

Digital
2030



Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector

Blended teaching and learning: practical tips for
teaching practitioners

December 2020



Introduction

This document is a practically-focused addition to complement previous [blended learning guidance](#) as part of our [Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector](#).

The skills and pedagogic approaches required for online teaching and learning are different to those required for in-person, or classroom-based teaching and learning. This is a complex area of practice and we appreciate that individual practitioners will have different levels of previous experience in adapting their practice to the online environment. Many teaching practitioners and learners are discovering how to work and learn in settings that may be unfamiliar. Conversely, many practitioners are already experienced and confident in delivering online and blended learning, and may have been able to support colleagues in further developing their skills.

Based on initial feedback of actual experiences and ‘lessons learnt’ so far from delivery during the early part of the 2020/21 academic year, this document has been designed to give teaching practitioners some practical tips for using blended learning approaches effectively which may help with managing situations where some learners are present in a classroom and some are learning remotely. The document also makes some suggestions for ways in which general good practice from ‘traditional’ pedagogy can be transferred into the online environment.

The ‘Post-16’ sector covers a wide range of provision for learners aged 16+, including full time learning, part time learning, academic and vocational subjects, apprenticeships and traineeships, and lifelong learning. Learning providers and teaching practitioners may find that not all elements of this document will be directly applicable to their own circumstances. This document isn’t intended as a comprehensive “how-to” guide, but presents a compendium of tips so that individuals can pick out points that may be useful to them in their everyday teaching and learning practice. We welcome feedback, suggestions and tips on approaches that are working well, to post16quality@gov.wales.

This document has been developed with our Blended Learning Working Group, including representatives from Joint Trade Unions, Estyn, Jisc, NTfW, ColegauCymru, Qualifications Wales, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, National Centre for Learning Welsh, Further Education institutions, Work-Based Learning providers and Adult Learning in the Community partnerships.

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Key definitions used in this document:

- **Blended learning** provides a combination of face-to-face learning and dynamic digital activities and content that facilitate any time/any place learning¹.
- **Synchronous learning** involves scheduled sessions where learners attend and participate in 'live' activities (online or face to face) with their tutor and other learners.
- **Asynchronous learning** involves the learner completing set tasks and independent learning, without 'live' interaction.

In context of Covid-19 where learners may not be able to be present on site, or where classes need to be split into smaller groups, remote learning can help learners continue to progress.

In some cases learning providers have planned blended learning programmes for the whole of 2020/21, to help manage numbers of learners on-site at any given time.

What are the potential benefits of using blended learning effectively?

- Planning blended learning effectively retains a level of structure and key 'milestone' points where the learner and teaching practitioner can check that learning has taken place, measure progress and receive/provide feedback.
- As with 'traditional' sessions, a remote session can be broken down by the type of activity into smaller blocks (for example; tutor input, learner activity, group feedback and lesson evaluation). Asynchronous learning provides more flexibility so that these activities don't necessarily need to be completed 'back to back' in a single sitting.
- Asynchronous sessions can also help learners to continue learning in situations where they may face challenges in their home environment (e.g. access to devices, connectivity, quiet spaces to learn) or need to balance time spent on learning with other needs (e.g. parental or other caring responsibilities).
- Synchronous sessions can be used to provide 'set' contact points and opportunities for greater interaction between tutors and learners; more in-depth exploration of key issues; opportunities for learners to share what they have learnt and to engage with their peers in real time.
- Using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities builds in flexibility, encourages learner autonomy and can allow teaching practitioners to focus their support more meaningfully.

