Blended learning review

**Report of the OfS-appointed
Blended Learning Review Panel**

October 2022

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Executive summary

The Office for Students (OfS) commissioned a review of blended learning that aimed to provide information to support the English higher education sector's understanding of how blended learning approaches might relate to conditions B1 and B2 in the OfS's regulatory framework.[1] The review was carried out over the summer of 2022 and it focused on blended learning approaches in six English higher education providers with a focus on four subject areas: humanities; medicine and allied health; natural sciences and engineering; and performing arts.

The OfS appointed a review panel (see Appendix 1) who carried out desk-based research, collected survey data and conducted interviews with staff and students in each provider.

The OfS student panel supported the review at all stages. Student panel members were present in all meetings with staff and they facilitated the meetings with students in each provider.

Main findings

Following an emergency pivot to online delivery at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the higher education sector is now in an *emergent context,* as providers consider their long-term learning and teaching strategies. All academics we spoke to suggested that the 2022-23 academic year would allow for a more considered blend, where learning from the previous academic year could be reflected on and used to inform curriculum design and pedagogic practice.

All of the providers were able to set out their approach to blended learning, situating this within their educational strategy, but the rationale for blend approaches adopted at course level was not clear to students.

The panel's desk-based research indicated that prospective students were not given clear enough information about the balance of face-to-face, online and blended study a student could expect and the digital skills and knowledge they would need to engage successfully in their studies. The student interviews confirmed this finding.

Whilst students valued the flexibility of asynchronous online lectures, which gave them the chance to review and re-watch material at their own speed, the panel heard that many of the students interviewed valued on-campus lectures which

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[1] The OfS's regulatory framework is available at https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/

supported peer learning, gave students separation between their home and study environments, supported their motivation to learn and helped them to engage with challenging course content.

Students reported that in many cases they received less timely and lower quality feedback on learning in online learning contexts.

Students reported on the isolation they experienced studying online during the lockdowns and they identified a long-term negative impact on academic community and the lack of peer networks and support that has resulted from this period of isolation.

Students reported cases of course overload. In these examples, students found it difficult to engage with significant amounts of online content whilst at the same time managing their on-campus timetable. Integrating their online and on-campus learning timetable was a challenge.

The panel identified examples of high quality blended approaches and innovations that supported students' learning, but pockets of poor online teaching practice and poor online learning resources were referred to by students.

The review panel took the view that the balance of face-to-face, online and blended delivery is not the key determinate of teaching quality. The examples of high quality teaching that were identified in this review would be viewed as high quality across on campus and online modes of delivery. This also applies to examples of poor teaching quality.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for higher education providers. These recommendations highlight the issues and approaches that the panel considers important in designing and delivering a high quality academic experience involving blended learning approaches.

Section 1 – Aims and methodology

Aims

1. Following an emergency pivot to online delivery at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the higher education sector is now in an *emergent context,* as providers consider their long-term learning and teaching strategies. Although the concept of blended learning is by no means new, the pandemic has foregrounded discussions about blended learning approaches across the higher education sector.

2. The OfS review of blended learning aims to provide information to the English higher education sector to support their understanding of how blended learning approaches might relate to conditions B1 and B2 of the regulatory framework.[2] These conditions require registered higher education providers to ensure students receive a high quality academic experience (B1) and to take all reasonable steps to ensure students receive resources, support, and effective engagement sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience (B2).

3. The OfS appointed the blended learning review panel in May 2022 (see Appendix 1). The panel was commissioned to design and carry out fieldwork that would produce a body of evidence to inform the OfS's report on blended learning in relation to conditions B1 and B2.

4. This panel examined six providers' approaches to blended learning. The sample included:

   a. High, medium and low tariff higher education providers

   b. Large, research-intensive providers through to small and specialist

   c. A geographical spread that covered different regions in England.

5. This report presents the review panel's findings and offers advice and recommendations to the OfS on the quality of the approaches identified. The OfS will reach its own independent judgments about the approaches observed in this report in relation to relevant conditions of registration. The OfS report will set out the approaches to blended learning that would be likely to meet the OfS's regulatory requirements and those that would not.

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[2] Office for Students, 'Securing student success: The regulatory framework for higher education in England' (2018). Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/

6. This report also includes advice and recommendations for higher education providers. Our fieldwork allowed us fascinating and privileged insight into the views of students, course leads, e-learning leads and senior leadership. We hope our findings, as well as informing the OfS, act as a valuable resource, sharing learning in relation to blended learning and supporting the development of teaching and learning across the sector.

7. The panel agreed two principles that informed our work at all stages. Firstly, a commitment to putting students at the centre of the review and, secondly, a commitment to a careful consideration of equality and diversity throughout our work.

Methodology

8. This report has been informed by fieldwork carried out at six OfS-registered higher education providers. All providers took part in the review voluntarily and we are grateful for their generosity in time, cooperation, and openness. Participating providers will not be named publicly in the interests of confidentiality.

9. Providers were asked to nominate courses for review in up to three of the following four subject areas: humanities; medicine and allied health; natural sciences and engineering; and performing arts. Not all providers offered provision across three of the four subject areas, so fewer courses were reviewed where this was the case. In total, data were gathered from sixteen courses.

10. At each provider, we held interviews with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Education (or equivalent), course leads, groups of students studying the courses being reviewed, and the e-learning lead. The PVC Education and course leads also received a written questionnaire, and we carried out desk-based research to review publicly available information on providers' websites.

11. For interviews and questionnaires, we developed a set of questions specific to each group which would ensure we collected the data necessary to get a clear understanding of blended learning approaches being taken. It was important to speak to a range of people within each provider to allow us to triangulate the information we collected and gain as full a picture of the situation at each provider as possible.

12. The technology context was different in each provider, and this technology context was essential for understanding how blended learning provision was enabled, quality assured and available equally to course leaders and students across their institution. A member of the review panel met with a senior member of staff in each institution to ensure that the panel had good

information about the technology available for high quality, up to date and inclusive blended delivery.

13. We worked closely with the OfS's student panel throughout our review. We held three workshops with the panel, gaining particular input on the issues the review questions needed to cover. Four student panel members also joined the review panel in the fieldwork interviews. A student panel member attended and asked questions at every meeting with staff. Student panel members led all interviews with student groups. The views and perspectives of students informed the approach taken and the questions asked of providers throughout the fieldwork phase.

Section 2 – Blended learning definitions

14. Digitally supported, fully online and remote learning and teaching were common in the higher education sector before the pandemic. However, the pandemic led to what Barber (2021) referred to as a 'gravity assist': a metaphor that describes the ways in which digital and online learning and teaching practices were propelled forward, extending their reach across the whole educational community.

15. Whilst the term 'blended learning' has been deployed for this review we note that other terms are in use that all give subtly different definitions of learning and teaching that includes significant digital elements. For example, there is digitally enhanced learning and teaching, technology enhanced learning, online, remote and post-digital education. The nomenclature is wide ranging but for the purposes of this review the panel considered a number of definitions drawn from existing literature.

Definitions of blended learning

Barber (2021)[3]

16. The current working definition of blended learning employed by the OfS is broad, focusing on the combination of in-person and online or digital delivery. The definition was set out in the OfS's 2021 report of the digital teaching and learning review, led by then-Chair Sir Michael Barber. It states:

   Blended learning is 'teaching and learning that combines in-person delivery and delivery in a digital environment.'

17. The report adds descriptions of the two components of its definition. 'In-person delivery' comprises 'teaching and learning activities whose participants are located in the same physical space and make limited or no use of a digital environment.' The phrase 'delivery in a digital environment' is used to highlight that not all delivery that is not in-person is carried out whilst directly using online services.

18. The panel members bring different backgrounds and positionality to this review, but agree that an effective relationship between in-person and online or digital elements is important for a high quality higher education course delivered through blended learning.

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[3] Sir Michael Barber, 'Gravity Assist: Propelling higher education towards a brighter future' (2021), pp 29-30. Available at: https://ofslivefs.blob.core.windows.net/files/Gravity assist/Gravity-assist-DTL-finalforweb.pdf.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004)[4]

Blended learning is 'the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences.'

19. Garrison and Kanuka (2004), stated their definition in a position paper discussing, as they put it, 'the emerging trend in higher education to blend text-based asynchronous Internet technology with face-to-face learning.' The essential wording in their definition is 'thoughtful integration.' This phrase emphasises the need for technology in blended learning to be deployed strategically and systematically ('thoughtful'), and the need for in-person and online or digital delivery to interact in a complementary and co-productive manner ('integration'). This definition thus adds a quality dimension to defining blended learning. It is not just the pure combination of modes that is important, but the effective functioning of the relationship between the two.

20. This definition can be further developed. For example, Laurillard (2015)[5] expands the definition to highlight the relationship between blended learning approaches and the requirement for education to meet needs of the 21st century. Her definition indicates that external factors (such as changes in the functioning of the workplace or economy) should influence how blended learning is designed. She states:

Blended learning is 'the thoughtful integration of conventional and digital methods of teaching and learning as the means to achieve our greatest ambitions for 21st century education.'

21. An effective relationship between in-person and online or digital elements is important for a high quality higher education course applying blended learning.

