

KEY BLENDED LEARNING PRINCIPLES AT CCCU

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I. Introduction

This brief guide aims to provide updated support and guidance on blended learning delivery of your modules and/or courses at CCCU. Previous versions of this documents have been published since July 2020.

The University still recommends the Flipped Learning model of blended learning. Course teams may nevertheless develop slightly diverging models of delivery which are more appropriate for your subject area, while still ensuring an excellent student experience.

What remains consistent in your approach:

- **Mode of Delivery:** Unless a course has been approved for Distance Learning delivery mode, all courses must provide regular on-campus experiences for their students. Course teams decide the proportion of hours delivered on-campus and digitally.
- **Module outcomes and assessments:** Students still need to demonstrate that they have met the module learning outcomes by the end of the module. All activities should be constructively aligned between the module's learning outcomes and assessments. If the lack of access to campus or practice (e.g., labs, placements) makes the approved outcomes or assessments impossible to complete, you should talk to your Course Director/Head of School.
- **Equitability of experience:** It is expected that some students will still face challenges in attending on-site sessions. Whether they are provided the option to attend synchronous classroom sessions digitally, or are provided an alternative activity instead, the learning experience must be equitable with those that do attend on-site.
- **Focus on interactive learning on-site:** Learning activities undertaken on-site should be focused on interactive learning (e.g., discussion, debate, group work etc) or where specific resources are required (e.g., specialist teaching spaces and equipment). Lecture presentations should continue to be provided via asynchronous recordings that students should watch in non-timetabled learning hours.
- **Development of Digital Capabilities:** A fundamental aspect of blended learning and teaching is to ensure that both students and their teaching teams have the correct digital capabilities to engage effectively with the intended practices. Staff need to be provided time to continue to develop their digital skills, while also embedding development for their students within the curriculum.
- **General scaffolded approach to learning into a "learning roadmap":** The structure you originally designed for the progression of students' learning in the module (week by week, or block by block) is still fit for purpose.

2. Definitions

2.1 General Definitions

Contact Hours

Hours in which a student interacts through thoughtfully structured activity to include:

- On-site face-to-face teaching
- Synchronous live digital teaching
- Asynchronous digital activities as part of structured learning (for example, running a discussion activity regarding an aspect of the current topic through Blackboard Collaborate, Padlet or Blackboard Discussion Boards).
A pre-recorded lecture presentation provided via ReCap can also be included in this definition provided it is part of a broader structured activity.

On-site face-to-face (F2F)

Those activities in which the students gather in a physical space, usually on campus, as opposed to attending digitally.

Synchronous activities

Those activities in which a group of students engage in learning together (and often with tutors or other staff) at the same time. An example of this would be engagement within a physical teaching space or a virtual classroom (such as Blackboard Collaborate).

Asynchronous activities

Those activities in which each student engages in learning at a time and place of their choosing, although often within a specified time limit. An example of this would be taking part in a discussion forum activity, where students can post and respond at any time within a particular period (e.g., “any time in the next two weeks”).

Human Presence

The visibility and audibility of the tutor/s to the student, and of the students to the tutor/s, other staff and to other students.

Digital Capabilities

The skills and abilities which equip someone to live, learn and work in a digital society. These include, but are not limited to, ICT Proficiency (the ability to confidently use technology), Information Literacy (the ability to find, interpret and review digital information), Digital Communication (the ability to communicate effectively through the appropriate digital platforms), Digital Collaboration (the ability to collaborate effectively with others through appropriate digital platforms) and Digital Learning & Teaching.

More information about Digital Capabilities can be found on [the University’s Digital Capabilities website](#)

2.2 Blended Learning Models

Blended Learning

Refers to learning design that purposefully, thoughtfully and effectively integrates on-site face-to-face and online learning opportunities, informed and driven by student needs. (*[CCCU Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy](#)*)

Flipped Learning

Refers to a blended approach where students gain asynchronous access to knowledge acquisition activities (often via reading, recorded lectures or other video content), and then attend synchronous activities to focus on knowledge consolidation and assimilation, such as problem-solving, discussion and debate.

Hyflex Learning

Refers to a blended approach where students have the option of attending sessions in the classroom, participating online or doing both. Students can change their mode of attendance from session to session according to need or preference.

3. Key principles for blended delivery

Principle A

Provide the number of student contact hours ([see definition of Contact Hours above](#)) approved for your module/course, blended between on-site and digital experiences.

Principle B

High quality learning should be facilitated through application of a blended learning model appropriate to your discipline.

Principle C

Synchronous timetabled learning should be focused on interactive activities for students. Lecture presentations should be kept to asynchronous online delivery (i.e., an auto-captioned recording) wherever possible, and made available a few days in advance of any synchronous session which builds on that content.

Principle D

Students studying through different modes should have an equitable learning experience with inclusive peer-to-peer learning opportunities to support cohort identity and student wellbeing.

