SECTION 3: PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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Supporting Documents:

1. QQI Programme Review Manual 2016/2017, Pilot Implementation Draft

2. QQI Programme Validation Manual (2016) for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships (FET and HET) Pilot Version (edition 2.15)

3. QQI (2014) Policy on Monitoring

4. QQI (2017-QP17-V.1.03) Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training

5. QQI (2016) Quality Assurance Guidelines

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

7. Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning programmes– QQI, March 2018.

3.1 Programme development and approval

Procedures for the Design and Approval of New Programmes

Stage 1: Internal Development

▪ Identification of potential new programme(s)

▪ New programme(s) proposal presented to Academic Council

▪ Establishment of New Programme(s) Development Committee

▪ Formal research and market identification

▪ Development of application for validation

Stage 2: External Assessment

▪ Stakeholder consultation

▪ Benchmarking against similar programmes national/international

▪ Analysis of external assessment

▪ Inclusion of assessment in validation application

▪ Agreement of validation application by Academic Council

Stage 3: Application

▪ Formal application to QQI for Validation

▪ Validation panel

Stage 4: Approval

▪ Adoption and Implementation of Recommendations

3.1.1 Stage 1: Internal Development

Identification of potential new programme(s)

The College identifies potential new programmes in a number of informal and formal ways. The informal avenues relate to the College's position in the sector and its close working relationship with agencies providing health and social care services.

A unique position

The College is in a unique position in that it operates within the structure of a service agency, which keeps it very close to what is happening on the ground in the area of service provision.

Close working relationship with agencies

As was outlined earlier the College works in collaboration with agencies and students. As part of the model of delivery, Programme Directors and Tutors have regular contact with agencies. The College also undertakes consultancy work for disability and non-profit agencies. Such work usually relates to service development initiatives and brings the College into direct contact with service-users, executive and middle management, and frontline staff.

The College has direct links to representative bodies in the disability, health related, non-profit and social care fields. Such bodies include, for example:

a. The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies (NFVB)

b. Social Care Ireland

c. Disability Federation of Ireland

d. Inclusion Ireland

1.   Students are employed or volunteering in programme areas

Most students of the College are currently working in relevant social care, disability, health related, non-profit, community or voluntary services. Therefore, students are connected directly into the current

thinking, practice and issues in their own agencies. This wealth of information is available to the College through workshops, tutorials and informal discussion.

2.   Workshop facilitators are practitioners

The presenters/lecturers employed by the College to lead workshops are almost all working as practitioners in their field and many are registered practitioners and members of professional bodies. Because of this they are well informed about current trends and issues in the areas of disability and non-profit service provision.

3.   Monitoring changing policy and legislation relevant to the area

The College stays up to date in relation to changing policy and legislation. It receives and reviews all relevant reports and papers and works closely with subject matter experts as module authors and editors to keep up to date with relevant changes and developments. In the development of new programmes the College is always cognisant of such policy developments.

New programme(s) proposal presented to Academic Council

When an idea for a new programme or module is identified the College Director/Assistant College Director/Programme Director draws up a brief outline proposal and risk assesses the initiative. This is presented to the College team, St. Michael's House Management and the Academic Council. The initial proposal will generally outline:

- the rationale for the proposed new programme;
- a brief review of similar programmes in other institutions (if they exist);
- proposed target group and the potential size of market for the proposed programme;
- initial costing for the development phase;
- potential funding sources;
- potential programme content;
- proposed academic level;
- relationship of new programme to existing programmes;
- risk assessment;
- proposed action plan and timeframe.

Establishment of New Programme(s) Development Committee

A New Programme(s) Development Committee will be established by the Academic Council following formal approval of a proposal for new programme(s). This committee is tasked with the development of programme(s) as per process agreed under QA and the ongoing review and enhancement of the process

for the development of new programmes. Development is also subject to the College's Risk Policy and Collaborative Provision Policy, if appropriate.

Membership of the Committee will be determined by the nature and purpose of the new programme(s) proposed, supported by the College Director and Head of Quality & Academic Affairs. This committee becomes an Ad Hoc sub-committee of the Academic Council, and as such the Chair of the committee will report on the activities of the committee to the Academic Council. The Chair of the committee is responsible for ensuring that minutes of all meetings are maintained and available to internal staff of the College and to the Academic Council.

3.1.2 Stage 2: External assessment

This phase runs in parallel with the final steps of phase 1, so that both phases will ultimately contribute to the validation application to be submitted to QQI. It involves stakeholder consultation; surveying and face-to-face interviews with identified key stakeholders (Quantitative and Qualitative).

The results from the consultation are then analysed, integrated with the internal programme development and presented in the application for validation.

Research and market identification

The committee will develop a rationale for the development of the programme including the identification of the target market for the programme. Where relevant and appropriate this will include market research being undertaken by the committee. Such research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature and is conducted through focus groups, questionnaires and interviews. The main focus of the research is to ascertain the level of interest in the proposed programme; to determine whether agencies and their staff/volunteers would purchase the programme and to what extent; to identify the training needs of the sector (s) as identified by the research sample; and to predict the long-term sustainability of the programme.

The research process concludes with the formulation of a research report, a revision of the risk assessment based on the research outcomes and the recommendation to proceed or not. In addition, the research report will also make recommendations on content and other aspects of the programme. The completed research will be presented to Academic Council. Following approval of this report by Academic Council a complete development costing will be drawn up by the College Director and funding secured.

3.1.3 Stages 3 and 4: Application and Approval

These stages follow those outlined for Validation in Section 3.4: "Procedures for Programme Review, Revalidation and Validation".

