

LMETB FET Blended Learning Policy

Arna chomhchistiú ag Rialtas na hÉireann agus ag an Aontas Eorpach.
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an Aontas Eorpach

Co-Funded by the
European Union

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Policy Version Control	
Policy Title	LMETB FET Blended Learning Policy
Policy Reference No.	23/05
Original Creation Date	September 2023
Version Number	V2
Version Author	LMETB Quality Assurance and Enhancement Service (QAES)
Version Update History	Version 1 – Policy developed and approved by the QAGMC 11/09/23 Version 2 – Policy updated to comprehend changes necessitated through LMETB’s application to QQI to extend its scope of provision to include blended delivery (synchronous and asynchronous)
Document Owner	LMETB QAES
Approved By	QAGMC
Date Approved	11/09/23
Noted By	LMETB Board
Dated Noted	29/09/23
Review Due Date	29/09/27 Policy may be updated within that timeframe if required
Version Review	Version 2 approved by QAGMC on 17/12/25

LMETB FET Blended Learning Policy	
Purpose	a) To describe LMETB's approach to developing, implementing, reviewing and evaluating blended learning programmes for delivery in FET centres. b) To provide a framework for staff to engage with blended programme delivery. c) To ensure compliance with other LMETB quality assurance policies, in relation to course delivery modalities. d) To ensure that LMETB's learning environment has the appropriate operational supports to allow blended and online learning programme delivery. e) To ensure that LMETB's technical infrastructure can support blended and online programme delivery. f) To provide guidance on instructional design for blended and online programme delivery. g) To ensure the legal responsibilities of LMETB have been met, in accordance with QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023¹), which are in addition to and supplement QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines for all Providers².
Scope	This policy applies to all programmes and courses offered by LMETB, with respect to the development, validation, governance, teaching, learning and assessment of programmes with a blended or online delivery component and is designed to safeguard the academic standards associated with LMETB courses for staff and students engaged in blended and online learning programme provision. The policy encompasses all awards made by any awarding body for whom LMETB is an approved provider including all providers contracted by LMETB to deliver courses on its behalf.
Related Policies	LMETB FET Policies and Procedures LMETB ICT Acceptable Usage Policy LMETB FET Blended Learning Guidelines

¹ [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023](#)

² [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#)

Audience & Communication	Applicable to all staff and learners of LMETB FET. LMETB's Blended Learning Policy is available on the LMETB website.
Policy/Procedure Owner & Implementation	The policy owner is the CE of LMETB. It is the responsibility of the CE to ensure the policy is implemented.
Monitoring, Evaluation & Continuous Improvement	The Policy Owner for this policy shall be responsible for keeping the policy up to date and for ensuring that only approved versions of the policy are accessible via the LMETB website. The Policy Owner shall periodically review this policy.

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Glossary of Terms

Asynchronous Online Learning³	Learners accessing online materials at their own pace and interacting with their Learning Practitioner and peers at times that work around other commitments.
Blended Learning³	A type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of online and on-site learning with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination.
Centre	The Centre refers to any LMETB college, FET centre or LMETB Training Centre.
Centre Management	The centre management refers to the FET Centre Manager/Coordinator, Centre Director, Principal or Deputy Principal in any LMETB College, FET centre or LMETB Training Centre. In the event of the absence of a centre manager, an appropriate designated person should be assigned.
e-Portfolio³	A collection of work (evidence) stored in an electronic format to demonstrate and showcase learning over time.
Fully Online Learning³	A type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur online, either synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination and where no on-site instruction is required.
Internal Assessor	The Internal Assessor is the Learning Practitioner who is teaching the class and setting the assessment tasks.
Learning Management System (LMS)³	The core platform or infrastructure used by providers to support online learning experiences (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.)

³ [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023, p.3](#)

Learning Resources³	Includes both print and digital materials and may include text, audio, video, animations, simulations and other types of rich media content designed for learning.
Learning Practitioner	The term 'learning practitioner' refers to all teaching staff and includes teachers, tutors, Adult Educators, instructors, learning practitioners, etc. In terms of assessment practices, the Learning Practitioner is regarded as the Internal Assessor , that is the person assessing the learner's work and grading accordingly.
Open Educational Resources³	Digital materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution.
Synchronous Online Learning³	Learning Practitioners and students gathering at the same time and virtual place and interacting in "real-time".
Video Conferencing Platform³	A tool that facilitates online communication for synchronous video and audio meetings and live online classes (e.g., Teams, Zoom, etc.).
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)³	A term used to describe the wider digital learning ecosystem of tools and platforms used for learning and that support the LMS.

