

SECTION 6: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Supporting Documents:

1. QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards (Revised)
2. QQI (2015) Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining (Revised)
3. QQI (2013) Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers
4. Approved Programme Schedules and Programme Validation documentation.
5. QQI Policy Restatement - Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training- NQAI 2003, Restated 2015

6.1 Assessment of Learning Achievement

Principles of Assessment in the Open Training College

6.1.1 Criterion-Referenced Assessment

The Open Training College operates a system of criterion-referenced assessment for all accredited programmes. Criterion-referenced assessment is assessment based on learning outcomes, established and agreed for all modules, stages and programmes accredited by QQI. This system ensures that assessment, in all instances is valid and reliable and applied in a fair and consistent manner, for all students, across all programmes and assessors.

6.1.2 Applied Assessment

The mission statement of the College indicates that our goal is to provide accredited learning opportunities for staff working in disability, health related, non-profit, community and voluntary services. In line with this, all programme content and assessment activities of accredited College programmes are applied to the occupational context of the subject area. Students work closely with supervisors and mentors in their workplace to analyse and understand the practical application of their learning, and carry out assessment tasks at work, under the guidance of their programme tutor.

6.1.3 Fit-for-Purpose Assessment Techniques

Accredited Open Training College programmes are assessed by a combination of applied practical assignment, examination, projects, case studies, continuous assessment, group work and e-learning

activities. Various approaches to examinations are employed including traditional closed book, open book and case study.

The assessment for each module is carefully designed by the programme delivery team to address the key learning outcomes for the module, as well as the broader learning outcomes for the stage and overall programme. Details of assessment requirements for all modules are included on the programme schedule for all programmes, and further detailed in the Assessment Strategies for each module, programme and stage.

6.1.4 Provision of Information on Assessment to Students

Information on all policies, procedures and regulations pertaining to assessments are provided to students in the Student Handbook, which is made available to students on the e-learning centre for the duration of their studies with the College. The Student Handbook is reviewed and updated on an annual basis to reflect current practices, guidelines and regulations pertaining to student assessment on QQI accredited programmes.

Assignment due dates are provided to students on commencement of their programme. These dates are clearly indicated on the Programme Calendar. Students will also be given access to the Assessment Strategies relevant to their programme of study.

In recognition of the necessity for a two-way flow of information on assessment between the College and students, regular feedback is sought from students regarding their experiences of assessment on College programmes. Following completion of each module, and on completion of each academic year students are requested to participate in an online survey, in which the College requests feedback from students on all aspects of the programme including assessment.

6.1.5 Organisational Structures for the Management and Conduct of Assessment

Day to day operation of assessment within the Open Training College is managed by the programme delivery team for each programme/stage; this team is generally made up of the Tutors/Assessors and the Programme Director.

The role of the **Tutor/Assessor** in the assessment process is to:

- Communicate the requirements for assessment of each module to the student using the various communication methods available: Workshop, tutorials, e-mail and telephone tutorials.

- Provide support and guidance to students as they complete assessment activities.
- Track student progress through the assessment process and ensure assessment work is received from students by agreed deadlines.
- Consult with the Programme Director regarding difficulties individual students may be facing and supports they require as a result.
- Grade student work in accordance with the assessment rubric for the module, and with the regulations outlined in QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards (Revised).
- Provide students with their provisional grade for that module and feedback regarding their performance on the assessment activities.
- Communicate the plagiarism process to students, including how they can avoid plagiarism and the benefit of using Turn-it-in prior to submission.
- Highlight and investigate possible instances of plagiarism in student assessment work, and bring findings to the attention of the Programme Director.

The role of the **Programme Director** in the assessment process is to:

- Draft the marking rubric for the module, in line with defined assessment activities and learning outcomes.
- Consult with individual students regarding difficulties they may be facing and supports they require as a result.
- Monitor and ensure fair and consistent implementation of assessment regulations across all assessors.
- Implement cross-marking procedures.
- Participate in investigations into possible instances of plagiarism.
- Oversee the proper conduct of assessments, including invigilation of examinations.
- Ensure security in all matters pertaining to assessment materials.
- Ensure that all assessment entries are notified to the Examination Board/ QQI by the required date(s).
- Ensure that assessment results are communicated to the appropriate committees and Academic Council.
- Ensure that examination question papers and appropriate assessment rubrics are prepared by internal assessors, sent in good time for approval by External Examiner(s) and printed in good time.
- Ensure that appropriate examination accommodation arrangements are made for each student with an individual support need.

- Ensure that assignments and examination answer scripts are examined by Internal and External Examiner(s) and results for each student are made available for meetings of the Examination Board for the programme.
- Ensure that accurate records with regard to continuous assessment are maintained and made available to External Examiner(s).
- Liaise with the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs to ensure proper arrangements are made for holding meetings of the Examination Board.
- Ensure that students are provided with the information relevant to them with regard to the conduct and regulation of assessments, including access to the assessment strategies relevant to their programme of study.
- Ensure that students are provided with the information relevant to them with regard to plagiarism policies and procedures.
- Ensure that Assessment Strategies are in place for all modules, stages and programmes under their remit, and that these strategies are regularly reviewed.
- Approving the assessment rubric for each module, in line with defined assessment activities and learning outcomes.
- Communicate the individual assessment process for each module to the relevant tutors and ensure their understanding of the process and their responsibilities in that process.
- Communicating the plagiarism process to the tutors and ensuring they understand the process and their responsibilities in that process.

The day-to-day activities of the programme delivery team, as described above, are supported at a quality assurance level by the Academic Council, and by several of its sub-committees:

The **Programme Boards** are responsible for producing and implementing the Assessment Strategies for each programme, module and stage. These strategies provide guidance to the programme delivery team in designing the assessment activities and rubric for the modules. The effectiveness of assessment strategies is discussed at programme boards, with reference to student feedback and to assessment results, and recommendations for improvement are made as a result.

The **Disciplinary Committee** oversees the application of the College policies and procedures regarding Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct in the assessment process.

The **Examination Boards** review the outcomes of external examiner moderation of programme(s) under consideration, conduct QA monitoring of assessment techniques, consistency of assessment

and comparison of standards of programme(s) under consideration with national norms and best practice, agree assessment results for all learners of programme(s) under consideration, consider learner appeals in relation to assessment results and procedures of programme(s) under consideration, and make recommendations to Academic Council, review penalties applied to assessment activities of programme(s) under consideration and review/monitor statistics/trends regarding assessment results of programme(s) under consideration. Finally the **Academic Council** makes final decisions on appeals made by students in relation to their assessment outcomes.

6.2 Assessment Regulations

6.2.1 Assessment Strategies

Programme Assessment Strategies are produced, implemented and reviewed by the Programme Boards (or Programme Development Committee in the case of new programmes) for each programme and their implementation monitored by the Programme Boards and the Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee. Module and Stage Assessment Strategies are also produced for each of programme's constituent parts. Each programme assessment strategy will have the following functions/features:

- Link the programme's assessment instruments (summative and formative, including continuous assessment and repeat assessment) to the minimum (and any other) intended programme learning outcomes, as well as intended module and stage learning outcomes.
- Describe and provide a rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures. It should also address their fairness and consistency, specifically their validity, reliability and authenticity.
- Describe any special regulations (e.g. learners may be required to pass some key modules outright and not rely on pass by compensation).
- Regulate, build upon and integrate the module assessment strategies and (where used) stage assessment strategies.
- Provide contingent strategy for cases where learners claim exemption from modules, including for recognition of prior learning.
- Match the programme's assessment instruments to the requirements of the institutional grading system, particularly concerning the recording and combination of module grades/marks (i.e. provide clear criteria for grading and marking).
- Ensure that the programme's continuous assessment workload is appropriately balanced.
- Relate to the programme's teaching and learning strategy.

QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards Revised

6.2.2 Marking & Grading

Marking and grading of student assessment work is carried out by trained, competent assessors, in accordance with standardised assessment rubrics specifically designed for each assessment task to ensure accurate criterion-referenced assessment against the relevant learning outcomes.

