

Blended/distance learning guidance

An ideal blended/distance learning programme will be one that balances:

- The freedom of remote access, with
- Tried and tested quality assurance strategies used in traditional learning situations

In designing a blended/distance learning programme, the centre should plan to meet an individual's needs and timescales rather than a group's. These must be negotiated between the centre and the learner and the centre must take account of the learner's situation and aim to meet their requirements for flexible delivery of the programme.

Planning for blended/distance learning

Blended/distance learning will present more challenges than conventional delivery modes because centres need to provide:

- Tailor made provision to a learner's individual situation and requirement
- Adequate resources, time and communication channels
- Appropriate, workable and cost effective arrangements
- Adequate learner support – for example, additional consideration should be considered for those learners in geographically isolated locations
- Effective quality assurance – to prove authenticity of a learner's work
- Security of ICT support – which may be open to plagiarism or impersonation

A blended/distance learning programme should include:

- Initial assessment to ensure that the programme and mode of delivery is appropriate to the needs of the learner
- Induction
- Learning and assessment materials
- Specialist tutor support
- Technician support
- Counselling and guidance
- Access to additional learning support
- Clear identification of delivery method in the programme literature and the learning agreement
- Some pre-assessment contact time with a qualified assessor

Learners have a right to access:

- Support from a Tutor (can include telephone/email)
- Guidance on staff availability/response times and expectations
- Learning and assessment materials
- Equipment and resources
- Assessment opportunities

Guidelines for planning and programming

CYQ suggest that centres consider all of the following:

- Establish the skills and knowledge to be covered
- Take account of the learner's situation and requirements for flexible delivery
- Draw up individual learning and assessment contracts
- Specify the time allowed to cover the programme content
- Specify the time allowed for any internal or external assessments
- Define any rules which apply to extension of timescales indicated
- Define the provision of any electronic managed learning which is available
- Define the resources and/or equipment available to the learner
- Define arrangements for any practical activities that may need to be carried out and the process by which evidence must be generated
- Ensure that all assessment tools and distance learning evidence are internally verified
- Ensure that all learners are made aware of their responsibility to submit only evidence that is their own

Learner support and communication

The level of support required during a blended/distance learning programme will vary between learners. It is important to allocate sufficient time to support all learners whether self sufficient or otherwise.

Communication

A blended/distance learning programme can be supported by traditional support mechanisms or by electronic methods. The ICT environment can provide blended/distance learning learners with easier access to their assessors who can communicate with a wider range of learners, providing that all participants have open access to computer technology.

The following strategies offer general guidelines to blended/distance learning communication:

- Allocate sufficient assessors to guarantee appropriate support for learners. The ratio of assessors to learners will vary from programme to programme and will depend on ICT support mechanisms
- Establish the support mechanisms to be used – post, telephone, tutorials, e-mail and/or fax
- Establish the extent of the availability of all support mechanisms and whether there are specific time restrictions (for example, specific days of week/hours)
- Define how the support will be managed, who will do it and how communication will be facilitated by the centre to offer learner support

Guidance for direct contact hours

A centre must provide the relevant amount of face to face teaching to ensure that learners have the best opportunity to succeed in the unit or qualification undertaken.

CYQ will sample learners during the course and assessment to monitor whether they have been given the best opportunity to pass.

Assessment for blended/distance learning

Assessment of blended/distance learning programmes should be as valid and reliable as assessment for conventionally delivered units or qualifications.

Validity

The tools of assessment used for blended/distance learning programmes must be fit for purpose and:

- Contain clearly defined criteria
- Ensure coverage of the skills and knowledge defined in the unit/qualification
- Be capable of generating appropriate evidence for the unit outcomes to be assessed

Reliability

It is important that the units and/or qualifications offered by blended/distance learning are as visibly reliable as those offered by conventional methods. Reliable assessment decisions must be:

- Based on evidence generated by valid assessment tools that are consistently applied over time
- Across a range of assessors and learners in different situations and contexts
- Subject to internal quality assurance monitoring to ensure comparability and credibility

Quality assurance for blended/distance learning

CYQ will expect to see quality systems adapted appropriately to encompass arrangements for units and qualifications offered by this learning route.

A centre must be confident that learners:

- Have access to information about the programme
- Have access to learning and assessment materials
- Have access to equipment and resources
- Are clear about communication channels
- Are supported to allow appropriate opportunities for formative guidance in addition to email/telephone contact
- Have opportunities to access and interact with peers
- Have access to opportunities for internal, external and re-assessment
- Submit their own work for internal or external assessment

NB: All human resources working on blended/distance learning programmes should be appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their role.

Internal verification of blended/distance learning

A centre's approach to internal verification may include the following:

- Appointing a key individual to act as IV for the blended/distance learning programme
- Subjecting assessment and learning materials to internal checking prior to use
- Documenting the roles and responsibilities for all those involved in the blended/distance learning process
- Recording and monitoring the support and communication offered to learners
- Monitoring the consistency of any assessments carried out for blended/distance learning learners
- Sampling learner evidence generated by blended/distance learning programmes
- Evaluating arrangements for delivery of blended/distance learning programmes
- Design and management of blended/distance learning programmes

Centre Sanction - Centres offering blended/distance learning must provide CYQ with detailed information and written evidence showing clearly how they follow the above guidelines. Failure to disclose this information prior to initiation may incur a sanction and/or an additional fee.