Review panel working definition of blended learning

22. The panel concluded that the working definition deployed for this review would be Barber's (2021) definition with the addition of the 'thoughtful integration' referred to by Garrison and Kanuka (2004). This combination of definitions

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[4] D. Randy Garrison and Heather Kanuka, 2004, 'Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education,' in *Internet and Higher Education* 7 95-105 (2004), pg. 96. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222863721_Blended_Learning_Uncovering_Its_Transformative_Potential_in_Higher_Education

[5] Diana Laurillard, 'Thinking about blended learning: A paper for the Thinkers in Residence programme' (2015), pg. 10. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1549749/7/Laurillard%20chapter%20HE%20in%20_blended-learning_en.pdf

helpfully foregrounds the importance of carefully considered blends of on-campus and digital teaching and learning. Different blends may be used for different purposes and at different times. This was important to us because it enables us to differentiate emergency pivot blends that allowed little time for careful consideration and more recent blends that have been adapted and adopted over the last year.

23. These definitions are a reminder that digital learning is present within all parts of higher education and that whilst we regularly refer to face-to-face, online and on-campus in this report we recognise that students' experience of studying is much less compartmentalised than these terms might suggest. Many students use digital devices (phones, laptops, etc.) to access learning resources whether they are on or off campus. These examples underline the ways that the digital is embroidered into education in post-digital learning spaces.[6]

24. It is easy to take for granted the face-to-face part of a blended offer and only focus on the digital element. The blended learning definitions above remind us that it is the coherence of the blend that is crucial and that learning and research into face-to-face, on-campus teaching needs to continue.

25. This review is tightly defined with a focus specifically on the subject matter of the OfS's conditions B1 and B2, in relation to blended learning. The panel notes that there is extensive high quality scholarship and research in the field of digital and blended teaching and learning.[7] This OfS review does not attempt to replicate this scholarship. Instead, we examined blended teaching and learning as enacted and experienced by a sample of students, educators, and senior leaders using snap-shot data across six providers and four subject areas.

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[6] Lamb, J., Carvalho, L., Gallagher, M. et al., 'The Postdigital Learning Spaces of Higher Education,' *Postdigital Science and Education* 4, pp. 1–12 (2022)

[7] See Further Reading section

Section 3 – Themes and findings

Analysis

The themes below were identified through a process of iterative analysis of evidence gathered during the panel's fieldwork. This included careful review of recorded interviews and interview transcripts, review of desk-based research and of questionnaire responses. Panel members' own notes and meeting transcripts were reviewed by other panel members.

Draft themes were discussed in review panel meetings and meetings with the OfS student panel to sense check and make modifications as required. This process of drafting and checking in with the review panel and the OfS student panel happened several times. The review panel and OfS student panel commented on the draft findings as they developed. At several stages, the original data (transcripts, questionnaires and desk-based research) were returned to in order to check and validate our conclusions.

Sample

The sample of staff and students interviewed was arranged between the OfS and each provider. It is important to note that we are reporting specifically on the desk-based research, questionnaire data and interview data we collected, rather than describing practices and approaches found across the wider higher education sector.

Timelines and government lockdown

26. Whilst this is a post-lockdown review of blended learning, unsurprisingly it was challenging for our interviewees to disentangle post-lockdown approaches from those adopted in the emergency pivot. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown and pivot to fully online delivery felt very recent for all of the staff and students we interviewed and sometimes their responses moved seamlessly between descriptions of the current offer to descriptions of the offer during the emergency pivot. Government-imposed lockdown restrictions in other countries that prevented students coming to the UK to study were continuing while we were collecting data in the summer of 2022. This was a reminder to the panel that the educational challenges associated with the pandemic are not in the past. This means that there is not a clear-cut delineation between lockdown and post-lockdown approaches in our data. The legacy of the emergency pivot and the pandemic cannot be ignored as a key context for this report and its findings. Most of the students we interviewed had experienced a period of fully online

teaching (at school or in earlier years of their higher education study) and the impact of this was still having a profound effect on their experience of study. They were keen to talk to our OfS student facilitators about these experiences.

27. This review was carried out in an academic year that started with much uncertainty about whether or not a full return to campus would be allowed and whether or not social distancing would be required and these are important contexts to recognise.

28. All providers in this review had returned to primarily face-to-face provision and linked the return to this model to government steers and student preference. Students reported that the balance of on-campus teaching had increased over the academic year 2021-22. The panel noted that some universities had been more cautious about bringing teaching back on site in the early part of the academic year due to local Covid infection rates and/or challenges for international students who were in some cases unable to travel to the UK.

The blend approach: strategic, departmental, local?

29. The review panel found a relatively high degree of variation in approaches to blended learning across providers and subject areas.

30. The term 'blended learning' was used in different ways by staff and students in this review. In some cases, it simply referred to accessing materials and activities on the virtual learning environment (VLE), whilst in other cases it referred to formal online delivery of lectures as well as online activities, tests and assessments.[8] There was no clear and widely understood nomenclature and this caused difficulty for students because there is no shared language to describe the course offer.

31. Several of the providers had well-articulated educational strategies that set out their overarching educational ambition. This was usually accompanied by a more operationally focused set of teaching and learning principles or models that could be applied to course design across the provider. The role of blended learning was addressed in different ways within these strategies. In at least two of the providers, the educational strategy made it clear that most decisions about course design and/or blended learning were owned at department or subject level.

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[8] VLEs are web-based platforms which host a variety of learning materials, including but not limited to administrative information (e.g. course timetables), recorded lectures, documents, and interactive course elements (e.g. quizzes). Some also have social features, including group collaboration and discussion tools.

Ratio approaches to blended learning

32. The ways that providers articulated their approach to blended learning varied considerably. One provider set out a ratio of online and on-campus delivery that was used for planning purposes across the institution.

33. As the review work developed it became clearer that students and staff across the providers in our sample were using 'ratio' based definitions in different ways. For example, one group of students pointed out that there is a difference between 'teaching ratios' and 'learning ratios'. In a teaching definition, the ratio typically refers to contact hours that are on campus or online. In a learning focused ratio, it can refer to hours spent studying online and/or on campus. Prior to the pandemic it would not have been common for providers to express their digital learning (access to VLE and online learning activities) as a ratio.

34. A ratio-based approach can inadvertently describe learning as a simple two-sided online/campus binary that does not reflect the complex ways that digital teaching and learning is threaded through the entire learning experience. For example, students (before and after the online pivot) engage with digital learning on campus as well as at home.

Digitally enhanced learning and teaching

35. Some providers expressed the view that articulating blended learning as a ratio of online and on campus was a dated way to approach digitally enhanced learning and teaching. One member of staff commented:

'Blended kind[s] of disciplinary practices are much more interesting to us than how many hours online and how many hours in the studio. That's not really a conversation – that feels like yesterday's conversation, to be honest with you.'

36. For many of the course leads we interviewed there was a focus on blended teaching and learning as, in the words of one course lead, 'just a way of delivering what we are trying to achieve'. Online components of courses (such as synchronous or asynchronous, interactive activities and online assessment and feedback) were viewed as being supplements to learning that simply reflect modern teaching approaches rather than represented examples of blended learning.

37. Students and staff reported that the quality of the teaching was more important than the ratio of online and on campus delivery. One course leader commented:

'[The blend is] not easy to measure. You can measure the output, are students happy, succeeding in the course, getting a job, or going on to higher study?'

38. One provider reported that they rejected the term blended learning completely, only using the term blended learning for courses where much of the delivery

was planned to be online. By this definition, this provider ran a very small number of blended learning courses. Its primary approach to teaching delivery was on campus.

39. Another provider said it would avoid using the term blended to describe its approach. Terms such as digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT), technology enhanced learning (TEL) and digital education (DE) appear to be increasingly used.

40. One course offered very precise articulation of the ratio:

'Learning is delivered online at least 1 hour per week with an additional minimum 2 to 3 hours face-to-face learning and a combination of at least 3 hours of face to face and online learning per week.'

41. One pro-vice-chancellor stated that their provider's ambition in the longer term was to offer all students choice of where, when and how they studied but generally the blend was determined by the provider rather than the student.

42. Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements or disciplinary contexts dictated the blend in some cases. For example, it was suggested that practical aspects of engineering and health-related courses required access to on-campus lab sessions to meet PSRB requirements.

Module approaches to blended learning

43. As referred to above, several of the providers had well-articulated policies stating that decisions regarding the nature of a blend should be made at subject or indeed module level. This reflects long standing practices in higher education where lecturers and course teams make local decisions about the teaching approach that they consider works best to support students meeting the learning outcomes of the module or course in their discipline.

44. Offering departmental autonomy to decide the blend appeared to be a core value in these providers. The reported view was that module leaders and subject leads were best placed to select the blend that they felt worked best for teaching their subject and this led to a range of approaches across modules. Students and staff recognised that some subjects and areas of courses suited online delivery better than others. For example, it appears to be increasingly common for so called 'theory' elements of courses to be delivered online.

45. The panel recognises that blended approaches across subjects will vary and that there is no 'one size fits all'. One consequence of an approach that leaves decision making at module level is that it sometimes created student timetables that were challenging to manage (for example, it was challenging accessing online content on campus if two modules were delivered on the same day that

required both online and on-campus engagement). The key risk to students' academic experience arises from an uncoordinated blend across a course where staff are not fully cognisant of the demands placed on students across the module combination.