The Open Training College operates a percentage grading system for all its QQI accredited programmes.

The grading scheme used by the College in relation to Higher Education and Training (**HET**) QQI programmes is as follows; this scheme applies to award classifications for major programmes:

Overall Result - HET	Major Programmes at level 6 and 7	Major Programmes at level 8	Description
70% and over	Distinction	First Class Honours	Achievement includes that required for a pass and in most respects is significantly and consistently beyond this
60% - 69%	Merit (Grade 1)	Second class honours (Grade 1)	Achievement includes that required for a pass and in many respects is significantly beyond this
50% - 59%	Merit (Grade 2)	Second class honours (Grade 2)	Achievement includes that required for a pass and in some respects is significantly beyond this
40% - 49%	Pass	Pass	Attains all the minimum intended programme learning outcomes
35% - 39%	Pass by Compensation	Pass by Compensation	Pass by compensation may only be applied in eligible cases
0% - 35%/39%	Fail	Fail	MIMLOs not achieved

Table 6: Grading Schemes and Major Award Classifications- HET

Note: Any QQI accredited minor, supplemental awards or special purpose awards of less than 60 credits, offered by the College will be unclassified (i.e. Pass \geq 40%/Fail < 40% – **HET**).

The grading scheme used by the College in relation to Further Education and Training (**FET**) QQI programmes is as follows:

Overall Result - FET	Major Programmes at level 5 and 6	Description
80-100%	Distinction	Achievement includes that required for a pass and in most respects is significantly and consistently beyond this
65-79%	Merit	Achievement includes that required for a pass and in many respects is significantly beyond this
50-64%	Pass	Attains all the minimum intended programme learning outcomes
0- 49%	Unsuccessful	MIMLOs not achieved

Table 7: Grading Schemes and Major Award Classifications- FET

6.2.3 Pass by Compensation - HET Only

A student who fails to attain the required pass standard in one or two of the modules in a stage (not to exceed one-third of the total credit value for that year), may be eligible to pass the assessment by compensation.

Compensation may be applied on the following basis:

- Where the assessment consists of:
 - five or more modules, compensation may apply in the case of a maximum of two (not to exceed one-third of the total credit value for that year);
 - fewer than five modules, compensation may apply in the case of only one (not to exceed one-third of the total credit value for that year).
- The marks obtained in the module(s) listed on the approved programme schedule, being considered for compensation must not be lower than 35%, where the pass standard is 40%.
- The pass standard must be reached, on the first attempt in all the remaining Modules of that year.
- Aggregate excess gross marks above the pass standard obtained in passed modules must be at least double the deficiency in the module(s) being considered for compensation.
- Compensation cannot be applied to repeat assessments (i.e. modules which were failed on first attempt).
- Compensation can only apply where all the modules as listed on the approved programme schedule for a stage are presented at the same sitting of the Examination Board. This means that students may not use exempted modules or modules completed in previous academic years for compensation purposes.

6.2.4 Late Submission of Assessments - HET Only

On commencement of their programme, assessment submission deadlines are provided to students on their programme calendar. In normal circumstances all students are expected to honour these dates.

However, in adverse personal circumstances students can apply for an extension to the submission deadline. In the first instance the request must be discussed with the tutor, prior to the submission date. Following approval by the tutor in this discussion an e-mail request must be made to the Programme Director, who will respond to confirm the extension and new submission date. If applying for an extension for reasons of ill health, a medical certificate will be requested. The normal period for an extension is two weeks. If a further two-week extension period is required, an application must be made directly to the Programme Director, following the same procedures.

Where the above procedure is not adhered to the following penalties will be imposed on work submitted after the submission deadline has passed:

- Up to 1 week late a penalty of 5% of marks will be applied;
- 1-4 weeks a penalty of 10% of marks will apply;
- 4 weeks or more a fail grade will be awarded.

The College does not accept more than two late submissions (where penalties are imposed), from any student. Third and subsequent late submissions will not be accepted for assessment in that year. The student will be eligible to submit in subsequent years. Late submission of the final module of each year will not be accepted.

6.2.5 Failed Assessments

A student who achieves less than 40% is deemed to have failed in that particular subject (unless eligible to pass by compensation). Any student who fails an assessment is permitted to resubmit, or re-sit, in the case of examination. One resubmission will be accepted, normally within a period of three weeks (this may be longer in the case of a project or other continuous assessment method).

While resubmissions/re-sits are graded in the same way as all other assessments students may not be awarded any grade higher than pass for a resubmission/re-sit (i.e. resubmission/re-sits are subject to a cap of 40%).

6.2.6 Examination Regulations

Examinations are a fundamental assessment component of all QQI higher education and training accredited programmes run by the College. The procedure for the running of Examinations for each programme is as follows:

1. Students are made aware upon commencement of a programme/stage which modules are assessed by examination. Examination dates are set. These are indicated on the programme calendar.
2. Approximately two months prior to the scheduled date examination papers and assessment rubrics are drafted by the Tutor/Assessor.
3. On approval of the Programme Director, draft papers are forwarded to the External Examiner(s) for review and comment (by registered post).
4. On receipt of External Examiner(s) comments, papers and assessment rubrics are finalised and approved by the Programme Director.
5. Students undertake Examinations at designated venues.
6. The procedure for the marking and grading of exams is the same as that used for assignments.

Supplemental Examination(s)

The procedure in relation to supplemental examinations applies to two distinct groups:

1. Students who do not attend on the day:

Any student who is prevented, for a genuine reason, from sitting an examination is permitted to re-sit it at the supplemental examination date. Students who are unable to sit an examination must notify the College as soon as possible of the reasons for their absence. This must be followed by a written explanation within three days. The College accepts the following reasons for non-attendance at an examination:

- own illness or injury (confirmed by medical certificate);
- illness or injury of the candidate's child (confirmed by medical certificate);
- family bereavement;
- birth of a child;
- unforeseen event of a serious nature (the College reserves the right to determine the 'seriousness' of an event).

Students who re-sit at a supplemental examination for any of the reasons above will be considered a 'first attempt', and will not be subject to any cap on the grade they may achieve in that exam.

Students who fail to sit an examination for an insufficient reason may also sit the supplemental examination for that subject. Insufficient reasons include any event not covered by the list above, for example being on holiday outside the country. Such students will be considered 'second attempt' students and their work may not be awarded any grade higher than pass (i.e. subject to cap of 40%). These students will also be required to pay a repeat examination fee.

2. Students who attend and subsequently fail to achieve a pass grade.

Students who sit their examination but fail to achieve a pass grade are permitted to re-sit the examination at the supplemental examinations. Such students will be considered 'second attempt' students and their work may not be awarded any grade higher than pass (i.e. subject to cap of 40%). These students will also be required to pay a repeat examination fee.

6.2.7 Assessment Feedback

The College is committed to providing students with clear and comprehensive feedback on each assessment activity. Each student will receive his/her provisional mark and grade, and written feedback in the form of a completed assessment rubric, within six weeks of the assignment/examination submission date. Since 2016, following student feedback and requests the College also provides commentary feedback/direction inputted directly into assignments presented as Google Docs. This approach has proved very beneficial to students.

6.2.8 Appeals

Following assessment grades and feedback being issued to students, tutors will be available to discuss same with students who wish to query their assessment outcome or who require assistance with understanding their assessment outcome.

Where a student is dissatisfied with the application of the assessment process in relation to the assessment of their assignment or examination, the following appeals procedure applies.

Students may appeal to the College for their work to be re-checked and/or reviewed.

- RE-CHECK means the administrative operation of checking the recording and the calculation of marks (This is not considered a formal appeal).
- REVIEW means the re-consideration, in detail, of all or part of the existing assignment and/or examination material where feasible by the internal and/or external examiner(s).

Any request for a Review must be made in writing to the appropriate Programme Director and signed by the student.

The written submission for an appeal must identify the elements of the assignment or examination for which the review is being sought. It must also specify the grounds on which the review is sought and must contain all the information that the student requires to have taken into account in the review.

