

SECTION 7: SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Supporting Documents:

1. MyOTC Induction Programme
2. Students at Risk Intervention Contract
3. Individual Academic Tutor Support Record Template

7.1 Supports for Learners

7.1.1 Student Learning Support and Pastoral Care Policy

STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT AND PASTORAL CARE POLICY

OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Introduction

The Open Training College (OTC) seeks to provide a supportive teaching and learning environment that is responsive to individual student needs. Such support is fundamentally based on the Supported Open Learning (SOL) Model and is targeted at all stages of the student lifecycle.

The academic entry levels for each programme are regularly monitored, benchmarked and adjusted where necessary, to ensure that students entering OTC programs have the academic proficiencies which will give them a realistic chance to successfully complete their chosen programme. At the same time OTC recognises that, for a wide variety of reasons, students may not find it easy to achieve the academic results of which they are capable. This document outlines the academic and pastoral care support available to all students.

2. Purpose

This policy defines who can avail of OTC learning support and identifies what services are available within this provision.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all students registered with the OTC who wish to avail of Learning Support.

4. Policy Statement

Our aim is to foster independent learning through the provision of online resources, one-to-one sessions and group workshops.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The OTC will ensure that our service is responsive to student need and delivered in a timely manner. In addition, we will undertake regular evaluations of our service and address any issues which may arise. At each stage we will respect the student's privacy and confidentiality.

The Programme Directors, will liaise with other OTC staff to arrange additional supports such as assistive technology, academic tuition and alternative formats.

Students are expected to disclose learning support or pastoral care needs to the OTC at interview or as early as possible in the student life cycle. College welcomes all feedback from students and see it as a vital element to the development and enhancement of the service we offer to students.

6. Definitions

The OTC defines learning support as the following suite of services:

- Supported Open Learning (SOL) Model
- Guide to Learning Support and Pastoral Care Services
- Orientation Programme
- MyOTC Induction Programme
- Students at Risk Intervention Contract
- Individual Academic Tutor Support Record Template
- Provision of Support for Students with Disabilities and or Specific Learning Difficulties
- Student Progression, Exclusion and Graduation Policy and Procedure
- English Language and Academic Assistance
- Library
- Information Technology
- Individual Academic Tutors
- In-workshop consultation
- E-learning consultation
- Online facilitators
- Programme Director consultation

Policy Title:		Student Learning Support and Pastoral Care Policy
OTC Policy No		1807
Version		1.0
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Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supported Open Learning (SOL) Model ▪ Guide to Learning Support and Pastoral Care Services ▪ Orientation Programme ▪ MyOTC Induction Programme ▪ Students at Risk Intervention Contract ▪ Individual Academic Tutor Support Record Template ▪ Provision of Support for Students with Disabilities and or Specific Learning Difficulties ▪ Awards Policy and Procedures.
Audience:		Public – accessible to anyone
Reference(s)		QQI QA and Validation Policies and Guidelines (2016-2018) European Standards and Guidelines (2015)

Guide to Learning Support and Pastoral Care Services

This guide is intended to provide staff and students with information regarding the facilities and resources that are available to students to support them with the academic demands of their programmes. The guide also outlines the expectations and responsibilities of staff to identify students with pastoral care and learning support needs and to direct them to or provide them with appropriate resources. Students deemed in need of specialist support services or academically 'at risk' are defined and the support strategies in place for these students described.

1. Orientation and Transition to Higher Education

All students are required to complete an Orientation Programme prior to commencement of their study with College. The Programme Director is responsible for the delivery of the orientation programme to all students. The orientation programme encompasses a range of educational, programme planning, independent self-directed study, e-learning and social information sessions. These include:

- Registration, creation of ID and enrolment check;
- Learning Management System and IT systems introduction;
- Online Library orientation;
- Programme and workshop attendance planning;
- Individual Academic Tutor allocation;
- Academic expectations including use of Turnitin and plagiarism;
- Student Support Services information;
- Orientation sessions are supported through appropriate resources posted on the website and the Student Learning Management System;
- The Tutor/Workshop Presenter or delegated member of staff is responsible for checking student attendance and following up with students who do not attend or who arrive late.

Orientation and follow up procedures are designed to ensure that all students are appropriately inducted into their programme.

2. Identification of Individual Student Needs

Close scrutiny of students is maintained by tutors and workshop presenters. Attendance rolls are taken at each class and assignment submissions are monitored. Students who fail to attend regularly

and/or who fail to submit one or more assessments are contacted by the Tutor and/or Programme Director. The Tutor and or Programme Director may identify these students as having learning support needs.

Learning support needs of students may arise from issues associated with:

- English language
- literacy
- study techniques
- time management
- organisational skills
- work demands
- personal issues
- I.T.
- the requirements of the programme

Learner support needs may be identified:

- by poor attendance or poor assessment outcomes
- during initial discussions with academic staff during Orientation
- by self-referral by a student
- when a workshop presenter/tutor has identified that a learner is experiencing difficulty (this may be by observation in workshop or upon analysis of assessment items submitted early in the term)
- when a learner seeks assistance from the Tutor or Programme Director or some other member of staff
- after a student subject evaluation survey
- during an interview with a student
- as part of an intervention strategy agreed between the learner and the Programme Director

3. Ongoing Student Learning Support

Programmes commence during Orientation to assist students with the transition to a tertiary level study regime. The programmes include workshops, individual interviews with students and informal support provided by tutors. The support programmes utilise a wide range of resources:

- **English Language and Academic Assistance**

English language and academic advice workshops and resources include such topics as essay writing, report writing, referencing, avoiding plagiarism, using Turnitin, making oral presentations, and examination tips.