Principle E

Course teams should continue to encourage, sustain and monitor student engagement.

Principle F

Early introduction and continued scaffolding of digital capabilities within each course are crucial to allow students to engage effectively with their learning and to provide a good student experience.

Principle G

The model used must be scalable to adapt to any changes in the current situation.

4. Guidance on the Principles

4.1 Principle A

Provide the number of student contact hours approved for your module/course, blended between on-site and digital experiences.

For the purposes of this guidance, we consider contact hours to be defined as hours in which a student interacts through thoughtfully structured activity (see definition of Contact Hours above).

How should I balance on-site face-to-face and digital contact hours?

The use of on-site face-to-face hours must be carefully considered to maximise the benefit to students' learning. Digital contact hours will need to account for a portion of the contact hours. This will not only minimize risk to students but help to focus on-site hours to be used as effectively as possible. [Principle G](#) examines this in more detail.

How should I use the on-site face-to-face contact hours I have been provided?

Read the recommended approaches in [Principle B](#) and [Principle C](#) below to consider ways in which to make use of on-site face-to-face contact hours effectively.

How should I use the remaining digital contact hours?

Digital contact hours need to be thoughtfully structured and should focus on actively engaging students with learning activities and with each other. For example, running a discussion activity regarding an aspect of the current topic through Blackboard Collaborate, Padlet or Blackboard Discussion Boards should be considered as contact hours. The focus here is on structured learning, with preparatory tasks also being considered as contact hours.

For example, asking students to watch some video content or read a chapter from an e-book in isolation to any other learning would not fit this definition; however, watching that same video or reading the chapter prior to a discussion activity (in-class or digitally) about its content would fit the definition.

It is important to schedule regular interactions with students. Recommended approaches to delivering digitally can be found in [Principle B](#) below.

4.2 Principle B

High quality learning should be facilitated through application of a blended learning model appropriate to your discipline. Blended Learning

One of the most popular models of blended learning is that of flipped learning. The main tenet of this model is the idea that core knowledge acquisition (e.g., description of theory, introduction of concepts, etc.) is undertaken digitally in an asynchronous manner, usually through the use of reading materials (e.g., digitised chapters, e-books or online journals), ReCap recordings and other audio & video materials. On-site face-to-face contact hours are focused on deepening understanding through more interactive and personalized activities such as discussion, problem solving, active learning, peer learning and formative assessment.

The Flipped model includes a capacity to:

- keep synchronous contact hours interactive and personal
- provide students with flexibility in engagement with their learning – they can approach the core asynchronous knowledge acquisition at a pace of their own choosing, replaying or re-reading content as often as necessary, and being ready to highlight areas for clarification during either on-site face-to-face or digital activities
- engaging with digital activities can help to develop students' digital capabilities, with on-site face-to-face support available
- adapt to changes in scheduling, allowing staff to maximise on the use of physical spaces.

The following principles are key in the implementation of the flipped learning model:

- Student engagement in digital activities is fundamental to successful delivery of on-site face-to-face activities.
- A fair amount of “front-loading” is needed, so that students can engage with the learning materials. Students need to be provided with a “learning roadmap” for each module from the start of the module, and some elements need to be available to them from the outset. For example, before the module starts, you will need to ensure the digitisation of reading materials through the [scanning service](#) and include references to available e-books and online journals [available via LibrarySearch](#). Other learning activities (especially the “knowledge transmission” type) will also need to be ready early on, to allow students to work at their own pace. It is also important that you check the availability of digital materials provided by the library.
- The learning activities provided through digital provision help students unable to attend on-site sessions.

Recommended Digital Approaches

Make core knowledge acquisition asynchronous.

When providing any of the options listed below, please consider when it is appropriate to release this content to students. Sufficient time for students to engage with the material must be provided – as a rule of thumb material should be available a few working days before it is needed for an on-site face-to-face (or digital) activity.

Pre-recording core knowledge acquisition activities (e.g., lecture presentations, introduction of concepts, description of theory, etc) via ReCap, or recording these activities while undertaking them live within Blackboard Collaborate, is normally more effective, as students can pause and replay the recording as often as necessary to consolidate their understanding of the content. Recordings available in ReCap also provides closed captioning of content, making materials more accessible for students, in line with government accessibility legislation.

Other audio & video sources (e.g., YouTube) are also more effective for asynchronous learning. These must be licenced (ideally via a [Creative Commons licence](#)) and referenced correctly and must meet accessibility legislation (subtitles and/or a transcript must be available). The [Learning Skills Hub](#) is a useful source for asynchronous learning.

For optimal inclusivity, specific chapters, journal articles, and other readings and research should be presented for students to read at their own pace via Blackboard. Materials should wherever possible be available through [LibrarySearch](#), or the Library’s [database list](#), and should be linked or directed to. These materials should NOT be uploaded directly into Blackboard unless the materials are specifically licenced for this to be allowed. Where print copies exist within the library, and are not already available to students online, specific chapters can be digitised (see [the Library & Learning Resources Scanning Service](#) for information on how module readings can be digitised and made available via Blackboard).

