



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Digital
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Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector

Guidance for Blended Learning

July 2020

Blended learning guidance

for further education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning in the community partnerships in Wales

On 20 May we published our overarching [Covid-19 Resilience Plan](#) for the post-16 sector (including further education, work-based and adult learning in the community), setting out how the Welsh Government will work with its stakeholders to meet the changing needs of Welsh learners and employers during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the last few months we have worked closely with learning providers and partners to develop an [overarching framework and vision for post-16 learning delivery from September 2020](#). We anticipate that this will involve a return to face-to-face learning for all learners, using blended learning (as defined below) to enhance the learning experience and assist with safe operation. In some cases providers will be planning to delivery online and blended learning regardless of the Covid-19 situation, and this guidance will also be relevant for them.

Blended learning definition:

Blended learning provides a combination of face-to-face learning and dynamic digital activities and content that facilitate any time/any place learning.

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

There is a huge difference between moving classroom content online, and a planned blended learning programme which effectively integrates face-to-face and remote activities. Working in this way requires specific skills for both learners and staff. We recognise that this is an ongoing process and that it will take time to establish high standards of blended learning across the whole sector.

This guidance outlines some of the key considerations for developing and embedding blended learning programmes, and signposts optional further reading.

- What are the characteristics of effective blended learning?
- Planning blended learning programmes
- Teaching and learning strategies
- Digital wellbeing
- Accessibility and inclusion

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

What are the characteristics of effective blended learning?

- Learning is planned to take account of the different modes of delivery to create coherent programmes with clear aims, objectives and assessment points.
- Learners are encouraged and supported to develop independent study and research skills, information literacy, motivation and resilience.
- Learners are provided with direction so that they know what to do and how to get help if they need it.
- Digital and face-to-face components are carefully planned to be integrated and complementary, and each enhances and enriches the other.
- Face-to-face time is prioritised for the delivery of practical activities that cannot be undertaken online, for peer collaboration, and to provide “scaffolding” for remote learning, including formative assessment, feedback, redirection and guidance.
- Staff and learners understand what is expected of them, including how many hours of face-to-face, remote and independent learning are required, and any flexibilities around attendance and when they learn.
- Learning is differentiated to meet learners’ individual needs, including additional support where needed and “stretch and challenge” activities.
- Digital inequalities and the barriers for vulnerable learners are considered in the planning and delivery of learning.
- Activities are designed to help learners and staff manage “screen fatigue”, including short, focused sessions, time for regular breaks and flexible timetabling.
- Learners understand when and how to submit work and are given prompt, constructive feedback on it.
- Learners have opportunities to work together and support one another, including through the medium of Welsh.
- Learner engagement is monitored and there is a clear understanding of what good engagement looks like.

Further reading and useful resources:

QAA guidance: [Building a taxonomy for digital learning](#) (2020)

[Estyn](#)

Welsh Government: [Online delivery and resources survey results and next steps](#) (2020)

Hwb’s distance learning section: [Post-16 Learning and skills](#) (2020)

Hwb playlist: [Introduction to the Digital 2030 strategic framework](#) (2019)

Jisc: [Digital 2030 interactive guide](#) (updated 2020)

Planning blended learning programmes

A wide range of elements need to be considered to support effective blended learning programmes:

- Do you have a clear understanding of what effective blended learning looks like, including how this aligns with requirements for assessment and inspection, with relevant professional standards and [Digital 2030](#)?
 - How is this understanding communicated and shared within your organisation? Do you have any formally recognised 'champions'?
 - Have organisational policies (e.g. data protection, online safety, safeguarding) been updated to reflect this new context? How will staff and learners be made aware of the information that is relevant to them?
- Have you identified your aims and what success will look like in terms of the use of blended learning within your organisation (and/or for individual programmes or specific groups of learners)?
 - This vision should also reflect staff and learner feedback.
 - How will you monitor progress and measure your achievements?
 - How (and when) will you obtain feedback from your staff and learners as part of evaluating your progress? How will this feed into further developments?

Jisc's annual [Insights](#) survey offers opportunities to gain feedback from staff and students, and to benchmark organisational results with results across the sector. Key findings are usually summarised at [UK](#) (FE) and [Wales-wide](#) (FE, WBL & AL) levels.
- What will the new learner experience look like? What are your expectations; for learners and for practitioners, administration and support staff? How will you develop and communicate these expectations?
 - What information will learners need before they start their programme, and as part of their induction? How will key messages be communicated?
 - How will learners without the required equipment, and/or skills to engage with digital learning remotely be identified and supported?
 - Will opportunities for learners to acquire and/or improve their digital skills be built into their courses, or made available as additional provision?
 - How will Welsh medium learners be supported effectively?
- Are your core technical infrastructure and IT support services aligned to support your delivery of this vision? If not, what changes will be required?
 - Do staff have the IT equipment, tools, software and access to digital platforms needed to deliver this vision; and the confidence to use them?
 - What practical tips and techniques can be communicated? Are there suitable channels in place for staff and learners to request additional support (including assistive technology)?
- Remember that blended learning models offer many opportunities and flexibilities, but may not be appropriate for everyone, all the time.

Teaching and learning strategies

What general principles are needed to support a blended learning approach?