46. Some students reported that they occasionally felt that academics were offering online content in a way that suited them and their own digital capabilities rather than a particularly thoughtful blend that supported learning.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure their approaches to blended learning offer a coherent learning experience to students, including ensuring coherence at a course level if decisions about the blend are decided at a module level.

Student number growth

47. In our interviews we noted other drivers that informed the blend. In several cases, decisions about a permanent shift to online delivery for elements of a course were linked to managing space on campus due to reported increases in student numbers. In 2020 and 2021 English school exams were cancelled and schools relied on teacher assessments. This was associated with grade inflation which in turn created recruitment pressures in some providers.

48. Given the particularity of this pandemic-related student growth context, the panel takes the view that drawing general conclusions at this stage about student growth and its relationship to managing blended learning is not possible. However, as we move forward and student number planning returns to normal cycles, it is our expectation that the sector will not be using online delivery models as a means to manage student number growth. All of the providers offered strategic educational frameworks that stated that blend decisions were related to educational principles. If blended approaches were driven by unplanned student growth rather than pedagogic principles then we suggest that the OfS may want to consider this issue further in relation to compliance with conditions of registration.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that growth in student numbers does not drive the approach to blended learning and that, instead, the blended approach should be informed by sound pedagogic principles.

Communicating the reasons for the blend to students

49. Course leads who demonstrated a deep understanding of pedagogy were able to articulate the decision making associated with the blend on their course. In many cases these approaches to designing the blend were linked to their provider's educational strategy but there was limited evidence that the principles supporting these decisions had been communicated to students.

50. Students we interviewed repeatedly reported that the nature of the blend was not always clearly communicated (a problem exacerbated by the recency of the emergency pivot and the absence of a common or shared language), and web-based research conducted by the panel confirms that in many cases the approach to blended learning was not clear on course content pages of providers' websites. We found very limited information on providers' website that would help a prospective student understand the ways that course teams approach blended learning on any given course.

51. It is the panel's view that a student embarking on a course at university should be able to understand why their course is designed in a certain way and how this is intended to support their learning. It is important that students are clear about the approach so they can plan for it – for example by accessing digital learning support where they need to. When staff communicated the reasons for online delivery clearly, students responded well. If course teams are developing well-considered blended opportunities for students, it is the panel's view that explaining this to students will support engagement. Ensuring students know what to expect is likely to have a positive impact on students' academic experience.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure applicants have clear web-based information about the approach to blended learning adopted on courses they are applying for. This information does not need to be expressed as a ratio but should give prospective students a clear picture of the modalities of learning they will encounter on any given course.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that, once enrolled, students continue to be supplied with accurate information about the blended approaches adopted on their course and modules across each year of study.

> **Recommendation**
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> Providers should ensure that, if a ratio-based approach is adopted as a way to describe the balance of a blended offer, the ratio definition is clear, to help students know what to expect.
>
> **Recommendation**
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> Providers should ensure that sound pedagogic reasons underpin the blend approach adopted, and that these principles are communicated to students so that they understand the rationale for approaches adopted.

Curriculum

52. The panel noted a tendency for what might be described as the 'theory' parts of courses to be delivered online. In one case students were concerned that this might be separating theory and practice and that the integration of the two was important for their learning. In some health-related disciplines, students reported that a more blended approach to harmonising practice and theory might be useful in enhancing their educational experience. This highlights the importance of making explicit connections between curriculum elements taught across different modalities.

On-campus teaching and learning

53. This is a review of blended learning and we observed that discussions of blended learning often focus on the digital part of the offer. During the early stages of full lockdown, all online learning was off campus but post-lockdown we are reminded that digital learning is engaged with in an integrated way on campus as well as off campus and is a core part of student learning. This means it is important to reflect on how the physical campus supports blended learning.

54. The panel was concerned that a focus on the digital aspects of teaching and learning might suggest that campus-based teaching is not seen as needing ongoing development and pedagogic enhancement. It remains the view of the panel that it is important for the sector to enhance campus-based learning as well as online learning.

55. Some course teams and students (particularly in performing arts) really valued the return to campus and appreciated a blend that was close to a ratio of 90:10, where 90 per cent was on campus and 10 per cent online.

56. Educators working in performing arts, natural sciences/engineering, nursing, medicine or other allied health disciplines cited the importance of specialist

space and kit for learning and viewed the on-campus (or on placement) part of the student experience as a foundational part of learning.

57. Students preferred to have peer-to-peer interaction (such as seminars) face to face on campus.

58. Students reported that it was sometimes hard to locate free space in libraries to study. They also reported that it was hard to find space on campus to engage with online study (synchronous or asynchronous). Providers whose physical estate is limited or listed (historic) reported that they found the challenge of fitting out buildings for blended and hybrid delivery and providing soundproofed study spaces (for example to watch recorded lectures on campus) very difficult.

59. This issue was of particular concern to the panel in cases where there was no coherent approach to blended learning at course level, meaning that students sometimes were required to combine online and on-campus learning in one day – rather than having days that are blocked for online or on-campus learning (which students preferred).

60. Digitally enhanced learning and teaching is placing new demands on the physical estate and, for the successful delivery of a blended offer, the needs of students who require space on campus to engage with online study needs to be addressed.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that appropriate provision is made on-campus to support blended learning, informed by consideration of how students engage with online elements of their course while they are on campus.

Learning resources issues

61. Staff referred to students' access to learning technologists, digital development courses, laptop loans and access to grants and bursaries to fund the purchase of equipment to access the digital learning environment. Some students were not aware that they could access a laptop loan service but this might be because they didn't need to make use of this offer.

62. One provider described its move to using e-books in reading lists rather than physical books. Post-pandemic, this can be beneficial to improve accessibility for disabled and commuter students; however, the panel did note the challenge of licensing costs. It was reported that university libraries have seen significant increases in costs of providing digital materials, e-books (and access to archive collections) for study. E-book publishers and software vendors have increased their prices and licensing costs.

63. Students reported that they were disappointed with restricted opening times to borrow and return kit (cameras, etc.) which they considered to be inflexible and not meeting their needs.

Studying on campus and personal privacy

64. One provider emphasised the importance of creating a safe studio space by not recording everything so that students could develop their creative practice without being filmed. When deciding whether teaching sessions are recorded, providers should consider implications related to student consent and the safety of learning spaces (do students feel able to experiment and innovate without worrying about a recording being shared with others?).

Equality, diversity and the needs of different students

65. Reflection on issues of diversity and inclusion are threaded through this report but this section briefly touches on the panel's shared view about the importance of ensuring that students with different learning needs are accommodated in relation to blended course design. The review questions focused attention on the ways that each provider was specifically addressing the learning needs of a diverse student community. We note that the review constraints meant that we were not able to interview students representing the full diversity of students' identity and experience and we are basing our findings on what was reported to us by staff and students in our sample.

66. Staff recognised the diverse learning needs of students and there were good examples where the needs of particular groups were addressed through the affordances of online learning. For example, commuter students had valued the flexibility afforded by a short-term pivot to online learning during times of train strikes. Some staff we spoke to also reported the usefulness of being able to take deliberate actions to rebalance the blend at short notice in certain circumstances to minimise impact on learning for specific groups. For example, during international lockdowns, providers had been able to pivot to online learning to continue to meet the needs of international students. These are important examples where an adaptable blended approach can support inclusion *and* the delivery of a high quality learning experience.

67. Students in one provider reported that lecturers created spaces both in-person and online for all voices to be heard and different cultures, opinions and beliefs were represented and respected. A student from this provider reported that:

'They create a very safe space both online and in person, for all of our voices to be heard. And we're… we're validated in what we are saying […] But I think we are just lucky that you know what we're going into and as a cohort, we're very respectful of each other's cultures and backgrounds.'

68. One course representative reported that certain neurodiverse students on their course found engaging with online materials difficult and further consideration of the learning needs of these students would be welcomed so that their learning needs are fully addressed.

69. The review did not look at reasonable adjustments made for individual disabled students but the review surfaced a range of views on the extent to which a student can reasonably request a fully online offer to meet their learning needs. Without information about any individual's learning needs and the details of a course's learning outcomes it is impossible to comment on specific reasonable adjustment arrangements to support individual disabled students. There were differing views expressed by providers about the extent and limits of providers' responsibility to meet the needs of all students at all times (such as providing content in different ways for immunocompromised students, disabled students, and students affected by coronavirus-related lockdowns in other countries). In response to discussions encountered about the extent to which students can request their own balance of online or on-campus delivery, it will always be for providers to meet their legal obligations and make properly considered judgements about what may constitute a reasonable adjustment for an individual student. While in some cases this may include a fully online modality, the panel were concerned about the challenges associated with delivering this. There are several reasons for this view: firstly students in this review were not positive about their experience of hybrid (dual modality) delivery and whilst tools might improve to make this a stronger offer in the future, a hybrid delivery mode specifically as experienced by students (and indeed staff) in this sample may be at risk of not offering a high quality academic experience. The panel also accepted the argument made by staff in some disciplines that access to specialist space and equipment (for example, labs, music studios, dance spaces, etc.) on campus is a critical component to learning and success in these disciplines.

70. The panel noted many benefits associated with one course in our sample that offered two ways to engage. On this course there is both a fully online mode and a blended mode. This course offers students choice regarding modality at point of entry (with provision made for students who need to change pathway while they are studying). This approach offers an inclusive model for courses that do not require specialist space or equipment and this approach may become more common in future.

