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Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim
Education and Training Board

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MSLETB Blended Learning Policy

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2 Introduction

This document specifies Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education & Training Board (MSLETB) policy for the delivery of programmes leading to an award or to specified credits towards an award through means which may not require the learner to attend on campus. This policy is intended to support MSLETB in developing flexible learning opportunities and providing access to further education and training for learners. All blended learning programmes will be developed under MSLETB QA's system and must follow the QA Governance structure approval pathway through Programme Feasibility Group to Programme Approval Committee and finally overall approval from the FET Quality Council.

This policy should be read in conjunction with MSLETB Blended Learning Strategy to align all developments with the phases of MSLETB's blended provision and the current limitations of only new programmes at NFQ Level 4-6 being applicable for Blended delivery. It is important to note that all examinations for all programmes will remain in centre.

3 Objectives

1. To ensure a learner-centred positive quality assured teaching and learning experience, with improvements and enhancements in accordance with national and international quality standards in the design, development, approval, resourcing, monitoring and review of blended learning programmes.
2. To provide a framework for staff to engage with blended learning programme delivery.
3. To ensure staff are provided with the necessary training and support for blended programme delivery.
4. To manage the challenges and potential risks in blended provision to safeguard standards.
5. To plan for and provide organisational infrastructure to support blended delivery.
6. To ensure MSLETB complies with national legislation, agreements and regulations and where relevant in the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines For Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes.

4 Definition of Blended Learning

Blended Learning refers to a type of programme where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of on-site and online learning, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination (QQI, 2023).

5 Scope

MSLETB staff, external partnerships and second providers involved in blended learning programmes

6 Strategic Context

MSLETB's mission is to deliver a high-quality learning experience that will lead to better outcomes for all those who engage in Further Education and Training. The National FET Strategy - Future FET: Transforming Learning emphasises the need for more blended and online provision to facilitate a more personalised learning experience.

7 Policy

Developing on MSLETB's experience of Blended Learning and with its Strategic Goals and aligning with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes MSLETB shall

7.1.1 From an Organisational Context:

- 1) Ensure that the use of blended learning is communicated clearly and shared with learners, staff members and all relevant stakeholders in a timely manner.
- 2) Invest appropriately in infrastructure and supports for the design and delivery of blended learning programmes
- 3) Recognise that teaching on a blended programme requires pedagogical and technological expertise and thus appoint, induct, train, offer professional development and appraisal arrangements for specialist, teaching and support staff relevant to a blended environment.
- 4) Offer continuous professional development training in the use of VLE/LCMS, developing online content, technological and pedagogical upskilling
- 5) Support staff in selecting an appropriate learning design model and developing appropriate content by delivery mode (e.g., ADDIE)
- 6) Ensure staff are provided with opportunities to develop their academic and technology enhanced learning skills and digital competences in accordance with The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (Redecker, 2017).
- 7) Create an engaging, motivating, and intellectually stimulating learning experience which enables a collaborative and participatory experience for the learner
- 8) Ensure that there is a parity of standards in relation to teaching, learning and assessment
- 9) Ensure policies, regulations and processes are fit for purpose for blended learning programme delivery
- 10) Design, develop, review and update resources to contribute to the achievement of the stated programme learning outcomes to ensure they are relevant, provide variety, and enhance the programme
- 11) Following the principles of Universal Design for Learning so that teaching, learning and assessment will be accessible, easy to navigate, well structured, readable, with sufficient variety to meet the needs of all learners, including learners with disabilities.