- **Library**

Library information sessions are held during Orientation. Additional tutorials/workshops are scheduled throughout the year to assist students to most effectively utilise the range of electronic databases and library resources. These tutorials/workshops are designed to improve information literacy skills of students.

- **Information Technology**

Through the dedicated e-learning support team, e-learning and information technology staff members are available to help students with the technology available to them and with connectivity and access issues related to their programme. All queries will be responded to within 48 hours.

4. Individual Academic Tutor

Individual Academic Tutors provide regular assistance, covering topics such as time management, exam preparation, essay and report writing, referencing, avoiding plagiarism, library research, and guidance on how to transfer learning into practice. Other topics are covered as required, with the objective of helping students to improve their performance.

Individual Academic Tutors will meet with students in person, if required, in addition to providing support online or by phone.

Documentation of students seeking support

Records are maintained by the individual Academic Tutor of students referred for additional academic or English language support. The individual Academic Tutor also keeps records of students seeking assistance. Summary data form part of the educational metrics reported to the Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

5. General Academic Staff Consultation

In-workshop consultation

Individual student consultations with the subject lecturer, tutor or other appropriate academic are an integral part of the learning experience for each subject. OTC's normal programme pattern provides face to face workshops/seminars/lectures and a structured tutorial. Further tutorials are scheduled to allow students the opportunity to clarify points of confusion, discuss aspects of the subject in more detail and obtain feedback on their assignments, both in draft form and on completed work.

The scheduled times of workshops and tutorials are given to students on commencement of their studies, online (by use of MyOTC) and provided individually to students. If a tutor considers that additional times for consultation are required, at particular times of the programme, then these may be arranged with the approval of the Programme Director.

E-learning consultation

The College's online environment is a platform that utilises Moodle 3.4, Google Education Products, Turnitin and a variety of databases including EBSCO and Emerald. The College's main aim is to ensure that the online environment is accessible and usable by all learners, regardless of previous learning experience.

Each module of the degree programme is placed on a bespoke virtual learning area, MyOTC Learning Centre, on the College's virtual learning environment. The module is divided into units and each unit contains module material, key links, documents, videos, learner activities and discussion groups. Through Moodle's conditionality function the tutor can structure the learning into a defined learning pathway so that the learner can only progress by completing well defined conditions. Each module has quick links to a number of resources including the college online library and databases, excellent best practice external resources, and key apps. This function can provide an indication of a student having IT or content difficulties and alerts the tutor to provide a response.

The modules are supported by a virtual tutorial developed through Articulate Storyline that, through multimedia supports, allows the learner to engage with the materials in an interactive way and caters for a variety of learning styles (visual, auditory, reading). Another support is the Open Training College

range of informative podcasts where the College interviews experts and academics in the relevant areas of social care, management and adult study.

Students use the Google education apps for email, assignments, college calendar and assessment feedback. The student has to engage with Turnitin to ensure that their assessment work is original.

Due to the demographic profile of the students that access the Open Training College, the College is keen to ensure that each student who enters the online learning environment is ready to learn effectively through the platform and processes involved.

7. Online Supports

Online induction programme

A key area of support is an online induction programme that students are required to complete prior to commencing their studies. It provides them with the key skills required to study effectively online.

The induction programme is made up of the following sections:

Unit 1 – Internet Essentials

Unit 2 – Your Open Training College Email Account - Your key communication tool with the College

Unit 3 – MyOTC Learning Centre - Where you do most of your learning

Unit 4 – Google Docs/Drive (See Online videos) – How to submit your assignment to the College

Unit 5 – Turnitin – How to check for any plagiarism issues

Unit 6 – Accessibility Issues – How to adapt your computer

Unit 7 – Survey Monkey Feedback – How to provide the College with feedback

The induction programme is delivered by an industry expert in adult learning online.

Learning and Development in Higher Education

College has developed a new 5 credit module for first year students on the degree programmes; this module, *Learning and Development in Higher Education*, delivered through a blended learning mix of online and workshop, provides a solid foundation for students on which to build their learning. It supports students – particularly those with minimal experience of education – to develop their academic skills and identify their preferred learning styles and therefore ensures the best possible start for each learner to learn and study effectively on the degree programme. This module may be offered to students on other programmes, as a learning support.

Each programme and module is enhanced by an individual web based support site. The module web page provides students with access to subject resources and also includes a 'chat room', 'forum' and group email facilities that allow for the posing of questions by students and tutors and response by both students and tutors. Such community based facilities are moderated and controlled by the year tutor.

All students enrolled in a module have access to the module web page. The Programme Director is responsible for checking following commencement of a programme to ensure that all students have utilised the platform.

