

‘No one size fits all’: Academic experiences of blended learning

Dr Kate Strudwick¹, Dave Prichard¹, Andy Beggan² and Professor John G. Sharp³

¹Lincoln Academy of Learning and Teaching (LALT); ²Digital Education; ³Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute (LHERI)

Abstract

This evaluation was conducted to understand the impact of blended learning at the University of Lincoln in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Experiences were gained from academics on elements of blended learning that worked well, those which were less effective, and where support may be needed for the future. Acknowledgment of the student voice was part of the consultation, but greater investigation of the student perspective and a broader examination of the logistical challenges of this model are currently underway. This evaluation provided recommendations informing planning for the 2021/2022 academic year, with analysis capturing examples of good practice and a focus on institutional support provided by Digital Education. As a response to the findings, new revised Design and Planning pages, ‘Review, Refresh or Renew’ (Planning & Design Support 2021), have been reformed to support academics with their planning and developments. These pages provide a timely response, signposting and providing a repository of good practice and showcase examples for assessment, student support and personal tutoring with video and presentational materials. In addition to what worked well, challenges focused upon accessibility, quality of internet connection, with emphasis on the need for timely communication, with IT support, at a local school level and institutionally. The evaluation identified lessons to be learnt with responses to Covid-19, with an acknowledgment of achievements from all shown through resiliency, adaptability, commitment and collegiality.

Keywords: Blended learning, Digital Education Design and Planning support, student voice, good practice

Introduction

This evaluation summarised here sought to understand the impact of blended learning at the University of Lincoln in response to the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. It was conducted through a staged process to understand what elements of blended learning worked well, where additional support may be needed, and which elements were less effective than anticipated. A consultative approach, through Qualtrics surveys, was identified as the most appropriate way to capture views from academics across all disciplines. Student voice was part of the

consultation, but greater investigation of the student perspective is currently being conducted focusing upon student perspectives and a broader examination of the logistical challenges of this model. The results of the evaluation will help inform the development of a Teaching and Learning Strategy for the University and aid the provision of supportive resources provided by Digital Education.

Adapt and EnABLE

The move to blended learning was developed at the University of Lincoln using ADAPT and EnABLE. Activity Development and Agile Planning for Teaching (ADAPT) workshops were developed as the underpinning activities for the EnABLE (Engaged Agile Blended Learning Experience) approach to delivery (Figure 1). ADAPT focused upon the design and planning of programme delivery for 2020/21 and EnABLE developed and implemented the outputs from ADAPT. This combined the development of blended learning resources and student engagement with delivery through a collaborative online environment.

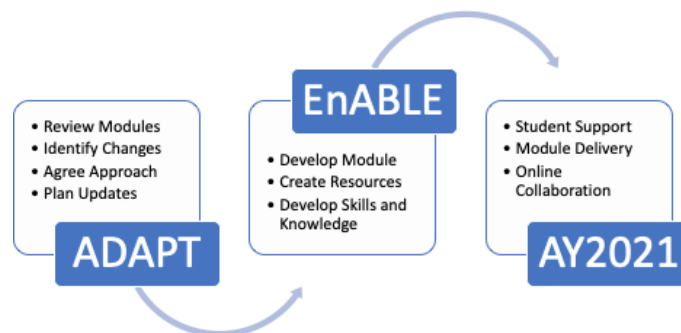


Figure 1 Infographic representation of ADAPT and EnABLE

It was imperative to evaluate the transition to blended learning in March 2020 and at that point in the academic year, to account for the moves to online delivery and provide an opportunity to share best practice and experiences. Timely reports from the Office for Students (Barber 2020), accompanied with external evaluations (Association for Learning Technology 2021; Pearson survey 2020; WONKHE Aula Survey 2021) also provided reflections on the transition to teaching and learning in response to Covid-19. Their evaluations discuss the move to more digital learning and teaching provision in Higher Education, with considerations of what these changes have demonstrated and where and how these can be addressed for the future. Barber's report (2020:8) references some of the positive developments with five benefits to online learning: Increased flexibility, personalised learning, increased career prospects, pedagogical opportunities and global opportunities. It is important to fully understand the experiences in recent moves to online learning and reflect upon both the positives and challenges associated with of this transition.

The evaluation Process: A staged approach

The first stage in the evaluation process involved a thematic discussion to draw out some reflections on the ADAPT and EnABLE process, online environments and learning experiences for engagement with students. This Padlet exercise for *Student Engagement – Community, Communications and Partnership* identified challenges with issues of technological knowledge and digital poverty, whilst recognising positive adaptations to blended learning that have been conducted and the impact they have had on relationship building with students.

The second stage focused upon experiences at a school level, with School Directors of Teaching and Learning (SDTL) capturing school level experiences. This was conducted through local consultation on what works at a module and session level through the completion of surveys. Quantitative and qualitative data from the Qualtrics surveys, Teaching and Learning Survey and the School Experiences Survey included responses provided on behalf of programme teams and schools, and some individual views on experiences on the themes:

- ADAPT (workshops, meetings and communication)
- EnABLE (support, webinars, digital support, resources and guidance)
- Student engagement (online environments and learning experiences for engagement with students)
- Practice of blended face-to-face and digital teaching & learning (seminars, lectures, studio/lab-based sessions and PTGs)
- Examples of blended learning successes (areas of best practice adopted)

Findings from participation in school level feedback

From the ten schools who shared their experiences in the Teaching and Learning Survey and 23 schools represented in the School Experiences Surveys, academics from across the University were invited to participate in a variety of ways to encourage participation and honesty. Some schools held staff meetings to feedback on levels of satisfaction, whilst other schools preferred to nominate the School Director of Teaching and Learning to represent their views.

Experiences of ADAPT

The ADAPT process focused on the design and planning of programme delivery for 2020/21, supporting the reshaping of programme/module(s) towards an active blended experience online. Delivered through a combination of online resources and planning workshops, ADAPT (an adaptation of the ABC curriculum design process) directly supports the aims of the ENABLE process. Quantitative data from the Teaching and Learning Survey indicated that the majority of responses to ADAPT

design and planning were seen as effective, with reference to workshops, reporting, planning meetings, communications and impact (Figure 2).