71. Whilst not all learning needs can be met, the importance of striving to ensure the maximum accessibility of teaching content is essential in the panel's view. This is because improving accessibility for individual learners improves their academic experience and can in many cases make the learning experience better for all students, not just those who the adaptations are primarily designed for.

72. If providers fail to consider and actively respond to the resource and support needs of diverse student groups then there is a risk to the quality of the learning experience, particularly for disabled students.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that they work with students to understand their learning needs, with a particular focus on the learning needs of individual students, including disabled students. This will help providers deliver flexibility and choice that can enhance the accessibility of the blended courses for all students.

Online lectures

73. The panel recognises that formal lectures form just one element of the teaching and learning offer in higher education, but this is the area of practice that students were keen to discuss with us in detail in our interviews across each of the subjects. There is a considerable research base on the role of lectures in learning, but this section focuses instead on the ways lectures are experienced by students as part of a blended offer.

74. There is a difference between online lectures which are pre-recorded asynchronous content and on-campus lectures that are accompanied by recordings to be replayed to support learning. Some lectures are also delivered using a hybrid approach, being livestreamed to groups of students on-campus and off-campus at the same time. In the interviews, students focused their comments on accessing and engaging with asynchronous lecture recordings.

Reported benefits of online lectures

75. Students reported that they liked the flexibility and variety of ways they could access online lectures. The convenience of online lectures was noted as helpful for students with long commutes and one student noted 'no more 8.30 lectures!'

76. Students liked recorded lectures because they could watch the recordings in their own time for review, revision and notetaking. The students we interviewed reported that recordings make content more accessible for students who may have missed sessions, and this was viewed as particularly helpful for some

disabled students or immunocompromised students who had challenges studying on campus. One student stated that blended learning had really supported their learning because they had a processing disorder and blended approaches to learning (particularly pre-recorded and lecture capture) enabled them to process their learning from lectures in a timely way because they missed out on so much information in face-to-face lectures – now they were able to do things at their own pace.

77. Asynchronous components also supported students with parental or other caring responsibilities and students who speak English as a second or other language.

Guest speakers

78. Students and staff valued having speakers from universities in different countries and from industry joining them in online sessions. Staff reported that in many cases this would not be possible if they only adopted an on-campus approach to guest inputs. This is an enhancement that was valued by students because they had access to prestigious speakers from within the UK and abroad. One student society had great success in being able to invite top scholars from around the world to online sessions. This is a lockdown innovation that is now part of regular course design and offers a high quality example of an online element of the course meeting students' learning needs well.

Reported challenges associated with online lectures

79. The panel noted strong student views in relation to the more negative aspects of engaging with recorded lectures in their own time. Many students said that watching a one-hour lecture online often took several hours due to the need for breaks and issues with motivation working at home (see section on attendance and engagement below).

Up-to-date resources

80. Students were critical of those instances where it was obvious (to them) that lecture recordings were recycled from previous years. When students complained about the reuse of lecture recording, their concerns were less to do with the curriculum content being up to date and more to do with the fact that the reuse was obvious because (potentially confusing) out-of-date assessment deadlines were referred to and the incorrect day of the week was referred to in the recordings.

81. This represents a challenge to course leaders and lecturers to find a blended learning pedagogy which balances the fact that content may not change too much from year to year with providing a student experience which is seen to be fresh and up to date.

82. Lecturers do not design lecture content from scratch every year so reusing online content in situations where fundamental contexts do not change over the course of one year is clearly acceptable within certain contexts.

83. Students suggested that lecture recordings should be 'future proofed' so that the recordings are made with the expectation that they will be used for more than one year.

84. As lecturers' digital skills improve across the sector, the ability to edit content to refresh elements of online content and to edit out content that is no longer relevant will become more mainstream. This then becomes an issue relating to the quality of teaching resources rather than an issue relating especially to online delivery (see 'quality of online lectures' section below).

85. Lecture recordings are learning resources and anything that distracts from the learning – in these cases dated course administrative information – detracts from the student learning experience. Whilst the reuse of learning resources from a previous year may not represent low quality teaching, the impression that students get is important and should be carefully considered.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that unedited lectures from previous years are carefully reviewed before they are used again, to identify and edit out incorrect course information and to make sure course content is up to date.

Synchronous/hybrid online lectures

86. Students in our sample reported negative experiences of live lectures that were dual cast and this appeared to relate to technical issues associated with this model. Staff reported that they did not think that hybrid worked well in their teaching contexts and as a result this model was rarely deployed across the providers in this review.

Policies and frameworks for recording lectures

87. Whilst recording policies were referred to in our meetings with e-learning leads, they were not the focus of our review. However, it is useful to report that most providers did have lecture recording policies in place. These policies typically covered whether lectures are streamed live or made available for review later. In providers without a clear policy on lecture recording, students experienced variable and inconsistent access to lecture recordings for review and revision across different courses. This appeared to vary depending on the decisions lecturers were making or the availability of AV recording equipment (cameras and microphones) across the physical estate.

88. In one provider there was a clear policy of allowing an 'opt-out' of lecture recordings (where lectures are recorded automatically unless staff make the decision not to) and in this provider several lecturers were using this opt out because they felt it was not always appropriate for their course, or recording facilities were not yet in place for their department.

> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure they have clear policies about the ownership, storage and reuse of lectures and this information should be clearly communicated to students and staff.

Benefits of on-campus lectures

89. Whilst the flexibility of accessing online lectures in their own time was appreciated, many students reported that they preferred face-to-face lectures because they found it much easier to motivate themselves and they liked to have a separation between home and university life. Students reported that being present physically at university helped their motivation and supported their learning away from distractions and pressures that might be present in a home context. Students repeatedly reported that they valued the social context for learning and time spent together with peers and with their teachers as part of a high quality student experience. Because the panel was surprised by the strength of this view, we offer three student extracts to give voice to this widely shared student perspective:

> *'[Face-to-face lectures]: I'm happy with how it is at the moment. It's so much easier to be sort of motivated once you're up and about, and once you're in uni and in that space, it's space that makes the difference. And like the room that you're in, because if you're at home, you know, sat in your room or sat in the kitchen, yeah, you're not motivated. I feel like a lot of people struggle to concentrate over Zoom and at home because you don't have the separation between home life and uni life.'*
>
> *'Although [there are] some advantages to studying at home, coming into campus makes me more productive and driven to get things done.'*
>
> *'When you're home or not in the right learning environment or you kind of get tired basically.'*

90. These views emphasise the importance of supporting peer-to-peer learning and the importance of the social experience which comes from meeting other students in the lecture theatres, libraries and cafes and in corridors before and after on-campus lectures. Face-to-face lectures appear to offer students a platform to engage with peers which supports their learning.

91. The benefits of on-campus lectures were captured by one student who compared the two modes:

'[In online lectures]: not seeing faces or hearing voices in person, little things, colleagues walking to lectures seeing other people to say hi. Little chats you get meeting new people… physical environment makes you stay in the moment… enjoy back and forth… not having to look at your own face.'

Quality of online lectures

92. At the start of the emergency pivot to online delivery, the approach used to move face-to-face to online course delivery became known as 'lift and shift'. This was primarily due to lack of time, but as we move to more 'steady state' there is a greater focus on well-considered blended learning design. Across the providers we found examples where lecturers were working to 'chunk' online learning resources into shorter, more focused learning materials. This was valued by students and is a positive development in blended learning that is supported by Jisc (2021) which identified that shorter chunks of learning and regular breaks helped to reduce the physical discomfort in working online, making it easier for students to maintain concentration.[9]

93. Whilst students valued face-to-face lectures they were also keen to have well produced lecture recordings that they were able to access after the live session. They view this as a core expectation. Where lectures are not well produced (examples include grainy images, whiteboard slides in background referred to in the lecture but not visible in recording, lecture recordings that were of a poor sound quality and some recordings that were of several hours duration without chunking or editing), the panel would consider this to be poor quality. In the words of one course leader this is 'no different to poor teaching and learning delivery in any other context'. We recognise that the impact of using poor learning materials is the same online as it would be in a face-to-face setting but the quality of lecture recording equipment and staff skills creating these learning resources are focusing attention on this as a problem that is surfacing in the online part of the course. It is the panel's view that these examples represent poor quality teaching; if online learning resources are consistently of a poor quality there is a risk to the quality of students' academic experience.

Teaching staff's digital skills

94. In our interviews we noted that when digital pedagogy staff development was discussed it was usually in the context of the emergency pivot rather than

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[9] Jisc, 'Student digital experiences insights survey: UK higher education (HE) survey findings' (2021), pp. 5, 18. Available at:
https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8487/1/Student%20DEI%20HE%20report%202021%20Final.pdf

support for blended delivery in the current context. Staff skills and knowledge in this area increased rapidly as a consequence of the pivot online necessitated by the pandemic. Post-lockdown, the development of digital teaching skills continues to increase. In our sample it was evident that some lecturers were actively extending their skills – developing abilities to edit, caption, create podcasts, online quizzes and using creative digital tools – to produce high quality digital learning resources. We recognise that this skills development can be time consuming and suggest that providers reflect on ways that staff can be supported to develop this expertise.

95. Several course leads referred to having someone on their course team who championed the use of digital pedagogy, offering support and upskilling to the rest of their team.

