GETTING READY FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-22:
TEACHING TEAM CONVERSATIONS

This guide introduces eight themed conversations to support Course and Programme team planning as you get ready for AY21-22. Teams are encouraged to reflect on their experience of Responsive Blended Learning and consider where course delivery, development and organization could be further developed to support student learning and ensure efficiency from a staff workload and wellbeing perspective.

This guide refers to 'teaching teams'. Course and programme teams, professional service or project teams supporting student learning may all find it useful to work through these conversations and actions.

RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING: REFRESHING YOUR APPROACH

As you begin to prepare for the new academic year, be pragmatic about what can be achieved in the time available. You do not need to embark on a wholesale redesign of your course or the development of swathes of high specification new resources. Rather, consider how you can use, adapt or 'upcycle' available resources. Prioritise developing a clear structure or pathway through the materials for your students and make links to appropriate activities that will engage them with their learning. It is this scaffolding and practical navigation that really supports student learning.

Over the past year all course teams have deepened their use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and grown in confidence in using a range of tools and activities to support online learning. The course learning hub on the VLE has become the focus for students, the site where they access resources and information about when and how to engage with their studies. It has also become a key site for communication and community across the course group. As campus spaces open up, your VLE learning hub will remain at the heart of your course.

The institution-wide move to Canvas will make navigating these online spaces more intuitive and will open up new possibilities for learning and teaching. Be pragmatic about how you approach this new platform: become familiar with it, explore its possibilities, but remember it is the simple actions – clear communication, careful structuring of resources and activities, the accessibility and enthusiasm of the course team - that remain key to student engagement.

Whether online or on-campus, the underlying principles that guide your RBL practice will remain the same. Focus on:

- inspiring learning,
- engaging students to learn through 'doing',
- encouraging learners to become active participants in their own studies and in our global Heriot-Watt learning community.
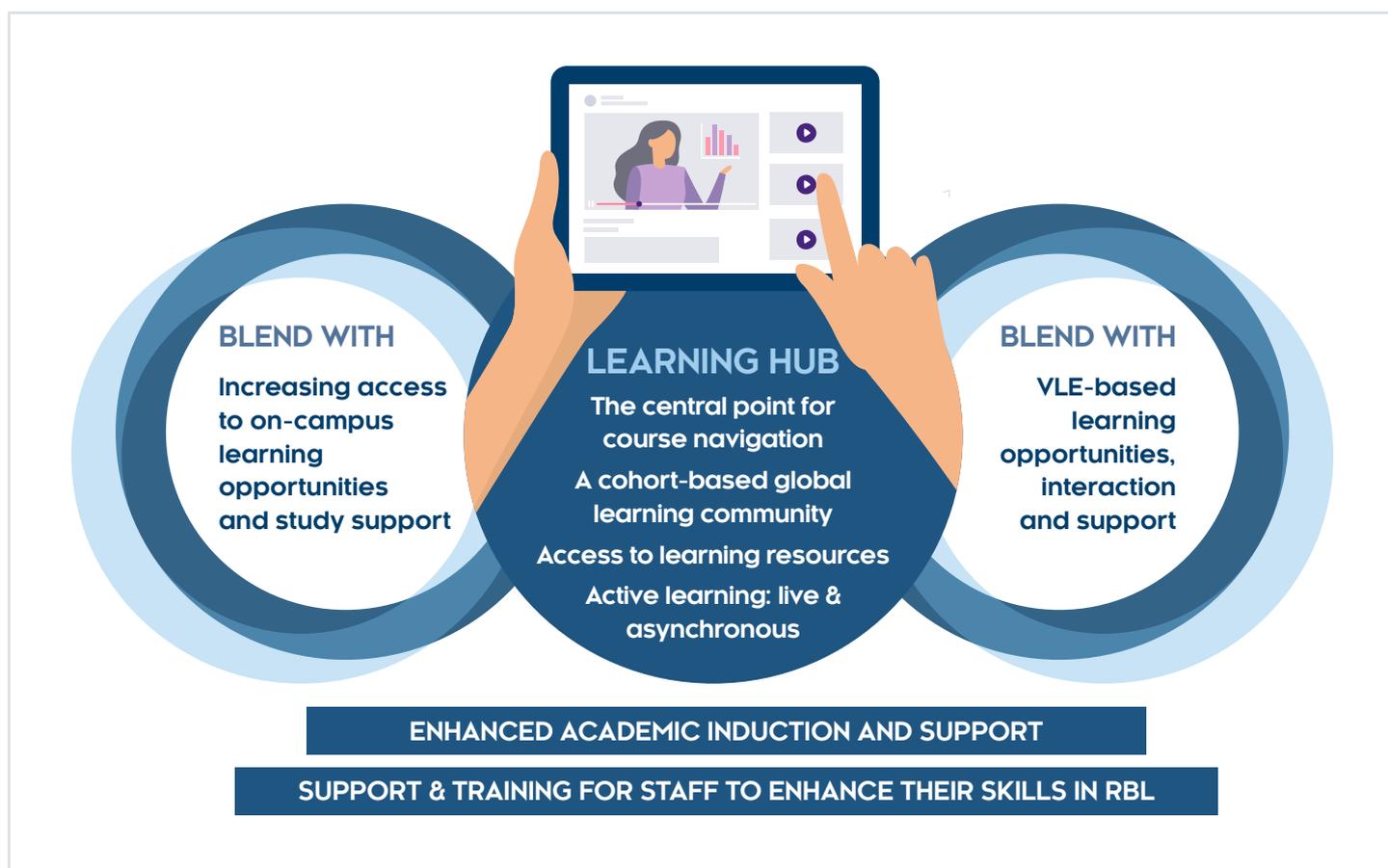
> *The underlying principles that will guide your practice will remain the same: focus on inspiring learning, on engaging students to learn through 'doing', on encouraging learners to become active participants in their own studies and our global Heriot-Watt learning community.*