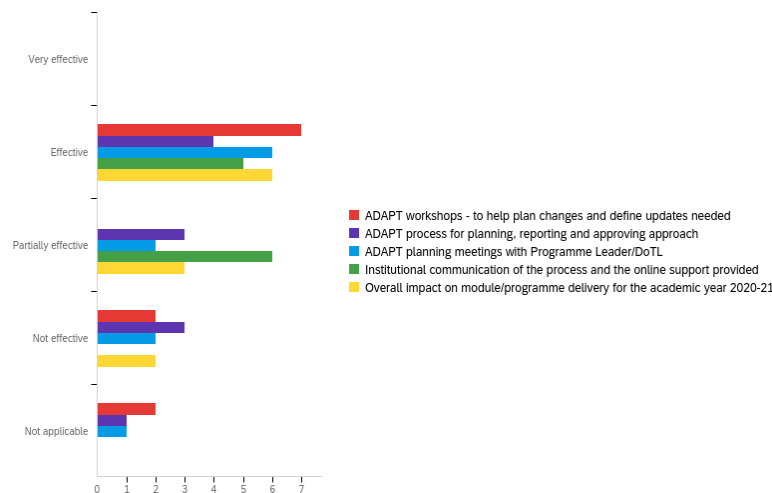


Figure 2 Effectiveness of ADAPT design and planning

Central to the planning process were the workshops, developed and delivered by Digital Education with programme teams, to start the process of re-design to blended learning. The ADAPT process was seen as effective for reporting and approval of redesign of programmes, with some variances shown across disciplines and programmes, often resulting from differential characteristics of programme curriculum structure. The effectiveness of planning meetings with local support were identified, with Programme Leaders, Digital leads and SDTL, all being seen in a positive light. Responses on the institutional level of communication were also seen as significant, with the importance of being informed and supported seen as key to the planning of the transition. This element of planning should be a consideration for future communication channels providing support. The overall impact of ADAPT, on a module and programme delivery, was seen as positive with data indicating the majority agreement of effective (Figure 3).

Qualitative data from the School Experiences survey further captured positive reflections and highlighted core areas, such as support and communication. Specific areas were identified in the consideration of levels of support, with *webinars* and workshops and training being seen to help with the practical elements, for material repository and development of materials, as noted:

‘Especially the website with the list of pre-recorded training that colleagues could access flexibly’ (School Experiences Survey)

It was reported that engagement with these sessions was good, with significance placed upon the timeliness and proactive approaches for the ADAPT process. One school noted

'These workshops were useful from a module perspective and from a programme perspective' (School Experiences Survey)

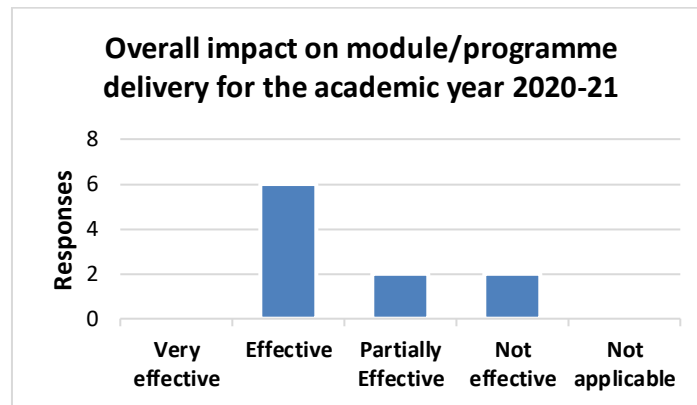


Figure 3 Impact of ADAPT

The importance of communication and key roles in schools were identified as having an impact on levels of understanding and awareness in the School Experiences Survey. Programme Leaders, SDTL and Digital Leads were all seen as being active on a school level by providing regular communication. Regular school, programme and senior leadership meetings were also seen as being useful for the ADAPT stage. For one school, the Senior Leadership Team met *'twice a week (daily in the initial months of the pandemic) to discuss issues, and plan priorities and support issues.'* One school developed a steering group on levels of study rather than programme, again signposting that active engagement was seen as key in *'creating an agile effective practice for a blended approach'* (School Experiences Survey).

There were some challenges identified with the ADAPT process, with timing seen as integral with school development of modules. Some schools developed a blended Teaching and Learning Strategy document, which according to one school gave *'clarity, help maintain consistency across subject areas'*(School Experiences Survey). Overall, schools had different experiences, but they all engaged with ADAPT as a developmental process. However, there was a lack of clarity identified with some elements of the ADAPT process, commented in one school as having *'to adapt to ADAPT to ensure that it would work for our particular school'* (School Experiences Survey).

Responses on levels of support offered by ADAPT indicated the usefulness but challenges associated with this planning stage. Reflections identified how it helped with the development of blended approaches, with key elements provided as part of for support packages institutionally.

Experiences of EnABLE

The EnABLE process developed and implemented stages as outputs from ADAPT. It combined the development of blended learning resources and student engagement with delivery through a collaborative online environment, supported by dedicated online resources and webinars (Figure 4).

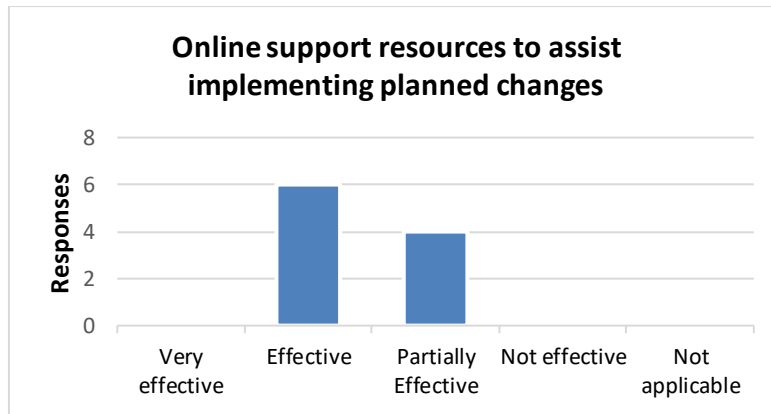


Figure 4 Online support resources

The developments in digital upskilling, from levels of support and training from Digital Education, were seen as hugely important, providing the community with the required assistance and central resources to develop their plans for programme design. To complement these resources, benefits of bespoke support, such as drop-in clinics, were also seen as important to the necessary upskilling for the transition, alongside the local digital support through key roles, notably Digital Leads (Figure 5).