- 12) Comply with data privacy, GDPR, child protection, software licensing, copyright and legal obligations both nationally
- 13) Ensure that all quality assurance policies and procedures accommodate remote learning
- 14) Ensure that arrangements are in place for online assessments including grading (all of which are robustly tested) if relevant to the blended learning programmes
- 15) Ensure that regulatory considerations are adhered to in the context of national provision for example Examination Board, Results Approval Panel, EA, appeals and complaints, disciplinary arrangements if relevant to the blended learning programme
- 16) Guarantee robust systems and processes are in place to manage the submission, receipt, marking and return of assessments
- 17) Ensure that processes are in place to verify the unique identity of learners
- 18) Pilot online classes (across different contexts) and sign off in advance of the programme commencing
- 19) Ensure technical support and contingency plans are in place throughout the duration of the online learning component of the programme
- 20) Ensure that blended and online learning developments are learner centred and subject-led rather than technology led
- 21) Recognise that contact hours may no longer be a suitable indicator related to teaching. The programme design will specify the required effort for the activities of teaching and content creation in a blended learning delivery model
- 22) Ensure that the availability and life expectancy of technology is appropriate to the numbers of learners and duration of the programme and that relevant supports are in place to ensure a smooth transition to new technology
- 23) Moderate forums and online interactions, ensuring system security and access is in line with MSLETB policies and procedures including plagiarism, academic integrity and social media etiquette.
- 24) Elicit feedback from teaching, support staff and learners on an ongoing basis and at the end of a blended programme to monitor, evaluate and improve provision
- 25) Ensure that a strategic plan including appropriate investment in infrastructure and contingency arrangements to support all relevant provision and programme design and delivery are in place
- 26) MSLETB FET maintains a risk register which outlines associated risks to all provision and maps these to strategic goals and assigns them to the responsible FET manager.

7.1.2 From a Programme Context:

- 1) Ensure that staff members keep up to date with emergent technologies and new pedagogical approaches through continuous professional development, attendance and participation at showcase events
- 2) Approve all online content to ensure it is current and relevant to the programme

- 3) Reinforce learning by offering remote formative assessment activities
- 4) Ensure that learner supports such as the e-mentor, administrators and tutors are available at scheduled times
- 5) Evaluate open education resources to ensure a quality provision
- 6) Provide controlled opportunities for staff to test new or evolving technologies
- 7) Ensure all assessment material is maintained on the chosen LMS this includes learner feedback and grading.
- 8) Provide Learner Charter or Centre Guidelines where available to the learner prior to the commencement of the programme to include information on online interactions, forums, netiquette and cyberbullying
- 9) Nominate an appropriate moderator who will intervene in cases of cyberbullying that may negatively impact the learner experience
- 10) Communicate to ensure that stakeholders are aware that all information designed for a blended learning programme are owned by MSLETB (even where development of same are outsourced)
- 11) Accurately and confidentially maintain learner records to monitor progressions and achievement and which will facilitate timely intervention for learners who may be struggling
- 12) Individuals developing online learning materials are bound by MSLETB policies, systems, hardware and processes
- 13) Facilitate the development of a community of practice to share knowledge and additional resources

7.1.3 From a Learner Perspective:

- 1) Recruitment and guidance staff available to support digital readiness for learners.
- 2) Learner induction to cover:
 - a. Email
 - b. Printing
 - c. Access to LMS
 - d. ETBI library
 - e. Submitting Assessments
 - f. Learning to Learn
 - g. Self-directed learning skills
 - h. Learning support structures
 - i. QA Procedures
 - j. Academic Integrity and Use of Artificial Intelligence
 - k. Learner Charter
 - l. Learner Handbook
- 3) Ensuring fair access and support for learners with additional needs, in line with Universal Design.

- 4) Ensure all relevant information pertaining to the online programme is made available in advance to the learner including but not limited to
 - a. Explanation of what constitutes a blended learning programme and necessary hardware, software and any other necessary requirements to participate on and complete this programme
 - b. Clarity on the expectations and levels of engagement of the learner and the education provider
 - c. All terms and conditions related to the blended learning programme
 - d. 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 commensurate to the level of the programme
 - e. Learners should be provided with an equitable, fair and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes to include but not limited to suitable teaching and learning material, adequate timeframes, opportunities for feedback, confidentiality, dignity, respect and courtesy.
 - f. Learners must comply with the MSLETB Community Rules for VLE Users; this ensure the MSLETB Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is used constructively and for the good use of our community of learning and practice.