3.2 Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition

3.2.1 Equality of Access to programmes and services

Admissions Procedures

It is the policy of the College, as far as is practicable, to admit all applicants who fulfil the minimum academic requirements for its programmes.

The Open Training College publishes detailed admissions criteria, procedures and regulations for entry to all of its programmes on an annual basis. Additional guidelines are published on the entry requirements for International Students, those seeking advanced entry onto a programme, and for those seeking additional supports or accommodations for reason of a disability or medical condition. All documentation is published on the College website and in the College brochure, and is provided in hardcopy and electronic copy to all applicants upon request.

Access, transfer and progression (ATP) procedures are in place, agreed with learners and affiliate Colleges, as per QA standards. Please see section 6.2.9 for requirements for progression and transfer.

3.2.2 Information to be made available to learners about the programme

Clear mechanisms are operated to facilitate access, transfer and progression based on the premise that all learners should have accurate and reliable information available to enable them to plan their learning on the basis of a clear understanding of the awards available and the associated entry arrangements and transfer and progression routes (NQAI 2003, Restated QQI 2015).

Information on programmes will be available through a variety of media, the primary media being the College website and brochures. The website is regularly updated. The information provided includes the following, at a minimum:

- Programme and Award Title
- Accrediting Body
- Level of the Award on NFQ, and Associated Credits

- Programme Content

- Student Profile

- Application Process and Entry Requirements

- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Procedures

- Student Support Structures

- Access, Transfer and Progression Arrangements

- Information on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) Arrangements

- Data Protection

In relation to programme information, enrolled learners will be notified in writing in accordance with section 67 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Education and Training Act (2012), of any changes to information within 14 days of the Colleges becoming aware of any change and the website(s) will be revised within the same timeframe.

Websites

The website of the College will be the primary vehicle for the provision of information about the programme and services of the Colleges to potential students and other interested stakeholders. The website will present detailed information on background, staff, mission, aims and values. Websites (including those of collaborative providers) will include a step by step guide and procedure for applying for the programme.

Social Networking Sites

Where appropriate, information will be disseminated through relevant and appropriate social networking sites.

Brochure and Marketing Materials

Printed brochure (s) will be produced periodically, containing all marketing materials relevant to the recruitment of new students into a programme. This brochure contains details of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies, information leaflets on all programme and relevant application documentation. This brochure is posted/emailed to agreed contacts and enquirers and is published as a pdf file on the websites.

Open Days and Information Sessions

Open days and information sessions will be facilitated, in which potential students and other interested parties can meet with staff, receive information about the programme and services available and query relevant opportunities available. These information sessions will be facilitated in accessible venues around the country.

3.2.3 Entry procedures and criteria for the programme including Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning

Admissions and Enrolment

It is policy to interview all applicants who fulfil the minimum academic prior-learning requirements for a chosen programme. Admissions criteria include minimum prior-learning requirements and a successful interview with a staff panel. Interviews provide opportunity for the applicant and the College to assess whether the applicant is currently positioned to pursue the programme.

Detailed admissions criteria, procedures and regulations for entry to all programmes will be made available to those who submit an application for the programme. Additional guidelines will be available on request to those seeking advanced entry onto a programme and for those seeking additional supports or accommodations for reason of a disability or medical condition. Documentation will be provided to all applicants upon request.

Where additional requirements are in place these procedures have been designed to ensure the best possible fit between student and programme is found and to ensure that the College can adequately and appropriately provide supports to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to succeed on their programme of choice.

The Registration and Admissions Committee (sub-committee of the Academic Council) is responsible for overseeing the annual review and fair application of the admissions policy and procedures and for ensuring that appropriate record keeping is maintained for applicants.

Application process:

1. Application for year one is by means of an online application form.
2. Prospective students will be invited to an interview with faculty as part of the application process.
3. Interview will assess level of suitability of the candidate.

4. English language proficiency, to CEFR B2+ (=IELTS 6.0) standard, is required for enrolment. Candidates with another language other than English as their first language, may be required to submit evidence of English proficiency.

5. The interviewer will ask the candidate about any additional support needs, so that the College can best prepare for the candidate's prospective enrolment (subject to receipt of relevant reports).

6. Candidates will be promptly notified of the outcome of interview by the Programme Director.

7. An appeals process is available if required.

Recognition of Prior Learning:

Entry to the programme at a later stage to stage one will require separate entry procedure and may require bridging work to be completed and submitted. This is assessed on an individual basis, through comparison with prior learning required to progress on the programme.

The College's RPL/RPEL Policy is presented overleaf.

POLICY ON THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)
OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Definition of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):

"Prior learning that is given a value, by having it affirmed, acknowledged, assessed or certified." (NQAI). This policy includes the use of the term Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) as being included in the general term 'RPL'. Please note that RPL is not available in relation to the BA in Social Care Level 7.

2. Policy Statement

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) is an inherent part of OTC's policy in relation to access or opportunity. RPL/RPEL supports and facilitates access to OTC by recognising and valuing the life, formal learning and workplace experiences of learners and will recognise knowledge or experience previously gained in these contexts. The OTC RPL/RPEL policy is fair, transparent and consistently applied.

3. Policy Purpose

The policy is designed to enable individuals to build on prior learning to achieve additional qualifications including Major, Minor, Supplemental, Professional and Special Purpose awards.

4. Scope

This policy applies to applicants seeking entry to all OTC accredited courses with the exception of applicants to the BA in Social Care:

- admission to programmes where a person may not have attained the standard entry requirements;
- exemptions from programme components which duplicate the learning an individual has already acquired;
- credit towards a qualification; and
- a qualification solely on the basis of prior learning.