The grounds for re-checking and reviewing must be specified under the following three headings:

1. The assessment/examination procedures of the College have not been properly implemented.
2. The procedures do not adequately cover the student's individual requirements.
3. Compassionate circumstances related to the candidate's personal situation were made known to the College by the candidate prior to or during the programme, of which the Board of Examiners were unaware.

The ***appeals process*** is as follows:

- Having specified the details outlined above, the student may appeal in writing to his/her tutor within three weeks of receiving the grade/feedback and additional feedback will be given.
- If, following discussion with his/her tutor, the issue has not been resolved to the student's satisfaction, he/she may request in writing to the Programme Director that their work be further cross-marked by the Programme Director and feedback will be given.
- If, following steps one and two, the student wishes to make a further appeal, he/she may request in writing to the College Director (within a period of three weeks following feedback from the Programme Director) that his/her work be reviewed by the External Examiners and the Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee and a recommendation made to the Academic Council. The Council will review the appeal and determine the final grade to be awarded.

Any student in an award year whose overall grade changes as a result of a decision made by an Examination Board, will be notified immediately of this change, by phone, by the Programme Director or Tutor. In such instances the student may appeal this decision, in writing, to the College Director, within 5 days of being notified of the change. This appeal will be considered by the Academic Council. The decision of Council is final.

6.2.9 Requirements for Progression and Transfer

In normal circumstances only students who have:

- satisfactorily followed their programme of study;
- met all programme requirements, including satisfactory completion of all assessments to the required pass standard;
- complied with regulations pertaining to fees;

will be eligible for progression to award or to subsequent stages of their programme.

However, in extreme mitigating circumstances a student may be permitted to progress with missing credit. Missing credit may not exceed 16% of the credit for the stage, i.e. 10 credits per 60-credit stage. Progression under these circumstances must be approved by the appropriate Examination Board.

Addendum to Progression procedures - 2020

“During time of such Public Health Emergency or other prevailing Force Majeure that the Academic Council may approve additional consideration to requests based on extenuating circumstances, so as to allow that no student may be disadvantaged by contingency plans which have been implemented. Moreover, that stipulated progression criteria may be increased to allow for more than 16% of credits to be carried into the next year of academic progression and that, inter alia, requirements on passing certain modules in order to progress may be temporarily waived to allow for such contingencies as have been agreed through the College’s governance structures.

Once approved, that these provisions may be actioned through the normal channels from Student, through Tutor and Programme Director, to Programme Board; each Programme Board having existing duty to report to Academic Council on all such actions.”

Programme-specific transfer (outward) procedures and criteria

When a student notifies the College that s/he wishes to transfer to another programme the following procedure will apply:

1. Administration is informed of the request for transcripts and completed elements. In addition, the Programme Director will undertake an exit interview with the student to ascertain the reasons for transfer;
2. A letter is provided to the student outlining all modules completed to date, and which have been externally examined, with the College;
3. Each stage which has been fully completed will have an official transcript provided;

4. A partial transcript will be provided for any partially completed stages, clearly indicating overall results and whether the module has been passed/failed;
5. Any additional requirements to progress which have been met/not met will be identified in the covering letter.

6.2.10 Exemptions & Recognition of Prior Learning

The policy and procedure with regard to RPL is presented in Section 3.

6.3 Academic Integrity in the Assessment Process

6.3.1 Academic Integrity Policy

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the College's commitment to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity from all staff, learners and stakeholders. It will define what areas constitute breaches of academic integrity and specify the consequences of such breaches, and the procedures which are to be followed in such cases.

The policy is referenced to the following QQI NAIN (National Academic Integrity Network) publications:

"Academic Integrity Guidelines (non-statutory)" (QQI, 2021a)

and

"Academic Integrity: National Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms" (QQI, 2021b).

The latter publication defines 'Academic Integrity' as: "Compliance with ethical and professional principles, standards, practices and a consistent system of values, that serves as guidance for making decisions and taking actions in education, research and scholarship." (QQI 2021b, p.10)

2. Scope

This policy and the associated procedures apply to all individuals at Open Training College engaged in academic work, including all registered students of OTC and academic staff engaged in assessment of academic work which contributes to an award or credits.

The policy also entails an undertaking to collaborate with relevant stakeholders in upholding and updating this policy and its related procedures in line with best practice and to report any findings relating to cheating sites to relevant stakeholders, including QQI.

3. Statement

The College commits to the following in relation to **communicating** Academic Integrity across all programmes and through assessment guidelines:

- Upholding Academic Integrity is a strategic objective of the College, supported by appropriate structures and with a repository of relevant and clear information on the subject being available to all staff and students.

- Staff and Students will be communicated with clearly and available supports will be made known to them.
- There will be an emphasis on preventing breaches of academic integrity.
- Assessment design will focus on reducing the risk of plagiarism.

The College commits to the following in relation to **learners** in particular:

- Creating awareness of Academic Integrity and the consequences of breaching this policy from the point of induction to the College; including consequences for using 'cheating sites' or plagiarising.
- Ongoing awareness-raising in this area during the programme of study, particularly at the point of sharing assessment guidelines; including the use of 'Turnitin'.
- All learners will have access to information on Academic Integrity, including supports available to those under investigation, and general and additional supports available under the College's 'Student Support Policy'.
- Awareness of relevant legislation such as the 'Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019'.

The College commits to the following in relation to **staff** in particular:

- Initial training in recognising and preventing instances of breaches of Academic Integrity; including training in assessment design, recognising plagiarism and the use of College tools such as 'Turnitin' to detect possible plagiarism.
- Ongoing CPD in this area to ensure that current best practice is followed.
- Awareness of relevant legislation such as the 'Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019'.

Furthermore, the College is committed to ensuring that anti-plagiarism software is always part of the learning environment and will continue to invest in developments in this area.

The aim of these provisions will be to provide clarity at all times pertaining to Academic Integrity, its upholding and the consequences of any contravention. Parties involved in all aspects of providing information on and investigating breaches of this policy will be supported at all times and

treated in a fair, consistent and transparent manner, while taking account of special provisions for recording and storing such information under the College's GDPR Policy.

4. Definitions

Selected definitions are provided below, with a full lexicon provided at:

https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Final_AcademicIntegrityLex_pagesv3.pdf

Advertising Cheating Services/ Essay Mills/ Provision of Cheating Services:

“Advertising the provision of assignments for learners where this has not been authorised by the provider. Advertising the undertaking of assignments (in whole or in part) on behalf of an enrolled learner, or sitting an exam, or have someone sit an exam, in place of an enrolled learner where this has not been authorised by the provider.”

(QQI 2021b, p.10)

The College undertakes to inform relevant stakeholders should it become aware of such services being offered and to make every effort to block such sites from its internal systems, as used by both staff and students.

Plagiarism:

“Presenting work / ideas taken from other sources without proper acknowledgement.

‘Plagiarism, i.e. the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit, including those obtained through confidential review of other's research proposals and manuscripts.’

Auto-Plagiarism

Instead of creating an original piece of work, the author adds insignificant additional data and/ or information to his/ her previously published work and changes title, modifies aim of the study, and recalculates results. Also, it is the omission of cross-citation to own previous publications.

Self-Plagiarism/ Redundant Publication

A form of redundant publication by recycling or borrowing content from the author's own previous work **without citation**. Self-plagiarism is the use of one's own previous work in another context **without appropriate citation**. Related to self-plagiarism is the practice of data fragmentation or

salami slicing where the author(s) separate aspects of a study and publishes it as more than one publication. Writers should recycle their own material carefully and sparingly.”

(QQI 2021b, p.18)

In instances of suspected plagiarism the procedure which follows this policy will be used:

“Procedures to be taken by the College if a student’s work is suspected of plagiarism”.