1. Introduction

Blended Learning (BL) is commonly understood to be the combination of something traditional (i.e., the in-person instruction) and something new (i.e., the online/virtual places, digital course materials, communication tools, and pedagogies). Blending these two worlds, the in-person and the online, allows FET Learning Practitioners to design different blends depending on their context (who and what they are teaching), their levels of digital competences and those of their learners. Ultimately, it provides greater choice to learners in terms of where they learn, how they learn and when they learn. LMETB FET is committed to providing, where appropriate, opportunities for learners to access blended learning delivery via the introduction of well-designed, quality-assured blended learning courses.

This policy supports the implementation of **LMETB's Strategic Action Plan for Blended Learning and/or Fully Online Learning 2025-2029**. It is informed by [LMETB FET Policies and Procedures](#) and QCI's statutory guidance documents [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023](#) and [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#).

For the purpose of this policy;

Blended Learning refers to 'a type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of online and on-site learning with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination'³.

Blended learning delivery includes both **synchronous** and **asynchronous** teaching.

Synchronous teaching involves the Learning Practitioner teaching learners course content in a physical environment or virtual environment in 'real-time'.

Asynchronous teaching involves teaching learners the course content through asynchronous activities such as online collaborative activities, self-paced multimedia eLearning, videos, podcasts, and other interactive activities. Learners have the opportunity to access these asynchronous materials in their own time and at their own pace. Interaction with the Learning Practitioner and other learners can occur through the appropriate VLE or through apps such as Padlet.

Asynchronous learning **does not refer** to the type of homework activities used to reinforce learning and commonly associated with self-directed learning in traditional face-to-face/synchronous courses.

Blended learning delivery involves the replacement of a portion, **but not all**, of the face-to-face teaching with online synchronous and asynchronous course content and activities. A blended learning course will **ALWAYS** include some face-to-face onsite learning.

While some assessment techniques such as e-portfolios, projects, collection of work and learner records may be submitted via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), assessment techniques such as examinations and skills demonstrations **should be conducted onsite** in the FET centre, unless permission to move the assessment online has been applied for and approval granted through the LMETB FET Programme Development and Approval policy. For example, a Skills Demonstration that involves a presentation may be appropriate to deliver online. However, **ALL examinations MUST be conducted onsite**.

Fully Online Learning refers to ‘a type of education where teaching, learning and assessment occur online, either synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination and where no on-site instruction is required’³.

As per **LMETB’s Strategic Action Plan for Blended Learning and/or Fully Online Learning 2025-2029**, LMETB is taking a phased approach to the implementation of a continuum of blended to fully online learning so as to develop its capabilities and resources in the area of blended and fully online delivery. LMETB intends to apply to QQI to extend its scope of provision to fully online learning modality by the end of 2029. This policy will then be updated to reflect the move to fully online learning.

2. Context

Blended learning has been recognised as a key enabler for the transformation of education and training, offering learners more flexible and accessible learning opportunities.

- 2.1. This document outlines LMETB’s policy for delivery of all programmes and courses which are delivered and supported in a blended modality. This policy supports the development of flexible learning opportunities using non-

traditional delivery methods, for access to FET. This policy also informs LMETB of risks posed by challenges faced in blended learning programmes, and ensures academic standards are maintained across any blended learning courses offered by LMETB.

- 2.2. LMETB's policy on blended and online learning provision is consistent with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) standards, guidelines, policies and criteria relating to programmes offered by LMETB. This policy is also informed by ETBI's Blended Learning Policy sessions and by reports from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, in relation to online and blended learning provision.

This policy is aligned with QQI's three core contexts for blended and online delivery⁴:

- Organisational context
- Programme context
- Learner experience context

3. Organisational Context

'The Organisation Context recognises the importance of leadership, quality management, relevant policies and regulations, staff training and professional development, and the provision of fit-for purpose infrastructure in the provider's context.' (QQI, 2023, p.15).

3.1. Strategy, Management and Implementation Plans

The [SOLAS FET Strategy Future FET: Transforming Learning 2020-2024](#) has digital transformation as one of its four key enabling themes. At EU level the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)⁵ also recognises the potential of digital technology to transform education and training and it has a specific action on blended learning. While the action plan for blended learning is specific to the schools' sector, the Commission recognises the need to offer alternative modes of learning to adult learners. Strategic Goal 1 of the [LMETB Strategy Statement 2022-2026](#) includes a strategic action (1.4) that provides a commitment to 'deliver education and training through the most appropriate

⁴ [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023, p.15](#)

⁵ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/actions>

learner channels including blended learning approaches that leverage opportunities presented by developments in ICT'. Thus, this LMETB Blended Learning Policy is underpinned by strong national and local strategic incentives and policy initiatives.