RPL is specific to the programme being applied for and all additional considerations are presented in the Student Handbook relevant to the particular programme.

The Open Training College does not offer Advance Entry pathways, accreditation of prior and experiential learning for the following programme:

- BA Social Care

5. Policy Process

RPL process allows awarding credits for knowledge acquired from external study or experience thatis equivalent to the learning outcomes of OTC programmes. Sources of this validation may includetesting, other training programmes and a prior learning portfolio. This policy focuses primarily on evidence of prior learning through:

i. demonstration of achievement of appropriate learning outcomes and /or

ii. demonstration of achievement of an appropriate level of prior qualification(s).

Where candidates are non-native English language speakers, certified demonstrable achievement in a Standard English Language Competency Test will be required, which is a College requirement. Applicants can gain entry to the First Year of the programme; credits towards/exemptions from programme components which duplicate the learning an individual has already acquired and match the learning outcomes required; or accelerated entry to all stages through RPEL and/or RPL.

6. 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.

7. Related Documentation

Student Guidelines on RPL/RPEL (Student Handbook/Website)

Application for RPL/RPEL; developing an RPEL portfolio of evidence

Bridging assignments

Guidelines on credits

Standard English Language Competency Test will be required, if appropriate

8. Contact

- Admissions: Corporate Services Manager

- Head of Quality & Academic Affairs

- Relevant Programme Director

Policy Title:		Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
OTC Policy No		1804
Version		3.0
Date approved: April 2022	Date policy will take effect: May 2022	Date of Next Review: 04/2024
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		The Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		Procedure for RPL/RPEL Access, Transfer & Progression (ATP)
Audience:		Public access
Reference(s)		- Sectoral Convention 5 (Post award achievement required for an additional major award at the same level) - Protocol 4.4.2 (Exemption from studyinga module) - QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards Revised - 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

Procedure for RPL / RPEL

The College offers exemptions on a modular basis to applicants who have successfully completed comparable accredited learning in another institute. To apply for an exemption the applicant must provide the College with evidence of (a) the level of previous study on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent) (b) the specific content covered and (c) their academic ability. In addition, students granted exemptions may also be required to complete bridging studies and assessment. The College reviews all applications for exemption on an individual basis. It is only when the College is completely satisfied that the applicant meets the stated criteria that an exemption will be granted. Exemptions may be granted against any stage of a programme.

Please Note:
RPL is specific to the programme being applied for and all additional considerations are presented in the Student Handbook relevant to the particular programme. As noted RPL is not available in relation to the BA in Social Care Level 7.

Where the module that is being exempted counts towards the overall result for an award an exemption will result in the recommendation of an unclassified award to QQI, except in the case of the previous learning having an equivalent mark/grade attached, which can be verified through an official transcript of results from the College itself or another institute. In this instance the learner will be eligible to carry the grade previously achieved, and to count this towards their new award. The learner will also have the option to decline the offer of exemption and carry out the regular requirements of the module(s) and be awarded a grade based on their achievement in the module, which will be put forward for the award to be classified. The credit value of exemptions awarded will not be greater than the credit value of the previous accredited learning.

Previous accredited learning to be considered for exemption purposes must be at the same or higher level than the module(s) for which the exemption is being sought. Where ECTS credits have been achieved by the learner additional credit will not be awarded through this exemptions process.

In assessing for stage exemption through RPEL, the following procedure applies:

1. A gap analysis is performed on stage learning outcomes (SLOs) for the target Level, contrasted against the target Level minus 1 (e.g., a gap analysis of SLOs at Level 7 contrasted with SLOs at Level 6);

2. A list of required evidence is compiled (e.g., CV, Certificates, Copies of research undertaken, References, Evidence of work completed etc.) and agreed by the Programme Director (PD), Head of E-learning & Assessment and the Head of Quality & Academic Affairs;

3. The prospective student is interviewed by the Programme Director and guided in the process;

4. The student compiles a portfolio of evidence and completes any additional bridging assignment required;

5. A final interview with the PD takes place to confirm that all evidentiary requirements have been met.

Similarly, stage exemptions through RPL must meet the following criteria, showing that the appropriate certified prior learning was:

a. on a cognate programme;

b. at the applicable level;

c. with 60 ECTS credits per stage;

d. and that any additionally relevant requirements (e.g., work placement hours etc.) have been met.

Exemptions will be awarded by the Open Training College in accordance with Sectoral Convention 5 (Post award achievement required for an additional major award at the same level) and Protocol 4.4.2 (Exemption from studying a module) of QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards Revised.

3.3 Programme Monitoring and Review

3.3.1 Internal Monitoring and Evaluation

To facilitate the continuous monitoring of programmes the College operates a cycle of evaluations and reviews to seek feedback on all aspects of programmes, review that feedback, make and implement recommendations for continuous improvements. The following table illustrates the variety of evaluations conducted and the structures in place to review the outcomes of these.

