BLENDED LEARNING HANDBOOK FOR STAFF

Carlow College, St. Patrick's

Contents

The *Blended Learning Handbook for Staff* is an associated document of the [Blended Learning Policy](#). Any modifications to this Handbook must be documented in the Version Control below and approved by the Academic Council.

Version Control		
Version No.	**Date Approved**	**Documented Changes**
1	24 June 2025	Initial Issue (all temporary guidelines / procedures related to blended learning approved as temporary measures to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic are replaced by the *Blended Learning Policy* and *Blended Learning Handbook for Staff*).

Introduction

Following the introduction of QQI's *Guidelines for Providers of Fully Online and Blended Learning Programmes* (2023), Carlow College has put in place a *Blended Learning Strategy* and *Blended Learning Policy*.

The *Blended Learning Handbook for Staff* supports College strategy and policy for blended learning by providing essential information and guidance to staff about the College's approach to development, implementation and management of blended learning programmes. The handbook should be read along with Staff Programme Handbooks, and understood in the context of the College's wider Quality Assurance Framework.

The handbook contains five sections, which outline guidelines and procedures in place for blended learning programmes in respect of the following:

(1) Programme Development and Design

(2) Administration and Implementation

(3) Learner Information and Supports

(4) Staff Training

(5) IT Systems

Additional information outlining procedures and guidelines for administration, academic staff and learners are contained in the appendices.

The list of Carlow College blended learning courses is contained in Appendix 7 of this handbook.

Section 1 – Programme Development and Design

The development of new blended learning programmes at Carlow College should adhere to:

- Carlow College *Quality Assurance Policy*; specifically the relevant procedures for programme proposal, development and approval (see Section 4.3 of the *Quality Assurance Policy*);

- Carlow College *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*;

- *Carlow College Blended Learning Strategy*;

- *Carlow College Programme Development Strategy, 2023-2028* and the *Carlow College Programme Development Rubric*[1]; and

- the *QQI's Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes* (2023).

Proposals to be submitted to bodies other than Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for validation follow the same initial internal process for proposal and approval as those validated by QQI. Once approved by Carlow College Academic Council for development, programme proposers will need to liaise with the Office of the Registrar in respect of South East Technological University (SETU) approval processes. Programmes to be validated by SETU adhere subsequently to that bodies' development and validation processes.

1.1 Principles of Blended Learning Programme Design

Programme developers should follow QQI's principles of good practice in their *Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes* (2023), Section 8 (p. 32). In addition, programme developers should ensure that:

(1) The rationale and benefits of the specific chosen modes of online delivery within the programme, whether synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both, are clearly articulated and supported by evidence for that choice, through market research, learner feedback, up-to-date research in blended learning design, and / or other evidential sources.

(2) The progamme's duration and credit weighting are appropriate for blended learning.

(3) Programme design teams and academic staff have been sufficiently trained through targeted workshops in the design and pedagogy of blended learning to undertake the development of a blended programme.

(4) All online learning materials for the programme including digital leaning tools are available to access remotely via the VLE, Microsoft Teams and the Library services and must be appropriate to remote study.

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[1] These documents are available via the Staff Portal.

(5) Suitable and sufficient IT resources are in place appropriate to the delivery mode by having due regard to the maxium cohort size, college technology capacity and resources available.

(6) The learning, teaching and assessment strategies are clearly designed for the learning environment, including the use of any learning technologies. The rationale for the choice of learning, teaching and assessment strategies must be clearly articulated in programme documentation.

1.2 Curriculum Design

The design of the curriculum of a blended learning programme needs careful consideration. Programme designers should follow QQI's principles of good practice for learning and curriculum design in their *Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes* (2023), Section 9 (p. 35).

The design of the curriculum of a blended learning programme should be aligned to the College's *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, which is centred on the following five objectives:

1. Ensure consistency and standards in curriculum design and execution;

2. Promote excellence in learning and teaching practice;

3. Support good practice in assessment and feedback;

4. Design and maintain effective and relevant learning environments; and

5. Encourage professional development in teaching and research.

The *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029* embeds the concept of 'constructive alignment'[2] (p. 8) to ensure coherence between learning outcomes and the alignment of teaching and learning activities and assessments, with a focus on what the learner is doing.

The programme curriculum is developed in accordance with the nine principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the key theme of 'Inclusive Learning Experience' as outlined in the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029* (p. 9).

In addition, programme designers should ensure that:

(1) The curriculum is centred on the needs of the learners and are subject-led rather than led by the availability of technology.

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[2] Biggs, J and Tang, C. (2007) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, 3rd Edition, Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

(2) The programme and module learning outcomes are demonstrably achievable through the learning mode.

(3) Modules with an online component, whether synchronous or asynchronous or a combination of both, are designed specifically for the proposed delivery mode.

(4) The balance between in-class and online in the delivery of module content is carefully considered. In line with Objective 2.4 ('Promote Excellence in Learning and Teaching Practice') of the college *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, opportunities for collaborative between learners and teachers should be embedded within the programme.

(5) Module content delivered online, whether sychronously or asynchronously or a combination of both, contains a variety of learning materials and tasks that promote interactivity between learners and align with the principle of Objective 4, 'Design and maintain effective and relevant learning environments', 4B 'Virtual Space', in the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*.

(6) Due consideration is given to accessibility and equality of opportunity for learners when designing the curriculum.

1.3 Digital Learning Materials and Resources

The digital learning materials and resources for learners on blended learning programmes should be carefully considered and selected. Programme developers should ensure that:

(1) Time spent by learners engaging with core and supplementary digital learning resournces and materials are clearly stated on programme Moodle pages.