LMETB FET's QA governance framework, [LMETB FET Policies and Procedures](#) and, in particular, its revised **LMETB FET Programme Development and Approval policy** enable decision-making bodies to have the necessary expertise and the policies and procedure in place to provide criteria to guide decisions on adopting a blended learning approach for the development and/or delivery of programmes. This policy is also aligned with implementation plans for capacity and resource-building detailed in **LMETB's Strategic Action Plan for Blended Learning and/or Fully Online Learning 2025-2029**.

LMETB FET Blended Learning Guidelines provide a more detailed look at blended learning and how it might be activated across LMETB FET centres. The Blended Learning Guidelines share LMETB FET's vision and expectations of blended learning with staff and learners so as to encourage LMETB staff to continue to innovatively meet the ever-expanding needs of FET learners. These guidelines:

- Define what Blended Learning will look like across LMETB
- Set out which kinds of blends will require approval from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Service (QAES) and the **LMETB FET Programme Development and Approval** process.

Within LMETB there are three levels of blended learning integration and delivery⁶.

1. **Low-impact blend:** adding extra activities to an existing course/programme. For example, where a Learning Practitioner uses a Kahoot Quiz during class, or they ask learners to watch a video of a skills demonstration on their phone during/after the in-person class.

⁶ Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014). Blended learning in higher education: Three different design approaches. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*.

2. **Medium-impact blend:** replacing activities in an existing course/programme. For example, where a Learning Practitioner records a presentation in advance of the face-to-face classroom session and learners access it online via their Learning Management System (LMS). The face-to-face classroom session focuses more on active learning and less on content sharing (The Flipped Classroom Model).
3. **High-impact blend**

Synchronous: replacing some in-person sessions (traditional face-to-face) with live synchronous online sessions.

LMETB designs or redesigns an existing course/programme so that it has a blend of in-person and online timetabled synchronous online sessions. Learners are required to access some part(s) of the programme live online using MS Teams. Such a programme is approved as a Blended Learning course/ programme by LMETB.

Asynchronous: replacing some in-person sessions (traditional face-to-face) with live synchronous online sessions and/or with asynchronous course material where learners access online materials at their own pace and interact with their Learning Practitioner and peers at times that work around other commitments.

LMETB designs or redesigns an existing course/programme so that it has a blend of asynchronous learning opportunities and/or in-person and online timetabled synchronous online sessions. Such a programme is approved as a Blended Learning course/ programme by LMETB.

It should be noted that if blended learning is approved for specific courses, they are then managed by each LMETB FET centre in the same way as their classroom-based, onsite courses. FET Leaders (Principals/Co-ordinators) hold day-to-day responsibility for programme coordination, local quality assurance and change management in their centres. They act as the primary point of contact for staff and stakeholders on matters relating to the design, delivery and evaluation of blended learning, ensuring that teaching, assessment and learner supports are implemented in line with LMETB policy and QQI requirements.

Courses that employ a blended approach including those delivered by a third party i.e. contracted/second providers are subject to LMETB's regular review and evaluation processes.

3.2. Policies, Regulations and Administrative Processes

To underpin a quality assured learning experience throughout all of its FET provision, LMETB has developed a suite of [FET Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures](#) and well-established administrative processes. These policies and procedures will equally apply to any blended learning delivery of LMETB FET courses. LMETB's Corporate Services section has, in addition, a number of policies with relevance to blended learning delivery including, but not limited to; child protection, equality, diversity and inclusion, data protection (including privacy notices) and an ICT acceptable usage policy [LMETB Corporate Policies and Procedures](#)

LMETB is responsible for the academic standards and quality assurance of programmes delivered through blended learning. All programmes offered under blended learning will be subject to the core quality processes that underpin all LMETB's programmes. It is the responsibility of LMETB to manage the arrangements for the delivery of programmes and provision of support and assessment of students while ensuring that the academic standards of all awards are in accordance with LMETB's academic standards as set by LMETB under its FET quality assurance policies.