Evaluation/Review Methodology	Programme element addressed	Stakeholders involved	Frequency of monitoring
Module Evaluation Surveys	▪ Open Learning Materials ▪ Workshops & Seminars ▪ Tutorial Supports ▪ MyOTC ▪ Assessment	Students Academic Staff	All years - Module One
Ad Hoc Student Evaluation Surveys	▪ Any element as determined necessary by Programme Boards	Students	Ad Hoc

End of Year College Evaluation Survey	▪ Open Learning Materials ▪ Workshops & Seminars ▪ Tutorial Supports ▪ MyOTC ▪ Assessment	Students	Annually
Programme Boards	▪ Open Learning Materials ▪ Workshops & Seminars ▪ Tutorial Supports ▪ MyOTC ▪ Assessment	Academic Staff & student representative	Min. 2 meetings per year
Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee	▪ Open Learning Materials ▪ Workshops & Seminars ▪ Tutorial Supports ▪ MyOTC ▪ Assessment: reliability and validity	Director(s) & Academic staff	Meetings as deemed necessary by committee Chair
Examination Boards	▪ Assessment: reliability & validity & consistency with national standards	External Examiners Director(s) Academic Staff	Min. Annually - and as required to approve results/repeats

Table 4: Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation/Review Methodologies

Module Evaluation Surveys

Upon completion of the first modules of their programme First Year students are invited to participate in an online module evaluation survey, administered using Survey Monkey[5] online surveying tools. These surveys address the following areas of module delivery: The Module Content; Tutorial and Online Supports; Module Workshop and Module Workload. The purpose of these surveys is to engage with and build supportive relationships with the First Year student cohort and to identify any particular concerns or issues which need to be addressed with this group. At the discretion of the Programme Board an additional module evaluation survey may also be administered for the third module. Participation in these surveys is on a voluntary basis and the identities of respondents are protected in all publications of survey results, which are shared immediately on MyOTC following completion of the survey.

At the discretion of and under the remit of the Programme Board, a student evaluation survey may be designed and administered with relevant groups of students to meet a specified need identified by a

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[5] See www.surveymonkey.com for more information

committee and/or in response to a change or development in the delivery of a programme (e.g. new workshop/seminar format or presenter, new content, move to online delivery, etc.).

End of Year College Evaluation Surveys

Upon completion of each academic year students are invited to participate in a detailed online evaluation survey of College programmes and services experienced by students over the year. This survey addresses the following areas of College programmes and services: Overall College Experience; Learning Materials; Student Supports & Tutorials; Online Learning & Activities; Assessment & Feedback; Professional Development; College Administration. These surveys are also administered using Survey Monkey online surveying tools and participation is on a voluntary basis. The identities of respondents are protected in all publications of survey results, which are shared immediately on MyOTC following completion of the survey.

Annual Module Review & Editing Cycle

The content of the BA in Social Care and of each module is informed by feedback from all stakeholders as outlined on the Programme Document (Appendices to Programme Document 18.10.19 Appendix 12 Stakeholder Analysis pp 144-155).

The diagram below outlines the annual programme/module review cycle
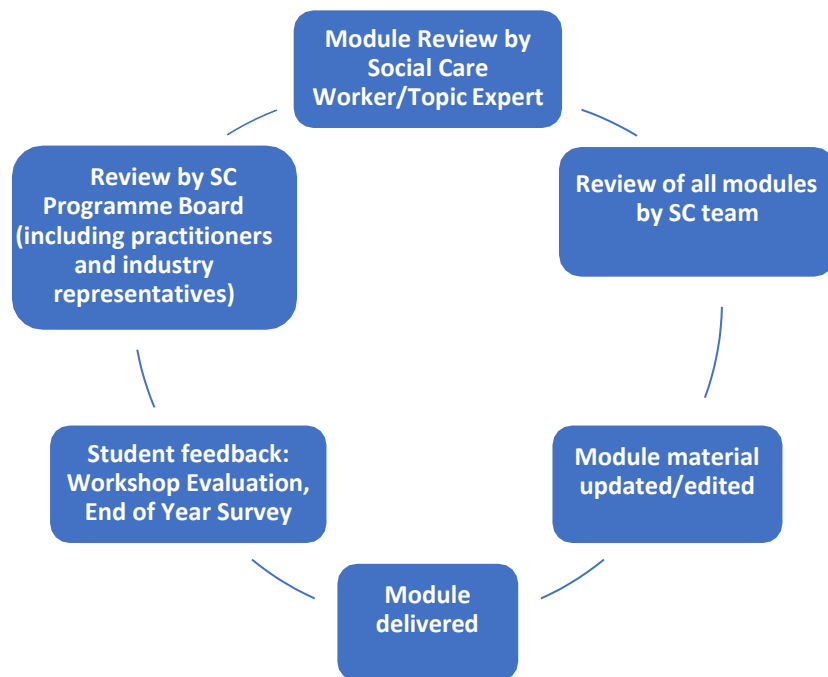
Programme Board(s)

The mechanism within the College for the review of the data generated by the modular and annual evaluation and the ratification of decisions in relation to quality improvements is the Programme Board. Three boards are currently in operation by the College.

(i)   Social Care Programme Board

(ii)   Management Programme Board

(iii)   FET Programme Board

In keeping with recent developments and re-engagement with QQI, a new Programme Board, to oversee QQI validated Further Education and Training (FET) programmes was established in the academic year 2018-19. Any future programmes developed will either sit under one of the above existing Boards or a new Board established.

Each Board meets a minimum of twice per academic year as follows:

September: Post Exam Board Review

July: End of Year Review

The Programme Boards are subcommittees of the Academic Council. Further information on the membership, terms of reference, reporting and recording arrangements of the Programme Boards can be found in Section 1 of this QA document.

Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee

This committee has a remit to review relevant results of evaluation surveys completed by the College as well as to analyse other relevant data. It is a sub-committee of the Academic Council. Further information on the membership, terms of reference, reporting and recording arrangements of these committees can be found in Section 1 of this QA document.

