



Blended Learning for Higher Education at NPTC Group of Colleges: Response to the Pandemic

At NPTC Group of Colleges we remain committed to providing a learning experience that is transformational and supportive to all learners. Our expectation is that social distancing and public health regulations will continue through the 2020/21 academic year and we are committed to ensuring that teaching and learning continues effectively while ensuring our communities and campuses are safe. To this end, we have implemented a blended learning framework for delivery of higher education from September 2020.

This document will provide details of the expectations we have for the delivery of blended learning. These are designed to offer a consistent baseline to all our learners, wherever and however they are studying with us, and will help staff to review their provision in the context of the new delivery method. Adhering to these expectations will ensure that we continue to comply with the requirements of our awarding partners. All partners have slightly different requirements and this document provides an overview of the principles we plan to adopt.

We will be working to the following principles, as originally set out by USW, one of our partner institutions:

1. Courses will provide regular opportunities for engagement, dialogue, debate, investigation, research and problem solving where learners will work with tutors and peers in a range of forms to facilitate interactivity, promote a blended learning approach and build learning communities;
2. We will provide digital material for learners to engage with in their own time to build understanding and will work towards ensuring that learners' progress is visible to them online as they develop;
3. We will remain responsive to the diverse needs of our learners and ensure that their voices are heard via a range of feedback mechanisms;
4. All learners will continue to receive supportive and high quality interactions with our academic staff;
5. Learners will continue to have access to online and offline support services to aid their academic development (HE Study Coach) and wellbeing (Student Support).

In practice, our minimum expectations for delivery of blended learning are;

1. Learners will receive support to achieve the learning outcomes of each module;
2. Course teams will ensure that the blended approach to learning is planned within each module;

3. Compliance with QAA and other regulations remains mandatory;
4. Teaching and learning will be split into synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (pre-recorded) interactions. The suggested synchronous/asynchronous split of contact hours* for blended learning of a 20 credit module is 3:1 (36:12 hours), although it is recognised this may be adapted to meet the specific needs of a course/subject area;
5. Where appropriate synchronous interactions involving video/audio presentation of learning materials will be timetabled and recorded;
6. In order to maximise resilience for each course, contingency measures will be implemented to allow cover to be provided where necessary in case of staff absence;
7. Course teams will consider the inclusivity and accessibility of their online provision.
8. Engagement with online and face-to-face delivery will be monitored by the HE Admin team, based on marked registers and online activity.

Additional Recommendations and Guidance

1. Provision of Information

- 1.1 Course handbooks should be completed and approved prior to induction.
- 1.2 Information should be provided to students that explains the pattern of course communication for each module and that sets expectations for staff response times to student enquiries. Course communication should include, for example, information on the frequency of tutorial sessions, availability of FAQs, discussion forums etc.

2. Induction

- 2.1 In addition to asynchronous activities, consider delivering a synchronous introductory session online if face to face induction activities are not possible. Within this session:
 - Explain how communications will work within the module (frequency, response time expectations, digital tools to use);
 - Provide ice breakers – use online activities to allow students to interact with each other and begin building learning communities.
- 2.2 Staff contact information for tutors, HE study coach and student support must be provided in a prominent place in the VLE.

3. Teaching and Learning

- 3.1 Make learning expectations visible. As a minimum, learning outcomes for each module should be available online. Most learners will not have experience of blended learning and will need structure to avoid falling behind or racing ahead of their peers.
- 3.2 Assessment details should be available to students at the start of each module.
- 3.3 Each module should have an online space for discussion with tutors and between learners (e.g. a discussion forum/Microsoft Teams, etc).
- 3.4 Consider communicating a weekly learning pathway to students online. This should include tasks and a timeline.

- 3.5 Consider breaking learning down into chunks or themed blocks of no more than 6 weeks' duration:
 - Provide summaries and debriefs, including building in learning touchpoints incorporating feedback and feedforward mechanisms;
 - Check learning at the end of each theme/chunk. This could be used to record progress and achievement in case there is a need to reintroduce no detriment policies in the future.
- 3.6 Synchronous interactions should be recorded, not normally lasting for longer than one hour and should build in comfort breaks.
- 3.7 Asynchronous recordings should be short, ideally not normally longer than 30 minutes.
- 3.8 Start a discussion thread/channel specifically for learners to ask any questions on assessment.
- 3.9 Aim for three weeks of learning resources to be available ahead of time in the VLE.

***Contact Hours** The term 'contact hours' typically refers to the time that learners and tutors are physically together in a learning space on campus, irrespective of the number of other learners sharing contact with the tutor. It is not possible to calculate 'contact hours' in the same way in a blended learning environment. In line with our awarding partner's expectations and the wider UK HE Sector, 'contact hours' will include a range of synchronous and asynchronous activities. The following list of activities has been adapted from USW to give examples of interactions that contribute to 'contact hours':

- Appropriately efficient and effective responses to learners' queries;
- Comments to learners' discussion forum posts;
- Live and asynchronous chats to support social and learning progress;
- Tutorial sessions;
- Short pre-recorded trigger presentations;
- Accompanying synchronous discussions and webinars;
- Multimedia personalised responses to formative and summative assessment.