# Blended Learning QA Policy (v1.3)

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| Policy Title | Blended Learning Policy |
| Date Approved | 16/10/2023 |
| Effective From | 01/01/2024 |
| Monitor | Registrar / Dean of Academic Affairs and QA Committee |
| Summary | This policy was informed by the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes, September 2023/V3. This policy reflects the experience and developments in delivering blended learning programmes at Dorset College in response to the Pandemic event (2020 to 2022). |
| | The guidelines specifically focus on quality assurance matters pertaining to blended learning provision. |
| Related Policies | Teaching & Learning Version 1 – 2019 |
| Revision History & | Version 1: 01/09/2020, |
| Commencement Date & Date of Next Review | Commencement Date (Version 1): 01/01/2024 |
| | Ongoing subject to QA policy for review |
| Purpose | The purpose of this policy is to provide an overarching framework to ensure the quality of the learning experience offered by the College using blended learning. This learning experience is inclusive of the learning facilitated in the classroom and Online through the College's Virtual Learning Environment, Zoom and Moodle, how programmes are taught and delivered by the College, as well as the learning environment offered by the College. This policy will also provide clarity of the College's provision of Blended Learning to its learners. |
| Scope | This policy applies to all delivery and assessments in Further Education, Professional and Higher Education programmes as well as English Language education at Dorset College. |
| Policy Statement | Dorset College recognises that the blended learning is integral to its educational provision. Therefore, the College is cognisant of the need to ensure that it maintains a high standard of teaching and learning. It is also cognisant of the importance of the learning experience and environment, which support the teaching and learning efforts of the College. |

## Dorset College Blended Learning Description

Blended learning involves the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment through both online and face to face synchronous and asynchronous learning approaches. Consideration is made for pedagogical teaching, learning and assessment strategies suitable for live online (or on-campus) classroom sessions, and for activities that can be carried out by the learner in their own time, and at their own pace. **Definition:** "blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences" (Garrisson & Kanuak, 2004, p. 96) as adopted by QQI in Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning.

Our blended learning programme development initiatives consider the following:

a)  The development of online learning material suitable for effective and engaging online and face to face synchronous and asynchronous delivery.
b)  Consideration for access to new and existing learning technologies, and the development of existing platforms such as our Learning Management System.
c)  Tools and resources to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous peer interaction and learning, for example, discussion forums and virtual group spaces.
d)  Online tools to support, enable and deliver formative and summative assessment.

## Institutional Role

The Dorset Senior Management Team is responsible for ensuring that all proposed developments are aligned with the strategic intentions of the College. This is articulated in our Strategic Plan, underpinned by appropriate investment plans, and specified timeframes for implementation. The strategic plan includes development of new programmes, including Blended Learning programmes. The Academic Council retains responsibility for academic oversight and governance of all programmes, proposed and current, including those delivered through blended learning.

Dorset College will strategically develop blended learning provision in line with best practice. The following procedures are in place to maintain and enhance our planning and development for blended learning:

a)  Dorset College will continue to invest in appropriate infrastructure and technology resources to support blended learning provision, including enhancements to our Virtual Learning Environment.
b)  Teaching staff are afforded professional development training for teaching and learning strategies specific to blended learning.
c)  Compliance with legal obligations are appropriately considered for blended learning contexts, including GDPR, professional and statutory body requirements, including the EU AI Act of March 2024.
d)  Resource implications are factored into all programme development initiatives and are subject to approval by Dorset College Academic Council and the Senior Leadership team.
e)  Academic integrity initiatives will be further developed to ensure that learners' work is properly attributed to them, particularly for assessment that is conducted through remote assessment means. We are members of the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and adhere to the recommendations. Additionally, we actively engage with and learn from the experiences of other members.
f)  External consultants with expertise in blended learning provision are considered in all blended learning programme development initiatives.

## Programme Development and Assessment

Programmes designed by Dorset College as blended learning programmes satisfy the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (For Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes. In doing so, they satisfy the academic quality and standards required of all Dorset College programmes leading to QQI awards. These programmes further reflect the underpinning concepts outlined within Dorset Colleges overarching Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

The use of technologies within programme delivery is determined by the Programme Development Team in the context of the best suited pedagogic approach for the discipline, programme level, award type, target learners and available technologies. The existing quality assurance policies and procedures of Dorset College, as approved by QQI, remain applicable in all instances.

