

[Open Training College (OTC)]

2025

**Annual Quality Report
(Open Training College - OTC)
Reporting Period 2023-2024**

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**Annual Quality Report
(Open Training College - OTC)
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM
Reporting Period 2023-2024**

PREFACE

The **Annual Quality Report** 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

CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Template	6
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM	7
Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)	7
Introduction and Overview of Institution	8
1.0 Internal QA Framework	10
1.1 Governance and Management of Quality	10
1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision	14
2.0 Programme Development and Delivery	15
2.1 Programme Development and Approval	15
2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification	15
These sub-headings correspond to SECTION 3: "Programmes of Education and Training" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	15
2.3 Procedures for Making Awards	15
2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment	15
These sub-headings correspond to SECTION 5: "Teaching and Learning" and SECTION 6: "Assessment of Learners" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	15
3.0 Learner Resources and Support	15
This heading corresponds to SECTION 7: "Support for Learners" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	15
5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	15
This heading corresponds to SECTION 4: "Staff Recruitment, Management and Development" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	15
6.0 Information and Data Management	16
This heading corresponds to SECTION 8: "Information and Data Management" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	16
This heading corresponds to SECTION 9: "Public Information and Communication" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	16
8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review	16

This heading corresponds to SECTION 11: "Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review" in OTC's Quality Assurance Document:	16
9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties	17
9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies	17
9.2 Collaborative Provision	19
9.3 Articulation Agreements	19
PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM	21
1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments	22
1.1 Strategic QA Updates	22
1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR	25
1.3 Governance and Management	27
1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule	27
1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments	27
1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review	28
1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews	28
2.0 IQA System - Enhancement and Impacts	32
2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity	35
3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period	37
3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives	37
3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods	1
3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period	1
4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies	2

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
8.0 - Monitoring and Periodic Review	2.10	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
9.0 - Details of Arrangements with Third Parties			1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
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 Open Training College (OTC) for the reporting period **1 September 2023 - 31 August 2024**.

It is to be submitted by **Friday, 21st March 2025**.

The AQR has been approved by the College'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 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.

As part of the original designation as a third level institute, in 1992, St. Michael's House set up the Open Training College (OTC), which was required to offer the programmes and training it developed to 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 15 core staff and 30 associate/contract teaching staff plus a range of workshop presenters, consultants, module/topic authors and specialist topic experts.

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 QQI 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 QQI'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/FET programmes), 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.

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:

<https://opentrainingcollege.com/>

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-Document-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:

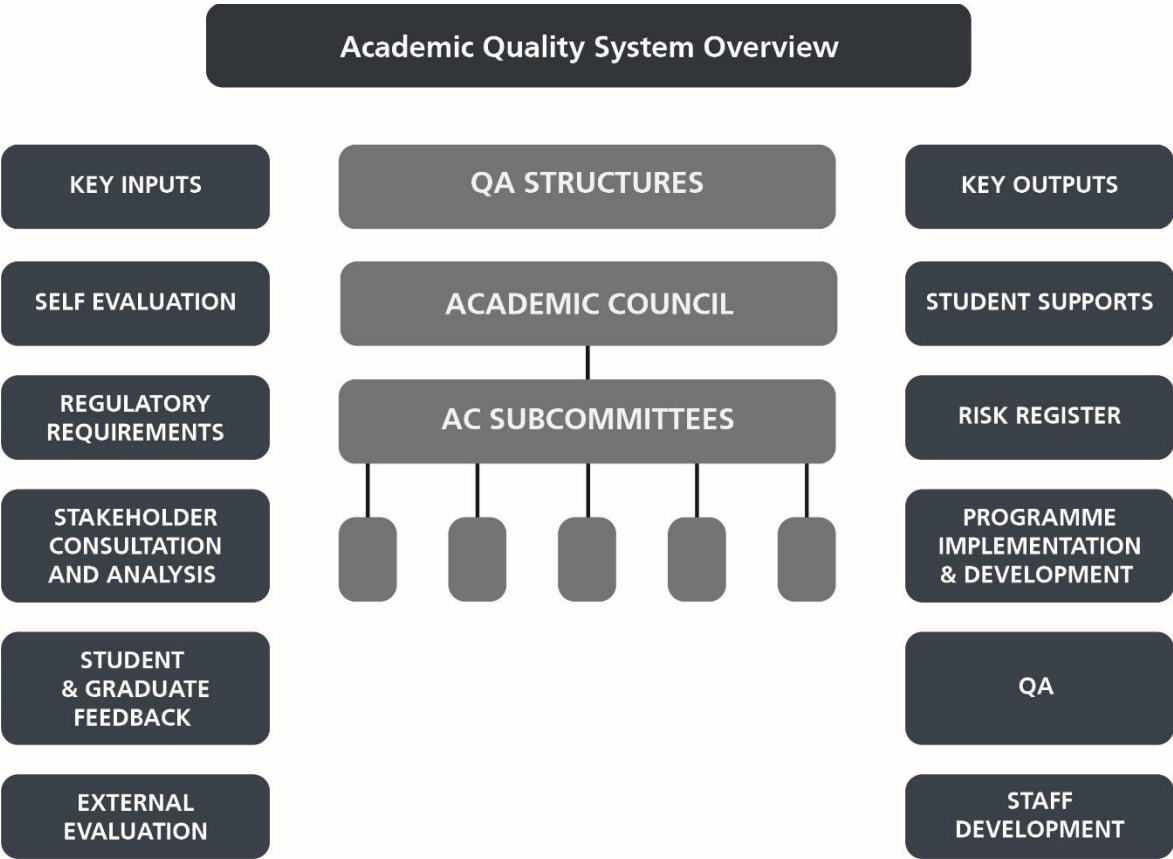


Figure 1: Academic Quality System Overview

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

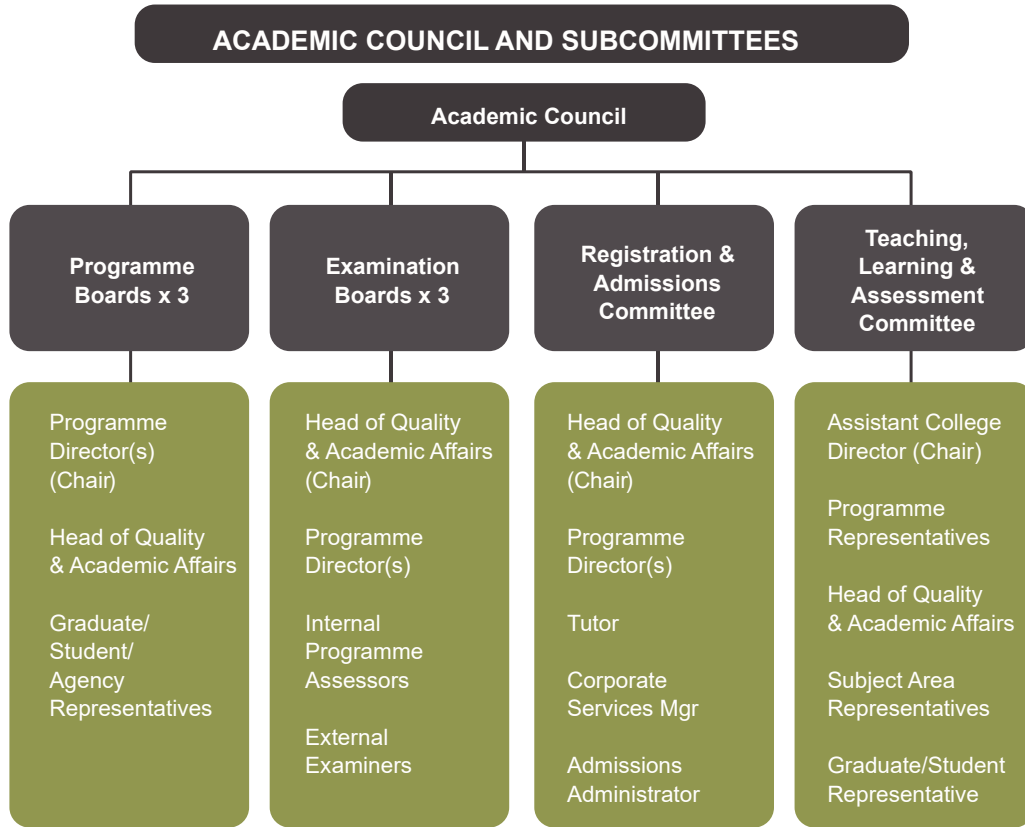


Figure 2: Academic Council and Subcommittees Structure

Governance of Academic QA is shown in the following diagram:

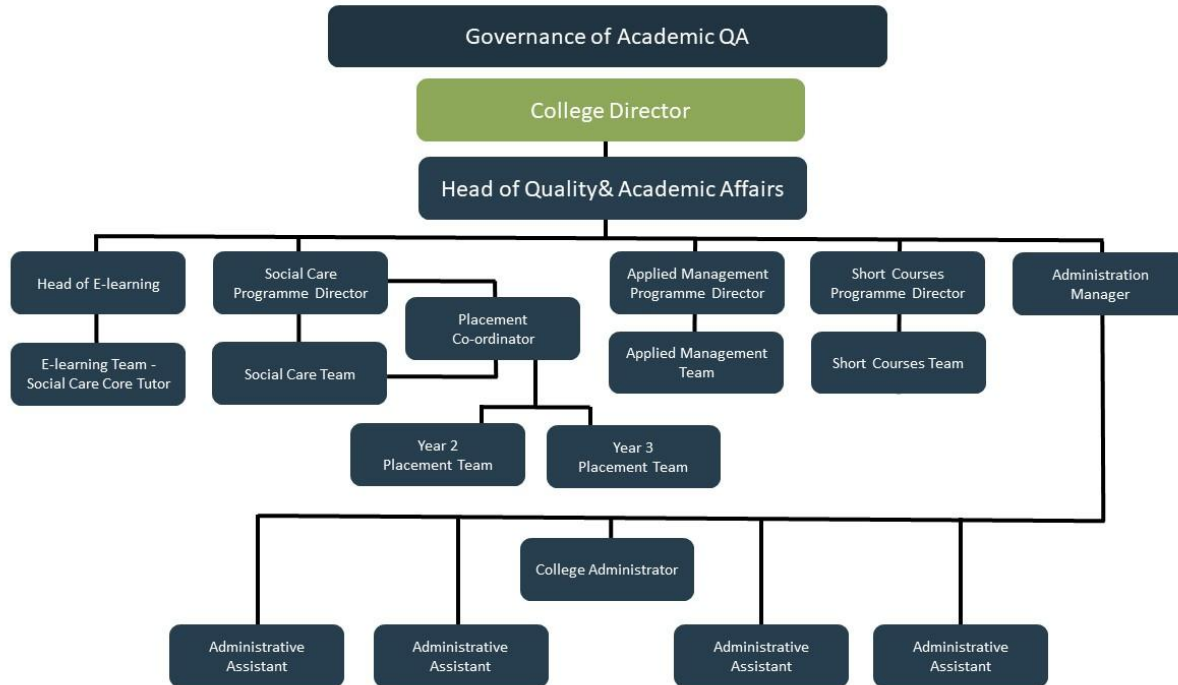


Figure 3: Governance of Academic QA

[Source: QuAD V 4.1, May 2022]

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,
- CORU
- the National Forum

- IASCE
- Peer Colleges
- Peers
- HECA
- 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

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

These sub-headings correspond to SECTION 3: “Programmes of Education and Training” in OTC’s Quality Assurance Document:

Section 3 - Programmes of Education and Training

2.3 Procedures for Making Awards

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

These sub-headings correspond to SECTION 5: “Teaching and Learning” and SECTION 6: “Assessment of Learners” in OTC’s Quality Assurance Document:

Section 5 - Teaching and Learning

Section 6 - Assessment of Learners

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

This heading corresponds to SECTION 7: “Support for Learners” in OTC’s Quality Assurance Document:

Section 7 - Support for Learners

4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

OTC does not currently provide Research Degree programmes. However, there is a Research Ethics approval process as part of the Level 8 degree “Honours B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management)”, which links to the following policy and procedures:

<https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OTC-Research-Ethics-Policy-and-Procedure-V1-Final-Website.pdf>

5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

This heading corresponds to SECTION 4: “Staff Recruitment, Management and Development” in OTC’s Quality Assurance Document:

Section 4 - Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

6.0 Information and Data Management

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

Section 8 - Information and Data Management

7.0 Public Information and Communication

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

Section 9 - Public Information and Communication

8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

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

Section 11 - Self Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	1
Awarding bodies	1 (incl. QQI)
QA bodies	0 (excluding QQI)

1. Type of arrangement (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	PRSB
Name of body:	CORU - Social Care Workers' Registration Board
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	Approval of the programme was notified to the College in November 2022. Monitoring will commence in 2025.
Date of next review	2027

2. Type of arrangement (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	Awarding Body			
Name of body:	QQI			
Programme titles and links to publications	https://opentrainingcollege.com/courses/			
	No.	Programme Code	Programme	Level/Type
	1	PG24966	Honours Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management)	8/Major
	2	PG22384	Bachelor of Arts in Contemporary Disability Studies	7/Major
	3	PG24094	Bachelor of Arts in Social Care	7/Major
	4	PG24096	Higher Certificate in Arts in Social Care	6/Major
	5	PG23919	Certificate in Applied Management (Human Services)	6/Minor
	6	PG00253	Certificate in Human Service Manager Skills (Micro-credential)	6/Special Purpose Award
	7	PG23915	Certificate in Supported Employment	7/Special Purpose Award
	8	PG24073	Certificate in Patient Safety Complaints Advocacy	7/Special Purpose Award
	9	PG10224	Certificate in Intellectual Disability Practice	5/Major
10	PG21078	Certificate in Health Service Skills	5/Major	

	11	PG21103	Certificate in Training and Development	6/Special Purpose
	12	PG10865	Certificate in Person Centredness in Intellectual Disability Services	5/Minor
	13	PG10227	Certificate in Facilitating Communication through Lámh	5/Minor
	14	PG10225	Certificate in Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour Supports	5/Minor
	IRQ.ie - OTC: https://irq.ie/providers/the-open-training-college?id=1128aaf9-0343-44cb-b8e2-d9af74848c6e&ref=%257B%257D			
Date of accreditation or last review	QA Approval Report (Re-engagement), 2019: https://gsdocs.qqi.ie/sites/docs/ProviderDocumentsLibrary/PG00253/PRID-253-ApprovalReport-20190613.pdf			
Date of next review	Annual (AQR/Cinnté cycle for Institutional Review)			

9.2 Collaborative Provision

Not applicable.