All students and tutors have unique OTC email addresses which are the primary conduit for academic and administrative information and enquiries. Students are encouraged to contact tutors directly by email if they have any questions that will not wait until the next tutorial session. OTC tutors are required to read and respond to their emails in a timely fashion.

Online facilitators

Facilitators of modules delivered in workshops and online provide students with information on the support they provide in their welcome email and in the Student Handbook. Students are required to respond to the welcome email to confirm they have received and read the Student Handbook. Students are contacted in the first week to ensure they understand the programme and assessment requirements and clarify any concerns or questions they may have. Facilitators contact students on a regular basis and also use the Discussion Forum for regular contact.

Students have access to any of the online support staff regarding their studies. These include dedicated online e-learning staff members who provide support to students who have queries or problems.

Consultation with Programme Directors

Programme Directors are available for individual consultations at times when they are not engaged in teaching or associated administrative duties. Programme Directors are normally fulltime permanent staff. Appointments can be made by email. Programme Directors provide a range of academic and programme management advice, from programme planning and subject enrolments, to dealing with appeals and progression issues.

8. Students at risk

Definition

Students are required to attain minimum academic standards. The individual Academic Tutor monitors the academic performance of students against the minimum academic standards at the end of each term. Students do not meet minimum academic standards in a programme if they:

- fail a particular module of study more than once; or
- fail two or more of the modules of study attempted in an academic year.

Students who do not meet the minimum academic standards are deemed to be “at risk”. The individual Academic Tutor will arrange for academic counselling for all students who are deemed to be “at risk” and also advise such students of the possibility that conditions may be placed on their enrolment going forward.

Intervention support strategies

During the academic counselling session the tutor and the student will determine what additional support will be provided to the student. This may include, but is not limited to, the student:

- a) attending academic skills programmes;
 - b) attending tutorial or study groups;
 - c) receiving individual case management;
 - d) attending counselling;
 - e) receiving assistance with personal issues which are influencing progress;
 - f) receiving mentoring;
- or
- g) a combination of the above and a reduction in programme load.

Intervention contracts/documentation

Students deemed at risk are required to complete and sign an Intervention Contract that stipulates the steps agreed with the tutor to give them the appropriate level of academic support.

The individual Academic Tutor is required to record the details of any student deemed 'at risk' and placed on an intervention contract. Summary data of students on intervention contracts form part of the educational metrics reported to the Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

STUDENT FEES POLICY AND PROTOCOLS OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students are adequately informed about the charging and payment of student fees and to ensure that fee protocols are applied in a consistent and correct manner. The *Student Fees Protocol* will be made available to perspective and existing students to ensure that they are aware of their obligations and commitments

2. Scope

This policy and protocols apply to all students registered with College.

3. Policy Statement

The fees policy and protocols set out the student's fee liability, payment schedules, payment supports and sanctions for late payment or non-payment of student fees and if the student subsequently withdraws or defers from the Programme. Students will be advised of their fee liability during the application process and College registration process. Each student is advised to familiarise themselves personally with their fee liability prior to registration.

4. Related Documentation

Student Fees Protocol: (Refer to schedule of programme costs published each year and available on the College website and in programme literature).

Commitment to paying fees

As part of the application/re-registration process at the beginning of each academic year, students are asked to complete an application/re-registration form in which they commit to paying their fees for the full academic year. The signature on that form commits the student to paying fees on time.

The signature on the form commits a student to pay the total amount of fees for that year, even if they decide to withdraw from the programme without completing all the modules.

Where an agency is making a contribution towards annual student fees, students are still responsible for the payment of all fees.

Fees instalments option

Students have a choice of paying fees all at once at the start of the academic year or through instalments during the academic year. Instalment deadline dates are as follows:

1. December 1st
2. February 1st
3. April 1st

Fees must be paid directly to the College through the online IMS (Information Management System). If, for an unusual reason, payment cannot be made in this way, it is possible they may be paid by cheque, postal order, bank draft or by credit card (this method will incur an additional admin. fee). In those cases, all payments should be made out to the Open Training College (send fees for the attention of **Fees Administrator, Open Training College, Prospect Hall, Willowfield Park, Goatstown, Dublin 14**). Do not send cash to the College. It is advisable to make use of Registered Post when sending fees or assignments to the College.

Where an agency is making a contribution towards annual student fees, students are still responsible for the payment of all fees. Students are instructed to pay all personal instalments prior to any payments expected from their agency. Students should contact the Administration Team if they are unclear about any aspect of fees instalments.

Sanctions for Late fees:

If a student is paying by instalments and has missed a deadline by more than 2 weeks, it will be necessary for the Open Training College to withdraw all student supports. This means that student supports such as access to My Learning Centre (MyOTC), and distribution of assessment feedback, will not be available to the student as long as there are outstanding fees. The College will email a message (1st reminder) to each student confirming that supports have been withdrawn until payment is received and total fees are up-to-date. The message will include a revised deadline date by which full payment of outstanding fees is expected.

If a student is still in arrears for a period of 2 weeks after the revised deadline date, the College will email a letter (2nd reminder) containing a withdrawal form and will request the immediate return of a completed withdrawal form from the student, along with payment of any outstanding fees.

