

[Open Training College - OTC]

2023

Annual Quality Report
(Open Training College - OTC)
Reporting Period 2021-2022

[Open Training College]

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(Open Training College - OTC)
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM
Reporting Period 2021-2022

PREFACE

The **Annual Quality Report (AQR)**; formerly AIQR) forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements.

The AQR, particularly part A, should assist with **document management** in the institutional review process and will facilitate institutions in providing review teams with procedural QA documentation in preparation for the external review process. It is an important part of the evidence base considered by external **review teams** as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, demonstrating that the institution's internal QA system is aligned with QQI's Core and relevant Sector- and Topic-specific Statutory QA Guidelines, and with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). It enables the review team to satisfy itself of compliance with these requirements for the purpose of the institutional review process.

Each AQR is **published in full on QQI's website**, providing transparency on the HEIs' assurance and enhancement of quality to external stakeholders. (As such, institutions should ensure that their submissions do not contain any data that they consider to be commercially sensitive.) Collectively, the AQRs comprise a single national repository of quality assurance practice in Irish higher education institutions.

Each year, QQI produces a synthesis report of the key themes highlighted across the AQRs, primarily arising from Part B of the reports.

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Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Template¹

Legislation

- [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Technological Universities Act 2018](#)
- [Universities Act 1997](#)

QQI Documents

Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

- [Core QAG](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Independent/Private Providers](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Designated Awarding Bodies](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Institutes of Technology](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Blended Learning](#)

Other QQI Policy Documents

- [QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards, 2012](#)
- [QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners, 2015](#)
- [QQI Policy Restatement on Access, Transfer and Progression, 2015](#)

Other National/International References

- [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(2015\)](#)
- [IHEQN Guidelines on Collaborative Provision](#)
- [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#)
- [Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes, 2019](#)
- [HEA National Framework for Doctoral Education](#)
- [The Salzburg Principles](#)
- [The Salzburg II Recommendations](#)
- [SOLAS Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

¹ These links will be updated as further guidance documents are published.

PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Table 1

Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)				
AQR Part A Section	QQI QAG Core Sub-section No.	QAG Core Sub-section Title	ESG Standard No.	ESG Standard Title
1.0 - Internal QA Framework	2.1	Governance and Management of Quality	1.1	Policy for Quality Assurance
	2.2	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance		
2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery	2.3	Programmes of Education and Training	1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review				
5.0 - Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	2.4	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	1.5	Teaching Staff
2.3 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment	2.5	Teaching and Learning	1.3	Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment
	2.6	Assessment of Learners		
3.0 - Learner Resources and Supports	2.7	Supports for learners	1.6	Learning Resources and Student Support
6.0 - Information and Data Management	2.8	Information and Data Management	1.7	Information Management
7.0 - Public Information and Communication	2.9	Public Information and Communication	1.8	Public Information
2.0 - Programme Delivery and Development	2.10	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
9.0 - Details of Arrangements with Third Parties				
2.0 - Programme Development and Delivery	2.11	Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.10	Cyclical External Quality Assurance
4.0 - QA of Research Activities and Programmes	QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes			

Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the AQR for the Open Training College - OTC for the reporting period 1 September 2021 - 31 August 2022.

It is to be submitted by Friday, 24th February 2023.

The AQR has been approved by OTC's Academic Council (AC) and is submitted by Ronnie Harrison, Head of Quality & Academic Affairs.

Overview of Institution

The Open Training College (OTC) is a section of St. Michaels' House (SMH), Dublin and a third level Institution offering programmes of education and training to staff who work in the disability, health-related, non-profit, community and voluntary sectors nationally. St. Michaels' House was established in 1955 and since then has grown to become the largest provider of services to people with intellectual disabilities, and their families, in the greater Dublin region and the third largest provider nationally. (See www.smh.ie). St. Michael's House operates under the auspices of the Health Services Executive (HSE) and is directly funded by it through an annual service plan.

In the early 1990s, St. Michael's House was providing extensive education and training to staff and sought to formalise and accredit the programmes delivered. To this end made an application for (non-funded) designation as a third level educational institution to the then Minister of Education. On achieving this designation St. Michael's House set up the Open Training College (OTC) in 1992 as the operational mechanism for the delivery of accredited training.

As part of the designation as a third level institute, St. Michael's House was required to offer the programmes and training it developed to staff in all staff employed in disability services nationally. To achieve this objective the organisation was innovative in developing a model of delivery based on a distance learning approach, but with significant adult-friendly supports built in. This model is known as the Supported Open Learning (SOL) Model and has been operated successfully by the College since 1992. More recently other educational providers and educational researchers have referred to this model as 'blended learning'.

The College administration offices are located in Goatstown, Dublin 14 and programme delivery is national (through online and regional locations). The College employs 14 core staff and 15 associate/contract teaching staff plus a range of workshop presenters, consultants, module/topic authors and specialist topic experts. The College budget is generated through student fees, project work, work for St. Michaels' House and tender activity. College awards were initially validated by the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) 1992-2003, followed by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) 2004-2012 and then Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) 2012-to date. The QA arrangements with QQI (and its former iterations) pertains to St. Michaels' House trading as (T/A) the Open Training College. St. Michael's House also has a separate structure which provides access to Awards at levels 1-3 on the NFQ to adult service users.