96. High quality staff development sessions offered by learning technology teams with professional expertise were found useful and most members of staff reported how important their central teaching and learning enhancement units had been supporting the development of digital pedagogy skills in lockdown.

97. However, the low quality of some of the online pedagogy and online learning resources referred to in earlier themes of this report suggests that there are pockets of low digital education skills amongst staff. It is clear that providers need to support continued development and upskilling for teaching staff. It is the panel's view that course teams that do not have suitably qualified and experienced staff to design and deliver blended learning are more likely to deliver poor quality online teaching and a lower quality academic experience for students.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that all staff are supported to develop their pedagogic expertise across face-to-face and online modalities, with a focus on supporting the delivery of blended learning. This should align with the refreshed UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (currently under consultation).

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that, as the core skills and knowledge required to deliver high quality blended courses continue to extend, teaching staff's continuous professional development in line with this extension is fully supported.

Feedback on learning progress in online contexts

98. We observed considerable variation in the extent to which students felt able to ask questions online and the ways that their questions about their learning were responded to.

99. Some students reported that they had access to less feedback on their learning in online sessions whilst other students felt that email contact and chat made it just as easy to get feedback online. There were lots of comments about the timeliness of email feedback being an issue – essentially the point was that by the time an email exchange had happened, the learning moment had passed and it was too slow. We did note that there were several groups of students who commended their course teams for their responsiveness to emails that were replied to promptly.

100. Both staff and students reported that they found it hard to create dialogue and participation in online sessions. One student commented:

'You were in a [virtual classroom], it was very hard, like nobody wanted to talk. Nobody wanted to ask questions. So, from that point of learning, it was very hard because even if you had a question a lot of times you didn't want to ask it. You would just wait and then e-mail the lecturer afterwards.'

101. Some students experienced real difficulty understanding aspects of the curriculum delivered online. Students commented that:

'Once you get down into more difficult calculations or equations, sometimes you need the lecturer to be there with you to actually guide you through.'

'There's been times where I've had sessions on [virtual classroom software] and I felt "oh well, I don't really know how to do this because it's just [in a virtual classroom]."'

102. Students across the sample reported that it was harder for them to gauge how they were learning in relation to other students when they accessed lectures online. They reported that, when lectures are face to face, individual students are more likely to appreciate that other students may be finding content difficult but when they are studying alone online they can sometimes feel like they are the only ones finding learning challenging. This means that getting explicit feedback on learning is even more important within a blended model of delivery as it can be more difficult for students to receive implicit feedback from peers. The panel's view is that where there is a lack of timely feedback on learning this puts at risk the delivery of a high quality academic experience for students.

> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure that, where course content is delivered asynchronously, approaches to teaching and learning are designed to facilitate learning checks that support students and help the course team to identify where students are struggling with online content or falling behind, so that their learning needs can be addressed.
>
> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure that their learning design across modalities supports interactive and collaborative activities that help students access feedback from the course team and from their peers. This is recommended as an area for pedagogic staff development.

Attendance and engagement

103. There were a small number of courses where students and staff reported high levels of attendance and engagement with the on-campus elements of the blended learning offer. More typically though, concerns about low student attendance on campus were referred to by the staff and students we met. Staff expressed concern about students who might be 'slipping through the digital gaps' and one student extract illustrates this point:

> *'About February, March, a lot of the students became disinterested. And they lost their motivation to actually do the proper work. Maybe 10-15 students at a time within those tutorials, which from a student body which was [a much larger number], that's not exactly enough.[10] ... Whether it was the fact that the university struggled at the beginning of the year or whether it was just some stress post-pandemic, we don't know […] The motivation wasn't just within this course.'*

104. The consensus was that attendance and engagement were currently lower than in the period before lockdown and staff and students speculated about whether or not non-engagement and/or low attendance were a lockdown legacy or a sign of more permanent changes to student behaviour. This section needs caveating:

    a. This review did not define or measure attendance or engagement.

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[10] Number removed from quotation to protect anonymity of student.

b. Universities are still developing integrated tools to assess online and on-campus engagement.

c. Covid infections were still affecting attendance at the time of the fieldwork for this review. For example, a flat of seven students who all contracted Covid could significantly reduce attendance on a course or several courses for up to ten days.

105. As the fieldwork was conducted, it became apparent to the panel that there was a contradiction between the students' expressed preference to access on-campus learning and reported low attendance patterns on campus. The panel referred to this phenomenon as the attendance paradox. It is beyond the remit of this review to speculate on the causes of this phenomenon, but it is the panel's view that this needs to be understood in the context of Covid recovery and the lasting impact of isolated periods of study which have made re-engagement on campus challenging for some students. It is unclear whether this is a permanent change in student behaviour or if students will gradually return to higher levels of on-campus engagement in study. This paradox is a reminder of the emergent blended learning context referred to in the introduction.

106. The panel notes the distinction between attendance (is the student in the room?) and engagement (is the student actively participating in the learning activity?).

107. Lecturers noted that students still needed support to engage meaningfully with face-to-face learning after the period of working online during the pandemic. Some students (particularly those who are immunocompromised) still had concerns in relation to engaging with aspects of on campus learning. The student below captures the challenges associated with the return to campus post-lockdown:

'At the beginning of the year when we went back in person, I think there was a real sense of excitement and buzz about being in the room together. One of the things we've noticed over the course of the year is that some of the students, especially the ones who are coming into the first year, actually they don't know how to be in the room with each other and they're needing more support with that because obviously they've come through this very weird school experience.'

108. As was the case before the pandemic, providers reported different approaches to measuring attendance. The key issue that came across in our interviews is the degree to which students should be trusted as adults to make their own decisions about their study patterns (on and off campus). Some lecturers said it was for students to decide how they engage with their course; however, in all of the providers, it was recognised that high levels of student engagement and attendance are associated with higher continuation and

attainment, and concern was reported about the low attendance patterns they had noticed.

109. Providers are deploying a range of tools (online and on campus) to develop a profile of student attendance and engagement, but several interviewees reported that their institution did not yet have effective tools to assess engagement in an integrated way across online and on-campus modes. Data dashboards hosted on VLEs are used by some course teams to measure engagement in online activities such as engagement with electronic resources and attendance. On some courses there was a minimum mandatory attendance of 70 per cent which could be met online or on campus. More typically, attendance requirements related only to on-campus attendance (for example, required attendance rates for lab sessions).

110. It is common to reflect on the impact non-attendance has on students who are not engaging with their course but what this review highlighted was the impact low attendance was having on the wider student learning community. One student observed:

'When lots of students don't attend you don't get the full experience – students chiming in with ideas, discussion-based seminars – you need the students in the room. It helps with the learning.'

111. Staff recognised this challenge too and said that low attendance was impacting on group work. Looking at the issues resulting from low attendance and engagement, it is important to differentiate between occasional pockets of low attendance and systemic issues where the majority of the student cohort are not engaging with learning opportunities (on-site or online).[11] Where there is persistent and significant student absence, this can lead to a concern that large numbers of students on some courses are potentially viewing aspects of the course offer as optional.

112. Courses in higher education are designed to support the achievement of programme learning outcomes; systemic patterns of low attendance suggest that there are sections of the offer that are not being accessed by students.

113. It is the panel's view that active and urgent engagement with this problem is necessary if students are to benefit fully from the opportunity to study at university and progress to positive outcomes.

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[11] The panel notes that there may be Student Loans Company or Home Office attendance requirements in place for students.

> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure that they actively engage with students to identify barriers to engagement and attendance. This will enable staff to 'design in' pedagogic and formative assessment approaches that support attendance and engagement that in turn are associated with positive outcomes for students.
>
> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure that students' engagement with their studies is supported.

Structuring independent study

114. The increasing use of digital learning materials and blended learning are serving to formalise and perhaps extend our expectations of students in relation to independent study requirements. However, some students are finding the management of online learning challenging. As one student commented:

> *'When students are on their own in a room at home online – so lonely – you don't feel like you are learning – you feel like you are just watching a screen distracted.'*

115. A number of students reported 'content overload' that appeared to be a consequence of a poorly managed blend. These students reported that they received significantly more content online than they could properly engage with if studying a reasonable number of hours in a week. The panel is concerned that the absence of a clear timetable for asynchronous lecture delivery, that is aligned to the on-campus timetable, can lead to unrealistic demands being made around the amount of online contact time a student has in any given week. Students reported that they found creating their integrated online/on-campus timetable hard.

116. This problem is exacerbated when module approaches are not coherently planned. Students told us that staff were not always aware of the timetable pressures on students because the volume of the asynchronous online elements across modules was less apparent to course teams. Asynchronous learning demands can inadvertently take away on-campus timetabling constraints leading to study demands that appear to have increased in volume on some courses in this review. A student unpacks this issue:

> *'I guess we also now come to realise that there are some cons to [online lectures] too, like it's not all perfect. You know it's harder to motivate yourself in your own time with lectures. I know that when I'm actually in the room and much more focused on what the person is saying focused on what, yeah, what's*

going on when we have like [...] 6 lectures a day which we never [had face to face]. *If it was in person we would have like what, actually no way they would have done that many. But I think because it's online, they feel like they can give us more things to engage with. But it's like harder.'*

117. The point made by this student is reinforced in Jisc (2021) where the survey results suggested that students wanted their tutors to be mindful of the volume of work and independent study asked of them.[12]

118. Students report that they receive lots of content from teaching staff, but struggle to manage their time, know how long to spend on work, how to prioritise and what to engage with. The opportunity to develop these skills over time is an essential part of a blended curriculum. We note that blended courses can offer less opportunity for students to talk with peers about how they are finding their study, and with teaching staff about expectations, so it is important for providers to consider new ways to develop students' independent learning capabilities.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that they have means to assure themselves that the blend approaches adopted on any given course are coherent and provide an appropriate balance of directed and independent study.