If the College does not receive payment or the completed withdrawal form after a further 2 weeks from the reminder date, the College will post a letter (3rd & final reminder) to the student explaining that the College must accept that the student has withdrawn from the programme and they will not be put forward for registration with QQI. A student who has already withdrawn is prohibited from returning to study with the Open Training College if there are any outstanding fees.

Student Appeal

The student can appeal in writing to the Programme Director within 2 weeks of receiving the 3rd and final reminder.

Support for Students

The College will offer short-term support to any student who is the victim of extenuating circumstances and who can evidence documents to support their unusual and extreme situation. The student and College must agree on repayment terms submitted in writing by the student to the College. Academic student supports will remain withdrawn until all the relevant documents have been reviewed fully and a decision has been made by the Programme Director. The student will be notified of the decision immediately. Any further appeal from this stage will go through the normal College appeal/complaint channels, to the relevant sub-committee of the Academic Council (i.e., the Registration and Admissions committee), in the first instance, with the Academic Council itself being the next and ultimate level of appeal.

All outstanding fees owed, due to extenuating circumstances during the academic year, must be paid by June 15th.

The College continues to offer the greatest of flexibility to all students regarding payment of fees. The various instalment plans relative to each programme are explained each year to all learners attending Applicants' Day. If student circumstances change after this, it is the responsibility of the student to communicate with the Administration department.

Agency Support

A portion of the programme fees may be paid by the participant's agency. Individual fee arrangements are agreed between the applicant and their agency prior to the commencement of the programme.

Therefore, invoices are issued to the student. **Negotiation with agencies in relation to fees will not be undertaken by the College in any circumstances.** Where there is a delay/issue in the College receiving agency fees, students are still expected to pay their contributions on the required dates on the instalment plan, which will be prior to the instalment date for agency fees. Students are then expected to liaise with their agency to expedite the payment of said fees.

Fees are non-refundable.

In the case of students who withdraw from their programme of study, fees that have been paid in advance will be fully credited to the student's account if the student returns within 12 months of the withdrawal date. 50% credit will apply to students returning within 24 months of the withdrawal date. Students returning after 24 months are liable for full fees applicable at that time.

Tax Relief on Fees

For programmes of one year or more, tax relief is available at the lower rate. Tax relief is available for the portion of fees paid by the student. In order to claim tax relief for tuition fees you will need to do the following:

Go to www.revenue.ie and type 'IT 31' into the search box.

1. Download and print off form **IT 31 Tax Relief for Tuition Fees form**.
2. Complete the form and send it with the receipts to your regional Revenue office.
3. If requested by the revenue service, contact the College office to request a specific tax receipt for the total amount of your fee payments.

(Details are also available on the www.revenue.ie website)

Miscellaneous Fees/Costs

Miscellaneous costs that may be incurred during the programme of your studies include:

Programme Material

Students receive access to all materials online as part of the programme fee.

Students are not permitted to copy materials or pass them to third parties without the express written consent of the College. The Open Training College retains the copyright in all programme materials.

Purchasing Hardcopy Material

Hard copies of programme material can be purchased (refer to schedule of costs published each year and are available on the College website). Each module will be mailed to the student's residence as

the module is released online. Please contact the Administration department if you wish to purchase hardcopy learning materials. The deadline for ordering your complete set of hardcopy modules occurs in September each year.

Bridging Fee

A fee is charged for applicants who participate in the Bridging process.

Re-registration Fee

Students who withdraw will be required to pay a re-registration fee on returning to their studies. Students who are spreading completion of their programme over additional academic periods (only by prior agreement made at application stage) will not incur a re-registration fee during the already agreed additional period.

Late Re-Registration Fee

Students who fail to complete the re-registration process within the specified timeframe will incur a late re-registration fee. Failure to submit a complete re-registration form will warrant the return of the form to the student, which may delay the process and result in a late fee being charged due to a missed deadline.

Repeat Exams

Students who avail of a re-sit examination for whatever reason will be required to pay an administration fee.

Repeat Module Fee (pro rata based upon programme fees)

Where students are required to repeat a module due to failure of that module in the previous academic period a repeat module fee will apply per module. Repeat module fees cover the student's attendance at the workshop, learning materials, MyOTC access, tutorial support, formative and summative assessment.

Formal Appeals

The College charges a fee in relation to appeals. A refund will be issued in the case of a successful appeal.

Exemptions

Students who are granted an exemption from a module or modules, pay their fees for the year on a pro-rata basis based on the number of modules they must complete in full.

All fees are communicated to students on the commencement of each academic year.

Increase in Fees: All fees are reviewed annually and may be subject to increases.

Policy Title:		Fees Policy
OTC Policy No		1710
Version		2
Date approved: Sept 2018	Date policy will take effect: Sept 2018	Date of Next Review: July 2019
Approving Authority:		College Directorate
Document Owner/Contact:		Corporate Services Manager
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		Programme Withdrawal Form Programme Schedule of Costs
Audience:		Staff and Student access
Reference(s)		QA Review of Administration Function (Current Version)

7.2 Equality Policy

EQUALITY POLICY OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Introduction

College is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and students irrespective of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, nationality or ethnic or national origin, or membership of the travelling community.