The College's Mission Statement is as follows:

"The Open Training College is committed to offering staff in the disability, health-related, non-profit, community and voluntary sectors, learning opportunities that are accredited, accessible and embody best practice".

Process for Development and approval of AQR

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

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

The College's Information Management System (IMS) offers ease of access for users, including student online registration. Many processes, including results processing for QCI's QBS, have been streamlined. This allows for easier access to information such as real-time analysis of student progression and results.

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

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

All of these inputs are gathered through the “Governance of Academic QA” (outlined at Figure 3 below) and the Annual Quality Report is compiled by the Head of Quality and Academic Affairs. The draft report is circulated to the Academic Council (AC) for final feedback before that body approves a final version for submission to QQI.

Following submission, the AQR is published on the College’s website and a dialogue meeting is subsequently arranged with QQI to garner feedback and recommendations for future reporting.

1.0 Internal QA Framework

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

For ease of access for all stakeholders, the Quality Assurance Document (QuAD) is published in full on the College's website: <https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Quality-Assurance-Documents-V4.1-1.pdf>

It is also published in individual sections, which correspond to the Core QAG sub-section titles, and individual policies are also published and presented, at the following respective links:

<https://opentrainingcollege.com/quality-assurance-sections/>

and

<https://opentrainingcollege.com/quality-assurance-policies/>

The individual sections of the QuAD can be navigated to directly through the following links:

OTC – Quality Assurance Document (QuAD) – Policies and Procedures Version 4.1 (May 2022)

Individual Sections:

Section 1 - Governance and Management of Quality

Section 2 - Documented Approach to Quality Assurance

Section 3 - Programmes of Education and Training

Section 4 - Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

Section 5 - Teaching and Learning

Section 6 - Assessment of Learners

Section 7 - Support for Learners

Section 8 - Information and Data Management

Section 9 - Public Information and Communication

Section 10 - Other Parties Involved in Education and Training

Section 11 - Self Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Academic Quality Overview

The following diagram gives an overview of the Academic Quality system at OTC:

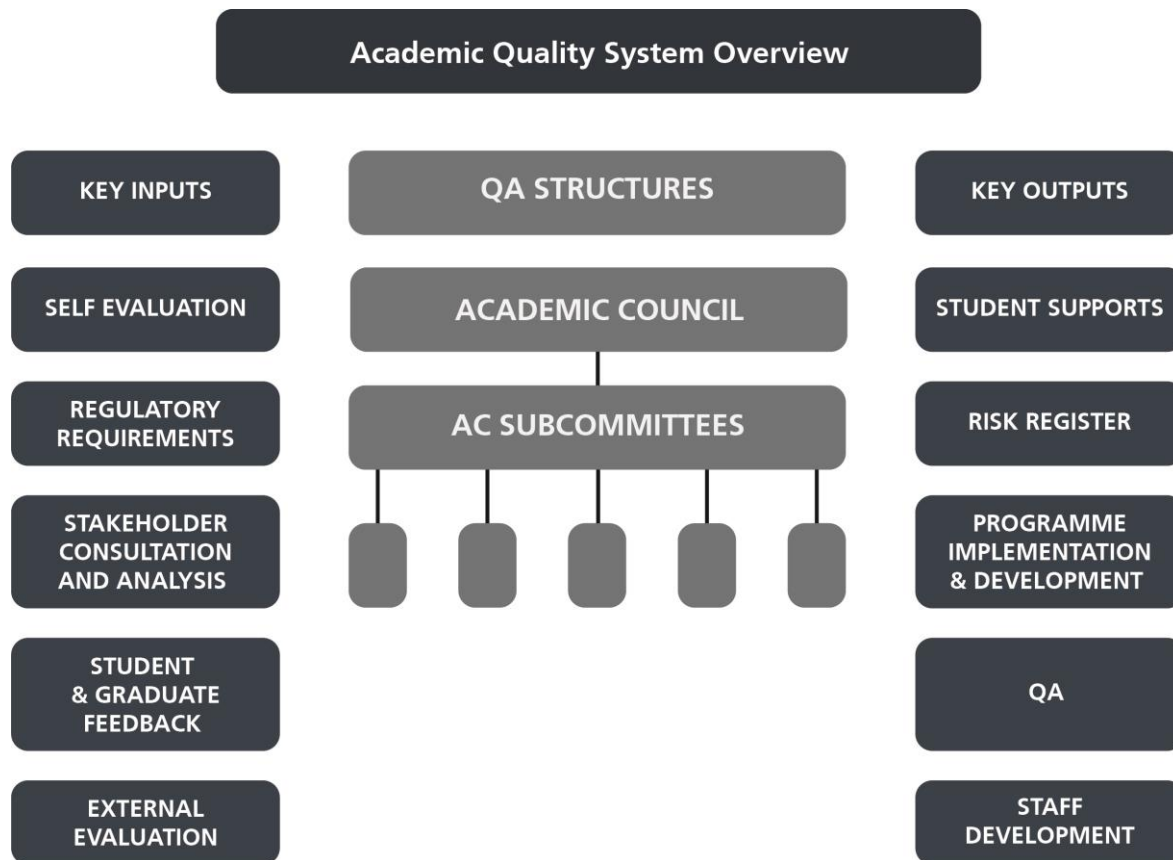


Figure 1: Academic Quality System Overview

The Academic Council and Sub-committee structure is further represented as follows:

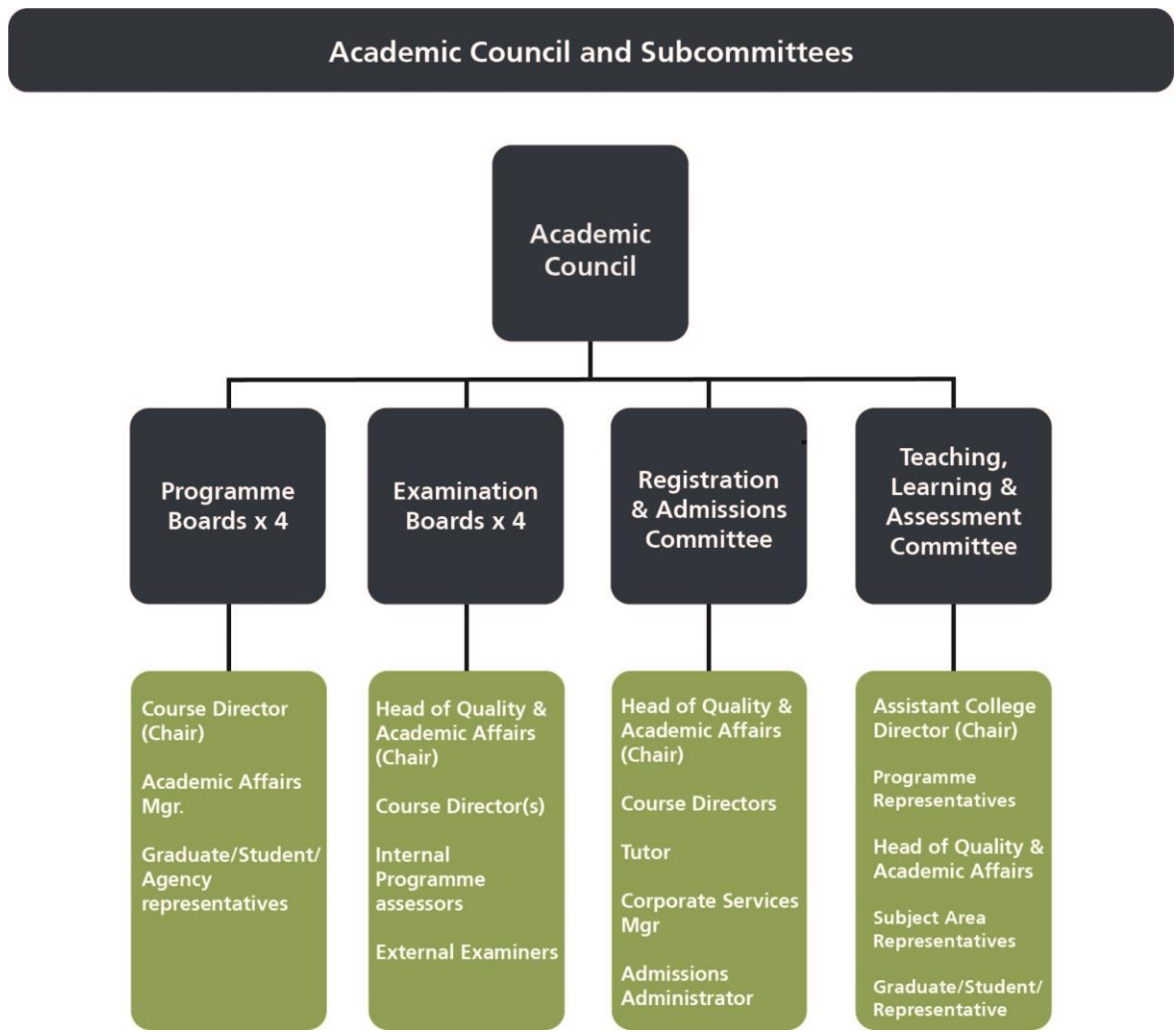


Figure 2: Academic Council and Subcommittees Structure

Governance of Academic QA is shown in the following diagram:

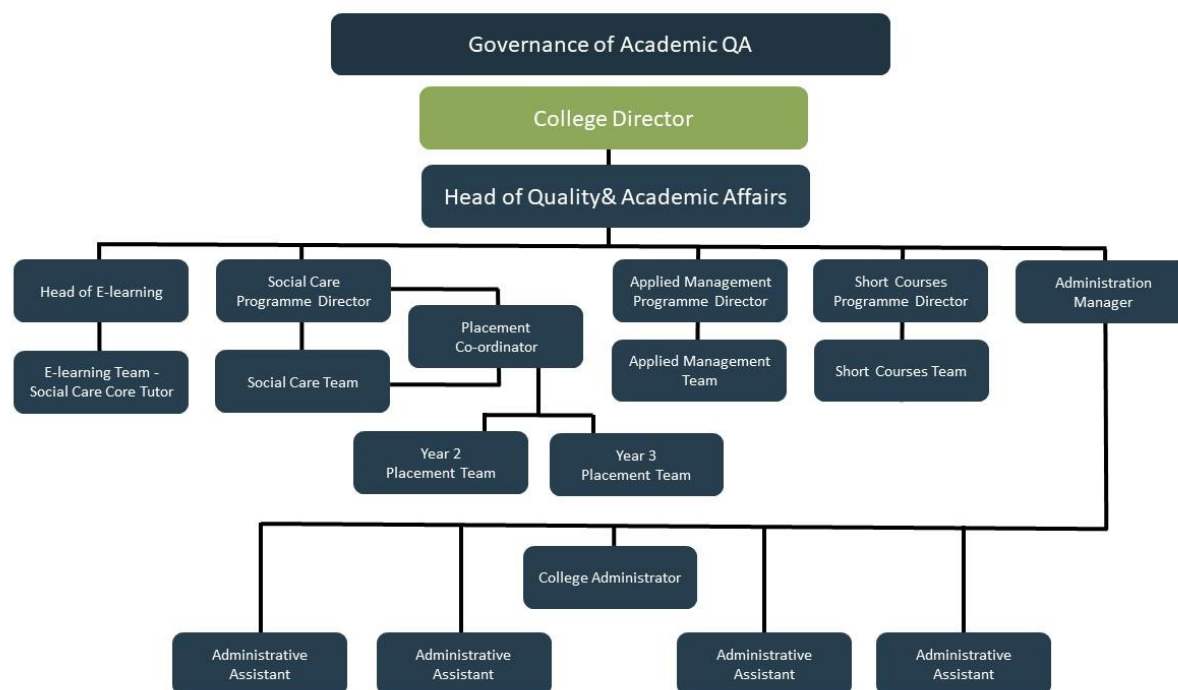


Figure 3: Governance of Academic QA

[Source: QuAD V 4.1, May 2022]

This structure was updated in 2020/21, in advance of the academic year 2021/22, in order to fully represent the addition of the Placement Co-Ordinator and Placement Teams, which come under the Social Care Programme Director's and Social Care Team's remit, which all ultimately convene at the Social Care Programme Board.

Representation of learners and external stakeholders

Learners are represented at all stages and levels of decision-making processes within the College, including as follows:

- Class representatives;
- Stakeholders consulted in programme design;
- Student and Graduate representatives on Programme Boards;
- Student representative on Academic Council.

Additional external stakeholders consulted on areas such as programme design or strategic decisions include Employers, Placement Agencies, Graduates, St. Michael's House (parent organisation), QQI, the National Forum, IASCE, Peer Colleges, Peers, HECA and HECA's Academic Enhancement Forum (HAQEF).

1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

OTC has a Collaborative Provision Policy in place, agreed with QQI and previously used. However, there was no delivery of programmes through collaborative provision during the reporting period. Transnational Provision is also not currently relevant to the OTC.

2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

The following sub-headings correspond to SECTION 3: "Programmes of Education and Training" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

The following sub-heading correspond to SECTION 5: "Teaching and Learning" and SECTION 6: "Assessment of Learners" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

2.3 Procedures for Making Awards

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

This heading corresponds to SECTION 7: "Support for Learners" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

OTC does not currently provide Research Degree Programmes.

5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

This heading corresponds to SECTION 4: "Staff Recruitment, Management and Development" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

6.0 Information and Data Management

This heading corresponds to SECTION 8: "Information and Data Management" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

7.0 Public Information and Communication

This heading corresponds to SECTION 9: "Public Information and Communication" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

This heading corresponds to SECTION 11: "Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document.

9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

OTC has a Collaborative Provision Policy in place, agreed with QQI. However, there was no delivery of programmes through collaborative provision during the reporting period or previously. Articulation agreements are also not currently relevant to the OTC.

9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	1
Awarding bodies	1
QA bodies	1

1. Type of arrangement (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	PRSB
Name of body:	CORU
Programme titles and links to publications	B.A. Social Care (L7): https://opentrainingcollege.com/courseitems/ba-in-social-care/
Date of accreditation or last review	The CORU panel occurred virtually on 22nd/23rd June 2022. Approval of the programme was notified to the College in November 2022.
Date of next review	2027

2. Type of arrangement (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	Awarding Body/QA Body
Name of body:	QQI
Programme titles and links to publications	https://opentrainingcollege.com/courses/ https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/ProviderDetails?providerCode=PG00253
Date of accreditation or last review	QA Approval Report (Re-engagement), 2019: https://qsdocs.qqi.ie/sites/docs/ProviderDocumentsLibrary/PG00253/PRID-253-ApprovalReport-20190613.pdf
Date of next review	Annual (AQR/Cinnte cycle for Institutional Review)

9.2 Collaborative Provision

Not applicable.

9.3 Articulation Agreements

Not applicable.