LMETB ensures that quality assurance systems to monitor and/or moderate standards are fit-for-purpose in a blended learning environment. To fulfil this commitment, LMETB ensures that:

- Procedures and regulations as specified in its FET quality assurance policies are fit for purpose in a blended learning environment. For example, LMETB will ensure that reliable and scalable systems and processes are in place to verify the identity of students.
- When LMETB moves to delivering fully online learning, LMETB will ensure that procedures are in place to manage remote assessments and to maintain the academic integrity of assessment processes.
- Processes and regulations in relation to its Access, Transfer and Progression Policy are fit-for-purpose in a blended learning environment.

- the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) systems support blended learning programmes and the quality assurance of a flexible learning experience.

3.3. Finances, Infrastructure and Resources

LMETB recognises the importance of providing flexibility in learning modalities to its learners and thus is committed in terms of budgetary planning to blended learning implementation through the support of appropriate infrastructure and resources.

LMETB's Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Officer works with LMETB's ICT Support Service to ensure that the appropriate IT infrastructure is in place to support teaching and learning in a blended modality.

During enrolment, learners wishing to participate in a blended learning course with LMETB will be given information on the resources they will require to ensure connectivity and access to the course. If required, learners may avail of supports such as the Device Loan Scheme. This loan scheme supports disadvantaged learners in FET provision to ensure equity of opportunity to FET provision. At registration, learners will be given access to the software and VLE required as detailed below.

Learners on blended learning courses in LMETB FET provision will have the same access to all IT resources available to learners engaging in on-site delivery.

MS Office 365: Office 365 is the core platform for learners and staff in LMETB. LMETB provides training opportunities on this platform through the TEL Officer and the Professional Learning and Development (PLD) Officer.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): Currently, LMETB supports a number of VLE platforms to support teaching and learning activities; Moodle, MS Teams and MyKademy. MS Teams and Moodle offer a backup choice to the other in the case of outages or other limitations. MS Teams also is the video-conferencing platform approved by LMETB's ICT department, for purpose of online communication for synchronous blended learning delivery. LMETB is not limited to the use of these VLEs and may choose to use other VLEs in the future.

3.4. Staff Training, Professional Development, and Institutional Support

LMETB FET teaching staff deliver high quality and inclusive FET provision which aims to be innovative and responsive to community and stakeholder needs. The [SOLAS Professional Development Statement of Strategy 2020-2024](#) emphasises the requirement for ‘an ongoing focus on professional learning and development to anticipate, respond to, and meet the needs of FET learners’.

It is important to note that while there may be shared pedagogical practices between the traditional live classroom and blended learning delivery (both synchronous and asynchronous) there are also different approaches required in the blended environment. Providing professional development opportunities to LMETB Learning Practitioners so as to enable the successful implementation of blended learning delivery is paramount to LMETB. LMETB FET, during the initial implementation of blended learning delivery, will provide training, mentoring, Communities of Practice and professional development for those who support teaching and learning in a blended learning environment.

Examples of professional development opportunities could include accessibility, cybersecurity, academic integrity, artificial intelligence, open educational resources, use of digital tools and software applications for content development, media production, video conferencing etc.

For an LMETB FET centre to offer a blended learning course, they will be required to show cognisance of blended learning pedagogical differences and Learning Practitioner competency by outlining, in their application through the QA governance structures (as per the LMETB Programme Development and Approval Policy), the methodologies that will be adopted for online engagement to ensure effective teaching, learning and assessment. Appropriate Learning Practitioner competency in delivering blended learning will also be required in the application to move a course to blended learning delivery.

Learning Practitioners require a set of digital competences specific to their profession to be able to seize the potential of digital technologies for enhancing and innovating education. Therefore, LMETB will ensure that staff

involved in teaching on a blended learning programme are appropriately qualified so that they have, at minimum, a level of training and competency in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) and related IT skills.

LMETB will ensure staff are provided with opportunities to develop their academic and technology-enhanced learning skills and digital competences.

Learning Practitioners are recommended to review the accompanying **LMETB Blended Learning Guidelines** document when designing and implementing a blended learning module or programme.

3.5. Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships

LMETB works in partnership with key stakeholders in the Louth and Meath region and at national level. LMETB's FET provision has established solid working relationships with many statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, and with a variety of employers and community and voluntary groups to deliver various community-based programmes. LMETB ensures collaborative arrangements align with QQI's [QQI Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for ETBs](#) in that they are approved and the effectiveness of those arrangements monitored and reviewed' (QQI, 2017, p.8).

Any community-based provision and second providers who provide courses on behalf of LMETB must comply with LMETB's QA policies and procedures. Thus, this policy applies to collaboration partnerships where courses are delivered through blended learning.

