

xello

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Making the Switch to Blended Learning: Your Guide to Preparing Secondary School Students for Future Success





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Introduction

Introduction

Since March 2020, school and college leaders, careers professionals, and educators have faced an unprecedented challenge. Since the spread of the novel coronavirus, leading to worldwide school closures, educators have been forced to adapt quickly and turn towards remote learning as a means of maintaining continuity.

The quick succession of government decisions left many schools unclear and panicked; how would all students' needs be met virtually? More specifically, it begged the question of **how schools could prepare students with future ready skills, such as critical-thinking, creativity, and emotional awareness, as well as continuing to assist them with career exploration and guidance, in a remote setting.**

It hasn't been easy for students either. Students have been feeling an odd mix of uncertainty and monotony. Unfortunately, this period of ambiguity means that educators need to be proactive when adjusting to the needs and mentalities of their students.



Introduction

This is exactly why, now more than ever, it's essential for students to feel excited and motivated to continue their education. At a time when society feels powerless and paralysed, and people are trying to gain a sense of control over their lives, educators can provide a semblance of normalcy by helping students to look ahead. By focusing on their future, as well as future readiness skills, **students can divert their attention from the chaotic outside world to an organised, personalised plan that empowers them to be prepared for their anticipated next steps, whether that be college, university or an apprenticeship.**

This guide will offer suggestions to help educators build a robust online learning experience for students. This will prepare them for implementing blended learning approaches in the forthcoming academic year, should that be necessary.

You'll also learn how two schools have tackled these issues with case studies that showcase how using an online future-readiness tool can help educators and students feel at ease while navigating this new normal.



Making the Switch to Blended Learning: What Educators Should Know

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Schools and colleges across the UK are acknowledging the continuation of social distancing measures into the new academic year and a level of uncertainty surrounding regional or even national lockdown. For educators, that means embracing a profession that is drastically different than the one they signed up to. **Teaching is a relationship-centred profession. For much of the summer term, educators spent hours a day talking to their screens instead of interacting with students.** Even for schools that relied heavily on technology, educators struggled to support students and reestablish virtual learning norms.

Instead of focusing on the ambiguity as we move into the new academic year, it is time for educators to lean into comprehensive edtech solutions as a way to create extensions of their typical and habitual practices. Since effective distance learning can be difficult to accomplish, schools that are new to online instruction, as a way to augment in-person teaching, can learn from the experiences of schools that have already embraced remote or blended learning as part of their everyday operations.

CASCAID has gathered a few handy tips and tricks to bear in mind while putting together remote or blended learning plans.

1. Keep it Simple:

There's a reason that the common advice of "keep it simple" never goes out of style. Simple works, and ahead of the autumn term, educators need to reestablish the school norm without reinventing the wheel.

Instead of trying out a variety of new platforms, figure out the best tool for your school, college or multi-academy trust and then educate others on how to use it before looking into additional ones.

Educators can also use this time to back up and review materials that have been previously taught.



Making the Switch to Blended Learning: What Educators Should Know

2. Establish a Consistent Schedule:

Schools and classrooms run on schedules, and students, although they may not care to admit it, crave structure and predictability. In fact, consistent routines are not only comforting to students and families, but can also support positive social behaviours and prevent negative ones from arising.

By making and sticking to a routine, students will regain some feeling of control—a feeling that many people are searching for. It's crucial to try to set standards for what a socially-distanced classroom will look, sound, and feel like, and to determine how much teaching could be accomplished via bubbles versus how much could be individual study leveraging technology used in the summer term.

Remember: it is never too late to revisit expectations, since in pre-pandemic times, educators would often reevaluate which procedures to practice and revise.

In the case of remote learning, the virtual classroom should be no different to the physical classroom; every student should feel heard, respected, and support within the digital space, as much as they would in the physical space.

Creating routines and boundaries will help solidify these sought-after feelings and enhance academic learning as well as supporting mental health and wellbeing.