The concept of equality is central to the shared values and ethos of the Open Training College. The principles and practice of equality are intrinsic to the way we conduct our business and working relationships and the shared values we hold.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to promote equality of opportunity for all staff and students of the Open Training College by ensuring that all administrative, academic and other practices operate on the basis of the appropriate merits, qualifications, abilities and potential of individuals, and do not discriminate against any individual on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or membership of the travelling community.

The Open Training College also operates in accordance with the St. Michael's House *Dignity at Work* and *Equal Opportunities* policies, which have been designed to ensure compliance with the Employment Equality Act 1998 and 2004.

3. Scope

This policy and associated procedures apply to all individuals at Open Training College including all students, core and associate academic staff and stakeholder engaged with the OTC.

4. Policy Statement

Open Training College is committed to the development, maintenance and support of a policy of equal opportunity for staff, students and prospective staff and students. The OTC has and will continue to develop policies, procedures and practices that comply with the Equality Employment Acts 1998 and 2004 and the Equal Status Act 2000 and 2004. OTC is committed to the eradication of unfair and discriminatory practices, direct and indirect, however and whenever they occur, and ensures that concepts of diversity and equality of opportunity are enshrined in its values and objectives.

Equality in the Workplace

The aim of the policy is to promote equality of opportunity for the OTC staff. The College ensures that, through its recruitment and selection policy and procedures, it provides equality of opportunities for employment so that the workforce reflects the diversity of the community it serves. In addition, the College is committed to the achievement of equality of opportunity for all staff in career development, training, promotion and re-grading.

The College monitors and reviews employment policies and practices to ensure that they do not, directly or indirectly, discriminate unfairly against individual members of staff or particular groups of staff.

A copy of this policy and related policies are included in the QA Manual, OTC Staff handbook and the SMH Human Resources Policies and Procedures documentation. Attention to this information is drawn to at all induction programmes for new staff. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Recruitment Policy and CPD Policy.

Equality in Student Life

OTC recognises and implements the philosophy that equality of treatment in the College educational environment is a fundamental right. To this end College endeavours to devise and implement procedures which will ensure that no student or potential student will receive less favourable treatment than any other because of age (subject to Colleges regulations in regard to minimum age of entry), nationality or ethnic or national origin, gender, civil status, family status, disability, religious belief, sexual orientation, or membership of the traveller community.

The objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities as tutors, assessors, administrators, managers, and representatives of the College under the provisions of national legislation and the policies of the College.
- To ensure that all applicants to the College are treated fairly and in accordance with published policies and procedures and have equality of access to programme and services.
- To ensure that the College affords all students an equal opportunity to develop their full potential; the policies, procedures and practices of the College in relation to teaching, learning and assessment will seek to ensure equality of opportunity for all students and, as far as is practicable, practices will conform with the published procedures of the College.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The College Director has ultimate executive responsibility for the effective development and implementation of academic policies. The Head of Quality & Academic Affairs has overall delegated responsibility for coordinating the day to day operation of the policies and the development, maintenance and monitoring of supporting procedures. Programme Directors and Tutors are responsible for pursuing the implementation of these policies in relation to the activities of their programmes.

6. Definitions

Equality as understood in this policy is defined as: 'treating people fairly, regardless of any irrelevant attributes they may possess, such as skin colour, background or lifestyle'. It means that people will not suffer unfairly, or benefit unduly, just because they happen to belong to a certain group, ethnic group or sex, or because they happen to possess certain personal attributes. (*Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004*)

Policy Title:		Equality Policy
OTC Policy No		1702
Version		3
Date approved: September 2018	Date policy will take effect: September 2018	Date of Next Review: September 2021
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs

Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:	Recruitment Policy CPD Policy Student Supports Policy Support for students with Disabilities and Specific Learning difficulties Academic Integrity Policy Complaints Policy and Procedures Dignity at Work Policy (SMH) Equal Opportunities policy (SMH)
Audience:	Public – accessible to anyone
Reference(s)	Equality Employment Acts 1998 and 2004 Equal Status Act 2000 and 2004

7.3 Complaints Policy and Procedure

COMPLAINTS POLICY OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Introduction

The Open Training College prides itself on the quality and standards of the programmes and services it delivers, and on its relationship with each individual student. As part of Quality Assurance procedures students are regularly asked for their feedback on all aspects of programme and service delivery, which informs the Programme Boards, and subsequently amendments and improvements to programmes and services. The allocation of a personal tutor to all students also provides a safe environment in which students can air any grievances they may have and discuss alternative supports that will work towards resolving their situation at a local level.

However, it is recognised that not all such complaints will be resolved satisfactorily at this level, thus this policy and related procedures are presented to provide students with the opportunity to take any unresolved complaints to the management of the College for further consideration. It is the policy of the College to take all valid complaints seriously and to strive for a speedy, equitable, timely and courteous solution.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide students and staff with a clear understanding of the students right to air a grievance and / or make an informal or formal complaint.

3. Scope

This policy and the associated procedures apply to all registered students of OTC.

