

Board of Management Learning and Teaching Committee

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 10 May 2022
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Agenda Item	4.3
Subject of Paper	Blended Learning Planning 2022-23
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Dr Claire Carney (Vice Principal Student Experience)
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Action	For Discussion

1. Recommendations

The committee is invited to discuss strategic development of the Blended Learning delivery model.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to provide a synopsis of, and facilitate a discussion on, the Blended Learning delivery approach across the College. The paper also provides a set of strategic principles for development of the Blended model.

3. Consultation

The paper has been developed in consultation with the Learning and Teaching Academy; the Associate Dean Forum, the Curriculum Head Forum, the Student Experience Group, the Student Academic Experience Group and the Senior Management Team.

4. Key Insights

4.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a fundamental shift to the delivery of college programmes over the course of the last 2 years, pivoting from fully on-campus teaching to fully on-line and then varying blends of online and on campus. COVID-19 shocked and challenged every aspect of our Learning and Teaching (L&T) and student support delivery systems across the whole College. The College was 'forced' into a fully online model through a series of lockdowns and, in between, pivoted to a blended model of delivery. The blend and approach were dictated by COVID-19 restrictions with physical distancing, in particular, limiting student numbers and our ability to teach on campus. In effect the driver for a blended approach was physical practicalities rather than L&T best practice.

As our COVID-19 response developed, the College committed through the Student Academic Experience Strategy to a future approach to L&T where 'City Learning and Teaching will be Active, Blended and Connected'. In this pedagogically-driven approach, blended learning requires students 'to engage with timetabled onsite learning activities across the academic year, in addition to engaging with digital learning activities between these times' ([QAA, 2020](#)). Blended learning has the advantages of increased flexibility and convenience as well as supporting effective learning. A blend of in-person and online teaching, with a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous activities, gives students opportunities to work flexibly in their own time where appropriate, but also to collaborate, socialize and undertake practical work. Moving to this next phase of blended delivery requires some reflection (where are we now), planning (how will we get there) and some developmental pillars (what will it look like).

4.2 Reflection (where we are now)

Over the course of the last 2 years, the College committed to reflecting on and learning from the COVID-19 L&T experience to ensure that we are better placed in the future to deliver a quality online learning offering. A cross-College Blended Learning 'Lessons Learned' exercise was conducted by Dean Gus Grubb. A working group was established and key outcomes from the study were shared across the Faculties and key internal Committees including Academic Board (Oct 2021).

A series of touchpoint 'surveys' were also conducted during this time to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (these included the student Experience Survey, Withdrawal survey and Learning Support Survey). The most recent evidence provided by the Student Experience Survey (Nov 2021) is positive, with 91% overall satisfaction with the College, an increase of 2.7% from the previous session. There was also increased satisfaction with online L&T materials, engaging course activities and overall satisfaction for L&T which was scored at 88.7%, an increase of 3.9% from last year (see Table 1). This is a remarkable achievement given the turbulent times experienced but is indicative of the maturing approach and the investments made in online development and delivery.

Table 1. Student Engagement Survey comparison data

Question	20/21	21/22	DIFF
Q9. Online learning & teaching materials are informative and of a good standard	83.1%	87.6%	+4.5%
Q10. Course activities are interesting and engaging	83.5	86.4	+2.9%
Q 19. Overall satisfaction for Learning and Teaching	85.1	88.7%	+3.6%

The survey also highlighted some key areas for development and enhancement. These were echoed in recent Student Association feedback gathered from Class Reps from all Faculties in Block One of 2021/22. This important feedback from both sources, both quantitative and qualitative, has been triangulated and key themes have emerged, the most prominent being communication, assessment and timetabling. These themes are currently being addressed through joint work between the Student Experience Directorate and communications to develop a student communications framework, the Learning and Teaching Academy will take on the key theme working with Faculties on designing assessment and feedback, and the Timetabling Group have agreed to review the timetabling procedure and consider the student proposal of 'mindful timetabling'.

4.3 Planning (how we will get there) – Investing in Blended Learning

It was clear from the outset of the pandemic that the perception of online learning, teaching and assessment being a financially more efficient model was unfounded. Indeed, the shift to online learning exposed the deficiencies of simply moving materials online and, more profoundly, highlighted issues with the efficacy of the Virtual Learning Environment.