9.3 Articulation Agreements

Not applicable.

[Open Training College (OTC)]

2025

Annual Quality Report (Open Training College - OTC)
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2023-2024

PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

The College sets objectives against the following key strategic areas:

1. Quality and Academic Affairs
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
3. Corporate Services
4. Management Programmes
5. Social Care Programmes
6. CPD/Short Courses - HET/FET
7. St. Michael's House (SMH) Service Plan - OTC Objectives

Examples of strategic objectives during the reporting period include:

Quality and Academic Affairs

Quality - Programmes To provide a clear validation and programme development plan for the OTC.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Online Strategy To implement the blended/online strategy from 23-26.

Social Care Programmes

Social Care Registration To develop an OTC approach to the registration process commencing from approval in 11/23.

St. Michael's House (SMH) - OTC Objectives

SMH 7 Continue QQI approval for relevant OTC programmes that meet QQI criteria and sectoral/organisational need.

Through these examples it can be seen how the College's strategic objectives intertwine with those of its parent organisation, St. Michael's House. The Quality Assurance system operated by the OTC ensures that there is regular input by relevant stakeholders. The information produced by QA procedures allowed for developments and an accurate picture of the current state of the systems, process and programmes to be produced.

Further detail on the implementation and setting of strategic objectives can be found in the relevant sections of this report. A summary of the main QA and Academic affairs activities during the year is contained under the next sub-heading.

Quality Assurance and Academic Affairs

The priority activity in this area in the last year has been the Programme Review of the B.A. in Social Care programme; as well as preparing the next iteration of this Level 7, CORU-approved, degree for Revalidation. The validation event, including an Independent Expert Panel visit (virtual) will take place in early 2025.

During the year, a micro-credential entitled 'Certificate in Human Service Manager Skills' was validated as a 20-credit, Level 6, special purpose award. This programme was designed to help human service managers meet HIQA requirements and has been offered since the start of the 2024/25 academic year.

The College continued to submit the Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI and is one of only six independent colleges to have complied with this originally mandatory, now optional, requirement in all of the last five years. Themes from the OTC's report were analysed along with these other colleges, and 16 public HEIs, for QQI's "*Quality in Irish Higher Education 2024 - A Thematic Analysis of the Higher Education Institution Annual Quality Reports for 2024*", which can be found here:

<https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2024-10/quality-in-irish-higher-education-2024.pdf>

OTC continued to rationalise the overall number of programmes offered, as part of the College's strategy to consolidate and focus on core programmes. This has meant a reduction in the number of QQI-validated minor and special awards, so that in 2024/25 three degrees (major award), three special purpose award and one minor award is now offered as part of the College's HE (Higher Education) provision. In the FE (Further Education) sphere two major awards, one special purpose and one minor award continue to be delivered. Overall, this accounts for fourteen active QQI-validated programmes, while some former minor and special purpose awards continue being delivered as courses which are certified in-house and can be taken by students for CPD purposes.

In addition, the following areas have been highlighted at Academic Council during the year:

- A new external Quality expert has been appointed.
- The GDPR policy has been updated to show students what is being shared with CORU to support the professional registration process.
- Academic Integrity is still a significant issue; the College's new Academic Integrity/Artificial Intelligence process is working well and constantly developing.

- For the B.A. in Social Care, there has been a focus on tightening the application process, including proof of ID and proof of language proficiency; 'Rolling Admissions' and 'Random Selection' have also been introduced in light of over-subscription in applications.
- A new iteration of the 'Pedagogic Framework' has been communicated to students and tutors to standardise the terminology used across the College.
- A Research Ethics Committee (REC) has been established for the Level 8 degree, B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Disability Service Management).
- A new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy was developed to replace the existing Equality Policy.

1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

No.	Planned objectives (Previous AQR)	Update on Status
1	<p>Quality - Programmes</p> <p>To provide a clear validation and programme development plan for the OTC</p>	<p>Completed - Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation letter from QQI • Action plan(s) to cover all programmes <p>With regard to:</p> <p>a) Finalise validation plan for 24 to include extensions, identification of OTC branded programmes, programmes to remove and FET.</p> <p>b) Contact QQI to gain agreement over extensions</p> <p>Create an action plan and implement for social care programme review and revalidation in 25</p>
2	<p>Quality - Institutional Review</p> <p>To commence groundwork for institutional review in 2026/27</p>	<p>Completed - Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to CEC/AC <p>With regard to:</p> <p>a) To start the update of policies for institutional review</p> <p>b) Create an action plan for 24 to 26 in relation to IR</p>
3	<p>Staff Development</p> <p>To review the current CPD policy and develop processes</p>	<p>Partially Completed - Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPD Policy and processes documents <p>Initial updates to policy; further benchmarking against CPD policies (incl. CORU Social Care providers) to be carried out in 2024/25.</p> <p>With regard to:</p>

