THE CONSORTIUM
ACADEMY TRUST

Blended Learning
Policy and Practice

An Exempt Charity Limited by Guarantee
Company Number 07665828

Status:	Live
Policy Owner (position)	Director of Education
Statutory / Recommended	COVID Related
Date Adopted	21 October 2020
Review Date	Termly Review
JCNC Consultation	14 October 2020
Advisory Committee	Academy Improvement Team/ELG
Linked Documents and Policies	Trade Union Guidance Academy Teaching and Learning Policies

**NB – This document can only be considered valid when viewed on The Consortium Academy Trust website. If the copy is printed or downloaded and saved elsewhere the Policy date should be cross referenced to ensure the current document is referenced.*

1 Rationale

At The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT), we are firmly committed to the principle that a good learning experience delivers positive outcomes for children and young people, enabling them to progress in their education. We remain fully committed to the position that a well-trained, highly effective practitioner in every classroom is the best way to ensure that positive learner experience. We work with our range of partners to train the teachers of the future and invest fully in our Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) Programme, as part of our Better Together @ TCAT strategy for our own staff.

However, recent research and our own experience has demonstrated that there are situations where, to avoid lost teaching and therefore potentially damage the life chances of children and young people, the use of technology to deliver learning can be harnessed to good effect. This policy and associated training is intended to support our learning communities to develop effective innovative approaches to teaching.

Embracing Technology is one of our pillars of teaching and learning and is exemplified through the delivery of a blended learning environment.

This Policy and Practice aims to address the changing dynamics of learning in the current pandemic situation and:

- Outline expectations of delivery of on-line learning including addressing any misconceptions
- Be clear about systems and procedures around safeguarding staff and learners
- Identify support available for staff to enable them to build confidence in delivering online learning

The definition of blended learning is:

'Blended Learning is defined as a way of learning that combines traditional classroom lessons and activities with lessons that use computer technology and may be given over the internet.'

The range of evidence based studies available suggests that the quality of the learning activity is the critical determinant to successful learning, regardless of the medium of delivery. We must not be of the view that blended learning must be about the delivery of a continuous provision of live lessons; this is not always the most productive use of time or technology. However, while explanation can be delivered via pre-recorded video, assessing learners' understanding and adapting the teaching to meet the immediate requirements of learners cannot and for this reason The Consortium Academy Trust has revisited the earlier barriers, working to remove them to allow as the most effective 'live' and reactive teaching as possible.

Across our academies, we have provided a highly sophisticated information technology solution and platform (Microsoft Teams) to enable our staff and learners to collaborate and continue their learning and teaching remotely, should they be away from the physical environment of the school building (either learners or staff). In some academies, there may be a continued focus on use of legacy systems, such as Google, to deliver blended learning.

We recognise that a significant majority of our teaching professionals did not train to deliver on line learning and we have therefore developed a Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) programme, both at Trust level and within individual academies, to introduce and develop skills and confidence amongst our team of professionals.

Our blended learning approach may be initiated by an individual academy, or Trust wide, dependent on the circumstances within the locality. Examples of where this approach may be beneficial include:

Pandemic Full/Local Lockdown/Health Protection – recent times have demonstrated that the protection of wider community health can be prioritised above continuing education for our young people. At this time we must be in a position to ensure that exceptional quality of education continues for our learners.

Workload – recorded lessons or webinar style delivery can be used for revision and will reduce workload for staff when coordinated across the Trust.

Best Practice – some of our identified trainers may record sessions to be shared, with their permission, with other colleagues to develop skills and knowledge

2 Delivery of a blended learning model

A successful blended learning approach builds on the best pedagogy. It is delivered through well planned knowledge delivery and a range of engaging focussed learning activities to develop learning and apply that learning with opportunities to consolidate and review. It may incorporate other web-based programmes to provide stimulating activities and, where these are used, the best programmes are responsive to learners and will pre-mark work to reduce teacher workload.

A blended learning environment does not insist on live delivery of learning but a balanced combination of physical delivery, live streaming and pre-recorded webinar style sessions to engage and introduce learners to the session. These sessions should be complimented by 'off line' resources to promote independence and application of knowledge and skills.

We recognise that a carefully blended delivery of online and offline activities will reduce screen time and improve engagement.