4. Programme Context

'The Programme Context focuses on the approval processes and the curriculum design. It considers the programme structure, coherence, sequencing, learning materials, teaching and assessment methods, and evaluation strategies to enable a quality learning experience' (QQI, 2023, p.15).

4.1. Programme Outcomes

LMETB has a clear policy and procedure on programme development and approval; [LMETB Policy on Programme Development and Approval](#). Any applications from a FET centre to deliver a course using a blended learning modality and/or any new blended learning programme validation request

must adhere to the criteria detailed in that process. The design principles guiding the decision to use a blended learning delivery mode are informed by the needs of the target learner group, the subject matter of the programme, the technological capability of the teaching staff in the centre, available learner supports, resources (hardware/software) and the suitability of the learning outcomes to being achieved through a blended delivery.

4.2. Approval and Validation Processes

Transitioning to Blended Delivery

Proposals to offer courses through a blended delivery mode will fall under one of two broad categories.

- Courses which have previously attained validation for face-to-face delivery which a FET centre decides to offer in a blended learning mode. That is, a course that a FET centre considers should move to a **high-impact blend** (see section 3.1 for definition).
- New programme proposals utilising blended learning.

The following QA procedures should be followed by LMETB FET centres when making an application through the LMETB Programme Development and Approval procedure for a blended learning course.

Step 1: Carefully Consider Why the Programme Should be Blended

FET centres should consider why the programme should be blended, and there should be a strong rationale for this decision supported by evidence. Requests from learners, employers, or other stakeholders may also be considered.

Step 2: Application to Change to the Mode of Delivery for a Programme

Centres will apply for approval through the Programme Development and Approval (PR1) Form, which has been adapted to consider a change of delivery mode. The application will be processed by the Programme Development Review and Evaluation (PDRE) Committee. The PDRE will consider each programme request and make a recommendation to LMETB's Quality Council, the Quality Assurance Governance Management Committee

(QAGMC) who will make the decision to approve (or not) the application for the change in delivery mode.

Step 3: Criteria for Decision-Making

An application to convert a programme to blended delivery will be decided against the following criteria:

- Whether **sufficient information** has been provided to consider the request – all relevant sections of the PR1 form must be completed including additional resources and costing.
- The **suitability of the course** proposed for blended delivery to include but not limited to:
 - **Award level** – blended delivery in LMETB will only apply to courses delivered at NFQ levels 4-6. Exceptions for courses at levels 1-3 may be considered if a sound rationale is presented in the application.
 - **Learner profile** – the suitability of the learner cohort must be considered, including the target learner cohort's IT skills, access to devices and broadband connectivity. Information on how learners will be informed about the blended learning delivery and associated requirements must be included in the application.
 - **Subject area** – courses incorporating high levels of academic content and that are not vocational in type will be more suitable to blended learning delivery. Predominantly skills-based/vocational type courses are NOT considered suitable for blended learning delivery.
- The **benefit of the mode change** to blended learning to the learners. For example, will the move to blended delivery be advantageous for some sectoral groups or under-served learner populations? Is there **demand** for more flexibility in delivery through blended learning which may emanate from the learner cohort, employers, or other stakeholders? For example, Skills to Advance learners who may suit a mixture of onsite and blended delivery options for upskilling and reskilling.
- **Extent of course to move to blended.** This criterion will be reviewed as capacity for blended delivery, including I.T. and pedagogical support, is built up within LMETB FET provision. Blended learning must comprise some face-

to-face delivery. It is envisioned that while LMETB develops its capabilities in the area of blended learning, the blend between face-to-face and online learning should be no more than 50% online learning. However, the blend will be shaped by the course's learning outcomes, assessment requirements and quality considerations. As a result, the optimal blend will emerge through LMETB's design, approval and quality assurance processes, ensuring learner-centred, high-quality provision. FET centres may apply to deliver a greater blend of online to onsite learning, however such applications must be accompanied by a sound rationale for the proposed blend.