		<p>a) To review the current CPD policy and actions in the OTC to gauge what is happening (note learning from panel)</p> <p>To provide a paper looking at any required changes to the policy and how to record and communicate actions</p>
4	<p>Academic Integrity & Artificial Intelligence</p> <p>To ensure the OTC is up to date in strategies to support and engage students around academic integrity</p>	<p>Completed - Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee (TLA) minutes • Discussions at Academic Council (AC) <p>With regard to:</p> <p>a) Bring the continuing issues to TLA to commence identifying the issues- send minutes to AC</p> <p>b) Review the OTC AI policy</p>

1.3 Governance and Management

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

Body	Meeting dates
Academic Council (AC)	10 th November 2023 23 rd February 2024 28 th June 2024 7 th November 2024
College Executive Committee (CEC)	20 th September 2023 11 th October 2023 15 th November 2023 13 th December 2023 17 th January 2024 27 th February 2024 26 th March 2024 17 th April 2024 15 th May 2024 12 th June 2024 24 th July 2024 18 th September 2024

1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

During the reporting period the following changes in key personnel occurred:

1. A new Programme Director for Social Care was appointed;
2. The External QA representative on the Academic Council was replaced as part of the scheduled rotation of this post.

1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted)	Links to relevant publications
Full review of all policies and procedures against the statutory guidelines for Blended and Online learning	Completed in Q4 of 2024	A gap analysis document is available internally and this and the intention for future validation of blended learning programmes was shared with QQI. The OTC is not pursuing fully online programmes at this time.
Review of Blended and Online learning strategy	Completed in Q4 of 2023	The strategy document is available here: https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Blended-and-Online-Learning-Strategy-2023-2026-V3.0-1.pdf
Review of Pedagogical Framework	Completed in Q1 of 2024	The framework document is available internally and has been shared with QQI and review/revalidation panels.

<p>Review of terms of reference for the Research Ethics Committee and publication of policy; to review effectiveness at end of academic year</p>	<p>Completed in Q4 of 2023</p>	<p>The policy, guide and ToR document is available here:</p> <p>https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OTC-Research-Ethics-Policy-and-Procedure-V1-Final-Website.pdf</p>
<p>Benchmarking of policies and procedures in relation to CPD and EDI policies</p>	<p>CPD - partially completed: the policy was updated in 2023 and will be further benchmarked in 2025</p> <p>EDI - Completed: new EDI policy to replace old 'Equality Policy' was published in Q2 of 2024</p>	<p>CPD Policy:</p> <p>https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CPD-Policy-Website-Final-2023.pdf</p> <p>EDI Policy:</p> <p>https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/EDI-POLICY-2024-Final.pdf</p>
<p>Commence programme review of B.A. in Social Care in 2023/24, for revalidation in 2024/25</p>	<p>The programme review was carried out in Q1-Q3 2024 and the programme document for revalidation was completed in Q3-Q4 2024</p>	<p>At the time of reporting the Programme Review and Revalidation process is still in progress and will be completed in Q2 of 2025.</p> <p>The Panel visits took place in Q1 2025 and reports are awaited, with some conditions and recommendations and with a panel recommendation to validate.</p>

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels² involved in IQA

(i) Expert Review Team/Panel Size and Related Processes

	Total	Academic Schools/ Department	Professional Services/Support Unit	Approval/Review of Linked Provider	Programme Approval	Programme Review	Other
Number of review/ evaluation processes	1				1		
<i>of those:</i>							
On-site processes							
Desk reviews	1				1		
Virtual processes							
Average panel size for each process type*	3				3		

* excluding secretary if not a full panel member

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

(ii) Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA

Type of Expert/ Role on Panel	Total	Gender			Internal	National	International			Institution Type	
		Male	Female	Other, or unspecified			UK, incl. NI	Other European	Outside of Europe	Similar	Different
Chair	1	1			1				1		
Secretary	1	1			1					1	
Academic/Discipline Specific											
Student Representative											
QA											
Teaching & Learning											
External Industry /Third Mission	1		1		1					1	

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 2023/24:

The survey results show feedback from 127 students, marking an increase in participation compared to the previous year (97 students). The percentage of survey engagement has risen by 6%. The students represented come from the B.A. in Social Care (BASC), the B.A. in Contemporary Disability Studies (CDS), and management programmes, with 62% of respondents from social care (61% last year), 24% from management, and 14% from CDS, mirroring the previous year's distribution.

