Board of Management

Learning & Teaching Committee

Date of Meeting	**Tuesday 7 September 2021**
Paper No.	**LTC1-F**
Agenda Item	**4.2**
Subject of Paper	**Blended Learning: Lessons Learned and Future Directions**
FOISA Status	**Disclosable**
Primary Contact	**Gus Grubb, Dean of Faculty Education & Humanities**
Date of production	**27 August 2021**
Action	**For Discussion and Decision**

1. Recommendations

1.1 The committee is asked to discuss the key Blended Learning Lessons Learned over the last academic year (2020/21) and beyond, within the Faculty of Education and Humanities.

2. Purpose of Paper

2.1 The purpose of the paper is to provide an update and share the lessons learned from the Faculty of Education and Humanities over the last 18 months and is an attempt to draw together some key learning points and provide some recommendations and guidance for all Faculties to consider and discuss. It provides an overview of experiences and offers a non-exhaustive list of considerations for the College and the Faculty to discuss and decide on next steps.

3. Context and Content

3.1 March 2020 and the first UK Lockdown resulted in CoGC moving, at one point, all learning and teaching to online. As we slowly move away from the Covid-19 pandemic, the educational landscape has changed and the need to offer a curriculum with greater flexibility and digital provision is imminent.

This blended learning document has been developed in alignment with the Student Academic Experience Strategy. The 5 headings relating to blended learning approaches are explored to support curriculum teams and managers in considering the impact of decisions on the City Student, City Learning and Teaching and the City Student Journey.

3.2 • The paper explores the following: equality, diversity and inclusion, blended learning approaches, student communications and support in blended learning, assessment and feedback, staffing and a summary of considerations for the College and the Faculty.

- It should be noted that this paper is not designed to be prescriptive and is deliberately aimed to be broad enough for all Faculties to consider within their own context.
- The paper was brought together with consideration and review of results and comments produced from the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2020-2021, the JISC student survey and the College withdrawal survey.
- Consultation took place across all 5 curricular areas of the Faculty, the LTA, Faculty learning technologists, Faculty students, library services, student support team, AD forum, CH forum and other Faculties
- This paper provides a platform to build from in advancing our blended offer across the Faculty and the College. This will be further supported by the significant investment in the new VLE (Canvas) enhancing and taking forward the College's transformative approach to our learning and teaching environment.

3.3 To the rear of the paper, there are some examples of College and Faculty considerations, this is a snapshot of those considerations:

College Considerations
- The College should explore funding options to develop a generic 'be tech ready' course on campus for any future interested enrolled students prior to course commencement.
- As progress on the new VLE, we as a College may consider how we optimise the two learning spaces, digital and physical to ensure that students can move seamlessly between online and classroom learning across a combination of locations, times and technologies.

- The College may wish to consider adding a new section to the general college induction module relating to blended learning, including some general advice for students.
- We may also wish to consider that the induction activities and student engagement activities include workshops on online etiquette such as use of cameras and learner agreements.

Faculty Considerations
- It will be important for all students to be made aware of the tech that will be used throughout their course. This information could be made available on the Get Ready for College Microsite and contained within induction materials/resources. This may remove some of the early challenges at the start of the course about technology and allow students to participate fully from day one.
- Future development should consider supporting student engagement from day one, by enhancing the Get Ready for College microsites to include some asynchronous activity to support the use of technology.
- It will also be important for curriculum teams to consider and develop a host of short synchronous 'keeping warm' events where technology platforms are used to allow students to practice using the technology in the educational context prior to formal learning.
- Faculty curricular teams may wish to consider how we ensure learners are supported in asynchronous learning, scaffolding and support such as activity completion timescales may be required in addition to self-evaluation tools such as checklists and opportunities for lecturer feedback.

4. Impact and Implications

4.1 The impact of restrictions associated with Covid have severely disrupted the learning and teaching approaches for our students with particular emphasis on practical areas of delivery and on Campus support.