¹ <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/creating-blended-learning-content>

Tips for facilitating a good remote learning experience

Setting clear expectations

- Learners should be used to having a code of conduct or standard requirements for behaviour when they are physically present in class. Your organisation may have produced a similar code for online behaviour.
- [Advice from SAGE](#) is that guidance on how to behave is more likely to be adhered to if it is co-produced with the staff and learners who will be affected by it. Codes of conduct could include:
 - Punctuality and attendance, including whether attendance at a particular time is mandatory and whether learners can leave the session.
 - Expectations around participation in sessions (use of cameras, microphones, chat functions, for example).
 - Getting dressed and arriving ready to learn.
- Make sure learners have seen the guidelines or code of conduct, and that you have a clear process to challenge those who don't comply and know what action to take if the behaviour continues.
- Lateness and non-attendance should be recorded in line with your provider's attendance policies and processes, so that patterns or trends can be identified and the learner given appropriate support.
- Starting each session with a brief and clear overview of how and when you will be expecting learners to participate will help learners to prepare and may help learners who are anxious about 'getting it right' and not making mistakes in front of their peers.
- Explain to learners how and when they can ask a question during a session (e.g. by raising hands and asking a question verbally, or typing a question in an online chat function), and/or how to contact you with any queries privately outside scheduled sessions. If you are not able to address all questions during a session letting learners know you will respond to any unanswered questions at a later point may help to manage expectations.
- Give learners a clear and realistic timescale for when to expect responses to queries and feedback on any marked or assessed work. You could have a standard brief response prepared to use when acknowledging receipt of learners' work (reassuring them that their work has reached you), which also outlines the timescale for receiving feedback.
- Using audio feedback in place of text can speed up the process for teaching practitioners and can enhance person to person contact.
- When used appropriately, peer to peer feedback can also encourage participation and engagement, and take some of the pressure off teaching practitioners. This does need framing properly, so that learners know what is expected of them and how to give constructive feedback.

Structuring teaching and learning activities

- Delivering sessions simultaneously to learners on-site, and others at home, can be very challenging for practitioners. Making sure that everyone is participating and has their needs met is particularly difficult. Consider whether remote learners can take part in different ways or at different times.
- Sessions (synchronous or asynchronous) delivered in short focused blocks help to keep the attention of learners and reduce screen fatigue. A session can be broken down by the type of activity into smaller blocks (e.g. tutor input, learner activity, group feedback and lesson evaluation) which don't necessarily need to be completed 'back to back' in a single sitting.
- Providing a mixture of synchronous sessions and asynchronous activities allows learners to study flexibly whilst still feeling connected to their tutors and peers.
- Using collaborative online working areas for peer and/or group asynchronous tasks can enrich the learner's experience and provide a sense of connection. Consider whether learner collaborative activities may require staff input (including supervision or moderation). The level of staff input required may vary depending on the nature of the exercise and on the learners' familiarity with this type of collaborative activity (and any digital tools being used).
- Your organisation's platform or [digital tools](#) used by your organisation may support collaborative activities such as: open microphones and breakout rooms for discussion; private chat function for asking questions or seeking technical support; polling and quizzing to check understanding and idea sharing; screensharing and annotation tools to illustrate key concepts.
- Experimenting with digital tools and testing ideas with a colleague before using them 'for real' with learners can help to reduce practitioner anxiety in live online learning sessions. Support and/or training may also be available from your organisation.
- Be aware that learners may also need some support and time to become confident with using a new digital tool. Introducing too many new tools in a short space of time can lead to learners focusing on the technology rather than the content of their learning.
- Break up 'passive' learning (e.g. listening, watching, reading) with more 'active' tasks (e.g. short quizzes or reflective activities). Active tasks can be used to check learners' comprehension and help to monitor the learner's progress; particularly with asynchronous sessions.
- Some learners may be worried about falling behind if they are spending less time on-site, particularly if they have exams or assessments coming up. Reassuring them that all the curriculum content will be covered, and giving them practical suggestions for independent learning, could help them to feel more in control.

