



Example of Practice 1: Advancing Active and Blended Learning at SRUC

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Context to the implementation of active and blended learning

In 2020, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) launched its Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy for 2020-25. This strategy, collaboratively developed by staff and students before the COVID-19 pandemic, outlines our vision for learning, teaching and assessment. A core principle of this vision is a commitment to active and blended learning.

Active and blended learning, however, can mean different things to different people. Recognising the fluid and subjective nature of this concept, it was important to clearly define what it meant for SRUC. Further, given SRUC's context - being a small, specialist, tertiary education institution, dispersed across Scotland, offering a range of campus-based, distance and apprenticeship programmes spanning from school level to PhDs - any definition needed to be flexible enough to accommodate various teaching levels, modes and subjects.

Towards a definition of active and blended learning

To develop a coherent definition, we researched various models and engaged in discussions with staff to better understand their interpretation. From this, we agreed to adopt Sharma's 2010 definition of blended learning as a base from which to build. This definition itself builds on Driscoll's 2002 framework and emphasises the importance of context later highlighted by Cronje in 2020.

For SRUC, active and blended learning encompasses four key elements.

1. **A blend of teaching locations:** This includes a mix of physical and virtual spaces. On-campus, field/work-based practical learning activities are mixed with small group, interactive classroom sessions and online learning activities. It is intended that the proportion of online learning increases with the learner's level of independence, in line with SCQF levels. Using City University London's adaptation of Alammary et al's 2014 framework, the blend of locations can be low, medium or high impact, or a mixture of all three.

Table 1: Adaptation of Alammery et al 2014

Blend Type	Explanation	Example
Low impact (complement)	Online components complement on-campus / field/work-based teaching	Students might watch resources online and complete a formative quiz as a way of consolidating in-class learning.
Medium impact (replace)	Online components replace elements of on-campus / field/work-based teaching	Students might complete a lesson (self-study or live) online instead of face-to-face
High impact (integrate)	Online components integrate with on-campus / field/work-based teaching	Students might watch resources online to discuss in face-to-face class, leading to implementation through a practical activity, with an online quiz then checking extent of learning

2. **A blend of teaching approaches:** This involves employing a variety of active learning strategies, minimising (but not eradicating - they are still of use) the use of passive acquisition methods. Active learning is prioritised to engage students more deeply in the learning process.
3. **A blend of teaching technologies:** Developing a digitally-enhanced approach. This means using a range of technologies in field/work-based, classroom-based, and online learning environments. This mix aims to support the development of digital intelligence and includes both 'hard' technologies (for example, drones) and 'soft' technologies (for example, virtual software, Moodle tools).
4. **A blend of teaching locations, technologies, and active learning approaches:** This requires intentional selection of a blend of locations and technologies to best support the chosen teaching approaches to ensure that learning outcomes are met.

Supporting an institutional approach

To embed this approach within SRUC, programme teams receive support in three main ways: the SEEDABLE Curriculum Review (a curriculum transformation project), programme design activities (such as validations and revalidations) and staff development. The rest of this case study focuses on programme design activities.

SRUC has created a bespoke programme and learning design process that brings in and builds upon elements of Atkinson's [8-Stage Learning Design model](#), Salmon's [Carpe Diem process](#), UCL's [ABC Learning Design approach](#), and Ulster's [Viewpoints work](#).

Evolution of the use of the ABC Learning Design Model

We first adopted the ABC Learning Design approach at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, to help teams in transitioning from face-to-face to online learning. It is now fully embedded in our learning design process and has supported the design and redesign of both modules and programmes across all tertiary levels, including apprenticeship and distance learning as well as traditional blended learning.

