

Parts 2-6

Institution-led QA – Annual Information

Parts 2-6 are completed annually with information pertaining to the reporting period (i.e. the preceding academic year only).

Part 2: Institution-led QA – Annual

Part 2 provides information relating to institution-led quality assurance for the reporting period.

Section 1: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System Developments

1.1 The evolution of quality assurance and enhancement systems in support of strategic objectives in the reporting period.

Quality Enhancement at OTC in the period September 2018 to August 2019 was principally focused on the Re-engagement process with QQI. Preparation had begun for this undertaking from early 2018, with a submission date for the re-engagement documents agreed for 9th November 2018, a subsequent panel visit on 5th December 2018 and the issuing of the panel report on 15th January 2019.

Existing College strategic objectives at the time of submission included:

- Increased risk assessment of planned programmes and projects (to include additional staff training for same)
- Development of placement model for the proposed CORU programme in social care
- Submission of QQI application for updated social care programme
- Proposed commencement of new PSCA programme
- Development of the College website (make policies accessible and increase search function)
- Role and job description review

The Re-engagement report offered the following 'Mandatory Changes' and pieces of 'Specific Advice':

“Mandatory Changes”
<i>The Re-engagement panel is of the view that the following areas need to be addressed before it can recommend to QQI that the OTC’s procedures be approved:</i>
<p>1. The independence of Academic governance needs to be made more transparent. The OTC should review the membership of the Academic Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •consider appointing an independent Chair to the Academic Council •demonstrate the separation between Senior Management and Academic Management •include tutors/associated tutors •simplify the number of sub committees required
<p>2. Appoint one person at Senior Manager level who will be responsible for Quality Assurance in the academic management structure.</p>
“Specific Advice”
<p>1. Develop clearer step-by-step procedures for all policies mentioned in the Quality Assurance document.</p>
<p>2. Consider having separate sections in the QA document for Further Education and Higher Education</p>
<p>3. Review the timing and operation of Assessment Boards and the appeals process.</p>
<p>4. Review the legal basis for collecting data on students and amend all appropriate documentation to reflect this.</p>
<p>5. Review and update the policy on RPL as required.</p>
<p>6. Publish a Blended Learning Strategy.</p>
<p>The College accepted all of these changes, except one; having combined HE and FE quality assurance for the first time in light of the Re-engagement process, it was considered appropriate to keep this joint system, while highlighting certain remaining differences. The other recommendations were all completed in the reporting period with the exception of the following two items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Develop clearer step-by-step procedures for all policies mentioned in the Quality Assurance document.” - “Publish a Blended Learning Strategy.”

For the former, additional work in this area was ongoing throughout 2019 allowing for the publication of all updated procedures in 2020 (the next reporting period). Similarly, the Blended Learning Strategy was developed towards the end of the current period with planned publication for the next period.

Having submitted the response and plan resulting from the Re-engagement report, the panel's subsequent recommendation for approval of the OTC's QA policies and procedures came to fruition at QQI's PAEC meeting of 13th June 2019.

In response to the specific panel recommendations in relation to governance, OTC realised the following changes to this part of its QA system:

- The terms of reference for the Academic Council (AC) were changed so that the Chair rotates between the four external members; (one HET expert member, one FET expert member, one QA&E expert member and one Governance expert member); and the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, all of whom have extensive expertise in the development and implementation of third level academic policy and procedure.
- The role of Manager of Corporate Services no longer holds a seat on the AC. The Manager of Corporate Affairs ceasing to be a member of the AC is because that role holds responsibility for marketing and recruitment (i.e. separation of business and academic functions).
- The terms of reference were also changed to allow for the appointment of a tutor representative on the AC. Ballots were held for this seat and the tutor representative took on the role from the AC meeting in June 2019.
- The number of sub-committees of the AC was reduced. The Assessment Committee was joined with the Teaching & Learning Committee to form the Teaching, Learning & Assessment (TLA) Committee.

These changes were seen as sufficiently enhancing the separation of academic management from commercial/corporate management. Graphic representations of the new structures were prepared for the updated V3.1 of the Quality Assurance Document (QuAD, April 2019). All other recommendations which were fulfilled in leading up to the publication of the updated Quality Assurance Document were also included in that iteration.

The Re-engagement process also saw the discontinuation of two programmes.

With respect to how this aligned with the strategic objectives above:

- The development of an updated risk assessment policy and set of procedures allowed for greater accessibility for internal stakeholders in particular.
- The development of the placement model for the proposed CORU programme in social care and its application to QQI for revalidation, as well as the application for the validation of a new programme for the Department of Health, the *Certificate in Patient Safety Complaints Advocacy*, were undertaken within the context of the updated policies and procedures presented, and approved, for Re-engagement.
- Further development of the College website took place in the light of feedback from the process and agreed policies were published and made more accessible, as were separate sections of the Quality Assurance Document. The search function on the website was also improved to allow greater transparency to both internal and external stakeholders.
- The role and job description review took place as part of the re-engagement preparation.

The College's having been through the Re-engagement process had a positive impact on validation panels' assessment of OTC's proposed programmes during this reporting period; achieving a recommendation for approval enhanced the perceived reliability of an education and training provider's underlying quality assurance and enhancement systems. Therefore, the process was not only a most worthwhile exercise in itself but also had positive impacts elsewhere.

1.2 Significant specific changes (if any) to QA within the institution.

As well as the significant changes cited at 1.1, above, many other changes were made to the core QA document presented to the Re-engagement panel for approval in November 2018 (QuAD, V3.0). These included:

1. The version being designed to comply with the layout presented in the **Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines** developed by QQI for use by all Providers (QQI, **April 2016/QG1-V2**).

2. The FET QA being subsumed under QA for HET and FET programmes, with the exceptions noted in Appendix 2 and at the relevant sections of that document:

- a) Grading scheme;
- b) Penalties;
- c) External Authentication.

