UCSD Blended Learning Principles 2024/25

For academic and professional services staff

The blended learning principles have been developed via consultation of recent sectoral guidance from the QAA, JISC and the OfS, and with UCSD staff and students. This aligns to the Teaching and Learning Policy, with specific focus on the Ambitious and Inclusive Curriculum.

These principles were initially informed and developed through student feedback on their experiences of blended learning throughout 2020/2021, which identified themes around curriculum delivery, independent learning, academic community, digital literacy, and support. These themes are reflected in these principles. Ongoing student consultation on the College's approach to Blended Learning for its Higher Education Students will continue throughout 2023/24 to inform and develop our practice.

The principles harness the key positive experiences in the identified themes and mitigate the challenges students face and should be used in conjunction with relevant policies. These principles should be read alongside the HE Assessment Strategy and Policy, and the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Curriculum areas are asked to interpret the principles at local level to best suit local context. Support for the principles can be provided by Higher Education Academic and Quality Coordinators and via the UCSD Blended Learning site.

Key terms

Blended learning	Formal approach to education that creates an integrated learning environment where in-person and online teaching and learning become complementary, with the purpose of giving students a more diverse and engaging learning experience.		
QAA Taxonomy blended learning to aid local interpretation	**Spectrum of blended learning**		
	QAA Supportive	**QAA Augmented**	**QAA Interactive**
	On-campus delivery with some digital resources in support.	A blend of on-campus and digital learning experiences.	Digital learning experiences are the main delivery with some on-campus provision.
Distance learning	Where students are recruited and enrolled online and study independently using a virtual learning environment. In the case of South Devon College, the majority of distance learning is delivered via the Online Learning (Moodle) platform. In some instances, distance learning is also delivered by posted resources and telephone support.		
In Person/On-campus delivery	Describes an approach where the delivery of a programme happens onsite, at the College, with a staff member delivering teaching and learning directly to students.		
Hybrid delivery	Hybrid delivery is a subset of blended learning and is when teaching is delivered simultaneously on campus and via a digital platform.		

Asynchronous	Enables students to learn at their own pace in their own time. Students can access resources and communicate at any time and are not restricted to accessing this learning at any specific time.
Synchronous	Takes place with participants all engaging with material in real time, although not necessarily in the same place (for example, some students may participate onsite while others may participate remotely, both at the same time)

Overall proposition

1. Regardless of mode of delivery, programme leads should develop activities designed to stimulate, engage, support, and educate students within an inclusive academic community.

2. Programme leads should only employ blended learning appropriate to the pedagogic and disciplinary context.

3. Distance learning should be implemented only where the programme has been developed specifically as a distance learning offer.

4. Hybrid delivery can be used to bring together specific cohorts of students (i.e., on campus and distance learning students who are studying the same module) but should not be used to offer students a choice of attendance mode.

5. As part of our universal offer to students it is an expectation that teaching activities should be recorded wherever practicable. It is acknowledged that as providers of skills based and technical higher-level study it may not be feasible to record all course content. The approach should be agreed at programme level and clearly communicated to students to support in managing their understanding of what digital content will be available. This approach should not be seen as an alternative to in-person engagement and attendance for synchronous teaching activities.

Curriculum design

1. Programme leads should be familiar with current sectoral understanding of blended learning; the opportunities it affords curriculum development, scalability, and impact on the student learning experience. The following publications are useful to inform curricula design:
   - QAA (2020) Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning;
   - Jisc (2021) Student digital experience insights survey 2020/21;
   - Jisc (2020) Learning and Teaching Reimagined: a new dawn for higher education;
   - OfS (2021) Gravity Assist: propelling higher education towards a brighter future.

2. When developing blended curricula Programme leads should be aware that new students will respond best to the 'QAA 'supportive' model in which students have mostly on-campus learning with digital support, whilst students in later stages are better equipped to succeed across a range of blended learning scenarios.

3. Where programmes are delivered by multiple stakeholders respective delivery teams should work collaboratively to ensure a coherent student experience, across components of the programme and delivery platforms.

4. Programme leads to ensure best practice of liaising with Professional Services (specifically Support Hub) areas where curriculum design may be different to what would be considered standard programme structures.

5. Programme leads should ensure that changes made to embed blended learning adhere to quality assurance process and to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) regulations.

Teaching and Learning

1. All blended learning activities should be appropriate to the pedagogic and disciplinary context and designed to be inclusive (and in line with the UCSD Inclusive Learning Practices Policy), supporting academic progression and performance for students.
2. When developing blended learning, it can be useful to use flipped learning. This recognises that acquisition and inquiry suit asynchronous activities and experiential, collaborative, making, and practice activities to synchronous, on-campus activities.
3. Hybrid delivery can be used to bring together specific cohorts of students (i.e., on campus and distance learning students who are studying the same module) but should not be used to offer students a choice of attendance mode.

Assessment

1. All assessments (formative and summative) should be accessible, inclusive, authentic, engaging, flexible and appropriately timed, to meet the needs of all students and support learning.
2. Curriculum will have flexibility to continue with assessment formats developed in response to COVID where the revised assessment format is considered appropriate and in adhering to the principles of the HE Assessment Policy.
3. Students should be given detailed support in how to access and engage in both digital and on-campus located assessment.

Student transitions

1. Communication with students about the support available for blended learning should be integrated into programmes, providing clear guidance and signposting to central services.
2. Students will be provided with a mix of on-campus events plus digital activities to transition them into and through their programme.
3. All students will be offered support and advice about effective and safe digital learning, and use of the required systems, technologies, and software in advance of them needing this guidance.
4. UCSD will offer access to digital resources and tools, online self-help resources, and blended delivery of wellbeing and academic support

Building belonging and community

1. A strong sense of belonging will be built into module and programme design. This will include opportunities to develop significant relationships with staff and students, and student to student peer relationships.
2. Programme leads can utilise tutor presence and inclusive practice to develop academic communities which foster student satisfaction and academic success within blended and hybrid offers.
3. Explore the 7 steps guide via University of Plymouth resource:
   - Online learning
   - communities.