- Learning providers should provide digital environments that are accessible, social and can be personalised for the individual. Some areas must be open and easy to access, whilst other areas (depending on the nature of learner activities, data security requirements etc) should be safe and secure.
- The new [Digital Standards for Welsh Post-16 Education](#) (developed under the [Digital 2030 strategic framework](#)) provide clear, nationally agreed standards for digital skills.
- Learning providers should enable their practitioners to teach responsively and confidently, with consideration of learners' different motivations, interests, learning histories and resources.
- Learning is planned to integrate the different modes of delivery in a blended model, to create coherent programmes with clear aims, objectives and assessment points, and to incorporate requirements for bilingual delivery.
- Digital learning activities are designed to help learners and staff manage “screen fatigue”, including short, focused sessions, time for regular breaks and clarity for learners and staff on when they can complete activities at different times or in different ways.
- Balance the need for learners to participate at the same time, in a scheduled slot (synchronous learning) with providing resources, activities and tasks they can access and complete when convenient for them (asynchronous learning). This can help learners with caring responsibilities and/or restricted access to IT equipment or WiFi at home.
- Practitioners plan to support learners to study online and face-to-face by being explicit about the skills and personal organisation needed to study at distance, by sharing information about sources of help, expectations, good study habits and accessibility. They should also continue to ‘stretch and challenge’ learners, and offer opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration.
- Learning providers and practitioners should support access to, and engagement with, rich and diverse learning content and resources.
- Learners should understand when and how to submit work, and have clear timescales for receiving constructive feedback.

Further reading and useful resources:

Jisc: [What makes a successful online learner?](#) (2016)

Jisc: [Developing blended learning approaches](#) (updated 2020)

Jisc: [What is digital capability?](#)

[Learn My Way](#): free online courses to help people develop digital skills (also available in [Welsh](#))

Ideas for practising and retaining [Welsh language skills](#) (2020)

Digital wellbeing

Looking after the wellbeing of learners and staff is important to help them balance other commitments they may have, and to remain engaged with learning.

- Adapt your practice to suit the online environment and think about reducing pressure on learners by using the technology available more creatively. E.g. could you use video plus chat forums to make participating easier?
- Think about online safety and data security when choosing and using digital platforms and tools. Online safety advice is available from [Jisc](#), and on [Hwb](#).
- Designing learning activities and resources to be easily accessible, and giving learners a choice in how they engage will often result in a better user experience. Consider simple design elements like coloured background and fonts.
- Build your learners' and staff's digital capabilities to increase their confidence with using digital tools and channels, and help them to choose digital tools appropriate to the learning and pedagogy, and to use these tools effectively. Digital mentoring could support learners and staff to co-develop their digital skills.
- Seek feedback from learners to find out what works and what is less helpful for them. Learners may have ideas and suggestions for improvements.
- How do you support and engage with your learners remotely? Do you offer the opportunity for individual learners to pre-book one-to-one conversations with their tutor or assessor?
- Are learners able to continue developing their Welsh language skills and practising their Welsh off-site? Is a Welsh-speaking learner offered the option to communicate with a Welsh-speaking member of staff and to access support services in Welsh? Are bilingual or Welsh medium resources available for mixed-language groups?
- Think about ways in which your organisation can maintain a sense of community and enable continued social interaction using digital technology. Do you have a newsletter or digital social space? Do you offer social activities (e.g. quizzes, clubs, hobbies) which learners can participate in remotely? Are there any Welsh medium groups or activities available for Welsh-speaking (or Welsh learning) learners?
- Think about the content, urgency, and priority of your message. Is your communication 'for information', or does it require a response? Does it need to be sent immediately as a separate communication, or could it be included in a newsletter or other scheduled update? Is your message clear, concise, and easy to understand to help learners and staff who may be facing 'information overload'?

Further reading and useful resources:

Jisc: [Digital wellbeing of learners](#) (updated 2020)

Jisc: [Digital wellbeing during lockdown – the student perspective](#) and [the staff perspective](#) (both 2020)

Jisc: [How your digital policies can support online safety](#) (2020)

Jisc: [Horizons report – Emerging technologies and the mental health challenge](#) (2019)

Accessibility and inclusion

Inclusion remains an important issue for learning in all forms, and learners with disabilities or other additional support needs may feel especially vulnerable and be at risk of disengagement when they are not able to access their 'usual' sources of support.

- [Accessibility regulations](#) for public sector bodies (2018) cover websites, mobile applications, and online material. Jisc has prepared [practical resources and advice](#) to help learning providers understand and implement this legislation, and runs an accessibility community of practice.
- The environment that learners are working in and other considerations (such as caring responsibilities or childcare needs) may impact on their ability and willingness to engage in some learning activities. Feedback from the lockdown phase shows that some learners may be unwilling to participate in activities where they are required to use live video (and show their immediate surroundings).
- Some learners may have limited access to IT equipment (if they are sharing devices and/or wifi with other household members). Some learners might not have suitable IT equipment, or other issues (e.g. connectivity issues at home). Learners with disabilities or additional support needs may not have access to the software and hardware they need when they are offsite. Learning providers should consider how these learners' needs will be identified and supported.
- Digital platforms, tools, resources and activities should be compatible with assistive technology to help support people with disabilities.
- Learners may be using a wider range of devices with different screen sizes (e.g. smartphone, tablet, Chromebook, laptop, PC) and with differing hardware (with/without a mouse, trackpad or keyboard). Learners may not have access to the same operating systems and/or software that your organisation provides onsite. This needs to be considered when designing learning activities, content and resources.
- Creating accessible content will benefit many learners, including learners who may not have a declared disability or additional support need.
- You could provide accessible document templates for staff to use and adapt? The [University of Sussex](#) and [Worcestershire County Council](#) have produced online guides and downloadable posters.

Further reading and useful resources:

Jisc: [Meeting accessibility regulations](#) (2018)

Jisc: [Steps to improve your organisation's digital accessibility](#) (2020)

[eAccessibility Wales](#): directory for software, hardware and computer settings to make your computer easier to use