(2) Programme digital learning materials and resources are fit-for-purpose, available and appropriate to the programme design and are selected to enable the the achievement of the programme learing outcomes. Digital tools and the platform they are delivered in is determined by the mode of delivery. See *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, Section 2.3 ('Promote excellence in teaching and learning') (p. 10).

(3) Digital learning materials and resources are accessible to learners, and align with the principles of accessibility in the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, Section 2.2 ('Promote excellence in teaching and learning') (p. 10).

(4) Digital learning materials and resources used are included for review by the Oversight Group and Internal Panel as part of internal programme development and review processes.

1.4 Guiding Principles for Assessment Design and Implementation

Programme developers and teaching staff should ensure that assessment and feedback practices in blended learning programmes are compliant with the *Assessment of Learners Policy*. They should align with the objectives outlined in the College's *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029* and reflect the principles of Assessment OF / FOR / AS Learning.[3]

(1) Assessment should align with best practices in both formative and summative evaluation, supporting learners in achieving the programme learning outcomes. This involves using a diverse range of assessment tasks, both individual and group-based, that are designed to reflect these outcomes.

(2) Where appropriate, teaching staff should integrate digital tools and platforms to enhance the learning experience. These technologies can support reflective learning, enable flexible engagement, and help learners track their progress.

(3) Learners should be viewed as active partners in the assessment process. Where suitable, learners should be provided with opportunities to co-design aspects of their assessment and use digital platforms to reflect critically on their development and achievements.

(4) The VLE should provide clear, relevant, and accessible information on all aspects of assessment. This includes marking criteria, deadlines, regulations, and feedback timelines, ensuring learners are well-informed and supported.

(5) All teaching staff and programme teams must be familiar with and adhere to the College policies on good practice in teaching, learning, assessment and feedback, particularly those concerning. The procedures for learning, teaching and assessment are detailed in the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, the *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy*, and *Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards*.

1.5. Equitable Assessment Design and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

(1) Learners should be provided with as much discretion and autonomy as possible by providing choices in undertaking assessment activities.

(2) Where possible, modules should include self-assessment and reflection techniques, such as self-assessment templates and checklists that must be made available on module Moodle pages.

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[33] See National Forum for Teaching and Learning for principles of Assessment OF / FOR / AS Learning: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/student-success/assessment-of-for-as-learning/

(3) Modules should heighten the salience of goals and objectives (e.g. prompt or require learners to explicitly formulate or restate goals and encourage division of long-term goals into short-term objectives).

1.6 Feedback and Reflection Mechanisms

Effective feedback is integral to both formative and summative assessments. In a blended learning environment, oral feedback may given via Microsoft Teams and written feedback via Turnitin. Programme designers should ensure that mechanisms to provide learners with timely, constructive, and actionable feedback are included.

- Formative Feedback: Feedback on formative assessments should be provided promptly to support ongoing learning. This feedback should be designed to guide learners on how to improve and will be delivered through written comments, video feedback, or individual meetings.

- Summative Feedback: For summative assessments, learners should receive detailed feedback on their performance, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Feedback should be made available electronically through the assessment platform, along with grades and comments.

The guidelines for feedback are set out in the *Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards*, Section 3.3.8.

1.7 Assessment Mechanisms and Integrity of Assessments

Careful consideration should be given to the types of assessment mechanisms included on the programme and that they are consistent with assessment instruments outlined in the *Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards*. For modules with an online component The following must be adhered to:

(1) All written continuous assessments must be submitted through Turnitin.

(2) Proctored exams are only permitted on blended learning programmes on modules that are delivered on-site.

(3) Time limited assessments may be offered as summative assessments. The regulations for such assessments are set in the *Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards*.

(4) Time-limited assessments should not be used for convenience but only in circumstances where the assessment strategy is designed to meet the learning outcomes.

Section 2 – Administration and Implementation

2.1 Admissions and Registration

Carlow College has in place policies and procedures relating to admissions and registration. Blended learning programmes follow the same procedures laid out in the *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy* and the *Fees and Refunds Policy*.

Learners on SETU-validated programmes are also registered with SETU. After registration with Carlow College, Admissions liaises with SETU to agree a schedule for the data transfer of learner information.

2.1.1 Induction

Induction for learners on blended learning programmes are held in-person. Individual induction for learners on individual certificate programmes or programmes incorporating minor purpose awards can be organised.

2.1.2 Learner Induction Procedures

The learner induction process is designed to ensure that all learners, whether enrolled in degree or certificate programmes, are equipped with the necessary information, skills, and support to successfully navigate online and blended learning environments. The induction covers key academic, technological, and institutional elements to enhance the learner experience. Learner induction procedures are detailed in Appendix 1: *Learner Induction Procedures*.

Information on first-time learner log-in procedures to Microsoft Teams is found in the Learner Programme Handbooks.

2.1.3 Student Cards

Student Cards are provided at induction. For learners on blended learning programmes who may not be able to attend the on-campus orientation programme, student cards may be issued by post.

Learners who are also registered with SETU are entitled access to SETU services set out in the Carlow College-SETU Carlow MOA. SETU student cards are issued via post.

2.2 Course Commencement Preparation and Procedures

The delivery of blended learning programmes entails programme commencement procedures specific to the requirements of remote learning. The responsibilities of Adminstrative and Academic Staff to ensure best practice in programme commencement are outlined in this section.

2.2.1 Administrative Staff Programme Commencement Procedures

Academic Administration Office staff should ensure that learners receive the necessary information, access, and support to begin their programmes smoothly (see Appendix 2: *Programme Commencement Procedures for Administration Staff*).