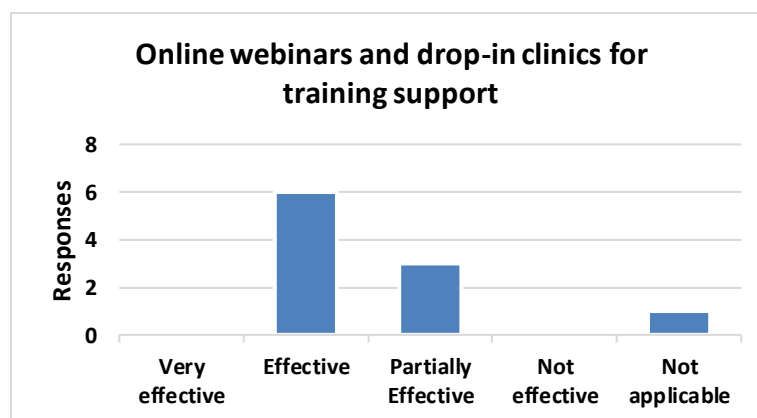


Figure 5 Online webinars and drop-in clinics

The importance of support from Digital Education, through accessible guidance, re-usable recipes and toolkits, alongside the digital tools available, were all evaluated positively. The breadth of guidance provided on multi modal levels will be invaluable for the development of suitable and relevant resources for blended learning approaches to teaching (Figure 6).

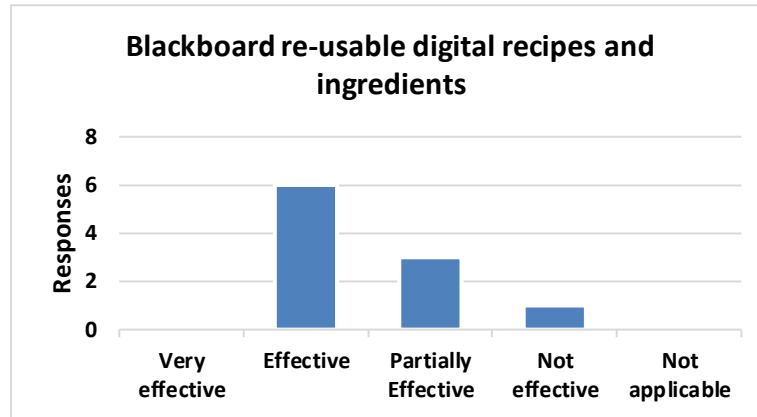


Figure 6 Blackboard re-usable digital recipes and ingredients

Support provided by the Digital Tools (MS Teams, Panopto, Blackboard Collaborate) was also seen as positive, with the majority agreeing with the level of support these platforms provided (Figure 7).

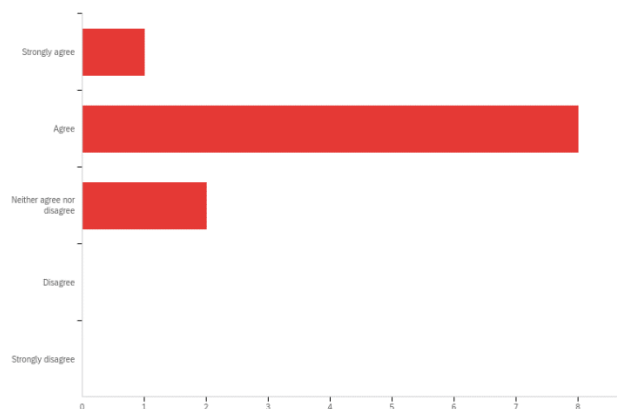


Figure 7 Support provided by digital tools

Qualitative comments from the School Experiences Survey were complimentary towards the efforts of Digital Education in developing support and CPD on the website. These elements were seen as core parts of the planning process and were beneficial for Schools '*with a number of colleagues actively using new ways to engage in digital learning*' (School Experiences Survey).

For one school, usefulness was provided by '*customised workshops ... following inhouse team sessions*' (School Experiences Survey), with another school noting, this experience '*reinforced and engaged the team further with the 'whole' programme rather than the focus of individual modules*' (School Experiences Survey).

The use of different platforms was encouraged as part of the online learning experiences, especially Panopto, Blackboard Collaborate, MS Teams and YouTube. However, some platforms were better suited to certain types of teaching and there was an acknowledgment for more training needed from ICT for software installation and for some of the more advanced features of platforms.

Some of the challenges associated with the EnABLE process, from the School Experiences Survey, did identify the stresses associated with this stage, often with requirements to quickly upskill, the lack of technical understanding and digital platforms to provide online teaching. Upskilling on a modular level were observed as challenging with one school commented

'No one size fits all in the School which has 21 programmes ... felt like the complexity of the School in terms of size and programme numbers had not been considered/understood fully' (School Experiences Survey)

As with ADAPT, the support offered by Digital Education and Digital Leads at this stage was praised with challenges being seen as important for design, as part of the wider continuous support from Digital Education. Literature on the use and role of technology in teaching and learning, with considerations of lessons learnt, impact, effectiveness, assessments of the value added to student's learning and the role in enhancing learning and teaching practices is influential in understanding the wider context (see Jones and Rocco 2014; Kirkwood and Price 2013; Price and Kirkwood 2014; Price and Oliver 2007). With work addressing the use of technology enhanced learning, with a focus on the need for professional development to ensure technological competences.