Policy Title:		Academic Integrity Policy
OTC Policy No		2102
Version		2.0
Date approved: Jan 2022	Date policy will take effect: Jan 2022	Date of Next Review: In 2 years
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		Student Handbooks, Induction and Assessment Guidelines “Procedures to be taken by the College if a students’ work is suspected of plagiarism.”
Audience:		Public access
Reference(s)		General Data Protection Regulation, 2018 Data Protection Acts, 1988-2018 “Academic Integrity Guidelines (non-statutory)” (QQI, 2021a) “Academic Integrity: National Principles and Lexicon of Common Terms” (QQI, 2021b) Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019

Procedures to be taken by the College if a student's work is suspected of plagiarism

The following diagram and explanatory notes illustrate the steps that the College will take if a student is suspected of plagiarism; *in relation to all definitions of 'plagiarism' as outlined in the Academic Integrity Policy*. It is anticipated that, where possible, the process be completed as quickly as possible (and usually within the timeframe of eight weeks). All assessments will be graded as "WH" (Withheld) until any and all investigations and related processes are completed.

Please note that incidents of plagiarism will be maintained on a student's permanent record, and that the process described below will apply for the full period of their registration, regardless of progression within a programme or onto a new programme.

The College sees the dialogue between the student and the tutor and the mentoring and coaching of the student to avoid plagiarism, as a Level 1 'Pre-Plagiarism Learning Level' as very important. At this stage, the tutor will identify any potential plagiarism that occurs due to lack of referencing skills and direct the student to the appropriate supports provided by the College to support appropriate student behaviour around this area. Should the student disregard the need to develop these skills or demonstrate more serious plagiarism (e.g. copying directly from another student's work) the investigation will move to Level 2 or 3 as deemed appropriate. These procedures are outlined below.

Level	Process	Documentation
Level 1 (Pre-Plagiarism)	Tutor identifies lack of referencing skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student notified Initial exploratory discussion with student by telephone (and/or in writing) Information Gathering 	Note made on tutorial form and/ or rubric Student directed to appropriate Study Supports
	Tutor identifies possible case of plagiarism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify Offence Refer to Programme Director 	Letter to student informing them of progression to level 2 investigation Report A
	Tutor concludes there is no case of plagiarism to be answered at this level	Letter to student informing them of finding of no case of plagiarism to be answered
Level 2	Student case referred to Programme Director <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews Report A Meets with investigating Tutor Meets with student 	Report B

	Programme Director decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classify Offence ▪ Determine sanction/penalty or ▪ Refer back to Tutor or ▪ Refer to College Director 	Letter to student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student accepts or ▪ Appeals to Disciplinary Committee
Level 3	Student case referred to College Director <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reviews all documentation ▪ Meets with Programme Director and investigating Tutor ▪ Forms Panel of Enquiry 	Report C
	College Director decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classify Offence ▪ Determine sanction/penalty and meet with the student <i>or</i> ▪ Refer back to Programme Director ▪ Form Panel of Enquiry 	Letter to student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student accepts <i>or</i> ▪ Appeals to Disciplinary Committee
Appeal	Student appeal received by Disciplinary Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reviews all documentation ▪ Meets Tutor/Programme Director/College Director as appropriate 	Disciplinary Committee report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appeal to Academic Council (AC)
	Disciplinary Committee decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Classify Offence ▪ Determine sanction/penalty 	Letter to student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AC decision is final ▪ No appeal

LEVEL 1

At the 'Pre-Plagiarism Learning Level' the tutor will identify any pre plagiarism errors due to lack of referencing skills and direct the student to the appropriate supports provided by the College to support appropriate student behaviour in this area. Should the student disregard the need to develop these skills or demonstrate more serious plagiarism (e.g., copying directly from another student's work) the investigation will move to Level 2 or 3 as deemed appropriate.

Reasons a tutor might suspect a possible case of plagiarism:

1. Specifically identified text by 'Turnitin' software as containing an unacceptable amount of material taken directly from identified sources.
2. Un-cited text copied from College materials.
3. Incongruity in style of writing e.g., deviation from students' own voice, use of advanced academic writing.

4. Inconsistency of fluency and spelling.
5. Change in formatting e.g., font, headings, margins; inconsistency of I.T. style e.g. very complicated table/chart having been inserted etc.
6. Lack of flow and/or development of topic. Paragraphs inserted that are inconsistent with previous points made – evidence of cutting and pasting.
7. Work that is very similar or the same as another student's work¹⁰. In assessments where group work is a component the presentation of the assessment outline will include specific advice on plagiarism considerations which may arise.
8. Work that is very similar or the same as the student's previously assessed work.
9. A piece of work written to a much higher standard than the student's previous work.
10. Suspicion that the student may have had assignment written for them by another person – 'ghost' writing.

This list is not exhaustive and the tutor may commence an investigation based on any reasonable suspicion. Following initial analysis, the tutor may decide that there is no case of plagiarism to be answered. In this instance the student's attention will be drawn to the incident and feedback provided through the assessment rubric. If the tutor confirms that a possible case of plagiarism has occurred the investigation continues to the information gathering stage as follows.

The tutor notifies the student of the situation and has an initial exploratory discussion by telephone (and/or in writing). Following this, the tutor commences the information gathering process. Information gathering may include but is not limited to review of previous work, discussion with a previous tutor, and review of assignments of current or former students, and consideration of any explanation/comments offered by the student in the initial telephone conversation. Students are made aware that their previous work may be reviewed as part of an investigation to provide background information about their standard of work.

On completion of the information gathering stage the tutor compiles a written report (Report A) and based on the evidence makes a decision as to whether or not there is a case of plagiarism to be answered. In making his/her decision, in addition to the information gathered the tutor will also consider:

¹⁰ In a situation where two current students have presented the same/similar work both students will be subject to the plagiarism policy and procedures and both may have penalties applied as appropriate. In the case of a current student presenting work which seriously overlaps with that of a previous student the current student will be dealt with through these procedures and the previous student will be informed of the situation. The current student in question however will not be identified in this communication. There will be no exceptions to this practice.

1. The Declaration of Authorship Form and the Student Handbook Terms and Conditions Statement, that have been submitted by the student stating that they have understood the nature of plagiarism and its implications as outlined in the Student Handbook.
2. Was the information about plagiarism and its implications made sufficiently clear?
3. Has the student misunderstood the above?
4. Is this a first incident?
5. Previous performance and assessment results from completed assignments.
6. The student's participation in programme/attendance at workshops etc.
7. Extenuating personal circumstances?
8. Has the issue arisen due to any oversight by the College?

If the tutor decides that yes, there is a case to be answered they will notify the student of this outcome in writing and refer the case for consideration to the Programme Director. The student may exercise their right to appeal to the Disciplinary Committee at this stage, and will be informed of this in the letter from the tutor.

If the tutor decides that there is no case of plagiarism to be answered they will also notify the student of this outcome in writing.

Level 1: Minor Offence Classification		
Criteria	Indicators	Penalties/Sanctions
Amount/Extent	Low percentage from individual source identified by Turnitin Basic referencing error	Reflective grade: deduct marks for referencing portion of assignment and/ or Reflective grade: deduct marks for portion of assignment with referencing errors
History	No History Too many direct quotes	
Level/Stage	Stage 1	
Additional Information	No evidence of deliberate attempt by student Extenuating personal circumstances	

Table 8: Level 1 Plagiarism Offence Classifications.

LEVEL 2

Student case is referred to the Programme Director by Tutor who has completed investigation at Level 1. The student has received notification of this development by the tutor.

The Programme Director commences the information gathering process, which will include but is not limited to a review of Report A, meeting with the investigating tutor and meeting with the student.

On completion of the information gathering stage the Programme Director compiles a written report (Report B) and, based on the evidence, makes a decision as to whether or not there is a case of plagiarism to be answered at Level 2 or above.

If the Programme Director decides that yes, there is a case to be answered they will classify the offence as Level 2 (major) or Level 3 (grave). In the case of a Level 2 offence the Programme Director will determine a sanction/penalty (see below for sanctions/penalties available at Level 2) and will notify the student of this outcome in writing. In the case of a Level 3 offence the Programme Director will refer the case to the Disciplinary Committee for further investigation at Level 3; the student will also be notified of this outcome in writing. The student may exercise their right to appeal to the Disciplinary Committee at this stage, and will be informed of this in the letter from the tutor.