2.2.2   Academic Staff Programme Commencement Procedures

Academic staff play a key role in the preparation of information and programme material for learners on blended learning programmes. Prior to commencement, academic staff must follow the procedures to ensure that they are familiar with the specific requirements for teaching on the blended learning programme, including Programme Handbooks, Orientation Guidelines for Staff and the minimum requirements for Moodle pages.

2.2.3 Information to be Included in Learner Programme Handbooks

Programme Directors or Course Coordinators in collaboration with the Office of the Registrar should update Learner Programme Handbooks every year to ensure that all relevant information for learners is included in programme documentation (see Appendix 3: *Information to be included in Learner Programme Handbooks*).

2.2.4 Staff Orientation

Programme Directors or Course Coordinators are required to ensure that all teaching staff are familiar with the specific requirements of the blended learning programme, including the programme learning, teaching and assessment strategy, the College's *Blended Learning Policy* and the information required for their Moodle module pages (see Appendix 4: *Staff Orientation Guidelines*).

2.2.5 Required Information on Moodle Pages

Academic staff should ensure that the VLE is suitably prepared for the blended learning environment and adherent to minimum College standards (see Appendix 5: *Required Information on Moodle Pages*).

2.3 Monitoring and Review of Programmes

Blended learning programmes at Carlow College are subject to the College's quality assurance procedures for monitoring and review (*Quality Assurance Policy*, Section 4.3.3).

Programmes that are validated by SETU are additionally subject to SETU quality assurance procedures for monitoring and review. Programme Directors or Course Coordinators should liaise with SETU Lifelong Learning (for certificate and higher diploma programmes) and SETU Department of Humanities (for Masters programmes) to ensure that compliance is observed with SETU policies and procedures.

2.4 Examination of SETU-validated Programmes

Examination of blended learning programmes validated by QQI and other examination bodies are subject to Carlow College's *Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards.*

Please note that blended learning certificate and postgraduate programmes validated by SETU are examined by SETU. Programme Administrators should liaise with SETU Lifelong Learning and / or Department of Humanities to arrange the recording of marks and to establish the times and dates of exam boards.

2.4.1 External Examiners on SETU Blended Learning Programmes

(1) SETU are responsible for the sourcing, appointment and remuneration of external examiners. Carlow College may assist in sourcing examiners.

(2) Carlow College Programme Directors or Course Coordinators and Academic Administration are responsible for liaising with external examiners, including providing access to the Moodle VLE and assessments.

(3) External examiners should submit their reports to the relevant SETU department.

Section 3 – Learner Information and Services

3.1 Public information and Learner Recruitment

Access to information about blended learning programmes can be different from face-to-face programmes. In addition, learners taking blended learning programmes may be doing so for the first time or are doing so in a part-time capacity. Consequently, clear information should be made available to prospective learners prior to the commencement of their study. To ensure that prospective learners understand the requirements of taking a programme with an online portion, initial public information about the programme should be accessible, concise and unambiguous. Public information made available on prospectuses and on the College website should include the following:

(1) Learner eligibility requirements for the programme;

(2) Information about the registration processes, fees, and payment mechanisms, and contact details for Admissions;

(3) Information about the programme learning, teaching and assessment methods, indicative module content, awards, and validating body;

(4) Any specific technology requirements learners will need to be successful in achieving the learning outcomes (i.e.., required internet connectivity and any prescribed hardware or software);

(5) Any specified timings for synchronous online interaction, i.e., times and dates of scheduled classes;

(6) A precise breakdown of online synchronous and / or asynchronous elements or both, e.g., as a percentage of the total module or programme time or any other breakdown that provides unambiguous information to learners;

(7) A statement of teaching, learning and assessment methods to be employed;

(8) A statement that remote library access and learning supports will be made available, including the programme Academic Advisor;

(9) A link to College data protection policies and procedures;

(10)   Contact details of programme co-ordinators for learners seeking further information

Carlow College's approach to the management of its marketing and communications activities are set out in the *Marketing and Communications Policy.*

3.2 Learner Supports

Carlow College provides supports for learners on blended learning programmes, including:

(1) **Orientation / Re-Orientation:** New and continuing learners have a programme orientation / re-orientation (see the *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy* and Appendix 1: Learner Induction Process).

(2) **Technical Support:** IT support to help learners set up and use digital tools (e.g. remote assistance via phone, email, Microsoft Teams, and online (see Getting Started Guides). Moreover, there is a dedicated technical support email to ensure on-going support and to help troubleshoot any issues with the VLE, Moodle, email or submitting coursework. For blended learning programmes that take place at night, Technical Support is available should learners have difficulty logging into Microsoft Teams.

(3) **Assistive Technology / Digital Skills Classes:** Digital literacy classes and workshops to help learners build skills in accessing and using the VLE and other tools necessary for successful participation in their programme.

(4) **Dedicated Disability Service:** The Academic Resource Office (Disability Service) works with learners and faculty to offer individualised accommodations for learners with disabilities such as examination accommodations, alternative assessments, extended deadlines, tailored learning resources and assistive technologies.

(5) **Accessible Learning Materials:** In line with UDL principles, the College strives to ensure that learning materials are accessible, with content available in multiple formats and offering multiple means of engagement, representation and expression.

(6) **Academic and Personal Support:** 1-to-1 Writing Development appointments are available online. Ther is a a dedicated Writing Development Moodle Page with a range of resources and materials to support learners.

(7) Remote access to personal, professional and pastoral supports such as Counselling, Chaplaincy, Health Service and Careers Office to support learners' overall well-being and academic success.