Make the best use of synchronous learning time on-site or digitally in seminars, webinars, and workshops by planning how you can optimise asynchronous tasks

Asynchronous digital activities are essential to prompt and support engagement outside of the physical classroom. These activities allow you to structure students’ learning and monitor student engagement and progress through more conversational methods. You should, however, be careful to strike a balance – too many activities can lead to overloading your students, so planning of these at both module and course levels is important.

Flip independent learning tasks to digital asynchronous tasks to be completed before synchronous classes (digital or on-site face-to-face)

Find and critique sources relevant to the current topic and post to a Blackboard Blog/Forum or Padlet (each shared with class). Post assessment outlines/drafts to Turnitin (tutors only) or Turnitin’s PeerMark (shared anonymously with peers).

Make a short video of some aspect of developing practice and post directly to a Blackboard Blog or Padlet (each shared with class) or using the Blackboard Journal or PebblePad (shared only with tutors).

Upload longer videos of practice, performance, or other creative works in progress to ReCap (recommended) or social media and post links to Blackboard Blog or Padlet (each shared with class) or Blackboard Journal or PebblePad (shared only with tutors).

Reflect on these independent learning tasks and/or progress with assessments in relation to individual goals (e.g., future employment ambitions) and post to a Blackboard Blog/Forum or Padlet (each shared with class) or Blackboard Journal (tutors only) or PebblePad (private or tutors only).

Consider whether Discussion and Debate work best for your discipline and group size in synchronous socially-distanced on-site sessions or in synchronous webinars. How will you include all students in any core group discussions?

The core seminar activities of discussion and debate can be undertaken synchronously via Blackboard Collaborate. This can allow for larger groups to engage synchronously than may initially be achievable in a physical space. This also benefits those students that are isolating, as they can attend alongside their classmates. Depending on your room allocation and your cohort's access to technology you may be able to run a discussion in which some students join the discussion digitally from home – for this to work effectively for all your students you will need to check your timetabling room specifications and consult with your students.

Full group discussion and debate can also be undertaken via an asynchronous digital approach, for example via Blackboard Discussion Boards or Padlet. This allows time for students to reflect and contribute thoughtfully. It can provide a voice for everyone in live sessions, where limited class time may prevent this. It can also encourage students who may be reluctant to speak in live sessions. You should discuss with students, especially at the beginning of each module, what opportunities are available to them to engage with their learning. You may choose to set up and moderate a detailed discussion asynchronously and digitally and then draw on some of the highlights from that in your next synchronous teaching session.

Question setting in advance will include the voices of a wider range of students.

Where an on-site face-to-face (or digital) activity will be based around particular questions or problems, you should post these online a few days ahead of the activity. This can allow time for students to reflect and research before contributing. This should provide best use of the limited activity time and encourage student engagement with course materials.

It can be beneficial to run this activity fully digitally, providing students with a space in which to post their responses, such as Padlet or a Blackboard Discussion Board. This can allow them to consider the thoughts and opinions of others, encouraging engagement and discussion, and allows a straightforward way for tutors to monitor that engagement.

Reflection Activities can be undertaken in several ways.

Text-based reflection

Students can submit Word documents via Turnitin or Blackboard Assignments for solitary reflection. Alternatively, reflection via more open activities such as Discussion Boards, Blackboard Blog and Journal, PebblePad or Padlet can encourage peer engagement and review. Career Pulse can be used to allow students to reflect on their employability and the [Learning Skills Hub](#) can help students to develop academic skills such as reflective writing and understanding and using academic sources.

Audio/Video reflection

Students can record their reflections via their personal devices and upload to ReCap or Kaltura and then share via Blackboard Assignments, Discussion Boards, PebblePad or Padlet.

Groupwork

Using groupwork, a greater sense of cohort identity and community can be established, which can lead to greater satisfaction and retention in addition to the pedagogic benefits. Groupwork can be more effective digitally when you have several groups who could not engage easily together in a single classroom environment.

Providing groups access to Blackboard Collaborate, Padlet, Office365 and other tools within the Learning Platform Suite can allow for strong collaboration opportunities and independent learning. Students also have more flexibility to explore tools beyond the scope of the University, provided they feedback their work within University-provided systems, and do not share personal data in external systems without each group members' express consent.

Engaging in groupwork digitally comes with some initial barriers that can be difficult to overcome. Students will often find working in a group face-to-face on-site more effective, because it comes more naturally to them. Engaging with unfamiliar technologies can be daunting initially, and some participants may make early mistakes as they learn to use the platforms. It is important, therefore, to set early introductory groupwork activities to let students engage with this and develop their digital collaboration skills and processes before the real group work is undertaken.