4.2 The Faculty and College can continue to develop a blended approach that offers access to both digital and physical space, providing the necessary support to our students and allow learning to flourish. The Faculty returned a satisfaction response of 82% from last years Student Satisfaction and Engagement survey and it is expected that this will increase for this year based on lessons learned.

Appendices

Blended Learning: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Blended Learning: Lesson Learned and Future Directions

Education and Humanities

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Aims and Purpose

March 2020 and the first UK Lockdown resulted in CoGC moving, at one point, all learning and teaching to online. As we slowly move away from the Covid-19 pandemic, the educational landscape has changed and the need to offer a curriculum with greater flexibility and digital provision is imminent. *"Our students of the future will be accustomed to the seamless and inextricable integration of technology into their lives on an unprecedented scale"* Student Academic Experience Strategy (SAES). Furthermore, employers will expect the workforce to possess the necessary skills to work between a physical and or, digital space.

Educators are now challenged to use the experience in the past year to purposefully combine excellent pedagogy with technology to design blended learning approaches. The SAES aims *"to enable all students to achieve their potential through supporting successful progression, raising levels of attainment, enhancing student meta skills/attributes, and preparing for work and or further study".*

This blended learning document has been developed in alignment with this strategy. The 5 headings relating to blended learning approaches are explored to support curriculum teams and managers in considering the impact of decisions on the City Student, City Learning and Teaching and the City Student Journey.

This draft is based on the experiences of the Faculty of Education and Humanities over the last 18 months and is an attempt to draw together some key learning points and provide some recommendations and guidance for all Faculties to consider and discuss. These experiences have been drawn from practical experience of design and delivery along with feedback gained from supporting surveys such as, the Student Satisfaction and Engagement, the JISC national survey, the Withdrawal Survey and the Learner Support survey. There were also areas of consultation undertaken across Faculties. The Faculty of Education & Humanities curriculum is largely theoretical, which reflects our approach, however other Faculties with a larger practical demand in their curriculum will need to consider how a blended approach may work for them.

It should be noted that this paper is not designed to be prescriptive and is deliberately aimed to be broad enough for all Faculties to consider within their own context, as outlined above. There should not be a move away from general pedagogical approaches when considering the move towards a blended approach, the technology should support the pedagogy, not the other way round.

As with all our approaches to teaching and learning in the College, the student remains at the heart of everything we do, therefore making any decisions on a blended approach should enhance the student experience and student engagement.

It would also be prudent for all Faculties to review and respond to results and comments produced as a result of the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2020-2021, the JISC student survey and the College withdrawal survey. The student experience team within the College produced a paper collating the common themes across these 3 surveys and would be a helpful starting point for Faculties.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in design and delivery

Digital inclusion is more than providing equipment, it must also ensure that the most vulnerable in society "*have the skills, confidence and information literacy required to make the most of being online*" (Renewing Scotland's full potential in a digital world: consultation, Sept 2020).

- Designing a blended learning course is an opportunity to consider a diverse range of learners from the outset and design the resources to be inclusive for all.
- All learning and teaching including blended approaches must comply with the Equality Act 2010, including the Reasonable Adjustment Duty, Public Sector Equality Duty and Accessibility Regulations. This means using digital accessibility tools such as captions, transcripts and/or recordings to optimise inclusivity and not just for disabled students or students with an additional support need where there is a legal requirement to do so but also for:-
  - Students who experience an unstable internet connection so miss content.
  - Students with parenting/caring responsibilities who miss classes.
  - Students with COVID or who care for family members with COVID, who miss classes.
  - Students with additional support needs.
  - Students whose first language is not English, who face challenges in understanding spoken English on first viewing.
  - Students who find it difficult to follow the lecturer/concentrate for too long in an online environment.
  - Students with short/long term absences to support profession and skills/knowledge development so that they can catch up on missed learning.