- **Assessment** – Some assessment techniques such as e-portfolios, projects, collection of work and learner records may be submitted via the VLE. However, **ALL examinations MUST be conducted onsite**. A sound rationale must be provided on the PR1 form if permission is sought to hold a Skills Demonstration online.
- **Methodologies** to be adopted for online engagement to ensure effective teaching learning and assessment.
- The **capacity and capability of the teaching staff** in the FET centre to deliver via a high-impact blended learning programme. This includes any qualifications and experience Learning Practitioners have in the area of TEL that leaves them confident to deliver in a blended mode.
- The **capacity of the FET centre** to have the resources in place to deliver via a high-impact blended learning programme. This includes hardware, software and resources for creating online curriculum.
- **Compliance with legal or statutory obligations** (e.g. child protection, health and safety, equality, intellectual property/copyright, licensing issues, privacy and GDPR, professional or statutory body requirements, local regulatory considerations). Consideration should be given to LMETB policies/procedures, staff training records, GDPR/Data Protection statements, risk assessments, child protection procedures, confirmation of appropriate licenses.
- **Contingency arrangements** in the event of interruption to normal functioning (e.g. security breach or technological issues)
- The degree of consistency with the strategic aims of LMETB.
- Agreement to engage in the LMETB **Preparation to Deliver Blended Learning** stage 5.

Step 4: Conditions of Approval

Preliminary approval may be given, but final approval to move to a blended mode of programme delivery will not occur until the preparation stage, outlined below, is successfully completed. The review and evaluation procedures are conducted by the relevant FET centres and evidence of the review submitted in the application.

Overall, the planning, delivery and operational responsibility will rest with individual FET centres or second providers who have had programmes approved for blended learning delivery through LMETB's QA governance structures. This replicates current processes and procedures for onsite programmes.

Step 5: Preparation Stage

A team should be assembled to ensure that the necessary supports are in place to support staff to design a programme that supports the principles of effective blended learning practice. Discussions should take place as part of the design process where, at a minimum, the following people and issues are considered:

- Centre/Programme/Service Leadership
- Teaching, learning and assessment staff
- Digital Content for the programme
- Representative from IT services
- Professional development for staff and learners
- Representative from the QA Team

4.3. Learning and Curriculum Design

In accordance with the [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023](#), LMETB will adapt existing courses to a blended learning mode and/or develop new programmes for blended learning delivery according to the following principles. LMETB will aim to provide a model of good practice in digital education in the form of blended learning as its capacity in the area evolves over time.

- The teaching, learning and assessment strategies and delivery mechanisms adopted in blended learning delivery, should be specifically designed for this context.
- LMETB will ensure that blended learning developments are learner-centred and subject-led rather than technology led.
- LMETB will ensure its teaching, learning, and assessment practices are accessible to all students, through the implementation of a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all.
- Subject-specific and educational scholarship informs the pedagogy and instructional design. LMETB recognises that contact hours may no longer be an appropriate indicator related to teaching. The programme design will specify the required effort for the activities of teaching, content creation and moderation in blended and online learning delivery.
- LMETB will take all practicable steps to ensure the security and reliability of its online learning and support systems.
- LMETB will control access to its online learning and support systems.
- LMETB will take all practical steps to ensure continuity of service delivery of its online learning and support systems as outlined in its service level agreement with the institutional VLE supplier. It will ensure that a contingency plan is available in the event of failure of the designated modes of delivery.
- Teaching staff involved in curriculum design will possess expertise in relevant areas such as online pedagogy, synchronous and asynchronous engagement, digital assessment, academic integrity, VLEs and Learning Management Systems (LMS), online student support, IT and TEL proficiency, and subject matter knowledge.

4.4. Learning Materials and Resources

Building upon the experience and learnings from the move to emergency remote teaching during the Covid pandemic, LMETB FET teaching staff currently use a variety of digital tools and resources. They are supported in their use of technology by the TEL Officer and LMETB's IT Department. As LMETB develops its capacity in blended learning provision, fit-for-purpose learning materials and resources will continue to be developed under the guidance of the TEL Officer and in compliance with LMETB's IT Department advice. Learning materials should be accessible, having cognisance of UDL principles and promote learner interactivity.

4.5. Assessment and Feedback Practices

LMETB's assessment related [FET policies and procedures](#) set out the expectations and arrangements for the fair and consistent assessment of learners.

Assessments for blended learning programmes are similar to those used for onsite delivery with parity of standards and maintenance of academic integrity being paramount. LMETB ensures that the outcomes of assessment for a blended learning programme meet the specified academic level of the award as defined by the NFQ. As per onsite delivery, formative assessment opportunities and timely feedback to aid learners in improving their overall performance will be integrated throughout all blended learning programmes.

The VLEs used in LMETB (Moodle, MS Teams, MyKademy) currently provide the Learning Practitioners the following functions which are used in FET centres;

- publish assessment schedules and deadlines
- house and control access to assessment briefs
- allow for secure submission of learner work
- provide plagiarism checks via the TurnItIn plug-in
- provide a feedback mechanism.