Formative Activities: various forms of formative activities can work well digitally.

Diagnostic Testing

Asynchronously, Blackboard quizzes (for example) can be personalised with pre-entered feedback and advice based upon the answers selected. When running synchronous activities (via Blackboard Collaborate), the use of Mentimeter quizzes can provide engagement and formative assessment with immediate feedback.

Draft Assessment Feedback

Providing feedback on draft assessment submissions can be useful not only to direct students' focus, but also to allow them to engage with the same feedback processes they will be using in their summative assessments.

Peer Review

Peer review is always a strong way to allow students to engage with both the learning and their classmates, providing them the opportunity to consider the work of others and how that might impact their own understanding. There are several ways in which peer review can be undertaken digitally. Turnitin can be set to allow students to review each other's work, and Padlet is a great tool for allowing students to post work for others to read and comment on. Both tools can be used to do this anonymously or knowing whose work the student is reviewing. Blackboard Blogs and Discussion Boards can also allow non-anonymous peer review of posted material.

Formative Collective Feedback

Pre-recorded or written feedback to a class or group can allow staff to provide feedback once for students to review and replay, rather than repeating the feedback to multiple groups in on-site face-to-face mode.

Recommended Synchronous On-Site Face-to-Face Approaches

On-site face-to-face time should be prioritised for high value contact time, which can be considered as those activities that require specialist equipment/spaces or those which provide the most interactive and personalized experience.

Practicals, Laboratories, Performance and Professional Practice

Where specific equipment or space is required, on-site face-to-face teaching can be essential. On-site face-to-face time should be prioritized for this type of work. You still need to bear in mind the limitations on physical spaces, and plan pre-instruction provided digitally ahead of the class.

Formative and summative assessments also need to be considered – if it is possible to run either without access to these spaces, this should be considered, and where it is necessary, prioritise suitable time (remembering to take into account that students with particular needs may require additional time).

Where learning is supported and/reliant on modelling of practice, you will need to consider how to undertake this within the physical limitations imposed. While some elements of modelling practice may be able to be simulated digitally, most is likely to require access to physical spaces.

Discussion and Debate

This works well in an on-site face-to-face setting, allowing more spontaneity, direct challenge and bonding, interpretation of body language, and strong peer learning. You must also be aware of possible limitations placed upon them – reduced student numbers could stifle discussion through the loss of differing opinion, social distancing and mask-wearing may limit the audibility of points being made. Digital planning and pre-activity may be key to maximizing the discussion opportunities in-class. For example, set an “independent learning” activity and have the students post their work digitally e.g., on a Padlet or Discussion Board. This can then be used as the basis of an in-class discussion.

Question Setting

Where a student’s initial response (emotion, body language, etc.) to the questions or problems being set is beneficial to the learning, or where the spontaneity of opinion without the opportunity for research is key, providing the questions or problems within the class in which they are being discussed is the only really suitable approach.

Formative Activities

Formative activities in the classroom can be easily undertaken with Mentimeter quizzes and polls. This can include open, text-based responses, or restricted option questions, as well as encouraging competitiveness between individuals or groups. In many cases these can be set to be run “student-paced,” allowing those unable to attend to take part equally with their classmates. Results can then be shared digitally to capture the full set of results across multiple on-site face-to-face groups and online attendees.

Verbal feedback is also beneficial, although current limitations within class may mean the need for repetition of feedback to multiple groups.

More generally, being in physical proximity with students can provide more spontaneity and responsiveness and create engagement between tutors and students through the “human element”.

Consider Human Presence

Whatever balance of digital and on-site face-to-face teaching is reached, maximising [human presence](#) helps retain a sense of community and encourage engagement. This can be achieved in several ways, including the use of cameras and microphones during portions of digital synchronous learning, or just through the inclusion of on-site face-to-face learning.

Your digital “presence” needs to strike the right balance between supporting students effectively whilst not being “hyperresponsive” and “on call” 24/7. Training on how to engage students in the digital environment is available via Staffspace (search for “LTE (Learning and Teaching Enhancement)” sessions). Students’ expectations need to be set clearly, with how regularly you will respond, and what means of communications can be used to contact you (specific Discussions Boards, Blackboard Announcements and email, individual emails).

Consider the use of images (e.g. upload a profile picture to your own Blackboard and encourage all your students to do likewise for themselves even if they do not wish to turn on their cameras at any point), video of the academic in ReCap recordings, and the use of video in short form during Collaborate sessions (turned on for the introduction and

end of a class, but turned off while delivering main content to avoid reduction of quality for those students on slower internet connections).

Consider the importance of students hearing each others' voices by speaking into their microphones during digital synchronous sessions - anxious or not, students should expect to speak and be heard regularly during synchronous sessions as well as using the chat function. It may be worth considering developing a classroom contract with your students stressing the importance of verbal communication as a graduate attribute and a professional/vocational requirement.