- For assistance with inclusivity in the design and delivery of blended learning contact the College Learning Support Team in the college.
- The blended learning environment can assist in providing choice in how and when students access their learning in line with their individual needs.
- This approach may better serve learners who have challenging circumstances and may help reach those not currently studying, widening access for study and ultimately supporting diversity in the workplace.
- If CoGC is to provide fair and equal access for all, it is important to ensure that part time students are offered the same resources, opportunity and support to access blended learning as full time students.
- All learners require timely provision of resources.

The SAES considers the Student Journey which begins with readiness, including tech ready.

- Faculty Considerations: It will be important for all students to be made aware of the tech that will be used throughout their course. This information could be made available on the Get Ready for College microsite and contained within induction materials/resources. This may remove some of the early challenges at the start of the course about technology and allow students to participate fully from day one.
- College Considerations: The College should explore funding options to develop a generic 'be tech ready' course on campus for any future interested enrolled students prior to course commencement.

The inclusion of all students from the start of a course is imperative.

- Faculty Considerations: Future development should consider supporting student engagement from day one, by enhancing the Get Ready for College microsites to include some asynchronous activity to support the use of technology.
- Faculty Considerations: It will also be important for curriculum teams to consider and develop a host of short synchronous 'keeping warm' events where technology platforms are used to allow students to practice using the technology in the educational context prior to formal learning.

Blended Learning Approaches

Blended learning is an approach to teaching and learning that combines physical learning with digital learning. Curricular teams across the Faculty of Education & Humanities took a different approach to the design of each unit or indeed outcome, determined by the mix of practical and theoretical elements of the course. This in keeping with the SAES will continue moving forward with our blended approach and will apply to other Faculties. Decisions on a blended approach should consider whether physical and/or digital allows better opportunity for learning to be Active, Blended and Connected.

ABC learning design approaches and resources offered by the Learning and Teaching Academy can support curriculum teams in deciding their approach to blended learning, whilst careful planning is required to manage student on campus activity in considering the timetable design for each student.

There are two approaches to online delivery, synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous learning involves learners working in real time together with other learners at a specified time.

Asynchronous learning involves activity which may afford learners more flexibility and choice in how and when they learn, and the resources used can be varied supporting learner inclusion. This type of learning can happen at any time and at different times for different members of the group.

- Faculty Considerations: Faculty curricular teams may wish to consider how we ensure learners are supported in asynchronous learning, scaffolding and support such as activity completion timescales may be required in addition to self-evaluation tools such as checklists and opportunities for lecturer feedback.

Thought should also be given to the learning maturity of the student group to ensure that all learners have ability to self-motivate and navigate through the resources.

There have been some excellent examples of good practice in asynchronous activity across the College. However, the quick shift to online learning over the last session resulted in many lecturers opting more often for synchronous activity as that is how their existing resources were designed to be used. The staffing section later in this document outlines the upskilling and collaboration required to enable lecturers to fully embrace a blended learning approach.

The Faculty identified that learners need time to build proficiency in using technology therefore lecturers should be mindful that learner ability may be slow at the outset and plan the activities accordingly. The Get Ready for College micro website will assist in highlighting technology used on the course.

- Faculty Consideration: It will be important for curriculum teams to select the technology platforms that best support the activity in their curriculum area, ensuring to only pick a few to avoid 'technology fatigue' for learners, particularly those with Additional Support Needs. The LTA will assist Faculties in this area.

All learning spaces (General Teaching Rooms) will be progressively developed to have a minimal digital kit-out, as identified and set out in the academic planning paper, allowing potential for live streaming of classes (If appropriate) and the recording of activities.

The introduction of our new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) offers the opportunity for a new intuitive collaboration space for staff and students. The College have invested significantly in the new VLE (Canvas) to ensure that the student journey and experience is inspirational, excellent and innovative. The new VLE will enhance and take forward the College's transformative approach to our learning and teaching environment.

