



# Blended Learning Policy

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**kcetb**

Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
Chill Chainnigh agus Cheatharlach  
*Kilkenny and Carlow  
Education and Training Board*

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## Glossary of Terms

TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning - a term to describe the use of technology to support teaching, learning and assessment
Internal Assessor	The person who sets and corrects the assessment
Blended Learning	The integration of classroom face-to-face teaching and learning with online teaching and learning
Online Learning	Learning that takes places solely online
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment - A site that hosts online resources and activities to support learning
FET	Further Education and Training
Asynchronous	Not occurring at the same time
Synchronous	Occurring at the same time

## 1.0 Introduction

For the purpose of this policy Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB) defines blended learning as “the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. This policy details KCETB’s procedure for the delivery of programmes leading to an award or to specified credits towards an award through means other than face to face learning.

Blended Learning (BL) combines Face-to-Face with online delivery or distance learning. BL is not designed to replace either of these approaches.

This policy is created in line with QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes<sup>2</sup>

## 2.0 Policy Statement

KCETB aims to offer blended learning opportunities to learners in line with KCETB’s quality assurance procedures. This will be done using TEL tools to enhance teaching and learning and the use of blended programme delivery to create greater levels of access to FET programmes.

## 3.0 Purpose of document

From a quality assurance perspective, there are several aspects of programme delivery that must be considered. This document sets out those and the associated procedures.

KCETB as a programme provider must ensure that learners achieve parity in the quality of service which they receive, regardless of how they complete their programme – on or off-site.

## 4.0 Organisational context

### 4.1. Covid-19 Pandemic arrangements

Covid-19 – This policy outlines the KCETB Blended Learning guidelines. However, it should be stated that in March 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching and learning moved to online for all levels of education in Ireland. This meant that overnight, all classes changed from ‘face to face’ to online. Teachers, learners and support staff all had to adjust to a new ‘virtual’ environment. Therefore, all courses were 100% online for the remainder of the academic year 2020/2021. QQI have provided for this to be continued in their

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<sup>1</sup> Garrison, D.R. & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), 95-105, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf>

proposal to ‘temporarily extend providers’ approved scope of provision to accommodate the modifications to programme delivery and assessment necessitated by the social distancing measures mandated by Government to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic’<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, blended learning is accepted for all QQI programmes until 31 August 2021 without the requirement to submit a validation proposal. Arrangements for alternative assessments are provided for and a guidance document in place ‘Guidelines and Procedures for Covid-19 Contingency Planning Addendum 1 Alternative Assessments and Authentication Processes’<sup>4</sup>

Outside of the provisions for the Covid-19 pandemic, programmes developed for delivery in a blended learning environment should follow the processes and procedures outlined in this document.

#### 4.2. Approval process

All requests to develop and deliver a blended learning programme should be submitted to the KCETB Quality Assurance Oversight (QAOS) committee for approval. Validation of the programme must be obtained via the KCETB validation approval process (currently in development).

KCETB learners should not be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by the mode of delivery. Proposals for blended learning should demonstrate parity with face-to-face delivery (see Table 2 Comparison of Face to Face vs Remote / Online).

Blended learning is subject to all KCETB quality assurance procedures including the authentication processes outlined in the KCETB Assessment Policy<sup>5</sup>. Amendments to assessments for online implementation are subject to quality assurance approval.

#### 4.3. Infrastructure and resources

KCETB is committed to supporting blending learning environments for learners and staff. Central to this is the provision of necessary supports to meet the needs of a blended learning environment as presented in Table 1 Identifying learners needs and supports

**Table 1 Identifying learners needs and supports**

Need	Support
<b>Resources</b>	IT and networking equipment Learning applications Digital libraries

<sup>3</sup> [MEASURES TO MITIGATE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PROGRAMMES LEADING TO QQI AWARDS](#)

<sup>4</sup> [https://kcetbqa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2.0-KCETB-Covid-19\\_Contingency\\_Planning\\_Assessment-Addendum-1-April-22nd.pdf](https://kcetbqa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2.0-KCETB-Covid-19_Contingency_Planning_Assessment-Addendum-1-April-22nd.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [KCETB Assessment Policy](#)

Need	Support
	Power and connectivity Accessibility
<b>Training</b>	Staff training for Virtual learning Environment Learner instruction on systems and applications Training on use of software packages e.g. Moodle, Teams
<b>Individual Support</b>	Ongoing support for learner Resource supports Adult guidance
<b>Feedback</b>	Opportunity for learner feedback

In considering the introduction of blended learning, the delivery mechanism needs to be reviewed. The supports, discussions, resources, assessments etc that are used in face to face should have an equivalent for online. Examples of these are presented in Table 2  
 Comparison of Face to Face vs Remote / Online

**Table 2 Comparison of Face to Face vs Remote / Online**

Face to face delivery	Remote / Online delivery
Face to face discussions.	Communication via email, Zoom, Microsoft Office 365 including Teams, telephone calls
Group discussions in classroom	Using Teams, Zoom, Google Meets including the use of ‘breakout rooms’
Physical, paper-based resources	Digital resources
Supervised Assessments	Remotely supervised assessments
Classroom support and resources designed for face to face	Remote support and resources designed for online delivery

#### 4.4. Management of blended learning programmes

Once blended learning is in place for programmes, they are managed centrally by each KCETB centre in the same way as classroom-based learning and are subject to regular operational reviews, addressing emerging issues and quality reviews. Blended Learning programmes are subject to KCETB’s standard programme approval and review processes. KCETB’s Programme Validation and Approval Policy (currently in development) comprehends Blended Learning.