Keep in contact with your students – regular communications via Blackboard announcements, discussion boards or email.

Run regular non-teaching touch points – such as office hours – to help encourage student dialogue and build the sense of community.

4.3 Principle C

Synchronous timetabled learning should be focused on interactive activities for students. Lecture presentations should be kept to asynchronous online delivery (i.e., an auto-captioned recording) wherever possible and made available a few days in advance of any synchronous session which builds on that content.

Timetabled on-site face-to-face sessions should focus on active learning, while passive learning activities, such as lecture presentations, should continue to be provided in an asynchronous digital mode.

You may wish to consider fully digital versions of traditional classroom activities to facilitate a suitable number of students to engage with the learning (e.g., using Padlet to facilitate digital collaboration in place of physical group tables).

Passive learning activities (lecture presentations, readings, videos, etc.) should continue to be provided in a timely asynchronous manner. Students should be provided with content a few days ahead of any synchronous session which builds upon that content. For example, a video case study to be used in a discussion session on Tuesday could be provided to all students on the previous Tuesday. This approach allows students with a variety of commitments (academic, personal, or professional) to structure their personal learning time appropriately to prepare for upcoming synchronous sessions. Expectations on personal learning needs to be clearly communicated to the students at the beginning of each module to support them in doing this.

Auto-captioning of video content (including lecture presentations) is not immediate, and the version of the media provided within the agreed upon timeframe needs to include these captions. You should therefore create content in advance to make sure that content is fully accessible when made available to students.

4.4 Principle D

Students studying through different modes should have an equitable learning experience with inclusive peer-to-peer learning opportunities to support cohort identity and student wellbeing.

Access to campus may still be restricted at times, and at other times some students will be temporarily unable to come to campus for assorted reasons.

You will need to refer to the [Guidance for students in self-isolation](#) to support them best. Where a fully online experience is necessary for a student, it should be as equitable as possible with the experience of those undertaking on-site learning activities.

Some synchronous on-site sessions may be streamed digitally for students to attend online, but careful thought needs to be applied about how to engage students in both modes of delivery. You need to prepare well for the management of two modes of students at the same time, and particularly the engagement of students attending digitally. Discussion and interaction only work if students in both modes can clearly hear one another and follow a defined classroom etiquette on when (and when not to) speak, to allow all students in both modes suitable opportunity to take part.

Staff should also consider in their planning how on-site face-to-face activities can be replicated digitally or replaced with equitable digital activities. Consider some of the options presented in [Principle B above](#), and look at [the advice on blended practice provided at the end of this document](#) for ways in which this can be achieved.

To help students to navigate their independent learning, it is useful to provide them with a “learning roadmap”. This should include an updated schedule of learning activities for the module – synchronous and asynchronous - and spell out the methods of delivery to students. The roadmap should allow flexibility and may require you to reorganise your Blackboard site.

You should be considerate of students’ digital wellbeing, as different forms of anxiety may arise through learning online to those experienced in the classroom, including (but not limited to) use of technologies. Lack of visual cues (amongst others) can often lead to misunderstanding, resulting in negative feeling.

How to create an equitable digital activity?

We provide a few examples here of how to take an on-site face-to-face activity and provide self-isolating students with an equitable experience. This is, of course, not an exhaustive list, just indicative of some approaches that could be considered.

Live streaming of on-site face-to-face classroom activities require suitable preparation and understanding of the technology by the staff involved. You need to consider both modes of attendance as part of the pedagogic model to avoid a poorer student experience for those attending in one or other mode.

Recording of on-site face-to-face classroom activities via ReCap should be considered for self-isolating students, as this will enable them to replay and review those activities, but this needs to be done in conjunction with other digital activities, to provide a properly equitable experience.

Should the platform used for live streaming include its own recording features (such as Blackboard Collaborate), you should use this option to record the class, providing the recording is subsequently transferred to ReCap (and removed from the live platform) to provide it in an accessible, structured form.

Discussion and Debate

A separate digital discussion could be run for just those online-only students through either a synchronous (Blackboard Collaborate) or asynchronous (Discussion Boards) approach. This only works if you have a suitable number of students to stimulate discussion, so you may also include some/all the students who are also participating on-site (although this may mean some duplication of activity for them).

Alternatively, consider running a pre-class activity where all students post initial thoughts on the topic being discussed or on the digitised readings for that week. After class-based activity has taken place, post a summary of the key points that came out of the discussion, and then run a post-activity to build on that discussion digitally. This allows those online students to engage with their peers and the topic effectively, building their learning in a comparable manner to those being taught on-site.

Question Setting

As with discussions, questions and problems can be provided ahead of class to give all students an opportunity to consider their answer. It may be possible to record the class time spent on working through the problem for online students to view, or you may want to consider running a digital activity (either synchronously or asynchronously) that allows for a similar work through with just online students. Where possible, setting a digital follow-on question or an independent study activity based around the problem posed could allow online students to continue to engage with their learning alongside their on-site peers.