3. Communicate with Parents:

It's essential for schools to proactively communicate with parents. However, the hard part is finding that “sweet spot” of sharing information in a capacity that makes families feel supported and not overwhelmed.

It is recommended that communications be sent through one contact so parents aren't receiving multiple emails regarding various schedules and structural changes. Contacting parents and students directly through phone or text message, rather than just relying on email, can be beneficial if parents and students have indicated they are happy to be communicated



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with in this way. Sharing learning schedules with parents so that they can manage their own careers, which may still involve remote working, alongside supporting their children with school work is important.

4. Master Tech Tools to Help Make Virtual or Blended Learning Easier:

There are a variety of tools that can be used to deliver curriculum online. The following are some top websites and apps that can help educators deliver remote learning plans and connect with their students:



[Zoom](#): Provides educators with a platform to hold classes virtually & interact with students using its video and audio functionality.

[Google Forms](#): Survey administration app that is included in the Google Drive Office Suite.

[Xello](#): Future readiness program that helps build self-knowledge, personalised plans, and critical life skills.

[Microsoft TEAMS](#): A chat-based workspace in Office 365.

5. Track Student Engagement:

Even though exams have been put on hold, educators should still use data to guide their practices. However, **the numbers aren't necessarily about performance or marks, but rather interactions, logins, and participation.**

Tools such as Google Classroom, Google Forms, and Xello are helpful in tracking student engagement metrics with the click of a button. Reviewing this type of data can help educators solve problems across subject matter as



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well as assist them in noting repetitive absences which can facilitate a check in with individual students.

Some key questions to ask in order to gauge student engagement should be:

- Are students logging in?
- Are students responding to messaging or emails?
- Are students submitting assignments?

6. Make an Effort to Connect with Students:

Educators need to push their old academic expectations aside and meet students where they are. That includes devoting time to focus on relationships, establishing strategies for maintaining relationships virtually, and allowing students downtime to interact with missed friends.

Educators can offer class meeting times, small group instruction, one-on-one check ins, or virtual office hours to help students feel supported and regain a sense of normalcy.

Another way to respect students' emotional needs is to pivot from correction to praise. In normal circumstances, the desired positive to corrective ratio is 5:1. The '[magic 5:1 ratio](#)' theory is that for every correction, five positive comments, statements, or compliments are given. **Educators could consider only identifying student successes in virtual meetings in order to model positive interactions.**

Additionally, this will prompt other learners to behaviourally and academically follow suit. Intentionally recognising the positive will in turn build a more productive, motivational, and supportive online community for all students.





Why Focus on Future Planning During Uncertain Times?

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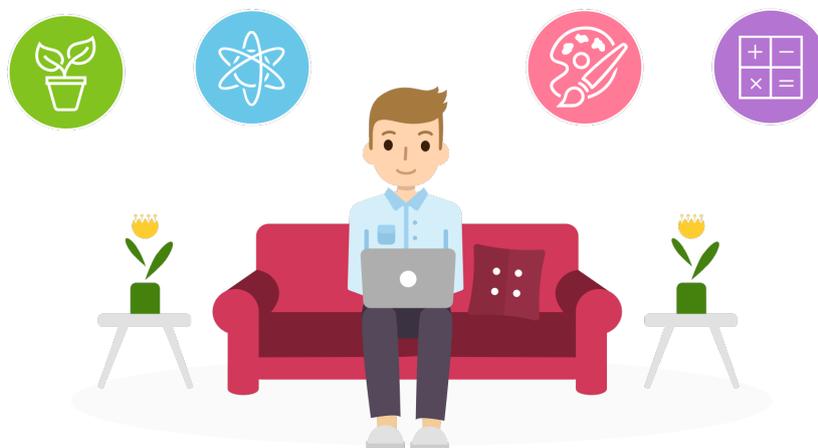
Once educators set up a remote or blended curriculum and communicate expectations with families, they are then faced with another tough decision: What should they prioritise when it comes to remote instruction? While STEM and language arts are critical subjects, **schools and colleges should also consider the value of future readiness skills.**