If the Programme Director decides that there is no case of plagiarism to be answered at Level 2 the case will be referred back to the investigating tutor for sanction/penalty at Level 1; the student will be notified of this outcome in writing.

Level 2: Major Offence Classification		
Criteria	Indicators	Penalties/Sanctions
Amount/Extent	High percentage from individual source identified by Turnitin	Viva voce
History	Repeat offence	Fail grade awarded with opportunity to resubmit (cap of 40%)
Level/Stage	Advanced stage of programme	
Additional Information	No evidence of formative engagement with supports and materials	Award bare pass mark (40%)
	Deliberate attempt by student	Fail grade awarded without opportunity to resubmit (re-take module)

Table 9: Level 2 Plagiarism Offence Classifications.

LEVEL 3

Student case is referred to the Disciplinary Committee by Programme Director who has completed investigation at Level 2. The student has received notification of this development by the tutor and has not exercised their right to appeal to the Disciplinary Committee.

The Disciplinary Committee reviews all documentation relating to the investigation to date and meets with the investigating Programme Director and Tutor to discuss the case, and based on the evidence available decides whether or not there is a case to be answered at Level 3.

If the Disciplinary Committee decides that yes, there is a case to be answered they will classify the offence as Level 3 (grave) and give a determination of an appropriate sanction/penalty (see below for sanctions/penalties available at Level 3). The Committee will arrange a meeting with the student to reiterate the plagiarism investigation process, findings and outcome to the student and inform them of the sanction/penalty to be applied, and of their right to appeal any decision to the Academic Council. Following this meeting the Programme Director will notify the student of this outcome in writing; the student may exercise their right to appeal to the Academic Council at this stage, and will be informed of this in the letter from the Programme Director.

If the Programme Director decides that there is no case of plagiarism to be answered at Level 3 the case will be referred back to the investigating tutor for sanction/penalty at Level 2; the student will be notified of this outcome in writing.

Level 3: Grave Offence Classification		
Criteria	Indicators	Penalties/Sanctions
Amount/Extent	High percentage from individual source identified by Turnitin	Fail grade awarded without opportunity to resubmit or proceed (defer year)
History	Multiple offences	
Level/Stage	Advanced stage of programme	Reduced award classification
Additional Information	Deliberate attempt by student	Expel student with credits
	Blatantly plagiarised material	Expel student without credits
	No evidence of formative engagement with supports and materials	

Table 10: Level 3 Plagiarism Offence Classifications

APPEALS:

At any stage of the Plagiarism process a student may appeal to the Disciplinary Committee for the handling of their case/sanctions imposed to be reviewed. Appeals must be made in writing to the chair of the committee within two weeks of correspondence regarding the plagiarism investigation.

The Disciplinary Committee is an 'ad hoc' subcommittee of the Academic Council, chaired by the Assistant College Director and includes one independent external person and an internal person who has not been involved in the case. The Disciplinary Committee will:

- Review all documentation and evidence arising from the investigation to date
- Review documentation and evidence arising from any previous plagiarism investigations relating to the student
- Meet with the investigating Tutor/Programme Director as appropriate
- Meet with the student

Following this review the Committee will decide whether or not there is a case to be answered.

If the Disciplinary Committee decides that yes, there is a case to be answered they will classify the offence as Level 1 (minor), Level 2 (major) or Level 3 (grave), and will determine a sanction/penalty according to the level of the offence and will notify the student of this outcome in writing.

If the Disciplinary Committee decides that there is no case of plagiarism to be answered the student will be notified of this outcome in writing.

All decisions of the Disciplinary Committee are noted by Academic Council.

A final report comprising detailed notes on the review by the Committee and its decision will be maintained on the student's file indefinitely.

6.4 Quality Assuring the Assessment Process

6.4.1 Committees of the Academic Council

Assessment regulations (since 2018 for both HET and FET programmes) are overseen by the subcommittees of the Academic Council – Programme Boards; Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee; and Examination Boards. They:

- Revise and discuss assessment techniques utilised by College programmes;
- Review/monitor College statistics/trends regarding assessment results;
- Review and approve of students sitting supplemental examinations;
- Approval of policy on penalties to be applied to assessment activities;
- Ensure compliance of OTC assessment policy and procedures with QQI HET and FET regulations;
- Monitor the implementation of assessment strategies for College programmes and modules;
- Monitor the recording of penalties applied to assessment activities (HET only).

Note: Since Autumn 2018 some differential QA applies to FET programmes (see Appendix 2).

6.4.2 Cross-Marking Procedures

A percentage of all assignments and assessment scripts are cross-marked within the College as they are submitted by students for marking. In addition to reviewing the standard of marking against the assessment rubric and the marks awarded to specific students, the cross-marking process also facilitates informal feedback between Programme Directors and Tutors on their interpretation of the rubrics, their standard of marking and possible suggestions for improvement. This procedure requires College staff to be vigilant and transparent in their application of assessment standards.

Procedure:

1. Assignments/examination scripts are marked in the first instance by the individual tutor assigned to each student.
2. A sample of each batch of assignments (usually 10%) are then cross-marked by a second marker – usually the Programme Director or a Tutor or Programme Director of another programme.
3. In instances where a student is failing an assignment, a second marking is always carried out.
4. In exceptional circumstances (for example where a significant discrepancy exists between a first and second marking) a third marking may be carried out. The Programme Director normally undertakes this providing they were not involved in the original cross-marking. Alternatively, this is done by the Programme Director of another programme, or the College Director.
5. Following completion of the cross-marking process students are provided with a provisional mark and feedback on their assignment.

6.4.3 Procedures for Corrective Action

Corrective action can be defined as the need to amend a student's mark for an assessment due to a discrepancy in the manner in which an assessment has been carried out or a grade recorded.

The Open Training College implements the following procedures to ensure standards and consistency in the assessment process and to avoid where possible the need for corrective action to be taken in relation to learner assessments:

Assessment Strategies

The Assessment Strategies outline the learning outcomes and associated assessment methods for all assessors to follow. These are complemented by the assessment rubrics, which further guide the assessor in making a decision regarding assessment grades.

Cross-marking

It is the policy of the College to carry out a second marking of at least 10% of all assessments, including all assessments that have been allocated a percentage mark which falls on the cusp of a grade. This process will ensure all assessors mark consistently and will highlight any discrepancies in the marking of an assessment or in the administration of learners' work.

In the event of a discrepancy identified in the manner in which an assessment has been carried out or a grade recorded the following procedures for corrective action will apply:

1. The assessor within whose work the discrepancy was highlighted will be identified and all assessments returned by that assessor will be checked.
2. If the discrepancy is identified as being a once-off occurrence then the necessary edits will be made and the assessor informed of this. If further/repeated discrepancies are identified all assessments will be returned to the assessor with directions to re-check their work.
3. If the corrective action results in a change of grade for the student's work the Programme Director will inform the student of this by letter.
4. Depending on the stage at which the corrective action is taken QQI and the External Examiner(s) may need to be notified of the change to the student's result.
5. The Programme Director is responsible for ensuring the implementation of this procedure and recording the process and any outcomes.

6.4.4 Procedures for External Examination

External Examining is the quality assurance mechanism employed by the College to support public confidence in academic qualifications awarded to students, by introducing an independent, objective element into the procedures for the assessment of students. These procedures have been devised to ensure compliance with QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards (Revised) and QQI (2015) Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining (Revised).

The function of the External Examination process is to ensure adequacy and equity of marking procedures and standards. In particular, External Examiners ensure that appropriate standards with regard to Pass, Merit and Distinction are applied and that comparability of standards between institutions is achieved and maintained as far as is feasible.

Procedures for the Appointment of External Examiners

The External Examiner is an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme's field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to his/her likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.

External Examination of a programme may be carried out by an individual or team of External Examiners, depending on the number of learners involved and the range of specialisations within a programme, which may be difficult to find in any one individual. The number of examiners required for any particular programme will be determined by the size (in terms of stages and credits) and scope of that programme, and the range of experience and expertise of nominees.