4. Policy Statement

The OTC (the 'College') is committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to have an excellent College experience. In order to achieve this all members of staff aspire to a high level of competency, fairness and professionalism. There may be circumstances where College systems, processes, human error or sub-standard performance on a specific occasion result in a student having a genuine grievance. It is the policy of the College to provide resolution mechanisms to address issues that may arise. However, should the student proceed to making a complaint the OTC has adopted complaints procedures and developed guidelines on how to make an informal or formal complaint that are outlined in the Student Handbook.

In making a complaint the complainant can expect:

- **Fairness:** taking into account any relevant or appropriate evidence, factors or circumstances
- **Listening:** in a courteous and professional manner
- **Responsiveness:** respond in a timely and sensitive way
- **Feedback:** keep the complainant informed of how the complaint is being processed
- **Learning:** use the information generated to help us improve our service
- **Confidentiality:** any individual named in a grievance will be provided with the details of the grievance and allowed to respond

The student has the right to seek advice from or to be accompanied by a nominated person or a member of College staff at any stage in the procedure.

All complaints that highlight gaps in College policy and procedures will be reviewed and utilised to develop policy and procedure for introduction in the following academic year. Policy and procedures relating to all College regulations are communicated to students annually through the Student Handbook and on the College website.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Programme Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 days.

The College Director has ultimate executive responsibility for the effective development and implementation of academic policies. The Head of Quality & Academic Affairs has overall delegated responsibility for coordinating the day to day operation of the policies and the development, maintenance and monitoring of supporting procedures. Programme Directors and Tutors are

responsible for pursuing the implementation of these policies in relation to the activities of their programmes.

A formal complaint must be made in writing to the Programme Director. This can be sent via letter, e-mail or fax.

6. Sanctions

A student will not be penalised in any way for lodging a grievance in good faith regardless of whether or not then grievance is upheld. However, where a grievance is found to be malicious in nature actions may be taken. No College staff named in a grievance procedure will suffer any unnecessary penalty for being involved in a grievance procedure.

7. Definition

Formal Complaint

A formal complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction with service or treatment received while participating in any Open Training College programme, which impacts negatively on the success or wellbeing of the student in question, and which requires the involvement of College management to resolve. Formal complaints relate to matters that cannot be addressed through another procedure, e.g. the appeals procedure in relation to assessment or plagiarism.

Policy Title:		Complaints Policy
OTC Policy No		1703
Version		2
Date approved: Sept 2018	Date policy will take effect: Sept 2018	Date of Next Review: Sept 2018
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student Complaint Procedure - Guidelines on how to make a complaint 2. SMH Complaints and Compliments Policy
Audience:		Public Access

Reference(s)	Student Handbook
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7.3.1 Student Complaint Procedures

Guidelines on how to make a complaint

Unless the student feels unable to do so, raise the complaint/grievance with the tutor or directly with person/people concerned. Meetings and discussions between parties directly involved are examples of informal problem-solving mechanisms that are highly recommended. Students who have complaint/grievances are expected to meet with their tutor and / or the person/persons directly involved to describe (1) the grievance and (2) to the resolution or remedy requested. Both parties are expected to seek a solution that is equitable and satisfactory to all parties.

Where these discussions do not result in a successful resolution, either party may then seek the assistance of the Programme Director. The Programme Director's role is to call meetings between the parties involved, facilitate and inform the discussion as appropriate and move toward a resolution. Any agreed resolution should be noted by the Programme Director and circulated to all parties.

In the event that the informal process is unsuccessful the grievance may be escalated to the Formal Stage. This will be commenced by the submission of a formal letter of complaint to the Programme Director seeking assistance with the complaint. This complaint will be responded to within 5 working days. Should this not be possible for reasons beyond the Programme Director's control all parties will be informed of the expected delay.

Informal Complaint

To make an informal complaint students can raise an issue with their tutor through the tutorial process using telephone or e-mail communication, or face-to-face with a tutor at a workshop. The tutor will discuss the situation with the student and attempt to generate positive solutions in order to resolve

the issue. In the event that a resolution cannot be satisfactorily met the formal complaints procedure, outlined below is available to all students.

What constitutes a formal complaint?

A formal complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction with service or treatment received while participating in any Open Training College programme, which impacts negatively on the success or wellbeing of the student in question, and which requires the involvement of College management to resolve. Formal complaints relate to matters that cannot be addressed through another procedure, e.g. the appeals procedure in relation to assessment or plagiarism.

Who can make a formal complaint?

Any student on any programme of the College can make a formal complaint, in the event that the issue being raised cannot be resolved satisfactorily at a local level.

How to make a formal complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing to the Programme Director. This can be sent via letter, e-mail or fax. The Programme Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 days.

How will formal complaints be handled?

The nature of the complaint will determine how it is dealt with. The nature of the complaint and appropriate action(s) will be determined by the Programme Director.

In the case that a complaint represents a situation involving (against) an OTC staff member and involves HR issues then the relevant HR policy and procedure will apply.

In the event that a complaint involves an academic matter (other than assessment) then the complaint may be reviewed by the appropriate sub-committee of the Academic Council (e.g., Registration and Admissions Committee, Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee).

In the event that the complaint refers to another aspect of College business the Programme Director will review all relevant information, policy and procedures and make a decision.

The Programme Director will communicate with the complainant regarding the avenue and action(s) being taken to address his/her complaint.