Keeping care and compassion for your students and for colleagues should remain your top priority across all learning and teaching decisions. The conditions we are living, studying and working in are likely to remain challenging for some considerable time.

The discussions which flow from this guide may lead you to consider more in-depth review of your course and assessment design. If you do wish to delve more deeply into any aspect of your course design, the Learning and Teaching Academy offer a suite of resources and can provide tailored support.

The **Introducing Responsive Blended Learning** module remains open to all staff. You may wish to access this and refresh your understanding of designing and facilitating blended learning.

RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

BLEND WITH
Increasing access to on-campus learning opportunities and study support

LEARNING HUB
The central point for course navigation

A cohort-based global learning community

Access to learning resources

Active learning: live & asynchronous

BLEND WITH
VLE-based learning opportunities, interaction and support

ENHANCED ACADEMIC INDUCTION AND SUPPORT

SUPPORT & TRAINING FOR STAFF TO ENHANCE THEIR SKILLS IN RBL

THEMED DISCUSSIONS FOR TEACHING TEAMS PREPARING FOR AY2021-22

As course teams, you are encouraged to consider eight key questions as you prepare for AY2021-22.

1. How can we strengthen our teaching teams, build collegiality, and work effectively across campuses?

Delivering courses via the RBL model works best when a strong team approach is adopted. Supporting learning in a blended way requires thinking about staff time differently, acknowledging the effort needed to develop learning resources and activities as well as the actual facilitation of live sessions. Having a course team with complementary skills and ensuring individuals are not working in isolation, will help teams to pool resources, share materials, and work together to tackle challenges. On a practical level, delivering teaching in a blended model can benefit from team teaching, particularly when supporting large groups, cross-campus teaching, or when there are cohorts split between on-campus students and those who remain at a distance.

ACTION: In preparation for AY21-22, take practical steps to deepen collaboration across your teaching team.

- Teaching teams work best when they encompass a breadth of expertise, bringing together academic and professional services colleagues. Consider who you need to bring in to support your teaching team, taking into account the skills and experiences of colleagues on all campuses.

Ensure that staff have clear and complementary roles. Arrange regular team meetings to share insights on the cohort and keep communication open.

- Prioritise building a positive team culture that recognises the contexts in which colleagues are working in. This includes practical issues such as time zones, working week, and consideration of team members' work-life contexts and constraints. Be inclusive in how you meet and work, rotating meeting times and establishing lines for asynchronous communication as well as 'live' discussions.

- Create opportunities for student participation in course development. Including student voices in the design of teaching can bring fresh ideas and perspectives to your plans. The School 'Town Halls' introduced in the past year, for example, have been a useful way of hearing from a diverse array of student voices and can be replicated at course or programme level.