As a response to the findings, the newly revised Design and Planning pages '*Review, Refresh or Renew*' (*Planning & Design Support 2021*) have been reformed by Digital education to support academics with their planning and developments for the 2021/2022 academic year. These updated pages respond to demand for greater signposting and provide a repository of good practice, showcasing examples for assessment, student support and personal tutoring with supportive video and presentational materials.

Blended learning: Online environments and learning experiences for engagement with students

The transition to blended learning and assessment of the impact on student engagement were evaluated quantitatively through assessing levels of community, communications and partnerships. Experiences of the collaborative online

environments, and learning experiences for engagement with students, was the focus for the Teaching and Learning Survey. Results as shown indicate positive responses on the benefits of blended learning, its impact on learning experiences, awareness at a School level and digital upskilling with staff and students being able to use technology for learning (Figure 8).

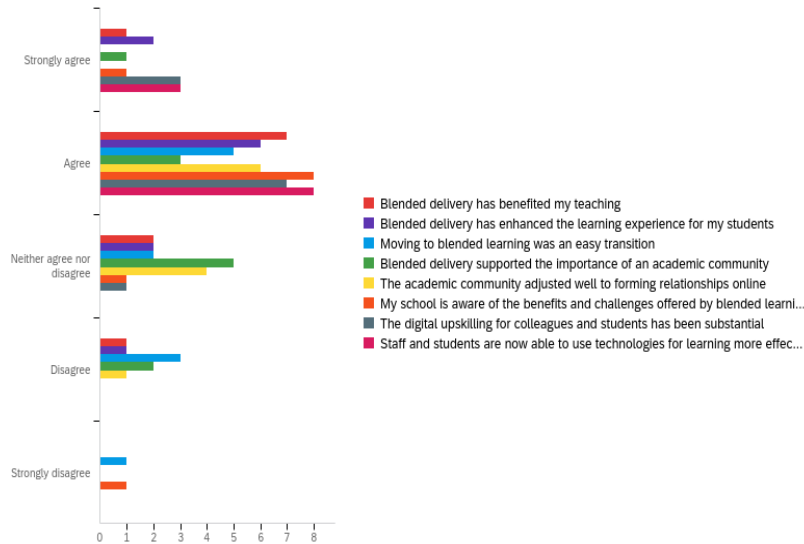


Figure 8: Online environments and learning experiences for engagement with students

By focusing upon the impact of blended learning, quantitative data demonstrates positive responses, with the majority agreeing the transition to blended learning has benefitted their teaching, with similar results shown for the perceived enhancement for students (Figure 9a,b).

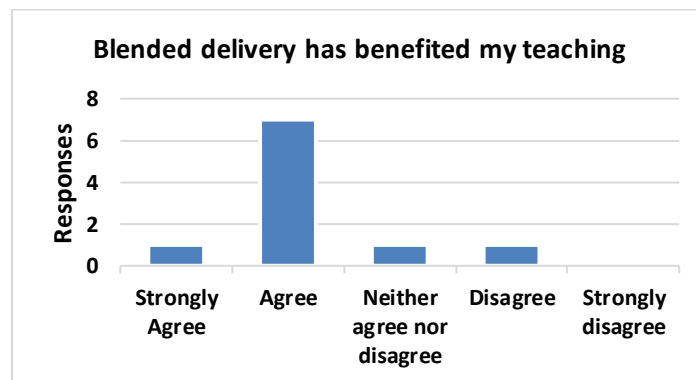


Figure 9a Benefit to teaching

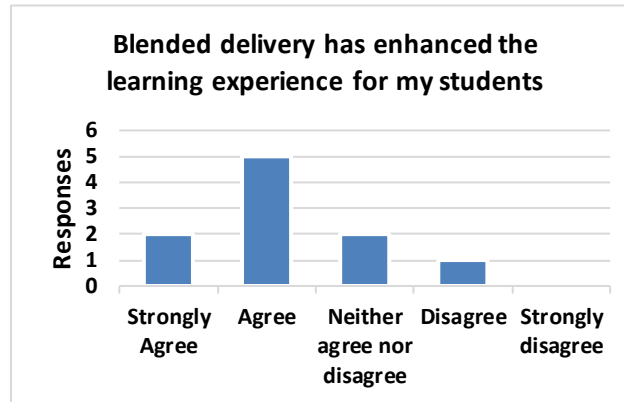
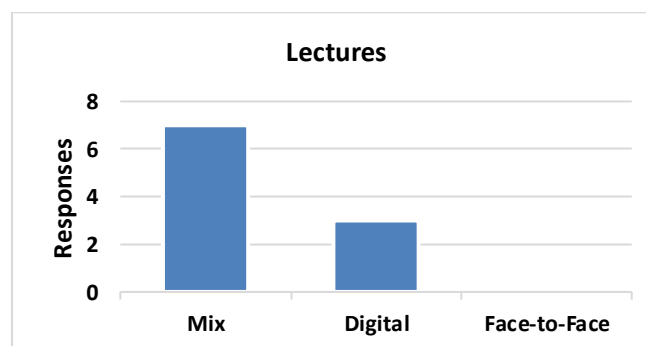
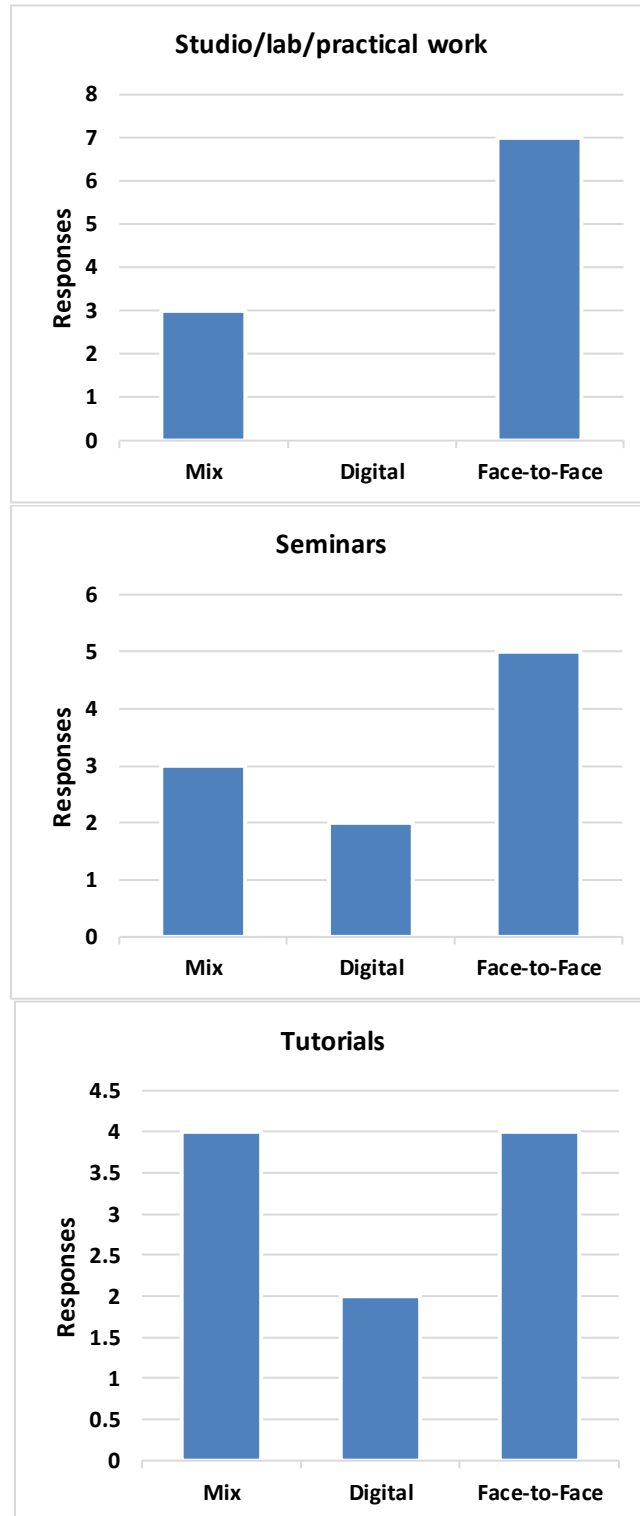