Demographically, the respondents this year are slightly younger, less female (78%, down from 84% last year), and more experienced, with 32% having over 15 years of service (up from 22% last year) and 7% having over 20 years of experience (down from 10%). A slight increase in self-funding is observed, rising from 51% to 54%, and 74% use the OTC instalment plan. Geographically, most students are from Dublin, Meath, Kildare, and Cork. Most enter the programme with a FET qualification, though this has decreased from 45% to 38%.

Regarding employment roles, 30% of students work as care assistants (down from 39% last year), while 31% are social care workers (up from 23%). The number of social care leaders remains constant at 7%.

The overall satisfaction with the OTC experience has slightly declined, with 88% rating their experience as excellent, very good, or good (down from 94% last year). However, 10% rated their experience as fair, which is an increase from 3%; and 2% rated it as poor, down from 3%. Learning material satisfaction has also decreased to 88% (down from 91%), but workshop satisfaction remains steady at 67%. Workshop facilitation satisfaction improved marginally to 83% (up from 82%). The library satisfaction rose to a career high of 65%, but still some students have difficulties using the databases.

Other key findings include a rise in telephone tutorial satisfaction, from 64% to 78%, while email tutorial satisfaction declined from 75% to 69%. Group tutorials were rated positively by 81%, up by 2%. Support utilisation increased from 14% to 16%, with 85% satisfied with the additional support received, an improvement from 81%.

In placements, 67% of students rated the experience as excellent or very good, the same as last year (when the NAs were removed). However, satisfaction with course practice tutors and educators slightly decreased.

Overall, the results show stability with some areas of improvement, though slight declines in satisfaction were noted in specific areas.

Things to ponder

- With the modules containing so much information, can we indicate to the student what is deemed essential (or is it all essential?)
- Workshops to make good use of time to reduce travel time for students not living in Dublin (especially during a weather warning)
- Ensuring links and videos are up to date and working
- Variations in tutor responses, both in quality and time delivered, mentioned
- Feedback needs to be timely
- Using the term 'service users'
- Narrowing down resources gathered from the library and databases
- More supports for the library
- Tutors to try to link in with students who have not engaged for a while (for example, a video call for all students halfway through the year)
- Need to promote the end-of-year survey as an important opportunity to provide feedback
- Provide physical ID for placement students
- Need to promote student representatives and what they do
- Placement Practice Educators (PEs) understanding of the Standards of Proficiency (SOPs)

Things to congratulate ourselves on:

- The overall results are positive
- Engagement with survey
- Modules are deemed excellent or very good.
- Tutorial supports increased uptake

- Some tutors go above and beyond
- OTC is very supportive
- Students liked the reflections from student support, and some needed the support provided
- Student representatives are seen as good support (up 10% to 71% see the SR as enhancing feedback)
- The Administration team is seen very positively
- Some Workshop facilitators were given great reviews
- Podcasts are still getting excellent reviews

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

The Academic Integrity Policy is of central importance in assuring the overall integrity of assessment, and can be found here:

<https://opentrainingcollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ACADEMIC-INTEGRITY-POLICY-Procedure-FINAL-VWebApr2023.pdf>

The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (a standing sub-committee of the Academic Council) oversees the integration of Assessment with Teaching & Learning within the College.

The College has always maintained a strict but fair policy and procedure when it comes to Academic Misconduct (formerly plagiarism/cheating) and the need for this has never been greater since the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a possible resource towards cheating, particularly in the last two years.

Some providers have seen this as an indication to return to an increased number of more formal examination hall sittings. OTC's response has been more nuanced and includes:

- Replacement of the original Plagiarism Policy with a more wide-ranging Academic Integrity Policy (two new versions in the last 3 years)
- Following all developments coming from NAIN (National Academic Integrity Network) and integrating this body's advice, definitions and guidelines into the current Academic Integrity Policy
- Increased vigilance for and focus on the markers of academic misconduct within a piece of student assessment
- Encouraging 'Courageous Conversations' with students in relation to Academic Misconduct (AM)
- Strong emphasis on signs of and consequences of AM as part of both student and staff inductions
- A specialised module developed in relation Academic Integrity/Artificial Intelligence
- Continued focus on this area as part of all module and assessment briefs
- Increased training (internal and external CPD) for all staff involved in marking assessment
- Increased cross-marking across all programmes

The last two years have indeed seen a marked increase in investigation of possible cases of Academic Misconduct and many more cases where this has been found to be the case than before the arrival of ChatGPT and other chatbots/virtual assistants based on large language models. Most of these cases have been dealt with at Level 1 of the AM procedure. There are three levels:

Level 1 - Minor Offence

Level 2 - Major Offence

Level 3 - Grave Offence

A recent review provided the following recommendations:

- Continue to AI-proof all assessment in as far as possible
- Continue to monitor and implement recommendations from NAIN
- Continue to focus on the area of Academic Integrity with students from the point of application briefing/interview (Applicants' Day), through the Academic Integrity specific module and throughout each module of the programme
- Continue to provide and support ongoing staff CPD in this area

All students are made aware of the value of the Academic Integrity policy and the penalties should this policy be abused.

