



ICHAS

Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences

QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL

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1. COLLEGE PROFILE

1.1 College Background and Context

The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS) (*formerly known as the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute of Ireland*) is an independent education provider, specialising in the delivery of third level programmes. The College, which was established in 1999, was initially called the National Counselling Institute of Ireland (NCII) and offered a small number of college-developed programmes in the field of counselling. In 2005, NCII agreed its quality assurance procedures with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The process of quality assurance commenced with HETAC in 2005 and concluded in parallel with the first programme validation in 2006. Since then the College has exclusively provided programmes validated by FETAC and HETAC and represented on the National Framework of Qualifications. ICHAS believes the development of the College has been characterised by a steady expansion of the range and suite of programmes and a corresponding expansion of resources to meet the growing needs of the college and to assure the quality of the education provided.

In 2009 the College changed the name to the *National Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute of Ireland (NCPII)* to reflect the expansion of programme provision into the field of psychotherapy. Following an internal review in 2010 and an external consultation that considered the future remit of the college, the appropriateness of the current range of academic programmes and future expansion into the wider domains of higher education provision, the Governing Authority recommended the adoption of the name *The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS)* in April 2011.

The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences (ICHAS) is based on a collegial structure comprising individual Institutes, similar to the traditional department within universities and Institutes of Technology. These Institutes are intended to foster excellence within their own areas of focus, while also drawing collectively on the strengths of individual disciplines and enhancing the learning environment within the overall College. Currently the College comprises of the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute, the National Institute of Childcare and Humanities and the Institute of Open Learning. Future development plans envisage the establishment of an Institute of Business and Management and an Institute of Science and Technology. Collectively these institutes offer undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes as well as opportunities for further and continuing education. The programmes are designed and developed through an innovative curriculum model based on principles of integrative learning and teaching.

ICHAS programmes are designed to be relevant and contemporary, ensuring both academic and occupational value nationally and internationally. The College is committed to ensuring that all students have direct and easy access to leading academics and a supportive learning environment for their educational journey. The academic staff of ICHAS has a wide and varied level of national

and international expertise and the College prides itself on the fact that many academics maintain an active practice base while engaged in teaching, adding to their credibility and enhancing the overall value of the student experience. Programmes are designed to meet the flexible needs of a modern student body, accommodating learners who wish to study on a part-time or full-time basis, with 'study at home' options incorporated into many programmes, utilising a blended learning model that supplement face-to-face lectures with elements of online study.

ICHAS is located within the National Technological Park in Limerick, where its main campus is spread across two separate buildings, Park House and Walton House. All administration and management functions are located in Limerick, which also is the central repository for teaching and learning facilities and resources to service full-time and part-time learners across the learner body nationally. ICHAS is approved by HETAC to offer programmes in 17 off-campus centres.

1.2 College Mission and Vision

Mission Statement:

The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences will facilitate and enable adult learners to achieve qualifications that are accessible, affordable, relevant to the needs of business, industry and the professions, and nationally and internationally recognised. Its programmes will be supported by quality assurance policies and procedures that are independently agreed and monitored, and that are subject to continuous review processes. It will promote the discovery, synthesis and dissemination of academic and applied knowledge in the contexts of higher education, further education and continued professional development.

Vision for ICHAS

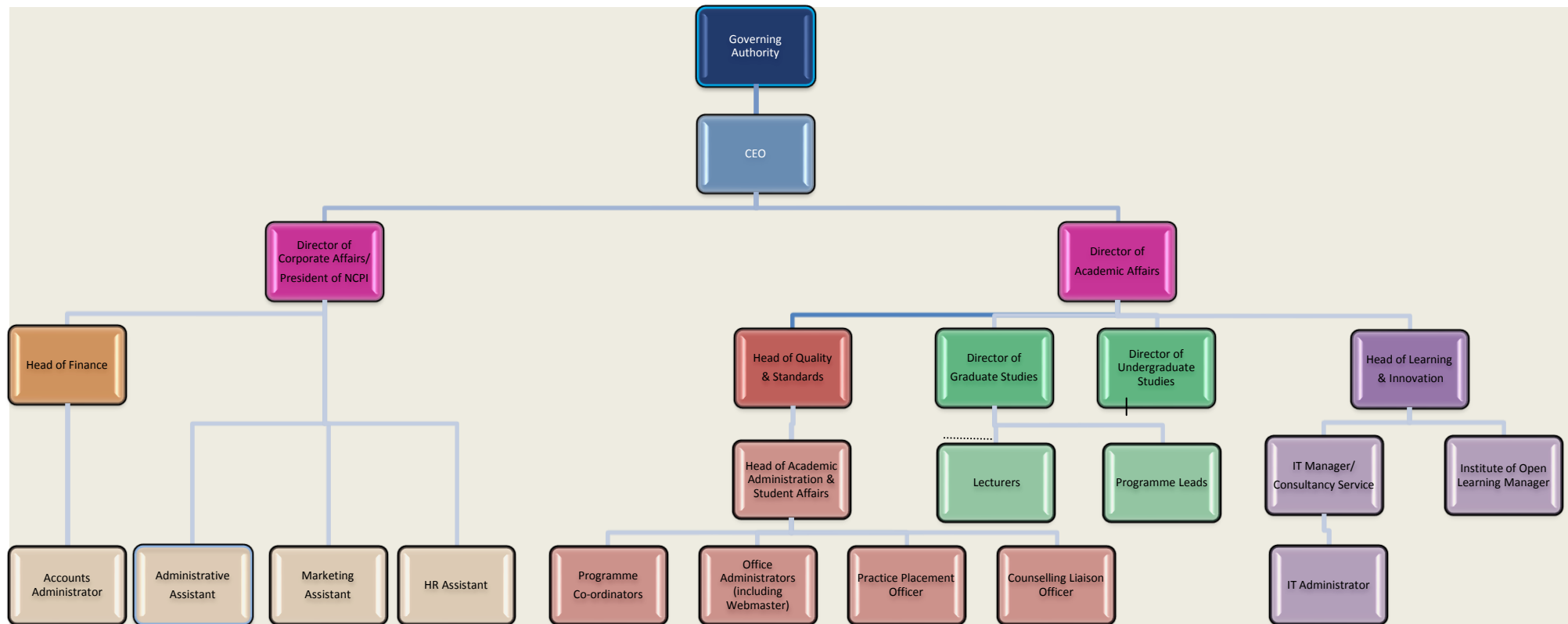
The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences will become a national and international centre of excellence in the fields of higher education, further education and continued professional development. ICHAS's education provision will be designed to meet the needs of the independent, adult, life-long learner and will become a model of best practice within the Irish education sector. The College will be distinguished within the Irish educational system through its dedicated focus on offering programmes across the two distinct areas of Humanities and Applied Sciences. Conscious of its need to establish credibility, it proposes that the development of programmes across these domains of practice will occur on a staged basis over a ten year period. It proposes to develop and deliver programmes using a blended learning approach, utilising the advantages of technology and working with international partners and individual academics to design and deliver the best programmes within these areas of interest. ICHAS proposes to capitalise on Ireland's unique strengths in the international education environment and, within the framework of blended learning, to draw on the expertise of nationally and internationally recognised academics to design and deliver programmes. The ethos of the College is firmly rooted in principles of adult education, placing the learner at the centre of the scholarly experience.