[Open Training College]

2023

Annual Quality Report (Open Training College - OTC)
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2021-2022

PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

Strategic objectives

Relevant College strategic objectives for the reporting period included:

- Ensuring currency and transparency of all College policies;
- Approval of a Social Care degree to meet with CORU requirements; B.A. in Social Care (Level 7);
- Continuing development of the College’s Blended learning and Online learning strategy, to include validation of a fully Online programme (Certificate in Applied Management – Level 6 – Special Purpose Award – 60 credits);
- Advancing adult (andragogical) life-long learning opportunities;
- Contributing to change and best practice at the level of the service-user, the staff member and the agency in the disability, community and non-profit sectors.

Improvements and enhancements arising from internal quality improvement

Following from a review of all College policies in the last reporting period, two additional policies were updated in this reporting period through the process of identification, consultation with internal and external stakeholders, final review and Academic Council (AC) approval. Internal stakeholders included programme boards, sub-committees of the AC, staff and students; while external stakeholders included employers, graduates, professional associations, regulatory bodies, placement agencies and service users. These policies are outlined in the table below:

Policy	Updated/Approved/To be approved
2101 – Attendance Policy – B.A. Social Care	Updated/Approved
2102 - Academic Integrity Policy	Updated/Approved

In addition, the provision of CPD opportunities for Tutors was enhanced with online sessions in academic integrity, online facilitation, assessment and the use of Google Drive. Indeed, CPD was a central theme this year, with lessons learned from annual CPD surveys and the emerging needs of all staff being taken into account, particularly in relation to the delivery of programmes. This will lead to further development of the College’s CPD policy in the next academic year.

In terms of staffing the College continued to add to its specialised employee base by hiring an additional Learning Technologist and a Content Developer.

As fully online delivery continued for some programmes, new Learner Guides were developed in order to improve the transparency of students' interaction with their courses of study. These guides sit alongside the more extensive Student Handbooks which accompany each programme, in order to act as a quick reference resource guiding areas such as assessment submission, learner effort involved and the different modes of delivery (webinar, seminar and tutorial). They also explain the different types of learning involved such as directed, self-directed (independent), work-based, synchronous, asynchronous etc.

Students studying for the professional Social Care degree also benefitted from a thorough consultation with all stakeholders (including themselves) regarding the placement model for this programme. This led to quality enhancements with regard to how the placement team communicates with Practice Educators (PEs), internally with the wider Social Care team and with students. A particular outcome of the feedback received was that the amount of paperwork necessitated with regard to placements and their assessment was better streamlined in order to reduce the burden on all stakeholders involved. A case study relating to this undertaking is attached to this AQR.

This period also saw the network of placement agencies grow significantly, concurrent to the College making its final submissions to CORU for approval of the programme to be included as part of the register for professional Social Care Workers (SCWs) planned for 2023.

In order to maintain its established focus on the disability sector, the College also developed a Level 8 programme, *Honours Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management)*, for submission to QQI for validation. The expert panel visit did not take place during this time, however, and will be convened in the next reporting period. The programme was developed in order to give graduates from Level 7 programmes a progression route and combines knowledge, skills and competences from the College's two main areas of expertise; Social Care and Applied Management within the human services/disability domain.

The College continued to interact with QQI's pilot project for the validation of fully online programmes in relation to the Certificate in Applied Management (Human Services). The adapted application was submitted to QQI in this reporting period and will be investigated by an expert panel in the next reporting period (2022/23).

Specific changes to QA system during the reporting period arising

- Increased CPD, with a particular focus on Online delivery and use of technology/tools
- Increased staffing
- Updating and enhancement of both student and staff induction programmes
- Development of a specific module to enhance awareness of Academic Integrity and College supports in this area
- New Academic Integrity Policy and Academic Misconduct Procedure

Contextual factors which impacted on QA system implementation, developments and enhancements

The primary contextual factors which influenced the QA&E functions within the College can be summarised as follows:

- changing application patterns (post-Covid)
- professionalisation
- continued fully online delivery
- return to blended delivery
- the increased importance of Academic Integrity

This period can be defined in general as one of 'transition', with many programmes returning to blended delivery, including live rather than online workshops; while others continued to be delivered fully online under the special contingency arrangements which were welcomely extended by the regulator, QQI. Application patterns to programmes could also be seen to change considerably, having increased significantly during the academic year most strongly impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21); there was a marked decrease in applications during this period. Return to the in-person classroom was implemented on a staggered basis from February 2021 onwards.

The focus on strengthening awareness of Academic Integrity considerations and providing additional supports in this area was also to the fore at this time, as outlined elsewhere in this report (see Section 2.1).