3. The Collaborative Provision Policy, presented at Appendix 1, being included for the first time, following its approval by QQI.

In addition, the following policies and procedures were updated/introduced for that version:

No.	Policy Title
1801	Policy on Policy Development
1802	Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) Policy
1803	Social Media Policy
1804	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy
1805	Academic Awards Policy
1806	Exit Award Policy
1807	Student Learning Support and Pastoral Care Policy
1808	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policy
1809	Risk Management Policy
1701	Plagiarism Policy
1702	Equality Policy
1703	Complaints Policy
1705	CPD Policy
1706	Collaborative Policy
1707	Word Count Policy
1708	Acceptable Usage of e-learning Environment Policy
1710	Student Fees Policy
1711	Home Work Policy for Student Based Work
1712	Supervision Policy
1713	Workshop attendance

Procedure/Guidelines/Protocol/Code
Guidelines on Policy Development
PEL Procedures
RPL/RPEL Procedures
Conferring Procedure
Guide to Learning Support and Pastoral Care Services
Procedures for Data Protection
Risk Management Procedures
Plagiarism Policy Procedures
Admission procedures
Complaints Policy Procedures
Procedures for Identifying CPD Needs
Collaborative Policy Procedures
Administration procedures
Working Arrangements/Guidelines
Guidelines for Supervision
Programme development and approval
Procedures for the Design and Approval of New Programmes
Equality of Access to programmes and services
Entry procedures and criteria for the programme
Procedures for Programme Review, Validation and Revalidation of Programmes and Awards
Cross-Marking Procedures
Procedures for Corrective Action
Procedures for External Examination
Student handbook - Section 6: Assessment procedures
Procedures Provision of Supports to Students with Disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties
Code of Conduct for OTC staff
Workshop etiquette (Student Code)

In May 2019, the Assistant College Director, Áine Melinn retired following 27 years with the College and the role was subsequently filled by Raymond Watson. Raymond has been with the College since 2002 and in his 18 years has been involved in most of the College's programmes. He was Course Director of Social Care for 10 years and has acted as the Course Director of the Management programmes. Most recently, Raymond has been the Head of Online Learning. This includes the development and implementation of the College's international award-winning blended learning model. In August 2019, Ronnie Harrison, who had been OTC's Manager of Academic Affairs for some years, was named as Head of Quality and Academic Affairs.

1.3 The schedule of QA governance meetings.

ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEETINGS (3 Corporeal; 4 Incorporeal)

12th October 2018

Week of 19th November 2018 (Incorporeal): Approval of submission of validation documents for the proposed Cert. in PSCA [Level 7 – SP – 20 crs.] programme

Week of 26th November 2018 (Incorporeal): Ratification of new external members to AC

Week of 21st January 2019 (Incorporeal): Approval of submission of validation documents for the proposed B.A. in Social Care (Level 7 – Major – 180 crs.) programme

25th January 2019 (+Recording of interim incorporeal meetings for the minutes)

29th March 2019 (Incorporeal): Update on response to Re-engagement report

21st June 2019 (+Recording of interim incorporeal meeting for the minutes)

Note: *The number of incorporeal meetings was unusually high in this reporting period, given the number of concurrent activities stemming from validation, revalidation and re-engagement activities.*

ST. MICHAEL'S HOUSE (SMH) BOARD MEETINGS

The dates of meetings for SMH Board for the period September 2018 to August 2019 are as follows:

Tuesday 4th September

Tuesday 2nd October

Tuesday 6th November

Tuesday 11th December

Tuesday 5th Feb

Tuesday 5th March

Tuesday 9th April

Monday 15th April

Tuesday 21st May

Tuesday 18th June

Section 2: Reviews in the reporting period

2.1 Internal reviews that were completed in the reporting period.

1. Administration Review (2018)
2. HET QA Review (2018-19)
3. FET QA Review (2018-19)
4. Additional QA review (2018): Blended Learning and Collaborative Provision
5. Data protection re. GDPR review (2018)
6. Website Review (2018-19)
7. Social Care programmes review (2018-19)

2.2 Profile of internal approval/evaluations and review completed in the reporting period.

Number of new Programme Validations/Programme Approvals completed in the reporting year	3
Number of Programme Reviews completed in the reporting year	1
Number of Research Reviews completed in the reporting year	0
Number of School/Department/Faculty Reviews completed in the reporting year	1
Number of Service Unit Reviews completed in the reporting year	4
Number of Reviews of Arrangements with partner organisations completed in the reporting year	1

2.3 Profile of reviewers and chairs internal approval/evaluations and review for reviews completed in the reporting period.

Composition of Panels	%
Internal	40%
National	50%
UK	
EU	
Student	10%
Other	

Chair Profile	%
Internal	60%
Similar Institution	20%
Different Institution	20%
International	

Section 3: Other Implementation Factors

3.1 A description of how data is used to support quality assurance and the management of the student learning experience.

Information Systems:

IMS

The key system for information collection and storage within the College is the Information Management System (IMS), which has been specifically designed and tailored to meet the needs of the College. Each new student registered with the College is assigned a unique student number on the system, which remains with them for the duration of their studies with the College. Access to the system is strictly limited to internal College staff, with varying levels of access for teaching and administration staff. Amendments to information held on the system may only be made by authorised personnel of the Administration Department following receipt of written confirmation of the required changes.

Survey Monkey

All staff, student, graduate and other stakeholder surveys are administered using Survey Monkey online surveying tools (www.surveymonkey.com). This system allows for the easy dissemination of surveys through e-mail or online channels. Data gathered is stored online in a private account, accessible only by authorised College staff. The system also facilitates basic analysis of the data or exporting of the data to other computer applications for more advanced analysis. Participation in these surveys is on a voluntary basis and the identities of respondents are protected in all publications of survey results.