Figure 9b Blended delivery enhanced learning

It is important to understand perceptions of the transition to blended learning, with the majority agreeing that this has been an ‘easy transition’, but also with acknowledgment that such developments have supported the academic community.

The Teaching and Learning Survey further questioned the perception of the optimal blend of digital and face-to-face teaching. The results provided indicate observations about the preferred combination for blended learning, represented as a mix (blended), digital and face-to-face (Figure 10: Composite). For seminars the clear preference was for face-to-face, with data indicating a similar preference for tutorials, both face-to-face and a mix (blended). For lectures and personal tutoring, the preference was primarily for a mix (blended) with no agreement for face to face and some recognition of digital modes of delivery. With respect to group work, labs, breakout rooms and assessments representations highlight preferences to different learning approaches. In a response to the transition to blended learning the Digital Education team ran a one-day conference on *The Future of Blended Learning* (March 2021) which sought to capture examples and good practice.





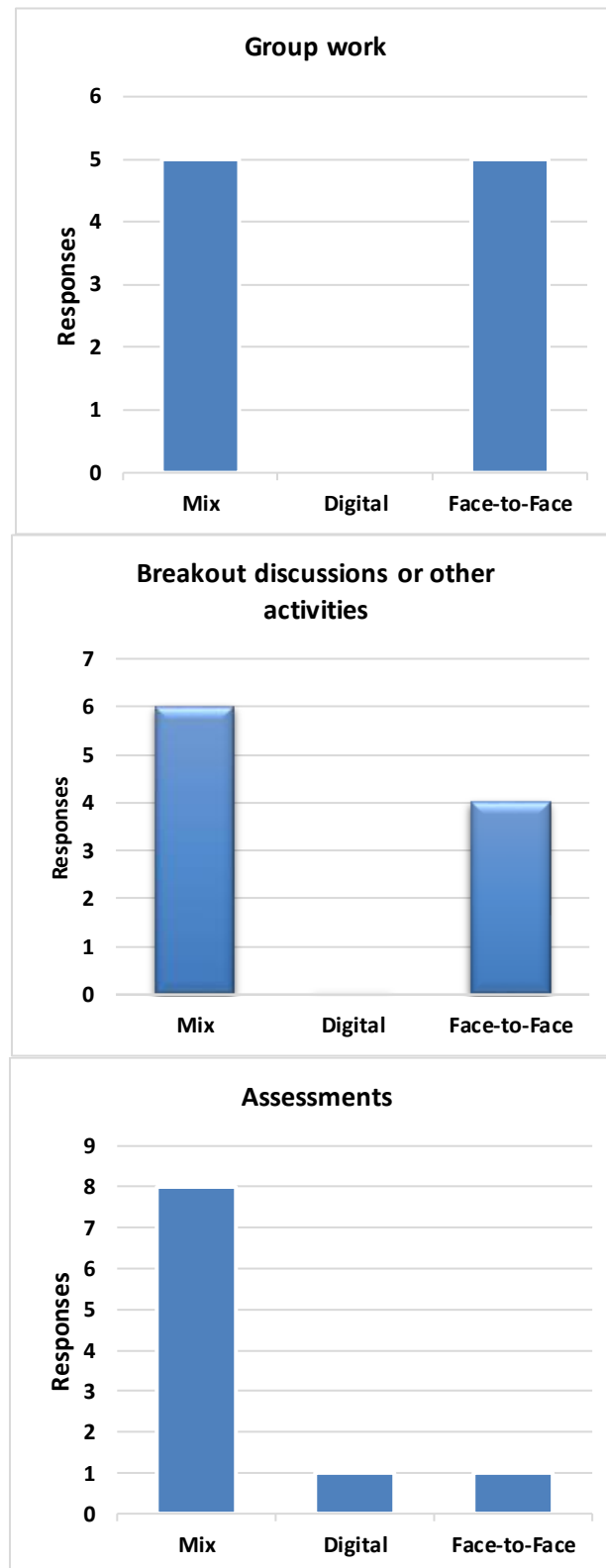


Figure 10 Preferred combination for blended learning

Qualitative responses from the School Experiences Survey further indicated the extent of student engagement shown with online blended learning, which was '*better than expected*' for some schools. The role of Programme Leaders, Personal Tutors and Student Engagement Leads were all highlighted as integral to the process, ensuring clear communication channels, providing support and facilitating regular meetings with School representatives.