Competences of an External Examiner

The basic precept of External Examiner's competence has been outlined above. In addition to these basic competences, specific competences and requirements of External Examiners for a programme will be considered by the Programme Board.

Process for appointing an External Examiner

Any member of teaching staff may make a nomination for the position of External Examiner. Nominees may come from the Higher/Further Education community, or from other communities of practice including the world of work and professional practice. Nominations are brought to the attention of the Programme Director, in their role as Chair of the Programme Board, for discussion at a meeting of the Programme Board. In discussing nominations the Programme Board will take into account the requirements of the programme, the need for independence and the need to avoid conflicts of interest. Following approval of an External Examiner nomination by the Programme Board this nomination is brought to the attention of the Academic Council for approval. The Academic Council ratifies the formal appointment of External Examiners.

Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner

The main functions of the External Examiner (or External Examiner team) are:

- To review the appropriateness of the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- To probe the actual attainment of learners by reviewing a representative sample of learner assessment during a visit to the College;
- To compare and contrast both the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and the actual attainment of learners with the relevant awards standards, the National Framework of Qualifications and with corresponding data from other programmes in the same discipline in Ireland and beyond, of which the examiners have knowledge and experience;
- To determine whether or not the applied procedures for assessment are valid, reliable, fair and consistent;
- To review the appropriateness of the programme assessment strategy and the assessment procedures and, flowing from this, to probe subsidiary stage and module assessment strategies;
- To review and provide feedback on examination formats and questions prior to their assignment in light of the programme and module assessment strategies and learners prerequisite learning. External Examiners have the right to make such suggestions, criticisms, deletions, additions and amendments as they deem appropriate;
- Report findings and recommendations to the College both verbally during their visit to the College and at the Examination Board meeting, and in writing using the report template provided by the College.

In addition, External Examiners of Open Training College accredited programmes are expected to:

- Provide support and feedback to the Programme Director during the academic year with regard to the drafting of examination papers and associated marking rubrics;
- Visit the College at least once per academic year to conduct the review of student assessment work;
- Attend the meeting of the Examination Board (where feasible and possible);
- Complete External Examiner reports using the College template provided and return same to the Programme Director within two weeks of conducting the external examination.

Induction and Ongoing Support for External Examiners

New external examiners to the College will be provided with all relevant information pertaining to the College and programme by the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, in the form of an Induction Pack. This pack will include:

- relevant background information on the college, including teaching and learning strategy;
- programme aims and objectives;

- programme learning outcomes;
- programme assessment strategies;
- college quality assurance policies and procedures on the assessment of learners and external examining, including guidelines for meetings of the examination board;
- sample assignment guidelines and marking rubric, in the college style;
- sample assessment feedback;
- external examiner's report template;
- QQI policy documents for both HET and FET.

The external examiners will receive support and guidance at induction stage, and throughout the period of their appointment with the College, from the relevant Programme Director.

Formal Agreement with the External Examiner

The Programme Director makes initial contact with the nominee to discuss his/her proposed appointment, the role and responsibilities of the External Examiner and the nature of the agreement between the College and the Examiner. Following verbal agreement between the nominee and Programme Director, and ratification of the appointment by the Academic Council the position and responsibilities are confirmed in a formal letter from the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs to the External Examiner.

The position of External Examiner is normally held for a period of three years, this however is subject to the continued interest and availability of the examiner and to the continued requirements of the College, and either party may amend arrangements each year. Appointment of External Examiners is communicated to QQI each academic year, and accompanied by the External Examiners' CVs.

The External Examiners' Visit to the College

The External Examiners' visit to the College normally takes place once per year per programme, on completion of the academic year, but may occur more frequently, or at any other stage of the year depending on the requirements of the College and/or the External Examiner(s). During the External Examiners' visit all assessment work undertaken by students is made available, in addition to all programme materials, assessment rubrics, examination papers etc. Programme staff will be available for the total duration of the visit for discussion where necessary and to answer any queries or questions. In visiting the College, the duties of External Examiner(s) include:

- reviewing borderline cases and, if necessary, interviewing such students;

- reviewing the work of students who have requested a review through the appeals procedure and making a recommendation to the Examination Board on the mark to be awarded with respect to the appeal;
- agreeing with the respective internal assessor(s) the proposed final marks / grades for consideration by the appropriate Examination Board;
- attending meeting(s) of the Examination Board where possible and feasible;
- providing feedback to the College on the overall standard of marking and student academic achievement and making suggestions for improvements.

Communications between College and External Examiner(s)

All communication between the College and External Examiners in relation to assessment of students is by registered mail, or other secure means of delivery. The College requires External Examiner(s) to acknowledge receipt of assessment material from the institution. This is normally completed by e-mail. The use of fax, telex or electronic messaging systems is not authorised by the College for sensitive communications. The use of telephones is restricted to logistics and operational matters.

Integration of External Examining with other Quality Assurance processes

Recommendations made by External Examiners during the programme of their visit to the College, during the meeting of the Examination Board, and in their official report are brought to the Programme Board for consideration and, if deemed relevant and appropriate at that time, are actioned and included in the quality improvement recommendations for the programme in the forthcoming academic year, and published in the annual programme QA report. Actions taken on the feedback of External Examiners, and the resulting outcomes of these actions, are communicated to the examiners during their subsequent visit to the College.

The External Examiners report constitutes the official record of the External Examining process. These reports are presented to the Academic Council for consideration and adoption, as well as being published in the annual programme Quality Assurance reports along with the names and positions held by the examiners.

External Examiners will be surveyed/interviewed as part of the stakeholder consultation processes for Institutional Review and Re-validation (Programme Review).

Procedure for the Removal/Replacement of an External Examiner

Should an external examiner need to be replaced prior to the completion of their three-year appointment then the procedures for the appointment of an external examiner will apply.

The Examination Board

On completion of the External Examiners' visit the Examination Board meets. There are currently three Examination Boards in operation in the College, one for the suite of Applied Management programmes, one for Social Care programmes and one for QQI-validated FET programmes. The Examination Board agrees all the marks/grades for all modules for all students submitted by the College at that time. It is during this process that a student's work can be graded up or graded down following discussion by the Board. Students who are 'borderline' are discussed in this forum and a decision made based on the cumulative evidence presented by College staff in consideration of the views of the External Examiner(s). The Examination Board also finalise a recommendation for forwarding to Academic Council in relation to student appeals.

Note: These boards currently operate in accordance with QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards (Revised) their operation and functioning will be reviewed and amended appropriately in accordance with any new directives provided by newly developed/updated QQI higher/further education and training policies and procedures.

Terms of Reference:

- Review outcomes of external examiner moderation of programme(s) under consideration;
- QA monitoring of assessment techniques, consistency of assessment and comparison of standards of programme(s) under consideration with national norms and best practice;
- Agree assessment results for all learners of programme(s) under consideration;
- Consider learner appeals in relation to assessment results and procedures of programme(s) under consideration, and make recommendations to Academic Council;
- Consider learners for progression with missing credit, approve/decline progression as appropriate;
- Review of penalties applied to assessment activities of programme(s) under consideration;
- Review/monitor statistics/trends regarding assessment results of programme(s) under consideration.

Membership of the Board:

- Head of Quality & Academic Affairs(Chair): Ex-officio
- Programme Director(s): Ex-officio

- Internal programme assessors: Ex-officio
- External Examiner(s): By appointment of the Academic Council

Meetings: Once per year immediately following external examiner moderation

Sub-groups: N/A

Co-option of members: N/A

Reporting arrangements: The Chair of the Examination Board reports on the activities of the Board to the Academic Council.

Recording procedures: The Chair of the Examination Board is responsible for ensuring that minutes of all meetings are maintained and available to internal staff of the College and to the Academic Council. Minutes are forwarded to the Academic Council for approval.

Note: Minutes of all Examination Board meetings are strictly confidential and are stored securely.

Decision Making Process of the Examination Board

The Examination Board will always strive to reach consensus in relation to final grades to be awarded to students. When negotiation is required the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, External Examiners and Programme Directors present at the exam board are voting members and are charged with making final decisions regarding students' grades. Voting members will consider information presented by tutors in making their decisions.