School plays a crucial role in developing a person's sense of self, which is why when many adults become nostalgic, they don't focus on what equations they studied in school, but the life lessons learned throughout their academic experience. It's also why many parents like to encourage their children to strive for the higher set group classes; **it's not the material that is necessarily important, but the work ethic and 21st century skills practiced along the way.**

These examples, in the same sense, are teaching future readiness: they are helping students become equipped with the knowledge, skills, and insights to make informed decisions and build actionable plans for their future.

Now, more than ever, students need to be thinking about the road ahead and how they're going to get there. In metaphorical terms, that future road may not look the same as it has in previous years—or even be there after social distancing ends—but that doesn't mean students can't prepare themselves.

Focusing on future planning helps every student take control of who they'll be and what they'll become, giving them the confidence to take that next step towards their successful future.





How to Engage Students Remotely with Future Planning

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We've established that it's important for educators to stress that, while things may be unsettling now, students can still take definitive steps to plan for their future. But can this be done as effectively remotely as it can in the classroom? The short answer is: yes.

Students are not limited to exploring careers and future pathways within the confines of their classroom or the normal school year. Below are some tips to help engage students remotely and assist them with future readiness.

Create a Digital Curriculum

The first step towards engaging students remotely with future planning is to create a digital curriculum. Educational experts recommend that instead of researching what online programs can be added to students' remote learning experience, schools and colleges should first focus on curriculum.

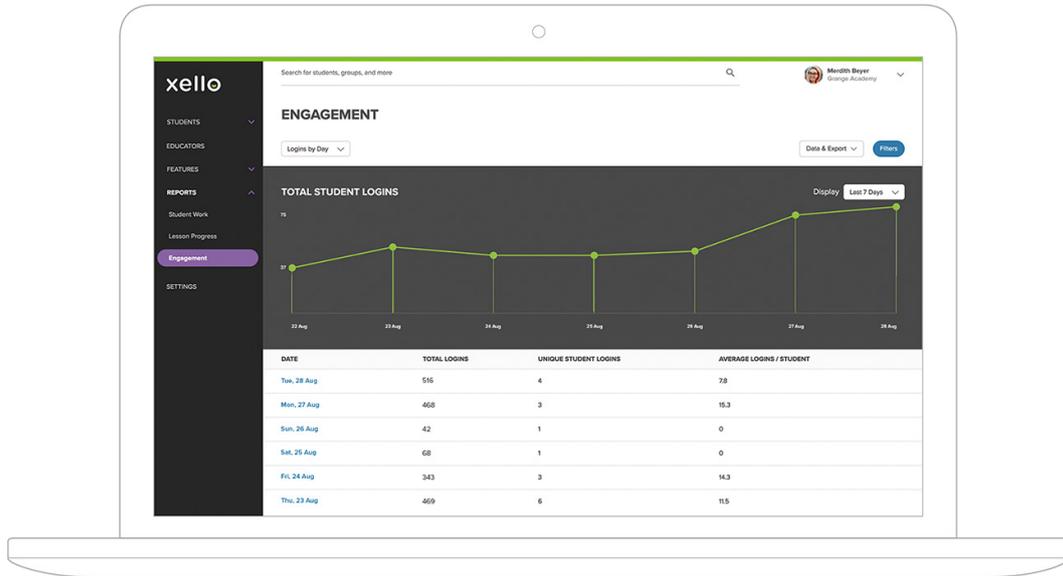
There are a lot of engaging educational programs available, but schools should consider how this work directly aligns to Ofsted requirements and the Gatsby Benchmarks. **By first focusing on a goal, such as teaching future ready skills, schools or colleges can then supplement lessons with engaging, easy-to-access online platforms that complement learning needs and achieve statutory obligations.**

These comprehensive programs that provide rigour as well as the ability to engage students and track that engagement are vital to remote learning plans and can be extremely helpful in a blended learning scenario.