- Reflect on how your course currently operates across different campuses. Do you work as one course, sharing resources or do you have distinct delivery across each campus? How will this develop as campuses re-open? Where do you wish to retain global teaching and where is campus-specific support required? Retaining cross-campus collaboration, team-teaching and resource sharing will strengthen the course team and the global learning community that students and staff are part of.

- Consider how to make the most of a team-teaching approach, including team-teaching in live sessions. This will help you support student interaction across online and on-campus contexts with care, focusing on unified communication and joined-up working.

2. How can we integrate the move to Canvas into our preparation for AY21-22 and ensure our Course site is engaging, easy to navigate and supports student learning?

The move to Canvas provides us with an excellent platform to support learning and teaching in AY21-22. Canvas offers a simple interface, engaging tools, open integrations, and reliable service and support. As your courses are migrated from Vision (Blackboard) to Canvas, follow the **migration guidance** to review the course to ensure that it operates as you intend. This is an excellent opportunity to ensure that the course is ready for AY21-22 and that you are making appropriate use of the VLE.

ACTION: Review your course on Canvas to ensure that it is ready for AY21-22 and that is it easy for students to know what they should be doing each week and how to engage.

- Provide a clear student journey through the course by using modules to structure the presentation of content. For example, use a module per week or per topic. Use 'student view' to see your course as students will.

- Integrate activities, e.g. discussions, quizzes, live sessions, in the relevant module for that activity to provide a seamless experience for students.

- Make use of Canvas sections when setting up assignments, quizzes and graded discussions so that students only see the tasks and dates which apply to them.

- Check that any course deadlines show in the Canvas calendar. This makes it easy for you and for students to keep track of deadlines across all courses.

- If you need help with Canvas contact use the **Canvas 24/7** support for immediate help with Canvas features and tools from a dedicated Canvas online support team or for questions and support regarding use at Heriot-Watt contact **CanvasProject@hw.ac.uk**.

3. How can the teaching team further develop its approach to Responsive Blended Learning? What aspects of course design need enhancement?

Over the past year, teaching teams adapted their practice to ensure learning could be facilitated in an online or blended environment. Many creative ideas emerged around adapting activities for socially-distanced on-campus delivery and for online engagement.

Three areas may be particularly helpful to reflect on:

- **Pacing and structuring student learning**
Designing for online and on-campus learning requires careful pacing across each block of study. This requires you as a teaching team to consider how the course is structured so that students are clear on what they should be doing at each point in their studies. Providing a study schedule for students explaining what they should do each week, identifying key activities and points of 'live' engagement is an effective means of ensuring students are clear on when and how to engage. Alternatively, providing study materials on a week-by-week basis can help students pace their learning and focus their studies.

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- **Reviewing Learning Outcomes**
As you approach AY21-22, review how course learning outcomes are delivered. Even if the learning outcomes remain the same, the method of delivery or the activities undertaken to achieve them may need to be changed as access to global campus spaces change. Consider if further discussion with accrediting bodies is likely to be required.

- **Designing activities that inspire engagement and learning**
Review the activities and learning events you ask students to participate in. Consider, for example, whether lectures (either delivered 'live' or recorded) are really the best way of engaging students with the material. Shorter audio-visual (or live) input, combined with activities to inspire discussion and engagement, can be more effective in encouraging active participation and engagement with materials. The course activities you introduce should all contribute to students meeting the course learning outcomes (and by extension the programme learning outcomes). Use appropriate activities to achieve this. Don't just use activities as a form of virtual presenteeism.

Many students are likely to begin their learning at a distance. Be sensitive to time zones, potential challenges with internet access, and shared home / learning spaces.

It is likely that physical distancing restrictions will impact on how on-campus support can be offered. This may mean that some aspects of the course will need to be delivered differently in order to meet the learning outcomes.

ACTION: Review your course learning outcomes and the pace of learning and teaching through the semester.

- Review your course learning outcomes. Are there any that will be challenging to deliver during AY21-22? Are there any that will be challenging to deliver online or in socially-distanced campus spaces?

- Review your existing course structure. Is it clear what students need to be doing each week?

- Review the coursework and activities. Will they meaningfully contribute to the students achieving the learning outcomes? Will students be able to engage effectively with these in online or blended mode? Will students be able to engage even if they have limited access to the internet, are in different time zones, or have disabilities or other additional requirements?

- Are there any professional and accrediting body considerations and requirements that will need addressed?

