

RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING

This guide is an introduction to the Responsive Blended Learning approach adopted by Heriot-Watt University in response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This approach will frame the delivery of learning and teaching throughout academic year 2021-22.

It combines active, supported online learning with contextually appropriate on campus learning opportunities, enabling us to respond dynamically to the changing external context.

OVERVIEW



As we approach academic year 2021-22, we continue to face high levels of uncertainty across our global learning community. Students and staff across Heriot-Watt University have already demonstrated considerable creativity, determination and compassion as they have dealt with the rapid move to working and studying remotely. Such skills and collegiality

will remain to the fore over the next academic year as we continue to respond to the challenges that stem from the Covid-pandemic. Many of the changes we are making now will also stand us in good stead for the future as we continue to develop our individual and institutional capabilities in globally-connected blended learning.

WHAT IS RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING?

Responsive Blended Learning (RBL) combines active, supported online learning with contextually appropriate face-to-face learning opportunities, responding dynamically to the changing external context. This approach enables students to proceed with their studies alongside their peers whatever pandemic-related restrictions are lifted or imposed in specific contexts.

The RBL approach will allow students to begin the academic year on schedule, wherever they may be in the world. As conditions change, it is anticipated that many students will be able to access on-campus learning whilst other may begin their studies wholly online. Wherever students access their learning, they will remain part of the same core cohort of learners, sharing and developing their learning together.

At the heart of this approach is our Heriot-Watt global learning community, our students and our staff collaborating together to inspire learning.

RBL: OUR PRINCIPLES

- ✔ **Prioritise the wellbeing of staff and students.**
- ✔ **Support students to thrive as part of global learning communities.**
- ✔ **Value our staff and their skills, knowledge and passion for their subject that underpins the HWU learning experience.**
- ✔ **Build on our strengths as a global, multi-sited university.**
- ✔ **Blend online and on-campus learning in a way that is pedagogically appropriate and practically deliverable.**
- ✔ **Ensure identical academic standards across learning contexts.**
- ✔ **Maintain our commitment to *Inspiring Learning*.**

RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING IN PRACTICE



WHAT WE NEED TO RESPOND TO



RESPONSIVENESS IS NEEDED IN THREE KEY AREAS

A. Responsive to changing learning environments

Physical distancing requirements, lockdowns, and the re-opening of campuses and partner organisations are likely to vary across location and across the academic year. Heriot-Watt's Responsive Blended Learning approach enables students to continue to learn alongside their peers, engage with inspiring learning opportunities, and be guided and supported by their academic course team.

The university's virtual learning environment (VLE) is the hub for student learning, the space where students can access course resources and engage with their global learning community, both in real-time and asynchronously. This will be blended with enhanced learning activities in face-to-face environments, as and when local campus and individual student contexts allow.

Assessments will be adapted to ensure they can be completed, where appropriate, at a distance and submitted online.

B. Responsive to student learning contexts

Across the globe, students in high school, college and university have experienced significant disruption to their learning through AY 2020-21, including the cancellation of examinations, a rapid move to studying online, and the loss of informal learning spaces and opportunities for peer-support.

Responding to this, Heriot-Watt will approach the start of AY2021-22 with a commitment to academic support and care for students. Academic induction for new and continuing students will be extended and courses will adapt, as appropriate, to support students whose pre-course study may have been disrupted. This may include tailored academic support for the cohort or the re-pacing of learning through the course.