Formative Activities

Many forms of formative activity are easily replicated in a digital activity. In-class quizzes or tests can be provided to online students through the Blackboard quiz tool. Where Mentimeter is used in the classroom, the same activity can also be run in “Student-paced” mode to allow students who are currently attending digitally to undertake the activity in their own time.

Group feedback provided verbally in-class can be recorded for online students to play back, can be provided in written form, or can be given through a separate Blackboard Collaborate session. Individual feedback can be provided in written form, can be provided through one-to-one Collaborate sessions, or can be recorded by staff and provided directly to the student.

Peer review can be undertaken through several methods, such as the Blackboard Discussion Boards, Blog tool or Padlet, which can be started in class and then continued digitally, with some recorded instructions for those who have not attended.

Some assessments may not be easy to replicate digitally, and you should be prepared to revise these assessments if digital submission is required. [Guidance on alternative assessments](#) is available to support you with this.

4.5 Principle E

Course teams should continue to encourage, sustain, and monitor student engagement.

One of the most critical elements of any form of blended learning is ensuring engagement from students. Where on-site face-to-face contact is reduced, it is far easier for students to become disengaged and risk dropping out.

You should consider regular contact points with your students (individually or in groups) to check on engagement and progress. This could be in the form of discussion, or could be short digital activities (quiz, Discussion Board, Padlet activity, etc.) depending upon the class size and the amount of other activity the students are being asked to undertake.

It is important that students are kept informed of changes to the course and its structure. Staff should keep in touch via Blackboard’s ‘Announcements’ function (with push email function selected). When initial communications are sent, they should include a link to the learning roadmap, the dates and times of the synchronous sessions, and what activities the students need to engage with (optional or mandatory) before the next synchronous session. Aim to strike a balance between not being visible to students but not “hyperpresent”. See our [Blended Learning video about communications](#) for an overview.

Set realistic expectations with students about what support is available and encourage them to take ownership of their own learning in asynchronous tasks. Prompting, sustaining, and monitoring students’ engagement in asynchronous independent learning activities between synchronous sessions are key here. See our [Blended Learning video “Student Needs \[Availability & Motivation\]”](#) for more information. Provide support for students in becoming successful online learners, including a focus on digital capabilities and time management. See our [Blended Learning video “Students Needs \[Confidence\]”](#) for an overview, our [Digital Capabilities site](#) and the guidance for students on the [Off-campus engagement and learning Padlet](#), and modules within the [Learning Skills Hub](#) such as Online Learning Skills.

To support and sustain engagement, consider the following suggestions:

- Keep core knowledge acquisition recordings short – several 10–15-minute topic-focused recordings are more effective than a 90-minute recording covering five topics (or topic areas)
- To support core knowledge acquisition, ensure that module readings are accessible to students in advance and made available online via [LibrarySearch](#), a specific online tool or resource, or Blackboard (i.e., by making chapters of print books available via the [Scanning Service](#) and uploading to your module board).
- Set small, regular digital tasks; start with low-effort tasks that introduce the technology used and build from there.
- Release tasks at regular intervals (e.g., one every two weeks) to allow students to anticipate workload.
- Provide detailed guidance, a timescale and guideline of the effort required for each task (e.g., 30 mins max, 200 words max)
- When running asynchronous activities through Blackboard Blog / Discussion Board or Padlet, start the activity with your own post first, to help direct and encourage student engagement.
- Where possible, try to answer queries as promptly as possible, but set expectations for turnaround first. A module-level (and/or course-level) guide to expected response times is essential, but you may need a different one for particular activities.
- Use a Blackboard Discussion Board or Padlet for Q&A so students can see your previous answers and help each other.
- To encourage engagement, consider providing some digital activities which directly support students' preparation for assessment.
- Ensure your content is as accessible as possible; use Blackboard Ally to identify and resolve accessibility issues with content.
- Encourage students to comment on each other's posts to stimulate discussion and peer review.
- At the end of (and often during) digital activities, provide generalised 'group' feedback on students' responses to the activity.

Administrative staff, Course Directors and Heads of School should also consider how they might support their students to stay engaged. Course administrators can often act as key voices for their students, and regular group communications can provide a voice of encouragement and reminder of upcoming events, deadlines etc. Course Directors and Heads of School may want to consider wider communications and online events to encourage students to engage with the wider academic community.

Monitoring engagement

The [Student Engagement Dashboard](#) is the key tool to use to identify where students may be at risk of dropping out or failing. Other areas where engagement data can be viewed, are:

- ReCap analytics can show who has watched a recording, and for how long.
- PebblePad will show each user's progress on a particular activity.

4.6 Principle F

Early introduction and continued scaffolding of digital capabilities within each course are crucial to allow students to engage effectively with their learning and to provide a good student experience.