Turnitin does provide software to identify potential AI issues, but this is treated as only an indicator. The main focus remains on the more tried and tested measures of academic integrity as listed in the student handbook, as follows:

Reasons a Tutor might suspect a possible case of academic misconduct:

1. Specifically identified text by 'Turnitin' software as containing an unacceptable amount of material taken directly from identified sources.
2. Un-cited text copied from College materials.
3. Incongruity in style of writing e.g., deviation from students' own voice, use of advanced academic writing.
4. Identification of use of cheating site or Artificial Intelligence text generator.
5. Inconsistency of fluency and spelling.
6. Change in formatting e.g., font, headings, margins; inconsistency of I.T. style e.g. very complicated table/chart having been inserted etc.
7. Lack of flow and/or development of topic. Paragraphs inserted that are inconsistent with previous points made - evidence of cutting and pasting.
8. Work that is very similar or the same as another student's work. In assessments where group work is a component the presentation of the assessment outline will include specific advice on academic misconduct considerations which may arise.
9. Work that is very similar or the same as the student's previously assessed work.
10. A piece of work written to a much higher standard than the student's previous work.
11. Suspicion that the student may have had assignment written for them by another person - 'ghost' writing.
12. The student has failed to answer the specific question asked.

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	<p>Quality - Programmes</p> <p>To provide a clear validation and programme development plan for the OTC</p> <p>Q2</p>	<p>Responsible: HQAA with relevant PD</p> <p>Wrt:</p> <p>a) Finalise validation plan for 25 to include extensions, identification of OTC branded programmes, programmes to remove and FET. (to include micro-credential development - CSE, Man 2 and 3, Fire Management)</p> <p>b) Contact QQI to gain agreement over extensions</p> <p>Create an action plan and implement for social care programme review and revalidation in 25</p>
2	<p>Quality - Institutional Review/Corporate Fitness/Due Diligence</p> <p>To commence groundwork for institutional review in 2026/27(?) exploring delegated authority options for the OTC</p> <p>Q2</p>	<p>Responsible: HQAA</p> <p>Wrt:</p> <p>a) To continue the update of policies for institutional review (Review CPD policy plus explore Fitness to Learn policy in other institutions)</p> <p>b) Set up a group to develop and implement plan for IR (HQAA, CD, ACD, CS)</p> <p>Create an action plan for 25 to 26 in relation to IR and due diligence</p>

3	<p>RPL options</p> <p>Exploring RPL options from FET to HET in the social care and management sectors</p> <p>Q4</p>	<p>Responsible: HQAA, ACD, Relevant PD</p> <p>Wrt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Continue exploration with Coláiste Dhulaigh and TUSLA in relation to options to provide RPL and recruitment options b) Discuss options with CORU through monitoring <p>Explore other College/agency options to allow RPL and/or set up EAYL</p>
4	<p>Staff Development</p> <p>To review the current CPD policy and develop processes</p> <p>Q2</p>	<p>Responsible: TLA, ACD, HQAA</p> <p>Wrt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To benchmark the current CPD policy and actions in the OTC with other institutions and create a gap analysis b) To provide a paper looking at any required changes to the policy and how to record and communicate actions <p>Draw up policy and ratify through AC.</p>
5	<p>Student Supports - Wellbeing</p> <p>To implement supports for student wellbeing; supported by the Healthy Campus initiative</p> <p>Q4</p>	<p>Responsible: H&W Officer, PD, ACD</p> <p>Wrt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Sign the Healthy Campus charter (Commit) b) Develop a Healthy Campus steering group with defined TOR (Coordinate) c) Consult with key stakeholders to identify two key priorities for 25/26 (Consult) <p>Action plan to implement ways to achieve the two priorities in 25/26 (Create)</p>

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
EDI Policy	Q3 2024	2021
CPD Policy	Q2 2025	2023
Review and Revalidation of the B.A. in Social Care	Q1 2024 - Q2 2025	QQI: 2019 CORU: 2022
Micro-credentials Review	Q3 2024 - Q2 2025	2023
Website Review	Q2 - Q3 2025	2023
Quality Assurance Document (QuAD) Review	Q2 - Q3 2025	2022/23

3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

OTC will continue to review all elements relevant to potential Institutional Review which is expected in 2026-2027 but which is not as yet confirmed.

4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

The Establishment of an Ethics Committee for the Open Training College

The Open Training College (OTC) achieved a significant milestone in 2023 when it received approval from QQI to deliver a Level 8, degree programme titled *BA (Hons.) in Applied Social Studies - Disability Service Management*. One of the key requirements for this approval was the establishment of an Ethics Approval Process as part of the *Applied Research Methods* module, a 15-credit component of the course. Implementing this process posed several challenges, but the successful establishment of the OTC Research Ethics Committee (REC) has led to numerous intended and unintended impacts on students, faculty, and the institution.