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[12] Jisc, 'Student digital experiences insights survey: UK higher education (HE) survey findings' (2021), pp. 6, 18-19. Available at:
https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8487/1/Student%20DEI%20HE%20report%202021%20Final.pdf

Digital learning support for students

119. As part of our desk-based research, we did a keyword search of a range of terms used for blended learning and digitally enhanced learning across each of the provider's websites. This surfaced very little information about the digital skills students would need to study on any given course (this reflects Jisc's 2021 findings that only 41 per cent of students surveyed agreed that they received guidance about the digital skills they needed for their course).[13]

120. Some of the providers offered introductory courses to support digital learning as part of induction whilst on other courses this offer was less apparent and take-up rates were not reported.

121. Some students were aware of services in central IT and the library, which offered digital skills development support although we noted that in some providers very few students cited e-learning and library staff as people they would turn to for help. The panel would encourage improved communications about the support these teams can offer to support students to engage effectively with digital learning.

122. Although services were available, the actual uptake of the services appeared to be mixed. Several students interviewed indicated that, although it was good that the services existed, they hadn't needed to use them personally. It is not clear from this whether students were being fully supported in the skills they needed to 'learn to learn' and manage independent study time in blended modes.

123. It is the panel's view that students would benefit from support with managing the blend – seeing this as a development area in and of itself rather than having separate development opportunities for digital and on-campus study. This support could address concerns students have about managing their studies and their timetable across modalities.

124. It is the panel's view that building blended learning support into course induction (as was the case in several of the providers) is an essential component of a high quality blended learning course, even in cases where only a minority of students report that they need support. This is because it is essential that all students understand how to engage with teaching and how to learn when offered a blended course design.

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[13] Jisc, 'Student digital experiences insights survey: UK higher education (HE) survey findings' (2021), pg. 14. Available at:
https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8487/1/Student%20DEI%20HE%20report%202021%20Final.pdf

125. Most students reported that lockdown study had helped them develop the skills they needed for blended study, but some students who were course representatives reported that it would be useful to spend time unpacking aspects of the digital curriculum offer, for example explaining the VLE structure, because there were a minority of students who found this difficult to manage. One mature student who hadn't studied online during the pandemic commented:

> *'And because I was new to it, I had to do a lot of like trying to work everything out myself. And because obviously when Covid first started and locked down and all that was a thing, everyone was on the same boat in terms of this is something new to us. So we need to, like, work together to work out how to do it. But for me, I [feel] like September last year ... it was just I had to work out how to do it myself because everyone had already been told how to do it or worked out how to do [it] previously.'*

126. Well-structured and accessible support for digital learning is a vital component to support student learning.

127. A distinctive aspect of the offer at one university was the strategic employment of a large number of student digital assistants, and their work and contribution to co-creation was viewed very positively by staff and students.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that students are given clear pre-arrival information about the knowledge and skills they will need to engage successfully in their study.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure they offer appropriate digital learning support to all students and should evaluate this offer to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure they communicate clearly to students about how they can access digital skills development.

Being part of a blended academic community

128. There was a lack of alignment between students' and providers' attitudes towards the sense of community experienced by students. In general students were more negative than staff about the sense of community that existed on their course.

129. Students reported feeling that they were not engaged with their courses or with each other, which in some cases prompted anecdotes about their peers leaving their course. Students consistently reported that they had lost community during lockdown online teaching and often had not regained it since. One student commented:

'There's no way to build connections within your own school year or within your own group. That's one of the biggest issues we had with [online learning].'

130. Our interviews with staff and students highlighted the isolation many students experienced while studying fully online during lockdown. They reported that they had fewer opportunities to meet other students during this time which had reduced the number of students they knew, and this was having a long-term impact on their sense of academic community.

131. Students in our sample missed peer learning and the social connection associated with a strong learning community. The importance of community and the relationship between learning and community were clearly articulated by the students. Peer learning supports individual learning and the wider social benefits of feeling part of a community also connected to students' wider academic experience. The very particular circumstances of a cohort of students who have experienced full lockdown, and where there is still a legacy that impacts on studying now and in the near future, means that the importance of community – sometimes viewed as being beyond the remit of a course offer – is crucially important. Strong learning communities support students' academic experience and may be linked to the support required to ensure a high quality academic experience.

Positive examples of community building

132. On one course, the use of online communication software was positively encouraging students and staff to interact in new ways.

133. We noted that one provider consistently emphasised the importance of community as a core part of its ethos and this was commented on by staff and students across the programmes as well. The strong community within these courses meant that students reported that they felt supported to succeed on the course. One course leader talked about the importance of establishing 'convivial relationships' across the staff/student community to support learning and engagement. This underlines the important role academic staff have in fostering an academic community on campus and online.

> **Recommendation**
>
> Providers should ensure they work in partnership with students to develop community building opportunities within all aspects of courses (within and extra curricula, online and on campus). This is recommended to address the continuing negative impacts of lockdown study.

Graduate attributes

134. Course leaders described a renewed emphasis on making the content and delivery relevant to students' expectations of future life and work. Graduate level skills discussed by course leaders included digital literacy, collaboration, detailed writing, structuring and presenting an argument orally as well as in writing.

135. In performing arts, new forms of digital performance production and consumption were increasingly part of the curriculum, reflecting digital developments necessitated by lockdown.

136. The panel noted that changes to industry practices resulting from the pandemic were increasingly reflected in the curriculum, ensuring that students graduated with skills that would meet needs for graduate-level work after graduation. These responsive approaches to developing curricula to meet graduate needs represent examples of high quality learning.

137. We were concerned to meet one group of students who reported that they had significant worries about their lack of experience and reduced opportunities outside of their course (such as networking and placements) resulting from a period of studying solely online during lockdown. This group of students were concerned that this would prevent them from achieving relevant employment after their course finished.

Learning from students' experience of blended teaching and learning

138. The aim of eliciting feedback from students about blended learning is not to establish one right way of doing it. Blends might vary across a course or a provider and this is acceptable as long it is coherent, well communicated and there is strong student feedback, engagement and attainment.

139. We noted that the normal channels for student feedback were in place across the providers in the sample. Course teams were using a range of standard approaches to offer students opportunities to feedback on their experience of the course. For example, all providers encouraged students to engage with a

range of module and course level surveys (internal surveys, the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)). In addition, there were opportunities for course representatives to feedback on issues arising and a range of staff/student consultative meetings were referred to by students and staff.

140. Some providers were using learning analytics to help them understand student engagement with learning online but we did not see any examples where providers were combining face-to-face attendance feedback, online learning analytics, student survey data and student representative feedback to fully understand how students were experiencing blended learning, so that an assessment could be made about the extent to which overall course design felt coherent for students.

141. Standard module and NSS questions do not ask explicitly about students' experience of blended study and this points to the need for bespoke approaches to feedback in the context of blended learning. In some cases, course teams were specifically asking questions about how students experienced and evaluated the blend. In one provider, pulse survey tools developed over lockdown, that focused on students' online experience, were being usefully revised and adapted to elicit feedback on blended learning. Staff at another provider pointed out the importance of learning about how students are actually engaging with digital and face to face in practice – and using this intelligence and learning to inform course design. In this case the focus was on talking with the students rather than collecting survey or learning analytics data.

142. This work was most effective when the provider was actively eliciting and acting on feedback from diverse student communities to explore the different ways blended learning is experienced. For example, one provider had established student inclusive consultants and disabled student panels to help them access and better understand different perspectives to address this point.

143. Our interviews with students suggested to us that they are keen to be part of the dialogue about blended delivery models and they accept that within their community there are different views about blended learning that need to be accommodated. Jisc's (2021) research points out that the majority of students surveyed in its study did not feel they were being given the chance to be involved in decisions about online learning, so this is an important area to address.[14]

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[14] Jisc, 'Student digital experiences insights survey: UK higher education (HE) survey findings' (2021), pg. 10. Available at:
https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8487/1/Student%20DEI%20HE%20report%202021%20Final.pdf

144. It is the panel's view that students thrive best when they are active participants in their learning. There is so much that can be learnt by working in partnership with students and taking the time to reflect on how students are experiencing blended learning post-lockdown. Our student meetings surfaced a range of challenges that students were experiencing with their blended study, and the panel speculated about the extent to which course teams were aware of these issues so that they could work with the students to address them.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that they work with students and student unions to create bespoke tools (surveys, focus groups, reference groups, etc.) that offer students opportunities to evaluate their experience of blended on-campus and online study.

Recommendation

Providers should ensure that students' evaluations of blended learning are used to inform course design enhancement.

Blend benefits and innovation

145. The panel observed a number of approaches during the course of its review that represented, in the view of students or staff, high quality blended learning and teaching. These examples are included in this report to draw attention to innovations and enhancements enabled by blended learning that appeared to support high quality student learning.