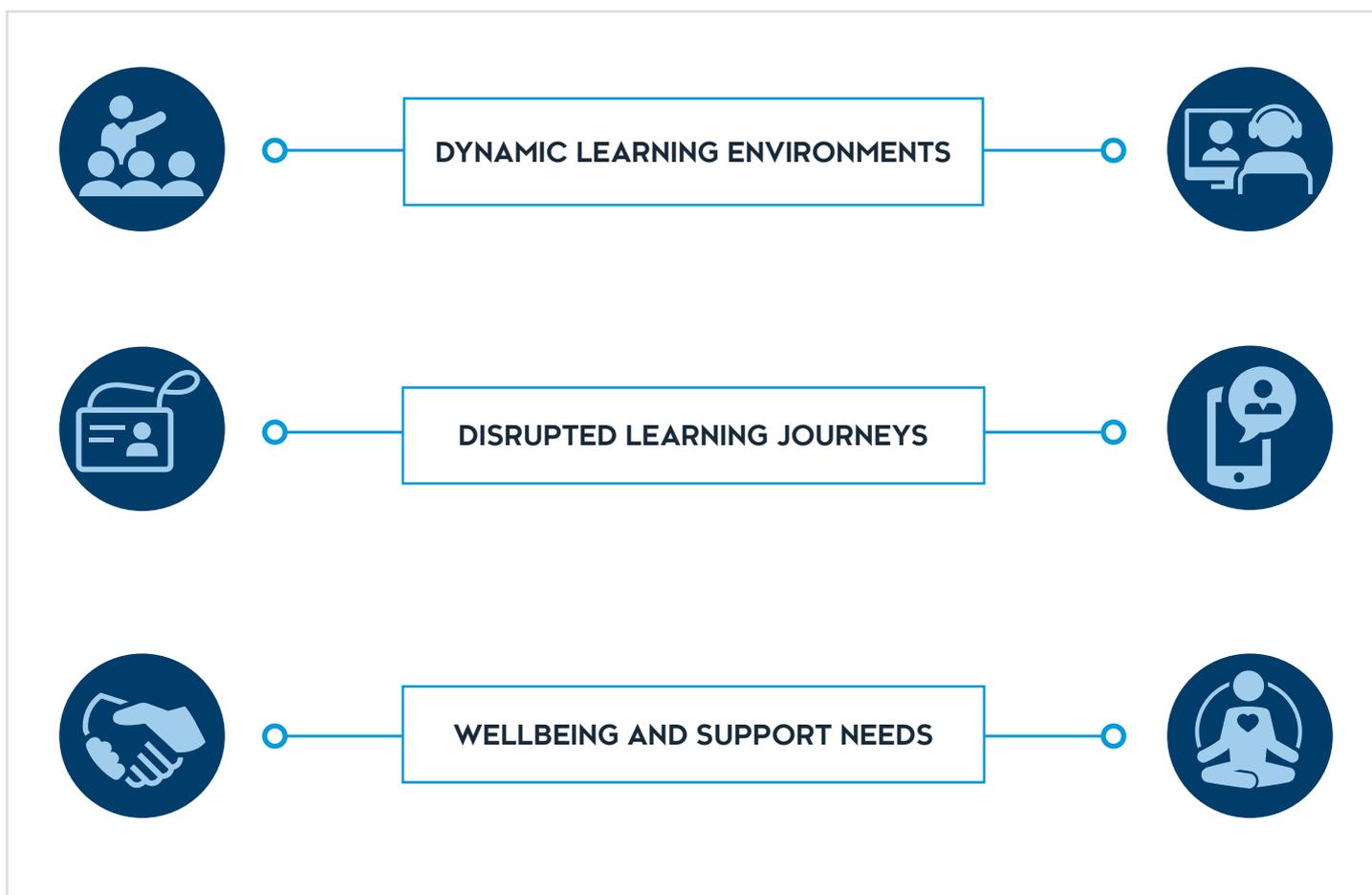
C. Responsive to the wellbeing needs of our global learning community

Students and staff have experienced unprecedented disruption to their work-life-learning balance. Our Responsive Blended Learning approach recognises the need to put care and empathy for all at the heart of our activities through AY21-22.

This begins with supporting students and staff across our community to continue to build their confidence in blended learning and teaching, offering training and development to prepare for the academic year and ensuring course teams are able to work effectively to support each other and their students.

It extends throughout our academic course delivery, to how we interact and communicate with students, design learning opportunities, and assess achievements. Particular emphasis will be placed on building community through our virtual and face-to-face interactions.

OUR APPROACH IS RESPONSIVE TO:



RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Successful delivery of Responsive Blended Learning requires a focus on community: a strong and dynamic course community that supports and inspires students to learn. This is at the heart of all decisions that we make as we approach the new academic year.