Assessment Broadsheets

Broadsheets of assessment results are completed for each academic year and uploaded to QQI's QBS for certification of students' academic achievements. These electronic broadsheet files are stored indefinitely in the secure filing system of the college, accessible only to internal College staff and may only be amended by authorised personnel of the Administration Department. Any amendments

required to broadsheets following their ratification by Examination Board will be notified, in writing by the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, to the External Examiner(s) and QQI.

Learner Information Systems:

Personal Data

Personal identifying information on all students is gathered and maintained for the purpose of providing an individually tailored service to each student, and for registering students for certification with accrediting bodies.

This information is collected for each individual student as part of the application process, and is updated each year through the re-registration process. All personal student information collected through these processes (i.e. name(s), addresses, email, contact telephone numbers, PPSN, gender, nationality, country of birth, occupational status.) is inputted into the College Information Management System (IMS), updated annually, and maintained indefinitely. A student will be facilitated to register a change in their personal details at any stage of their studies. To facilitate a name change students are required to submit suitable identification with the desired name (i.e. birth certificate/marriage certificate). This documentation will be forwarded to the relevant accrediting body and maintained on file by the College.

At the application/registration stage, students are also informed of the College's obligation to share this information with QQI/Other relevant bodies, in a case where the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) arrangements are invoked. Students are informed of any changes within 14 days of such change.

Additional hardcopy documentation gathered in the application process is maintained for the period of registration of the individual student. This can include:

- Application form
- Photographs
- Copy of ID (driver's licence/ passport)
- Copy of visa (International students)
- Previous educational transcripts
- Volunteer declaration form
- Academic reference (Advanced Entry students)

- CV (Advanced Entry students)
- English proficiency evidence (International students)
- Interview record form

The tutorial support function generates significant records regarding individual students' progress with their studies. The College is committed to ensuring that sufficient data is gathered and stored to ensure the ongoing provision of a high standard of service and support to students, while respecting individual student needs for confidentiality.

The following records are maintained for the period of student registration on a programme to ensure continuity in the provision of tutorial supports, to facilitate any transition in tutors and to ensure consistency in the application of College policy and procedures:

- Individual student tutorial records;
- Assignment extension applications;
- Medical certificates;
- Records of all online activity of students, including assessment activities completed online.

Tutorial information which may be called upon after student graduation is maintained by the College indefinitely. This information may be relevant to students who progress to further education or who appeal assessment results to the accrediting bodies, for example. The following records are maintained indefinitely by the College:

- All formal written correspondence between tutors and students;
- All original documentation relating to additional supports or assessment accommodations implemented (e.g. for reasons of disability/medical condition/specific learning difficulty);
- Records of assessment appeals and outcomes;
- Records of disciplinary procedures and outcomes (including any plagiarism investigations).

Academic Performance and Achievement:

Details of programmes, modules and assessments completed by students are recorded by the College and maintained indefinitely, to facilitate the certification of students' work through the accrediting bodies as well as facilitating access, transfer and progression for students.

All marks achieved by students in assessments are recorded and maintained in secure Excel files, on the College IMS and on the QBS, which are updated on completion of each module. Internal Broadsheets are produced and these are finalised and signed on conclusion of the Examination Board meeting. Following the meeting the agreed marks are signed off by the Academic Manager on the QBS for issuing of certificates. Electronic copies of the broadsheets are maintained on computer file indefinitely, to facilitate the provision of transcripts and reprints of Diploma Supplements.

For each year of their studies with the College, each student is assigned a student box, which is maintained by their Tutor and in which the following are stored:

- All work submitted by the student for assessment;
- Completed rubric for each assessment;
- Copy of written feedback given to student on assignments;
- Copies of appropriate documentation regarding assessment supports and/or accommodations implemented;
- Records of assessment appeals and outcomes.

In addition to this hardcopy record all assignments (excluding appendices) submitted through Turnitin.com are maintained indefinitely as electronic files, and rubrics, with feedback to students, are filed and maintained indefinitely on the College's secure IT system.

On conclusion of the Appeals Process timeframe, hardcopies of all ratified assessment scripts and related materials will be destroyed (using a certified document destruction contractor) within 4 weeks. Students are advised to keep a copy of all work, which they submit to the College for assessment, as this cannot be returned.

Where a student has delayed completion of their studies, the following system applies to the storage of students' work:

- Students' work that has been assessed and ratified by the Examination Board will be destroyed within 4 weeks of the meeting, as the corresponding credits will have been awarded to the student by this time.
- Assignments and examinations, which have been completed but not ratified by the Examination Board, will be considered invalid after a two-year period.

- The work of any student, who wishes to return to the Open Training College more than two years following their withdrawal, will be reviewed individually by the Course Director, and the student may be required to attend a viva voce and/or resubmit work. This is to ensure that the student's knowledge and skills are sufficiently current and relevant for them to continue with their studies.

Student feedback:

Student satisfaction with and feedback on the programmes and services of the Open Training College is garnered through a series of module and end of year surveys administered online, with each individual student. In these surveys, students are invited to give their feedback on the module and programme content and delivery, the tutorial and other learning supports, and the subsidiary support services offered by the College.

This feedback is collected by e-mail invitation to each individual student. Responses to all surveys are treated as confidential and identifying information of respondents is not contained in any published material. However, in the case of inappropriate use of the surveys individual responses may be altered or removed, as deemed appropriate by the College. The College also reserves the right to track responses to the individual user to be followed up as appropriate.

Inappropriate use of the surveys includes the identification of any staff member or student by using their name in a response, and the use of language that may be considered defamatory, obscene, threatening or offensive. Students are provided with appropriate usage guidelines before commencing any survey.

Feedback is also attained through the Class Representative system where regular meetings are held between the representatives and the Programme Director/Programme Board.

Management Information Systems:

As is detailed in this document the College has a well-functioning quality assurance management system that produces ongoing evaluative information about results and processes. Management and College staff can then use this information to respond, develop policies and procedures and take actions

that contribute to strategic/operational management and continuous improvement, which is at the core of our quality assurance system.