In instances where there are dissenting opinions between the external examiners and the relevant Programme Director regarding a student's overall grade the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs may place a casting vote, taking into consideration all information presented pertaining to the student in question.

Preparation for the Examination Board meeting

The date and time for the Examination Board meeting will be agreed well in advance with the External Examiner(s) and will be notified to all those involved and other relevant stakeholders, including QQI. The Programme Director may conduct a pre-board meeting with the team of programme assessors to discuss their findings and outcomes of the assessment process, and to ensure adequate preparation of all documentation for the External Examiners. The minutes of such meetings will be made available to the Examination Board where appropriate.

Procedure for the Conduct of Examination Board meetings

1. Meeting opened by the Chair.
2. Statement of due process by Chair;

- Clarification of roles of board members
- Clarification of order of programmes and stages to be considered by board
- Statement of process for recording changes on original broadsheets

(Copies of broadsheets will be provided to all members on coloured paper)

One original broadsheet on white paper will be held by the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, who will check results and record changes as results are read out by each year/programme coordinator. This original broadsheet will be given immediately to the relevant administrative assistant to update results and produce final broadsheet ready to be signed)

3. Feedback from External Examiners;

- This is followed by discussion and debate regarding individual student assessment results involving all board members as appropriate and relevant

4. Agreement of results;

- At this stage all results are read out by each year/programme coordinator and changes are recorded on original broadsheet

5. Signing broadsheets: Final broadsheets are signed.

6.4.6 Ratification of Assessment Results

On completion of the meeting of the Board of Examiners, broadsheets are internally ratified. Subsequently, Academic Council may also make final decisions in relation to student appeals. All finalised results are signed off by the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs on the QQI QBS for awarding of certificates and to conclude the process. It is only on completion of all the above stages that a student can progress to Conferring of Award.

6.5 Policy on Academic Awards and Conferring Procedures

6.5.1 Academic Awards Policy

ACADEMIC AWARDS POLICY OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Introduction

Open Training College (OTC) is a provider of programmes leading to QQI awards in accordance with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). QQI is the awarding body for OTC Degree, Higher Certificate and Certificate programmes. This policy should be read in conjunction with (and is subject to) the relevant provisions of College *Conferring Procedures* and relevant supporting documents.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to inform stakeholders that the Open Training College on behalf of QQI, have the power to confer these awards on Students following the successful completion of a programme of study. The certification of awards provides evidence of qualifications attained.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all awards made by Open Training College on behalf of QQI. This policy applies to Dual and Joint awards delivered collaboratively with partner institutions, nationally and internationally.

4. Statement

Students are entitled to receive an award following the successful completion of a programme of study for which they are registered. The authenticity of awards is verifiable.

A student may elect to have their award conferred in person at a graduation ceremony or in absentia.

All reasonable adjustments will be made to allow students or staff with disabilities, or long-term illness, to fully participate in graduation ceremonies.

5. Definitions

The **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)** is a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualifications system. The NFQ describes what students should know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a given qualification.

An **award** is an academic qualification (degree, diploma or certificate) conferred in recognition of the successful completion of a further or higher education programme of study, either at undergraduate or postgraduate level, and issued by a designated awarding body. The National Framework of Qualifications sets out the criteria for major and non-major awards. Non-major awards include, minor awards, special purpose awards and supplemental awards.

Major awards (Further Education) the principal class of awards made at a given NFQ level and reflect a significant volume of learning. The Framework contains different award types, major, special purpose and supplemental. In the Common Awards System (CAS), levels 1 – 6, are generally achieved through the accumulation of minor awards. A major award (often called ‘the full certificate’) typically gives eligibility for progression to learning opportunities at the next level on the Framework. A major award reflects a significant volume of learning and can be achieved for example, through successful completion of a further education and training (FET) programme. Major awards create opportunities for progression to higher education.

Major awards (Higher Education) are the principal class of awards made at a given NFQ level and reflect a significant volume of learning, e.g. Higher Certificate (NFQ, Level 6), Ordinary Bachelor Degree (NFQ, Level 7), Honours Bachelor Degree (NFQ, Level 8), Master’s Degree (NFQ, Level 9), Doctoral Degree (NFQ, Level 10).

Minor awards provide recognition for students who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. While having relevance in their own right minor awards are always part of at least one major award. These awards will always be smaller in volume than the major award of which they are a part.

Special Purpose awards are made for specific purposes, e.g. Special Purpose Certificate in Academic Practice.

Supplemental awards are for learning which is additional to a previous award, e.g. Continuous Professional Development.

Programme is a set of modules, programmes, or programme options that lead to an award.

Certificate is a non-degree award granted upon successful completion of a prescribed programme of study.

Diploma is a non-degree award granted upon successful completion of a prescribed programme of study.

Degree is a major award granted upon the successful completion of a prescribed programme of study, i.e. Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate.

Certification is the process of verifying and evidencing educational achievements and awards through the issuing of transcripts and parchments.

An award **parchment** is evidence of the academic qualification attained and is presented to successful candidates at a Commencement/Graduation ceremony.

A **transcript** is a document outlining the grades/marks obtained by a learner for their programme of study.

A **linked provider** is a provider that is not a designated awarding body but enters into an arrangement with a designated awarding body under which arrangement the provider delivers a programme of education and training that satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the designated awarding body (Ref. Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012).

A **graduand** is a student who has met the requirements for programme completion, but is yet to have the award conferred.

A **graduate** is a student who has successfully completed the requirements for a degree, and that degree has been conferred.

6. Awards

All awards granted by Open Training College on behalf of QQI are aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

6.1 Awards presented under special circumstances

Awards may be presented in the following special circumstances, consistent with the *Procedures for Conferral of Awards*:

a) Posthumous awards

A posthumous award may be made at a graduation ceremony if a student dies before the ceremony at which they would normally have been presented with their award. The award is usually presented to a member of the family or other appropriate person.

b) Awards where programme requirements are not fully satisfied

In rare and exceptional circumstances, approval may be given by the College Director for the conferral of an award at a graduation ceremony to a student who has died, or has become incapacitated, and has not completed all programme requirements.

6.2 Parchments

Open Training College, on behalf of QQI, issues parchments on the conferral of awards to its graduates.

6.3 Transcripts

6.3.1 Open Training College provides academic transcripts for undergraduate and postgraduate Students.

6.3.2 Open Training College will not issue an academic transcript to a third party without the written consent of the person named on the transcript.

6.4 Fees and Charges

6.4.1 Fees and charges will apply to aspects of a graduand's attendance at a graduation ceremony. Fees and charges relating to graduation ceremonies are detailed in the Conferring Pack.

6.4.2 All fees and charges must be paid in full prior to the graduand participating in their graduation ceremony.

6.4.3 There are no fees or charges for OTC staff participating in a graduation ceremony.

6.4.4 Fees and charges will be determined on an annual basis by the Corporate Services Manager.

Policy Title:		Academic Awards Policy
OTC Policy No		1805
Version		2.0
Date approved: June 2021	Date policy will take effect: June 2021	Date of Next Review: 3 years from date
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs Corporate Services Manager
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convocation for Conferring ▪ Conferring Pack for Students ▪ Procedures for Conferral of Awards
Audience:		Public access
Reference(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaborative Award Policy ▪ Exit Award Policy ▪ National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) ▪ Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Award-Types, National Qualifications Authority Ireland ▪ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

EXIT AWARD POLICY OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Definition

'An exit award programme is a special case of an embedded programme where the exit award programme is never offered to learners independently and only accessed by learners who enrol on a principal programme and then exit early but have been assessed as having met the requirements for the lower NFQ level award'

QQI Programme Validation Manual (2016).

2. Policy Statement

Students, who formally exit from a principle programme prior to its completion, may be eligible for an exit award, provided such exit award has been validated under the OTC's validation processes and provided they have attained the requisite minimum number of credits. Exit awards are intended for use in exceptional circumstances only and the decision to award them is an Examination Board decision.

