

The following outlines Kerry Education and Training Board's (Kerry ETB) policy and procedures for the development and delivery of programmes in Blended Learning Mode. This policy and the associated procedures do not exist in isolation, so cross reference may be made to other related policies and procedures where appropriate.

Kerry ETB is committed to ensuring its programmes that are developed for blended learning delivery are developed having regard to QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (2018). It will incorporate the guidelines in its blended learning programme development processes in a planned incremental manner and is committed to achieving the overall goal of full compliance.

QQI has adopted Garrison and Kanuak's definition of blended learning as *'The integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences'* (Garrison and Kanuak, 2004, p.96).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to set out the framework for the infrastructure development, staff training, programme development and delivery in blended learning mode, in alignment with QQI's Statutory QA Guidelines.

This policy and the associated procedures guide all staff in training, development and delivery of programmes, in a blended learning mode.

SCOPE

This policy applies to Blended Learning Programmes developed, or procured, and delivered by Kerry ETB, at levels 3 to 6 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Programmes include those that lead to CAS Awards, non-CAS Awards and new Apprenticeship programmes.

Programmes may lead to major awards or minor awards or special purpose awards.

Kerry ETB is conscious of the difficulties posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the required shift to online delivery required by the pandemic. However, this policy transcends the contingency arrangements required to address this issue and refers to the development of all Blended Learning programmes in the future.

This policy applies directly or indirectly to all Kerry ETB staff members, working under the FET pillar at a point in time, particularly those holding teaching, administrative, management or support roles.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

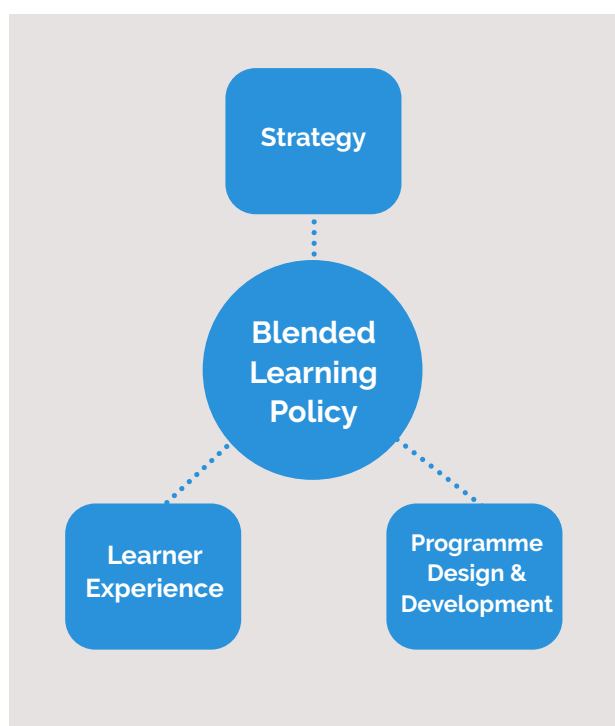
Kerry ETB's Blended Learning Policy is guided by the following principles which are aimed at facilitating high quality teaching and learning. Kerry ETB has responsibility for:

- Ensuring that proposals for new blended learning programmes take full account of the implications of blended learning and are subject to appropriately informed academic review and approval.
- Establishing clear criteria to identify fit-for-purpose programmes suitable for Blended Learning integration.
- Providing contextually appropriate strategies for blended curriculum design and the integration of blended learning to existing programmes.
- Ensuring that an appropriate balance is maintained between face-to-face and online content and delivery within programmes.

- e) Providing clear guidelines and practical supports for learners and staff members in relation to all aspects of Blended Learning within the organisation.
- f) Providing the concrete infrastructure required for the facilitation of teaching and learning, inclusive of programme delivery, learner supports and programme administration.
- g) Providing access to appropriate Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training programmes that interface with internal processes and systems for the incorporation of Blended Learning.
- h) Providing a framework for facilitating learner engagement in both face-to-face and online learning environments; ensuring learner support mechanisms are visible and actively promoted in both.
- i) Implementing and maintaining quality review processes that encompass both the online and face-to-face components of programme delivery.

POLICY DETAIL

Kerry ETB's policy in respect of blended learning is formulated around three core pillars - Strategy, Programme Design and Development, and the Learner Experience.



STRATEGY

Kerry ETB is cognisant 'of the distinctive demands that blended learning will make on infrastructure and systems that differ from full-time face-to-face contexts' (QQI Guidelines page 8).