Examination Boards

Two Examination Boards are currently in operation in the College, these are:

(i)   Applied Social Studies/Professional Social Care

(ii)   Management

For FET programmes, the examination board is referred to as the Results Approval Panel. Any future programmes developed will either sit under one of the above existing Boards or a new Examinations Board established.

The Examination Boards are subcommittees of the Academic Council. Further information on the membership, terms of reference, reporting and recording arrangements of the Examination Boards can be found in Section 1 of this document.

3.3.2 External Monitoring and Evaluation

External monitoring of all accredited providers is carried out by QQI. This monitoring addresses the following areas:

- Programme quality and attainment of awards standards
- Follow-up on internal and/or external quality procedures, e.g. Re-validation
- Institutional Review
- Tracking the implementation of policy
- Specified quality indicators, e.g. completion rates

To facilitate baseline monitoring by QQI the College will supply the following information to QQI as and when required:

- Findings (as agreed with QQI) arising from the application by a provider of its Quality Assurance Procedures
- Follow-up reports as required
- External examiner details and their reports
- Detail on change which may affect the status of a registered QQI provider
- Crisis notification (e.g. financial issues and capacity deficits, major impending media disclosures relating to academic quality)
- Annual completion rates report
- Annual First Destination Survey Data
- Arrangements for the protection of learners where appropriate

3.4 Procedures for Programme Review, Revalidation and Validation

From 2017, QQI policies and criteria state that "Re-validation is Validation". Therefore, Stages 3 and 4 below are common to both the re-validation of existing programmes and the validation of new programmes. Stages 1 and 2 are unique to Programme Review (formerly Programmatic Review).

Programme Review – is a provider-owned process and relies on QA approved by QQI.
Re-validation/Validation - is a process owned by QQI and carried out on its behalf in part by an independent expert panel, which makes a recommendation for approval or otherwise to QQI's PAEC through the completion of an Independent Evaluation Report (IER).

Ultimately, programme approval depends on an application for re-validation/validation meeting all the criteria and sub-criteria of QQI's Validation policy. A full case must be presented.

3.4.1 Programme Review

The procedure for programme review and re-validation is as follows:

Stage 1: Programme Review-Self Evaluation:
1. Formation of Programme Review Team
2. Planning of the process
3. Stakeholder consultation
4. Agreement in writing of Terms of Reference with QQI
5. Provider's Programme Review Report (Programme Evaluation Report – Part A)

Stage 2: Programme Review - External evaluation and reporting:
6. Site visit by formerly agreed Independent Panel
7. Production of an Independent Programme Review Report (PER – Part B)
8. College formal response and implementation plan to 7 (PER – Part C)
9. The Independent Panel's response to 8 (PER – Part D)

Risk assessment is carried out under the College's Risk Management Policy and procedure throughout stages 1 and 2.

Stages 1 and 2 are unique to Programme Review. Stages 3 and 4 are common following the review of programmes, the development of new programmes (Section 3.1, above) or for differential validation of programmes.

Stage 3: Revalidation/Validation
10. Formal application to QQI for Revalidation/Validation
11. Panel visit/desk review
12. IER Recommendation
13. Approval by PAEC

Stage 4: Adoption and Implementation of Recommendations
14. Adoption and Implementation of Recommendations

Programme Review is the formal evaluation of QQI accredited programmes and related services, carried out at five-year intervals for related programmes. This review process has an internal and an external evaluation phase as detailed above.

The specific objectives of a programme review are to[6] :

- ensure that the programme remains appropriate, and to create a supportive and effective learning environment
- ensure that the programme achieves the objectives set for it and responds to the needs of learners and the changing needs of society
- review the learner workload
- review learner progression and completion rates
- review the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of learners
- inform updates of the programme content; delivery modes; teaching and learning methods; learning supports and resources; and information provided to learners
- update third party, industry or other stakeholders relevant to the programme(s)
- review quality assurance arrangements that are specific to that programme

Stage 1: Programme Review - Self-Evaluation

Step 1: Formation of the Programme Review team

A Programme Review Team is formed under the co-ordination and management of the relevant Programme Board. Members of the programme review team can include:

- the relevant Programme Director (Team Leader)
- a Programme Tutor

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[6] QQI Programme Review Manual 2016/2017, Pilot Implementation Draft, p. 3.

- a Programme Director of another College programme
- The Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
- Any other relevant person(s)

Step 2: Planning of the process to include collation of 5-year QA summary report

The programme review team will conduct a review of the Quality Assurance data collected for the programme(s) during the 5-year period being addressed by the review. This data will be contained in the annual QA reports for the programme(s). A QA summary report will be compiled from this data, which details the recommendations for improvements made and the current status of each recommendation. This QA summary report will provide an accurate representation of the current state of the programme(s).

Step 3: Stakeholder Consultation

Consultation with relevant stakeholders will be conducted to gather feedback and opinions on the successes of the programme(s) and recommendations for future developments. Relevant stakeholders will be defined by the Programme Review Team and the focus of the programme review itself. Stakeholder groups must include, but are not limited to:
- Current students
- Programme graduates
- Employers
- Academic Staff of the programme(s)

Appropriate methodology for consultation with each of the stakeholder groups will be identified and developed by the Programme Review Team.

Step 4: Agreement in writing of Terms of Reference with QQI

The Programme Review Team will define the Terms of Reference for the programme review and agree these with QQI.

Step 5: Review of data and development of Provider's Programme Review Report

The Programme Review Team will convene meetings as necessary to review the data gathered through steps 2 and 3, and critically evaluate the programme(s) with reference to the current Programme Review Manual and Validation criteria[7].