The management process assisted by the information generated by the QA system includes sequential planning and management activities such as strategic management and objectives, the planning of operations and resources, implementation and monitoring, and finally, the evaluation of results and process performance. The strategy process produces the strategic objectives for the planning period. The operations of the internal processes are aligned with budgeting and human resources planning. The achievement of results is regularly monitored and ensured to achieve the desired objectives during the planning year. Finally, the achievement of objectives is evaluated and reported to stakeholders.

Information for Further Planning:

All of the data gathered by the College, as indicated throughout its Quality Assurance Document provides important information to the College about the success of its endeavours, areas requiring improvement and opportunities for further developments. All data which is considered to be a critical quality indicator is carefully considered by the Academic Council and/or the appropriate subcommittee of the Council, and forms the basis upon which recommendations are made to amend, develop and improve programmes and services. Data, which are considered to be critical quality indicators, include:

- Student registration and re-registration numbers
- Withdrawal numbers
- Programme and stage completion rates
- Assessment results
- Staff and student feedback
- Survey response rates
- Quality assurance recommendations and follow-up

Completion Rates:

Completion rates are recorded in the first instance on the cover page for the External Examiner's report. The information given will show, in relation to the specific programme, the number of students who:
a. Started; b. Withdrew; c. Passed or failed; and d. Completed (and relative percentages).

Additional information will also be presented regarding the percentage of students achieving particular grades. This data will then be analysed in the annual QA report for programmes, in conjunction with Student end-of-year feedback and Programme Board improvement plans. Completion statistics can then be used to allow benchmarking against other internal and external (sectoral, discipline area, national, international) cognate programmes.

Records Maintenance and Retention:

This area is comprehensively covered by the College's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policy.

3.2 Factors that have impacted on quality and quality assurance in the reporting period.

The primary factors which had an impact on the College's quality and quality assurance in this period were:

- Changes resulting from QQI policy and statutory guidelines from 2016 onwards, including;

A. Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines – QQI, April 2016.

B. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers – QQI, April 2016.

C. Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis – QQI, April 2016.

D. Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes – QQI, March 2018.

E. Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (QQI, Revised 2012)

- College involvement with peer associations such as the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), the HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum (HAQEF) and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education (NFETL-HE).

- College involvement with sectoral bodies such as Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE), the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), National Federation for Voluntary Bodies (NFVB) and The Wheel.
- The Re-engagement process.
- College member participation on QQI external panels for other providers for re/validation (FET &HET) and re-engagement (FET&HET).
- Interaction and communication with national human service agencies.
- Student and other stakeholder feedback.
- The proposed opening of the CORU Social Care Worker Registration Board in 2022 (indicative date).
- QQI and CORU information sessions and communications.

3.3 A description of other implementation issues.

To 2017/18, a separate set of FE Quality Assurance (QA) policies and procedures were maintained and updated annually. As part of the re-engagement process it was proposed to have FE and HE come under the same QA, with some differences highlighted in the QA Document (V3.0) and highlighted at Appendix 2 of that document:

- Grading scheme;
- Penalties;
- External Authentication.

In reviewing all policies and procedures for re-engagement, it became apparent that certain policies had achieved a greater level of embedding than others. These were highlighted in the V3.1 of the quality assurance document post-reengagement, in order that they could be monitored for impact over the following two academic years. In addition, new policies which evolved through the process needed to be similarly embedded. Therefore, a clear communications and monitoring plan was drafted in order to ensure the maximum impact and effectiveness of reach.

The concurrent re-development of the website during the reporting period allowed for a much clearer presentation of the resulting final versions of the QuAD, its separate sections and also individual policies and procedures. This has made the College's QA much more transparent for all stakeholders and the ability to search for specific items on the website has greatly increased.

Part 3: Effectiveness and Impact

Part 3 provides information relating to the effectiveness and impact of quality assurance policy and procedures for the reporting period.

1. Effectiveness

Evidence of the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

In 2018/19, through reviews and surveys with all stakeholders, the effectiveness of the QA system as a whole, and its subordinate sub-systems, were thoroughly investigated for effectiveness. This presented an opportunity to ascertain whether existing policies and procedures were functioning as intended. In this regard, it was found that whilst many of the policies which had been imbedded over many years of institutional use were fully understood and employed effectively by long-standing staff, there was some lack of clarity in terms of procedures for newer staff. The 'Administration Review' which ran in parallel with re-engagement activities, led to the specification of step-by-step work plans for each process which is regularly undertaken administratively.

Certain more recent policies, which had been introduced from 2016 onwards were found not to have achieved full effectiveness and were therefore in need of embedding. These included the:

- Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) policy
- Social Media policy
- Exit Award policy
- GDPR policy

It was also found that, in particular, the Risk Management Policy was not functioning as intended. This policy tended to be used predominantly by senior management in the College but had not been adopted at all levels throughout the organisation. Whereas it was applied when major projects and new programme development were at the planning and implementation stages, it was not invoked for more regular activities, even in cases where this was called for in other existing policies and procedures. A

need for additional training was identified, for those at middle management level initially, to be followed by all levels and functions across the institution.

There were no delays to any planned reviews. In contrast, the review of the College website was advanced in order to accommodate the findings emerging from other reviews, including the broader QA review for re-engagement. It became apparent, through stakeholder feedback at this time, that whilst the majority of existing policies and procedures were effective, this was not always transparent for those accessing the QA documentation and information on the website. Therefore, the updated website was designed to allow for greater ease of access to targeted information.

In terms of relevance of pre-existing QA, a general need to update in line with legislative, professional body and QQI requirements which had emerged in the previous two years was identified. Areas where these requirements had an impact on particular policies and procedures were duly brought up to date and cross-referenced against each other. This can clearly be seen in the version of the Quality Assurance Document (V3.1) which was published in April 2019.

