

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGY

At its meeting on the 2nd October 2013, the Taught Student Education Board endorsed the Blended Learning Strategy, detailed below.

Introduction

01. There has been considerable positive activity in Schools and Faculties to adopt Blended Learning approaches into the curriculum. However, recent institutional and external advances are transforming the tools available for blended learning. This includes MOOCs, lecture capture and multimedia management capabilities, social media, Open Educational Resources and mobile devices. There is now a need to refresh the Blended Learning Strategy (first agreed by FLTCs in 2010-11 FLTC/10-04) to reflect these changes in the environment and to reflect the new Digital Strategy for Taught Student Education (TSEB/12-54). It is also hoped that the new Strategy will be more widely used and referenced.
02. Blended Learning and Learning Technology Innovation Group has refreshed the Strategy in an effort to make the document more accessible and user-friendly, and to encourage Schools and Faculties to further embed Blended and Digital Learning approaches. In order to facilitate this, the Strategy has been shortened and a template for use by programme teams has been included.
03. The new Faculty based academic champions for Blended and Digital Learning will be responsible for contextualising the Blended Learning Strategy locally and providing colleagues with discipline-based case studies and evidence from the educational literature (see Annex 1). This activity will be supported by the Staff and Departmental Development Unit, who will be running Faculty-based events to support colleagues adopting blended and digital learning approaches.

Recommendation

04. Taught Student Education Board is invited to endorse the revised Blended Learning Strategy and refer to FTSECs for discussion and implementation. Each Faculty will be requested to report on local context and implementation, through Faculty Academic Champions.

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Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age

Definition

01. Blended Learning is the considered, complementary use of face-to-face teaching, technology, online tools and resources to enhance student education.

Vision

02. Each programme will define and embed into a research-led curriculum an appropriate blended learning approach which supports learning, enhances the student experience, and inspires students to reach their full potential so that they can have an impact on our global and digital society.

Context

03. The Learning and Teaching Board had a vision that by 2012, “a blended learning student experience would be a normal expectation” (LTB/06-43). Now, all staff and students are using technology in learning to some extent, but use is varied across the University. This Strategy aims to develop this in a planned, structured and consistent way, in order to ensure the blend of tools we use is appropriate to the educational context. A key strategic aim of the University continues to be to translate excellence in research and scholarship into learning opportunities for students. Therefore, the effective integration of digital and non-digital tools should provide exceptional and inspirational teaching in a research-led context.
04. Learning technology is an evolving discipline in a fast-changing world that requires an on-going and focused endeavour from practitioners and institutions in order to make conscious decisions on how to enhance student learning and the quality of the student experience. Blended learning applies to all stages of learning and teaching, including curriculum design, delivery and assessment and also applies to many different modes of learning: lecture-based, seminars, laboratory, practice-led, clinical, and so on. It is expected that the actual blend of technology and face-to-face tools will vary depending on the context.
05. The University values the role of individual innovators, and pilot projects are useful in exploring new technologies. However, the Strategy applies to all programmes and staff. The Strategy applies to taught programmes, but the document may include information relevant to research student supervision. This strategy should be read in conjunction with the Digital Strategy for Taught Student Education¹, which is an over-arching strategy concerned with all aspects of student education and the student experience.

Benefits

06. The benefits of blended learning include:
- Students are learning using digital tools in their everyday lives. Embedding blended learning approaches into all aspects of education will help students to make sense of their learning experiences, including digital experiences.
 - Use of a blend of digital and non-digital tools is common within the workplace, and employers expect graduates to be competent with digital tools.
 - Mobile device ownership is increasing rapidly. Blended learning approaches can effectively exploit these technologies to encourage anytime, anywhere learning.

¹ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/qat/documents/policy/Digital-Strategy-Student-Education.pdf>

- Evidencing an integrated use of blended learning approaches will meet the expectations of potential applicants, current students, staff and external stakeholders.
- Publication of digital learning materials externally (in the form of learning assets and structured online courses) will increase the University's global standing and inspire high quality applicants.
- Use of a wide range of internally produced and externally sourced (open educational) learning resources enriches students learning opportunities.
- Innovation, creativity and piloting of new approaches to blended learning will help the University to maintain and extend its distinctive edge and offer professional development opportunities for staff.

Principles

07. The following principles should be adopted for all use of blended learning approaches:

- **Programme-focused:** all blended learning approaches which support learning and enhance the student experience at the University of Leeds should be considered by programme teams to ensure consistency in the student experience.
- **Educationally appropriate:** technology intervention should be curriculum focussed and aligned to the learning strategy. Approaches should be consistent with current educational literature and described in appropriate documentation such as specifications and reviews.
- **Research-based:** use of technologies and digital material should support students' understanding and experience of the research underpinning their discipline and their learning.
- **Optimising contact time:** use of technology and digital materials within, and outside the classroom should enhance learning during contact time.
- **High quality content:** all digital learning materials, whether produced internally or sourced from external open educational resources (OERs), should be relevant and fit for purpose (see University position on OERs²).
- **Available and Accessible:** all tools and digital materials should be designed with mobile technologies in mind, normally made available ahead of time and be accessible to all students³.
- **Use of learning spaces:** Innovative and effective use should be made of existing physical spaces to enhance learning.
- **Skills development:** graduate-level digital literacy skills should be developed to enhance employability.

