Top Tips for Flexible and Online Teaching

In July 2020, we asked over 50 Student Reps to reflect on their experiences of moving to online study due to the global pandemic.

These Top Tips have been informed by the feedback from Student Reps and aim to support teaching in a flexible and online environment.

Authentic participation

Use a variety of **tools and methods** in your teaching and ensure students feel safe and fully supported to fully contribute their perspective. *''Use Menti for surveys or instant polls for students to participate in real-time''*.

Expectations vs. experience

Some students will be enjoying learning in a blended approach and will have an appropriate environment to work in, others may find themselves facing multiple barriers to blended learning. *''Don't make assumptions about the tools and facilities an individual student may have access to''*

Active learning

Set tasks where students can have **meaningful interaction** with course content and each other to create shared experiences (e.g. structured group work). *''Ask students do something aside from just listening throughout the session - draw a mind map, watch a video, or quickly go around the house to observe something, or any other appropriate activity''*.

Keep connected

Keep in touch regularly to support students to feel **connected to their learning.** Maintain teaching presence in your Blackboard module and set student expectations for email replies by communicating boundaries for your own time. *''Keep contact or ask a Course Rep to feedback on any problems regularly raised. Drop- in sessions can also be beneficial for students to address concerns''*

Academic community

Create dedicated online spaces to **support cohort cohesion and foster cohort identity** e.g. peer support groups in Blackboard or Teams, Blackboard discussion forums, open webinar room in Blackboard Collaborate. *''Encourage everyone to support each other and no one must be made to feel alienated under any circumstance''*

Student voice and partnership

Students will be able to identify what works well in a blended environment and what could change. **Include students in an ongoing dialogue** about the design and delivery of teaching and learning. Remember to **close the feedback loop**. *''Ask students questions about how they are finding everything or maybe involve them in preparing materials''*

Engaging webinars and online content

Keep **screencasts** and **webinars** conversational and succinct. Aim to use a variety of ways to promote engagement. Ask questions at specific times in webinars or build in time to review the chat messages, but try not to leave the silence for too long as students can find this disengaging and uncomfortable *''Be enthusiastic, speak loudly to make sure everyone can hear clearly''*

Clear communication

It can be hard to hit a balance between too many or too few emails and you cannot always please all students. To ensure **communications are effective and engaging,** the key is to be clear, concise and any actions to be plainly stated. *''Clear guidance from the tutors and staff can make this a good experience''*

Accessible materials

Ensure learning materials are available in advance and **accessible** and that the layout of materials in **Blackboard is simple and intuitive**. *''Give interesting articles to read, interactive quizzes and publishing extra exercises on BB for the whole lecture class''*

Be honest

In a time of uncertainty, it is important to be open and honest. If there is no straight answer or if the situation is likely to change, being honest helps overcome student frustration. *''Just keep us updated about the changes in the module on BB and email''*

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