The use of these VLE functions will be continued in blended learning delivery

Information on methods and criteria of assessment will be provided to learners during induction and the early part of their course. Learners will also be made aware of the following important policies, procedures and guidelines related to good academic integrity practice and assessment misconduct.

- [LMETB FET Assessment Misconduct Procedure](#)
- [LMETB FET Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [LMETB FET Learner Guidelines for Academic Integrity and Use of Gen AI Tools](#)

Security issues relating to the authentication of a learner's work will be considered when designing assessment processes.

4.6. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Strategic Goal 1 of the [LMETB Strategy Statement 2022-2026](#) states the aim to provide a high quality learner experience with the associated strategic action

(1.6) being to 'support LMETB's schools and centres in self-evaluation'. This goal demonstrates LMETB's commitment to monitoring, review and self-evaluation processes to ensure a high-quality learning experience for all its learners. It aligns to the QQI requirement, seen as a fundamental element of a provider's quality assurance system, for 'review and self-evaluation of quality including review of programmes of education and training'⁷.

LMETB FET centres carry out ongoing reviews of the courses they offer during which they gather feedback from various stakeholders, e.g. learners, teaching staff, employers, industry and community groups, as to the effectiveness of their provision and to look for any improvement that may be required. Quantitative data is gathered through authentication reports both internal and external, certification data, Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) data on learner inputs, outputs and outcomes, attendance details regarding retention, etc. This quantitative data is enhanced by the qualitative data gathered from the feedback via surveys to inform and ensure that provision remains relevant and fit for purpose.

Blended learning delivery will be evaluated via the existing mechanisms, however LMETB FET centres delivering in this mode will ensure that cognisance is given during the review process to ascertaining learners' views of their online learning experience.

5. Learner Experience Context

'The *Learner Experience Context* addresses the importance of support, promoting high levels of engagement and equality of opportunity. Notably, it includes several additional quality assurance considerations from those in the previous guidelines. This section reflects an even stronger focus on the learner and the quality of their learning experience in programmes supported by blended and fully online provision' (QQI, 2023, p.15).

5.1. Thinking About Study

The [LMETB Access Transfer and Progression Policy](#) ensures fit for purpose learner access and progression opportunities during the learner's journey through FET in LMETB. The policy encompasses access, transfer and

⁷ [QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, p.21](#)

progression for all courses offered by LMETB including those provided via a blended learning modality. Key to the implementation of this policy is LMETB's Adult Educational Guidance Service who can aid prospective learners in exploring course options and assist with educational and career planning.

During the recruitment process, potential learners interested in a blended learning course will be provided with relevant information so that they can make an informed decision about the suitability of the course and their capacity to engage. This information may be provided by the FET centre, LMETB's Adult Educational Guidance Service, through online prospectuses, via the LMETB website and/or LMETB's social media platforms. Learners will be informed of the format of the course, the level of online to onsite delivery, expectations regarding synchronous and asynchronous engagement, minimum technical requirements and supports available before they make their decision to enrol for the blended learning course.

5.2. Learning Support and Development

The second strategic goal of the [LMETB Strategy Statement 2022-2026](#) emphasises LMETB's commitment to ensuring equity of opportunity to its learners, specifically to 'provide supports and opportunities for learning to all, recognising the needs of vulnerable learners and the most marginalised, and assist people in access to and progression through the provision of education and further education and training' (strategic action 2.5). LMETB FET centres provide learner-centred and supportive provision through the availability of focused learner supports initiatives. Learner support provision is coordinated by LMETB's Learner Support Officer who has overall responsibility for LMETB FET's learner supports, ensuring a well- resourced, responsive and up-to-date service.

To increase accessibility of learner supports, particularly in the online environment, a FET Learner Virtual Hub was added to the FET area of the LMETB website to supplement the information available to FET learners through the FET Learner Handbook and the FET Learner Support information section. The FET Learner Virtual Hub is a dedicated space designed to empower and guide learners on their learning journey with LMETB. The Hub is a go-to resource for accessing support while studying with LMETB. There are training programs, support materials and support updates. The Hub is sub-divided into broad areas including the following:

- Learner Support Request
- Our Learning Space
- Wellbeing Space
- Learner Support Updates.

‘Our Learning Space’ hosts training sessions and resources designed to help learners develop their skills in Microsoft Office 365: Microsoft Teams Word, PowerPoint, Excel, OneDrive and Outlook. Further down the page, learners can access material to help improve literacy and numeracy skills. In the ‘Understanding the Academic Process’ course, learners are prepared for their academic journey by being provided with information on three core areas: Academic Integrity, Referencing and Academic Writing. The FET Learner Support Update section provides useful resources for the Louth and Meath areas to improve wellbeing and learning. It is regularly updated with local events and important information.