Infrastructure and resources

08. The following infrastructure and resources are available (or will be for 2014/15) within the University and should be used as part of an integrated blended learning approach:

- **Event capture system** in central teaching spaces and at-desk, for the recording and publication of audio, screen capture and (in some spaces) video from teaching, learning and assessment sessions (available for 2014/15 session);
- **Multimedia management system** for storage, management and publication of all audio and video assets for use in teaching, learning and assessment (available in 2014);

² <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/qat/documents/policy/OERs.pdf>

³ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/accessibility>

- **Video-conferencing and interactive classroom facilities** for synchronous interaction and collaboration between teachers and students;
 - **External digital learning channels** for publication of learning assets and structured courses to global audiences (e.g. iTunesU, YouTube, FutureLearn platforms);
 - **Digital content repositories** for depositing and accessing teaching materials for use with students (e.g. Jorum, Digital Library);
 - **Virtual learning environment** for managed publication of learning resources, provision of information, interaction, collaborative and reflective writing, assessment and curation of external resources.
 - **Computing facilities and software packages** for group based teaching, learning and assessment and specialist use of software.
 - **Skills resources** through library websites (e.g. Skills), training opportunities and local provision.
 - **Tools for pilots** provided through Staff Development or IT services.
09. Additional specialist facilities and resources are provided within Faculties and Schools to support blended learning approaches as appropriate to the discipline. These should be integrated into the curriculum in accordance with this strategy.

Measures of success

10. Programme teams will use a number of sources of feedback to reflect on the success of the blended learning approach, including discussion with staff and students, external examiners' reports, student surveys, and so on. Schools and Faculties should use the following measures to define and report success, setting clear, realistic and aspirational targets in their local context:
- Scores and feedback on student satisfaction surveys (e.g. NSS, Programme Survey, Postgraduate experience survey) in relation to quality of teaching, quality of resources, services and experience.
 - Judgements and comments from internal and external quality assurance exercises (e.g. internal QA reviews; External Examiner reports; PSRB reports).
 - Relevant graduate employability statistics (e.g. Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) report).
 - Usage statistics for institutional digital technologies and services (e.g. Multimedia repositories; event capture systems; external digital learning channels).
 - Informal feedback from students and staff about engagement with, and effectiveness of, blended learning.

Implementation and timescales

11. Programme teams, Schools and Faculties should consider their local practice in the context of this strategy and draw up action plans (using the template overleaf) to work towards realising the strategy where their current provision necessitates this. These action plans should be considered, agreed and monitored annually by Faculty Blended Learning Committees, with support from Academic Blended Learning Champions, SDDU and other relevant personnel. Blended Learning Champions will provide a document summarising the strategy in their local context for use by programme teams.

Blended Learning Strategy Action Plan

Faculty:

School:

Programme(s):

Year:

Blended Learning Principle	How does this principle apply to your programme?	What evidence do you have that this principle has been met within your programme ⁴ ?	What action do you need to take to ensure this principle is met within your programme?	What resources/support do you need for effective implementation of this principle within your programme?
Programme-focused: all blended learning approaches which support learning and enhance the student experience at the University of Leeds should be considered by programme teams to ensure consistency in the student experience.				
Educationally appropriate: technology intervention should be curriculum focussed and aligned to the learning strategy. Approaches should be consistent with current educational literature and described in appropriate documentation such as specifications and reviews.				
Research-based: use of technologies and digital material should support students' understanding and experience of the research underpinning their discipline and their learning.				
Optimising contact time: use of technology and digital materials within, and outside the classroom should enhance learning during contact time.				
High quality content: all digital learning materials, whether produced internally or sourced from external open educational resources, should be relevant and fit for purpose (see University position on OERs ⁵).				
Available and Accessible: all tools and digital materials should be designed with mobile technologies in mind, normally made available ahead of time and be accessible to all students ⁶ .				
Use of learning spaces: Innovative and effective use should be made of existing physical spaces to enhance learning.				
Skills development: graduate-level digital literacy skills should be developed to enhance employability.				

⁴ Refer to Blended Learning Strategy measures of success and use module – or programme – level examples.

⁵ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/qat/documents/policy/OERs.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/accessibility>

Annex 1: Blended Learning Academic Champion Role Description

The University has a Digital Strategy for Taught Student Education and a Blended Learning Strategy, and staff across the University are actively using digital technologies and blended learning approaches to enhance the quality of student learning and the overall student experience. The role of the blended learning academic champion will be to support the implementation and realisation of these strategies, at University level and within their local environment. One academic champion will be appointed for each Faculty in the University.

Workload allocation: 0.1 fte

Responsible to: Director of Digital Learning

Term: 3 years, with a possibility of one further 2 year term

Responsibilities and duties of the role:

1. Membership of the University's Blended Learning and Learning Technology Innovation Group (BLLTIG), representing the views of the Faculty;
2. Contributing to the development and / or implementation of on-going University Blended and Digital Learning projects, under the guidance of the Director of Digital Learning and commensurate with the workload allowance;
3. Chairing (or supporting the Chair of) a Faculty Blended Learning Committee (or equivalent), which receives reports from BLLTIG and oversees the on-going development and implementation of a Faculty level Blended Learning Strategy (or equivalent);
4. Supporting academic staff in the Faculty in the capacity of a local champion for digital and blended learning;
5. Providing leadership, support and guidance to local blended learning enhancement teams (or equivalent), under the guidance of the digital learning team and SDDU;
6. Providing regular updates to the Director of Digital Learning about Faculty blended and digital learning strategy, plans and on-going projects.

Person specification:

The ideal candidate for this role will be an experienced member of academic staff with:

1. Extensive experience of Higher Education teaching in a blended learning mode;
2. Experience of leading the implementation of successful blended learning initiatives with their own discipline area, School and / or Faculty;
3. Interest in assessing the impact of blended learning approaches and digital technologies on student engagement and learning.