Carlow College's Supports for Learners are found in the *Quality Assurance Policy*, Section 4.7 and an overview of all Learners Supports are found in the Quality Assurance Appendices, Appendix 44. Below is an overview of the key learner support services available, including their hours of operation and methods of access.

3.2.1 Academic Resource Office Learning Supports

The Academic Resource Office provides a variety of learning supports tailored to the needs of learners in blended learning environments. These supports are available through online workshops, one-on-one virtual meetings, and digital resources, ensuring accessibility for all registered learners.

3.2.2 Learner Assistive Technology Supports

Assistive technology is available to support learners with disabilities, learning differences, or those who require technological assistance to optimise their learning experience.

- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Via: Online meetings via Microsoft Teams, email support, and assistive technology resources through Moodle.

3.2.3 Learner Digital Supports

Learners can receive help with using digital tools and platforms such as Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and other online learning technologies.

- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Via*:* Online help via the Digital Support Desk, workshops on Moodle navigation, and individual consultations.

3.2.4 Writing Development Tutor

Learners can book sessions with the Writing Development Tutor for assistance in academic writing, referencing, and improving essay and report-writing skills.

- Hours: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Online appointments: via Microsoft Teams or email consultations: writingdevelopment@carlowcollege.ie

3.2.5 Disability / Learning Differences Supports

Dedicated support services are available for learners with disabilities and / or learning differences. Learners can access accommodations, advice, and guidance to ensure they are fully supported during their studies. Further details regarding the services and supports for *learners* with disabilities and learning differences are available in the Carlow College *Learner Disability Policy*.

- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Via: Online meetings with Disability Support Advisors via Microsoft Teams, with additional resources available on Moodle.

3.2.6 Learner Information and Retention Officer

The Learner Information and Retention Officer is available to help learners navigate academic challenges, ensure retention, and offer general advice on balancing academic and personal life.

- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Via: Learners can book virtual meetings via Microsoft Teams or contact via email: liro@carlowcollege.ie

3.2.7 Students' Union

The Students' Union provides support for learners in areas such as learner welfare, academic representation, and general guidance for student life. Whether learners need assistance with their rights, policies, or any academic-related concerns, the Students' Union is available to provide help and advocacy.

- Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- Via: Online meetings via Microsoft Teams, email support, and online workshops. Contact details for the Students' Union representatives are available on the institutional website and Moodle pages.

3.2.8 Library Access

The PJ Brophy Library is fully equipped to support learners on blended programmes with both digital and physical resources. A range of eBooks, academic journals, databases, and digital research tools is available remotely through the library website. In addition, the library offers guidance on how to access these resources and provides workshops on research skills and citation.

3.2.9 Online Library Services

- Hours: 24/7 access to digital resources via the library online portal.

- Via: All registered learners can log into the library system using their learner credentials. Online tutorials and guides for accessing resources are available via the Library website.

Library staff are available to assist learners with research questions, navigating digital resources, and other queries.

- Semester opening hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 8.30pm & Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm.

- Summer opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

- Virtual consultations can be booked through the library website and one-to-one queries can be handled via email (librarycc@carlowcollege.ie) or the 'Ask' chat option on the library website.

The Library regularly hosts online workshops covering a range of academic skills such as research methods, citation practices, and how to use the library's online tools. Workshop schedules are posted on Moodle, and registration links are sent to learners' emails.

3.3 Ensuring an Inclusive Online Learning Environment

The commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment is guided by the Carlow College key objective of providing a learning experience that is 'inclusive of students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities' (Carlow College Strategic Plan, 2023-2028, p. 6). This provides learners the experience and support necessary for them to meet their academic potential.

These values inform the approach to blended learning, ensuring that each learner is supported as both an individual and an engaged member of their wider community. The *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029* is a core component in realising this vision and enabling the development of core values within learners at Carlow College.

- Inclusive learning practices aim to develop the Carlow College Graduate Attributes — nurturing Critical and Creative Thinkers, Collaborators and Clear Communicators, Continuous Learners, and Conscientious Citizens (*Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*, pp. 2–4).

- These attributes underpin the strategic plan for pedagogical practices at Carlow College and is reflected in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy of the College, where the core theme is 'providing for an inclusive learning experience' for a diverse learner population (p. 6).

3.4 Learner Code of Conduct for Blended Learning Programmes

- The Learner Code of Conduct is an integral part of ensuring a respectful, inclusive, and productive learning environment for all learners enrolled in blended learning programmes and certificate programmes.

- Learner behaviour in virtual settings must adhere to the *Dignity and Respect Policy*, the *Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy*, the *Social Networking and Social*

Media Policy for Learners, the *Acceptable Use Policy,* the Equality Policy and the *Gender Identity and Expression Policy.*

- As it relates specifically to blended learning programmes, learners must also adhere to the *Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'* (Appendix 6), which aims to help the learner prepare for online classes and sets out good practice and expectations for behaviour and communication while online.

- The standards and expectation for learner code of conduct provide explicit protocols that promote dignity, courtesy, and respect in digital interactions between teachers and learners applies to both in-person and online settings. Failure to comply with the *Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy*, or any Carlow College policy, may result in disciplinary actions as outlined in the policy.

Section 4 – College Staff Development and Training Supports

To maintain high standards of teaching and learning, Carlow College provides continuous staff development and training programs for all academic staff. The training ensures that academic staff are equipped with the necessary skills, pedagogical knowledge, and technical expertise to deliver effective and engaging programmes on blended learning programmes.

4.1 Induction Training for New Staff

New staff undertake an Induction Training Programme organised by Human Resources that covers a wide-range of topics related to Blended Learning (see Recruitment and Selection Handbook, Section 19):

- Data Protection;

- Student Records Management System (SRMS);

- Information Security; and

- Technology

Please note that other training will be required, which is also outlined in Section 19.