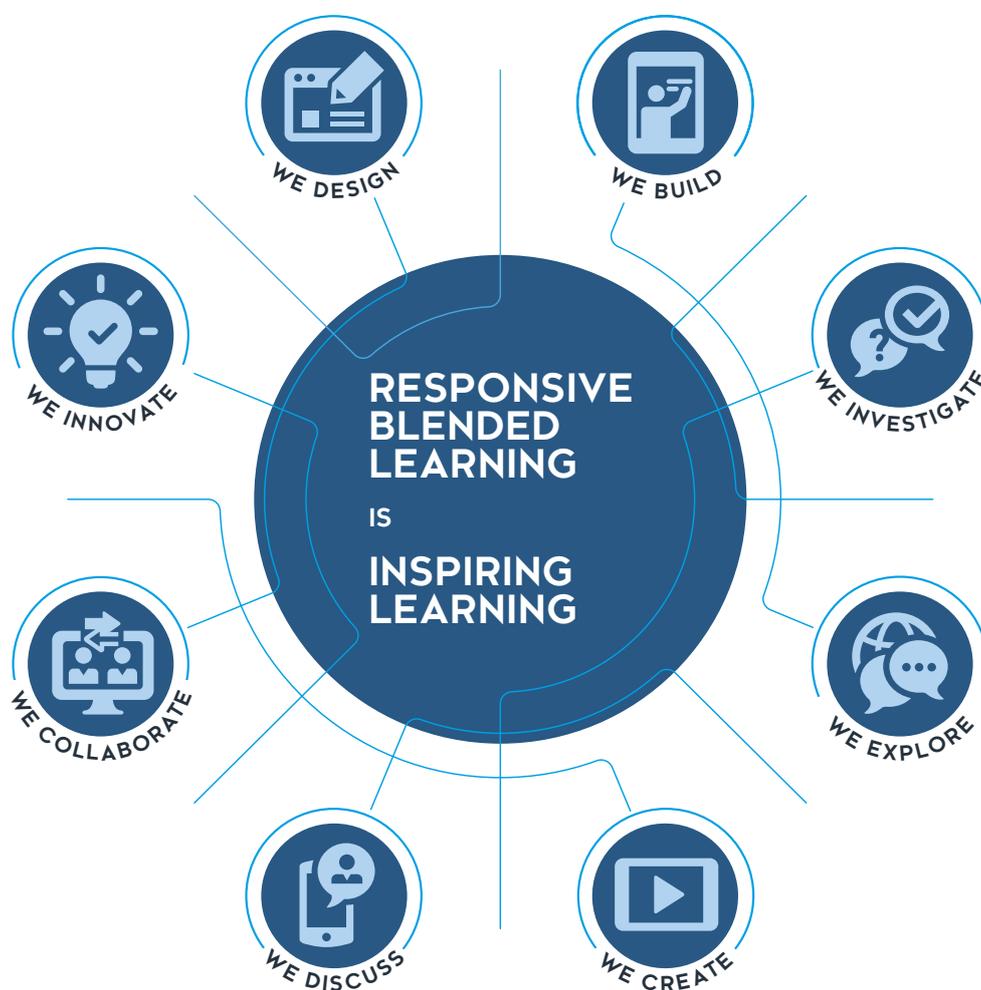
Our RBL approach will ensure students can actively participate in their learning community in a range of ways. For example, through online webinars, tutorials, discussion forums, collaborating on projects, sharing insights from practical activities. When campus spaces become accessible, appropriate use will be made of these, ensuring on-campus learning is active, engaging and supportive.

Building collaboration, learning communities, and friendships with others in their classes will be key to inspiring student learning - both on campus and online.

To achieve this, Heriot-Watt's virtual learning environment will be the key hub for learning, a space for interaction and engagement that