The Principle of Equivalency⁸ applies to LMETB learners on blended learning courses, that is, they will have the same access to the full suite of learner supports to ensure a quality learning experience as onsite learners.

LMETB’s existing **induction** framework is applicable in traditional face-to-face programmes and has been expanded to include Blended Learning. Learner induction provides information on the level and nature of support available, including but not limited to academic, technical and pastoral/affective support.

In addition to existing disability supports, in compliance with the Statutory Disability Act 2005, LMETB is committed to the needs of learners with disabilities and fostering equality and inclusion in a face-to-face and remote environment. As much as possible, online aspects of teaching, learner services and assessment are accessible to all learners through a range of embedded features, e.g. assistive content reading applications.

LMETB has developed **Learner Guidelines for Blended Learning** that provide essential information for learners engaging in a blended learning environment. These guidelines include information on:

⁸ [Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes 2023, p.38](#)

- the technical requirements the learners need in terms of device and broadband connectivity to engage in blended learning
- Information on how to test for connectivity and internet quality
- hardware options such as the LMETB Laptop Loan scheme if the learner does not have access to a suitable device
- information on MS Office 365 suite, Moodle, any other VLE information required
- how to log a ticket with LMETB's IT Help Desk if an issue arises with access to any of LMETB's MS Office 365 apps
- specific guidance will be provided to learners on acceptable background images. In most cases it is expected that learners will blur their background.
- how to access to digital resources including Digital Libraries and Open Educational Resources
- how to submit assessments (projects, assignments, learner records or collection of work) online
- definitions of synchronous and asynchronous delivery and how these elements are integrated in their chosen course
- LMETB's expectations for learner behaviour in online learning environments in terms of respectful online communication
- how to access to the full range of learner supports

As with onsite course, learner attendance and engagement is monitored by during blended learning delivery so that early intervention supports can be made available for any learners displaying signs of difficulty. Learners may be referred to the Learner Support Officer, the Adult Educational Guidance Service or other appropriate services as determined by the FET centre.

Engagement with the Learner Support Office, availing of the laptop loan scheme, or any other supports mentioned will be monitored during the lifetime of the blended learning course. Such data will add to the learner feedback surveys gathered at the end of the course to inform future iterations of the course and a process of continuous improvement.

5.3. Equality of Opportunity

‘Consistent with learner-centred principles, teaching, learning and assessment practices and associated activities and resources provide every learner with an equitable, fair, and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes—irrespective of the study mode’ (QQI, 2023, p.44). LMETB is committed to encompassing equality, inclusivity and fairness across all its FET provision so that learners achieve on their course of study regardless of the delivery mode.

Learners on blended learning courses have the same access as onsite learners to support services, resources and representation on learner voice forums, such as PLC Board of Management and Student Councils, the Learner Forum as well as the LMETB Learner Voice Network (LVN). Calls for new members for the LVN takes place across FET centres at various stages in the academic year and 1-2 members of the LVN are invited to be part of LMETB FET Communications sub-committee.

LMETB is committed to ensuring that the online learning environment is safe. And the LMETB Learner Guidelines for Blended Learning include guidance on online etiquette to promote dignity, courtesy and respect in digital environments. Reference should also be made to the [LMETB ICT Acceptable Usage Policy](#) for specific protocols.

At the local level, FET centres will communicate a shared expectation to learners on a blended learning course on whether they should be visible with their cameras on during all parts of synchronous live teaching and learning activities. Specific guidance will be provided to learners on acceptable background images. In most cases it is expected that learners will blur their background.

5.4. Learner Experience and Outcomes

As with all its FET provision, LMETB strives to foster a culture of continuous improvement in providing the learner with a quality assured learning experience during their blended learning course. As detailed in section 4.6, qualitative and quantitative data gathered during the blended learning course will inform the ongoing enhancement of the course going forward. The

qualitative data captured from learner feedback is much valued as part of this process.

Learner progression will be informed by data from the PLSS. If applicable, qualitative data will be gathered from employers or community groups for graduates from blended learning courses, e.g. Skills to Advance courses offered through blended learning delivery.

6. Operational Procedures for Policy Development and Review

This policy will be reviewed in Q4 2027 OR when LMETB moves to the next phase of its blended and online learning strategy which will happen when it applies to QQI to extend its scope of provision to fully online learning.