Blended learning

## Making it work: from policy to practice

Recommendations for governments and higher education

Implementing a blended learning project necessitates an understanding of local contexts, existing infrastructure and educational needs across institutions to ensure its substantiality. Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components, offers numerous benefits such as flexibility, scalability, and increased access to educational resources.

University partners of the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning in West Africa (PEBL WA) project (supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT]), are already demonstrating the long-lasting impact of the project. It has been widely recognised that blended learning offers distinct benefits to students and academic staff since the approach increases flexibility in accessing course materials, which can enrich the learning process. Additionally, it can foster a more inclusive educational environment, making it easier for institutions to offer an increased number of courses to more students.

Some countries in Africa are experiencing growing populations, with student numbers increasing to exceed admissions while the number of academic teaching staff falls behind. In this context, it behoves government to reimagine education systems and approaches in Africa in order not to miss the window of opportunity presented by blended learning.
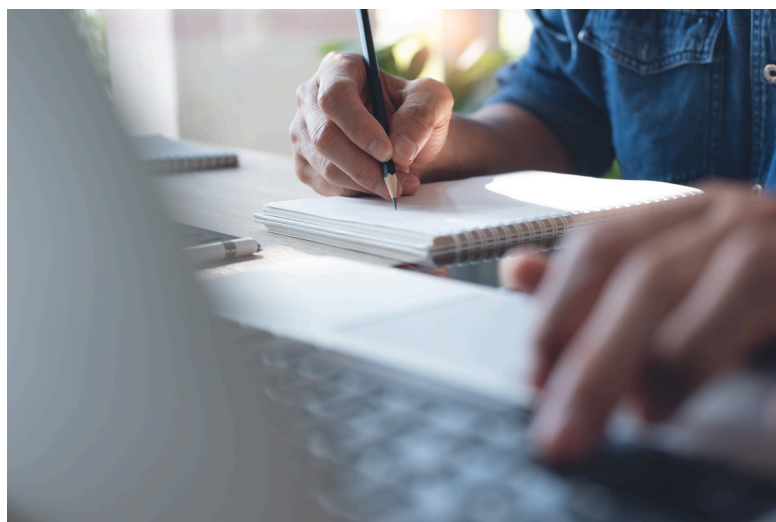
Promote partnerships and collaboration among different stakeholders

Governments can create policies that encourage partnerships between the higher education sector and industry service providers, particularly technology and internet providers. Incentives can be used, such as tax breaks and grants to facilitate the uptake of such partnerships. Institutions have different levels of resources. Identification of the needs of institutions will ensure the sustainability of blended learning, with tailored approaches used to bridge the resource and digital divide with the support of all stakeholders.

Continue to develop and implement comprehensive national policies and guidelines for blended learning

Institutions have been developing their individual blended learning policies. These outline the principles, strategies and guidelines for integrating online and face-to-face learning in a structured and effective way aligning with an institution's goals. However, there is a clear need for policy harmonisation and regulatory alignment which ensures consistency and standardisation on such issues such as accreditation, certification, quality assurance and data privacy. Government authorities can share expertise in curriculum development and assessment methods through training programmes tailored to the needs of individual institutions.

Embed learner support mechanisms within the blended learning programme accreditation process

Institutions can be mandated to develop comprehensive learner support plans as part of their blended learning design and implementation. The plans should provide strategies for providing proactive support to blended learners throughout their educational journey. The plans should also cover how to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all categories of learners, including those with learning differences and those with limited or no access to technology. Governments can also establish accountability mechanisms. These would ensure that accredited institutions fulfil their obligations to provide proactive and effective leaner support which may include reporting requirement or site visits. By embedding learner support mechanisms within the accreditation process for blended learning programmes, governments can promote the delivery of high-quality inclusive education that meets the diverse need of leaners.

Collaborate with regulatory authorities in other countries to share experiences and lessons

There are ways that government can enhance institutions' capacity to promote inclusive blended learning practices through collaborative approaches. This might mean organising policy dialogues involving all relevant stakeholders to facilitate the sharing of best practices and frameworks between institutions, or blended learning capacity-building initiatives. It could also include cross-border mobility programmes or study visits for participants to experience different blended learning environments and approaches.