Online and on-campus tutorial options

146. Students and staff appreciated being able to take part in online or face-to-face tutorials, as the student below articulates:

'So I think part of the unique experience, it's so important that you know you do get to see people and it is in person. Yeah. And as we said like there are some things like tutorials that suit an online thing because it might be […] half an hour long and you're like what's the point in walking 20 minutes to go into uni because that be the only lesson you have that day being that half an hour and then going home again. Yeah. So that I would just say [online tutorials are] good.'

Virtual placements

147. One allied health course team reported on a virtual placement approach that was valued by students and employers.

Blended 'wrap around'

148. Several course leaders and students talked positively about the benefits of a well-considered 'wrap around' blend, where students were offered high quality online learning materials to engage with before and after on-campus teaching. This 'pre/post on-campus digital blend' appeared to deepen students' learning and this approach exploited the affordance of face-to-face and online learning blends. This worked particularly well to prepare students to make the most of lab or studio based learning time. The panel took the view that this was a high quality approach with benefits for student learning.

Return to campus support

149. One university developed a learning package specifically designed to support students returning to on-site lab work.

Digital hub

150. One university had a discipline-level digital hub that was supporting innovation in course design and assessment practice.

VLE

151. Providers that had supported consistent use of the VLE to support learning were able to articulate more clearly how students used the VLE in the context of a blended learning offer.

152. Students valued the VLE and online reading lists. Close integration of the library catalogue and the VLE in some providers ensured that reading lists were up to date and academic resources were accessible and available.

Section 4 – Advice and recommendations for providers and the OfS

The recommendations set out in Section 3 of this report are listed below. The recommendations have a dual purpose.

Firstly, they are intended to provide a set of considerations and actions that higher education providers would benefit from taking into account when designing and applying blended learning approaches.

Secondly, they illustrate for the OfS the issues and approaches that the panel considers important in designing and delivering a high quality academic experience involving blended learning approaches.

The blend approach: strategic, departmental, local?

Providers should ensure their approaches to blended learning offer a coherent learning experience to students, including ensuring coherence at a course level if decisions about the blend are decided at a module level.

Student number growth

Providers should ensure that growth in student numbers does not drive the approach to blended learning and that, instead, the blended approach should be informed by sound pedagogic principles.

Communicating the reasons for the blend to students

Providers should ensure applicants have clear web-based information about the approach to blended learning adopted on courses they are applying for. This information does not need to be expressed as a ratio but should give prospective students a clear picture of the modalities of learning they will encounter on any given course.

Providers should ensure that, once enrolled, students continue to be supplied with accurate information about the blended approaches adopted on their course and modules across each year of study.

Providers should ensure that, if a ratio-based approach is adopted as a way to describe the balance of a blended offer, the ratio definition is clear, to help students know what to expect.

Providers should ensure that sound pedagogic reasons underpin the blend approach adopted, and that these reasons are communicated to students so that they understand the rationale for approaches adopted.

On-campus teaching and learning

Providers should ensure that appropriate provision is made on-campus to support blended learning, informed by consideration of how students engage with online elements of their course while they are on campus.

Equality, diversity and the needs of different students

Providers should ensure that they work with students to understand their learning needs, with a particular focus on the learning needs of individual students, including disabled students. This will help providers deliver flexibility and choice that can enhance the accessibility of the blended courses for all students.

Online lectures

Providers should ensure that unedited lectures from previous years are carefully reviewed before they are used again, to identify and edit out incorrect course information and to make sure course content is up to date.

Providers should ensure they have clear policies about the ownership, storage and reuse of lectures and this information should be clearly communicated to students and staff.

Teaching staff's digital skills

Providers should ensure that all staff are supported to develop their pedagogic expertise across face-to-face and online modalities, with a focus on supporting the delivery of blended learning. This should align with the refreshed UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (currently under consultation).

Providers should ensure that, as the core skills and knowledge required to deliver high quality blended courses continue to extend, teaching staff's continuous professional development in line with this extension is fully supported.

Feedback on learning progress in online contexts

Provider should ensure that, where course content is delivered asynchronously, approaches to teaching and learning are designed to facilitate learning checks that

support students and help the course team to identify where students are struggling with online content or falling behind, so that their learning needs can be addressed.

Providers should ensure that their learning design across modalities supports interactive and collaborative activities that help students access feedback from the course team and from their peers. This is recommended as an area for pedagogic staff development.

Attendance and engagement

Providers should ensure that they actively engage with students to identify barriers to engagement and attendance. This will enable staff to 'design in' pedagogic and formative assessment approaches that support attendance and engagement that in turn are associated with positive outcomes for students.

Providers should ensure that students' engagement with their studies is supported.

Structuring independent study

Providers should ensure that they have means to assure themselves that the blend approaches adopted on any given course are coherent and provide an appropriate balance of directed and independent study.

Digital learning support for students

Providers should ensure that students are given clear pre-arrival information about the knowledge and skills they will need to engage successfully in their study.

Providers should ensure they offer appropriate digital learning support to all students and should evaluate this offer to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Providers should ensure they communicate clearly to students about how they can access digital skills development.

Being part of a blended academic community

Providers should ensure they work in partnership with students to develop community building opportunities within all aspects of courses (within and extra curricula, online and on campus). This is recommended to address the continuing negative impacts of lockdown study.

Learning from students' experience of blended teaching and learning

Providers should ensure that they work with students and student unions to create bespoke tools (surveys, focus groups, reference groups, etc.) that offer students opportunities to evaluate their experience of blended on-campus and online study.

Providers should ensure that students' evaluations of blended learning are used to inform course design enhancement.

Section 5 – E-learning technology

153. Our aim was that the analysis in this report should provide the OfS with expert academic judgement about providers' approaches to blended learning and the features of blended learning provision that influence the quality of courses.

154. The technology context of each provider helps to underpin the provision of blended learning. It is, therefore, appropriate to also explore and understand the features of learning technology support and infrastructure available to staff and students as part of the panel's fieldwork. It is the view of the panel that it is helpful to set out what was observed in relation to the ways underpinning technology for blended learning was being invested in, deployed and utilised.

155. This section of the report therefore sets out the findings that arose primarily from discussions with each of the six providers' e-learning leads and also through discussions with other staff and students. These discussions with providers' e-learning leads ensured that the panel had good information about the technology available for the delivery of blended learning at reviewed providers.

Technology contexts observed in the review

156. The technology context was different in each institution, and this context is essential for understanding how blended learning provision is enabled, quality assured and made available equally to course leaders and students across institutions at an enterprise level.

157. All providers had in place an institution-wide virtual learning environment (VLE), operated and supported by central teams. Each provider also had in place a member of staff designated as 'head of e-learning' or 'senior learning technologist'; these individuals were able to explain how their roles fit with governance structures, planning and decision-making.

158. Reviewed providers reported that, during the national lockdown, institutional VLEs became the 'digital estate' through which teaching and learning was supported. The traffic and load on these systems increased dramatically at short notice and learning technology teams had worked to ensure continuity of business for learning and teaching. Among reviewed providers, VLEs had proven to be scalable (in terms of student numbers and increasing use) and the interviewees reported that this work was well-integrated with other enterprise systems, such as timetabling, student record system, identity access and authentication, library catalogues and online reading lists.

159. It is useful to note that several providers had established portfolios of fully online distance delivery courses. These are seen as distinct and different from their blended learning offer. Only one of those interviewed described having the administration systems in place to offer students the choice of moving formally between modes of online and on-campus course delivery.

160. In most providers, lecture recording systems had already been put in place for use before the national lockdowns and those systems proved valuable in enabling recording of lectures from home during lockdown. The number, scale and size of media files being uploaded and downloaded from university platforms put considerable strain on university networks, storage space and home broadband.

161. Most providers already had in place guidance, templates or policies detailing threshold standards for VLE use. Most providers also had lecture recording policies in place. The providers that had been successful in assuring these quality measures consistently were more able to articulate what students and staff could expect in terms of support for blended, structured and scaffolded learning.

162. Reviewed providers reported having made significant investment in a wide range of technology, to support the delivery of blended learning. These included investment in:

- scaled up digital platforms and digital infrastructure

- increased online storage and cloud services

- additional licensing, streaming and hosting capacity

- digital learning resources, such as e-books

- virtual classrooms and labs, and meeting tools

- software, such as media and production tools

- physical equipment to upgrade the 'physical estate', such as AV kit

- digital learning support services, such as laptop and equipment loans

- digital capability, in the form of both staff training and the recruitment of learning technologists with specialist expert skills in appropriate technology.

These investments and other costs were representing a growing challenge for recurrent budgets, as well as capital investment by central teams, and may have been less visible to students and course leaders.

163. Reviewed providers were exploring cost-effective ways of ensuring that appropriate high quality, up-to-date resources were available to students in digital formats. However, rapid purchasing and rollout of learning technology tools had resulted in a confused technology environment in institutions with multiple virtual classroom tools, and inconsistent application of policies for recording, storage, retention, privacy, security, data protection, copyright and cloud hosting.

164. Several providers reviewed described having employed students from their own institution as assistant learning technologists, helping central learning technology teams and, in other cases, as peer digital champions helping to support other students with online learning. This was seen by reviewed providers as a good way to ensure that students' experiences of blended learning were directly shaping the development of practice 'on the ground'.