Ensuring that policies and procedures are documented in a clear and accessible form is a shared aim of all who contribute to their current form within and outside the College. As part of the Re-engagement process OTC sought to provide further clarity through aligning the presentation of its central QA Document with the guidelines provided by QQI and which correspond to the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers (QQI, April 2016). This will also mean that the cross-referencing of policies and procedures here and elsewhere will be more straightforward as the College moves to its next iteration of core QA.

2. Impact

Evidence of the impact of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

Reviews of both HE and FE QA at College, led to the most significant change in this area, since the first drafting of a QA manual for HETAC and FETAC approval, respectively, in October 2003. To 2018/19 different sets of QA documentation and policies were maintained. This period saw the combining of both sets into one overall QA Document. While some areas, as highlighted earlier, are clearly marked as retaining distinctions, for the most part all programmes at College now operate under common policies and procedures.

The development of procedures and their thorough documentation was also a major impact resulting from reviews and recommendations in this period. Policies which were identified as lacking in impact were updated, presented more clearly and made more accessible to all stakeholders. One example of this is where a communication strategy was introduced to ensure regular communication on updates with all stakeholders, with different policies being presented to different groupings each month.

Benchmarking against national and international providers across different reviews highlighted areas where new policy development was indicated. These policies were then developed, tested and implemented as part of the QA Document published in 2019.

Students, in lectures and workshops were presented with policies, where relevant, and had an opportunity to investigate their meaning and impact on their own cohort in particular, as well as being able to feed back into the continuing development of these policies. Highlighted policies here relate to such areas as RPL/RPEL and GDPR (including data protection in general). In addition, the timing of examination boards, repeat and resubmission windows, and the amount of feedback given to students were all reviewed and adjusted to ensure maximum transparency and fairness.

The College's major programme in Professional Social Care underwent programme review and revalidation in this period. Following from this review, a significant overhaul of the placement model

for social care students was undertaken, which resulted in the publication of a fully comprehensive Practice Placement Handbook for use by both Student Practitioners and the Practice Educators who supervise their placements.

External examiners and examination boards are of prime importance in verifying that results are fair, consistent and comparable to the results gained by learners studying with other providers. This is supported internally by Course Director oversight of module results, cross-marking and internal verification procedures. Feedback from the external examination process also provides valuable information in relation to policy, procedure and process improvement. It is also a most useful monitoring tool which can help monitor and gauge the effectiveness of implementation. In this regard, OTC has consistently received commendations from various external examiners with regard to the amount and quality of feedback given to students on a module by module basis.

Procedures in all areas are intended to achieve the most effective operation of the QA system and to maximise operational outcomes in terms of effective, benchmarked and most current best practice. The application of risk assessment is particularly important in this regard. During the review for re-engagement it was found that a more targeted risk policy was needed for the College's projects and circumstances. This policy is being rolled out to the end of this reporting period and will see additional training in place in the next.

The primary indicators of successful delivery of outcomes from policy changes and implementation used during this and other periods of review are:

- Student surveys;
- External Review and Validation expert panel reports;
- External Examiners' reports.

It is noted that feedback from these mechanisms has been particularly positive in recent years; and where there have been recommendations for improvement these have been implemented through Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) which are monitored through the QA System outlined earlier.

3. Themes

Analysis of the key themes arising within the implementation of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

The following themes have emerged most predominantly over the reporting period:

1. Continued updating for relevance and impact of core QA, as a 'living document' or entity
2. Communication of existing, updated and new policies and procedures
3. Importance of stakeholder feedback in terms of effectiveness and impact of policies and procedures
4. Increased external oversight of Programme Boards, Academic Council and its sub-committees
5. Increased student and tutor representation of Programme Boards, Academic Council and its sub-committees
6. Breadth of experience and focus on particular expertise of Academic Council members (e.g. HE, FE, Governance)
7. The clear delineation of academic and corporate reporting structures and system design which supports that outcome
8. The importance of clear procedures and CPD, for newer and associate College staff in particular
9. The communication of a clear Blended Learning Strategy to all stakeholders
10. The transparency, accessibility and clarity of information presented to all stakeholders; particularly on the College website

Part 4: Quality Enhancement

Part 4 provides information which goes beyond the description of standard quality assurance procedures. Quality enhancement includes the introduction of new procedures but also extends the concept of quality assurance to other initiatives, activities and events aimed at improving quality across the institution.

4.1 Improvements and Enhancements for the Reporting Period

Improvements or enhancements, impacting on quality or quality assurance, that took place in the reporting period.

The feedback mechanisms identified in the academic governance and corporate governance structures ensure timely information is gathered and acted upon, in order to deal with arising issues and/or invoke enhancements. These include:

- Regular student and tutor surveys
- The sub-committee structure under the Academic Council (AC)
- A separate corporate management structure
- End-of-year and graduate surveys
- National and international benchmarking against similar programmes/providers as part of new programme development and programme re/validation
- Continual Student/Personal Tutor contact
- The organisational structure and reporting lines therein
- Regular, recorded staff and project team meetings
- External monitoring and review by QQI and its representative panels

OTC has had a phased introduction of a new Information Management System (IMS) over the last three academic years, so that it became fully operational in the reporting period. Increased ease of access for users, including student online registration, has been a great benefit of this system. Many processes, including results processing for QQI's QBS, have been streamlined and the reports generated by the

system attest to its effectiveness. This allows for easier access to information such as real-time analysis of student progression and results.

External Examiner reports provide vital feedback in the area of the most important impacts of enhancements and their findings are recorded in the annual QA reports for the relevant suite of programmes (e.g. Applied Management), along with end-of-year student feedback and the improvement plans of the programme board. Therefore, these improvements can be effectively tracked by the boards using the QA reports as a central reference point, which intersects with the real time reports which are generated by the College's IMS.

