Briefing: Blended Learning in Higher Education

Tuesday 15th of November 2022 10:00 – 12:00

House of Lords, Committee Room G

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# Agenda

10:00 Networking – tea and coffee served

10:30 Event begins with opening remarks from Lord Norton, co-Chair of the Higher Education Commission

10:40 Speakers:

Jean Arnold, Director of Quality, Office for Students

Prof. Susan Orr, PVC De Montfort University (review author)

David White, President of Association for Learning Technology

Prof. Kathryn Mitchell, VC of University of Derby

Rt Hon Lord Willetts, former Universities Minister

11:20 Discussion with all participants

11:50 Concluding remarks from Lord Norton

11:55 Information on next steps from Shamima Akhtar

12:00 Event Close

# Background

**2.1 Blended Learning in Higher Education**

Blended learning is the teaching and learning that combines in-person delivery and delivery in a digital environment. Use of blended learning has long been an established aspect of teaching delivery in higher education, in the UK and around the world. However, in response to the first national Covid-19 lockdown, in spring 2020, higher education providers moved rapidly to offer learning and teaching fully online. As social distancing guidance was progressively relaxed, many providers began to offer a mix of online and in-person learning - often referred to as blended learning. By November 2020, 93% of undergraduates and 89% of postgraduate students received all or mostly digital teaching and learning. [[1]](#footnote-1) This change in teaching delivery has prompted debate in the sector about the extent of digital learning and the quality of provision delivered through blended learning. In response, the Office for Students (OfS) has commissioned a review into how providers can ensure their blended learning approaches are compliant with OfS regulations. This meeting will discuss the finding of the Review and wider topic of the future of blended learning in UK HE.

**2.2 Key reports prior to the OfS Blended Learning Review**

**2.2.1 OfS Gravity Assist report**

In 2020, the OfS published [*Gravity Assist*](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/gravity-assist-propelling-higher-education-towards-a-brighter-future/) – a report about the shift towards digital teaching and learning in higher education since the start of the coronavirus pandemic[[2]](#footnote-2). The review recommended the following:

* Redesign pedagogy, curriculum and assessment
* Ensure digital access
* Build digital skills
* Harness technology effectively
* Embed inclusion
* Plan strategically

**2.2.2 Jisc from technology enabled teaching to digitally enhanced learning**

A series of reports by Jisc have examined how learning and teaching changed throughout the coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, [*Learning and Teaching Reimagined: change and challenge for students, staff and leaders*](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-change-and-challenge)followedchanging student and staff needs, as well as emerging best practice in response to the pandemic.[[3]](#footnote-3) [*Learning and Teaching Reimagined: a new dawn for higher education?*](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-a-new-dawn-for-higher-education) published in 2020 focused on sector challenges to digital transformation and changing aspirations of students, lecturers and leaders. [[4]](#footnote-4)

[*Technology-enabled teaching and learning at scale*](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/technology-enabled-teaching-and-learning-at-scale-report)published in 2021 explores the future of blended learning approaches to teaching and learning.[[5]](#footnote-5) [*From technology enabled teaching to digitally enhanced learning: a new perspective for HE*](https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8824/1/emerge-education-from-technology-enabled-teaching-to-digitally-enhanced-learning-a-new-perspective-for-he-report.pdf)published in 2022 provides a snapshot of the current state of play.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Jisc’s digital experience insights survey 2022[[7]](#footnote-7) found that students see the value of blended learning:

* + 45% preferred a blended approach
  + 42% wanted mainly face-to-face
* 13% want mainly online learning

**2.2.3 Disabled Student Commission Annual Report**

To uncover the impact of Covid-19 on disabled students’ experience the DSC commissioned a survey to take place between May and June 2021 investigating transition, blended learning and wellbeing, as well as further qualitative research throughout 2021.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The report found that 80% of respondents experienced a negative impact on their mental health and close to half felt that their provider had been ineffective in considering disabled students’ needs when changing or adapting support offered during Covid-19. One example of this was around the use of automated captioning. The report found there was a lack of consistent application between modules, delays to checking transcripts and a perception from some HEPs that transcripts were seen as notes. However, disabled students also reported benefitting from the greater flexibility offered to them by learning and being assessed online.

**2.2.4 Student Academic Experience Survey**

The 2022 SAES survey found that the quality of online teaching and learning in the pandemic affected student satisfaction[[9]](#footnote-9). For 13% of students, between 91% and 100% of lectures were taught online. For 38% of students, 50% or more of their lectures were delivered online.

In-person teaching moved from being two times to three times as popular than online delivery according to the 2021 Unite Students Applicant Survey. Research from the UUP Student Future Commission also showed that 90% of students prefer in-person teaching where content is also recorded.