4.2 Annual CPD and Continuous Training

At the start of the academic year, the last week in August, staff attend induction with timetabled training events. Key policies related to blended learning are outlined, such as academic integrity, processes and dates for the upcoming academic year.

Training is organised by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and is informed by the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*. Topics at these training events change from year-to-year but may incude topics related to AI, Academic Integrity, effective use of VLE, using digital tools, and pedagogy related to learning and teaching.

Throughout the academic year, training opportunities are provided by the College and occur at:

- Induction;

- February Reading Week; and

- June CPD.

4.3 Staff Orientation on Blended Learning Programmes

Staff teaching on blended learning programmes are given orientation on their roles and responsibilities, including technology training and standards for use of the VLE, by the Programme Directors or Course Coordinators at the commencement of each academic year (see Appendix 4: *Staff Orientation Guidelines*).

4.4 Training Provision for Part-Time Staff

To ensure that part-time staff are fully supported and have access to upskilling and further training in blended teaching contexts, Carlow College provides, where appropriate:

- *Flexible Training Options:* Recognising the specific needs of part-time staff, training programmes may be made available in flexible formats, including recorded webinars, online modules, and asynchronous learning opportunities that can be accessed at any time.

- *Customised Learning Pathways:* Access to tailored training pathways may be provided to part-time staff to allow them to focus on the most relevant skills and tools for their specific teaching responsibilities.

- *Support for New Part-Time Staff:* Sessions may be specifically designed for new part-time lecturers, ensuring they are familiar with the institution's blended learning policies, tools, and support resources.

- *Compensation for Training Time:* Compensation for part-time staff for the time spent participating in mandatory training sessions, ensuring that they are not financially disadvantaged by their involvement in professional development activities.

- *One-on-One Technical and Pedagogical Assistance:* Staff can access individual support from Programme Directors or Course Coordinator and the IT Department, who are available to offer guidance on programme design, content delivery, and troubleshooting technical issues.

- *Peer Learning and Collaboration:* The College may facilitate peer learning opportunities, where staff can share best practices and innovative teaching techniques for online and blended learning environments.

Section 5 – IT Systems

5.1 Online Learning Platforms: Moodle and Microsoft Teams

All blended learning programmes at Carlow College exclusively utilise the Moodle VLE and Microsoft Teams for online learning. No other platforms should be used unless sanctioned by the College.

5.2 IT Support

To support learners in their learning environment, the IT Department provides real-time IT support to troubleshoot issues at the commencement of synchronous online classes, including evening and weekend classes.

Email: ITsupport@carlowcollege.ie

5.3 IT Disruption

In the event of disruption to IT services that prevent the effective delivery of classes, classes will be postponed. Lecturers should rearrange classes to ensure the completion of modules / programmes.

Communication to learners is via email from the Academic Administration Office during office hours, and via the programme lecturer through the SRMS in the event that disruption happens outside of the normal business hours when the Academic Administration Office is open or during class.

In the event of long-term IT disruption, the College will initiate the *Critical Incident Policy* and provide clear directives to learners and staff.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Learner Induction Procedures

Learner Induction Procedures

The learner induction process is designed to ensure that all learners, whether enrolled in degree or certificate programmes, are equipped with the necessary information, skills, and support to successfully navigate blended learning environments. The induction covers key academic, technological, and institutional elements to enhance the learner experience.

1. Scheduling of Learner Orientation

- The Programme Director or Course Coordinator is responsible for scheduling induction sessions at the start of each term.

2. Welcome and Orientation

- Provide an overview of the institution, its mission, and the learning outcomes for the specific degree or certificate programme.

- Introduce key academic and administrative staff, including:

  o Programme Directors

  o Course Coordinators

  o IT and Academic Support Staff

3. Overview of Blended Learning

- Provide a clear explanation of blended learning expectations, e.g., Blended Learning is a combination of online and on-campus components, where some sessions are held in-person and others delivered remotely, synchronously or asynchronously.

4. Introduction to Technology Platforms

- **Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)**:

  ο Explain Moodle's role in hosting programme materials, discussion forums, assessments, and resources.

  ο Provide a walkthrough of the Moodle interface.

  ο Highlight key features such as how to access learning materials, submit assignments through Turnitin, and track progress.

  ο Academic Integrity awareness: how Turnitin works and how to interpret Turnitin scores; how to avoid plagiarism, including the use of AI in assessments.

- **Microsoft Teams**:

  ο Demonstrate how to join live classes via Microsoft Teams.

  ο Provide guidelines on participating in live sessions, using chat and discussion features, and attending breakout rooms.

5. Video Tutorials and Login Instructions

- Provide links to **video tutorials** on the following:

  ο **Moodle login**: How to access programme pages, navigate the platform, and locate essential resources.

  ο **Student Email Account**: How to activate and access the student email account, as well as its importance for communication.

  ο **Logging into Your First Class**: Step-by-step guidance on how to join the first Microsoft Teams session via email or Moodle links.

- Links can be accessed on the College 'Getting Started' Portal here: https://carlowcollege.ie/student-portal/getting-started/

6. Programme Overview and Academic Resources

- **Programme Moodle Page**: Provide an overview of the Programme by sign-posting the Programme Mooodle Page that contains key information for the programme like the Learner Programme Handbook (contains the curriculum, learning outcomes, grading policies, etc. and the assessment schedules.

- **Academic Calendar**: Highlight important academic dates such as registration deadlines, assessment submission dates, and term breaks.

- ***Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'***: Introduce online behaviour expectations, including respectful communication, active participation, and appropriate use of technology.