The School Experiences Survey noted areas of good practice with engaging students online, shown through the use of breakout rooms, meetings on MS Teams, and recordings of shorter bite size sessions. Positive comments were further made on the combination of synchronous and asynchronous delivery, with students reporting to prefer recorded lectures because of the flexibility with how and when they engage with the content. There was a recognition that there was 'no one size fits all', as shown with the flexibility with designing personal tailoring and a broader learning community to aid engagement. WONKHE Aula survey (2021) noted the development of a sense of community among students reporting it was the most popular area for support, with access to resources or guidance tool kits on an institutional level also being recognised for their impact. Hardman (2021) further summarised similar reflections, indicating that experiences with shifts to online learning were seen to prompt student ownership of their learning, but acknowledged the reported loss of student learning community, as reported in the Aula survey.

There were some challenges identified in the School Experiences Survey with concerns about equity levels, for both staff and students, to digital devices, with reported issues on meeting minimum tech requirements and the use of 'HyFlex' learning (trying to run an online and face-to-face session simultaneously). There were also considerations of how to access levels of engagement with students through cameras and mics. This was reported to improve in smaller group settings with greater confidence shown with some tools (Talis Elevate, Padlet, and OneNote).

Practices of blended learning

There were common trends reported on with what worked well with blended learning, face-to-face and online sessions. Overall, there was a noted acknowledgment of achievements and levels of commitment to the transition from students and academics, shown with levels of adaptability and flexibility. Academics were praised for providing support in multiple ways of delivery including face-to-face sessions, online live lectures, online live seminars/practical activities and pre-recorded lectures, whereby '*students felt that we had achieved a good balance between the different modes of teaching*' (School Experiences Survey).

Areas identified as working well were student facing, notably group work (through use of break out room) with group tasks being welcomed by students, allowing them to produce their own Panopto video presentations, research posters and make use of shared PowerPoints. Other positive areas were noted as Talis Elevate and the use of Padlet and chat function on MS teams for communication with online settings.

The use of online activities, such as Q&A sessions, quizzes, Poll Everywhere and Blackboard Collaborate polls were all seen as useful in enhancing collaboration and encouraging participation and communication. Pre-recorded lectures were identified as practical for the level of flexibility they offer students- when to watch the recording, to re-watch sections and allowing students to use such platforms at their own pace. One school noted they had addressed the problems with accessibility to learning materials and sites by providing recorded videos and live streaming, to help with '*Band width and firewalls with company/employer loaned laptops*' (School Experiences Survey). The accessibility of learning resources was seen to increase through greater use of edited captions in lecture videos and live captions for synchronous sessions.

Examples of blended learning successes

Responses indicated successes with moves to online learning being seen as positive, enabling tutorials, small group seminars, mentor meetings (staff/student), while also enabling some ability to provide individual meetings between staff and students. WONKHE Aula survey (2021) assessed what was working well, with reference made to student engagement (improved attendance, peer and small groups learning), pedagogy (diverse flipped activities and curriculum design), technology (use of technology as communication platform and breakout rooms), student access (flexibility and access to resources) and working culture (collaborations, innovations and freedom to experiment) all being highlighted.

Support for assessments were seen as key in the Teaching and Learning Survey, being delivered online with assessment feedback and delivery of feedback tutorials, with the provision of online In-Class Test and Time Constrained Assessments (online) seen as 'a huge success'. For those schools with technical and practical demonstrations the move to labs online were also flagged as being effective for the blended learning experiences.

One of the principal areas raised in the Teaching and Learning Survey was the recognition of support and collegiality required for the transition to blended learning, with 'kindness' and 'excellent support' from key roles emphasised (School Directors of Teaching and Learning, Digital Leads and Heads of School).

Examples of good practice

Some prominent examples of good practice highlighted the importance of using digital tools and activities effectively, to enhance student's learning and development through a mixture of learning resources, online, face-to-face, asynchronous and synchronous. The use of Talis Elevate was seen as positive by more than one school.

'Innovative ways to support summative assessment ... and is a very effective way of tracking engagement outside of class and therefore OVERALL student engagement' (School Experiences Survey)

Adopting a combination of all-cohort sessions and smaller groups, with various digital learning platforms was seen as core, with students often contributing more in online small group scenarios. One school noted the importance of *reflection as 'a core part of our practice but this takes the time and space'* (School Experiences Survey) while another school noted that successes were seen by being adaptable with the planning of synchronous sessions *'cross programmes to enhance distance learning participation'* (School Experiences Survey) had led to increased engagement.

Adoption of the use of different approaches and modes of delivery was seen as one way to embrace engagement and *'prevent online student fatigue'* (School Experiences Survey). Positive responses from students were reported by SDTL as areas of good practice, focusing upon the need for clear communication, with staff, Student Representatives, Student Engagement Leads, and transparent design on Blackboard, the production of materials in a timely fashion and enabling pre-work for seminars. Support providing icebreakers at the beginning of online seminars helped engagement and applied a variety of ways in which students could engage with blended learning. Some key sessions and activities were highlighted by some schools in the School Experiences Survey, expressing their positive reflections of the transition to blended learning, notably signposting different learning activities, personal tutoring and welcome week activities.