Example outputs from ABC Learning Design Sessions

Figure 1: HND Module Design

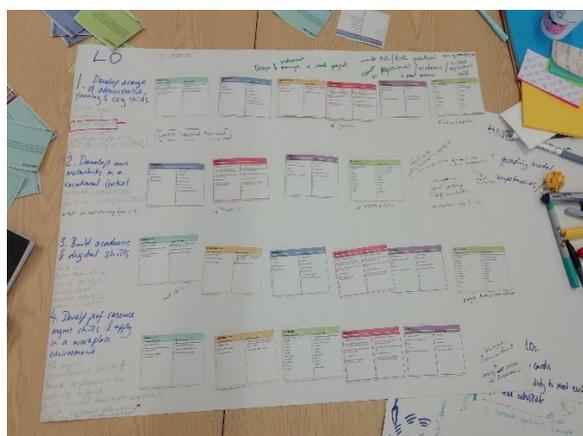


Figure 2: Apprenticeship Programme Design

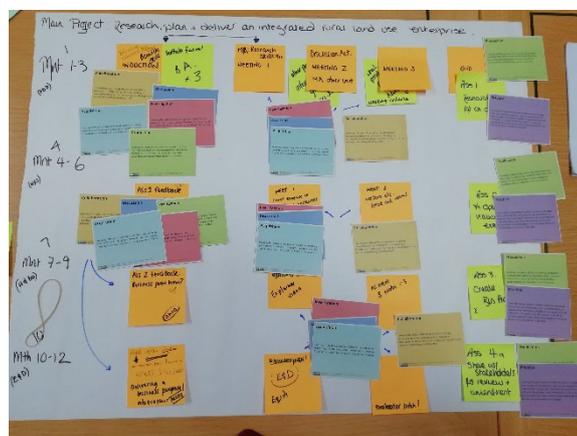


Figure 3: HE Module Design



Our experience has shown that using the ABC model to design by learning outcome is the most effective approach to achieve constructive alignment and the intentional blend of locations, technologies and teaching approaches as outlined earlier. While the ABC model can be used by individual staff, we have found that it is most beneficial as a tool for collaborative module development, facilitating debate and evaluation.

We have found that it is important to contextualise the ABC approach within SRUC's own definition of active and blended learning. In so doing, we align the approach to our SEEDABLE Curriculum Review criteria and connect it to Kolb's experiential learning model and Laurillard's wider conversational framework (Kolb, 1984; Laurillard, 2012). Given that most of our programmes are practical, blending vocational and academic elements, Kolb's model is particularly useful. Laurillard's conversational framework is in some way an evolution of Kolb and illustrates how learning is not just a series of activities but involves 'conversations' between learner and tutor, learner and peers, concept and practice, and learner and environment. The latter is particularly important for SRUC in light of the diverse

learning environments in which our programmes are situated. Both Kolb's model and Laurillard's framework recognise the key role of reflection in active learning.

Despite the recognition of the benefits of active learning, we observed that, when using the ABC approach, module designers often overemphasised acquisition learning. Further, despite the recognition of the importance of reflection to active learning, we found that designers often omitted this element. To address these issues and inspired by the evolution of Laurillard's model and the ABC approach, such as the Open University's inclusion of creation and reflection (Williams, personal correspondence, 29/06/23), and UWE's addition of reflection and peer teaching (Hammond, 2020), we tested new approaches. We are now using a version that replaces acquisition with reflection, integrating acquisition methods instead into the investigation category, requiring the guiding of learners in their reading, watching and listening tasks.

Having introduced this approach in 2023/24, we have only trialled it with a few programmes. However, observation indicates that the issues found with regard to overreliance on acquisition and omission of reflection are now being addressed at the design stage. We look forward to evaluating their effectiveness in practice.

Conclusion

SRUC's journey in developing an institutional approach to active and blended learning has highlighted the value of the ABC Learning Design model and Laurillard's underlying framework to implementing the definition we have adopted at the design stage of module and programme development. These tools are adaptable to various contexts and needs, supporting our commitment to flexible, engaging and effective learning experiences. As we continue to embed active and blended learning at SRUC, we are open to further evolution, and look forward to exploring the impact of the current revised approach on practice.

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