165. Network teams in universities had worked hard to ensure that their networks were resilient against cyber-attack, responsive to load balancing and architected to provide virtual private networking (VPN) access for students, researchers and teaching staff.

Student and staff views on technology provision

166. Some students and staff made reference to the centrally provided technology and to the learning technology support available to them in their institutions. They described combinations of local (departmental) staff and central (IT and libraries) support.

167. Students and staff interviewed noted that off-campus access to specialist software initially proved challenging, with access restricted to university-owned machines on-site. Reviewed providers had revisited licence agreements and been challenged to virtualise access to complex discipline-specific tools in science and engineering so that students could participate in virtual labs and have access to the computing power needed to work with large data in complex ways. Local IT teams supporting science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and creative arts courses had developed new ways for students to get access to the tools they need.

168. Some students were aware of services in central IT and the library, which were offered to help them develop the digital skills needed for study. However, awareness within reviewed providers was in general quite varied; although services were available, the actual uptake of the services was mixed. Several students interviewed indicated that although it was good that the services existed, they hadn't needed to use them personally. It is not clear from this whether students were being fully supported in the skills they needed to 'learn to learn' and manage independent study time in blended modes.

169. Reviewed providers with significant numbers of international students described the challenges of delivering teaching across time zones during the pandemic. The need to be inclusive presented a significant challenge for synchronous delivery and most had opted to focus on ensuring equal access to asynchronous experiences. For these institutions, the challenge of this kind of delivery remains, as different countries continue to restrict travel.

170. The expectation that (all and any) lectures can be recorded has been driven by students who have become accustomed to having the option to review session(s) they have missed. All providers included in this review reported that they were planning and considering this investment.

Providers' blended offer

171. Strategies for assuring staff skills for digital teaching were generally aligned to the institutional strategy for blended learning, where one existed. Reviewed providers had offered comprehensive training and staff development programmes during the pandemic to ensure that colleagues were able to use digital methods to promote and support students' learning as well as to design and deliver content.

172. In each provider the head of e-learning interviewed gave examples of course teams who had delivered in new and creative ways. There was a clear enthusiasm for continuing to learn and share developing practice and not to 'lose' the gains made in making teaching more accessible and in teaching innovation.

173. Senior institutional decision makers as well as course teams that reviewers spoke to said that they were increasingly using the data captured by institutional systems such as VLEs, library gates/door data and lecture-recording systems to develop dashboards integrated with business information systems. These dashboards were assisting in planning and quality monitoring at course and enterprise level. Data was also being used institutionally in support of institutional/sector agendas (such as access and participation, student engagement). It was not clear from talking with students that this data use was transparent to them, or that it was being used to give them real-time feedback on their academic progress.

Specific recommendations relating to the technology underpinning approaches to blended learning

174. Procurement and delivery of new learning technology systems represent large and complex programmes for IT departments in a rapidly changing environment, as providers reposition themselves in response to blended and online delivery.

Therefore, providers should have in place the necessary project management, procurement and delivery expertise to ensure that provision is maintained at a high standard and that all enterprise platforms and learning technology tools provided for blended learning conform to standards for interoperability and accessibility for students and staff.

175. Providers reviewed described increasing the numbers of staff in their learning technology teams during the pandemic. High quality, professional staff with expertise in learning technology should work closely with senior leaders and course teams to ensure that the technology available in the institution is being used to best support student learning.

176. Understanding of the institutional and individual responsibilities of technical and teaching staff, to ensure that learning materials are accessible, was patchy. The word 'accessible' was often used to mean 'digital' or 'available' rather than aligned with web accessibility standards. More work is needed to ensure that all staff in universities are aware of the policy context, regulations, standards and ethics around use of technology, including equality, inclusion, universal design, accessibility, copyright and data use.

Appendix 1 – Review panel membership

The Blended Learning Review Panel was appointed by the Office for Students in spring 2022. The panel was appointed to provide expert academic judgments about providers' approaches to blended learning. Panel members were selected to ensure the panel had a range of expertise relevant to the task.

Lead reviewer

Professor Susan Orr

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor: Education, De Montfort University
- Professor of Creative Practice Pedagogy
- Former TEF subject panel Chair for Art and Design
- Researcher in creative pedagogy and formerly led a university digital learning team through the pivot to online learning in 2020
- Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- National Teaching Fellow
- Subject specialism: Creative education

Reviewers

Dr Melissa Highton

- Assistant Principal for Online and Open Learning and Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services, University of Edinburgh
- Former Director of Academic IT, University of Oxford
- Researcher in leadership in learning technology
- Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- Subject specialism: Digital pedagogy

Professor Nick Lieven

- Professor of Aircraft Dynamics, University of Bristol
- Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor posts in Education, International and Strategy, University of Bristol
- Former TEF subject panel Chair for Engineering and Technology
- Subject specialism: Engineering

Dr Dave S.P. Thomas

- Senior adviser, Advance HE
- Associate Lecturer, Kent and Medway Medical School

- Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy with expertise in curriculum design
- Subject specialism: Public health

Molly Lawson

- Member of OfS student panel
- Former student of Classics, University of Cambridge, and History, Lancaster University
- Former Outreach Event Supervisor, University of Cambridge and Students with Disabilities Officer, Lancaster University Students' Union

Note: Molly Lawson joined the Blended Learning Review Panel after the panel's fieldwork had been completed, to support the analysis and writing-up phases of its work. This was because another member of the panel had been unable to continue to participate in the blended learning review at this point, for personal reasons. Up to the point that Molly joined the review panel, she had been involved in the review as an OfS student panel member, joining several provider meetings and facilitating discussions with students participating in the review.

Appendix 2 – Glossary of terms

We recognise that a number of terms used within this report have contested definitions, and that other literature may use differing terms or the same terms with differing definitions. This glossary of terms sets out the working definitions of various significant terms employed by the Blended Learning Review Panel throughout their work.

Asynchronous

Asynchronous learning: Learning that does not occur in the same place or at the same time for a whole cohort. Students can access resources and communicate at any time and are not restricted to accessing this learning at any specific time. Enables students to learn at their own pace in their own time.

Blended learning

The working definition of blended learning for this review is set out in 'Section 2: Blended learning definitions.' See in particular paragraph 22.

Digitally Enhanced Learning and Teaching (DELT); Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL); Digital Education (DE); Digital Learning

These terms were used by providers to describe teaching and learning activity that makes use of technology. In some cases, these terms were used by certain provider staff as an alternative to 'blended learning'.   Digital technology is now highly present within higher education. Students can make use of technology when carrying out synchronous or asynchronous, and in-person or remote, learning (see paragraph 23).

Digital pedagogy

The study and practice of employing digital technologies within teaching and learning.

Dual cast

Dual-mode teaching (also referred to as dual delivery, blended synchronous learning or hybrid flexible teaching) refers to a teaching method where the same learning activities are experienced by students on-campus (in-person) and remote (e.g. at home) within a single group session and at the same time (synchronous).

Engagement

Throughout this report, the panel uses the term engagement in a number of places to discuss the manner and extent to which students take part actively in their courses. It should be emphasised that this use of the term is separate to the OfS's definition of 'engagement' in condition B2, defined as 'routine provision of opportunities for students to contribute to the development of their academic experience and their higher education course, in a way that maintains the academic rigour of that course.'

Hybrid learning

Teaching and learning activities which involve two modalities at the same time. For example, when a lecture is delivered live in a room on campus and simultaneously live-streamed for students off-campus.

In-person learning

Where teaching and learning takes place with teaching staff and students in the same physical space. The typical example is the traditional lecture in a lecture hall, but digital technologies are increasingly being integrated into in-person teaching and learning (e.g. interactive quizzes requiring the use of smartphones).

Jisc

An organisation providing UK universities and colleges with shared digital infrastructure and services, and carrying out research on digital technology in education. You can find out more about Jisc at: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/about

Modality

In the context of blended learning, online and face to face are teaching modalities.

National Student Survey (NSS)

A UK-wide annual survey of students to gather students' opinions on the quality of their courses and the academic experience at their provider. For more information, see: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/

On-campus learning

Teaching and learning taking place on-campus principally refers to sessions occurring with teaching staff and students together in the same physical space. Although, increasingly, asynchronous and online learning can be carried out by students on-campus.

Online learning

Where students take part in sessions solely through digital technologies (such as video call software or VLEs).

Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

A UK-wide survey of students studying taught postgraduate courses on their learning and teaching experience. For more information, see: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/reports-publications-and-resources/postgraduate-taught-experience-survey-ptes

Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB)

PSRBs are professional and employer bodies, regulators, and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professions. They can accredit or endorse higher education courses relevant to their profession or group of professions, and set out requirements for the curriculum and approaches to teaching relevant courses.

Synchronous / Asynchronous

Synchronous teaching and learning involves scheduled interaction with individuals coming together at the same time for a session. Asynchronous teaching and learning is unscheduled and carried out by individuals on their own time. Both synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning can take place in-person or online.

UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)

The UKPSF is a globally-recognised framework for benchmarking success within higher education teaching and learning, developed by Advance HE. You can find more information at: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/ukpsf

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

VLEs are web-based platforms which host a variety of learning materials, including but not limited to: administrative information (e.g. course timetables), recorded lectures, documents, and interactive course elements (e.g. quizzes). Some also have social features, including group collaboration and discussion tools.

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