Xello is an example of this. As a comprehensive secondary school program for students aged 11 - 18, Xello provides [thoughtful, age-appropriate lessons](#) and the ability to [create assignments](#) that build critical thinking skills and prepare students for post-secondary success in academics, careers and life. **The interactive educator dashboard gives educators full access to assign these lessons and activities to different groups of students, taking the guess-work out for learners and parents alike.**

Student needs are vastly different, and Xello provides the flexibility for educators to differentiate their lessons according to individualised education plans or simply year-group level requirements.

How to Engage Students Remotely with Future Planning



Xello Educator Dashboard

After creating a digital curriculum, it is imperative that the information be communicated with families. Walking parents through log-in procedures, online learning expectations, and student data safety are all important aspects to cover when addressing needs and concerns. When doing so, educators should check to see if their chosen online platform already has a written guide, overview, or letter to share, [just like this](#).

Choose Future Readiness Platforms that are Accessible on Multiple Devices

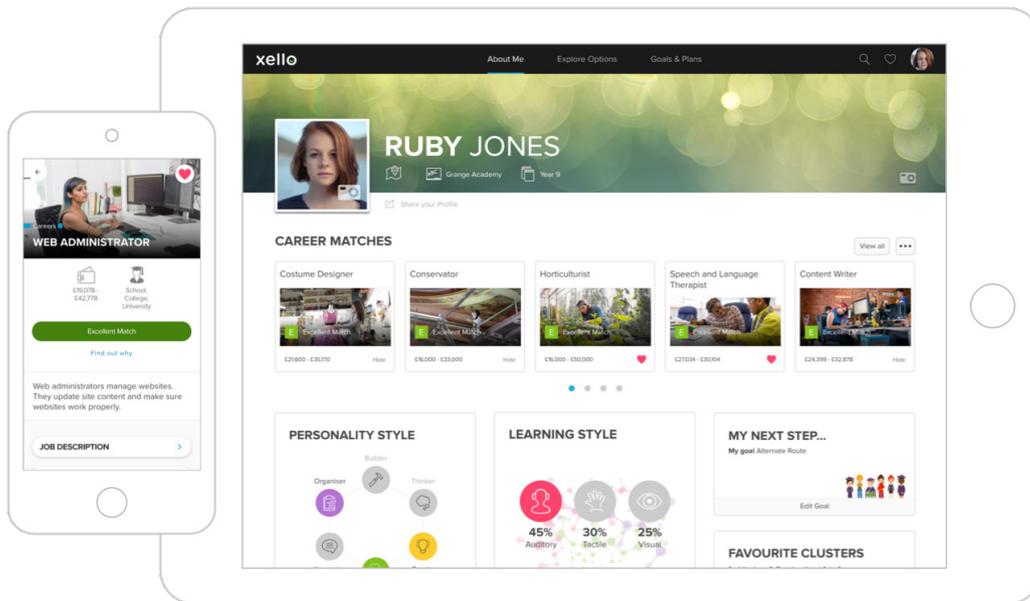
Many families are juggling multiple schedules, not to mention multiple devices, and working with a limited amount of time and space. For a lot of students, it's not that they're refusing to do their assignments, but simply can't, due to reasons outside of their control.

Parents may be using the family laptop to continue their own work from home, and kids may therefore be left to use a tablet or smartphone to access online curriculum.

Therefore, **schools and colleges should consider adopting programs that are compatible across various online interfaces**. Doing so provides flexibility for students to extend their learning beyond the classroom and explore their future options anywhere and any time.

How to Engage Students Remotely with Future Planning

Xello is one such program that has designed a desktop, tablet, and [mobile browser experience](#). The program is ready and waiting for them whenever and wherever inspiration or curiosity strikes — making learning more timely, shareable and relevant.