1.3 College Programmes

All programmes offered by ICHAS are validated by FETAC or HETAC and lead to qualifications at Levels 5 to 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The current range of programmes is set out below in Table 1.

| CODE | PROGRAMME TITLE | NFQ LEVEL | FIRST APPROVAL |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| FETAC PROGRAMMES | | | |
| N22551 | Drug and Alcohol Addiction * | 5 | n/a |
| E20159 | Substance Use Issues in Youth Work * | 5 | n/a |
| N32909 | Suicide Awareness * | 6 | n/a |
| N32957 | Child Psychology | 5 | n/a |
| 920505 | Certificate in Childcare | 5 | n/a |
| EYXXX | Certificate in Youth Work | 5 | n/a |
| 5M2181 | Certificate in Applied Social Studies | 5 | n/a |
| D30178 | Advanced Supervision in Childcare | 6 | n/a |
| HETAC UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES | | | |
| TBC | Certificate in Counselling Studies** | 6 (Minor) | 04.07.11 |
| | Certificate in Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills and Practice | 6 (Single Subject) | <i>Single BA module</i> |
| C1700 | Diploma in Counselling and Psychotherapy** | 7 (Minor) | 18.10.10 |
| CI701 | Diploma in Counselling Skills and Addiction Studies** | 7 (Minor) | 18.10.10 |
| CI702 | Diploma in Youth and Counselling Studies** | 9 (Minor) | 18.10.10 |
| CI001 | BA in Counselling Skills & Psychotherapy Studies | 7 | 04.05.06 <i>(reviewed 2011)</i> |
| CI002 | BA in Counselling Skills & Addiction Studies | 7 | 23.07.07 <i>(reviewed 2011)</i> |
| CI004 | BA in Counselling Skills & Youth Studies | 7 | 23.07.07 <i>(reviewed 2011)</i> |
| CI01 | BA (Hons) in Counselling and Psychotherapy | 8 (add-on) | 07.07.08 <i>(reviewed 2011)</i> |
| TBC | BA (Hons) in Childhood & Adolescent Care and Practice *** | 8 | 04.07.11 |
| HETAC TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES | | | |
| CI800 | MA in Counselling & Psychotherapy | 9 | 23.07.09 |
| CI801 | MA in Clinical Supervision in Professional Practice | 9 | 05.07.10 |
| CI802 | MA in Cognitive & Behavioural Therapy | 9 | 05.07.10 |
| CI803 | MA in Counselling & Pastoral Care*** | 9 | 05.07.10 |
| CI804 | MA in Childhood & Adolescent Studies*** | 9 | 05.07.10 |
| CI805 | MA in Leadership & Management in Professional Practice*** | 9 | 05.07.10 |

1.4 ICHAS Organisational Structure



2. POLICY & PROCEDURES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS promotes a culture of quality in its education provision. This is supported by a documented quality framework and a published procedural manual, which allows for the continuous review and enhancement of quality procedures. The Quality Framework enables ICHAS to meet best national and international guidelines, standards and statutory regulations.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)

Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HETAC, 2011)

National Framework of Qualifications Guidelines

Education and Training (Qualifications) Act 2009

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|--|---|--|
| CEO, Management Team, Office of Academic Affairs & Student Services, Faculty, i.e. all staff | Periodic QA Audits Programmatic Review Self Evaluation Report Institutional Review Self Evaluation Report | Annual Quality Assurance Report, Institutional Review Panel Report, Programmatic Review Panel Report, Validation Panel reports Reports (including recommendations) to be considered by Academic Council annually. |
| <p align="center">Continuous Improvement Process</p> <p align="center">Implementation of recommendations arising from measurement and evaluation phases. Actions arising to be recorded in annual Quality Assurance Report. Accountability: Head of Quality & Standards</p> | | |

2.1 Scope of the Quality Assurance System

All activities within the College are subject to the College Quality Assurance procedures. All staff undertake a key role in the management and implementation of quality assurance procedures and a collective responsibility for same is distributed across a range of boards and committees. Ultimate responsibility for the approval and monitoring of all quality assurance procedures rests with the ICHAS Academic Council. Quality Assurance procedures are reviewed periodically and an annual Quality Assurance Report is produced by the Head of Quality and Standards and submitted to Academic Council.

2.2 The Quality Assurance Framework at ICHAS

ICHAS recognises that the effective and transparent operation of quality assurance is essential to student and public confidence in the College, and that it is critical to achieving its long-term vision. The regulatory and statutory framework for the operation of quality assurance procedures as described in this edition is derived from HETAC quality assurance policies and from the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurances in the European Higher Education Area. It is further informed by exposure to and collaboration with a network of reputable higher education providers nationally and internationally.

Quality Assurance within the College is managed by the Head of Quality & Standards, with the support of the Quality & Standards Committee. All quality assurance procedures are reviewed on a regular basis and the findings of such reviews (including proposals for changes to policy and procedures) are presented to Academic Council for review and approval. Any future amendments to the Quality Assurance Manual will be documented in the manual and a summary of changes and updates will be appended to the revised version. The Quality Assurance Manual is published on the College Website and the ICHAS portal and is formally highlighted to students and lecturers. Individual staff members receive specific induction on the areas of the manual that specifically relate to their area of responsibility.

The following principles underpin the development, implementation and continuous improvement of quality assurance procedures at ICHAS:

- Transparency
The work, policies and procedures that underpin education provision at the College should be transparent and available to interested stakeholders.
- Inclusivity
The development and review of the quality assurance procedures should be based on input by all key stakeholders: learners, teaching staff, support staff, employers, professional bodies and external agencies.
- Relevance
The quality assurance procedures should be relevant and applicable to the specific requirements and resources of the College.
- Accessibility
The procedures should be written in clear, concise language that is readily understood in the context of higher education; the procedures should be easily available to any stakeholder.
- Accountability

Accountability for implementation and review of specific procedures should be clearly identified within the procedures themselves.

2.3 Management & Governance

The system of management and academic governance at ICHAS is central to the implementation of the College's quality assurance system. The academic units and groupings that comprise the overall management and governance structures have ongoing responsibility and accountability for ongoing quality assurance. The College complies with all relevant legislation, including Freedom of Information, Data Protection, Safety, Health and Welfare, Employment and Equality Legislation. For ease of overview and reference, the governance structures are diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.1 while the membership and function of the different boards and committees within the College are detailed in Table 2.1.

The functional and operational responsibilities of the members of the Board of Management, the Office of the Director of Academic Affairs, and the Office of Academic Administration and Student Services and are contained in Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 respectively.