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[7] QQI (2016-2017) – i. Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training and ii. Programme Review Manual

The Programme Review Team will develop recommendations for developments and improvements to the programme as a result of this review and analysis.

Details of actions taken and results of each step of the internal phase, as well as the recommendations generated, will be presented in the Provider's Programme Review Report. This report also presents all findings from the Programme Review and evaluation against the Validation criteria (above) and includes the outline of and Proposed Programme Schedules for the programmes to be investigated by the Independent Review Panel.

Stage 2: External Independent Review

Phase 2 of the Programme Review is carried out by an Independent Review Panel which is required to make an impartial judgement on the continued maintenance of the overall standard of the programme and on its acceptability for the award in question, when compared with similar programmes elsewhere in Ireland and / or internationally. The Independent Review Panel is agreed with QQI at the time of the agreement of Terms of Reference, at which time it may also be requested (and agreed in writing) that the same Panel members are designated as Independent Evaluators for the Revalidation Phase (Phase 3-below).

Step 6: Site Visit of the Independent Review Panel

The Independent Review Panel is comprised of external peers familiar with current practice and developments in the programme area. At a minimum it will comprise the following:
▪ Chairperson – experienced in higher/further education and training; with training in programme review/revalidation through QQI
▪ Secretary
▪ Academics (minimum 2), experts in relevant field of learning
▪ Representatives from industry/relevant profession
▪ Learner representative
▪ QQI representative if appropriate

Panel members are selected with the aim of forming a balanced panel which has:
▪ an understanding of the relevant sector;
▪ experience of working in the sector;
▪ knowledge and expertise in relation to teaching and assessment;
▪ expertise in relation to national and international trends relevant to the programme;
▪ knowledge and expertise in relation to the management of third level education

- an acceptable gender balance of at least 40% of either gender.

Each of the panel members will be supplied with the Provider's Programme Review Report and any necessary supporting documentation well in advance of the panel visit to the College.

In order to complete its work, the review panel visits the College to review the relevant documentation including the programme review report, discusses the programme with the Programme Review team, students and graduates of the programme(s) and reviews the facilities available for conducting the programme(s).

The Chair of the programme review team is responsible for agreeing the agenda for the panel visit with the Secretary of the panel, ensuring all relevant personnel are available to meet with the panel as required and that all relevant documentation is available. The general issues considered and evaluated by the Independent Review Panel encompass all of the issues considered by a validation panel but with an emphasis on the following aspects of the self-evaluation:

- Quality and comprehensiveness of the self-study process;
- Principles and philosophy underpinning the self-study and their relevance to the programme;
- Evidence of programme improvements in the annual monitoring and quality outcomes;
- Logic of the detailed recommendations arising from the self-study;
- Appropriateness of the proposed changes to the programme to fulfil these recommendations;
- Overall health of the programme and the procedures for academic quality assurance within it.

On completion of the site visit, the Review Panel and Programme Review Team meet and the Chairperson of the Panel provides verbal feedback to the Programme Review Team. Issues are discussed and clarifications are provided. The Panel and Review Team discuss recommendations in relation to developing and improving the programme(s).

Step 7: Production of an Independent Programme Review Report (PER – Part B)
Following the panel visit, the Secretary is responsible for producing a written panel report, which gives the panel's response to the self-evaluation conducted by the College and their recommendations for developments and improvements to the programme. It should also include a recommendation, positive, negative or conditional, in respect of the continuing validation of the programme(s), which are the subject of the review. The report should specify the duration of revalidation recommended; not in excess of five years.

Step 8: Response to the Independent Programme Review Report (PER – Part C)

The Programme Review Team will have the opportunity to review the report before it is finalised, in order to check for factual accuracy. At this stage, the review team should also prepare a formal response to the Panel's report and an implementation plan in respect of any recommendations made by the Panel. This response and plan become Part C of the Provider's Evaluation Report.

Step 9: Response of the Independent Panel to PER Part C (PER Part D)

Following the College's response to the Panel at step 8 above, the Panel may make a final response, which is included in the PER as Part D.

Stage 3: Validation/Revalidation - Submission to QQI for revalidation of programme(s)

The Provider's Evaluation Report (PER – Parts A, B, C and D), will be forwarded to QQI for Independent Evaluation, as part of the revalidation process. This will be accompanied by a formal request for revalidation and:

- Documents demonstrating prerequisites to apply have been established;
- The proposed terms of reference for the Independent Evaluation Report (IER), if these have not been agreed earlier at Phase 1, Step 4.

In the case of all applications for validation, the application will be submitted on the current QQI template, with QQI appointing the panel. Following submission, the following steps occur:

- Panel visit/desk review
- IER Recommendation
- Approval by PAEC

The College will receive a copy of the IER, for fact checking, before it is submitted to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) for approval/declining of validation/revalidation.

All relevant reports arising from validation and revalidation processes will be published on the College's website.

Stage 4 - Adoption and Implementation of Recommendations

This is the final stage in the Programme Review, Validation and Re-validation processes. The Provider's Evaluation Report (PER) and Independent Evaluation Report (IER) are circulated to the Academic Council and the relevant Programme Board. The recommendations of the report are formally approved and adopted at the Academic Council meeting. Following this the recommendations are taken up by the relevant Programme Board, which will plan for and monitor their implementation.

PROTECTION OF ENROLLED LEARNERS (PEL) POLICY
OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE

1. Introduction

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 contains provisions for the protection of learners enrolled in programmes of education and training (Part 6, S. 64-67). The legislation applies to all education providers (other than those specifically exempt under legislation) and to any programme of 3-month duration or longer where fees have been charged. QQI has developed protocols to facilitate providers in the fulfilment of their legal obligations with regard to PEL.

