1. Introduction

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

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

2. Purpose

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

3. Scope

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

4. Policy Statement

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

5. Roles and Responsibilities

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

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

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

The College offers a Student Support Service and Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator described in the current 'Guide' which accompanies this policy.

6. Definitions

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

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

Policy Title:		Student Support Policy
OTC Policy No		1807
Version		3.0
Date approved: Jan 2022	**Date policy will take effect:** Jan 2022	**Date of Next Review:** 2 years
Approving Authority:		Academic Council
Document Owner/Contact:		Head of Quality & Academic Affairs
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:		- Supported Open Learning (SOL)Model - Guide to Learning Support Services - Orientation Programme - MyOTC Induction Programme - Students at Risk Intervention Contract - Individual Academic Tutor Support Record Template - Provision of Support for Students with Disabilities and or Specific Learning Difficulties - Awards Policy and Procedures.
Audience:		Public – accessible to anyone
Reference(s)		**QQI QA and Validation Policies and Guidelines (2016-2018)** **European Standards and Guidelines (2015)**

Guide to Learning Support and Other Care Services

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

1. Orientation and Transition to Higher Education

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

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

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

2. Identification of Individual Student Needs

Close scrutiny of students is maintained by tutors and workshop presenters. Attendance rolls are taken at each class and assignment submissions are monitored. Students who fail to attend regularly (as outlined in the attendance policy for the relevant programme) and/or who fail to submit one or

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

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

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

Learner support needs may be identified:

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

3. Ongoing Student Learning Support

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

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

- **Library**
  Library information sessions are held during Orientation. Additional tutorials/workshops are scheduled throughout the year to assist students to most effectively utilise the range of electronic

databases and library resources. These tutorials/workshops are designed to improve information literacy skills of students.

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

4. Individual Academic Tutor

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

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

Documentation of students seeking support

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

5. General Academic Staff Consultation

In-workshop consultation

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

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

E-learning consultation

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

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

The modules are supported by a virtual tutorial developed through Articulate Storyline that, through multimedia supports, allows the learner to engage with the materials in an interactive way and caters for a variety of learning styles (visual, auditory, reading). Another support is the Open Training College range of informative podcasts where the College interviews experts and academics in the relevant areas of social care, management and adult study.

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

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

7. Online Supports

Online induction programme

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

The induction programme is made up of the following sections:

Unit 1 – Internet Essentials

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

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

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

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

Unit 6 – Accessibility Issues – How to adapt your computer

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

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

Learning and Development in Higher Education

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

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

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

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

Online facilitators

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

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

Consultation with Programme Directors

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

8. Students at risk

Definition

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

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

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

Intervention support strategies

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

a) attending academic skills programmes;

b) attending tutorial or study groups;

c) receiving individual case management;

d) attending counselling;

e) receiving assistance with personal issues which are influencing progress;

f) receiving mentoring;

or

g) a combination of the above and a reduction in programme load.

Intervention contracts/documentation

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

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

9. Student Support Service and Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator

Overview of student support service:

The health and wellbeing of our students is a key priority of the Open Training College. Our Student Support Service and our professional, clinical partner, *Spectrum Life*, provide dedicated support to our students in relation to a range of topics including self-care, wellbeing, managing anxiety, supporting sleep, financial concerns, parenting, mindfulness (please note this list is not exhaustive).

As a student, you may be referred to the Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator by your Individual Academic Tutor or you may also self-refer yourself directly to the Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator. Similarly, a

student may also be referred to Spectrum Life by the Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator or may self-refer directly. An account name and password for Spectrum Life is issued to all students who may access the site and its associated supports directly. OTC will receive anonymised usage reports from Spectrum Life but these will not identify any individual students and OTC will not share any data held on the student with Spectrum Life, nor will Spectrum Life share any identifiable personal data with OTC.

<u>No obligation is placed on any student to share information about their use of our clinical partner's services with the College.</u>

Our Student Support Service consists of a range of supports and resources, including:

- ✓ A dedicated Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator
- ✓ Initial transition support for Year 1 students during the first 8 weeks of starting their studies
- ✓ 6 wellbeing seminars per academic year on a range of topics including dealing with procrastination, self-care, managing stress. These seminars are open to all students and staff
- ✓ Ongoing individual support where required
- ✓ A dedicated self-care resource on the Learning Centre (MyOTC)
- ✓ Free 24/7 in the moment support from qualified counsellors and therapists. This is provided in a variety of formats – live chat, SMS, WhatsApp, Call Back and freephone services
- ✓ Referral to qualified counsellors and therapists for up to 6 sessions free of charge to the student
- ✓ Multilingual counselling supports
- ✓ Access to clinically approved health and wellbeing content and resources online through Spectrum Life. This digital resource covers a range of resources – health, well-being, parenting, finances, sleep, nutrition, exercise – and is delivered through a number of formats including podcasts and videos
- ✓ Access to a directory of resources and helplines nationwide via Spectrum Life

Role descriptor for Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator:

- ✓ Initial transition support for Year 1 students during their first 8 weeks of study. This would include weekly emails on tips, suggestions, encouragements, links to videos and/or other resources as appropriate
- ✓ Ongoing individual support as required across the study body
- ✓ Initial tutor training to identify when a tutor should refer a student to the student support service
- ✓ Ongoing tutor support as required and appropriate
- ✓ Liaise with Spectrum Life as required
- ✓ Monitor and respond to messages via a dedicated student support email
- ✓ Develop and deliver 6 wellbeing seminars across the academic year – showcasing key topics such as procrastination, self-care and managing stress – these would be open to all staff and students

- ✓ Student referral to relevant helplines and resources in the Spectrum Life platform where relevant and appropriate
- ✓ Update the news forum and resources in the self-care area of the Learning Centre as appropriate
- ✓ Maintain appropriate records, in line with GDPR requirements
- ✓ Maintain regular contact and engage in update meetings with the Programme Director