Kerry ETB therefore commits to ensuring that:

1. Its strategy, at an institutional level, systematically addresses and facilitates arrangements for blended learning.
2. The infrastructure and resources required to support good quality blended learning are understood, planned, and routinely monitored and evaluated.
3. Appropriate continuing professional development processes and procedures are developed and facilitated to ensure the upskilling of staff in the latest developments in Blended Learning.
4. Appropriate investment in Learning Design capacity is made through new appointments and/or re-training of existing staff.
5. Adequate levels of IT support services are provided as technical support for the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
6. A fit-for-purposes Community of Practice is developed among its staff involved in Blended Learning activities in its different units.
7. A planned approach to professional development in the area of Learning Technology is implemented. This approach will support relevant staff to in turn support staff to use technology for blended learning.
8. Realistic expectations for the overall quality of the blended learning provision, including the effectiveness and accessibility of learning resources and other learning materials to support online provision are approved and published.
9. Its Quality Assurance Procedures for blended learning are comprehensive and fit for purpose and encompass provisions for dealing with a second provider who delivers aspects of a programme through blended learning.

Programme Design and Development

Kerry ETB is committed to assuring quality in the design, development, review, delivery and evaluation of programmes and modules that include blended learning.

Kerry ETB commits to ensuring that:

1. Online learning components are appropriately designed to ensure they can be effectively integrated into programmes for the purpose of achieving learning outcomes.
2. Learning resources, materials and delivery mechanisms are appropriate, fit-for-purpose, monitored and reviewed.
3. Its current chosen blended learning delivery vehicles, Microsoft Teams and Moodle, are continually reviewed to ensure they are appropriate for the respective sets of programmes and target learners for which they are deployed.
4. Its programme development processes for blended learning programmes, including online learning modules, are appropriate and fit-for-purpose, reflecting best practice in blended learning curriculum design.

Learner Experience

Kerry ETB is committed to providing a range of appropriate information and supports to both prospective and enrolled learners. Kerry ETB commits to ensuring that:

1. Appropriate information is made available to prospective learners to enable them to make an informed choice about enrolling on a blended learning programme.
2. Appropriate support is provided to enable learners to progress towards becoming an autonomous learner.
3. The range of available technical, academic and pastoral supports are made clear and promoted to learners enrolled on a blended learning programme.

Kerry ETB's minimum standards for its online content and learning resources have been derived from QQI's guidelines and Kerry ETB's ICT Strategy and Blended and Remote Learning guidelines for staff and learners 2020. These may be supplemented and augmented as appropriate over time, utilising the processes within the Quality Assurance Handbook for ongoing review of QA documentation.

RESPONSIBILITY

- a) The FET Quality Council is responsible for approving this policy and procedure for ratification by the Chief Executive Officer.
- b) The Quality Assurance Governance Board is responsible for approving a schedule for quality reviews and submitting this to the FET Quality Council for noting. It is also responsible for receiving reports on follow-up on actions arising from quality reviews and reporting to the FET Quality Council on issues or recommendations arising.
- c) The Quality Assurance Governance Board is responsible for undertaking the review, amendment and development of quality assurance policies and procedures.
- d) The FET Director, Quality Assurance Officer and Learner Support Officer are jointly responsible for making recommendations to the FET Quality Council, through the Quality Assurance Governance Board, pertaining to Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.
- e) The Quality Assurance Officer is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the overall alignment of Kerry ETB's policy and procedures pertaining to Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review to QQI's guidelines and policy statements.

RELATED LEGISLATION, REGULATION OR GUIDELINES

- a) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- b) Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Education and Training Boards 2017 (QQI).
- c) Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes 2018 (QQI).
- d) Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training 2017 (QQI).
- e) Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2014 (QQI).

PROCEDURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF BLENDED LEARNING

Overview

Kerry ETB engages learning designers and educational technologists in the curriculum development process, enabling close collaboration between this function and academic subject specialists. This enables Kerry ETB's programmes to be developed in a subject-led, learner centred manner, in which technology is in the service of pedagogy, as per QQI's guidelines.

The FET Management Team in Kerry ETB has determined that Microsoft Teams and Moodle should be Kerry ETB's VLE options. Moodle is used in its new apprenticeship programmes and a number of other programmes delivered through its training centres, while Microsoft Teams is used in other cases. In addition, Kerry ETB intends to deploy Turnitin as a tool to promote academic integrity, streamline grading and feedback, deter plagiarism, and improve learner outcomes in its programmes.