This will make the presentation of materials easier, provides better and more easily manageable assessment tools and makes communication and collaboration more effective - this among many other things.
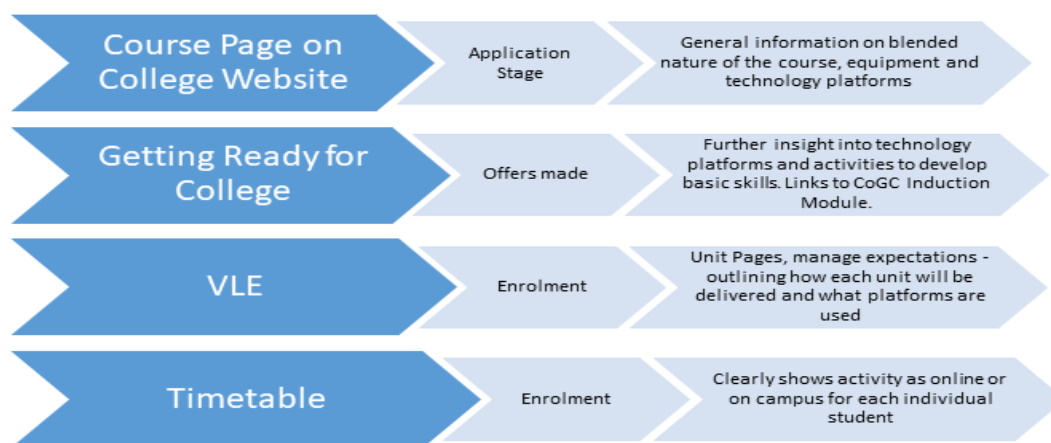
- College Considerations: As this progresses, we as a College may consider how we optimise the two learning spaces, digital and physical to ensure that students can move seamlessly between online and classroom learning across a combination of locations, times and technologies.
- Faculty Considerations: The introduction of a new digital learning space is planned (VLE) and Faculties may wish to consider the look and feel of the resource, providing a sense of familiarity and ease of access to the learner. A resource already exists within the College, which should be referred to, for learning design. The learning technologists assigned to each Faculty will be key in assisting with this.

This progressive approach on learning spaces and the introduction of the new VLE supports the college blue ocean and purple strategy, by thinking about learner spaces and resources of the future, which are innovative and inspirational.

The College joins a select group of institutions across Scotland, including Stirling and Herriot Watt Universities, Borders College, the Glasgow School of Art and Clyde College in adopting Canvas.

Student Communication and Support in Blended Learning

Managing student emotion and motivation in course and activity design is vital to ensure student engagement. Communicating with the student begins at application. Clear communication is paramount to ensure that learners understand how their course will be blended, know what is expected and when they are required to be on campus. The College website, Get Ready for College microsite, the new VLE and timetables are all vital tools for this communication.

Course Page on College Website	Application Stage	General information on blended nature of the course, equipment and technology platforms
Getting Ready for College	Offers made	Further insight into technology platforms and activities to develop basic skills. Links to CoGC Induction Module.
VLE	Enrolment	Unit Pages, manage expectations - outlining how each unit will be delivered and what platforms are used
Timetable	Enrolment	Clearly shows activity as online or on campus for each individual student

Communication is the responsibility of everyone in the college, Faculties should carefully consider how they communicate with all faculty staff (both academic and support) so that information passed on to students is accurate and consistent.

There are a variety of communication methods, which can be used throughout delivery depending on the characteristics of the students.

Some curriculum areas across the Faculty experimented with using google forms to gather student feedback on online in the first quarter of Block 1 in the last academic year.

There was a positive experience in enhancing lecturer reflection and encouraging an agile response to learner feedback and communications.

It was also noted that there had been a helpful amount of advice and guidance sent out to students from the College about studying at home during lockdown.