3 Strategic Considerations

The following information is to inform opportunities for collaboration to deliver a successful programme of blended learning:

- when learners are isolating or there is a partial closure of an academy
- in the event of a full school closure
- where a teacher is self-isolating but is not ill

3.1 Infrastructure at Trust level investment

Ensure that all recordings are enabled and saved into 'one drive' or 'google drive' (for legacy schools) – the purpose of the lesson recording is to enable learner independence to review the content later, for learners to keep up not catch up if they were unable to attend and also for safeguarding purposes. The lesson remains in the ownership of the teacher to share **ONLY** with lesson participants. If it is not downloaded within 19 days of the lesson on TEAMS it will be automatically deleted. Unless the teacher deletes the video from their 'one drive' it will be retained indefinitely. The teacher must make a local decision about the value of retaining this resource. We would advise practitioners to retain recordings only as long as they believe they are useful to learners and certainly not beyond the end of the academic year it was recorded.

3.2 Intended Audience (ref 3.8.4)– it is the responsibility of the Academy Headteacher to manage the expectation of parents/carers of blended learning delivery. This includes

timings, content, extent and being explicit about intended audience. This will be done through the most appropriate whole school communications and will remain a key feature of the academy communication strategy with parents.

3.3 Access to reliable device and internet (staff) – for staff delivering in school, this will not be an issue as devices are refreshed and fit for purpose and there is always specialist support available through the icthelpdesk@consortiumtrust.co.uk However, where delivery is required from an individual teachers home, we will endeavour to provide a device for home use and a temporary link to the internet where the member of staff feels this is not available to them. Staff are encouraged to have a conversation with their Senior Leader for Teaching and Learning locally as soon as possible if they feel this may present them with undue concern.

3.4 Access to reliable device and internet for learners – our evidence shows us that our learners predominantly have access to a device and the internet but this may be a shared device. We have worked with the DFE Laptop Programme to provide a minority of students with access to a device. However, our lesson recordings will support those with shared devices to continue to access learning. We continue to survey our families to ensure that we have a good understanding of barriers to learning.

3.5 Individual Learners isolating – it is the expectation that teachers will provide resources from the lesson (preferably prior to) for the individual learner to keep up with their learning. Teachers should not deliver live to individual learners if the rest of the learners are in attendance. However, the academy will make provision for the learner to have a contact to provide additional learning support.

**this is not the case for Consortium A Level travelling students or home based A Level students where every effort should be made to engage them in live learning alongside the rest of their class.*

3.6 The teacher is self-isolating but not ill – as with all COVID-19 related incidences this should be reported and recorded in the appropriate way. In these circumstances staff are asked to deliver learning from home, with use of other tools to deliver effective blended learning. The class will be supervised in school by an appropriately trained teacher, cover supervisor or Higher Level Teaching Assistant for the duration of the lesson.

3.7 Prior to the lesson

3.7.1 Review the curriculum to identify the core concepts and ideas which are best delivered in the physical classroom environment. This should be done in subject specialist teams with colleagues working together within and across academies***.***

3.7.2 Ensure that the teacher is confident with the technology to be used. It is always a good idea to develop their own skills slowly. Though the technology is advancing all the time, ensure they stay within their comfort zone until they develop their skills further and advance. This way they will be better able to manage successfully their own virtual classroom.

3.7.3 Identify elements of the curriculum which are best delivered through the virtual environment. These are usually linked to further development of key learning points and consolidation or application of learning.

3.7.4 Plan for learning activities and virtual collaboration. It is not expected or desired that a teacher will deliver content for the full lesson, just as it would not be in the physical

world. It is important that thinking time, activity time and opportunities for learners to collaborate are built into the virtual lesson plan.

3.7.5 Plan for technological failure. Although we have a high quality technical infrastructure and support, the systems must be embedded with learners and staff and supported by home technology to be able to consistently deliver in the virtual world. This cannot always be guaranteed. As lessons will be a full blended approach plans should include resourced activities that can be used in the event of technological failure.

3.7.6 Additional support for learners in the virtual lesson– where there would usually be support in the lesson for learners with additional need, teachers are encouraged to invite the child's TA to their lesson for support. Messages of support and encouragement can be sent to the child personally through the TEAMS/Google Chat feed and the TA may then be able to support with 'break out work'. It is not anticipated that the child will have support during the lesson at home.

