

Redefining contact time: a guide

Defining learning engagement time

This document is for guidance only and is to support planning and to help communicate with students. There is no requirement to update module specifications to redefine contact time for 2020/21.

Courses have traditionally defined face-to-face teaching and learning methods as 'contact hours' and all other forms of learning as 'non-contact hours'. In flexible, blended learning the division may not be as clear. This way of learning provides a broader set of tools, removing barriers and shifting the definition to focus on the student journey.

In this context, course teams should instead think in terms of **learning engagement time** to describe the range of learning and teaching approaches that students experience on a flexible, blended learning module.

Learning engagement time comprises two broad learning methods:

- Directed learning, and;
- Guided independent learning

Learning engagement time accounts for the total number of hours of expected learning in a week.

Example of learning engagement time:

A 20-credit module is made up of a total of 200 learning hours. If the module is delivered over 15 weeks the total amount of learning engagement time each week is 13.3 hours.

The weekly learning engagement time is planned to include both directed learning and guided independent learning and is clearly structured to provide a logical and coherent learning experience for students. In many cases this may be fairly simple to achieve, and example 1 below demonstrates this.

Examples of learning engagement time

Directed learning is broadly those facilitated activities (both synchronous and asynchronous) that a student is expected to undertake each week. Guided independent learning is activity undertaken by the student on their own with the tutor providing some basic guidance. Module reading lists are an example of this.

The table below provides examples of learning and teaching activities that make up learning engagement time, both directed and guided independent learning.

Directed learning	Face-to-face teaching sessions such as workshops, studios, laboratories, SCALE-UP, action learning sets, group tutorials
	Synchronous online activities such as Teams discussions, webinars, live Teams briefing, simulations, demonstrations, facilitated workbooks, guest sessions, collaborative seminars, virtual visits.

	Asynchronous online activities such as discussion forums, problem-solving/enquiry-based activity, peer review, multiple-choice questions, portfolio, tutor generated video material.
Guided independent learning	Guided reading Preparation for assessment (formative and summative) Watching externally generated video material, i.e. TedEd material LinkedIn learning Designing a video/ blog/ wiki

Example 1: A week of learning engagement time based on current contact time

This example provides a fairly simple option for converting existing contact and non-contact time into learning engagement. It is based on a 20-credit module with 45 contact hours and 155 non-contact hours over 15 weeks. The module is traditionally delivered with a one-hour lecture and two-hour seminar each week.

In this example, the lecture content is broken into short pre-recorded videos of ten minutes in length, with guided independent learning time in between each video. The seminars are delivered on a hybrid model with a maximum number of students on-campus and remainder attending remotely, rotated each week so that all students get some on-campus time.

Module title			
Week 1: week title			
Activity title	Learning engagement type	Synchronous or asynchronous	Time estimate (minutes)
Pre-reading	Guided independent	Asynchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Read a case study and add notes to a group space	Guided independent	Asynchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Research a topic	Guided independent	Asynchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Small group discussion on research topics	Guided independent	Synchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Reading	Guided independent	Asynchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Research a topic	Guided independent	Asynchronous	60
Pre-recorded video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
Flipped task	Directed	Asynchronous	60

Seminar (on-campus/remote on rotation)	Directed	Synchronous	120
Formative assessment task	Guided independent	Asynchronous	180
Total learning engagement time: 780 minutes (13 hours)			

Example 2: A week of learning engagement time in chronological order

This example demonstrates best practice for flexible learning, with directed and guided independent learning time clearly scheduled on a ratio of approximately one third directed learning to two thirds guided independent learning.

Module title			
Week 1: week title			
Activity title	Learning engagement type	Synchronous or asynchronous	Time estimate (minutes)
Voiceover PPT video	Directed	Asynchronous	6
Reading	Guided independent	Asynchronous	30
Voiceover PPT video	Directed	Asynchronous	10
MCQ quiz	Directed	Asynchronous	15
Online live group discussion in Teams	Directed	Synchronous	30
Problem solving flipped activity	Directed	Asynchronous	90
SCALE-UP session (on-campus)	Directed	Synchronous	50
Group tutorial (on-campus)	Directed	Synchronous	50
Study skills support (on-campus)	Guided independent	Synchronous	50
Pre-recorded podcast	Directed	Asynchronous	30
Research a case study	Guided independent	Asynchronous	90
Small group collaboration to design a video	Guided independent	Asynchronous	120
Group presentation of videos with peer feedback	Directed	Synchronous	60
Voiceover PPT video	Directed	Asynchronous	6
Individual tutorial	Directed	Synchronous	30
Reflective blog post (formative assessment)	Guided independent	Asynchronous	120

Total learning engagement time: 787 minutes (13 hours)

Further guidance

The [flexible learning website](#) provides useful further guidance for course and module teams, including:

1. Introduction to flexible learning
2. How to develop a flexible module
3. Creating student personas and a module map.

In addition, teams are advised to consult the Principles for healthy online learning guide on this website.