



Carlow College Blended Learning Strategy

Carlow College, St. Patrick's (hereafter Carlow College) first delivered programmes online during the COVID-19 pandemic as an emergency measure. After the pandemic had ended, the College subsequently delivered its first blended learning programme, the Higher Diploma in Politics and Society, in January 2023, followed by a number of blended certificate programmes (minor awards and special purpose awards) in September 2023, validated by South East Technological University (SETU). In September 2024, Carlow College commenced the delivery of the BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) as a blended learning programme, validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

Following these experiences, Carlow College aims to continue to offer these programmes in blended learning formats in the context of the [Carlow College Strategic Plan, 2023-2028](#) and guided by the principles of the College's [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029](#).

1. Alignment with College Vision, Mission and Values

This Blended Learning Strategy aligns with the vision, mission and values of the College's Strategic Plan. In this context, blended learning at Carlow College is designed to:

- (1) Provide programmes that will enhance the academic and career potential of learners.
- (2) Be responsive to the needs of learners through the flexibility offered by blended learning.
- (3) Integrate into the blended learning environment the wider College learning experience by ensuring learners have access to excellence in teaching and learning, supported by the range of college supports.
- (4) Align with the College's [Graduate Attributes](#) of (1) Critical and Creative Thinkers; (2) Collaborations and Clear Communicators (3) Continuous Learners (4) Conscientious Citizens.

2. Vision for Blended Learning at Carlow College

Our vision for blended learning is to provide flexible blended learning programmes that are learner-centred and responsive to learner needs. We aim to:

- (1) Provide an overall experience of blended learning programmes that is enjoyable, informed, valuable, smooth and worthwhile for students and staff.
- (2) Promote excellence in teaching and learning through continuous staff training and professional development and by setting clear expectations for students on blended learning programmes.
- (3) Embed accessibility, inclusiveness and equality of opportunity in the design and delivery of our blended learning programmes.
- (4) Use appropriate and suitable technology and digital tools in blended learning programmes with careful consideration, leading to clear and beneficial learner outcomes.
- (5) Provide blended learning programmes where there is clear evidence of need from market intelligence.

3. Alignment with College Strategic Objectives

1. Teaching and Learning

Carlow College's aim for teaching and learning is to engage and inspire through the quality of our transformational learning and teaching experiences.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Ensure blended learning programmes are consistent with the objectives of the College's *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*.
- (2) Continue to build on the current range of SETU-validated courses by developing new certificate and postgraduate blended learning courses in areas of current and emerging competence in the College, in line with the objectives of the College *Programme Development Strategy*.
- (3) Offer blended learning courses in areas of professional development that enhance learner employability, addressing skill gaps and career prospects.
- (4) Ensure our blended learning courses meet any professional and regulatory requirements.
- (5) Recruit sufficiently qualified staff when required with the required expertise and experience to teach on blended learning programmes.

- (6) Continue to provide opportunities staff training in pedagogy, technologies and innovations involved in blended learning programmes, including mandatory induction training, annual CPD events, and targeted workshops for skills-exchange and knowledge-sharing.
- (7) Provide opportunities for staff to engage with colleagues working in other providers and relevant professional bodies to enhance knowledge and understanding of the most-up-date practices and principles involved in the design and delivery of blended learning programmes.

2. College as Community

Carlow College has a long and established community ethos. Our strategic goal is to enable our diverse learners and graduates to achieve their academic, personal and career potential.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Provide learners on blended learning programmes with access to the range of College support services available to learners on our face-to-face programmes.
- (2) Continue to explore and develop services for learners on blended learning programmes, responding to the needs of remote learners and their learning contexts.
- (3) Ensure the Student Engagement and Success Strategy is extended to learners on blended learning programmes.
- (4) Give voice to learners on blended learning programmes through representation to ensure their learning experiences are captured and that feedback is acted upon to improve blended learning experiences and outcomes.

3. Marketing and Student Recruitment

Marketing and student recruitment plays a key role in enhancing the College's reputation and reach. A key aim of our blended learning provision is to increase student numbers through an integrated approach to marketing and student recruitment.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Promote blended learning as a core educational offering at Carlow College through bespoke and targeted marketing campaigns.
- (2) Market our blended learning courses to a wide range of learners, increasing the geographical reach of our catchment areas.
- (3) Utilise the voices and experiences of students on our blended learning programmes in marketing campaigns.

- (4) Use market research and knowledge to identify new and emerging markets for blended learning programmes to help increase student numbers.

4. Information Technology

Reliable information and data management systems to inform improved teaching and learning experiences, administrative processes and evidence-based strategic planning are critical for the development of blended learning programmes.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Continue to invest in digital learning technologies tools and resources to maintain a fit-for-purpose blended learning environment, and which supports interactive and collaborative learning opportunities for learners and staff.
- (2) Employ an educational technologist to assist in the maintenance of the VLE and training of staff in the most up-to-date online pedagogies and digital learning tools.
- (3) Continue to ensure that our blended learning programmes are compliant with the College's *Data Protection Policy*.
- (4) Continue to maintain and invest in cybersecurity protections for the College IT systems.

5. Governance and Organisation Structure

The unique and specific requirements of Blended Learning requires an organisational structure that is robust and flexible enough to deal with the changing demands of technological innovation.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Ensure that institutional processes are responsive and adaptive to the innovations and developments involved in the delivery of blended learning.
- (2) Revise and update our Quality Assurance Framework to ensure it is aligned to regulatory frameworks for blended learning.
- (3) Implement the best practice requirements of QQI's *Guidelines for Online and Blended Learning* (2023) so as to ensure the College blended learning offering is fit-for-purpose.
- (4) Ensure representation of staff on blended learning programmes on relevant College and programme boards and committees and respond to feedback in order to improve the experience and outcomes of blended learning.

6. Collaboration and Partnerships

Blended learning offers new potentialities for collaboration and partnerships. Carlow College blended learning certificate and postgraduate programmes are validated by SETU.

In this context, our Strategy for Blended Learning is to:

- (1) Maintain SETU validation for current programmes and seek SETU validation for new blended learning programmes at certificate and postgraduate level.
- (2) Build on our relationship with SETU by continuing to exchange knowledge, expertise and experiences of learning, teaching and assessment in blended learning contexts.
- (3) Identify potential industry, charity and regulatory collaborators and partners in the development on new blended learning programmes, in subject areas such as Social Studies and Psychology.