Challenges and barriers

In the Teaching and Learning Survey there was some clear acknowledgment of the challenges faced in this transitional period. The differential abilities to engage with blended approaches to learning were interestingly often seen as a result of poor quality of Internet connection and broadband width, rather than indicating a lack of engagement. Managing expectations was also seen as integral to ensuring levels of availability, with support provided to enhance student engagement with blended learning (examples were providing materials in advance and providing access to materials during online learning). This challenge of meeting student expectations was further raised by WONKE Aula survey (2021) in their report as one of the biggest challenges or barriers to making things work, alongside inclusion (digital divide and technology issues including connectivity, lack of tech and digital infrastructure). Being adaptable was seen as key to meeting these challenges, summed up by one school

'Digital education planning and learning is a complex and highly skilled profession in its own right and the fact that academics have succeeded in providing excellent online sessions and resources for their students is testament to their commitment to our students' (School Experience Survey)

Some challenges were expressed in the Teaching and Learning Survey through providing practical sessions with blended learning, with levels of support to students, with online delivery. Reflections were made by Barber (2020, 88) who stated *'Leaders should avoid assuming one size fits all'* with recommendation to *'ensure a strong student voice informs every aspect of strategic planning.'* (2020, 110). This observation was summarised as no one size fits all with experiences of blended learning

Given the diversity, some students enjoy interactive sessions (including breakout groups) and others really dislike it (if they are uncomfortable to be on the spot and do not know others or feel other do not contribute)' (School Experiences Survey)

Further support

Areas of attention, focused upon in the Teaching and Learning Survey, identified the need for further flexibility with timetabling, recognising that changes were made where possible, but that this places a huge burden on the timetabling team and that further consideration around supporting the logistics of a blended model is needed. There was also an acknowledgment of the importance of providing different experiences, depending on the lecturer and seminar tutor's technology skills and choice of delivery method *'I think we need more directed guidance on what we should be doing ... so students get a more comparable experience.'* (Teaching and Learning Survey). Other areas included allowing time for culture changes for development of flipped approaches, authentic learning and meaningful assessment. Proposals were summarised as requiring *'time and space to review and reflect on experiences. This cannot be shoehorned in whilst trying to mark, teach and carry out research'* (Teaching and Learning Survey) and addressing the need to work on *'engaging and educating the students that blended learning is the new norm'* (Teaching and Learning Survey).

Implementation of digital education, for all cohort sizes, was seen to be enhanced with support providing a repository of good practice examples *'a signposting webpage that brings together all the different teaching and learning resources/advice'* (Teaching and Learning Survey). WONKHE Aula survey (2021) presented the one great hope for learning and teaching post-Covid in their report noting *'blended learning that embraces "the best of both" ...'* whilst also adding *'modernising pedagogy'*. The need for continued ongoing training/support packages for staff using online and digital media was seen as necessary for the future planning, to help with the implementation of standard digital media, software and hardware. Research by Jorgensen et al. (2018) addressed the use of technology in teaching and learning, considering challenges about how technology was used pedagogically, and emphasised the need for collaboration with both students and the institution, through *'the organization of communities of practice and peer mentoring'* (2018, 208) which would result in support and professional development.

In the Teaching and Learning Survey there was recognition of the co-ordinated support needed to upskill staff and students, which allows for originality and creative thinking for staff developing blended approaches. There was a clear recognition of the need for more coordinated support for students use of online platforms. Providing the time for developments with timetabling and student monitoring systems was also identified by some schools in the Teaching and Learning Survey, seen to facilitate a more responsive approach to the use of the campus space in the future, but clearly a challenge given current timelines.

The transitions to blended learning showed clear levels of resiliency and adaptability, from staff and students, and there was an acknowledgment that the lessons learnt should be reflected upon institutionally. This observation was summarised by one School as having *'rolling discussions and planning/implementation based upon clear pedagogic requirements/benefits and innovation'* (Teaching and Learning Survey).

The Teaching and Learning Survey posed the question *'What one single lesson could the University learn about its response to the pandemic and the move to digital and blended learning?'* Responses provided observations on changes to models with concerns over a lack of engagement from students and greater burden on work loading for staff. One school noted the model presented challenges for online delivery of modules with technical or specialised concepts that require live staff-student interaction stating:

'The solution would be to have one additional online (staffed) seminar slot timetabled for all students timetabled for asynchronous seminars combined together' (Teaching and Learning Survey)

Other observations reflected upon the efficacy of the approaches to timetabling and student attendance monitoring, both identified as important for future planning, and the need to ensure all relevant colleagues are involved at an early stage in this planning. WONKHE Aula Survey (2021) noted in their report on the hope for learning and teaching post-Covid *'they also want the freedom and flexibility to innovate, and for University managers to display faith in Programme Leaders.'* With acknowledgment of the need for greater flexibility for the transition to blended learning for the future, some suggestions for amendment were to have greater freedom away from prescriptive models and expectations, and a consideration of practical models for teaching delivery.

Recommendations

In reflecting on the past year, the Office for Students (Barber Report) have further contributed to discussions through the publication of a report (Feb 2021) which provides a comprehensive review of digital teaching and learning during the national lockdown. The Barber report (2020) is available here:

Gravity assist: propelling higher education towards a brighter future (Office for Students)

The report highlights six actions for all universities to consider ahead of the 2021/2022 academic year. These are listed as follows:

- Assess students' digital access on a one-to-one basis and address issues before learning is lost
- Inform students what digital skills they will need
- Involve students in designing teaching and learning
- Equip staff with the right skills and resources
- Make the digital environment safe for all students
- Plan how you will seize the opportunity for the longer-term

Key recommendations arising from the report are summarised as follows:

- Provide support for different learning experiences through blended learning approaches.
- Develop continuous on-going training and support packages for staff using online and digital media platforms.
- Increase and better signpost the co-ordinated support for student use of online platforms and key software (e.g. MS Teams, Blackboard/Blackboard Collaborate, Poll Everywhere).
- Explore support for digital platforms to enable large cohort interactivity (250 plus). It is acknowledged that existing platforms are already making positive inroads here, but may still fall short of requirements for our largest cohort. As such, expansion of options available to large modules is needed (at least in the interim).
- Provide and communicate on an institutional level a repository of good practice examples for module development.
- Carry out a broader consultation around the challenges of timetabling for a flexible approach to delivery, ensuring all relevant colleagues are consulted.
- Consider the necessary time required for cultural changes for required learning development approaches.
- Establish a Digital Pedagogies Research Group (DPRG) for continuous evaluation and practical support.