The VLE chosen for a particular application allows staff to develop and select appropriate online content and learning resources for learners, and enables learners to access this in a controlled, secure environment. It encourages communication and collaboration in learning tasks, thus encouraging cooperation and adding to the learning experience of the learners. Forum activities in the VLE are used by staff and learners for online discussions which promote collaborative working, engagement and interactivity with all members of the group. The chosen VLE is also used to manage continuous assessment and feedback. All assignments are required to be submitted in soft copy via the relevant process and through the plagiarism detection software, Turnitin, where appropriate.

Kerry ETB takes a proactive approach to reviewing new tools and resources that may be used to enhance programme delivery.

Kerry ETB's procedure for the assessment, use and monitoring of platforms and tools ensures that potential new technologies are carefully evaluated to determine whether they are reliable, secure and aligned to pedagogic objectives prior to use, and that opportunities for staff to test these are planned and controlled.

To ensure the quality and consistency of blended learning provision across its programmes, Kerry ETB has developed minimum standards for online content and learning resources, learner induction/ supports and staff development/ training. Kerry ETB has prepared two sets of guidelines that are relevant to this:

- a) Teaching and Learning Guidelines for Staff
- b) Blended and Remote Learning Guidelines for Kerry ETB Learners.

These are attached as Appendices A and B, respectively.

Approval and Oversight

Kerry ETB's oversight processes are aligned with our strategic objectives and mission. We also rely on the Quality Improvement Plan Strategy to guide approval and oversight practices. The programme development and internal approval process for blended learning programmes mirrors that for face-to-face programmes, with a number of significant additions that are detailed below.

Approval

Kerry ETB follows a two-stage approval process in the preparation for and execution of processes - Planning and Programme Management.

Decision-making at governance level takes account of strategic and corporate decision-making, and funding concerns. Programme management approval processes take account of academic issues that fall within the remit of programme management.

The governance element includes an analysis and approval of the following:

- a) Vision, strategy and goal: What is the intended end-result for the Blended Learning programme?
- b) Learners and provision: Who is the Blended Learning learner? Which cohorts would benefit from Blended Learning? What is the scope and provision required for the target learners? Do the target learners have access to the required devices? Is their broadband capacity adequate?
- c) Needs and sector demands: Which groups and individuals are in urgent need for Blended Learning? What supports are in place and which ones are lacking or missing?
- d) Decisions and levels of authority: operational leadership, tactical oversight functions (e.g.

- compliance, risk, finance), executive leadership and/or statutory, corporate leadership.
- e) Clarity: regulatory bodies and requirements: QQI, FET sector, government, and other external bodies.
- f) Corporate decisions and funding.

The programme management element includes the following:

- a) Overseeing development of the programme proposal: collation of proposal plan, format, scope and standards.
- b) Programme outline, outcomes and awards: what are the intended learning outcomes and awards?
- c) Considering the outcomes of consultation with industry.
- d) Identifying specific cohorts and learner profiles through appropriate methodologies.
- e) Identifying the most appropriate delivery vehicle and programme management systems (currently either Microsoft Teams or Moodle).
- f) Ensuring programme efficiency: depth, duration and provision.
- g) Ensuring the programme maintains an appropriate balance between face-to-face and on-line learning.
- h) Content and programme components for fit-for-purpose delivery.

OVERSIGHT

Kerry ETB's oversight and review processes in respect of blended learning provision, include addressing the following questions:

1. What do we need for effective Blended Learning programmes? Resources, priorities, contexts; Learner and staff needs; FET environment.
2. How can we achieve this? Resources and planning required for new programmes, having regard to the desired provision and target learners.
3. Are we doing it right? Effectiveness of the implementation planning; issues emerging from the deployment phase.
4. Did the programme meet the anticipated outcomes? Assessment through robust review systems involving stakeholders.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Kerry ETB has adopted QQI's guidelines to guide the assessment, procurement, use and monitoring of platforms and tools to deliver blended learning.

USE AND MONITORING OF PLATFORMS AND TOOLS

Kerry ETB has chosen two platforms, Microsoft Teams and Moodle as delivery and programme management tools for its blended learning offerings. Moodle is used in its new apprenticeship programmes and a number of other programmes delivered through its training centres, while Microsoft Teams is used in other cases. It is committed to refining the protocols for deciding on a particular VLE for specific programme types and learner cohorts, based on analysis and review of current experience of delivery. Kerry ETB is planning to deploy Turnitin to promote academic integrity, streamline grading and feedback, deter plagiarism, and improve learner outcomes in its programmes.

