ACTIVE BLENDED LEARNING AS A RESPONSE TO SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

The issue
The majority of scenarios for how teaching will be managed in the 2020/21 academic year anticipate some restrictions on movement and congregation because of the Covid-19 epidemic. This document assumes that there will be provision for face-to-face teaching, but this will be limited to small groups. Timetabling constraints and finite availability of teaching resources rule out the delivery of curricula through conventional teaching alone.   Blended learning offers a solution. This is a combination of face-to-face and online instruction where students interact with their teacher(s) and fellow students, as well as the relevant learning materials.

Learning is characterised by students having both cognitive and social presence in the learning environment. Cognitive presence reflects the critical thinking, problem solving and construction of meaning in students' interactions with their peers and academic staff. Social presence is the extent to which students are 'connected'. This is critically important in the early stages of courses when students need to get to know and trust their peers and tutors. Students who are able to make interpersonal networks are more likely to engage and succeed. Current approaches tend to the classroom as the 'location' of presence, with the VLE in a supporting role to offer materials for independent learning. The blended approach has to ensure that cognitive and social presence is a feature of both online and face-to-face teaching.

The proposed approach
> *"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."*
>> *Chickering, Arthur W. and Ehrmann Stephen C. (1996), "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever," AAHE Bulletin, October, pp. 3-6*

Active blended learning brings together a number of concepts from learning theory and technology. It demonstrates how student learning is enhanced by capturing their time-on-task, as well as involving them in complex collective and individual problem solving. Technology can support this both in physical and online learning spaces. This, in turn, assists educators by demonstrating student progress through formative tasks.

Active blended learning is a process of deconstructing the curriculum to identify the aspects that are best delivered through face-to-face teaching and those that can be delivered online. It gives equal priority to signaling to the student that they learn both within the class and outside of it.

Principles for active blended learning
1. Recognise learning as a social, as well as intellectual activity.
2. Reinforce connections between students and staff.
3. Create a sense of belonging.
4. Maximise opportunities for engagement, participation and interaction in both physical and online learning spaces.
5. Recognise and support digital capability of both staff and students as a key component to the success of online/blended learning
6. Provide online learning materials that are accessible for all
7. Provide intellectually robust and challenging learning materials and activities that prepare for, motivate to and consolidate learning.

8. Explicitly scaffold learning activities to indicate expectation and support student management of their own learning
9. Provide a range of materials and methods for students to engage with.
10. Effectively use data and learning analytics to identify student engagement

The function of online learning and teaching

Blended learning retains some conventional uses of the VLE within an enhanced functionality. This includes:

- Curation of high quality, independent learning resources. These can include:
  - Conventional 'broadcast' materials such as Panopto videos
  - Documents including presentations and supplementary notes
  - Links to relevant readings and external sources of information
  - Suitable external learning resources

- 'Live' teaching that allows structured participation in real-time

- Provision of interactive activities. These can include:
  - Quizzes
  - Blogs/Wikis
  - Discussion forums
  - Discussion/chat with other students and tutors in real-time
  - Answering tutor's questions
  - Voting /polling
  - Shared documents
  - Submitting short 'low stakes' work for quick feedback
  - Journaling

- Sense-making activities that help students to understand and consolidate learning. This includes opportunities for reflection, debate and testing ideas

Key Factors

It is important that tutors remain highly visible in the online learning space.
- Synchronously through opportunities for real-time engagement
- Asynchonously through regular communication, discussion boards etc.

Students need clear direction to manage online learning. This should include:
- Explicit articulation of the relationship between online and physical engagement.
- Expectations of appropriate behaviour
- Details of anticipated time on task for activities
- A detailed structure of the anticipated learning process

The table below outlines some specific technologies in Canvas that support teaching practice.
(Further details on these and other Canvas functionality can be found on the Teaching & Learning Academy Technology Enhanced Learning webpages)

Purpose	Technology	Some elements of good practice
Live lecture Transmission of information from lecturer to students in real-time	MS Teams via Canvas LTI Canvas Conferences (Big Blue Button) Additional 'webinar' solutions are being explored	Live lectures can support a sense of joint endeavour and community. They are usually best limited in length Live lectures should be recorded to support later learning and revision Use chat function to facilitate interaction
Recorded lecture Transmission of information from lecturer to students available for viewing	Panopto	Micro-broadcasts, where the session is presented in separate, shorter sections.
Seminar Group activity characterised by high levels of interaction – can be student or tutor led	MS Teams via Canvas LTI Canvas Conferences (Big Blue Button) Additional webinar solutions are being explored	Encourage students to have cameras on to engender a sense of community. Promote screen sharing Request control of student PCs if necessary.
Workshop Structured range of opportunities for intensive discussion and activity associated with a subject or task	As above	The ability to access a wide range of documents and materials in MS Team
Problem based learning Active investigation of open-ended, real-world issues in small collaborative groups	Canvas Groups	These act like 'mini' canvas sites
Tutorial One-to-one engagement between a student and tutor	MS Teams.	See My Tutor will generate a Teams meeting request in the student Outlook calendar.
Orientation Familiarise students with the how learning is structured and expectations of their role	Canvas announcements Canvas Pages	Pages provide context for the learning materials associated with a session and facilitate clarity in instruction and expectations

Face-to-face teaching
It is anticipated that scheduled physical classes will constitute a fraction of the normal timetable. Therefore, these should be used as opportunities to reinforce social presence and experiences that generate a sense of belonging. They should:
- Eschew conventional didactic teaching
- Explicitly build upon and reinforce learning in the online environment
- Emphasise activities that promote student-to-student interaction
- Maximise reflection, debate and challenge.
- Provide opportunities for students to check understanding of online learning

RECOMMENDATIONS
Additional detail on the operation of many of these recommendations is available on the Teaching & Learning Academy Technology Enhanced Learning webpages.