Figure 2.1 GOVERNANCE AT ICHAS

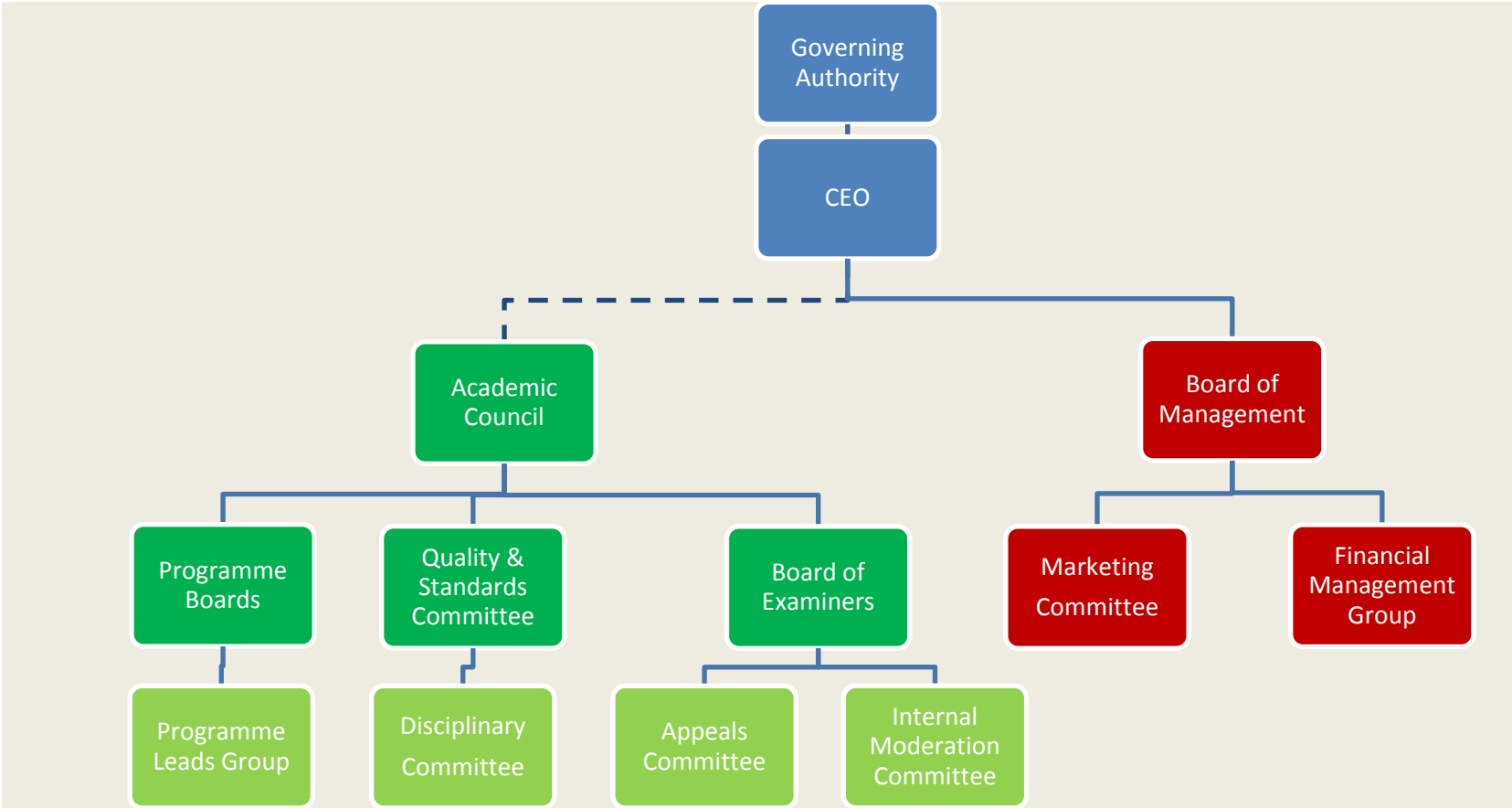


Table 2.1 GOVERNANCE: BOARDS & COMMITTEES

| BODY | MEMBERSHIP | FUNCTION | MEETING FREQUENCY |
|--|--|---|--|
| Governing Authority | <p>External Chair 2 x External Advisors (Academic) 1 x Public Interest Representative Director of Corporate Affairs CEO Director of Academic Affairs</p> | <p>Overseeing strategic development. Advising on strategic planning. Overseeing compliance with quality assurance procedures. Guardianship of corporate and academic governance best practice.</p> | Three times per year. |
| Board of Management | <p>Director of Corporate Affairs (Chair) Director of Academic Affairs Head of Finance Head of Learning & Innovation Head of Quality & Standards</p> <p>Reporting to CEO</p> | <p>Development and implementation of the Strategic Plan. Overseeing the operational management of ICHAS. Compliance with Quality Assurance Procedures Consideration of HRM requirements. Overseeing marketing and PR initiatives. Overseeing programme development and review.</p> | For period covering transition from NCPII to ICHAS, Management Team will meet weekly. Over time, this will move to fortnightly. |
| Academic Council | <p>Director of Academic Affairs (Chair) Head of Quality & Standards Director of Undergraduate Studies Head of Academic Administration & Student Services 3 x Programme Leads 1 x Student Representative Head of Learning & Innovation</p> | <p>Academic planning and development. Academic monitoring and review. Coherence of academic policies with strategic plan. New Programme review and approval. Management of sub-groups and review of same as appropriate.</p> | Three times per academic year – Semester 1 and post Summer and Autumn Exam Boards. More frequently if required for reasons of five-year reviews or programme development submissions. |
| BA Programme Boards (1 x NCII) (1 x Childcare) | <p>Director of Undergraduate Studies (Chair) Level 7&8 Lecturers Head of Academic Administration & Student Services Head of Learning & Innovation Level 7&8 Programme Co-ordinators</p> | <p>Content Development & Review Examinations & Assessment Technology Programmatic Review Student Performance & Feedback</p> | Twice per year |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| MA Programme Board (Joint NCII & Childcare) | Director of Graduate Studies (Chair) Level 9 Lecturers Head of Academic Administration & Student Services Head of Learning & Innovation Level 9 Programme Co-ordinator | Content Development & Review Examinations & Assessment Technology Programmatic Review Student Performance and Feedback | Twice per year |
| Quality & Standards Committee | Head of Quality & Standards (Chair) Head of Academic Administration & Student Services Head of Learning & Innovation Director of Undergraduate Studies Programme Co-ordinator Finance Representative Office Administrator | Review, evaluation and revision of QA procedures. QA Audit & Reporting Monitoring of all systems and policies across the college and their impact on the student experience and academic standards. Knowledge dissemination, Monitoring adherence to QA policies and procedures. Informal staff training. | Quarterly. More frequently if required for cyclical quality reviews. |
| Board of Examiners | Director of Academic Affairs (Chair) Director of Graduate Studies Director of Undergraduate Studies Head of Quality & Standards Head of Academic Administration & Student Services Programme Co-ordinators Programme Leads Lecturers External Examiners HETAC Observer | Consideration of Assessment Findings Determination of Assessment results Progression Eligibility Classifications of awards | Bi-annually June and September |
| Appeals Committee | Head of Academic Administration & Student Services <i>Board to be convened by HAASS as necessary; Membership decided by HAASS based on nature of Appeal (stage, level, module). Minimum 3 members of the Exam Board to be included.</i> | Review appeals of examination and assessment grades or against the decisions of the academic committees. | As required. |
| Internal Moderation Committee | Director of Studies | assessing the reliability and validity of | Following terminal examinations and in |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| | Programme Leads Head of Quality and Standards Head of Academic Administration & Student Services | the assessment process ensuring consistency of marking between internal examiners ensuring consistency with national standards for each level | advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners |
| Financial Management Group | Head of Finance (Chair) Chief Executive Officer Director of Corporate Affairs Company Shareholders | Annual Returns and Annual Reports. Financial Stewardship. Capital Expenditure. Monitoring & Review of budgets, accounts, revenue and expenditure on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. Determining budget allocations Financial monitoring and compliance. | Monthly |
| Disciplinary Committee | Head of Quality & Standards (Chair) <i>Committee to be convened by Head of Quality & Standards as necessary; membership based on nature of alleged disciplinary offence. Minimum 3 persons to be included who may be drawn from across the organisation according to relevance to disciplinary issue under consideration.</i> | Hear unresolved cases of alleged misconduct and academic impropriety. | Ad hoc as required. |
| Programme Leads Group | Director of Undergraduate Studies (Chair) Individual Programme Leads | Assessment (Setting, marking, moderation, feedback) Consistency (delivery, assessment, marking and feedback) | Once per semester and on an ad hoc basis as requested by the Director of Studies. |
| Marketing Committee | Director of Corporate Affairs (Chair) Chief Executive Officer Marketing Administrator Head of Learning & Innovation Webmaster | Develop annual marketing plans in line with the strategic plan, college mission and allocated marketing budget. Obtain sign-off of management team on marketing plan Implement marketing and PR initiatives as per plan, liaising with key personnel across the organisation to ensure optimal involvement. | As required. |