Kerry ETB continually monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the platforms and tools used through feedback from learners and academic staff. This feedback is considered and reviewed by the Quality Council and decisions for improvement made.

There are a number of mechanisms in place to facilitate the collection of feedback, which is considered by the programme board system.

Feedback is routinely sought from learners on programme curricula and delivery via the VLE, in addition to feedback on the quality and availability of support services and effectiveness of administration.

- Teachers/Tutors/Instructors and support staff are able to provide feedback and raise any concerns pertaining to the VLE and integrated platforms on an ongoing basis.

IT SERVICE SUPPORT

IT support is required to facilitate access to suitable information technology and educational resources (including educational technology and any VLE provided as required by Kerry ETB, identified at programme development and agreed at validation).

It is the responsibility of the Programme Governance Board, supported by the TEL Working Group, to identify and specify the IT and computing requirements for programme delivery.

The CCT department is additionally responsible for the provision and the management of sustainable computing facilities accessible to staff and learners.

The CCT department works with management and staff to systematically upgrade hardware and software in line with technical developments and advise Kerry ETB on more effective tools and methodologies to enhance the learner experience.

IT support services are available at all time during class delivery. Helpdesk support provided by TEL Champions is available for learners and teachers/tutors/instructors during normal office hours.

The CCT Department is also responsible for ensuring that all software is properly licensed and copyright protocols are respected. Other responsibilities include firewalls, backups, etc.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure for Blended Learning is multifaceted. The most appropriate model, either Microsoft Teams or Moodle, is determined through consideration of the following elements in a sequential manner:

1. Learner Profile.
2. Learner needs.
3. Staff supports required.
4. Identification of required infrastructure and associated functionality for delivery of the programme.
5. Review of available infrastructure and associated functionality.

PROGRAMME CONTEXT

Standards for Online Content and Learning Resources

Kerry ETB has adopted the following standards in respect of online content and learning resources:

- All content items and learning resources within Kerry ETB's VLE and supported platforms must:
- a) Reflect the learner-centred pedagogy of Kerry ETB.
 - b) Be subject to quality review by an appropriately informed peer (e.g. subject matter and learning design expertise) before uploading to the VLE.
 - c) Cite copyright and licensing status appropriately for any third-party content.
 - d) Engage learners in activities that enable them to test and monitor their progress at appropriate points in their learning.
 - e) Be presented in a manner showing its relationship to the face-to-face learning environment.
 - f) In the case of text items developed within Kerry ETB, be written in plain language.
 - g) Be accompanied by links to clear information regarding the availability of relevant academic supports.
 - h) Reflect culturally diverse perspectives that are free of bias.

PROGRAMME DESIGN

Blended Learning programmes for Kerry ETB follow the stages of programme and curriculum design that are incorporated in traditional course planning and detailed in section X of its Quality Assurance Handbook.

Curriculum design for all programmes, including those delivered in Blended mode, includes learning, teaching and assessment quality measures. Each programme is informed by approaches to Blended Learning that are fit for purpose and support achievement of learning outcomes.

All programmes and modules incorporating Blended Learning are subject to approval by the FET Quality Council and ratification by the Chief Executive Officer.

Programme quality reviews cover four main strands: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Technology. The review process follows a structured approach that encompasses both the online and face-to-face learning environments.

Design, Syllabi and Delivery

Kerry ETB's curricula are driven by the fundamental tenet that places the learner at the centre of quality assurance. Its curricula incorporate Blended Learning approaches, while maintaining traditional face-to-face programme functions to suit a varied spectrum of learners and programme structures.

These design and delivery principles:

- Are subject led, rather than technology led.
- Focus on the learner, critical thinking, reflection, autonomy, and engagement.
- Develop content that is specifically designed for blended learning delivery.
- Ensure subject matter and content inform pedagogy and instructional design.
- Maintain continuity and consistency (access, resources, instructional design).
- Maintain security; promote supports and services.
- Encompass contingency measures to ensure the continuous delivery of content and assessment.
- Facilitate ongoing syllabus and curriculum enhancement, informed by programme quality review mechanisms.

Content Creation

Kerry ETB's content development process involves the selection of appropriate platforms, formats or tools to facilitate achievement of pedagogic objectives. Content development may entail the use or production of the following:

- a) Video and audio content.
- b) Reusable learning objects (RLOs).
- c) Subject- specific and Blended Learning curricula and syllabi.
- d) Online learning and teaching platforms, including Moodle and Microsoft Teams.
- e) Functions within Moodle, Microsoft teams and other platforms that facilitate engagement and participation.
- f) Learning, teaching and assessment analytics: records of learning and teaching performance, e-Learning experience and achievement, allocation of programme content and resources.
- g) Comprehensive study guides accessed onsite and online by learners and staff members.