Xello Career Profile and Student About Me Page - on Mobile and Tablet

Track Students' Progress and Engagement From Home

Many educators rely on formative assessments throughout the course of the term to gauge student comprehension. This feedback helps teachers modify instruction and craft future lessons based on students' performance. **When students are working from home, it's even more important to know who is engaged with the online curriculum and who isn't.**

The reasons for tracking engagement extend past students meeting learning objectives, although this is helpful when assessing plans for next term. This information also allows educators to identify which families may be struggling — academically, emotionally, or financially — and to try to provide additional support to reduce barriers to learning.

How to Engage Students Remotely with Future Planning

Therefore, it is recommended that schools and colleges select software that automatically runs engagement reports to provide daily information on student learning progress. However, “engagement reports” mean different things to different companies, so it’s important to compare what kind of data is at your disposal. Educators should consider platforms that offer [a variety of data](#) trackers, such as log-in reports, progress summaries, and work completion, to get a full sense of when and how students are interacting with their online studies.

As good educators know, data is just the beginning. Educators can use this information to help guide conversations about future planning, either with students in classroom meetings, individually during one-to-one check-ins, or with parents as scheduled communication.

Progress reports can also be beneficial when connecting with students who are not moving forward in their learning. **Careers leaders can use the automated reports to analyse virtual learning outcomes and determine careers education and future-readiness goals to meet Ofsted requirements and the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#).**



Real World Implementation: How Two Schools Are Using Xello to Promote Future Readiness Remotely

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Schools in the UK faced closures during the spring term of 2020 and then intermittent access to accommodate the need for social distancing ahead of the summer months.

Minimising the spread of COVID 19, while keeping the educational “lights on”, requires innovation, ingenuity, and technology. Despite the challenges afforded by the lockdown, some schools are thriving.

We spoke to two educational leaders who quickly found their stride as everything changed. Remote learning, including lessons that focused on career exploration and future readiness, was actively in place during lockdown. To find out how they did it, read their stories.

The Bolsover School, Derbyshire

When UK schools entered lockdown in late March 2020, Debbie Crossley, like so many other careers advisers and educators at the time, was initially apprehensive. How would educators be able to deliver learning plans to their students remotely? And how would they maintain crucial relationships with their students without in-person contact?



The Bolsover
School

Fortunately, Debbie had already planned to introduce Xello to her students during the spring term. “I wanted a platform that would withstand the test of time and that would engage every year group with age-appropriate lessons and content. I could see straight away that Xello would deliver that for me.”

As the country locked down further, Debbie rolled out Xello and the effect was rapidly measurable. Within the first two weeks, The Bolsover School had a quarter of their students using the program.

Debbie noted three obvious areas of improvement following introducing her students (and colleagues) to Xello.

Real World Implementation: How Two Schools Are Using Xello to Promote Future Readiness Remotely

1. Increased student engagement

Students immediately took to the online program. Using the Educator Tool in Xello, Debbie saw how her students were progressing and those that were going to require a bit of extra attention. “I’ve already measured a 19% increase in student engagement [since the start of April]. That is all down to Xello’s interactive content and lessons,” she said.

And what’s more, Debbie has reported seeing her students logging in at the weekends! “The students are loving it! [They’re] not seeing Xello as academic work. It’s different, they are investing time in themselves.”

2. Time savings for educators

“Xello actually takes work away from me,” says Debbie. It didn’t take long for Debbie and her colleagues to make use of Xello’s interactive, online lessons and ready-made reports. Leaning on Xello to deliver in these areas meant that Debbie was able to focus her time on the delivery of Bolsover’s careers programme and dedicate more time to virtual interventions with students needing extra guidance during this tough time.

Initially, I was a little apprehensive about rolling out Xello immediately, especially because we purchased the software at the beginning of lockdown. But actually, it turned out to be the ideal time ... Xello is so intuitive for students that they are able to work remotely in the product with ease and minimal direction.