Appeals Process

If the student is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint or its handling s/he can appeal the decision to the Academic Council. The Director will review all relevant information and documentation, may meet with the complainant and/or other parties and seek external advice (if required and respecting any matters of confidentiality). The decision of the Academic Council will be communicated to the complainant in writing and is final.

The College recognises rights under the Freedom of Information Act.

7.4 Procedures for the Provision of Supports to Students with Disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties

The Open Training College operates the principle of inclusive access to learning materials and opportunities for all students. This is achieved through the *Supported Open Learning Model* and the College's Virtual Learning environment *MyOTC*, which facilitates the presentation of learning materials in a variety of formats and provides multiple opportunities for students to dialogue with staff and collaborate with other students.

However, it is recognised that some students who present to the College with specific learning support requirements (e.g. medical condition, specific learning difficulty, physical disability, mental health issue etc.) may require additional individual consideration and accommodations to provide them with equal opportunity to succeed on their chosen programme.

The following procedure outlines the process, which will be undertaken by the College to identify and implement appropriate and reasonable supports for such students.

7.4.1 Procedure for Verifying and Designing Individualised Learner Supports

1. Learning/medical support requirement is disclosed/discovered

- Initial discussion with tutor/member of academic programme team (interview, in the case of applicants)

2. Verification of support requirement by nominated health professional

- Existing report with regard to Third Level academic study

OR

- OTC verification form completed by appropriate health professional

3. Learner supports agreed and implemented

- Learner Support meeting
- Learner Support Plan
- Regular review of supports

1. Disclosure/discovery of a learning or medical support requirement

At the application stage, all applicants are requested to disclose details of any learning or medical support requirements they have and wish to make the College aware of, in their initial application form. The application form states that any student who discloses any requirement at this stage will receive advice and guidance from a member of the academic programme team. The applicant is also directed to information on the College website about learner supports available.

Students will also have the opportunity to disclose any support requirement at any stage of their studies with the College through the tutorial process, which facilitates ongoing individual communication between tutor and student. Any student who discloses in this manner will be directed to the following procedure. This also applies to any student who develops/discovers a support requirement which they did not have or were not aware of at the time of application.

All information relating to a medical/disability diagnosis provided by applicants/students will be treated sensitively and as confidential information.

2. Verification of support requirement

Following disclosure/discovery by the student, verification of the indicated support requirement will need to be provided by an appropriate professional. This verification can be done through the provision of an existing evaluation report conducted with regard to Third Level academic study; where an appropriate evaluation has not been carried out to date, the student will be required to supply a completed report/form from an appropriate nominated professional from the list below.

Indicator	Accepted medical consultant/specialist report
Visual Impairment/Blindness	Ophthalmologist OR Ophthalmic surgeon
Hearing Impairment/Deafness	Professionally qualified Audiologist
Physical Disability	Orthopaedic OR other relevant Consultant such as a Rheumatologist or Paediatrician

Neurological Condition (incl. Brain injury, speech & language disabilities)	Neurological Condition: Neurologist OR other relevant consultant Speech & language disabilities: Speech and Language Therapist
General learning disability	Appropriately qualified Psychiatrist, Psychologist, OR Neurologist
Specific learning difficulty: Dyslexia Dyscalculia Dyspraxia ADD/ADHD Autism	Appropriately qualified Psychiatrist, Psychologist, OR Neurologist AND Occupational Therapist (in the case of Dyspraxia) who is a member of their respective professional or regulatory body
Mental Illness: Anxiety Disorders Mood Disorders Eating Disorders Impulse Control & Addiction Disorders Personality Disorders	Psychiatrist
Significant Ongoing Illness	Epilepsy: Neurologist Diabetes Type 1: Endocrinologist Cystic Fibrosis: Consultant Respiratory Physician Gastroenterology Conditions: Gastroenterologist Others: Relevant consultant in area of condition or consultant registrar/Registrar

3. Support meeting

Following satisfactory verification of a support requirement, (and offer and acceptance of a place on the programme in the case of applicants) a support meeting will be arranged between the student and a member of the College academic team. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the learner's requirements in detail and to ensure the College can provide adequate supports to learners to allow them equal opportunity to succeed on their programme of study. General supports available for learners are outlined below, and are communicated to learners on the College website and in the Student Handbook; these supports will be individually tailored and matched to the learner's needs as reasonable and appropriate. At this stage, and where available, the applicant/student will be asked to supply an academic reference from their most recent school or college placement, outlining supports they have previously received and their impact.

Following this meeting a *Learner Support Plan* will be devised for the individual. This plan constitutes the formal agreement between the College and learner and will have specified review dates (at least following first module, mid-year and end of year) attached to the plan to ensure the continued relevancy and appropriateness of the supports being provided.