As part of the review and gap analysis for re-engagement OTC identified a need to develop a new Student Support policy. While a strong policy was already in place for students requiring additional supports and accommodations, it was felt that the policy in relation to the student population as a whole needed more specification and the iteration of pastoral support, in particular. This does not represent a new departure for the College but is rather an expression of support procedures which existed but were not necessarily specified in the core QA documentation. Therefore, this policy did not require the same embedding as other new policies developed at this time. It does, however, have the distinct advantage of increased clarity for the learner and other stakeholders. The policy was presented in the version of OTC's Quality Assurance Document (QuAD – V. 3.0) submitted for re-engagement and will continue to be developed, based on student feedback, in future iterations.

OTC offers the Supported Open Learning (SOL) model as the basis of its blended learning for students. In recent years, there has been continued enhancement of this model, including immediate feedback on workshops and strengthened resources (including library resources) and increased conditionality within the online delivery of programmes.

4.2 Quality Enhancement Highlights

Analysis of quality enhancement activities that were initiated during the reporting period and which would be of interest to other institutions and would benefit from wider dissemination.

As well as the examples outlined above, further enhancements in the following areas have also been highlighted above:

- Increased externality and student/tutor representation on the Academic Council and its sub-committees
- Increased clarity and documentation of procedures
- Focus on a Blended Learning Strategy
- Alignment of outcomes from the QA system with the strategic aims of the College and its parent organisation
- Focus on dissemination of risk management practices

A particular highlight in enhancement of the College's offerings which support students in their studies relates to a project undertaken in partnership with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) towards the end of the reporting period. As well as participating in IASCE working groups in order to move to full compliance with CORU criteria and standards of proficiency for Social Care Workers, the College undertook a particular project to develop a resource for Practice Educators with AIT. This is outlined as case study below.

CASE STUDY:

- **Background: size, staff and nature of organisations involved**

This project was a collaboration between Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and the Open Training College (OTC). The training for Social Care Practice Educators is a fully asynchronous online course designed with best practice content to provide supports for social care student supervisors in the field and has been rolled out nationally. The course is a product of an innovative collaboration between AIT and the OTC.

AIT is a Midlands-based third level institute offering third-level undergraduate and post-graduate programmes to approx. 4000 students across its faculties. The AIT Department of Social Science launched its first fully online course for agency supervisors who support social care students on placement. The purpose of the course is to ensure that the governance of placements of the Department's full-time social care programmes is fully compliant with CORU, the regulator for health and social care professionals. AIT faculty who worked on this project were Fiona Walshe, Social Care lecturer and CORU co-ordinator, and Dr Mairéad Seery.

The Open Training College (OTC) is a third level institution offering accredited education and training programmes to those involved in the non-profit, disability and community/voluntary sectors nationally. The OTC is a division of St. Michael's House, the largest provider of services to people with learning disabilities, and their families, in the greater Dublin region. OTC has won national awards for its adult friendly learning models and the International E learning Award for Blended Learning in 2016. The College runs programmes in two key areas: social care and management. The programmes are accredited by QQI and range from levels 5 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The College has on average 800 students enrolled across all its programmes. The Open Training College faculty who worked on this project were Dr Noelín Fox, Course Director for Social Care and Raymond Watson, Head of Online Learning.

- **Programme: ICT and programme development**

The Practice Educator online course was devised to support social care work practice educators across Ireland within social care degrees.

Social care work is in the process of becoming a registered profession through CORU. As part of this process, all educational institutions who deliver social care must ensure that they meet the criteria for educational providers as stipulated by CORU. Each social care work course must ensure that each student completes 800 hours plus of supervised practice placement in a social care organisation. The person who carries out the supervision is called the Practice Educator. They are normally managers and supervisors within social care organisations. Key support criteria for 'practice educators' include:

- Practice education teams will be fully prepared and informed of the expectations of the practice placement, including the education/training provider's student fitness-to-practise requirements.
- Guidelines/procedures and supports are available for practice educators in managing students, including students who are in difficulty, throughout the placement.
- The education provider will make regular support and training available to the practice education team to develop their practice education skills.
- All stakeholders must be informed about practice education assessments, their link to the standards of proficiency and the marking criteria used. The practice education team must have access to assessment tools and be trained in completing these assessments and providing feedback during the placement.

The course while devised and created by AIT and the Open Training College, was made available to any College that delivers social care work degrees through the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE). A key principle of the course design was that it would be freely available to all IASCE partners. While the course was designed by AIT and OTC to fulfil their requirement for the governance of their social care programme placements, the materials have been created in such a manner that they can be utilised by any education provider, supporting 1200 Practice Educators across the sector.

Practice educators who complete the course are issued with a certificate of completion which they can use for the purposes of their CPD, a requirement in a CORU registered profession.

• **Structure: How does the courses prepare Practice Educators for their role?**

The course is divided into 5 units. There are 4 units that are common for all Colleges. These units are designed to map onto the criteria stipulated by CORU. The units are:

Unit 1 – Introduction to CORU and Placement

Unit 2 – Practice Educators as Supervisors

Unit 3 – Assessing Students on Practice Placements

Unit 4 – Working with Students in Difficulty

The fifth unit for all Colleges is the College’s own practice placement handbook. The course refers to Unit 5 throughout and supports the practice educator in developing their understanding of this important document.

The technology (Articulate Rise) allows for many interactive activities for practice educators to test their knowledge. Also included are branched scenarios that bring the practice educator through a typical placement scenario and allows them to test their understanding of a variety of approaches and the outcomes of appropriate (and inappropriate) responses. The software also supports links to key resources and websites to support the practice educator in their role. The practice educator’s understanding of the role is assessed through this innovative scenario branching assessment and a series of multiple-choice questions based on the content. Successful completion is awarded with certification.