All students will remain part of the same cohort. While they may experience the blend of on-campus and online support in different ways, the academic experience will be equivalent and the academic standards identical.

4. How can we support students whose learning has been disrupted over the past two years?

The RBL model highlights the need to respond to disruption to student learning journeys – the need to tailor provision to ensure we support students from where they are, not from where we hoped they would be. Students coming from school will have experienced two years of disruption to their learning and are likely to have missed whole topics and areas of learning, including practical skills and activities. Returning students have also experienced considerable disruption and the majority will now have been off-campus more than on. We need to be mindful of this disruption and how it will impact across the whole programme of study. Induction and support will need to be presented in a positive and supportive way throughout the duration of students' study pathway.

ACTION: Reassure students that they will be supported in their learning and that you recognize the disruption they have faced.

- Take time to explore with students how their learning has been impacted by the global disruption. Reassure them that you are able to support them.

- Consider the pace of study and the expectations you have of the knowledge and experience students will have when they join the course. Can you adapt the pace of learning to enable them to develop / consolidate the foundation skills and knowledge needed for the course and to develop their confidence from the start?

- Plan for some students returning to campus part-way through the year. Consider how the teaching team can help such students to integrate into the on-campus learning community and to engage in any required practical learning,

- View induction as a whole-university effort. Identify where collaboration with other groups around the University could support student learning. This includes the **Maths Gym**, **Effective Learning Advisors**, the **Academic English team** or colleagues in **SCHOLAR**.

5. What will assessment look like in Academic Year 2021-22?

Over the past year course teams have adapted traditional examinations to Take Home Exams or other forms of alternative assessment. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to limit the possibility of being able to offer traditional on-campus exams. Staff will need to develop alternative ways of assessing their students.

This may involve repurposing existing exams as take-home assessments, as many courses did for AY20-21. As we look to AY2021-22, course teams do have a little more time and opportunity to rethink their assessment in a more comprehensive way.

The most important factor when developing an alternative assessment is that it remains focused on the course learning outcomes. Not every assessment needs to address every one of these learning outcomes, but every learning outcome should be assessed at some point in the course. Course teams are encouraged to look at the suite of resources available from the Learning and Teaching Academy on designing alternative assessments and ensuing that an Assessment for Learning approach is adopted.

ACTION: In preparation for AY21-22, identify the key assessments in the course and consider how they could be adapted for remote delivery and submission.

- Consider whether all proposed assessment is required. Reducing the number of assessments may be possible whilst still ensuring all learning outcomes are addressed.

- Review existing assessments and consider what adaptations to the assessment content and / or marking regime will be required to enable remote completion and submission.

- Ensure that any proposed changes are in alignment with course and programme learning outcomes and highlight any potential challenges associated with professional body expectations that may need explored. Check the current position and what opportunities exist to work with professional bodies to work through alternative approaches to meeting learning outcomes.

- Plan how you will communicate assessment requirements and expectations to students well in advance of the assessments. Will they require support or practice opportunities to engage in alternative assessments? Students will only be able to accurately demonstrate their ability if they have a good understanding of what the assessment requires them to do.

6. What can we practically do to support students who are on campus and those who need to continue studying at a distance?

It is likely that students will begin their studies for AY21-22 in a range of locations. Many students will be returning to campuses and engaging in a blend of on-campus and online activity, others will remain off campus and engage solely online. All students will remain part of the same cohort. While they may experience the blend of on-campus and online support in different ways, the academic experience must be equivalent and the academic standards identical.

When planning teaching, it is important to consider what will be the most effective and efficient approach for you and your students. It is useful to consider:

- When is it most effective to teach the whole cohort online?

- Where it is appropriate to offer both online and on-campus live options (e.g. the same tutorial focus delivered in different spaces)?

- What is most appropriate to teach asynchronously and what is most appropriate for live sessions?

- Where could dual mode (simultaneous online and on-campus) teaching provide the most appropriate solution?

In exploring options, bear in mind that teaching in dual mode requires a substantial amount of planning and preparation. It is easier to deliver dual mode teaching with two people, so it may not present the efficiencies that it might, at first glance, appear to offer.

If you are considering simultaneous dual mode teaching, we recommend you first read this **Teaching Online and On-Campus Simultaneously** Guidance Note and the associated **Top Tips for Teaching Simultaneously Online and On-campus**.

ACTION: Focus on how you can provide opportunities for students to learn from each other and work together across the whole cohort.