3.8 During the lesson

3.8.1 Remember this is a classroom in the virtual world. Behaviour management and scene setting within a lesson is essential, regardless of the medium used for delivery. All staff are encouraged to ensure that learners have a clear understanding of the 'virtual classroom' rules and the teacher's expectations to support the learning for all. Academy Behaviour Policy should be followed in the virtual classroom. At times, because of the link to social media platforms, it may be that learners feel they can be more informal in a virtual classroom, this should not be accepted.

3.8.2 Be alert to safeguarding as a primary role. Ensure the safeguarding information is shared with learners at the start of each session as they join. Reporting systems embedded within the school must continue to be used.

3.8.3 Pedagogy considerations. As with all lesson planning and delivery, good pedagogy sits at the heart of successful teaching. Delivering a varied and appropriate lesson matched to learner needs is essential to foster engagement. However, there are no experts, we don't know what best practice looks like in blended learning so we will focus on the skills our staff already have to deliver effectively.

3.8.4 Intended audience (ref 3.2**)–** as is clear in our Virtual Lesson Welcome Page (Appendix 2) which should be shared and committed to at the start of each virtual lesson, the lesson delivery is *'private'* between the teacher and their class. If the teacher is aware of parent/carer or other unintended audience members attending the lesson, they should professionally end the session and provide alternative independent work for learners to complete to avoid further loss of learning. The teacher MUST then report their concerns to their departmental Senior Link Teacher (SLT) who will contact the parent/carer and discuss our expectations with them personally. The SLT Link will feedback to the teacher before any further virtual learning for that class is delivered. Where parent/carer does not meet the expectations, they will be invited to 'attend' a meeting with the Headteacher to discuss continued learning. At no time will we disadvantage a learner's education as a result of the behaviour of their parent/carer.

3.9 Post lesson

3.9.1 Time for reflection and review. As with all professional practice this will provide opportunity for improvement and a focus on the critical aspects that defined the positive experience for staff and learners.

Further advice and guidance on a practical level for those facilitating blended learning can be found at Appendix 1 or through the TCAT Blended Learning Team. FAQs can also be found at the end of the policy which summarise key practices for staff.

4 Policy Monitoring and Review

It is essential to monitor the impact of this policy on the following aspects of its application:

- Staff workload and well being
- Engagement with learners
- Reliability of Trust provided technology
- CPDL engagement with staff
- Impact on outcomes (in their broadest sense)
- Survey Outcomes – staff, learners and parents conducted termly

The Director of Education will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy. It will be informally reviewed through staff feedback in the early implementation and subsequently formally reviewed termly.

We will not, as an established good practice, continue with this approach for full classes/cohorts other than during the current (September 2020) pandemic in line with the rationale statement of this policy.

The quality of live or recorded lessons will not form the basis of the monitoring, evaluation and review programme for any academy within the Trust and will not be admissible as evidence in a performance review meetings or pay decisions. There are no experts to deem what is or isn't good practice for on line learning delivery therefore it would be ethically wrong for us to make this judgement.

For longer term digital innovation this policy will receive a full review, including lessons learned, consultation with staff and Trade Union and Professional Association representatives to determine a reflective long term policy and strategy for digital innovation across the Trust.

Appendix 1: Operational Teacher Guidance for successful delivery of blended learning.

This is advice and guidance which has been obtained from colleagues, both within and outside the Trust, to support high quality blended learning delivery. It is not intended to be a checklist but to offer support in your professional development and confidence to deliver.

If you have other top tips that you would like to share to benefit colleagues across the Trust then please contribute to the TCAT Blended Learning Team.

There is further practical advice and research available on the TCAT Blended Learning Team for all colleagues to access.