7. Procedures for First-Time Login

- Ensure that learners are provided with a step-by-step guide for logging into Moodle and their student email accounts.

- Provide instructions on how to access programme links for their first class, which should be embedded in Moodle and sent via email by Programme Director or Course Coordinators.

8. IT Support and Troubleshooting

- Direct learners to the **IT FAQ** section, which addresses common technical issues, such as password resets, accessing Microsoft Teams links, and troubleshooting login issues.

- Provide the key contact details for IT Support, including email addresses, phone numbers, and office hours.

9. Administrative Support and Contact Information

- **Programme Director or Course Coordinator and Academic Staff**: Provide a list of contact details for all relevant academic staff, including office hours and preferred methods of communication (email, Microsoft Teams messaging).

- **Administrative Support**: Include contact information for the administrative team responsible for:

  o Registration;

  o Student records

10. Procedures for Completing Registration

- Provide reminders for completing the registration process, including deadlines for submission of forms and payment of fees.

- Direct learners to any necessary resources or offices for resolving registration issues.

11. Programme-Specific Induction

- Degree and certificate programmes may require unique induction sessions to cover specific content relevant to the course of study.

    o For **degree programmes**, include discussions on core modules, elective choices, and pathways for progression.

    o For **certificate programmes**, provide a focused orientation on the skills and competencies being developed within the shorter programme.

12. Academic Resources and Learner Supports

- Inform learners about mechanisms for providing feedback on their induction experience, such as surveys or follow-up meetings with the Programme Director or Course Coordinators.

- Ensure learners are aware of continuous support services available throughout the year, including:

    o Learner Information and Retention Officer

    o Academic Resource Office – Disibility Service

    o Writing Development Tutor

    o Careers Support

    o Student Counselling

    o Student Health Centre

    o Pastoral Care

    o Students' Union

An important hub for all learners registered at Carlow College, regardless of the programme delivery, is the [Student Portal](#). For information regarding events, visit [Connect to Carlow College](#).

13. Library Resources

- Library induction and library access, via video for Carlow College.

- There is a separate library induction for SETU validated programmes, which learners can access here: https://libguides.itcarlow.ie/introduction/tutorials

14. Programmes Validated by SETU

Carlow College certificates and postgraduate programmes are validated by SETU. This means that while the programme is taking place at Carlow College, their programme and their award will come from SETU. SETU issue learners a SETU student username and password and instructions on how to get their final results in the summer. Please note that this is different from the Carlow College student username and password.

15. Summary of Key Contacts for Learner Induction

- Programme Director: [Email and Phone]

- Course Coordinator: [Email and Phone]

- IT Support: [Email and Phone]

- Administration Office: [Email and Phone]

Programme Commencement Procedures for Administration Staff

This section outlines the key responsibilities of administration staff in supporting the commencement of blended learning programmes where registration, induction and a significant portion of classes take place online. These procedures are designed to ensure that learners receive the necessary information, access, and support to begin their programmes smoothly.

1. Communications to Learners

Administration Staff must ensure that all new learners receive a welcome email containing essential information and points of contact. This email should be sent well in advance of the first class and include:

- Induction details, programme start date and timetable details.

- Contact details for administration staff, academic staff, and programme directors / programme coordinator.

- The instructional video that outlines the steps for accessing IT accounts, the programme Moodle pages, and Microsoft Teams and accessing the first class via Microsoft Teams.

- Links to the Learner Programme Handbook.

- Information on IT support services.

The email should be clear and detailed, encouraging learners to reach out for help if they encounter any issues.

2. Reminders Regarding Completing Registration

Administration staff must send reminders to learners who have not yet completed the registration process. These reminders should include:

- Instructions for completing online registration.

- A link to the registration portal or relevant webpage.

- Contact details for the registration support team, if assistance is needed.

Reminders should be sent at least two weeks before the programme start date and again one week prior to the commencement of classes.

Appendix 3: Information to be included in Learner Programme Handbooks

Information to be included in Learner Programme Handbooks

Responsibility: Programme Director or Course Coordinator

It is essential that learners are provided with key information regarding the implications of online learning within their blended learning programme. The following must be included in the Learner Programme Handbook:

- The programme's duration and credit weighting;

- The programme teaching, learning and assessment strategy;

- A clear breakdown of class time of on-site vs synchronous and / or asynchronous teaching and learning;

- The digital tools and platforms that will be used to facilitate blended and online teaching and learner interactivity;

- The digital learning resources and materials that will be available and how they can be accessed;

- A link to the College's data protection policies, procedures and information on the website: https://carlowcollege.ie/about/leadership-structure/data-protection/

- Information on how to access Microsoft Teams – video (Procedures for first time log-in);

- Information on how to access Moodle (link to instructional video); and

- Contact details for the Programme Director or Course Coordinator, Programme lecturers, Programme Administrator, IT Support, and Student Services.

Appendix 4: Staff Orientation Guidelines

Staff Orientation Guidelines

Responsibility: Programme Director or Course Coordinator

The Staff Induction process for programmes is essential for ensuring that all new and part-time staff are equipped with the necessary information and skills to effectively teach and support learners in blended learning programmes. This process ensures that staff are familiar with the institution's policies, technology platforms, and pedagogical approaches.

1. Schedule and Orientation

- The Course Coordinator or Programme Director is responsible for scheduling the induction session to go over the policies and procedures for blended learning delivery for all new staff before the commencement of the academic term.

- Staff should be provided with a clear induction schedule and relevant materials at least one week prior to the induction meeting.

- It should be ensured that part-time staff receive an induction that aligns with their specific roles and responsibilities within the programme.