Preparing resources and using digital tools

- When creating curriculum resources for planned asynchronous delivery, keep any audio or video resource to a 'bite-sized' length, and combine these with activities where learners engage with the content. Too much reliance on lengthy or low quality videos will often result in learner disengagement.
- Recording sessions can provide a useful reference for learners to revisit, or to use as a 'catch up' resource. However, be aware that recording may not be appropriate in all circumstances, and all participants (learners and staff) should be asked for consent before a session is recorded. Recording sessions can add value for all learners, but is not an adequate substitute for regular active participation in group sessions.
- Learners may be using a wide range of devices with different screen sizes (e.g. smartphone, tablet, Chromebook, laptop, PC) and with differing hardware (e.g. with/without a mouse, trackpad, or keyboard). Learners may also not have access to the same operating systems and/or software that they would use when onsite. This needs to be considered, and regularly reviewed, to inform the design of learning activities, content and resources.
- Learner feedback highlights that simplicity and consistency is important to enable them to access activities, content and support easily.
- Make sure that there is a sound pedagogical reason for using any digital tool to help boost learner engagement, and consider experimenting with a new tool before using it 'for real' with learners.
- Consider how easy the digital tool or platform is to use; for example, does the learner need to create a separate account or password (in advance) in order to use it, or will they be able to log in automatically via your organisation's VLE or other core platform?
- Consider having a "Plan B" if the technology doesn't work as planned.

Inclusion

- Creating accessible content will benefit all learners, including learners who may not have a declared disability or additional support need.
- When planning your delivery, be mindful of the challenges faced by remote learners.
- Individual learner and class profiling activities can still be used to identify needs, but will need to be adapted to consider the digital environment, including digital devices, tools, etc. Some learning providers may include a personal audit of digital equipment and capabilities as part of the induction process for new learners.
- Some learner behaviour (e.g. not being willing to turn cameras on or participate in live video activities) may be influenced by other things going on in their immediate surroundings, and/or technical issues such as connectivity of limited bandwidth.

- Is it an imperative that a learner appears on camera? If learners are required to have 'cameras on', is this essential throughout the session, or just at certain points (e.g. when joining at the start, when asking a question or contributing to an interactive session)? Have you communicated this requirement clearly to your learners?
- Encouraging learners to use a headset (or the earphones with microphone which are often supplied with a smartphone) may help with reducing background noise and enable them to contribute verbally.
- Some providers have created corporate backgrounds which their staff and learners are able to use in live online sessions (e.g. on Microsoft Teams or Zoom). If corporate backgrounds aren't available, you could invite learners to join live video sessions using a blurred background to avoid sharing their immediate environment.
- Learners with additional learning needs may benefit from exploring any built-in accessibility settings on their device; and/or using accessibility tools and functionality (e.g. Microsoft Immersive Reader, ReciteMe add-on etc)
- You should be aware of your organisation's internal processes for identifying accessibility and digital exclusion issues and offering support to learners; including whom/how to contact for further advice.

Online safety and privacy

- Staff and learners should have an understanding of core organisational policies and procedures which will apply in the online environment (e.g. safeguarding and data protection).
- Develop good personal habits, such as checking that you do not have any sensitive or confidential information open on your screen before starting a live session with learners, to prevent accidental sharing.

Where can I find more help and support?

The 'Post-16' sector covers a wide range of provision for learners and different types (and sizes) of learning provider organisations. Your learning provider is likely to have channels available for you to obtain more information about your organisation's policies and procedures, and request assistance with issues such as:

- Technical and/or IT support
- CPD, training and/or peer support (e.g. mentoring; digital champions)

We have also signposted some more general information on key topics which you may find useful.

Blended learning guidance

- [Blended learning guidance](#) for Post-16 providers, co-produced by the Welsh Government's Blended Learning working group members
- Useful hints, tips and resources are highlighted in Jisc's new [digital pedagogy toolkit](#) (published in October 2020)
- Jisc's quick guide [Developing blended learning approaches](#)
- [QAA: Building a taxonomy for digital learning \(2020\)](#)

Accessibility

- The sector led digital accessibility working group have developed a [digital accessibility toolkit](#) resource
- The [University of Sussex](#) and [Worcestershire County Council](#) have produced online guides and downloadable posters

Professional development

- The [Post-16 Continuing Professional Development](#) page on Hwb signposts material to support staff, including some free online training
- Hwb's [Keeping safe online zone](#) supports children and young people, parents/carers, practitioners and governors, with online safety and cyber security