To achieve effective blended learning provision, the Programme Development Team actively addresses the following:

a) Teaching and learning practices are grounded in the latest research, such as work from the National Forum and the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). This includes leveraging cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence to ensure robust learner engagement. Universal and instructional design principles ensure that blended learning environments are accessible and promote reflective, active learning.

b) Approval mechanisms for both synchronous and asynchronous elements are subject to internal review and continuous quality assurance processes. This includes oversight from the Academic Council and Governance teams to ensure programmes are aligned with the College's academic standards and policies, enhancing teaching presence and maintaining consistent quality.

c) Assessment strategies integrate both formative and summative assessments to support continuous learning. Formative assessments (e.g., quizzes, peer assessments, and reflective journals) provide opportunities for learners to engage with course content remotely, while summative assessments incorporate academic integrity principles to minimise academic impropriety. These assessments align with intended learning outcomes and foster cognitive presence.

d) Curriculum development prioritises learner-centred approaches, ensuring that technology serves pedagogy rather than driving it. Each module integrates synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences that promote interaction, reflection, and critical thinking. The design incorporates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles where reasonably possible to cater to a diverse student population, thus fostering inclusivity and accessibility

e) A variety of media delivery models are employed to enhance the learning experience and ensure accessibility for all learners. The team selects tools that not only support content delivery but also promote social presence through collaborative platforms, discussion boards, and group projects.

f) Learners receive clear information about the structure of blended learning within each module, including the technologies and tools to be used, expectations for attendance, and engagement requirements. This transparency helps learners understand the balance between online and in-person activities, fostering a shared learning culture that promotes teaching and social presence.

g) All learning activities, assessments, and instructional methods are closely aligned with the programme's learning outcomes. This ensures coherence between what is taught and what is assessed, with clear benchmarks for success across both synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery. Assessment rubrics help learners understand how their work aligns with

the intended outcomes, ensuring that both cognitive and teaching presence are actively supported.

h) Summative assessment design is guided by best practices in academic integrity, referencing the work of the National and Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN). This ensures that assessments are fair, secure, and reflective of the learners' understanding and application of knowledge, particularly in online contexts.

i) All blended learning programme development complies with Dorset College's internal programme development policies, procedures, and approval mechanisms. This ensures that all programmes adhere to quality assurance standards and are in line with College governance frameworks.

## Learner Experience

The learner experience is an integral focus for the provision of a learner-centred blended learning approach. Blended learning approaches may be new to some learners. It is therefore important to clearly highlight how blended learning may differ from previous learning experiences. This will ensure learners are prepared through a statement of motivation and engagement. The following procedures are put in place to ensure the learner is well supported and well informed.

a) Appropriate information is made available to the prospective learner at induction that adequately explains the blend of learning (synchronous and asynchronous), including how it aligns with the intended learning outcomes, and the realistic time commitment required of them to engage and succeed on the programme.

b) Clear prerequisite knowledge and technological skills required to participate on the programme is presented. Information on broadband, software and hardware specifications is outlined.

c) Learner monitoring and support mechanisms for blended learning provision remain in place since the pandemic, including appropriate interventions to identify learners who may be struggling with online/remote learning programme elements.

d) Regular learner feedback mechanisms are implemented to ensure continuous improvement based on student experiences, allowing the College to adapt and enhance support as needed.

e) Orientation is provided through a series of sessions to outline support and learning resources, for blended learning, including relevant key staff contact information.

f) Teaching and learning resources for online learning elements meet Dorset College specified expectations around equality of opportunity, interactivity, and autonomous learning. Resources are carefully designed to align with both formative and summative assessment strategies, ensuring that learner progress is effectively measured across all blended learning activities.

g) Summative assessments include clear guidelines and are designed to uphold academic integrity, using technologies such as plagiarism detection where appropriate. These assessments align with the programme's learning outcomes to ensure consistency across all delivery modes.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of Blended Learning provision aligns to the already established Dorset College Evaluation, Feedback and Monitoring protocols. Feedback is sought from programme administration and support staff, teachers, and learners through on-going feedback processes (Programme Boards, Student

Surveys etc.). In addition, feedback is sought from external examiners to ensure the integrity of assessment is maintained in an online environment. Evaluation outcomes feed back into new blended learning programme development initiatives led by the Programme Development Team.