2. Introduction to Key Policies and Procedures (Programme Director or Course Coordinator)

- Provide an overview of the College *Blended Learning Policy*, with a focus on:

  - Programme design and delivery expectations.

  - Communication protocols with learners and staff.

  - Assessment and feedback procedures.

  - Academic integrity and plagiarism policies.

3. Technology Training and Access

- Ensure staff are trained on the following technology platforms:

  o **Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE):** Navigating, uploading materials, using available digital tools, and setting up assessments.

  o **Microsoft Teams:** Creating, managing, and conducting online classes and meetings.

  o **Student Records Management System (SRMS):** Accessing student records and tracking academic progress.

4. Minimum Standards for Moodle

- Walk through the minimum standards expected for each Moodle programme page:

  o Mandatory programme information (syllabus, schedule, assessments);

  o Learner Support Resources (*Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'*, IT support contact); and

  o Microsoft Teams links embedded for virtual class sessions.

5. Academic and Administrative Contacts

- Provide new staff with key contact details, including:

  o Programme Director or Course Coordinator;

  o IT Support Staff;

  o Academic Administration Team; and

  o Relevant library and academic resources.

6. Support and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

- Inform staff about the available CPD opportunities for improving their skills in online and blended learning.

- Outline support available for part-time staff regarding technology use, pedagogy, and programme delivery.

7. Assessment Guidelines

- Ensure that staff are familiar with the assessment strategies used in blended learning programmes, including:

    ο Online assessments;

    ο Formative and summative feedback processes; and

    ο Grading rubrics and deadlines.

8. Programme Board Meetings *(Responsibility of the Programme Director)*

The Programme Board meeting serves as a formal platform for ongoing evaluation and decision-making related to the management, delivery, and enhancement blended learning programmes. These meetings ensure that the programme operates smoothly, addresses issues as they arise, and complies with institutional and accreditation standards.

(i)　　**Frequency of Meetings**

- Programme Board meetings should be scheduled as per the terms of reference for the programme. Additional meetings can be convened as necessary.

- The Programme Director is responsible for circulating the meeting schedule at the beginning of each academic term.

(ii)　　**Agenda Setting**

- The Programme Director is responsible for setting the agenda, ensuring that it includes:

    ο Learner feedback on programme content and delivery;

    ο Programme performance (enrolment, completion rates, assessment outcomes);

    ο Staff feedback on teaching challenges, technology, and learner engagement;

    ο Updates on new policies or changes to online and blended learning; and

    ο Consideration of external developments, such as industry trends or accreditation updates.

(iii)   **Programme Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Review and discuss learner performance data, including completion rates, feedback, and grade distribution.

- Monitor the implementation of the institution's *Blended Learning Policy*, ensuring compliance with standards for programme content, pedagogy, and technology use.

(iv)   **Staff and Learner Support**

- Discuss support mechanisms for staff teaching on blended learning programmes, including CPD opportunities and IT support.

- Address any challenges related to learner engagement, learner retention, or technical difficulties faced by learners.

- Evaluate feedback from learner representatives on the board.

(v)   **Assessment and Feedback**

- Ensure that assessments and feedback mechanisms are fair, timely, and in line with programme standards.

- Discuss any proposed changes to assessments or learning outcomes for future iterations of the programme.

(vi)   **Quality Assurance and Improvement**

- Evaluate the programme's compliance with internal quality assurance processes.

- Identify areas for improvement and agree on action plans to address any deficiencies in programme delivery or support.

(vii)   **Action Items and Follow-Up**

- Assign specific tasks or action items to board members and set deadlines for completion.

- Ensure that meeting minutes are recorded, distributed, and followed up on to track progress on key actions and initiatives.

(viii) **Reporting and Communication**

- The Programme Director is responsible for reporting significant findings, issues, or achievements to the relevant college committees or administrative bodies.

- Communicate key decisions and updates from the Programme Board meeting to academic and administrative staff involved in the programme.

Appendix 5: Required Information on Moodle Pages

Required Information on Moodle Pages

Academic staff must follow the procedures below to ensure that blended learning programmes with a significant online component are prepared and fully operational for learners at the start of each semester. By adhering to these procedures, staff will maintain a consistent and high-quality learning experience for all learners.

Moodle pages for programmes / modules with an online important must be well-populated and contain access to every resource needed for learners to successfully complete the module and achieve the module learning outcomes. Each programme or module's Moodle page must contain the following mandatory information:

- Programme syllabus: Outline of the programme objectives, learning outcomes, and topics to be covered;

- Office hours: Contact details for academic staff and office hours for learner consultations;

- A clear breakdown of class time of on-site vs synchronous and / or asynchronous teaching and learning;

- The digital tools and platforms that will be used to facilitate blended and online teaching and learner interactivity;

- Information on expectations of learner engagement and effort with asynchronous learning tools (if applicable);

- Assessment details: Information on all forms of assessment, including submission dates, word counts and grading rubrics / criteria;

- Ensure that programme material is 'road-tested' and fully functional before class commences. This includes ensuring that the Microsoft Teams link, links to lecture notes, readings, and digital resources are working and up to date. Resources for each learning block must be sufficient so that remote learners have access to all the material needed for their learning;

- Turnitin links for assessments;

- Weekly content: An overview of the programme content for each week, including links to lecture notes, readings, and other essential and supplementary resources;

- Microsoft Teams link: There should only be one link on the Moodle page so that learners enter the classroom the same way every week. The same link for each session of the programme should be used so that learners do not get multiple links for different classes. After induction, learners should only enter the class via the Microsoft Teams on the programme Moodle page. It is therefore essential that the enrolled learners list on the programme Moodle page is correct and matches that list of registered learners on the SRMS;

- The Learner Programme Handbook; and

- *Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'*.

