcement.

Note: You may also see at the bottom of a slim announcement, a link to 'read more'. That will also take you to the full text.
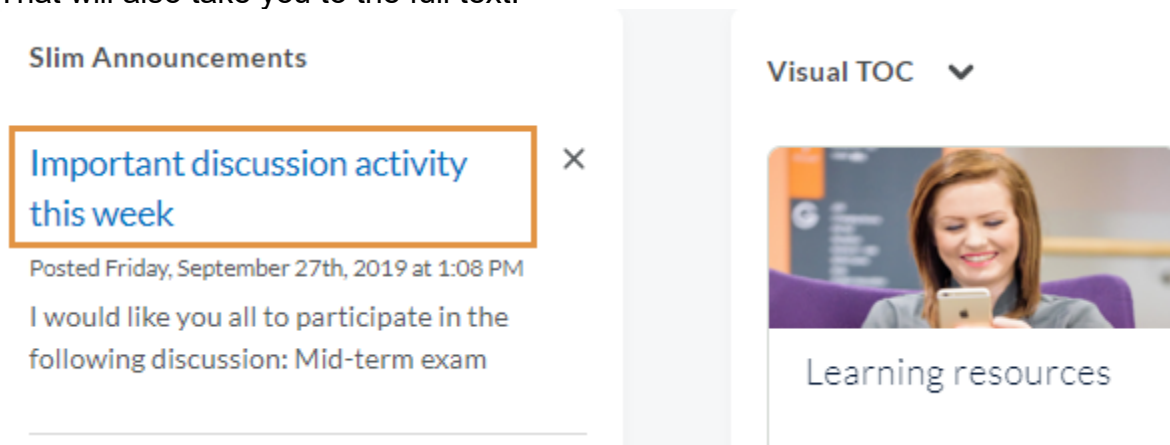

Figure 34: Slim announcements

Another way to view announcements, is to click on 'Communication and Collaborate'. on the navbar, then select 'Announcements' (Figure 35).
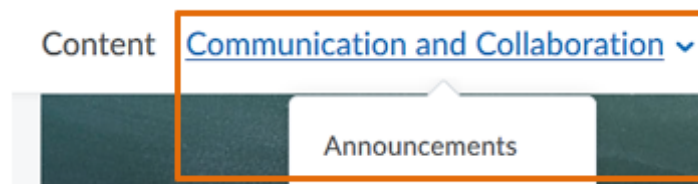

Figure 35: Communication and Collaboration drop-down menu with link to the Announcements tool

Notifications: As mentioned earlier, you can set up instant notifications to be sent an email any time your lecturer either updates an existing announcement or posts a new one.

To edit your notification settings, click on your profile picture at the top right of the Brightspace screen, select Notifications and scroll down to 'Instant notifications'. In that section you will find the options related to announcements (Figure 36).
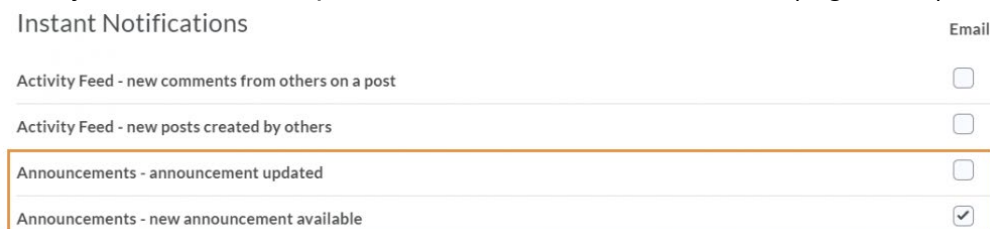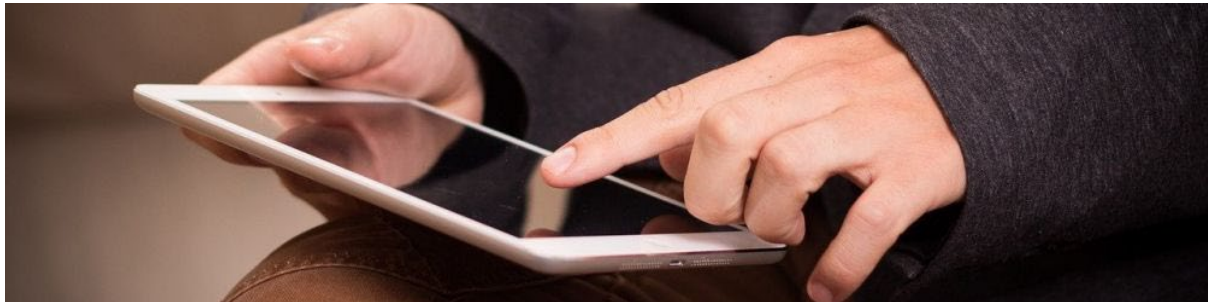