By using this software’s SCORM output, the course can be placed on any institution’s virtual learning platform (Moodle, Canvas or Blackboard) and allows tracking of course completion and collation of learning analytics that can be used to improve the product over time. The software is highly responsive and can be used on multiple devices. This allows the course to not only be an educational support but to act as an ongoing reference portal for a practice educator who needs to access information quickly in the future should a situation arise.

• **Value: How this ICT initiative adds value**

This learning asset is unique in relation to Practice Educators. Practice educators are normally people who have management roles in busy human service organisations. This means that they need a learning solution that allows them to gain relevant knowledge in a flexible and accessible manner. The collaboration is relatively unique amongst educational institutions and has allowed the development of a product that can be used by any College supporting social care work students into the future.

The availability of the same product nationally allows practice educators to use the completion of this course to support students from multiple educational institutions. This standardises the supports practice educators can provide for social care students and also minimises the time needed to engage with many different inductions across multiple educational institutions. Also by gaining input from many stakeholders the product can be ensured to deliver supports that contain the key values and principles needed to be an effective practice educator.

The practice educator online course is the first national online option for practice educators of any regulated profession in Ireland.

• **Excellence in Education and Training: enriching the educational experience**

Through this efficient and effective support for practice educators AIT and the OTC are ensuring that the student practitioner (on placement) gets a standardised and values-lead support for their placement. The placement is at the centre of all social care work qualifications as the student can apply theory to practice in the real world. By doing this while supported by a well-supported practice educator the student can progress from being a novice, to dependent practitioner and on to independent practitioner. This is only possible if the practice educator is clear about their role and the processes involved receive effective support.

This online course provides 'just in time' supports for all practice educators ensuring the students can immediately get quality support away from College while working in the real world. The College can ensure that practice educators have engaged fully with the course through the innovative scenario assessment and a knowledge test at the end of the course.

Innovation and collaboration are essential elements of any educational excellence and this project has both. In understanding the restrictions on practice educators, especially in relation to them being time poor, this project uses ICT to provide this cohort with a flexible, accessible way to ensure they are trained to support social care students to become social care workers in the future. In addition, the Practice Educator is involved in a CPD experience that is supported through a suite of eLearning tools to provide participants with a positive, flexible learning experience.

Part 5: Objectives for the coming year

Part 5 provides information about plans for quality assurance in the institution for the academic year following the reporting period (in this instance 1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020).

5.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement System Plans

Plans for quality assurance and quality enhancement relating to strategic objectives for the next reporting period.

There are four main objectives in focus for the development of the QA system and its enhancements over the next reporting period:

1. The publication of the College's Blended Learning Strategy and its integration into to the core QA Document. An action plan for blended learning will also emerge from this development.
2. The publication of an addendum document outlining Procedures, Protocols and Processes which have emerged since the re-engagement process. The development of the Practice Placement Handbook has produced new and updated systems in this area. There will also be a renewed procedure on preparation for External Examination based on a review of the processes in that area and taking into account developments in the College's Information Management System (IMS) and in QQI's QBS.
3. Further dissemination of the Risk Management policy, its tools, implementation and use of the risk register.
4. Further implementation of the GDPR action plan, particularly in relation to suppliers and associate staff, as well as a focus on deletion/destruction in relation to the retention element of the GDPR policy.

The former two points relate directly to the completion of undertakings outlined in the College's response to the Re-engagement panel's report. Work on the Blended Learning Strategy had already commenced at the end of the reporting period, with the aim of publication in the first quarter of 2020. The Head of E-learning will oversee the action plan which will also result from this strategy and it will

be tracked through the E-learning committee and relevant programme boards, as with other existing College Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs). Ultimately, reporting back in to the College's Academic Council.

Full implementation of the risk management policy will require additional training, which will be ongoing through the academic year 2019/20.

The main aim of OTC's information and data management policies and procedures is to ensure that all information held on a subject (student, staff member, supplier) is stored safely and securely, with appropriate backup and in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR – introduced Europe-wide in May 2018). This is an area where a new policy was developed but more needs to be done in the next 6 months to ensure full implementation and the follow-up to the developing data retention/destruction guidelines.

5.2 Review Plans

A list of reviews within each category (module, programme, department/school, service delivery unit or faculty), as per the internal review cycle, planned for the next reporting period.

Programmes: All modules of the current B.A. in Contemporary Disability Studies (CDS), a major 180 credit programme leading to an ordinary degree will be reviewed; as will the modules of the, add-on 1-year 60-credit, B.A. (Hons.) in CDS. These programmes are due for revalidation for September 2021 but the review may recommend an earlier or indeed a postponed revalidation date; for Sept. 2020 or Sept. 2022.

OTC will also undertake a review of its Level 5, FE Major, programme in Intellectual Disability Practice. It has been indicated that as this award is part of the Common Awards System (CAS) and as full revalidation for FET programmes has not yet been commenced by QQI under its most recent policy, that working/steering groups may be formed to review such programmes. OTC has indicated its desire to be part of any such review group.

Department/School: The Social Care department will be under continuing review, with a particular focus on the implementation of the updated Social Care Practice Placement policy and its effectiveness. This will involve in depth consultations with a panel of Practice Educators from agencies where the College's students are undertaking their placement and also with Service Users in each of these agencies, so that the impact of having an OTC student can be measured in terms of the experiences of these clients.

Service Delivery/Faculty: E-learning, its effectiveness, recommendations for enhancement, implementation of the blended learning strategy and the application of the action plan will be reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

The core Quality Assurance Document (QuAD) will also be fully reviewed in the light of all recent changes, with the next iteration to be published as V3.2 in Q1 of 2020.

The above is apart from the usual annual reviews of all modules and programmes to ensure that they are fully updated. In particular, there will be a focus on reviewing existing Minor awards and their effectiveness (which follows from the withdrawal of two minor programmes under the earlier re-engagement review).

5.3 Other Plans

The overall strategic plan for the College will be reviewed against the continuing mission statement of the OTC and also with regard to ensuring its continuing alignment with the strategic plan for its parent organisation, St. Michael's House.