– Debbie Crossley, Careers Adviser at The Bolsover School



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3. Increased student aspirations

One core focus of The Bolsover School is to raise the aspirations of their students. The school is located in a disadvantaged area, and The Bolsover School is passionate about their role in supporting their students to connect with role models and with alternative pathways so that they feel confident and adequately prepared to pursue their dreams.

“I can already see how Xello is raising the aspirations of our students,” she says. “Students are understanding the reason for careers planning and recognising opportunities within their reach. My colleagues and I have supported that by creating Dream Job and CV Writing as custom assignments for students to complete in Xello.”

The Co-op Academy, Walkden

Tech-savvy Josh Mangas admits that his unique role at Co-op Academy, Walkden had a positive impact on his ability to champion Xello during the nation’s lockdown. “As a senior leader with responsibility for participation and engagement, I lead the Careers, Community and IT Communication side of things. This means that I have a degree of autonomy in decision making as well as the technical ability to implement software,” Josh says.

Josh made the move to Xello at the start of the UK’s 2020 lockdown. “I think the transition to remote learning has reinforced the need for edtech, like Xello, to become more of a priority [for schools and colleges],” he says.

A notable challenge in rolling out any new programme across a school or college is generating enthusiasm, obtaining stakeholder buy-in, and managing the implementation process generally. At The Co-op Academy, Walkden, Josh devised a strategy that meant he felt confident project managing this rollout completely remotely.

Here Josh talks about his approach for successfully engaging stakeholders with Xello at any school or college—remotely or in-person.



Co-op Academy
Walkden

Real World Implementation: How Two Schools Are Using Xello to Promote Future Readiness Remotely

1. Engage the students

“I saw Xello’s potential from the very first demonstration. I like the personality quiz and the depth of the career profiles is remarkable—everything is there for the students to explore.”

Josh started by emailing all students to introduce them to Xello; almost immediately, he saw many actively using the product. The Co-op Academy, Walkden, believes in a whole-school approach to delivering careers education so Josh wanted to reach every year group. But to manage the rollout effectively, he initially turned his focus to years 7, 8 and 9.

“Engaging our students early on also has the advantage of providing the school with more information about the likes, dislikes and interests of the student body; this will help us tailor our provision as students progress through our school.”

For the older year groups, Josh plans to focus on specific goals and activities to provide a more tailored experience.

Interestingly, you would think that onboarding to Xello post-lockdown [announcement] and entirely remotely would be more challenging, but that’s not been the case at all. I think the transition to remote learning has reinforced the need for edtech like Xello to become more of a priority.

– Josh Mangas, Senior Leader and Careers, Community & IT Communication Lead at the Co-op Academy, Walkden



Real World Implementation: How Two Schools Are Using Xello to Promote Future Readiness Remotely

2. Engage the faculty

During lockdown, Josh began liaising with his fellow educators and subject leads about how they could use Xello to help students build on their skills. At Co-op Academy, Walkden, it is important to the team that students make those fundamental connections between learning and careers.

“The most effective way I see this happening is by embedding Xello into our curriculum across all subjects,” says Josh.

3. Engage the parents

The third phase of Josh’s plan to support all his students with their successful futures, no matter whether remotely or in-person, is to engage their parents in the journey.

“The more that parents encourage their children to engage with Xello, the better prepared they [the children] will be for real life,” says Josh.



Conclusion

Conclusion

While the 19/20 academic year certainly did not end as planned, educators can still continue to build relationships with their students, as well as provide organic learning experiences to create curious and inventive thinkers. By being flexible with their content and putting community needs first, educators can build a solid rapport with families that will be remembered long after COVID-19 has passed.

Lastly, schools and colleges should be intentional in their practices as they look to blend the traditional classroom setting with an element of remote learning.

A comprehensive online curriculum is one that supports future planning; adopting this mindset will help students establish a strong sense of self and continue to mould their own future from the comfort of their own home. If schools want their students to feel empowered and in control of their future, now is the time to practice what they preach and lean into teaching these future readiness skills.