Figure 36: Instant notification settings

Continue to the next section find out more about **further resources**.

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Further resources

In this part of the quick start guide, you will find information about a couple of very useful lists of support materials and guidance.

Continue to the next page to find out more about additional **Brightspace help available to students**.

Further information and help resources for students

Essential Student Skills pages

Your main port of call for a wide variety of guidance, including Brightspace, is the Essential Student Skills suite.
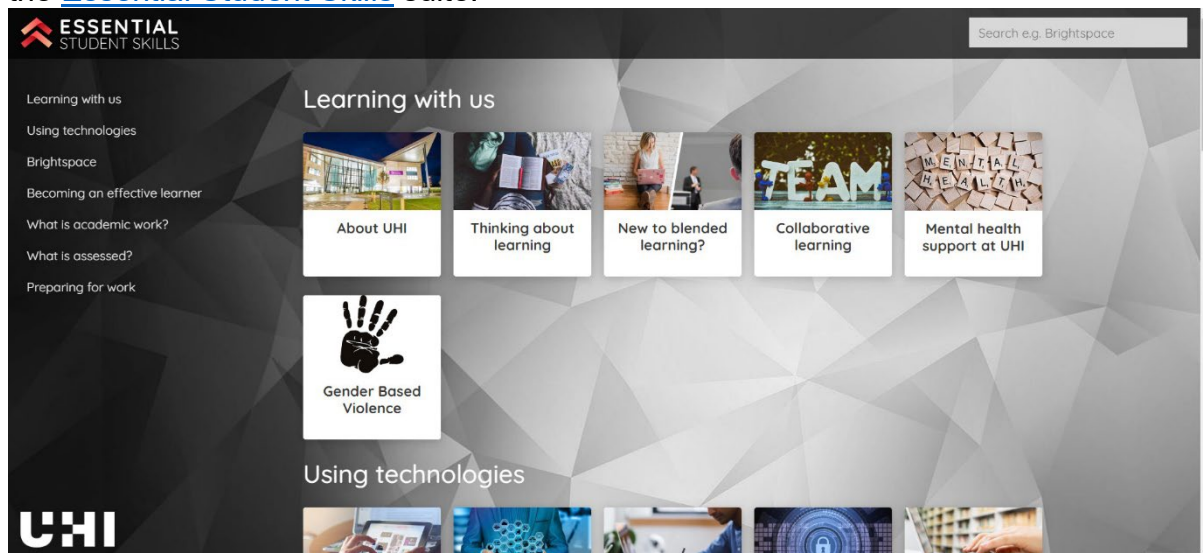

Figure 37: Essential Student Skills suite

Brightspace Help drop-down menus

In each Brightspace unit or module, you will find the **Help** drop-down menu, and the **Library Resources** drop-down menu (Figure 38).

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Both contain many helpful links you will find yourself visiting frequently during your studies.

ourse Tools ⌄   Library Resources ⌄   Help ⌄

Figure 38: Library Resources and Help drop-down menus in the Brightspace navbar