2.4 Accountabilities of the Board of Management

| Title | Director of Corporate Affairs | Head of Finance | Director of Academic Affairs | Head of Quality & Standards | Head of Learning & Innovation |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| Accountabilities | External Relations Strategic Alliances Human Resource Management Marketing & Public Relations | Financial Planning Budgetary Control Resource Allocation | Academic Strategy Programme Monitoring & Review New Programme Development Academic Leadership & Stewardship | Academic Standards Quality Assurance Strategy, Implementation & Review Academic Administration & Student Affairs Programme validation, monitoring and review | Learning & Teaching Strategy Open Learning & CPD IT Strategic Development Blended Learning Strategy Management Information Systems |
| Board & Committee Membership (Red = Chair) | Board of Management Governing Authority Financial Management Group Academic Council Marketing Committee | Board of Management Financial Management Group Quality & Standards Committee | Board of Management Governing Authority Academic Council MA Programme Board Board of Examiners Quality & Standards Committee | Board of Management Academic Council Quality & Standards Committee Board of Examiners | Board of Management Academic Council Programme Boards Quality & Standards Committee |
| Direct Reports | Head of Finance Administrative Assistant | Finance Administrator | Head of Quality & Standards Head of Learning & Innovation Director of Graduate Studies Director of Undergraduate Studies Lecturers Tutors | Head of Academic Administration & Student Affairs Programme Co-ordinators Practice Placement Officer Office Administrators | IT Manager Institute of Open Learning Tutors |
| Indirect Reports | Office Administrators | | Programme Co-ordinators Practice Placement Officer | | Institute of Open Learning Programme Co-ordinator IT Administrator |
| Performance Review | CEO/Director of Academic Affairs | CEO/Director of Corporate Affairs | CEO/Director of Corporate Affairs | CEO/Director of Academic Affairs | CEO/Director of Academic Affairs |

2.5 Accountabilities of the Office of the Director of Academic Affairs

| Title | Head of Academic Administration & Student Services | Programme Co-ordinators | Practice Placement Officer | Academic Administrator | Office Administrator |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| Accountabilities | <p>Admissions</p> <p>Examinations Office</p> <p>Supervision of Academic Co-ordinator Activities</p> <p>Academic Calendars, Programme Timetables & Scheduling</p> <p>Implementation of Quality Assurance Procedures</p> <p>Provision of information to lecturers</p> <p>Student Registration</p> <p>Information Provision to Learners</p> | <p>Primary Point of Contact for current and prospective learners at each level</p> <p>Learner Support & Response</p> <p>Administrative support for admissions, examinations and assessments.</p> <p>Administrative support to Directors of Studies & Lecturing/Tutor Team</p> <p>Scheduling Support to HAASS</p> <p>Adherence to Quality Assurance Procedures.</p> <p>Level 7: Marketing Assistant Duties Level 8 & 9: HR Assistant Duties</p> | <p>Primary Point of contact for practice placement learners (before, during and after a period of placement)</p> <p>Adherence to Quality Assurance Procedures.</p> <p>Administrative Support to Director of Undergraduate Studies in matters relating to Practice Placement.</p> | <p>Webmaster</p> <p>Composition, compilation and collation of academic documents and handbooks (in co-operation with HQS & HAASS)</p> <p>Library</p> <p>Evening Cover</p> <p>Adherence to Quality Assurance Procedures.</p> | <p>Reception</p> <p>Administrative & Organisational Support to Director of Corporate Affairs</p> <p>Printing, Photocopying & Binding</p> <p>Adherence to Quality Assurance Procedures.</p> |
| Board & Committee Membership (Red = Chair) | <p>Academic Council</p> <p>Quality & Standards Committee</p> <p>Programme Boards</p> <p>Board of Examiners</p> <p>Appeals Committee</p> | <p>Programme Boards</p> <p>Quality & Standards Committee (1 representative)</p> <p>Board of Examiners</p> <p>Marketing/HR Committee</p> | | Marketing Committee | Marketing Committee |
| Performance Review | Head of Quality & Standards /Director of Academic Affairs | Head of Quality & Standards/HAASS | Head of Quality & Standards/HAASS | Head of Quality & Standards/HAASS | Head of Quality & Standards/HAASS |