As summarised by QQI, the 2012 Act seeks to ensure that:

(1) Learners have an opportunity to complete a programme leading to an award, or

(2) Learners are refunded the moneys most recently paid if a programme ends before they complete it, and

(3) Learners are provided with adequate and accurate information about the programme that they wish to pursue and about the protection in place for them in event that the programme ceases prior to their completion.

2. Purpose

To outline how the OTC complies with its legal obligations in respect of the protection of enrolled learners.

3. Scope

Protection of learners enrolled in OTC, QQI approved, undergraduate and postgraduate accredited programmes of 3 months duration or longer where moneys have been paid by, or on behalf of the learner.

4. Policy Statement

OTC has learner protection arrangements in place with respect to enrolled learners on all QQI validated programmes of 3 months duration or longer, where moneys have been paid in advance of delivery of programme by, or on behalf of the learner, ensuring learners' education at OTC is protected, and in accordance with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Part 6 "Protection of Enrolled Learners".

OTC strives to ensure that all its programmes are taught out and finished. The purpose of the policy and related 'Protocols and Procedures on PEL document' is to facilitate OTC's reaching workable and tangible PEL solutions across all relevant programmes, for its continuation to completion. Arrangements which facilitate learners to complete their studies, is the preferred PEL option and approach for QQI and OTC, as this accommodation is in the best interests of the learner.

In addition, OTC seeks to strengthen public confidence by:

(1) Having a refund policy in place which will be communicated to students in their programme documentation and made publicly available on the website;

(2) Making arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners known to the Designated Awarding Body, if collaborative arrangements are not already agreed and stated within the joint contractual agreements;

(3) Minimising risk through appropriate control and monitoring activities, including:

- Designing and delivering programmes in accordance with contractual agreements with the Designated Awarding Body and in compliance with national Quality Assurance requirements and guidelines;

- Fulfilling corporate governance and financial reporting and regulatory obligations;

- Conducting risk assessment activities during the programme design stage and programme evaluation stage, and analysing environmental threats.

Learner Protection insurance is provided by Arachas and underwritten by Aviva Insurance Company Limited. This insurance policy provides either for the completion of the programme or the return of fees most recently paid in line with the 2012 Act.

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

Enrolled Learner: student fully registered with the College. Application form accepted and required fee/part fee paid – for the purposes of completing an accredited programme of 3 months duration or longer.

7. Related Documentation

This policy should be read in conjunction with *Procedures for PEL.*

8. Contacts

The Head of Quality & Academic Affairs/Corporate Services Manager

Policy Title:		Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)
OTC Policy No		1802
Version		1.3
Date approved: June 2021	Date policy will take effect: June 2021	Date of Next Review: Annual
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs Corporate Services Manager
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		Procedures for PEL
Audience:		Public – accessible to anyone
Reference(s)		The Qualifications and Quality Act (Education and Training), 2012 Statutory Instruments relating to PEL European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area

3.5.2 Procedure for Protection of Enrolled Learners

Procedure Outline / Method(s) used to carry out this procedure	Responsibility of	Evidence generated by this procedure to ensure its effectiveness
1. When PEL arrangements are activated Learner Protection insurance is provided by Arachas and underwritten by Aviva Insurance Company Limited. This insurance policy provides either for the completion of the programme or the return of fees most recently paid in line with the 2012 Act. The agreements with Arachas which underpin these PEL arrangements are designed and developed in line with QQI's *Protection of Enrolled Learners: Protocols for the Implementation of Part 6 of the 2012 Act*. PEL arrangements will be activated when: 1. OTC fails to provide a programme of education and training of three months' duration or longer where moneys have been paid, for any reason (including the insolvency or the winding up of that provider), or where QQI withdraws programme validation. 2. Enrolled learners have begun, but not completed, a programme of education and training of three months' duration or longer where moneys have been paid and OTC ceases to provide the programme before that programme is completed for any reason (including the insolvency or the winding up of that provider), or on account of QQI withdrawing programme validation.	College Director, Head of Quality & Academic Affairs	Records of correspondence between College Director to QQI and to Learner Protection insurance provided by Arachas and underwritten by Aviva Insurance Company Limited; to inform them PEL arrangements need to be activated.

Typical examples of incidences for PEL activation are: 1. A provider ceases trading while learners are enrolled on programmes 2. A provider ceases offering a specific programme while learners are enrolled on the programme 3. QQI withdraws validation of the programme while learners are enrolled 2. Guideline Procedures on consideration of PEL arrangements activation 1. In relation to the PEL option for the learner to complete the affected programme, the following section (2.2) provides a template framework approach to PEL, and outlines basic procedures in relation to managing a potential PEL situation arising. OTC would need to make available access, and/or information on the following: 2.2 *2.2.1 PEL Activation Procedural Considerations* 1. OTC needs to ensure that QQI and Arachas can readily access learner records in the event that PEL arrangements need to be activated. 2. PEL Activation commences when the OTC College Director informs QQI and Arachas that there is a need to activate the PEL arrangements, and will discuss and agree a suitable timeframe for the transfer of data and learners to the respective alternate providers. 3. OTC agrees a timeframe for the transfer of learners and all relevant learner records data	College Director, Head of Quality & Academic Affairs, Programme Directors, Corporate Services Manager, Core Programme Staff	Arrangements Document, detailing procedures around the full PEL arrangement with Arachas. All records of correspondence between OTC, QQI and Arachas, during PEL activation Process.

and relevant institutional information, to QQI and Arachas.