Teaching and Learning Top Tips

- try to practise your lesson delivery with a peer support, even once is a help to build confidence
- plan exciting and engaging lessons to deliver in the virtual environment
- provide gaps in the lesson for independent activities and bring learners back together for review sessions, in these gaps cameras and microphones should be turned off and support offered through the chat
- share a verbal plan of the lesson at the start with learners to provide a scaffold
- narrate your actions and progress through the lesson (metacognition)
- use learner names to direct questions
- 'warm call' learners through the chat or informing them as you set the task
- provide thinking time for learners to complete activities and respond to challenges
- maintain a good pace to the lesson as you would in the physical world
- where possible provide pre lesson information/tasks to support learners to prepare for the lesson
- have a blended approach so that resources are available to learners if the technology fails or learners cannot access the lesson

Do

- make your classroom rules explicit
- we want our lessons to be positive and collaborative learning experiences using learner microphones and cameras may achieve this, but learning can be equally successful if these are turned off for all participants.
- if you choose to leave cameras on insist that learners use one of the 'background features' for equality.
- schedule your lesson at least 24 hours before delivery to ensure learners attend
- schedule your lesson in your usual timetabled slot to avoid clashes and support learners to develop their independence for engaging in all aspects of their learning
- add your home school initials to the name of the team (for example HHS Maths 12C or CPS Year 4 RH) for ease of management of the team
- follow safeguarding and behaviour management policies
- use the features of the technology to support lesson delivery – ability to enter the lesson via the lobby, mute all, attendance download, removing access to ppt control
- use the Trust Primary/Secondary 'Virtual Lesson Welcome Page' at the start of every online lesson
- record all lessons for later use by learners for review and consolidation and as part of our safeguarding protocols
- ask for help from colleagues if you feel you want it

- speak to your Line Manager/SLT Link or Headteacher about ‘work arounds’ if you are experiencing issues with competing priorities for example, in full lockdown you may have childcare commitments, which may mean you are unable to meet the provision around continuing education for learners. You can also seek support through your Trade Union Representative.

Don’t

- plan to deliver live lessons for the full lesson allocation every lesson, this is not necessary and is unsustainable from a workload perspective.
- accept anti-social or over familiar behaviour or language over the internet
- have parents/carers/other siblings attend as part of your lesson
- save your lesson onto a local device, always save into one-drive (google drive) to protect your and learner data privacy
- ignore safeguarding concerns in the wider background of a virtual lesson
- over challenge yourself, either with elements of technology or activity, go slow and use what you are confident with
- use an email address to invite learners other than their school email account
- schedule a lesson for an individual learner without express permission from the Headteacher
- meet outside of the lesson in the virtual world with any learner on an individual basis
- worry!

Appendix 2: Virtual Lesson Welcome Page - Primary

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Welcome: Your teacher will be with you shortly. Please read this page. By continuing with the lesson you agree to follow this guidance.



Please mute or switch off devices you are not using for the lesson.



Speak clearly and avoid talking over others.



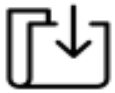
Use the hand up function or raise your hand if you wish to ask a question or talk.



Mute your microphone to avoid background noise which may distract others.



Find a quiet space on your own where you can concentrate.



The lesson will be recorded to make sure everyone is safe and so it is available to those who could not attend afterwards.



This lesson is private and must not be shared with anyone outside it.



Show respect to fellow learners and the teacher at all times.



If you have been sent anything by your teacher before the lesson, make sure you have read it thoroughly first and that you have it with you.



Be mindful of your background. Use the blur function to make it less personal.

Icons courtesy of https://thenounproject.com/

Appendix 3: Virtual Lesson Welcome Page - Secondary

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Welcome: Your teacher will be with you shortly. Please read. By continuing with the lesson you agree to abide by this guidance



Please mute or switch off unnecessary devices



The lesson will be recorded to safeguard all participants and be available to those who could not attend afterwards



Speak clearly and avoid talking over others. Be polite at **all** times



The content of this lesson is private and must not be shared with anyone outside it.



Use the hand up function or raise your hand if you wish to ask a question or talk



Show respect to fellow learners and the teacher at all times



Mute your microphone to avoid background noise which may distract others



If you have been sent material in advance, ensure you have read it thoroughly first and that it is accessible



Find a quiet space **on your own** where you can concentrate and be confident in your engagement



Be mindful of your background. Use the blur function to make it less personal

Icons courtesy of https://thenounproject.com/

Appendix 4: Frequently Asked Questions – Summary of Key Policy and Practice

Q) I have some learners in my class that are absent and some who are present. What should I do?

A) *Please upload your lesson resources and set homework on Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom for the missing learners. This will allow the learners who are absent to keep up to date with your subject and facilitate a positive return to your class. Please teach the remaining learners in school as normal.*

Q) My entire class is absent. What should I do?