2.6 Accountabilities of the Office of Academic Administration and Student Services

| Title | Director of Graduate Studies | Director of Undergraduate Studies | Programme Leads (NCPI) | Programme Leads (NICH) | Lecturers |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Accountabilities | Overall quality and standards of academic governance and performance of graduate programmes Provision of Academic Leadership for Faculty, Staff and Students on Graduate Programmes Management of academic aspects of Graduate programmes Academic management of Lecturers at Graduate programme level. Design, validation and systematic review of academic programmes at Graduate level. | Overall quality and standards of academic governance and performance of undergraduate programmes (including further education programmes) Provision of Academic Leadership for Faculty, Staff and Students on Undergraduate and Further Education Programmes Management of academic aspects of undergraduate programmes Academic management of Lecturers at undergraduate programme level Design, validation and systematic review of academic programmes at undergraduate level. | Quality and standards of academic governance and performance of nominated programmes Academic so-ordination of Assessment & Learning strategies associated with relevant programmes | Quality and standards of academic governance and performance of nominated programmes Academic so-ordination of Assessment & Learning strategies associated with relevant programmes | Design and Delivery of Quality Scholarly activities including, teaching, research, mentoring, supervision. |
| Board & Committee Membership (Red = Chair) | Academic Council Quality & Standards Committee MA Programme Boards Board of Examiners | BA Programme Boards Programme Leads Group Academic Council Quality & Standards Committee Board of Examiners | BA Programme Boards – C&P Board of Examiners Programme Leads Group | BA Programme Boards – Childcare Board of Examiners | Relevant Programme Boards Board of Examiners |
| Performance Review | Head of Quality & Standards /Director of Academic Affairs | Director of Academic Affairs/Director of Corporate Affairs | Director of Academic Affairs/Director of Undergraduate Studies | Director of Academic Affairs/Director of Undergraduate Studies | Director(s) of Studies; Director of Corporate Affairs |

2.4 Procedures for Measuring the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures

The effectiveness of quality assurance procedures at ICHAS is measured in a number of different ways. It is proposed that a schedule of review activity will be devised for the current academic year and each subsequent year. The main reviews are periodic Quality Audits, Annual Quality Assurance Report, Programmatic Review and Institutional Review.

2.4.1 Periodic Quality Audit

The Quality & Standards Committee is charged with the review, evaluation and revision of quality assurance procedures. It is responsible for monitoring all systems and polices across the College and their impact on the student experience and academic standards. In addition, it monitors adherence to quality assurance policies and procedures. On a quarterly basis, the Committee members undertake an audit of implementation of quality assurance procedures, based on a defined cycle, with all procedures reviewed within a twelve month period. The practice of the review involves consultation with relevant staff through which knowledge of quality assurance procedures is disseminated and understanding enhanced. Each quarter, a brief Audit Report is prepared and retained by the Head of Quality & Standards.

2.4.2 Annual Quality Assurance Report

The Head of Quality & Standard produces an Annual Quality Assurance Report each year. The Annual Quality Assurance Report is for internal use only and takes the format of a self-study, identifying existing strengths and areas for improvement. The desired outcome of this report is an annual action plan aimed at ensuring the achievement of ongoing quality enhancement. The Report and a proposed Quality Enhancement Plan is submitted to Academic Council for review, discussion and ratification. The Report will consider the implementation and effectiveness of each quality assurance policy and associated procedures, deriving information from the periodic QA audits, consultation with staff, stakeholder feedback and evolving best practice guidelines from HETAC and other relevant bodies.

2.4.3 Programmatic Review

ICHAS undertakes a major evaluation of each programme or a suite of related programmes at defined intervals (usually every five-years), termed Programmatic Review. The programmatic review process provides the Programme Board with an opportunity to conduct a critical evaluation of the programme and all associated supports, and to propose significant amendments, where appropriate. The programmatic review is conducted in line with guidelines and criteria contained in the *Provider Monitoring Policy & Procedures (HETAC, 2010)*. Full details of the procedures relating to Programmatic Review are contained in Section 4.4.

2.4.4 Institutional Review

In accordance with the *Policy on Institutional Review of Providers of Education and Training (HETAC, 2007)*, the College undertakes a five-yearly Institutional Review. According to HETAC, the objectives of the institutional review process are:

- To enhance public confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the institution and the standards of the awards made;
- To contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance in the institution;

- To assess the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements operated by the institution;
- To confirm the extent that the institution has implemented the National Framework of Qualifications and procedures for access, transfer and progression;
- To provide recommendations for the enhancement of the education and training provided by the institution.

HETAC may also prescribe institution-specific objectives which will be contained in the agreed Terms of reference. The College may also choose to include specific objectives relevant to its context. The Head of Quality & Standards is responsible for managing the Institutional Review Process, which comprises a number of distinct phases:

1. Agreement Terms of Reference with HETAC.
2. Appointment of an External Panel of Experts by HETAC.
3. Institutional Self Study, including a review of each objective above, based on available documentary evidence, experience and extensive stakeholder consultation.
4. Submission of the Self Evaluation Report to HETAC and the External Panel.
5. External Panel Site Visit.
6. Report of the External Peer Review Group including recommendations.
7. College Response and Implementation Plan.
8. Progress Report.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will seek to establish and maintain effective communication within the College and between all stakeholder groups; it will provide students with timely, relevant and accurate information relating to all aspects of its programme offering; the College will publish objective and impartial information (relating to student profile, programmes, qualifications, assessment and quality assurance procedures) for the general public on its website; its marketing initiatives will display honesty and integrity.

*European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)
Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures (HETAC, 2011)*

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|---|--|---|
| CEO, Management Team, Office of Academic Affairs & Student Administration, Faculty, Marketing Committee i.e. all staff | Communications & Public Information Audit (covering website, prospectus, handbooks, advertisements, PR materials, Portal, Intranet, internal memos and minutes) Benchmarking review of other providers Stakeholder Evaluations Periodic self-evaluation reports | Annual QA Report (reporting to Academic Council) External Panel Reports (Validation, Programmatic Review, Institutional Review) Review of stakeholder evaluations |

Continuous Improvement Process

Implementation of recommendations arising from measurement and evaluation phases.

Actions arising to be recorded in annual QA Audit Report.

Accountability: Head of Quality & Standards

3.1 Communication with Teaching Staff

Programme provision at ICHAS takes place at the main Limerick campus as well as a number of off-campus centres nationwide, and programmes are delivered on a blended learning model, using both traditional face-to-face and newer online methodologies. It is essential for the College to ensure consistency of communication, and therefore understanding and knowledge, between those lecturers who are based at the main campus and those who are based in off-campus centres. To this end, the following elements form part of communication procedures for teaching staff:

- Lecturer induction, which is mandatory for all new and returning lecturers, takes place in advance of programme commencement and the start of each academic year at the main Limerick campus. The Lecturer Inservice Day which takes place in Spring of each year is mandatory for all lecturers and also takes place on the Limerick campus. These two days are designed to maximise peer interaction, relationship-building and idea-sharing. They also ensure that information is presented simultaneously and in a uniform fashion to all teaching staff. The ICHAS portal incorporates discussion fora as necessary, to encourage peer interaction and exchange of views/ideas.
- All programme-specific information is available in print copy in advance of the academic year, which includes timetables, academic calendar, assessment schedule, marking guidelines, practice placement requirements, student handbook. This ensures consistency and clarity of information across all centres and lecturers. Teaching staff receive a specific calendar of Academic Meetings for each academic year at Lecturer Induction.
- The bi-annual Programme Board meetings and Board of Examiners meetings are an important element of faculty communication and all lecturers are strongly encouraged to attend same. Lecturers may attend in person or through the use of Live Meeting technology so as to maximise participation by lecturers in off-campus centres.
- The relevant Director of Studies visits off-campus centres on a planned basis over the course of each academic year and also participates in online discussions with teaching staff.
- A high level of personal contact (in person, by telephone or through email) is maintained by the Head of Quality & Standards, the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services and the Programme Co-ordinators with all teaching staff.