4. Internal emergency activation meetings commence within the College to prepare the following information for transfer to QQI and both alternate providers as soon as possible.

2.2.2 *Provider and Programme Details Information*

a) Statement from the OTC College Director, confirming that he/she has the capacity to confirm all details provided are in compliance with the Part 6 of the 2012 Act, on behalf of the organisation.

b) Legal entity confirmation and full company name and address.

c) Programme details: Full programme title, Award title, NFQ Level, Joint Awards / Collaborative Provision, Number of Stages, ECTS credits per stage, Mode of Attendance (full time / part time / distance), Number of Intakes per year, Structured Work Placements if relevant, or any other special features.

2.2.3 *Relevant Learner Records*

a) Learner Personal detail records (including personal reports and learning needs)

b) Learner Academic records

c) Learner fees records

2.2.4 *Programme Organisation*

i. Full details of academic staff (full time, part time)

ii. All administration support staff at all levels within OTC

iii. Premises information (including lease and owner information of the premises where applicable)		
iv. Information on outreach or satellite centres in use, for programme delivery where applicable		
v. Key interaction contacts for the programme (including government or state agencies, international agencies etc.)		
vi. All promotional information used to market the programme		
2.2.5 Programme Information		
2.1 Approved assessments, examination questions and marking schemes		
2.1 Any repeat assessments, examination questions and marking schemes		
2.1 Soft copies of any submissions, feedback issued to learners and resubmissions, hard copies of examination scripts		
2.1 A copy of the most recent approved assessment schedule		
2.1 Copies of Programme Board meetings over the previous academic year		
2.1 Copies of minutes of Exam Board meeting minutes over the previous academic year		
2.1 Any programme related Quality Assurance meeting minutes		
2.1 Any applications for Reasonable Adjustment, issues of Plagiarism or other incidence of learner infringement on assessment and examinations over the previous academic year		
2.1 Details / copies of the validated programme submission document originally agreed with QQI, including programme schedule		

2.1 Copies of issued workshop/seminar notes and other materials distributed during the programme		
2.1 Copies of results transcripts (if applicable) and/or copies of results issued to learners up to the point of the activation of the PEL arrangements		
2.1 Collateral and Supporting Assets necessary to provide the Programme		
2.1 ICT Network Infrastructure		
2.1 Virtual Learning Environment access (for example Moodle), SOL		
2.1 Library materials and assets (online)		
2.1 Online Licenses and Software related to programme delivery		
2.1 Storage and security of assessment related materials		
2.1 QA policies and procedures of the Provider		
2.1 All equipment related to the programme (owned, leased)		
2.1 Location of assets		
2.1 All other Intellectual Property related to the programme, (other than what is mentioned in e and f above)		
2.2.6 Information to Learners In accordance with Section 67(1) of the Act, The Provider shall, before commencing the Programme and before accepting any payment from or on behalf of an enrolled learner in respect of the Programme, notify the enrolled learner in writing of the following: 1. the name of the awarding body or, where appropriate, awarding bodies making the award		

2. the title of the programme and the award to which it leads, and 3. whether the award is recognised within the NFQ, and if so: the level of that recognition within the NFQ, and 4. whether the award is a Major, Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental award as identified within the NFQ 5. where OTC is required to have procedures for access, transfer and progression in place under section 56, a statement of how those procedures apply to that programme 6. the details of the arrangements for PEL that The Provider has in place in accordance with Section 65(4) of the Act. In accordance with Section 67(2) of the Act, the Provider shall notify the enrolled learner in writing of any change in the information notified to the learner under subsection (1) within 14 days after becoming aware of that change.		

3.6 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:

- BL/OL focus as part of Programme Review/Revalidation/Validation
- External review
- Informing of External Panel Members on BL/OL
- Induction of external academic Council and Sub-committee members re. BL/OL
- Design of programmes around BL/OL delivery
- Equality of access
- Information provided to prospective learners on BL/OL requirements
- Evaluations and surveys relating to BL/OL
- BL/OL expertise on programme development committees

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. Organisational structures and processes ensure that technology is in the service of pedagogy.

ii. 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.

iii. The programme as a whole is intended to achieve learning outcomes. Online learning is effectively integrated into the programme for this purpose. Overall programme design is informed by best practice in curriculum design.

iv. Curriculum development processes with an appropriate representation of subject, educational technology, instructional design and other key internal stakeholder expertise. For example, specialist student support advisers and administrators, library and information professionals play significant roles in effective online learning as well as the teaching staff who will support learners.

v. Developments are subject-led rather than technology-led.

vi. A focus on the delivery of an interactive learning experience for each module delivered online and academic content appropriate to the unit of study.

vii. Information for individuals developing online learning modules to ensure the use of the platform the institution has committed to and that they are bound by the institutional policies, systems, hardware and processes for online learning.

viii. Approval and validation processes for blended learning programmes including online learning modules are appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

ix. Testing of delivery mechanisms for online modules or parts of modules. For example, confirming that (where appropriate) it is possible to access learning on a private computer or on a mobile device or other as appropriate.

x. Programmes are fully designed before being offered to learners.

Online Learning: <u>Indicators</u>, for mapping and monitoring:

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

INDICATORS
• Authors of learning materials are relevant for the subject. Learning materials are reviewed and updated periodically.
• External quality assurance considers the characteristics of e-learning in regular procedures, such as innovation in teaching and learning processes (institutional or programme evaluation).