

5 LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT

This section relates to key issues and principles in provider responsibility for supporting learners, as groups/cohorts and as individuals.

The benefits of flexibility offered for learners by blended learning in general and online learning in particular is balanced by its demands for autonomy, commitment and self-regulation. Procedures are in place to highlight to learners that online learning may differ from their previous learning experience; that they are appropriately prepared for it; and that their progress and engagement is monitored, encouraged and supported. Learners are enabled to pre-assess their own readiness to engage with online/blended learning programme.

5.1 Support available to learners

Learners are supported to make informed choices about participating in a blended learning programme and to develop the necessary independent study skills to successfully progress towards becoming an autonomous learner. The level and nature of support available to learners is clear.

Procedures in place include:

5.1.1 The availability of appropriate information that adequately explains the online sections of the programme and assesses the suitability of a programme. This is available in advance of the programme commencing. For example:

- prospective learners receive a clear explanation of the blend of learning that they will experience and the realistic commitment required of them to complete the programme as well as the pre-knowledge and technological skills necessary to participate;
- information on the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning;
- information about the hours when academic, technical or pastoral support is available;
- information on the hardware and software required;
- information on how much time learners are expected to commit to independent learning in order to successfully complete the programme;
- clarity on the specific level of engagement expected for different elements of the blend, for example mandatory participation in online activities in order to demonstrate participation in collaborative learning activity, face-to-face attendance requirement, synchronous and asynchronous activities, autonomous learning etc.;
- information on the extent to which face-to-face attendance is part of the blend is made clear to learners and/or other stakeholders such as funding, recognition or validating bodies.

5.1.2 Clear terms and conditions:

Prior to enrolment on a particular programme, the prospective learner is made aware of all terms and conditions relevant to that programme, either in the prospectus or similar material, by correspondence, or in discussion with the provider. This might include:

- any specified timings for synchronous learning or assessment
- deadlines and the consequences of not meeting them
- the rules governing flexibility for learners, such as the regularity of presentation or re-assessment opportunities
- processes in place to protect the provider against fraud, plagiarism or other forms of cheating

5.1.3 Requirements for access, bandwidth and any prescribed hardware or software are appropriate and viable, are communicated well in advance to the learners and all requirements are published. There is a mechanism for learners to test if hardware meets technological requirements to participate.

5.1.4 Processes to ensure the delivery of any study materials direct to learners remotely through, for example, online methods or correspondence, are secure and reliable, and there is a means of confirming its safe receipt.

5.1.5 Deliberate steps taken to assist every learner to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and to shape their own learning experience.

5.1.6 Learner support for monitoring their own programmes. Every learner undertaking online learning is supported in monitoring their own progression and achievement through the provision of regular opportunities to test their knowledge and understanding, reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff and/or their peers.

5.1.7 Appropriate interventions and mechanisms to identify learners who may be struggling with online remote learning. Learners are encouraged to complete their programme. Progress is monitored, and learners are provided with prompt and helpful comments on their progress in relation to learning guidelines and goals.

5.1.8 Learners have access to:

- Descriptions of the online components of the blended learning programme, or aspect of study, to show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of the unit or module.
- A clear schedule for the delivery of their online learning study materials, learner support (local and/or remote) and for the submission and assessment of their work. This will include learner responsibilities in this regard.
- Information on the ways in which their achievements will be judged, and the relative weighting of online and other remote parts of the programme in respect of assessment overall.

- Timely formative assessment on their academic performance in the online sections of the programme to provide a basis for constructive individual feedback and guidance.
- Information about the quality assurance processes in place to give confidence that the assessed work conducted through online activity is properly attributed to them.
- Unique identifiers that will enable them to access learning resources in good time at the start of their programme and form part of the validation of their identity. Learners are made aware of all the mechanisms the provider has in place to test and confirm learner identity.
- Appropriate and sufficient learning resources to support online learning and remote study.
- Orientation to learning resources and other support to access them effectively and efficiently (including technical and academic support and guidance, as appropriate). Face-to-face induction includes an explanation of the concept of blended learning; where possible, staff who will deliver the online portion of the programme are present at this induction.
- Identified and available contacts (academic, administrative, technical).
- Information about the intended life-span of all online sections of their programme and the arrangements in place to phase in or out new online or other remote components without disadvantaging learners.
- Appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme, including the effectiveness of blended and online learning arrangements.
- (Where appropriate) information about the respective responsibilities of the provider and any third parties – such as local study centres or administrative offices - that may be involved in supporting the provider’s online learning.

5.1.9 Information in advance of programme commencement on how personal data will be used, for instance, in relation to the monitoring of learner engagement with online platforms.

5.2 Equality of opportunity

Learning and teaching activities and associated resources provide every learner with an equitable, fair and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Procedures in place include:

5.2.1 Teaching and learning resources for online learning which meet the provider’s specified expectations around equality of opportunity, interactivity and the empowerment of autonomous learning.

- 5.2.2 Mechanisms that monitor and/or moderate standards (both in terms of learner outcomes and teachers and/or assessors' practice). Assessment arrangements conducted through online learning are valid, reliable, and secure and provide learners with appropriate confidential feedback on their progress.
- 5.2.3 Arrangements that provide assurance that all those involved in teaching and learning or supporting learning are appropriately qualified, supported and developed to provide effective online learning. This will include the protocols for communication and facilitation of online discussions and other challenges of teaching with technology.
- 5.2.4 Mechanisms that facilitate a safe, accessible and reliable blended learning environment for all learners. These mechanisms promote dignity, courtesy and respect in their use and encourage gender sensitivity amongst both learners and teachers.
- 5.2.5 Arrangements that make reasonable effort to ensure blended learning experiences are accessible to all learners, including learners with disabilities.