**2.3 OfS Review of Blended Learning**

The review of blended learning is intended to support English higher education providers’ (HEP) understanding of how different approaches to blended learning may relate to OfS’ regulatory requirements for quality[[10]](#footnote-10) . A panel of academic experts carried out fieldwork at six English HEPs in June 2022 identifying examples of good and poor practice. The review panel made 23 recommendations. This includes:

* Students must have clear information about the expected blended learning approach before they apply and have registered.
* Unedited lectures from previous years should be carefully reviewed before they are used again.
* The blended learning approach should be informed by sound pedagogic principles.
* Approaches to learning and teaching should allow academics to identify where students are struggling with online content or falling behind.
* To engage with students to identify and address barriers to attendance and engagement.
* To work with students and students’ unions to create tools (including surveys, focus groups, reference groups) for students to evaluate their experience of blended study.

**Susan Lapworth, CEO of the OfS said:**

‘’We recognise the speed at which universities and colleges transformed the delivery of their courses at the start of the pandemic. Significant change and innovation were achieved by university staff in the most difficult circumstances. It is now important that universities and colleges reflect on what has worked well for students and what has not. Today’s report should inform that reflection and contains lessons for universities and colleges that wish to continue to adopt blended approaches.’’

# About the Higher Education Commission and Policy Connect

The **Higher Education Commission** is an independent body made up of leaders from the education sector, the business community and the major political parties. The Commission examines higher education policy, holds evidence-based inquiries, and produces written reports with recommendations for policymakers.

**Policy Connect** is a cross-party think tank with five main policy pillars; Education and Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability, Health; and Assistive and Accessible Technology.

We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat and delivers impactful policy research and events programmes. Our collaboration with parliamentarians through these groups allows us to inform public policy in Westminster and Whitehall. We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular membership subscriptions and time limited sponsorships.

We are proud to be a Disability Confident (Level 2, going for Level 3), London Living Wage employer and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

# Speakers

**Lord Norton** is a co-Chair of the Higher Education Commission and a Conservative member of the House of Lords. Professor of Government in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Hull, Lord Norton has been described as the UK's greatest living expert on Parliament and a world authority on constitutional issues.

**Jean Arnold** is the Director of Quality at the Office for Students with responsibility for the regulation of quality and standards, degree awarding powers and issues relating to consumer protection. She has worked in higher education for over 20 years in a variety of policy and regulatory roles in HEFCE, OFFA and the OfS.

**Professor Susan Orr** is the lead for OfS’ review of blended learning and is Pro Vice Chancellor Education at De Montfort University. She is a former TEF subject panel Chair for Art and Design, researcher in Creative Pedagogy and formerly led a university digital learning team through the pivot online and is a subject specialist in creative education.

**David White** is President of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) and the Head of Digital Learning at the University of the Arts London. He has worked at the intersection of teaching, research and digital for over 20 years. David is best known for the Digital Visitors and Residents idea which provides a framework to explore motivations for online engagement. He is a keen advocate for Open Educational Practices and a well-known thinker in digital and open online education.

**Professor Kathryn Mitchell** is co-Chair of the Higher Education Commission. Kathryn joined the University of Derby as Vice Chancellor in 2015. Before she came to Derby, she was Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of West London, with special responsibility for academic provision and quality. She was also previously Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic and Student Support Services and Dean of Students.

**Lord Willetts** is a Conservative member of the House of Lords. He wasa Member of Parliament for Havant 1992-2005, Minister for Universities and Science between 2010-2014 and previously worked at HM Treasury, as well as well the No.10 Policy Unit.

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1. [\*Gravity assist: Propelling higher education towards a brighter future – Digital teaching and learning review (windows.net)](https://ofslivefs.blob.core.windows.net/files/Gravity%20assist/Gravity-assist-DTL-finalforweb.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Gravity assist: propelling higher education towards a brighter future - Office for Students](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/gravity-assist-propelling-higher-education-towards-a-brighter-future/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Learning and teaching reimagined | Jisc](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-change-and-challenge) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Learning and teaching reimagined: a new dawn for higher education? | Jisc](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-a-new-dawn-for-higher-education) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Technology-enabled teaching and learning at scale | Jisc](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/technology-enabled-teaching-and-learning-at-scale-report) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [A new perspective for HE (jisc.ac.uk)](https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8824/1/emerge-education-from-technology-enabled-teaching-to-digitally-enhanced-learning-a-new-perspective-for-he-report.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Student digital experience insights survey 2021/22: UK higher education (HE) survey findings - Jisc Repository](https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8850/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Disabled Students’ Commission Annual Report 2021-2022 | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/disabled-students-commission-annual-report-2021-2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [2022-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey.pdf (hepi.ac.uk)](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [Blended learning and OfS regulation (officeforstudents.org.uk)](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7ee31f42-b376-4d36-b45f-8398582b14ab/ofs-response-to-blended-learning-review.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)