On an ongoing basis, the Programme Co-ordinators and Head of Academic Administration and Student Services are primarily responsible for day-to-day communication with lecturers and are tasked that all general communications are issued to all lecturers, selecting appropriate methods according to geographic location and programme mode.

3.2 Communication with Students

ICHAS recognises the importance of facilitating efficient and effective communications with learners in all centres to ensure that they have an inclusive and responsive learning experience within the College. Induction Days, examinations and workshops are held at the main Limerick campus. Ensuring a Class Representative, who fully appreciates the role and its responsibilities, is elected early in the academic year is an important element of good communications. Lecturers play an important role in liaising

between the College and student body. Learners are strongly encouraged to contact the relevant Programme Co-ordinator, either directly or via the Class Representative, to raise any queries or concerns regarding their programme, and are assured of a prompt response at all times. In addition, a senior College representative aims to visit each centre at least once during the academic year.

The following elements form part of the communication procedures for students:

- A general student induction takes place at the main Limerick campus at the start of each academic year
- All programme-specific information is available in print copy and on the ICHAS portal in advance of the academic year, which includes timetables, academic calendar, assessment schedule, marking guidelines, practice placement requirements, student handbook. This ensures consistency and clarity of information across all centres and centres.
- The relevant Director of Studies visits off-campus centres on a planned basis over the course of each academic year.
- All formal examinations are held in Limerick to ensure consistency of examination conditions and implementation of examination regulations.
- The class representative system is emphasised during Student Induction and lecturers facilitate the election of class representatives in the early weeks of each academic year. A schedule of class representative meetings is communicated at the start of the academic year, the function of the class representative is communicated on the portal and a formal response is provided to all matters raised by class representatives at the Class Representative Meeting.
- The News section of the Learner Portal is designed to relay important information to all learners on an equal basis, and it is also envisaged that discussion forums will be implemented soon after the launch of the portal to provide learners across all locations with an opportunity to interact with the wider student body.
- Lecturers in off-campus centres are briefed on all items that may affect the student learning experience, recognising lecturers' role as the Institute's primary representative

On an ongoing basis, the Programme Co-ordinators are primarily responsible for day-to-day communication with the general student body and are tasked to ensure that all communications are issued to all students, selecting appropriate methods according to geographic location and programme mode.

The effectiveness of communications to both lecturers and students is reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Quality & Standards Committee and recommendations for continuous improvement in this area are implemented on an ongoing basis by all relevant staff.

3.3 Provision of Information about College Programmes

The following information is published by ICHAS in relation to all programmes offered at the College:

- Programme award title and level of the award on the NFQ
- Accrediting Body
- Programme content
- Student Profile
- Application process
- Entry requirements
- Assessment procedures
- Student supports
- Access, transfer and progression arrangements
- Potential employment opportunities

The College employs a number of different media for communicating information related to College programmes:

- College website
- College Prospectus and other printed marketing materials e.g. flyers
- Newspaper and radio advertising
- News features
- Online course directories
- College Open Days
- Participation in Conferences and Recruitment Fairs
- Participation in Career Guidance Counsellor events and CAO Conferences
- College Newsletter

3.4 Public Information Provision

All reports produced by the College in relation to the effectiveness of its programmes and services are published on the College website. These include, but are not limited to:

- The ICHAS Quality Assurance Manual
- Annual Quality Assurance Reports
- Programmatic Review Reports (Self Evaluation Report, Peer Review Panel Report and Programme Improvement Plan)
- Institutional Review Reports (Self Evaluation Report, Peer Review Panel Report and Quality Improvement Plan)
- Annual Graduate Destination Reports

ICHAS recognises its responsibility under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003, and the right of students to gain access to information held on them by the College, and will comply with any reasonable requests made under the Acts.

4. APPROVAL, MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES AND AWARDS

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will develop and deliver programmes that are well-structured, relevant to the needs of students, industry and the professions, and that reflect the standards set out by the National Framework of Qualifications; the College will maintain and implement formal, documented mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and review of all programmes.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)
Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HETAC, 2011)
Core Validation Policy and Criteria (HETAC, 2010)
Provider Monitoring Policy & Procedures (HETAC, 2010)
Assessment and Standards (HETAC, 2009)
Awards Standards (HETAC, various)
National Framework of Qualifications Guidelines

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|--|---|--|
| Office of the Director of Academic Affairs through engagement in programme validation processes and subsequently through programme board monitoring and review procedures. | Programme Boards (reporting to Academic Council), which consider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student performance stats - External examiner reports - Student feedback - Lecturer feedback - Minutes of Exam Board | Reports of Validation Peer Review Panels Programmatic Review (5-yearly) Self Evaluation Reports & Panel Reports Institutional Review (5-yearly) Self Evaluation Reports & Panel Reports Programme Board Reports |

Continuous Improvement Process

Review outcomes of evaluation processes above and achieve agreement of amendment to programmes (where necessary) in order to ensure ongoing compliance with the policy.
 Accountability: Chairperson of relevant Programme Board – programme updates; Head of Quality & Standards – Quinquennial Reviews

4.1 Procedures for the Design and Development of New Programmes

The first phase of the new programme development procedure comprises the preliminary programme proposal and approval to proceed stages. A preliminary proposal may be made by any member of staff who identifies a student need and related programme development opportunity. The preliminary proposal is directed to the Director of Academic Affairs, who will discuss the idea with the proposer and/or the Head of the academic unit where the proposal may eventually be situated. The Director of Academic Affairs assesses the proposal to establish its consistency with the College's strategic plan and mission, and the likely resource implications. If satisfied that the proposal represents a genuine opportunity that is worthy of further development, preliminary agreement to proceed is granted.

The proposer in collaboration with the relevant Academic Head (as identified by the Director of Academic Affairs) then develops a detailed programme proposal, which would address (at a minimum) the following key areas

- Rationale for the development of the programme
- Coherence of the programme proposal with the ICHAS Strategic Plan and mission
- Relationship of the proposed programme to the existing programmes within ICHAS
- Market demand and a profile of the proposed target market
- Programme level, potential course content, including module titles and outline content
- Resource implications – facilities, equipment
- Lecturing Expertise required
- Proposed assessment methodologies.
- Proposed timeframe for development

This detailed proposal is submitted to and considered by Academic Council. In addition to considering all of the above areas, the Academic Council evaluation process specifically considers:

- the 'fit' of the programme with the College's objectives and strategic plan
- the evidence of market demand, the expected course fees and the ability of the target market to pay
- Academic expertise and leadership required (if not currently available within the College, where it might be sourced)
- Potential and desirable collaborations with employers, practice placement host organisations (where relevant) and/or professional bodies
- The implications for quality assurance and how these can be addressed

The Academic Board notifies the programme proposer and the Management Team of the outcomes of its evaluation. Where approval is withheld, reasons and/or recommendations will be provided to the proposer. Where approval is granted, the relevant Director of Studies is tasked with initiating and managing the programme development process.