Ensuring Learners are Enrolled on Moodle Pages

It is essential that prior to the commencement of the programme, programme teaching staff cross-check the list of registered learners with the enrolled learners on the Moodle page to ensure that all learners have access to the programme Moodle page and Microsoft Teams link. Where there are discrepancies, learners should be enrolled on the Moodle by cross-checking the list of registered learners on the SRMS. Discrepancies should be reported to the SRMS Team without delay to ensure rectification of records.

Appendix 6: Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'

Learner Guide to Online Classes and 'Netiquette'

This guide aims to help the learner prepare for online classes and sets out good practice and expectations for behaviour and communication while online.

<u>Preparing for Classes</u>

- Choose a good <u>location</u> for your online classes. Ideally it should be private and without distractions. You can select a background filter to minimise the possibility of activities around you being seen.

- The class is for the invited class group. <u>Do not share your login details,</u> the link or your screen with others.

- Be <u>punctual</u> for your online classes and stay until the end of the class.

- Let your lecturer know <u>in advance</u> if you cannot attend for some reason so that the class is not delayed waiting for you.

- Be prepared. Have what you need within easy reach.

<u>During Online Classes</u>

- It is suggested that you have your video switched on for classes. Being able to see each other creates a sense of community in the virtual classroom. Having the video switched on is particularly important when contributing to class discussions, asking questions or doing a presentation.

- Put your microphone on <u>mute</u> unless you are speaking. This cuts down background noise and interference.

- If the lecturer invites the class to discuss topics, do participate. This helps the lecturer get to know the class and helps to create a sense of community within the class.

- Indicate you wish to speak by <u>raising your hand</u>. Do not interrupt the lecturer or speak over other class members.

- If the teacher places the class in breakout rooms, remember that the same protocols apply.

<u>Using the Chat Function</u>

- The lecturer may invite questions to be put into the chat or may use the chat function for discussions.

- Some things are best discussed in private rather than in your class group. Should you need to do so, contact your lecturer or other Carlow College directly by email or other means.

- If using the chat function be aware of your <u>language</u> and show respect for the opinions and sensitivities of others.

- Contribute positively. DO NOT TYPE IN CAPITALS. This looks as if you are shouting!

<u>Recording</u>

In general, learners are not permitted to record classes from their computer or other device by any means. Please note that recording class without permission is considered to be an infringement of the *Carlow College Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy*. Disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the *Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy*. Please note the following:

- A very small number of learners are permitted to record classes (audio only). This is a reasonable accommodation due to a learning difference, disability or health condition. This arrangement is also in place for in-person classes. These learners are subject to the *Recording of Lectures, Tutorials and Other Teaching Sessions Policy*, which contains provisions to protect learner and staff data.

- Learners must delete any class recording in their possession by the end of the academic year in question at the latest.

<u>Breakout Rooms</u>

- Learners are not to record breakout rooms

- Learners are not otherwise to share breakout room chat or files with other people, and should use such material only in connection with their programme of studies.

Collaborating outside of the classroom

- If modules require you to participate in group work or collaborative assessments, make sure that you engage with these.

- The IT Department will provide advice on how to schedule and conduct meetings, e.g. setting up a team in MS Teams and sharing documents in the files section.

- Apply the protocols used in formal classes to your group meetings. Have videos on and mute your mic when someone else is talking. Be considerate and encouraging to group members.

- Classes may sometimes set up a WhatsApp Group to keep in touch. The College doesn't administer this, but students remain subject to the College's communication expectations.

- When sharing content on a social networking/media platform as part of their studies, work placement, as a member of a college club or society, as a learner representative or Officer of the Students' Union, Learners should conduct themselves in a professional manner that fully adheres to this Policy and associated guidelines; https://carlowcollege.ie/media/SocialNetworkingAndSocialMediaPolicyForLearners.pdf

Appendix 7: List of Blended Learning Programmes at Carlow College

List of Blended Learning Programmes at Carlow College

Award	Level	Duration	Delivery mode	Validating body
Certificate				
Child Developmental Psychology	7	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Cyberpsychology	7	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Citizenship, Identity and Belonging	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Colonialism, Development & Gobalisation	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Sychronous online, 92%	SETU
Contemporary Politics and Public Policy	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Cultural Heritage	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU

International Human Rights	8	1 Semester	In-class, 17% Synchronous online, 66% Asynchronous online, 17%	SETU
Introduction to Politics	8	1 Semester	In-class, 17% Synchronous online, 66% Asynchronous online, 17%	SETU
Creativity and Social Media	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Media Studies and Digital Media Skills	8	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Political Philosophy	8	1 Semester	In-class, 17% Synchronous online, 66% Asynchronous online, 17%	SETU
Psychology of Gender and Sexuality	7	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
Theology Through the Creative Arts	7	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU
World Religions, Conflict and Peace	7	1 Semester	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 92%	SETU

Undergraduate				
BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies in Professional Social Care	8	1 year	In-class, 67% Asynchronous online, 33%	QQI
Higher Diploma				
Hdip Journalism and New Media Content (joint programme with SETU)	8	1 year	*To be revalidated*	SETU
HDip Politics and Society	8	1 year	In-class, 8% Synchronous online, 80% Asynchronous online, 12%	SETU
Postgraduate Diploma in Irish Regional History	8	18 months	In-class, 67% Synchronous online, 33%	SETU
Masters				
MA Irish Regional History	9	2 years	In-class, 60% Synchronous online, 40%	SETU