Part 6: Periodic Review

Part 6 provides information that acts as a bridge between the AIQR and periodic external review.

6.1 The Institution and External Review

A description of the impacts of institutional review within the institution.

The last Institutional Review for OTC was in 2009. Since, and before, that time, the Quality Assurance Document (QuAD) has been updated on an annual or bi-annual basis, with all changes approved by Academic Council. This is recorded in the 'Document History' at the front of the current, and all previous editions.

In recent years, the following reviews have been relevant in feeding into updates of OTC's quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures:

1. Revalidation of Social Care programmes (2015-16)
2. External evaluation of the online/blended model (2015)
3. Administration review (2016 -17)
4. QA Review (2016-17)
5. Additional QA review (2018): Blended Learning and Collaborative Provision
6. GDPR review (2017-18)
7. Applied Management and Certificate Programmes – Re/validation – (2017-18)
8. FET QA Review (2018)
9. Website Review (2017-18)

The reviews undertaken in particular for the re-engagement process were at 4,5,6 and 8 above. This involved gap analysis against recently published QQI policies, guidelines and criteria in 2016, 2017 and 2018, with particular reference to:

A. *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines – QQI, April 2016.*

B. *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers – QQI, April 2016.*

C. *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis – QQI, April 2016.*

D. *Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes – QQI, March 2018.*

E. *Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (QQI, Revised 2012)*

The FET review was undertaken to ascertain whether all programmes at OTC could come under the same QA and this was found to be mostly achievable, with any outstanding differences noted in the QuAD.

In terms of moving towards the next IR, in the coming years, this AIQR and the one to follow, which summarise the outcomes from the re-engagement process and how the findings and recommendations from that process in particular are being implemented, measured and changed, will form the basis for the themes which will be afforded most focus on meeting the requirements of Institutional Review.

6.2 Self-Reflection on Quality Assurance

A short evaluative and reflective summary of the overall impact of quality assurance in the reporting period or, over a more extensive period, in the review.

Over the last ten years, QA, its monitoring, increased focus on enhancement, its implementation and the understanding of its importance has increased dramatically at OTC. Initially, the pursuit of HETAC and FETAC approval was the primary aim and the College was guided by those respective bodies' policies and guidelines.

The College was one of the first to have blended programmes approved and there was early interaction with the professionalisation of some of its core programmes. That level of interaction has increased significantly with the move towards professionalisation of Social Care Workers under CORU, as well as embracing the relevant awards standards emanating from QQI. OTC was very much part of the consultation process with QQI as it sought to establish its more recent policies and guidelines, following from the legislative change in 2012. Moreover, members of the College team enhanced their learning and understanding greatly through attending briefing sessions from both CORU and QQI, and in practical terms from taking an active part in external panels for the latter body.

Core QA will always be a developing entity and one of the College's strengths is in taking on board recommendations which issue from both internal and external reviews. Since 2016, reviews of all the major suites of programmes available from the College, and the recommendations from re-engagement, have greatly enhanced overall QA, enhancement and their application. In this area, there is still some room from improvement in the internationalisation of review panels.

Benchmarking against similar programmes, services and institutions (nationally and internationally) and real, in-depth consultations with all stakeholders are key components of OTC reviews. Indeed, these fields have been repeatedly highlighted by review panels for praise.

Blended learning is the central mode of delivery at OTC and all of the College's QA has always been based on this premise. Recent feedback has shown that this may not always have been as clear to all stakeholders as it has been to those working within the College and within its QA framework. Therefore, the feedback from re-engagement which proposed a more transparent strategy in this area was welcomed and steps are already in place to improve this, as outlined above. Overall, greater transparency regarding policies and procedures has already been achieved through enhancements made over the last two years.

OTC is a learning organisation and an HEI and FET provider which has quality at its core. The importance of this function has been demonstrated by the top down approach which has seen all members of College come to see its significance. In this, as in many other ways, the re-engagement process was most helpful in involving all in feeling part of QA at College and in making everyone part of its ultimate and continuing enhancement. This has its strongest impact through the quality of delivery to students and most importantly, through the targeted learning which leads to better outcomes for the service users with whom students work on a daily basis.

6.3 Themes

Developmental themes of importance to the institution which will be relevant to periodic review.

From the foregoing, and all reviews and processes which fed into this report, it has become clear that the major themes for the College to pursue in moving towards its next Institutional Review (IR) are:

- **Student success; improved online delivery; improved face-to-face delivery; implemented student support policy and its development:**

Here, College will continue to work with the National Forum, HECA, IASCE, CORU and other professional bodies and networks to ensure best practice.

- **Publication of Blended Learning Strategy; application of action plan:**

This will provide measurable KPIs in this area, which can be investigated in the next reporting period.

- **Iteration of outstanding procedures:**

These will be published in 2020.

- **Governance:**

Academic Council, its terms of reference and the terms of reference of its standing committees will continue to evolve.

- **Alignment of HET and FET QA:**

Having been approved with essentially the same sets of provisions for both areas (with some exceptions), the efficacy of the first full year of application will be closely monitored, particularly in relation to FET delivery.

- **Embedding of policies; RPL/RPEL, GDPR, Risk Management:**

Further training and development will take place in these areas. This will also be monitored for effectiveness.

- **Possibility of fully online programmes:**

An application will be made to QQI in order to seek approval for the OTC's first fully online, and fully validated, programme. Other applications may follow.

- **Practice Placement:**

OTC will put a strong emphasis on ensuring that all the required "Standards of proficiency" in this area of the Social Care degree are met to the utmost, in readiness for CORU's approval panel in 2021.

- **Information to stakeholders; continued enhancement of website, QA documents and handbooks:**

This area of the College's website has been substantially augmented throughout and following the re-engagement process. Additional publications and enhancements will follow.