1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

No.	Relevant objectives	Planned actions and indicators (2020-21)	Outcomes (2021/22)
1.	Policy review	Approval of outstanding policies.	<p>All policies and related procedures have been fully updated by this reporting period (by approval of the College's Academic Council). This represents the first full policy review since Re-engagement with QQI in 2019.</p> <p>Resulted in the publication of a fully updated Quality Assurance Document (QuAD – V 4.1, May 2022).</p>
2.	Review of the level 7 programme – BA Contemporary Disability Studies	Full: 2016; with annual reviews to date.	<p>Given the development to the B.A. in Social Care (L7) for CORU approval, the case for continuing with this disability-focused, level 7, degree was fully investigated.</p> <p>The result was the recommendation to extend the current programme into the next review period, with a view to possible re-validation in 2024, contingent on continuing viability.</p>
3.	Review of Student Support policy implemented from Sept. 2021, to include review of tutorial effectiveness and impact.	First full review re. online and blended learning	The review ensured that College support mechanisms, including through tutorial support, fully met the needs of students. This also lead to additional supports being put in place for tutorial

			staff and additional training being targeted in these areas.
4.	Review of Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy	In preparation for next iteration (last full iteration April 2020).	<p>The current strategy was reviewed against its objectives and the resulting findings are reported elsewhere in this report.</p> <p>This will be further reviewed against expected Online Guidelines proposed to be published by QQI in 2023, which will in turn prompt a new version of the strategy to be developed, in order to take these statutory guidelines into account.</p>
5.	Review of BA Applied Management programmes, for possible revalidation in 2022/23	Last validated in 2018 (with interim reviews re. Online Learning).	<p>Having reviewed the full degree programme, the first stage, the Certificate in Applied Management, was put forward for QQI's Online pilot initiative.</p> <p>The continuing viability of the full degree will be further investigated in the next reporting period.</p>

1.3 Governance and Management

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

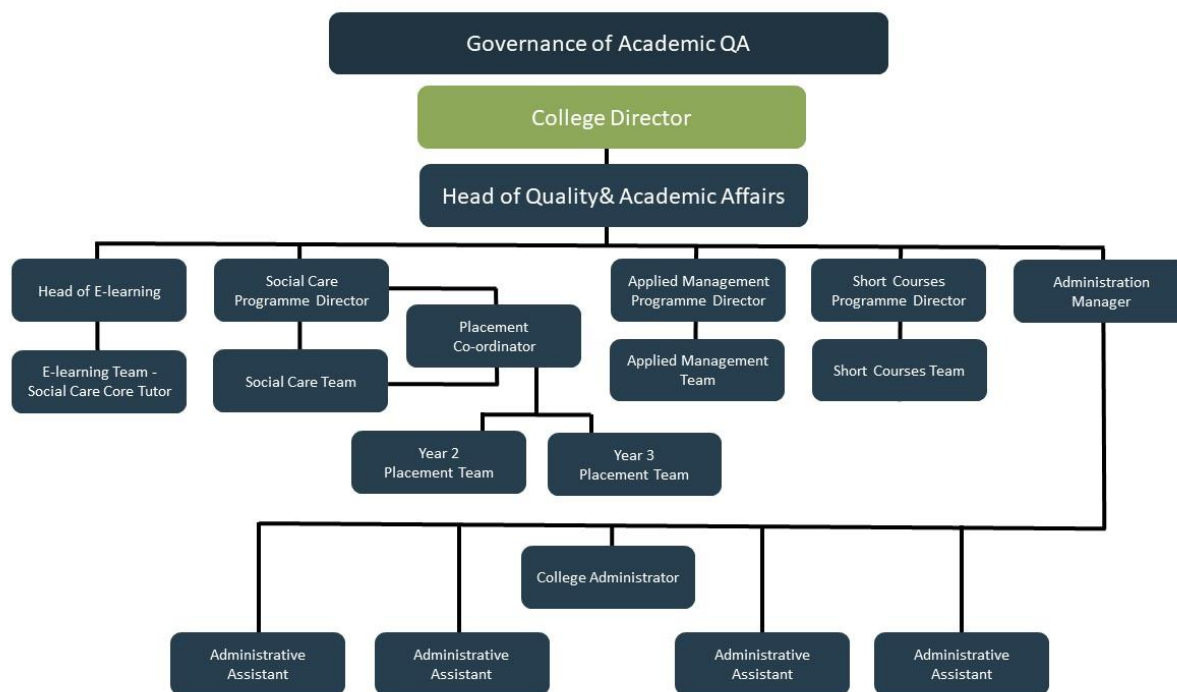
Body	Meeting dates
Academic Council (AC)	24 th June 2021 21 st October 2021 25 th February 2022 7 th March 2022 (Incorporeal) 22 nd April 2022 (Incorporeal) 3 rd November 2022
College Executive Committee (CEC)	8 th September 2021 13 th October 2021 10 th November 2021 9 th December 2021 12 th January 2022 9 th February 2022 16 th March 2022 13 th April 2022 18 th May 2022 8 th June 2022 13 th July 2022 14 th September 2022

1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

During the first half of this reporting period, the College Director (Dr Karen Finnerty) continued to be seconded to work with the St. Michael's House Board and EMT (Executive Management Team). The position was filled by Mr Raymond Watson as Acting College Director during this time. Dr Finnerty returned to post in February 2022 and Mr Watson resumed the role of Assistant College Director, as well as assuming the role of Acting Head of

Quality & Academic Affairs from March to September 2022. The latter role was resumed by Mr Ronnie Harrison in September 2022, having been employed elsewhere from March to August 2022.

The structure of the 'Governance of Academic QA' continues to be represented as follows:



[Source: QuAD V 4.1, May 2022]

1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

There were no periodic reviews in this period, apart from the normal annual reviews of programmes and the submission of the AQR. Two programmes were submitted for validation but the panel events did not take place within this reporting period.