The Director of Studies commences the process of assembling a team of course authors and tutors, identifying external expertise where necessary. The exact membership of the programme development

team will be determined by the nature and purpose of the new programme proposed, with the advice of and in consultation with the Director of Academic Affairs. To support the development process, the Director of Studies may appoint external expert(s) to provide guidance and direction at critical stages in a programme's development. The role of the programme development team is to manage the creation of a relevant, high-quality curriculum (on the basis of independent research and consultation with appropriate academic, professional and/or industry experts and bodies) and to identify suitably experienced and qualified staff for the programme. The Chairperson of the programme development team (commonly the Director of Studies) is responsible for updating the Academic Council on the group's activities. He/She is also responsible for ensuring that minutes of all meetings are maintained and available for review by any relevant group or staff member.

The Director of Studies is tasked with compiling the programme validation documentation, in collaboration with the Head of Quality & Standards, based on the General Programme Validation Template supplied by HETAC. Particular attention must be given to the development of the programme assessment strategy, with specific reference to *Assessment and Standards (HETAC, 2009)*, and its application to the programme. In addition, the validation document must reflect the appropriate HETAC awards standards and NFQ level indicators. Development of a programme to be offered using blended learning technologies should specifically address the quality of:

- The student and learning experience, including induction and assessment
- The delivery, management and resourcing of each element of the programme, identifying specifically the blended learning technologies being applied for each module and/or stage

For all programmes, the learning outcomes of the programmes and its constituent modules must be clearly articulated with a demonstrable alignment of assessment criteria with the intended learning outcomes. The Director of Studies submits the validation document to Academic Council for final approval. Academic Council considers the final document against the same criteria as outlined above, notably the precise implications for physical and human resources, as well as existing support facilities. If approved, the programme documentation is submitted to HETAC for validation.

4.2 Procedures for the External Assessment and Validation of New Programmes

Following approval by Academic Council, the final submission documents (in the desired multiple of copies) and appropriate fees are submitted to the Director of Academic Affairs at HETAC. The standard minimum timeframe for the completion of the external assessment and validation phase is 20 weeks, and comprises the following stages:

1. Acknowledgement and Desk Review (HETAC)
Determine whether the application addresses the validation criteria and should be forwarded to an External Panel
2. External Panel Selection
Formed by HETAC on a case-by-case basis in accordance with Core Validation Policy & Criteria (HETAC, 20XX)
3. Assessment by External Panel

Assessment of the programme against the validation criteria, normally including a site visit

4. Expert Panel Report

A draft report of the panel's findings, conclusions, pre-conditions for validation, conditions and recommendations

5. Provider Response

Provider responds formally to the draft report, addressing the conditions and recommendations, and highlighting any perceived inaccuracies

6. Final Expert Panel Assessment

A brief statement of the Panel's overall findings and recommendations, included in the submission to HETAC's Academic Committee

7. HETAC Decision

HETAC's Academic Committee formally considers the expert panel report, provider's response and any other relevant documentation and reaches a decision on validation.

Where validation is approved by the Academic Committee, HETAC issues an Order of Council, Approved Programme Schedule and Certificate of Programme Validation. The Expert Panel Report is published on the HETAC website.

4.3 Procedures for the Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes

To provide regular academic quality assurance and enhancement of each programme, ICHAS operates a cycle of evaluations and reviews to seek feedback and evaluation of all aspects of the programmes. These evaluations and feedback are then reviewed and recommendations for continuous improvement are made based on same. The following table described the components of the review cycle, indicating responsibility for review.

| Evaluation Methodology | Stakeholder Involved | Frequency | Element Evaluated |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Student Module Survey | Students | Completion of module | Module Content Module Delivery Workshops and Tutorial Supports Assessment Facilities & Learning Environment Blended Learning Support & Moodle |
| Lecturer Module Survey | Lecturers | Completion of module | Module Content Module Delivery Assessment Blending Learning Support & Moodle Lecturer Resources & Support |
| Programme Board | Faculty & | Once per semester | Physical Materials |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| | Students | | Blended Learning Materials Student & Lecturer Support Assessment Student Attainment Levels |
| Internal Moderation Committee Report | Internal Moderators | Three times per year (January, June and August) | Assessment reliability and validity; internal consistency and consistency with national standards |
| Examinations Board | Faculty & External Examiners | Twice per year (June & September) | Assessment reliability and validity; consistency with national standards |
| Reports of the External Examiners | External Examiners | Annually | Overall assessment process; reliability, validity and consistency of same |
| Graduate Destination Survey | Graduates | Annually | Suitability to employer requirements and student progression |

The Programme Board is the body responsible for the overall review of the data generated by the period evaluations. Based on this, the Programme Board is tasked with identifying areas for continuous improvement and for making proposals for programme modification, where necessary. When making any proposals for modification, initial advice should be sought from the Head of Quality & Standards to confirm whether the proposed change is minor or major - minor modifications are approved internally whereas major modifications require HETAC approval prior to implementation. Minor modifications do not impact on the overall programme or module learning outcomes, the approved course schedule, and the overall assessment strategy. Such modifications are proposed by the Programme Board to the Head of Quality & Standards, who assesses same proposes an agreed modification to Academic Council for ratification. A major modification may include, amongst other items, a change of module, change to the programme schedule, change to the programme title, change to module or programme learning outcomes, change to credit weightings. A proposal including rationale for a major modification should be forwarded by the Programme Board to the Head of Quality & Standards, who considers the proposal in respect of the potential impact of the change on the programme as a whole, the students, and the teaching and assessment strategy for the module/programme. Following initial approval by the Head of Quality & Standards, the Course Director (on behalf of the Programme Board) presents the proposal to Academic Council. If approved by Academic Council, the proposal is forwarded by the Head of Quality & Standards to HETAC for approval prior to implementation.

As part of the Annual Quality Assurance Report, the Head of Quality & Standards produces a Programme Quality Report for each programme, which is submitted to Academic Council. The Annual Quality Assurance Report is for internal use only and takes the format of a self-study, identifying existing strengths and areas for improvement. In relation to programme quality, the report is based on inputs from all the evaluation tools outlined in the above table, and consultations with Programme Leads, Directors of Studies and the Director of Academic Affairs. The desired outcome of this report is an annual action plan aimed at ensuring the achievement of ongoing quality enhancement.

4.4 Procedures for Programmatic Review

In addition to annual review as outlined in Section 4.3, ICHAS undertakes a major evaluation of each programme or a suite of related programmes, usually at five-yearly intervals, termed Programmatic Review. The programmatic review process provides the Programme Board with an opportunity to conduct a critical evaluation of the programme and to propose significant amendments, where appropriate. The programmatic review is conducted in line with guidelines and criteria contained in the *Provider Monitoring Policy & Procedures (HETAC, 2010)*, which defines the specific objectives for this review as follows:

- Analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of each validated programme, including details of student numbers, retention rates and success rates
- Review the development of the programmes in the context of the requirements of employers, industry, professional bodies, the Irish economy and international developments
- Evaluate the response of the provider/school/department to market requirements and educational developments
- Evaluate the feedback mechanisms for students and the processes for acting on this feedback
- Evaluate the physical facilities and resources provided for the provision of the programme(s)
- Evaluate the formal links which have been established with industry, business and the wider community in order to maintain the relevance of its programmes
- Evaluate feedback from employers of the programmes' graduates and from those graduates
- Review any research activities in the field of learning under review and their impact on teaching and learning (notwithstanding that the reviews of the research degree programmes may be undertaken separately)
- Evaluate projections for the following five years in the programme(s)/field of learning under review.