Technology and support
Canvas has proven to be robust and secure. Despite a significant upsurge in usage, the system has coped very well, with few reported issues. It is a familiar space to staff and students. Therefore, where feasible, all online teaching will be managed through Canvas. Operating software outside Canvas has implications for the provision of support from within LJMU and Canvas 24/7. In addition, the Teaching & Learning Academy will only be able to offer training for software associated with Canvas. In line with this, the Academy has reviewed the various functions that sit within Canvas to assess suitability and usability.

1. A 'baseline' of active online learning for standard modules will be established to help all staff understand expectations.
2. Training will be provided for all teams/programme clusters, with an initial focus on programmes with large cohorts.
3. The institution will offer a small range of 'webinar' technologies via Canvas to support the widest variety of delivery methods and requirements. The Academy will assess these for usability and functionality.

Curriculum design
Curricula have been designed primarily for face-to-face teaching that is supplemented by online activity and may need review. A characteristic of such curricula is the online activity tends to focus on self-directed study with relatively minimal supervision. This is not suited to blended learning models that rely on significant levels of online delivery. This may prompt a need to review curriculum structure, anticipated delivery, some content and assessment

4. Necessary changes will be made to programme structure and delivery to facilitate online learning and engagement. It is important that these changes do not compromise programme standards, but the process of change will be simple and quick to support the development of online provision.
5. Programme teams should consider identifying one key semester one module per level per programme as a focus for Academy support to provide an online lynch pin that drives engagement. (This would also provide exemplars for use in other modules).
6. Programme teams should explore options for different volume/patterns of face-to-face delivery for different levels of study. This will facilitate flexible provision of support to reflect need.

7. Engagement activities should reflect the learning needs associated with level of study
8. Programme teams should consider reviewing delivery patterns to maximise opportunities for online learning and assessment. This may signal, for example, a shift from parallel delivery to series delivery or the adoption of a hybrid model.
9. All curricula should frontload instruction and support for online learning to facilitate student engagement in the process from the outset.

Teaching, learning and assessment activities
Blended learning will necessitate a shift in academic practice. Online learning opportunities will have to include more opportunities for interaction. In addition, programme teams need to maximise the value of face-to-face teaching to reinforce learning as opposed to presenting information. Sharing resources and using external materials will help to reduce the burden on academic staff, whilst maintaining a high standard of learning opportunity

10. All live online teaching should be recorded to accommodate students' needs during the period of disruption.)
11. The Teaching & Learning Academy will support the development of shared learning materials by working with both academic and professional services teams (eg 'Skills@LJMU, Student Engagement Team, Student Advancement)
12. The use of Canvas Commons will be promoted to facilitate resource sharing.
13. Programme teams should consider 'decoupling' face-to-face teaching sessions from module delivery. These sessions would then act as opportunities for cross-module students to discussion their learning across modules in the form of 'Peer Learning Groups' or seminars.
14. All online resources will meet accessibility standards.

Student support
Face-to-face teaching is characterised by both formal and informal guidance, instruction and support. The nature of online provision is that this will need to be formalised and structured to a greater degree than would traditionally be the case.

15. Students will be provided with clear instructions regarding how to engage in specific modules and individual teaching sessions.
16. Programme teams should consider the use of module templates to afford a degree of consistency across modules.
17. Module leaders should use Canvas Pages where possible to help students conceptualise and inter-relate the learning resources associated with specific sessions.
18. There will be an institutional induction course to prepare students for online learning. This can 'plug into' local induction provision.
19. The institution will explore the feasibility of providing cohort-specific canvas sites for all programmes.
20. Teams will be encouraged to adopt an online student peer mentoring scheme (or operate as part of existing schemes) to support level 3 and 4 students.
21. Academic staff should use Canvas Analytics to both identify struggling students and provide insight into what works in online delivery.

Student voice
The University has varied formal mechanisms for capturing the student voice. Some of these (e.g. surveys) are inherently online, other forms need adaptation to work in an online environment. In addition, much feedback is informal. This occurs through impromptu conversations after lectures, in meetings, coffee shops and corridors. These also need to be facilitated in the online environment

22. *The Teaching & Learning Academy will work with JMSU to support online activity that facilitates student representation.*
23. *Programme teams should offer opportunities outside the modular structure for students to engage with staff through, for example, group chat, regular polling or online meetings.*

Student socialisation

Understanding learning as both a social and cognitive process reinforces the need for interactive activities in the learning environment. These have the additional impact of supporting a students' sense of belonging, which has an important impact on retention. This is complemented by extra-curricular opportunities for students to interact.

24. The Teaching & Learning Academy will work with JMSU in the provision of online student societies to support students' belonging outwith their programme.
25. The Teaching & Learning Academy will liaise with JMSU, faculties and professional service areas (e.g. Student Advice and Wellbeing, Foundation for Citizenship, Strategic Initiatives) to identify and support opportunities for online extra-curricular activity.