The above list is not exhaustive and continues to be under ongoing quality review via quality assurance and enhancement processes.

STANDARDS FOR LEARNER INDUCTION AND SUPPORTS (BLENDED LEARNING)

Kerry ETB's minimum standards for learner induction and supports in blended learning have been derived from QQI's guidelines, Kerry ETB's ICT Strategy and SOLAS TEL Strategy. These may be supplemented and augmented as appropriate over time, utilising the processes within the Quality Assurance Handbook for ongoing review of QA documentation.

PROGRAMME INFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT

All learners within Kerry ETB must:

1. *Be informed prior to enrolment of the level and nature of the support available. This will include information pertaining to:*
 - Details on the different elements of the blend of learning that they will experience on the programme including online activities, face-to-face attendance requirement, synchronous and asynchronous activities, autonomous learning etc.
 - The commitment required from them to successfully complete the programme, including self-directed learning.
 - Pre-knowledge or technical skills required to participate on the programme.
 - When academic, technical and pastoral supports are available.
 - Details of the hardware or software required.
 - Terms and conditions relevant to a specific programme (e.g. timings for synchronous learning or assessment, assessment deadlines, regulations pertaining to re-assessment opportunities).
2. *Be systematically inducted to Kerry ETB's VLE and integrated platforms following admission. This induction must include information pertaining to:*
 - Overall layout and navigation of the VLE.
 - Location of contact lists for academic, administrative and technical queries within Kerry ETB.
 - Availability of online technical support and contact information.
 - Location of essential learner support information, policies and procedures within the VLE.

- General protocols for communicating online, which promote dignity, courtesy, and respect for diversity.
 - Communication channels used within the VLE and Kerry ETB.
3. *Be systematically inducted to learning in blended and online modes. This induction must include information pertaining to:*
 - Overall expectations and standards.
 - Strategies for successful blended and online learning.
 - Support services and resources available online, including those relevant to academic integrity and the avoidance of plagiarism.
 - Online library access and associated resources and supports.
 4. *Have access to comprehensive information regarding their programme of study, to include:*
 - ILOs and teaching, learning and assessment methods for each module and for the programme overall.
 - Schedules for the submission and assessment of work.
 - Information on how their performance will be assessed, and the relative weighting of assessment tasks.
 - Information on how timely formative feedback will be provided to them in the online sections of the programme.
 - Lists of learning resources available.
 5. *Have access, within a reasonable time frame, to technical support for asynchronous learning activities.*
 6. *Have access, in real time, to technical support during synchronous learning activities.*
 7. *Have the opportunity to provide feedback to Kerry ETB, both routinely and ad hoc, on their experience of using the VLE and integrated platforms.*

STANDARDS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING (BLENDED LEARNING)

Kerry ETB's minimum standards for staff development and training in blended learning have been derived from QQI's guidelines, Kerry ETB ICT Strategy and SOLAS TEL Strategy.

These may be supplemented and augmented as appropriate over time, utilising the processes within the Quality Assurance Handbook for ongoing review of QA documentation.

All staff in academic, teaching and learner support roles within Kerry ETB must:

1. Undertake a general and an academic induction upon commencing employment with Kerry ETB. Within the academic induction, be introduced to:
 - The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) of Kerry ETB.
 - The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy of Kerry ETB (inclusive of Blended Learning)
2. Complete designated Blended Learning training modules within a time frame agreed with their manager.
3. Participate in ongoing training and development activities for Blended Learning.
4. Ensure their contributions to the development of curriculum within Kerry ETB comply with minimum standards for online content and learning resources and associated processes.
5. Observe protocols for communication with learners and facilitation of online discussions.
6. Strive to facilitate a safe, inclusive, accessible, and reliable online learning environment.

CONTROL SHEET	
Policy and Procedures Title	Blended Learning
Responsible Officer(s)	FET Director
Issuance Date	September 2020
Effective Date	September 2020
Last Revision Date	
Supersedes	Version 1.0
Next Revision Date	September 2024
Designated Reviewers	FET Management Team; Quality Council
Scope	All programmes using Blended Learning as a mode of delivery

REVISION HISTORY				
Revision	Approval Date	Revision Description	Originator	Approved by
New Policy Version 1.0	Sept 2020	New Policy and Procedures	Quality Assurance Officer	FET Quality Council