The following table outlines how the recommendations from the OfS Barber report (2020) are being considered (Table 1).

OfS Barber Report (2020)	Recommendations
Assess students' digital access on a one-to-one basis and address issues before learning is lost.	<i>This is being planned via the central Getting Started survey and will also need to be embedded as a process at school/programme level.</i>
Inform students what digital skills they will need.	<i>Programme teams will be asked to embed this in inductions, ensuring signposting to the support materials and digital training is included. Information will also be provided around the main platforms pre-arrival via Digital Student Life.</i>
Involve students in designing teaching and learning	<i>Students were involved in our design processes last year and this will be continued. There are many examples of excellent practice with student leading initiatives across the Colleges.</i>
Equip staff with the right skills and resources	<i>Support will be provided by Digital Education on an institutional level to develop continuous on-going training and support packages for staff using online and digital media platforms. Support will be provided at a school level by Digital Lead roles and a repository of good practice will provide examples of good practice for module development.</i>
Make the digital environment safe for all students	<i>Ensuring a safe environment digitally will be addressed institutionally.</i>
Plan how you will seize the opportunity for the longer-term	<i>To establish a Digital Pedagogies Research Group (DPRG) for continuous evaluation and practical guidance. The creation of such a group would place Lincoln at the forefront of digital pedagogies practice and a sector leader in the field with the potential to generate research output and external funding.</i>

Table 1 OfS recommendations and responses

Conclusions

Findings emerging from this work indicate some positive reflections of what went well with the transition to blended learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, in both the School Experiences Survey and Teaching and Learning Survey. There were also concerns raised on meeting the challenges of the transition and the impact on staff and student wellbeing. Results from the School Experiences Survey and Teaching and Learning Survey fully recognised the financial costs (technology) and emotional challenges arising during this time of transition, and the Association for Learning Technology Report (2021) stated that 90% of their survey indicated that wellbeing has been an impact. Moving forward, Hardman (2021) notes the potential for making a difference with the re-design of a hybrid learning environment, with recommendations from Barber (2020, 60) noting the need to take a Pedagogy first approach. This approach re-designs developments so that *'pedagogy should be*

placed at the centre of the design process, as opposed to this process being driven by technology.'

For one school, as summarised in the Teaching and Learning Survey, one single lesson to be learnt is the realisation of what has been achieved in the transition to blended learning:

'Students and staff stepped up to the challenge, but it has been hard. So going forward it is important not to under - or overestimate the community...'

Further reflection was made on emphasising how well students and staff had risen to the challenges, with one school stating

'Student response has been exceptional to the challenges faced and certainly shows how receptive they can be to new ways of learning - certainly some positives of the digital approach to retain for future lectures, seminars and assessments' (Teaching and Learning Survey)

With recommendations for future planning to be framed by developing good practice and achievements shown in the transition to blended learning, results reflected upon the importance of applying these to future plans for teaching and learning developments.

Finally, it seems timely to shift traditional thinking to align digital alongside face-to-face teaching on an equal basis, acknowledging how best to optimise digital baseline delivery with face-to-face interactions (Sharp 2021). This observation was acknowledged by Barber (2021) as seizing the opportunity for positive change, emphasised by a SDTL, who stated

'The School (both staff, students and business support) has made great leaps and generally has been very positive when thrown many many challenges. Most aspects of blended learning will now naturally become rapidly normalised within our approaches to teaching and learning - which is great'
(Teaching and Learning Survey)

References

Association for Learning Technology (ALT) (2021) Learning Technology in the age of COVID-19 Key findings from the 2020 Annual Survey. Available at: <https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/annual-survey>.

Barber, Sir M. (2020) Gravity Assist: Propelling higher education towards a brighter future. *Report of the digital teaching and learning review*. Office for Students: London. Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/gravity-assist-propelling-higher-education-towards-a-brighter-future/>.

Hardman, P. (2021) Educators' experiences of digitally- enabled learning and teaching during Covid –19. *WONKE*. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/educators-experience-of-digitally-enabled-learning-and-teaching-during-covid-19/>

Jones, T. and Rocco, P. (1999) Research Framework and Dimensions for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Educational Technology Systems on Learning Outcomes. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 32(1), 17-27.

Jorgensen, M., Havel, A., Fichten, C., King, L., Marcil, E., Lussier, A., Budd, J. and Vitouchanskaia, C. (2018) Simply the best: Professors nominated by students for their exemplary technology practices in teaching. *Education and information technologies*, 23(1), 193-210.

Kirkwood, A. and Price, L. (2013) Missing: evidence of a scholarly approach to teaching and learning with technology in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(3), 327-337.

Pearson survey (2020) Higher Ed Presidents' ongoing response to the COVID-19 crisis (June 2020) Available at <https://www.pearson.com/ped-blogs/blogs/2020/06/survey-higher-ed-presidents-responding-to-the-covid-19-crisis.html>.

Price, L. and Kirkwood, A. (2014) Using technology for teaching and learning in higher education: a critical review of the role of evidence in informing practice. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(3), 549–564. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.841643>

Price, S. and Oliver, M. (2007) A Framework for Conceptualising the Impact of Technology on Teaching and Learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 10(1), 16-27.

Sharp, J.G. (2021) Blended learning: A review and source reference for the development of strategy, course design and practitioner use. *IMPact*, 4(1), 1-25.

WONKHE Aula survey (2021) Available at <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2021/03/Wonkhe-Aula-digitally-enabled-teaching-survey.pdf>.