Digital capabilities become more critical when students are learning through a blended model. Of the fourteen capabilities defined in the University's digital capabilities framework, five are especially important: ICT Proficiency, Digital Communication, Digital Collaboration, Digital Learning and Digital Wellbeing. These should be embedded within teaching at an early stage to introduce the concept and allow students to engage before they become important to support their studies.

Further information about the University's Digital Capabilities Framework, along with resources to support each capability, can be found on [the University's Digital Capabilities website](#).

ICT Proficiency

This is the core digital skill that allows students to build their confidence in using devices and apps, software and services, across their studies and other aspects of their lives. We often assume that our students are all "tech-savvy", but in reality, there will be a range of confidence and ability across every student group.

Introduction of basic systems and software packages that students are going to use should be provided in a timely manner as part of the early curriculum. This does not mean introducing everything in week one, but instead introducing them ahead of their first real need. Consider how and when you will introduce some of the basic tools for learning at the University – Blackboard Learn & Collaborate, Microsoft Word & PowerPoint, University Email, Turnitin, [LibrarySearch](#), the [Learning Skills Hub](#), OneDrive, OneNote, PebblePad and Padlet, to name just a few. For example, Blackboard Learn and Email may be required from the start of teaching (or before), so early introduction is essential. Turnitin may not be needed until mid-semester, so introduction of this tool around week four might be suitable.

Setting activities to begin to familiarise students with these can build students' confidence, helping them to view the technology as the tools they are intended to be, and not as barriers to their learning.

You may also want to consider scaffolding the development of these skills, engaging the efforts of students from later stages to provide guidance and support to new students.

There are also opportunities for students to undertake ICT training via the IT Training team. Students can book a training slot for a specific tool, or for more general support by visiting the [IT Training for Students booking form](#).

Digital Communication

Regardless of the mode of study, digital communication is an essential capability for our students to learn, not only for supporting their University career, but also as graduates in an increasingly digital workplace. Students need to be able to identify the benefits of different forms of digital communication, the differences (and nuances) between email, text chat, video calls, discussion boards and others. Having the skill to understand a new digital communication platform, to assess its benefits and disadvantages, and to grasp the etiquette associated with it can make a dramatic difference to how well students can make themselves understood when using that platform, and how well they understand others. Effective communication is at the heart of everything we do, and the methods we use to do this are changing constantly.

You should consider what communication platforms they are going to be using and outline expectations for this in the module handbook. These platforms should be introduced early, and the etiquette to be followed could be outlined in initial activities. Consider the following questions:

Will you be relying heavily on email with your students? If so, how quickly should your students expect a response back from you when they email you? After an hour? A day? A week?

Are you using the Blackboard Announcements tool? What can students expect to see posted here, and how often should they be checking it?

When running Collaborate sessions, will students have access to their microphones throughout each session? When should they use them? What should the text chat be used for?

These are just a few examples of areas of communication that you need to consider. Be clear with your students about how you intend to communicate with them, and if there are methods or tools you would like them to use to

communicate with their peers. Set introductory activities that set a meaningful dialogue to allow them to communicate through the expected channels.

Digital Collaboration

Collaborating digitally can be daunting to students who have never engaged in this type of activity before, so building confidence in how to do this can be critical. The University provides several platforms within which student collaboration can be undertaken – Blackboard Collaborate, Padlet and the Office365 suite (OneDrive and Microsoft Word in particular) all provide straightforward ways to collaborate on different types of work and can be used individually or combined as the students become more adept.

You should consider how students to work engage with the learning roadmap set in your module. Individual work can be the backbone of many teaching practices, but in a blended mode where students spend much of their time working off-site in isolation, creating activities that require them to engage with one another can be vital in building the identity of the cohort and providing a sense of community. This can provide support, guidance and learning opportunities that might otherwise not exist for the student.

The introduction of collaborative tasks can often be built on top of the initial ICT Proficiency activities. (“Now that you have saved your work to OneDrive, share it with your team and comment on the accuracy of each other’s work”).

Digital Learning

Whether they have good ICT Proficiency or not, the ability to learn effectively using technology is something that few students will possess to a high level when starting at University. One of the fundamental aims of creating lifelong learners is developing their capability to assess the opportunities and challenges of learning digitally, providing them the means to use technology effectively and appropriately within any educational setting they may find themselves.

Consider the learner journey that you expect your students to undertake – from welcome through engagement, to assessment and feedback; participation and presentation; reflection, self-analysis, and progress monitoring. How do you expect your students to learn from these and so many other elements of their studies? How would they do this in a traditional on-site face-to-face setting? How does that change when learning digitally? What tools do they need, what skills do they need?