- College Considerations: The College may wish to consider adding a new section to the general college induction module relating to blended learning, including some general advice for students.
- College Considerations: We may also wish to consider that the induction activities and student engagement activities include workshops on online etiquette such as use of cameras and learner agreements.

A learning community enhances student motivation and their emotional connection to their course. The Faculty of Education and Humanities experience is that student groups who had been on campus prior to lockdown, and therefore had developed a sense of community, continued to do so throughout the online experience.

- Faculty Considerations: Faculty curriculum teams may wish to ensure that consideration is given to facilitating on campus activity early in the course to achieve this.

Team building sessions such as those delivered by student engagement Team can also support building learning communities.

When offering additional support to students, consideration should be given to the individual needs of the learner when determining if that is delivered on campus or online.   The availability of such flexible support options may increase the motivation of students who find some elements of coursework challenging and reduce college related anxiety. The Faculty identified that one challenge is understanding when additional support is required and what consideration should be given to measuring engagement during digital activities.

It should be noted that all the elements of the academic advisors handbook can continue to be delivered whether digital or physical.

Assessment and Feedback

The impact of Covid-19 in relation to online learning and the personal challenges faced by learners allowed the education sector to think differently about assessment. In line with awarding body guidance, a greater use of holistic and integrated assessment approaches has ensued. Consideration has also been given to assessment conditions where open book assessment is now more common place ensuring a greater focus on student understanding rather than knowledge retention.

The last 18 months have brought to the forefront continuing discussions regarding 'over assessment' which should be addressed through the redesign of qualifications (HN Next Gen) and the creation of alternative assessment models designed by education providers and approved by awarding bodies.

Faculty Considerations:
- Curriculum teams should ensure that the assessment requirements are mapped across courses to allow for integration of assessment. Where practicable, curriculum teams may wish to devise alternative assessments and submit to awarding bodies for approval to reduce the assessment burden for students.
- Faculties should consider formative assessment approaches in order to gather evidence and track learner progress in support of holistic assessment decision making, and to prepare students for summative assessment.
- Communication with learner services such as learning support lecturers is important to ensure that learners understand the assessment methodology and have appropriate continued support where required.
- To encourage the avoidance of assessment malpractice, curriculum teams will need to embed activities into the Get Ready for College microsites and induction activities as a common feature going forward.
- Curriculum teams may find it beneficial to collaborate to ensure consistency in assessment methodology to ensure that those participating digitally, and those on campus, are treated equally and fairly, and in line with verification procedures.

In a classroom setting students will receive regular formative feedback. Lecturers should consider how to ensure that students working digitally also benefit from regular feedback. Synchronous sessions allow the use of discussion, live chat, breakout rooms and screen sharing to provide feedback to learners and asynchronous learning should also allow for scheduled direct feedback opportunities.

It is also vitally important that staff inform students clearly, whether or not they are having a general discussion or they are providing feedback, students very often don't treat formative feedback as formal feedback and as such can dismiss this.

- Faculty Considerations: Faculties may need to be mindful of how feedback is provided in a blended learning environment, giving consideration to the impact of feedback delivered digitally or in the classroom where students are in front of their peers.

Staffing

To design blended learning that is in line with the Student Academic Experience Strategy, ongoing investment is required in the staff who will be designing and delivering the courses. The move from a traditional teaching approach to entirely online for many course areas, was a substantial change for lecturers and this will also be replicated in a move to a blended approach. Therefore the ongoing requirement for upskilling and reskilling of teaching and learning staff and support staff will continue into the future. The webinars offered by the Learning and Teaching Academy in the last session demonstrated an appetite for CPD.

A resource to facilitate development discussions is essential so that it is tailored to the 'readiness' of each individual and aligned to the direction of the curriculum team as set out in the operational plan.

