

## Blended approaches used to modernise and enhance teaching and learning at Russell Group Universities

### Blended Learning – Explainer

Russell Group universities have always looked for new ways to modernise and enhance teaching and learning with digital technology. A blended learning approach can enhance traditional in-person teaching methods (lectures, seminars, small group discussions, tutorials, lab work and workshops) by including an element of digital learning and online materials.

### Blended Learning at Russell Group Universities

**The University of Leeds** developed a virtual landscape designed to develop geologic mapping and field skills. The 3D maps are used to introduce students to the concept of reading the landscape and allow students to observe how changes in the strike or dip of a rock alter the outcrop pattern and can be used to encourage students to develop their own rules for how patterns change. The mapping landscapes are used before going on the first geological mapping field trip to help students understand the process before doing it in ‘real time.’

**Warwick’s Medical School** developed a virtual patient to mimic the long term and episodic interactions between a GP and their patient, including a virtual consultation. This virtual learning experience allows students to understand the patient’s problems and as his story develops, it helps students to apply their learning as they progress through all four years of the course.

**Liverpool’s Geography department** created digital versions of their practical, which included putting 150 videos online for students to collect and analyse data from, rather than do in person. This blended approach has also made the module more accessible to students, providing an opportunity for students who miss practical sessions for valid reasons, such as medical or caring responsibilities, to be able to go through practical work in their own time.

### In-person teaching remains at the heart of the university experience

- At all Russell Group universities, students can expect seminars, small group classes, field and lab work to be taught in person.
- Our universities will continue to prioritise in-person teaching, but many courses will also use digital technology to enhance and complement this.
- While in-person teaching remains our top priority, there may be circumstances where universities must be responsive to public health needs and will use digital technology to minimise disruption to students – as the Government requested us to do in 2020 and 2021.

### Digital learning has been an important piece of the university teaching jigsaw for years

- COVID-19 accelerated the use of blended learning, but it has not caused a need for it
- Learning is personal and social, which is why digital technology is being used to enhance rather than replace face-to-face in-person teaching
- Many universities were already making use of new digital technologies pre-2020 and transformed on-campus spaces to make them suitable for interactive teaching and learning.

University of Birmingham • University of Bristol • University of Cambridge • Cardiff University • Durham University  
University of Edinburgh • University of Exeter • University of Glasgow • Imperial College London • King’s College London  
University of Leeds • University of Liverpool • London School of Economics and Political Science  
University of Manchester • Newcastle University • University of Nottingham • University of Oxford  
Queen Mary University of London • Queen’s University Belfast • University of Sheffield • University of Southampton  
University College London • University of Warwick • University of York

- Universities are reshaping their approaches to encouraging interaction, in-depth learning, and more active engagement by students so they're able to drive their individual learning experience, with choice over the time, place and pace of their learning.
- Flexible learning can help drive forward positive changes in access and participation through creating a conducive learning environment for students with additional responsibilities.
- These methods can also help increase student choice and help prepare graduates for a world that will increasingly demand agility and digital skills.

### Students are at the heart of blended learning decisions

- Our universities work closely with students to consider their views on blended learning and understand where improvements can be made and what is working well.
- Communication is critical and our universities continuously update students on teaching plans in-person, via emails, social media and student union channels.
- Evidence from university surveys provides insights that students value the increased flexibility blended learning provides. Positive feedback includes:
  - Online availability of lectures and materials giving students wider access to learning
  - Students with medical conditions, disabilities or caring responsibilities feel less anxious if they must miss lectures/classes
  - Opportunity to learn at times that suit students.

As they continue to develop blended learning, our universities are constantly reviewing how in-person teaching hours are used to maximise the benefits of this time for students, enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning experience.

### Blended Learning – Fact Check

1. **All** Russell Group universities are undertaking in-person teaching.
2. It is **not** about saving money. Universities are investing in blended learning to enhance students' learning experience and improving teaching provision.

**Manchester University** has invested £3m into supporting blended learning including equipment and expanding staff resource (e-learning support team increased by 20%).

3. It is **not** about reducing contact/teaching hours. Blended learning can help maximise the benefits students get from in-person teaching.

**Glasgow's School of Psychology and Neuroscience** has introduced **flipped learning** (where students use online materials to help understand new concepts and increase engagement during in-person teaching). Students attend timetabled, pre-recorded lectures that allows lecturers to speak and interact with students, answering their questions in real-time via a digital chat function.

4. Russell Group universities **will always look to continue with in-person teaching**, but where public health leads or the Government have advised otherwise, they always strive to return to in-person teaching when it is safe to do so.

#### In January 2021:

- **Nottingham** continued with their plans to keep full in-person teaching. <sup>1</sup>
- **Newcastle** have been clear that all students studying on an on-campus programme will receive in-person teaching.<sup>2</sup>
- **Edinburgh** have committed to increasing in-person teaching on campus though large lectures will remain online for now.
- **Durham** moved to in-person teaching once the severity of Omicron became better understood and students could be given sufficient notice to return.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/currentstudents/news/covid-19-keeping-our-community-safe-when-returning-to-campus>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/study/covid-19/>