#### 4.5. GDPR

The KCETB policy and procedures for GDPR apply.

#### 4.6. Collaborations and other partners

The KCETB corporate and governance arrangements for external stakeholders apply.

## 5.0 Centre and Programme context

### 5.1. Overview

Blended learning is the newest development in the suite of learning options that are provided through KCETB and in this way enables us to provide even broader access to learners and potential learners in our communities. As it is another part of the broader fabric of delivery, all relevant standard policies and processes apply to blended learning and learners who undertake their studies with us.

### 5.2. Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) as an enhancement to face to face provision

Where TEL is used only to support and improve the quality of teaching in the classroom, through a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) e.g. Moodle or Teams, formal approval from the QA Oversight Committee is not required.

Using TEL through the medium of a VLE in this way, is encouraged as it complements and enhances face-to-face delivery. In this context the VLE is used to enhance learner engagement not to replace face-to-face delivery or tutor/ teacher contact time.

The use of TEL should be promoted within each centre and monitored at centre level for quality assurance purposes. Centres are encouraged to take part in the initiatives offered by the PD & TEL office. It is an important first step in developing capacity and capability to move to blended programme delivery. Internal Assessors should be supported to utilise TEL.

### 5.3. Policy areas relevant to Blended Learning

- Blending Learning Policy – Applies only to delivery of programmes partially online and/or remote/distance learning including online summative assessment
- Assessment Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Programme Validation and Approval
- ICT Usage Policies

### 5.4. Approval of Blended Learning Programmes

Blended programme delivery includes;

- using TEL tools (including VLEs) to deliver programmes partially online
- remote/distance learning including where summative assessment is carried out online

Remote delivery in lieu of face-to-face contact results in a material change to programme and assessment processes which brings additional quality assurance considerations requiring QA oversight. This necessitates Blended Learning programmes to have attained QA Oversight Committee validation prior to offering the programme.

Not all programmes are suitable for blended delivery. It is important when moving aspects of a programme into a VLE for delivery that levels of interaction and pastoral care elements of the programme are not lost.

There are two separate instances where the decision might be made to utilise blended learning –

1. Programmes which have previously attained validation for face to face delivery which will be offered as Blended Learning.
2. New programme offerings utilising Blended Learning.

To achieve validation to offer Blended Learning, centres must complete a proposal, approval and validation process. All centres wishing to offer blended learning provision must provide evidence of consideration of the following:

- Suitability of the course and modules proposed for blended delivery including but not limited to award level, learner profile, vocational area and demand
- Benefit to learners of a mode change to blended learning
- Extent of course delivery using blended learning
- Capacity of the centre to deliver via blended learning (VLE and relevant resources in place)
- Consistency with the strategic aims of KCETB
- Compliance with legal or statutory obligations appropriate to blended learning contexts be ensured (e.g. child protection, health & safety, equality, intellectual property/copyright, licencing issues, GDPR, PEL (Protection of Enrolled Learners), professional or statutory body requirements, local regulatory considerations).
- Relevant supports for tutoring and assessing staff
- Planning for conversion of modules (for face-to-face and e-learning/remote delivery)
- CPD for Staff – Gap analysis should inform training plans
- Supports for Learners – initial and for the introduction of new TEL tools during the course in a staged manner. See Table 1 Identifying learners needs and supports
- Technical Support

### 5.5. Programme Recruitment

Whilst KCETB encourages the participation of learners in programmes through the means of their choice, KCETB reserves the right to make programme offers to learners on the basis of suitability. Learners will be considered on the basis of suitability (e.g. level, digital skills, availability of required resources) for inclusion in a Blended Learning programme with KCETB. Where it is determined that a blended learning programme is not suitable to the learner KCETB will seek to remediate the skills gap or refer to alternate face to face provision.

## 5.6. Programme Design and Delivery

KCETB places learning at the heart of all programmes – blended or on-site. KCETB promotes relevant and purposeful learning which enhances the learner and the provider.

In accordance with QQI (2018) guidelines the teaching, learning, delivery mechanisms and assessment strategies and adopted in blended and learning delivery, should be specifically designed for a blended context. The process for keeping the learner at the centre of the process is shown in Figure 1 Learner centred blended learning online.