7.4.2. Supports for Students with a Physical/Sensory Disability

- Venue checks to ensure accessibility and appropriate facilities
- Physical modifications to the training and examination environment e.g. seating arrangements, sound amplification etc.
- Learning materials provided in accessible, modifiable electronic formats
- Learning materials developed using multimedia, including ScreenR and Articulate
- Additional time allocated to complete assessments
- Alternative assessment formats, e.g. Viva Voce
- Support of a scribe to complete examinations
- Access to open source assistive technology software, e.g. Screen Reader, Browse Aloud

7.4.3 Supports for Students with a Specific Learning Difficulty, e.g. Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia

- Alternative assessment formats, e.g. Viva Voce
- Support of a scribe to complete examinations
- Additional time allocated to complete assessments
- Spelling and/or grammar waiver for assessments
- Extended individual tutorial support
- Provision of lecture materials

7.5 Procedures to Monitor, Review and Improve the Effectiveness of Resources and Support Services

7.5.1 Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee

The Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee monitors the implementation of learner supports and is responsible for the ongoing review and enhancement of such supports. This committee will also continually monitor the effectiveness of teaching systems and learning resources available from the College, and make recommendations for the enhancement of these, to ensure a service to students, which is consistent with current best practice.

7.6 Integration with Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy

The most pertinent elements relating to Blended Learning (BL) and Online Learning (OL) in this section are:

- MyOTC (Online platform-Moodle) Induction
- Academic Tutor support
- Additional supports (Assistive Technology / Reasonable accommodation etc.)
- Online library
- IT support
- E-learning consultation
- Learning & Development in Higher Education (LDHE) module
- Online facilitators
- Intervention support strategies
- Learner analytics
- Equality policy
- Complaints & Appeals
- Freedom of Information
- Monitoring, Review & Improvement of Resources & Support Services

Blended Learning: This section meets “*Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes*” (QQI, 2018), in relation to the following:

i. The provider’s arrangements for the validation of online programmes will focus on some additional issues such as: design and development mechanisms for **improving and updating learning resources**; **arrangements for student support and guidance**; and the availability and accessibility of appropriate learning resources.

ii. Specialist, reliable and accessible computer hardware and software applications are required for designing, developing and delivering online learning.

iii. There is a planned approach to staff guidance of online learners on any open education resources referenced including any intended or unintended endorsement of such resources.

iv. The infrastructure and resources required to support good quality blended learning are understood, planned, and routinely monitored and evaluated. These arrangements should take into account that, while online, learners are likely to be remote from the provider and from teachers and/or assessors. There is an institutional approach to these matters.

v. Any blended learning elements of provision have had the reliability of their delivery systems tested and signed off in advance, with confirmation that appropriate technical support and contingency plans are in place.

vi. Intellectual property rights and software licensing issues are addressed in the development and delivery of online learning.

vii. The delivery system for each online section/unit of study is fit-for-purpose.

viii. Curriculum content and student support that accommodates enhancement or updating, for example, in response to feedback or other quality assurance mechanisms. All online content is subject to approval and

ongoing quality assurance. Resource planning at programme level includes a budget for the updating of content to ensure it remains current.

ix. Open education resources referenced by the provider are subject to quality evaluation.

x. All materials and media (for example audio-visual, printed or digitised assets) used to deliver online learning are subject to informed peer comment at one or more draft stages and allow for the incorporation of feedback into subsequent and final versions of the learning resources.

xi. Learners are supported to make informed choices about participating in a blended learning programme and to develop the necessary independent study skills to successfully progress towards becoming an autonomous learner. The level and nature of support available to learners is clear.

xii. Processes to ensure the delivery of any study materials direct to learners remotely through, for example, online methods or correspondence, are secure and reliable, and there is a means of confirming its safe receipt.

xiii. Deliberate steps taken to assist every learner to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and to shape their own learning experience.

xiv. Learner support for monitoring their own programmes. Every learner undertaking online learning is supported in monitoring their own progression and achievement through the provision of regular opportunities to test their knowledge and understanding, reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff and/or their peers.

xv. Appropriate interventions and mechanisms to identify learners who may be struggling with online remote learning. Learners are encouraged to complete their programme. Progress is monitored, and learners are provided with prompt and helpful comments on their progress in relation to learning guidelines and goals.

xvi. Equality of opportunity.

xvii. Arrangements that make reasonable effort to ensure blended learning experiences are accessible to all learners, including learners with disabilities.

Online Learning: Indicators, for mapping and monitoring:

(Adapted from: *ENQA - Considerations for quality assurance of e-learning provision*, 2018)

INDICATORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students are clearly informed about the e-assessment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students/prospective students are informed about requirements concerning equipment, e-learning and digital skills, pre-knowledge and prerequisite subjects, and attendance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning resources:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The VLE supports a variety of methods and tools.– The technical infrastructure ensures the accessibility of the e-learning programme by students with special educational needs.– The institution defines the electronic security measures that guarantee standards of quality and information integrity and validity.– The VLE is based on non-proprietary web standards and is constantly updated to reflect technological changes.– The institution provides students with an adequate e-library and virtual labs.

- Student support:

- The institution has procedures in place that cover student support, including tutoring, pedagogical, technological, and administrative elements.
- Student support is offered according to the student's profile and their specific needs.
- The student support reflects characteristics of e-learning.
- Support for the development of learning, as well as digital skills (students are guided towards reflection, developing time management skills, etc.), is provided.
- Students receive guidelines/training in using e-learning resources (VLE, e-library, etc.).
- Hours of support are transparent and suit the needs of students; for instance, periods of peak demand (evenings, weekends, holidays, etc.) are considered.