A review of all programme review, validation and revalidation activities forms part of the plan for the next period.

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels² involved in IQA

Not applicable; see 1.4.1 above.

² QQI acknowledges that the terminology used to describe the groups of individuals that conduct peer review/evaluation varies from institution to institution.

2.0 IQA System – Enhancement and Impacts

In terms of the overall impact on programme delivery, as monitored through student feedback in end-of-year surveys (EOYs) the following was reported from the EOYs 2021/22:

“135 students completed the survey (125 last year).

The demographics of the responders, in comparison to last year, are slightly more female, slightly younger, less experienced in services, and funded/ self-funded in nearly exactly the same way (there was a slight reduction in complete funding from employers).

Overall, 80% of students stated their experience was excellent or very good.

Scores for learning materials increased (94% stating they were very satisfied or satisfied, in comparison to 88% last year) but the indication on whether the student will purchase hard copies is down again. The experience of ‘Workshops’ are slightly down (66% said excellent or very good last year; 58% this year) but attendance is up from 93% to 99%.

While satisfaction with facilitation of workshops is up (69% said excellent or very good last year, 77% this year), telephone tutorials satisfaction fell from 71% to 58% and the same for email tutorials; 91% to 74%. It is worth noting that the results for this year were more similar to the results from 2 years ago than to those from a year ago. The group tutorials, measured for the first time, were rated excellent or very good by 70% of all students.

Regarding podcasts and narrated podcasts, while their ratings are down, they are still very popular and are well represented in the open-ended questions on online support. Google Drive's use rating fell slightly but is still very positive (94% said it is very easy or easy to use last year, to 92% this year with only 6 % saying it was difficult or very difficult).

The results around the applicability of the programmes stayed stable; around 85% rated the courses material totally applicable or nearly all applicable.

Administration maintained the rating of 94% saying the service was excellent or very good, the same as last year.

These results suggest that overall they are a testament to the College and Programme teams' continued resilience, innovation, student-centred actions and hard work. They are still high with most positive views being 75% or over. The message about a return to face to face is mixed; some students want it back now, while others feel that Zoom gives them flexibility."

Based on these outcomes, the following was summarised and actioned:

Areas for focus/improvement

- Students finding it expensive to print modules and the placement portfolio
- Workshops to make good use of time to reduce travel time for students not living in Dublin
- Variations in tutor responses both in quality and time delivered
- Feedback needs to be timely
- An additional reference guide in the Student Handbook
- Ensure the tutor is on the same page as the podcast
- Tutors to engage more in online discussions and provide more feedback on them

Tutors to continue to link in with students who, through analytics, have been shown not to be as engaged as others.

Areas positively reinforced

- The overall results are very positive
- Some tutors going 'above and beyond' are specifically mentioned
- Our ongoing support through COVID
- Students liked the reflections from student support, and some felt they needed the support provided
- Student representatives are seen as good support
- The Administration team is seen as easy to work with
- Online exams are handled well

In addition, Workshop facilitators were given very positive reviews.

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

The College is particularly aware of the QQI NAIN (National Academic Integrity Network) publication ***“Academic Integrity Guidelines”*** (NAIN, 2021). While these guidelines are non-statutory, every effort has been made to integrate them into the College’s QA implementation in the reporting period. This has entailed outlining, how the College:

- Raises student awareness of Academic Integrity considerations from the outset of their studies;
- Includes a focused module on this area as part of student induction;
- Teaches students how to reference properly in order to avoid plagiarism;
- Provides additional online resources to support students in upholding Academic Integrity;
- Outlines misuse of cheating sites/essay mills and other text generation tools (misuse of Artificial Intelligence);
- Provides clear definitions to students as to what constitutes Academic Integrity and correspondingly what constitutes Misconduct;
- Clearly outlines the consequences of Academic Misconduct (re. Academic Misconduct procedure);
- Provides initial and ongoing training to relevant staff in this domain;
- Continues discussions relating to Integrity throughout the course of studies, particularly at the point of Assessment briefing;
- Encourages ‘Courageous Conversations’ between students and staff where appropriate;
- Provides a full range of supports for students at each stage of the Academic Integrity journey, including where suspected misconduct has taken place;
- Continues to update students through the College’s communication protocols on any developments in this area, while appraising/training staff in relation to same;
- Ensures policies and procedures are updated in a timely manner to reflect any such developments.

A new Academic Integrity Policy was implemented in this period and will be further developed in the next period (2022/23) based on continuing learning through the sector and CPD provided by QQI and NAIN in particular.