Many of these will already be in place as part of the existing teaching practice on most modules, but staff need to consider whether changes need to be made to benefit their students. Your [Faculty Learning & Research Librarians](#) within the Learning Skills Team will be able to work with you to help students navigate the range of information sources available to help them succeed. Librarians can also suggest how to use the digital library to support your virtual classroom (see the [Library blog post on “Using Your Digital Library to Support Your Virtual Classroom”](#) for more information).

As with the other digital capabilities, early introduction in a non-crucial manner is always the best approach.

Digital Wellbeing

When learning in a blended or fully online mode, it is vital that students consider their wellbeing, both physical and digital. Staff need to guide their students on how to look after their personal health and safety, how to act responsibly in digital environments, and how to manage their digital workload. Studying remotely to campus, often in isolation from other students, can create a disassociation with their peers and erode the sense of belonging and community that can be so important to students throughout their University life.

You may wish to consider activities that can build that sense of community, using Collaborate to run more social sessions, such as the “virtual pub quiz”. Students should be encouraged to engage with the Students’ Union and their online activities through their website and social media channels.

Building regular synchronous touch points in one-to-one or small group forms to allow students the opportunity to discuss concerns and raise issues can help to alleviate stress and mental health problems, particularly those related to their digital experience.

Other Digital Capabilities

Finally, consider the other digital capabilities – Information, Data and Media Literacies; Digital Identity; Digital Creation, Problem Solving and Innovation. Students will need to develop all of these in some capacity. Identify where these capabilities will be needed, and how they are being addressed for your students.

A range of support in developing digital capabilities is available from the [LTE Technology Enhanced Learning Team](#), the IT Services Training Team, the Learning Skills Team, and the Department of Enterprise, Employability and Research Development.

Further information about the University's Digital Capabilities Framework, along with resources for staff and students to support each capability, can be found on [the University's Digital Capabilities website](#).

4.7 Principle G

The model used must be scalable to adapt to any changes in the current situation.

Guidance from the government and other bodies regarding the COVID-19 situation is changing regularly, so it is safe to assume that between the time that staff design their approach, begin teaching in September, and complete the first semester/trimester of teaching, there may well be a shift in the number of students we can accommodate on campus. We could see restrictions ease, allowing more students on-site, or we could see them tighten and on-campus numbers become further restricted or removed as an option entirely.

As such the approach undertaken for each course must be scalable both up and down. The Flipped Learning model allows for this quite easily in many cases, moving activities from on-site face-to-face to digital or vice versa with minimal redevelopment or planning.

Where campus facilities are essential to teaching (for example, lab work), it is important that staff consider options on how those on-site face-to-face sessions might be replaced with digital activities should the campus be unavailable.

5. Where to get help

5.1 Guidance

- i. [Blended learning support](#) pages: detailed activity design and delivery advice, using various Learning Platform Suite systems for sharing posts with peers and/or just privately with yourself; case studies and links to training and learning technology support.
- ii. [Blackboard Help section](#): learning technologies guides inc. video tutorials, full training session recordings and quick guides and video tutorials.

[Digital Capabilities site](#)

- iii. [Prism](#): the University's repository of innovative practices in learning & teaching provides case studies on Blended Learning and other related practices.
- iv. Guides for students on [our blended learning approach](#), our [main learning technologies and IT systems](#), guidance on effective online learning on the [Off-campus engagement and learning Padlet](#) and the [Learning Skills Hub](#)

5.2 Staff development and training

- i. Contact your Digital Academic Developer for advice on staff development & training opportunities, including how to do the things suggested in this guide, and to request bespoke School/subject/course-level staff development.
- ii. Contact your Learning Developer or Learning & Research Librarian to help you with [study skills development opportunities](#).

- iii. Contact your Employability and Skills Manager to support you in designing and delivering blended employability and career management activities.
- iv. See StaffSpace and the Blackboard Help section for more in-depth staff development and guidance for designing and facilitating learning.
- v. [Learning Platform Suite technical training](#) – flipped with initial via session recordings and hands-on via surgeries to be available when you need it.
- vi. For any queries on pedagogy, development, or technical queries, visit the daily [Lunchtime Learning Surgeries](#), drop-in sessions available every weekday from 1-2pm via Collaborate.

5.3 Support

- i. Digital Academic Developer: advice on designing online activities - efficiency as well as effectiveness, encouraging, sustaining and monitoring engagement; supporting development of students’ digital capabilities; facilitating sharing of practice, ‘support the supporter’ advice to enable colleagues to support students.
- ii. Learning Technology Skills Developer: Workshops and small group/1-to-1 training on use of the learning platforms available.
- iii. [Learning Skills Team](#): Support and training on academic and information literacies or research skills. Contact your Faculty Learning & research librarian for collection development or access to Library materials.
- iv. Employability and Skills Manager: advice on integrating the Future 360 Framework into your programme design, including training on and support with delivering employability sessions and activities including blended approaches to providing work-related experiences.
- v. Faculty/School Directors of Learning & Teaching.
- vi. Your colleagues can help you too: share your practice with each other.

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