Exit awards are always linked to a specified major award and may be validated at Certificate, Higher Certificate or Ordinary Degree levels as appropriate to the parent programme and the number and level of credits attained. Exit awards are minor (unclassified)/major (classified). The OTC adheres to naming conventions and other criteria for exit awards as defined by QQI and amended from time to time.

A student must initially discuss the option of an exit award with their Programme/Programme Director and then apply formally for an exit award by the closing date specified for each individual assessment/examination session.

Holders of exit awards are eligible to attend the Conferring Ceremony.

An Exit award is noted on the student record. It is automatically surrendered if the holder is subsequently conferred with the principal award.

3. Policy Process

Exit awards are intended for use in exceptional circumstances only and the decision to award them is an Examination Board decision.

4. Conditions of Eligibility

The programme on which the student has been registered must have a validated exit award in place. The student must have earned all credits relating to such award as follows:

Exit Award	Level	Number of Credits
Certificate	6	60
Higher Certificate	6	120
Ordinary Bachelor Degree	7	180
Postgraduate Diploma	9	60

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/Programme Directors and Tutors are responsible for pursuing the implementation of these policies in relation to the activities of their programmes.

6. Related Documentation

- Student handbook - Student Guidelines on Exit awards
- Exit Award Student Request Form

7. Contact

- Programme Director
- Head of Quality & Academic Affairs

Policy Title:		Exit Award Policy
OTC Policy No		1806
Version		2.0
Date approved: June 2021	Date policy will take effect: June 2021	Date of Next Review: 3 years later
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convocation for Conferring 2. Conferring Pack for Students 3. Procedures for Conferral of Awards
Audience:		Public – accessible to anyone
Reference(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaborative Award Policy ▪ Academic Awards Policy ▪ National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) ▪ Descriptors for Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Award-Types, National Qualifications Authority Ireland ▪ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

6.5.3 Procedures for Conferring

Registration for Graduation

1. There will be a registration period for each graduation period, and registration will close no later than 2 weeks before the ceremony.
2. All graduands must complete the online registration process, and must opt to:
 - attend the conferring; or
 - graduate in absentia;
3. Graduates who defer, or graduate in absentia, will be sent their documentation at the end of the relevant graduation period to the postal address recorded in the student system.
4. Graduands will be allocated **2 guest tickets** per registration. Additional tickets are subject to availability and are subject to a fee.

Systems and Processes

1. The Administration Office will be responsible for the establishment and maintenance of student and staff conferring ceremony registration systems.
2. Advice of special awards and other inclusions must be received by the Administration Office no later than 4 weeks prior to the conferring ceremony.

Medals and other Awards

Medals and special award certificates are presented to recipients at a graduation ceremony by the College Director.

Staff Participation in Graduation Ceremonies

Staff registration for attendance at graduation, including requests for provision of academic dress must be completed no later than two weeks prior to the ceremony at the given location. If academic dress is required this must be ordered through the registration process and comply with the deadline above.

Stage Setting for Graduation Ceremonies

1. There will be standard elements for stage setting for all graduation ceremonies. These are managed by the Administration Office.
2. The stage seating plan for a graduation ceremony will be determined according to the protocol outlined by the Administration Office, and the list of staff who have registered to attend.

Order of Degrees

Degrees will be presented at a graduation ceremony according to the following hierarchy:

1. Masters
2. Postgraduate Diploma
3. Graduate Diploma
4. Bachelor (Honours)
5. Bachelor
6. Higher Certificate
7. Certificate

Music

Music will be played for the following elements of the graduation ceremony:

- i. Procession
- ii. Recession

Graduand Participation in Graduation Ceremony

- a. Graduands must check-in upon their arrival at the venue by the time advised to them by the Administration Office.
- b. Graduands will be advised to enter the hall, no later than one hour prior to the commencement time of the ceremony.
- c. Seating of graduands will be dependent on the layout of the venue as follows:
 - Graduand seating will be arranged by Administration Office and Faculty, and alphabetically within each programme group, as printed in the Graduation Program.
 - Once all graduands are seated, they will receive a briefing to explain when in the proceedings the awards will be presented, crossing the stage, and how to receive their parchment from the College Director.
 - Graduands who may require seating other than in the regular seats supplied by the venue will be accommodated on a case by case basis.
 - Graduands who arrive after the presentation lists have been finalised will be seated last and presented towards the end of the ceremony.

Arrangements for Graduands with Disabilities

1. The College has a responsibility to ensure that graduands with a disability can participate in a Graduation Ceremony in the same manner as the rest of the graduands, as far as is practicable.
2. Provision will be made, on request, for a Sign Language interpreter at graduation ceremonies for graduands who have a hearing impairment or are deaf. The aspects of the ceremony that

will be signed may vary and will be agreed between the graduand, Administration Office and the interpreter.

3. Where a graduand who has a vision impairment or is blind is assisted by a guide/assistance dog, the Graduation Office should inform the venue in advance to ensure that adequate arrangements are made, and that the graduand is seated with sufficient room to accommodate the guide/assistance dog. Where a graduand is assisted by a person, seating must be provided for the guide.

Award Parchment, Supplement and Conferring Convocation

1. The Administration Office is responsible for the compilation and production of Award Parchment, Supplement and Conferring Convocation for each graduation ceremony.
2. Any graduands who fail to check-in on the day will have their names removed from the presentation list.
3. The Award parchments will be checked against the final presentation lists and placed on the stage prior to the commencement of the graduation ceremony.
4. The names of graduands arriving after the presentation lists have been printed and sorted, will be added to the end of all graduates for that ceremony and will be announced towards the end of the ceremony.

The Ceremony

Academic procession

1. The academic procession will assemble in the designated assembly point of the venue 15 minutes before the ceremony.
2. The order of procession is determined by the room and stage seating plan which is in accordance with the seating protocol.
3. An opening announcement is made before the graduation ceremony commences.
4. Processional music commences, the audience stands, and the graduands and academic procession enters the hall and proceeds to the seats and remain standing.

Conferring of Awards

Commencement formalities follow the order and format laid out in the Conferring Convocation booklet.

6.6 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:

- External examiner induction
- Approved programme schedules; balance of blended learning (BL) elements
- Additional supports for Online learners
- BL/OL induction for students as part of Access
- Formative online assessment and summative submission
- Feedback from Tutors/Markers
- Plagiarism policy and procedures; use of Turnitin
- Use of technology in External examination process
- Assessment strategies take full account of BL/OL
- BL/OL expertise of examination boards

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. Tracking learner progress and achievement, marking and returning assessments, providing feedback to learners and assessors are just a few of the areas where existing policies, systems and processes are unlikely to be fit-for-purpose in an online learning context.
- ii. Appeals and complaints policies and processes which accommodate remote learning.
- iii. Arrangements for online assessment including pre-assessment, the conduct of assessment and marking/grading which are robustly tested and invoke confidence.
- iv. Robust and consistent systems and processes across the organisation to manage the submission, receipt, marking and return of assessments.
- v. Include assessment practice and process that are published and provide consistent, equitable and fair arrangements for the setting of, marking of and return of feedback on assessment tasks. Learners are provided with consistent, secure and reliable means for submitting work to be assessed and confirmation of receipt. There are institutional regulations and protocols to ensure confidentiality and security in feedback to individual learners on assessment, and for the recording of marks or scores.
- vi. Assessment strategies with opportunities for learners to engage in formative assessment activities that will check and reinforce learning remotely.
- vii. Moderation processes are in place to ensure consistency and share good practice where more than one associate is employed to support or assess more than one group of learners. Documentation of best practice examples and exchange of information among all staff is important where there is a growing knowledge base, a growing availability of additional open access resources

and constant demands to update ICT skills. Provider support through structured networking is in place to facilitate this.

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">• The institution has a policy and code of practice to ensure academic integrity and freedom and ethical behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The technical infrastructure is aligned with the teaching methodology, learning activities, and e-assessment methods, and it eases the teaching and learning process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E-assessment methods are fit for purpose, allowing students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students are aware of plagiarism rules.