Challenges Encountered and Solutions Implemented

1. Establishing the Research Ethics Committee (REC)

One of the initial challenges was forming the REC itself. The College needed to ensure that the committee had the right mix of expertise and experience, particularly in research ethics relevant to disability services. Multiple discussions were held to define the committee's structure, including Membership, Terms of Reference, a Policy Statement, a statement of guiding principles, and a Code of Conduct. The challenge was to balance the need for stringent ethical oversight while maintaining an accessible and supportive process for student researchers.

To overcome this, the College sought external expertise, engaging a research professional with experience in third-level student research. A training and information session was provided to REC members before they began reviewing applications. This ensured that all members had a shared understanding of ethical research principles and procedures.

2. Ensuring Compliance with National and Sector-Specific Ethical Guidelines

Another significant challenge was aligning the College's ethics policy with national and international ethical standards. The REC had to ensure that ethical review processes conformed to guidelines such as:

- HSE National Policy for Consent in Health and Social Care Research (2023)
- The National Disability Authority Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities (2009)
- CORU Social Care Workers Registration Board Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics (2019)

Given the complexity and evolving nature of these guidelines, the College had to develop an adaptable policy framework. This was addressed by integrating these regulations directly into the REC's guiding documents and training sessions. Faculty and students were provided with clear guidance on how to apply these standards in their research proposals.

3. Student Awareness and Preparedness for Ethical Review

Many students entering the *Applied Research Methods* module had limited experience with ethical approval processes. A common issue was that students did not fully understand the importance of ethics approval before beginning their research. Some students initially submitted incomplete or non-compliant applications, leading to delays.

To address this, the College developed clear, structured application forms with detailed guidance notes. These materials, along with examples of successful applications, were made available on the OTC Online Learning Centre (MyOTC). Additionally, tutors took on a more proactive role in guiding students through the process, requiring them to review and endorse applications before submission to the REC.

4. Ethical Approval from Host Organizations

One of the most pressing challenges was that students conducting research in external organisations (such as disability service providers) often faced delays in obtaining ethical

approval from these organisations' own ethics committees. This sometimes meant that students had to revise their research plans mid-module.

To mitigate this risk, students were advised at the start of the academic year to consider the feasibility of their research proposals carefully. They were encouraged to select participant groups that would not require additional ethical approval beyond the OTC REC. For those who still needed external approval, the College provided templates and guidance on liaising with host organisations to streamline the approval process.

Intended and Unintended Impacts

1. Improved Research Quality and Ethical Standards

The introduction of the REC has significantly enhanced the quality of student research at OTC. Students now have a clearer understanding of ethical considerations in research, leading to better-designed studies that prioritise the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants. The structured review process ensures that ethical lapses are identified and corrected before research begins, fostering a culture of ethical integrity within the College.

2. Increased Student Confidence and Research Competency

While initially daunting for students, the rigorous ethical approval process has ultimately empowered them. By engaging with ethical review procedures, students develop stronger research skills, learning to critically assess risks and apply best practices in ethical research design. This not only benefits their academic work but also prepares them for professional roles where ethical decision-making is crucial.

3. Strengthened Institutional Reputation

The establishment of the REC has positioned OTC as a voice in ethical research within the social care and disability services sector. External stakeholders, including potential research partners and employers, recognise that OTC graduates have been trained to high ethical standards. This enhances the College's credibility and attractiveness to prospective students.

4. Unexpected Administrative Burdens

An unintended impact has been the increased administrative workload associated with the REC. Processing applications, reviewing proposals, and providing feedback require significant time and effort from committee members. To address this, the College has adopted a more structured review schedule, ensuring that meetings are planned well in advance and that students receive timely feedback. The use of standardised forms and online submissions has also streamlined the process. The timeline, providing ample feedback and deadlines are ongoing issues.

5. Adaptation to an Evolving Ethical Landscape

Another unintended impact is the need for continuous adaptation. Ethical standards evolve, and new challenges arise, such as the ethical implications of digital research methods. The REC must remain agile, periodically reviewing policies to ensure they align with emerging best practices and technological advancements. This has led to ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty and REC members.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at OTC was a challenging but ultimately rewarding process. By overcoming obstacles related to committee formation, regulatory compliance, student awareness, and external approvals, the College has successfully embedded a robust ethical review process into its new Honours degree programme.

The intended impacts—improved research quality, student competency, and institutional reputation—demonstrate the value of this initiative. However, unintended consequences, such as administrative burdens and the need for continuous adaptation, highlight the importance of ongoing evaluation and refinement.

The REC ensures that research conducted by OTC students meets the highest ethical standards, contributing to both academic excellence and the broader field of social care

research. Ultimately, the REC strengthens OTC's role as a trusted institution for ethical, high-quality research in disability services and social care.