3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

No.	Relevant objectives	Planned actions and indicators
1.	The continuing development of fully Online provision.	<p>Taking part in QQI's Online pilot initiative</p> <p>Consulting on draft statutory guidelines, when available</p> <p>Meeting statutory Online Guidelines, when published</p> <p>Review of 'Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy' – currently V2.0 (2022-2024)</p>
2.	The continuing development of the Blended model	<p>Supporting students in their return to the classroom and to exam hall sittings</p> <p>Review of 'Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy' – currently V2.0 (2022-2024)</p>
3.	The provision of contemporary and accredited 'Disability Studies' qualifications.	<p>Pursuing the validation of a Level 8 programme in 2022/23:</p> <p><i>"Honours Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management)"</i></p>

4.	The ongoing development of the College's core QA.	Publication of updated/new policies Alignment of QA with Online Guidelines when available Preparation for possible future 'Delegated Authority'
5.	Student recruitment	Benchmarking and cost analysis against other providers in the market Marketing plan through the Promotions Committee Increase attractiveness/relevance/competitiveness of programmes with the aim of ultimate increase in student numbers

3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

3.2.1 Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
Review of the College's Re/validation plans	Q4 2022	Q4 2020
Review of Blended Learning and Online Learning Strategy	Q4 2022	Last full iteration April 2020
Review and development of the College's CPD policy	Q1 2023	April 2022
Review of additional student support service (Spectrum Life)	Q1 2023	First full review of effectiveness
Review of Tutorial support (Costing)	Q1 2023	2021-22 (focused on effectiveness rather than cost)

3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

The following period will see a full review of the B.A. in Social Care in preparation both for monitoring and re-approval through CORU and for re-validation through QQI.

4.0 Additional Themes and Case Study

CASE STUDY 1

Title: Lessons learned through feedback from stakeholders involved in a professional Social Care placement model.

Theme: Ensuring the quality assurance and enhancement of work placements. An examination of the lessons learned and challenges ahead.

Keywords: Social Care, placement, professional

Short Abstract: This case study shows the importance to the quality assurance and enhancement functions of feedback garnered from stakeholders in relation to students on placement as part of a professional Social Care degree which was concurrently seeking approval through the professional regulator, CORU. Through this feedback the College was able to adapt and enhance elements of the model so that the case for professional recognition was strengthened.

Case Study:

In applying for CORU approval for the B.A. in Social Care (Level 7), the Open Training College (OTC) moved from a work-based supervision model to a practice placement-based model. The newly validated programme and hence placement model commenced in 2019.

The main differences in implementation of the model included the student now having to work in an agency to evidence-defined standards of proficiency (SoPs). Academically, the College provides access and supports through the innovative, supported open learning model. The flexibility of the placement model – 16 hours per week across 25 weeks – allows for a profile of students who may be excluded or restricted from completing a more traditional block placement arrangement to be able to engage with a professional Social Care degree. The OTC has over 30 years of experience working with a profile of students who tend to be mature learners and who often already have many years of life and professional experience. Our placement model allows this profile of students the flexibility to engage with the SOPs on placement over 25 weeks.

If a specific organisation feels that the 16 hours per week over 25 weeks does not meet the demands of their service, they can request that the 400 hours be completed in a more block placement arrangement. The College can, and has facilitated, this arrangement once a student is in a position to achieve this.

Due to COVID, opportunities to gain feedback on this new process were limited. In the spring and summer of 2022, the college gathered in-person feedback from the students, agencies (via the practice educators

who supported and supervised the student during the placement in the agency) and the people who used the agencies' services.

These were themes that emerged in the feedback:

Effectiveness of communication

The Practice Educators (PEs) were asked how effective they felt the communication between the College and their organisation was (for example, email correspondence from the placement coordinator/ placement tutor, phone calls and meetings). Most said the communication was appropriate and timely. However, the large amount of paperwork involved in the assessment was identified as an issue by both students and practice educators.

The Placement model

The model had a mixed response from the agencies. Some agencies said that the 25-week model did not suit their organisational flow and that a block placement on hindsight would have been better. However, while still stating that balancing work, life, study and now placement was challenging, the students still felt that the 25-week model allowed them to study more effectively, where a block model would not.

Assessment

The PEs were asked how they found the assessment of the placements – they were asked specifically about the tripartite meetings, the portfolio and the Assessment Record Book. The portfolio generally allowed for well-structured discussions on the standards of proficiency and key learning. The online induction provided by the College gave a clear sense of the processes and structures involved in supporting the assessment. The practice educators and the students again mentioned the amount of documentation.

Level of preparation of students and practice educators before placement

Overall, the PEs felt that the students were prepared before placement, but one PE recommended introducing more pre-placement preparation on communication. The practice educators appreciated the support emails the practice placement team sent periodically.

Role and contribution of the Students to the placement agency

The responses stated that the students had become part of the agency teams while bringing their experiences and an outside eye to the practice. The service users felt that it was positive having a new person to interact with. The theme of having someone who spends quality time with them and supporting them in many ways, including outreach in the community and with families, distinctly emerged.

Summary of outcomes

The overall response to the placement model was positive from all stakeholders. However, a few areas need to be adjusted, especially the amount of paperwork involved in the assessment for all stakeholders. The key positive is that the service users benefit from this process by having another person in their service, which allows for more quality time. Also, the practice placement team needed to ensure that the placement model used while working for the student must also work for the agency.

This annual process allows all stakeholders to give feedback to the practice placement team. The feedback is then reviewed at the social care team and programme board level to ensure that any identified issues are actioned and implemented.

The process also provides the practice placement and broader social care team to engage with people in practice to ensure that the programme continues to fulfil the sector's needs.