- College Considerations: The SAES outlines the needs for learning to be connected to encourage collaboration and in order to move forward with this, we as a College should consider a staffing budget that would allow hours for lecturers to work together to design and deliver a sector leading blended learning experience.
- College Considerations: The blended learning fund has been a positive initiative in encouraging collaboration and allowing lecturers the time and space to embrace new technologies within their teaching practice. The College should consider the continuation of this fund as we move forward, allowing for the agility required in a blended learning environment, which is underpinned by investing in the upskilling of the lecturing staff.

The Learning and Teaching conference in September 2021 is an example of sharing practice at college level. Education and Humanities identified a need for improved sharing of experiences at Faculty level and are exploring ways of utilising the Faculty Board structure to encourage innovation and collaboration.

- It may be appropriate for other Faculties to consider this also and as a College consider a more structured approach to ongoing cross College collaboration.

Summary of Considerations

College:

- The College should explore funding options to develop a generic 'be tech ready' course on campus for any future interested enrolled students prior to course commencement.
- As progress on the new VLE, we as a College may consider how we optimise the two learning spaces, digital and physical to ensure that students can move seamlessly between online and classroom learning across a combination of locations, times and technologies.
- The College may wish to consider adding a new section to the general college induction module relating to blended learning, including some general advice for students.
- We may also wish to consider that the induction activities and student engagement activities include workshops on online etiquette such as use of cameras and learner agreements.
- The SAES outlines the needs for learning to be connected to encourage collaboration and in order to move forward with this, we as a College should consider a staffing budget that would allow hours for lecturers to work together to design and deliver a sector leading blended learning experience.
- The blended learning fund has been a positive initiative in encouraging collaboration and allowing lecturers the time and space to embrace new technologies within their teaching practice. The College should consider the continuation of this fund as we move forward, allowing for the agility required in a blended learning environment, which is underpinned by investing in the upskilling of the lecturing staff.

Faculty

- It will be important for all students to be made aware of the tech that will be used throughout their course. This information could be made available on the Get Ready for College Microsite and contained within induction materials/resources. This may remove some of the early challenges at the start of the course about technology and allow students to participate fully from day one.
- Future development should consider supporting student engagement from day one, by enhancing the Get Ready for College microsites to include some asynchronous activity to support the use of technology.

- It will also be important for curriculum teams to consider and develop a host of short synchronous 'keeping warm' events where technology platforms are used to allow students to practice using the technology in the educational context prior to formal learning.
- Faculty curricular teams may wish to consider how we ensure learners are supported in asynchronous learning, scaffolding and support such as activity completion timescales may be required in addition to self-evaluation tools such as checklists and opportunities for lecturer feedback.
- It will be important for curriculum teams to select the technology platforms that best support the activity in their curriculum area, ensuring to only pick a few to avoid 'technology fatigue' for learners, particularly those with Additional Support Needs. The LTA will assist Faculties in this area.
- The introduction of the new digital learning space (VLE) allows Faculties to consider the look and feel of the resource, providing a sense of familiarity and ease of access to the learner. A resource already exists within the College, which should be referred to, for learning design. The learning technologists assigned to each Faculty will be key in assisting with this.
- A learning community enhances student motivation and their emotional connection to their course. Faculty curriculum teams may wish to ensure that consideration is given to facilitating on campus activity early in the course to achieve this.
- Where possible and practicable, curriculum teams may wish to devise alternative forms of assessment and submit to awarding bodies for approval.
- To encourage the avoidance of assessment malpractice, the Faculty curriculum teams will need to embed activities into the Get Ready for College microsites and induction activities as a common feature going forward.
- Curriculum teams may find it beneficial to collaborate to ensure consistency in assessment methodology to ensure that those participating digitally, and those on campus, are treated equally and fairly, and in line with verification procedures.
- Faculties should consider that learners may need formative assessment practice that is aligned to summative assessment, whether physical or digital.

Faculties may need to be mindful of how feedback is provided in a blended learning environment, giving consideration to the impact of feedback delivered digitally or in the classroom where students are in front of their peers.