**Figure 1 Learner centred blended learning**

KCETB will ensure that all blended learning is driven by the learner needs and curricular requirements, rather than technology. To this end the use of multiple methodologies is appropriate - central to this is the careful planning and mapping of programmatic elements to a blended learning programme. In blended learning, learner autonomy must be supported and learning tasks (asynchronous and synchronous) must be purposeful and engaging. Active learning methods and task-based learning predominate. Teaching and learning methods and tools must cater to learner needs and the learners’ readiness to engage in blended learning.

## 5.7. Instructional Design

KCETB acknowledges that by its nature, Blended Learning requires specific consideration of Instructional Design during the planning phase. Learners who undertake learning through a blended mode must be enabled to achieve learning outcomes commensurate with learners undertaking face to face delivery. This requires specific planning to be undertaken with the mode of learning in consideration. As with all programmes of learning the teaching, learning and assessment must be fit for purpose and act as enablers for the learners.

Blended learning may not be appropriate in every instance and programme suitability can be judged on the basis of learner needs, programme content and intended learning outcomes.

### 5.8. Programme content

Course work, activities and content must be designed to foster deep engagement within the blended environment. The VLE should be used as an environment for dynamic learning as opposed to a mere repository for documents.

### 5.9. Tools

KCETB believes that course content is constantly evolving as are blended methodologies and tools. KCETB encourages staff to keep up to date with blended learning tools and techniques and supports this through Continuous Professional Development provided by KCETB's PD and TEL Department. Types of content include:

- Video and Audio
- Reusable Learning Objects
- Curricula and Syllabi
- Online learning and teaching platforms and VLEs
- Moodle
- Online forms and documents
- Websites
- Microsoft TEAMS

### 5.10. Assessment

Blended learning is subject to the KCETB Assessment Policy. As with all aspects of delivery specific consideration must be given to the most appropriate means of assessing in a blended environment which ensures fair, reliable, valid and consistent assessment. Learners availing of blended learning must receive an induction on assessment in a similar way to the induction that on-site learners receive. Consideration should be given to additional measures that may need to be taken to assure the integrity of any assessment that takes places online; e.g. the use of plagiarism checking software such as Urkund, the use of cameras during an exam. These measures will be outlined when a centre is seeking programme approval for Blended Learning.

### 5.11. Accessibility

In addition to existing disability supports, and in compliance with the Statutory Disability Act 2005, KCETB is committed to meeting the needs of learners with disabilities and to providing reasonable accommodation when evidence of the need is presented.

As much as possible, online aspects of teaching, learner services and assessment are accessible to all learners. The use of embedded features such as assistive content, reading applications and alternative online assessment are supported. Where learners are unable to

use online content, KCETB will make arrangements to provide paper-based material and assessment. In addition, reasonable accommodations are available as detailed in the KCETB Assessment Policy.

### 5.12. Contingency Planning

KCETB will take the steps necessary to ensure continuity of service delivery of its online learning and support systems. It will ensure that a contingency plan is available in the event of failure of the designated modes of delivery.

## 6.0 Learner experience context

When a centre or college is making the decision to transition to a blended mode of delivery, consideration must be given to support learners and to provide opportunities in this transition. Key areas that should be considered in supporting learners include but are not limited to the following:

### 6.1. Support available to Learners

- The difference between blended and traditional methods of delivery are highlighted and explained to learners.
- An explanation of what constitutes a blended learning programme is provided to learners.
- The necessary hardware and software required to participate in and complete the programme successfully is available and accessible to learners.
- Clarity on the expectations and level of engagement of the learner and the education provider is explained to the learner.
- All relevant documentation pertaining to the programme including module descriptors, academic calendar, schedule of assessments and rubrics, QA processes and procedures and adequate learning resources for the level of the programme, are provided to learners and where to access these resources.
- Learners are familiar with KCETB ICT policies and compliance. Learners understand where to access KCETB ICT policies and procedures.

### 6.2. Learner Opportunities

The provision of equitable, fair and realistic opportunities is provided to learners, to achieve the intended learning outcomes. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Suitable teaching and learning material
- Adequate timeframes and deadlines
- Opportunities for feedback
- Confidentiality
- Dignity
- Respect and courtesy

### 6.3. Learner Effort and Blended Learning

Consideration should be given to the learner effort required in line with QQI guidelines for directed and self-directed requirements when developing a blended learning programme.

Clarity on the expectations and level of engagement of the learner and the expectations of the education provider is clear to all involved.

Requirements for mandatory on-line contact time should be clearly mapped out. This includes structured on-line reading / activities / formative assessments that are to be completed as part of the programme, in lieu of face to face contact and are subject to monitoring (e-moderation) by an Internal Assessor.

Self-directed study can occur where an Internal Assessor provides additional resources to learners via an on-line VLE which the learners can avail of as additional study and reading. This is learner-led and can be pursued at any time.

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