A) *Please teach a 'live lesson' to your class via Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom*.

Q) How do I do this?

A) *The suggested way of doing this is by sharing your screen with the students. This allows you to give verbal explanations over your PowerPoint or other resources and model techniques using your visualiser, where available in the classroom. You should be able to teach the live lesson sitting at your computer*.

Q) Do I have to appear on camera?

A) *No. However, you may find this easier to gauge engagement of your class in the learning you are delivering. If delivering from home during teacher absence or full lockdown we would ask you to use a filter background and insist learners do the same to avoid any issues with social disadvantage.*

Q) Will I be able to see or hear the leaners?

A) *No if your classroom rule is that they turn the camera/microphone off however, if you do this you must make use of other strategies to gauge engagement and receive feedback from learners to ensure that your teaching is having a positive impact on learning. If you are using microphones in the 'live' lesson then we recommend you use the mute all feature and only invite students to speak when appropriate within your lesson.*

Q) If I can't hear my class how will they ask me a question?

A) *Learners can communicate with you through the chat function, you should monitor this throughout to provide timely interventions and receive feedback on learning*.

Q) What if learners use inappropriate language or make an inappropriate comment in the chat?

A) *Learners will log in via their school email, so all chat comments have their name next to them. Any inappropriate language will be dealt with through the Behaviour Policy and you should report it in the usual way*

Q) Should I aim for my lesson to be live for the full length of the slot?

A) *No, this is not required. As is usual in a lesson, there may be times of teacher input and then independent work. You may wish learners to 'post' their work to you at the end of the session so you can review it but we are working with young people and parents to ensure our expectations of independent learning are clear.*

Q) What about learners who don't have the technology to access these lessons from home?

A) *We are providing the technology to learners who need it so all can access these lessons, as far as we are able*. *The class recording may be really important for some as our research shows us that shared devices in a household are common so learners may not be able to engage in your live lesson but will be able to keep up with their learning.*

Q) How do I give feedback to work submitted via Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom?

A) *As per the regular marking and feedback policy*

Q) What should I do if a learner is regularly not completing work set at home?

A) *If this is just in your subject then it is worth speaking to your Subject Leader in the first instance. Where there is a pattern across subjects then pastoral teams will also become involved to try and get them back on track.*

Q) Will recording be used for quality assurance?

A) *Absolutely not. Recordings are only there to allow learners to revisit the lesson if they could not attend at that time or wish to revise*

Q) Should I be concerned that a parent/carer might 'sit in' my lesson?

A) *For younger children this might be necessary and helpful. However, if you feel a uncomfortable or you have other concerns, please let a member of the senior team know to support you. It is unlikely to be positive for learner engagement in the secondary phase. If you feel that parents are attending your lesson then please politely close the lesson down by setting a learning task for participants and seek advice from a member of SLT.*

Q) Should I respond to learners' questions and queries outside lesson times?

A) No, there is no expectation that teachers will be available at all times for learners. *As learners become more familiar with online learning they may ask more questions outside the lesson time on chat functions. While staff are free to respond whenever they wish, there is no expectation this will happen outside normal timetabled lessons or school hours. This will be explained in the letter issued by Headteachers to parents/carers to manage expectation.*

Q) What if in any future lockdown or self-isolation periods I have childcare or other personal issues that prevent me from doing what I want to deliver to my classes?

A) We all have personal lives and at this difficult time it can sometimes feel like we are being pulled in competing directions, don't worry there is always a work around. Speak to your Line Manager/SLT Link or Headteacher if you are experiencing issues with competing priorities. You can also seek support through your Trade Union Representative.

Q) Have issues around workload been considered?

A) As we have throughout lockdown, we remain committed to being reasonable and sensitive to concerns about workload. In developing this guidance, we have considered staff workload and well-being and have worked with union

representatives. However, this is new for all of us so we will be reviewing these procedures regularly and part of that review will be an opportunity for staff to give feedback. We will do this by:

- *Informal Feedback*
- *Staff, Learner and Parent Survey*
- *Quantitative Data*
- *Help Desk Call Levels*

This feedback will be shared with Trace Unions and the Trust Board, and we commit to act on feedback to ensure workload is reasonable and manageable.