- Develop student collaborative activity that includes on-campus and online students working together. For example, use discussion boards to provide opportunities for formal and informal discussions across the whole cohort.

- Use the VLE Learning Hub activities as a focal point for student engagement, reflection and sharing of learning.

- Consider staff workload and the most efficient way of enabling all students to receive equivalent support and access to learning activities.

7. What can we do about practice-based learning that needs to take place in labs, studios or maker-spaces, through fieldtrips, or which requires access to specialist equipment?

Over the past year, Heriot-Watt colleagues have offered exceptionally creative solutions to the challenge of offering practice-based learning opportunities at a distance. Some examples of this work can be found here:

1. **The 'Practice based activities: Labs, studios and fieldwork' guide** provides advice and links to resources to help staff develop online and blended alternatives to labs, studios and fieldwork.

2. **The 'Practice based activities: Guidance and case studies' guide** shares case studies and practical examples of developing online alternatives for labs, field trips and studios.

As planning for AY21-22 gets underway, consider what aspects of 'practice based learning at a distance' you may wish to retain.

There are likely to be areas where you will wish (and need) to get back to campus-based/ location-specific practical work. However, you will need to continue to consider how students who cannot return at the start of semester will be able to access this learning either through equivalent 'at a distance' activities or through these activities being offered later in the semester or academic year. A key consideration is the link between practical activity and assessment. Given the ongoing uncertainties, delinking practicals from assessment remains an appropriate course of action. These discussions and decisions will be best made at discipline and School level. Take time to explore options with colleagues.

ACTION: In preparation for AY21-22, map out possible scenarios and consider the action you will take as a course team in each case.

- Keep focused on learning outcomes as the focal point of your decisions regarding practicals, lab work, studios and fieldtrips: Can they still be met, or do they need to change? If they cannot be met in the timeframe of the course as it stands, is there the possibility of addressing these at later points in the programme?

- Consider creative alternative approaches to meeting learning outcomes.

For continuing students, check that you are aware of any additional requirements and that all students are aware of the student wellbeing services and disability support provided by the university.

8. How can we ensure our course is accessible to all students?

Learning and teaching in blended mode provides opportunities to enhance accessibility for some students, however it can also create barriers for others. It is important to consider what accessibility requirements students may have. Many of the VLE tools have accessibility features built in or interact well with assistive technology. There are also steps you can take to ensure that your sessions are accessible for as many students as possible e.g. checking resources for accessibility, providing materials in formats which can be personalised to suit the student's needs.

Regular / reliable access to the internet may be challenging for some students. Providing asynchronous activities which they can engage with at a time and location convenient to them will facilitate access. Similarly, if providing live online sessions, remember that not all students will be in a quiet study place when they join the session. This may impact on their ability to engage fully e.g. speak using a mic, use video etc. Design live sessions with this in mind and consider what alternative options can be provided for students.

ACTION: In preparation for AY21-22, consider how you will ensure accessibility for all of your students.

- Think about the blend of live and asynchronous activities. Are there any activities which could be provided on an asynchronous basis to ensure more students can engage with them?

- Review course materials and your course site on the VLE to ensure that they are designed to promote accessibility.

- For continuing students, check that you are aware of any additional requirements and that all students are aware of the student wellbeing services and disability support provided by the University. Encourage students to get in touch if they have any additional requirements or their requirements have changed due to working online or in blended mode.

- Read the **Supporting Accessible Learning Online guide** and **RBL Student Accessibility Guide** for further suggestions on how to ensure your course is accessible.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Further support is available from the **Learning and Teaching Academy** and **Learning and Teaching Enhancement Service** and the **Canvas Project Team**.
Resources are available to support individuals and teaching teams to develop the skills and confidence to deliver Responsive Blended Learning. As a starting point, you may find it useful to explore these resources:

- **Responsive Blended Learning Resources list**
- **Supporting Student Learning Online resources list**
- **Introducing Responsive Blended Learning** staff-development module.
- **Digital Education Watt Works Guides**
- Complete **Canvas Fundamentals 1 and 2 training**.
- Colleagues new to teaching may find it useful to explore In At The **Deep End: Starting to Teach at Heriot-Watt University**. This provides a general introduction to learning and teaching in higher education, offering practical hints and tips across a range of topics.

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CONTACT US
E: LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk

FOLLOW US
@LTA_HWU

www.lta.hw.ac.uk