In response, the **Blended Learning Fund (BLF)** was established to ensure that we are well placed to support quality online L&T and to "Let Learning Flourish". It is recognised that online delivery is resource intensive and includes time requirements for the design of materials and online student support. To date the College has funded nearly £600k worth of projects and have therefore developed a significant amount of quality online learning materials establishing a significant baseline. The impact of this is perhaps evidenced in the most recent Student Experience Survey (Table 1 above).

A further key investment and component of the Student Academic Experience Strategy was to 'Provide and implement the best possible **Virtual Learning Environment** for our students and staff which is accessible, inclusive, reliable and adaptable'. This followed significant issues linked with Moodle and 'MyCity' which rendered the status quo unsustainable. Issues had been longstanding and, with the utter reliance on the VLE highlighted following the onset of the pandemic, the procurement of Canvas is considered a 'step change' in blended delivery for both staff and students.

Canvas will offer a more accessible platform and will act as a channel for student communications therefore addressing communication issues identified above. Moreover, it will also allow for a more integrated approach to assessment and learner analytics. Canvas will be THE Virtual Learning Environment for City of Glasgow College and as such will be mandatory for staff and students (ie no L&T other VLE will be supported). In addition, the development by IT of a student app, which will co-exist alongside the Canvas, will take over much of the functionality of 'MyCity'. The combination of both developments will firmly place the college in a more digitally strategic position for the coming years.

4.4 Developmental Pillars of Blended Learning (What will it look like?)

Blended learning, whilst new to the College, is not a new concept and has been in operation in many educational settings for a number of years. For context, Appendix 1 includes definitions of different modes of learning and the types of activities that they support.

The task for the College now is to move on from considering blended learning as the 'emergency' model that we have operated for the last 2 years and to continue to develop the maturity of our offer. Over the past two years educators across the college have developed a wealth of knowledge, experience and resources and it is important that we build on and incorporate what has worked well in order to deliver a sustainable quality delivery model. It is proposed that the Model will be based on a small number of key Principles which have been developed in consultation with staff and in conjunction with key literature in the area.

It is proposed therefore that the Blended learning model will be based on the following principles:

- **Pedagogically driven:** Delivery of the curriculum will be drawn from best L&T practices for the particular discipline/subject area. It will be led by a 'conversational framework' approach supported by the LTA which identifies six learning activity types and is supported by the ABC learning design model. The LTA will support course teams in developing/designing best practice in blended delivery using this approach and how Canvas and other tools can support collaboration and community building between our students wherever they are located.
- **Inclusive and accessible:** the College will offer a supportive and inclusive curriculum where different backgrounds and cultures in staff and students are cherished and celebrated. Our students will have equal access to learning, information and services, regardless of physical or developmental abilities or impairments. Well-designed blended learning, supported by appropriate technology, can make learning more accessible and effective and support will be provided by the LTA.
- **Student centred:** The blended learning model positions our students at the centre, supported by teaching and educational support staff. The development of student study skills, including self-management and self-direction, will become more important.

Observing the above principles course teams will work together to decide the appropriate blend of learning activities (face to face on campus/online/synchronous/asynchronous) for their curricular area focusing on the following key questions:

- What is best for our students the level at which they are studying ?
- What is best for the curriculum area?
- What are the intended learning outcomes?
- What blend of learning activities will meet these outcomes?
- How does this blend support active and collaborative learning?
- What resources do we need in the learning spaces (digital or physical) to support these activities?
- How can we take a holistic and constructively aligned approach to assessing student learning?

For planning purposes, it is imperative that the student experience takes priority over hybrid working and the blend might change as we move through the academic year.

5. Impact and Implications

The development of the Blended Learning model has a number of implications for the College, the majority of these are being addressed and include:

- *Learning spaces:* Active blended learning will necessitate a change in how we configure and use learning spaces, be these digital or physical. Physical learning space should support digitally enabled collaboration and community building. A blended pedagogy, where acquisition activity is mostly done online, enables face-to-face time to be used for group working, practical tasks and active participation. This might mean the redesign of classroom and social learning spaces to support collaboration and connectivity. A Learning Spaces group (sub group of the Digital Transformation Group) has been established to develop a model of active learning spaces. A separate and important issue is understanding time tabling and the impact on room utilisation. An assessment of utilisation will be conducted for Block 3 TT and plans for Block 1 22/23 to gain an understanding of BL room utilisation.
- *Learning design:* active blended learning foregrounds a process of deliberate learning design that might have been implicit or unacknowledged in 'traditional' face-to-face delivery. With curriculum teams having to consider how to blend activities, delivery methods (synchronous or asynchronous, online or face to face) and technologies, the LTA will support learning design and provide staff development in this area.
- *Digital skills:* Over the past two years staff and students have had to develop a range of digital skills to support online learning and teaching. A clear outcome of the last 2 years is the recognition that a significant majority of our students did not have the necessary educationally relevant digital skills to progress or excel in their studies. The Get Ready for College sites and induction activities will be progressed to support and develop these skills. In parallel, as our model evolves support for continued staff digital skills development will be important
- *Assessment* – an active and collaborative approach to learning, alongside the use of digital tools, implies a change in the way that we design and support assessment. A blend of digitally enabled formative and summative assessment, that involves group working, projectworking or problem-based approaches might allow a more holistic view of assessment design. In addition, as well as being pedagogically desirable, the feedback options available in Canvas and other tools should allow us to address student concerns around the quality and quantity of feedback that they receive.
- *Financial implications:* Clearly the continued development of BL resources, adaptation of learning spaces and enhanced digital provision will continue to draw significant financial spend. and in the current financial climate this will become increasingly challenging.
- *Equality Impact:* An Equality Impact Assessment for the Blended Learning model has been developed and this will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure address issues that have been identified to comply with the Equality Act.

APPENDIX1 - Modes of learning and teaching

	Blended	Hybrid	Online	Face to face
Definition	Blended learning is ‘a combination of face-to-face learning with separate periods of typically asynchronous online activity’. ¹	Hybrid teaching involves ‘teaching a mixed group of physically present and remote students simultaneously’. ¹	In online learning ‘all the learning may be web-based, requiring students to use a connected device in order to access any of the learning, teaching and support activities. ... online can be considered as happening at a physical distance from a provider’ ²	Face-to-face teaching is ‘an approach where the delivery of a programme happens at a provider with a staff member delivering learning and teaching directly to students’. ²
Implications for teaching	Asynchronous activity takes place online and remotely. Synchronous activity takes place face to face on campus and is focussed on participation and active learning. Activity is scaffolded by learning material available online.	Synchronous activity takes place simultaneously face-to-face in the classroom and online. Asynchronous activity takes place online and remotely. Course material is available online and asynchronous activities. Activity is scaffolded by learning material available online.	All course material is available online and synchronous and asynchronous activities take place online and remotely. (This was the main mode of teaching in Academic Year 2020-21.)	Synchronous activity takes place face to face on campus and is focussed on participation and active learning.. Activity is scaffolded by learning material available online.
Collaboration, discussion, inquiry, practice	Seminars/labs/practicals O365 Padlet	Synchronous classes (face to face and Teams) O365 Padlet	Synchronous classes (Teams) O365 Padlet Discussions (Canvas/Teams)	Seminars/labs/practicals O365 Padlet

¹ College Development Network, 2021, *Key Terms*: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kAV9zu_Nv5kSt36ult-wMHuAbRdCxQbD

² QAA, 2020, *Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning*: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/building-a-taxonomy-for-digital-learning.pdf>

(example activities and tools)	Library resources	Discussions (Canvas/Teams) Library resources	Library resources	Library resources
Production (assessment examples)	Formative assessment – self tests, Journal, blog, portfolio Summative assessment – coursework, group work, online or on campus	Formative assessment – self tests, Journal, blog, portfolio Summative assessment – coursework, group work, online or on campus	Formative assessment – self tests, Journal, blog, portfolio Summative assessment – coursework, group work, online	Formative assessment – self tests, Journal, blog, portfolio Summative assessment – coursework, group work, online or on campus
Acquisition (example lecture produced or curated course resources)	Canvas pages Short, recorded videos Reading list Third-party resources	Canvas pages Short, recorded videos Reading list Third-party resources	Canvas pages Short, recorded videos Reading list Third-party resources	Canvas pages Lectures Reading list Third party resources
Hardware (example tools)	Classroom: Display screen, courtesy monitor, in-room audio (microphone, speakers) Students (in class): internet-connected mobile device, collaboration screens	Classroom: 2 x cameras, in-room audio (microphone, speakers), display screen, courtesy monitor Students: <i>In class:</i> internet-connected mobile device. <i>Online:</i> internet-connected device, webcam, microphone, headphones/speaker	Internet-connected device, webcam, microphone, headphones/speaker	Classroom: Display screen, courtesy monitor, in-room audio (microphone, speakers) Students (in class): internet-connected mobile device