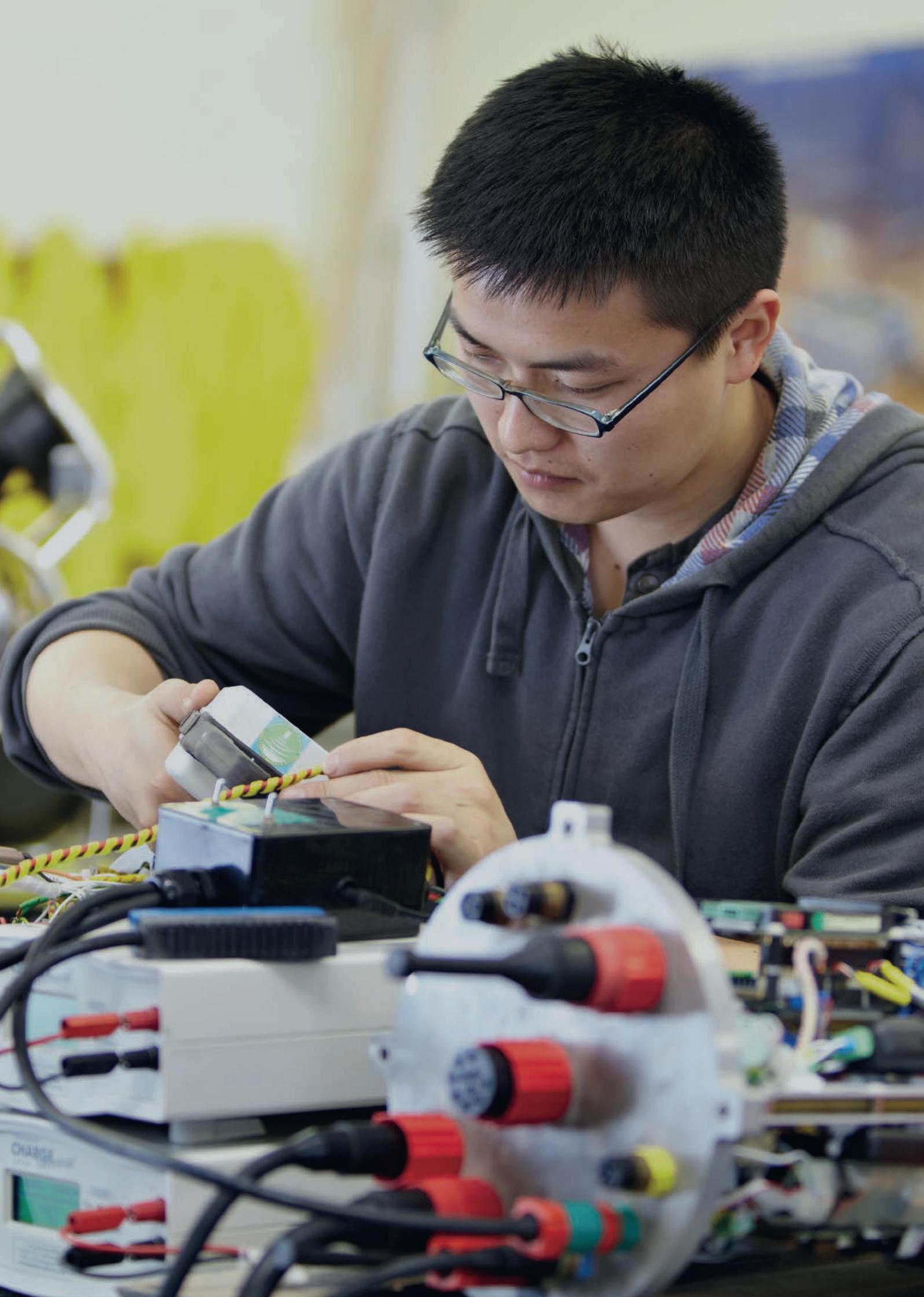
combines live sessions with opportunities for students to engage flexibly at times that suit them. Students will be able to access course resources, participate in group discussion and webinars, and work collaboratively to shape their own learning and share insights with peers. In doing so, students will be able to develop their passion for their subject and build their sense of belonging to our Heriot-Watt learning community.

Moving to Responsive Blended Learning marked a significant change in approach for students and for staff across the university. Over the last year, the Heriot-Watt community has transformed its approach to learning and teaching, creating a unique model of globally-connected blended learning. Drawing on the diverse skills, experience and enthusiasms of our university community we are confident we can respond creatively and positively to whatever the next academic year may bring.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Responsive Blended Learning** will be our approach across this academic year to enable students to proceed with their studies as part of their own cohort, whatever restrictions are lifted or imposed in specific contexts.
- **Responsive Blended Learning has opened opportunities to strengthen global course teams.** This offers exciting opportunities to share staff expertise to support course development and delivery.
- **Responsive Blended Learning is a pragmatic approach to an extraordinary situation.** Delivering this requires ingenuity, creativity and considerable care if for all across our community.
- **Positive changes introduced now will be developed and sustained** as we move to post-pandemic working and continue our efforts to enhance our digital education capabilities.
- **Responsive Blended Learning requires a focus on community,** a strong and dynamic course community that supports and inspires students to learn.





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