Provider Monitoring Policy & Procedures (HETAC, 2010) states that proposals and decisions in relation to updating programmes and modules, discontinuing programmes or parts of programmes, together with proposals to develop new programmes, should be part of such a review process. Furthermore programmatic review confirms that the promise evidenced at validation has been realised. Alternatively, it recognises whether or not a programme has adapted appropriately to circumstances unforeseen at validation. The programmatic review process is project-managed by the Head of Quality & Standards, in close collaboration with the Director of Academic Affairs and the relevant Programme Board. The process comprises an internal phase and an external phase as follows:

Internal Phase

1. Development of timetable for review and agreement of Terms of Reference with HETAC

The cycle of programmatic review for all programmes within ICHAS is held and co-ordinated by the Head of Quality & Standards. When a programme or suite of programmes is due for five-yearly review, the Head of Quality & Standards agrees the Terms of Reference with HETAC which includes an overall timetable for the process. Based on this, a detailed project plan which identifies timelines and responsibilities is completed and circulated to the Director of Academic Affairs and the members of the relevant programme Board. He/She then consults with individual members as appropriate to allocated specific tasks and duties to individual programme board members or groups of members, as appropriate.

2. Stakeholder Consultation

The feedback and opinions of relevant stakeholders will be gathered in order to evaluate the success of the programmes and receive suggestions for continuous improvement. The appropriate methodology for consultation will be identified by the Head of Quality & Standards, and a wide selection of stakeholders should be consulted, including at a minimum:

- *Students*
- *Lecturers*
- *Employers*
- *Practice Placement Providers*
- *Professional Body Representatives*
- *Relevant External Agencies*
- *Graduates*
- *Community Interest Groups*

3. Review of data and development of recommendations

The main source of data for the self-study is derived from the consultation with external stakeholders, the annual Programme Quality Reports and the considerations of the relevant programme board over the five-year period. The data is critically analysed to establish the extent to which the programme continues to meet the core HETAC validation criteria, and the ability of the programme to respond to internal and external events that arose in the five-year period. Through internal dialogue and consultation, with recourse to external opinion where necessary, a set of defined recommendations for programme enhancement is developed and is presented to the Programme Board for finalisation.

4. Production of a Self Evaluation Report

The Self Evaluation Report is jointly compiled by the relevant Director of Studies and the Head of Quality & Standards. It focuses on qualitative analysis, referring to quantitative analysis and statistical evidence to support conclusions reached. It is designed to provide the External Peer Review Group with an overview of developments over the 5-year period under review and to provide all information as outlined in Provider Monitoring Policy & Procedures (HETAC, 2010). It includes a SWOT analysis, a description of the approach to review, the findings of the internal self-study and the recommendations being made for programme enhancement. The report also

includes confirmation of the proposed programme schedules, module descriptors, learning outcomes and assessment strategy for the programme for the subsequent five-year period. The final Self Evaluation Report is presented to Academic Council for endorsement prior to submission to the Peer Review Group.

External Phase

5. Formation of an External Peer Review Group

The External Peer Review Group is compiled by ICHAS. Its membership includes external peers familiar with current practice and developments in the areas of quality assurance in higher education and the academic programme area. It will include at a minimum a suitably-qualified Chairperson, minimum of two academic experts in the field of learning, a student representative and a representative of the industry or profession. Where acceptable to the Chairperson, the Head of Quality & Standards will act as secretary to the Peer Review Group. Where preferred by the Chairperson, he/she will appoint a secretary to the Group. The panel is selected on the basis of its composite ability to form a balanced opinion and arrive at a set of relevant recommendations, based on their combined understanding of the programmatic review process, developments in higher education and quality assurance, experience of the industry/professional sector, expertise in relation to teaching and assessment, and national and international trends relevant to the programme.

6. External Peer Review Group Panel Visit

The External Peer Review Group will normally visit the College to review the relevant documentation and meet with College representatives. A detailed agenda for the visit will be agreed between the Chairperson and the Head of Quality & Standards in advance, and will usually allow for meetings with faculty, support staff, students, graduates and employers. It will also allow for private discussions of the panel and for review of further documentation and evidence not included in the Self Evaluation Report. The Chairperson of the Group will normally provide verbal feedback to College representatives at the end of the visit, indicating overall conclusions, whether the Group will be recommending the programme(s) for further validation, and conditions and recommendations associated with same.

7. Panel Report

The formal Report of the Peer Review Group is compiled by the Chairperson of the Group and is based on their combined review and evaluation of the Self Evaluation Report and the Panel Visit. It will make a recommendation in respect of the continuing validation of the programme, including the duration of the revalidation recommended (not exceeding 5 years). The report include proposed programme schedules and any conditions and recommendations associated with the continuing validation of the programme. The College receives a copy of the Panel Report and has the opportunity to check the factually accuracy of same before being finalised by the Chairperson.

8. Provider Response to Panel Report

The Final Report is considered by the College Programme Board and Academic Council. Academic Council decides whether to request revalidation from HETAC for the programme. A

formal response to the report is then prepared and this must include an implementation plan which addresses the internal findings and the report of the Peer Review Group (including accountabilities and timelines).

9. Submission to HETAC for re-validation

The Report of the Peer Review Group and the Provider Response is submitted to HETAC for consideration by the Academic Committee, accompanied by a formal request for validation or withdrawal of validation.

10. Decision by HETAC Academic Committee

The Head of Provider Monitoring at HETAC is responsible for informing the College of the decision of the HETAC Academic Committee. The reports submitted to HETAC are published on the ICHAS website following the decision of the HETAC Academic Committee.

5. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will develop and adhere to procedures for the fair and consistent assessment of students, and will publish all related criteria and regulations; ICHAS will ensure validity and reliability of assessment tools and methodologies; students will receive timely and constructive feedback on assessment.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)
Assessment and Standards (HETAC, 2009)
Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining (HETAC, 2009)
Quality Assurance in Further Education & Training (FETAC, 20XX)
National Framework of Qualifications Guidelines

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|---|--|---|
| Directors of Studies in collaboration with lecturers, Head of Quality & Standards, Head of Academic Administration & Student Services and Head of Innovation & Learning | Internal Moderation Process Bi-annual Examination Boards Internal QA Audits Student Feedback Lecturer Feedback Programme Boards (reporting to Academic Council) | External Moderators & External Examiners Annual QA Report (submitted to Academic Council) Programmatic Review & Institutional Review (5 yearly) |

Continuous Improvement Process

Combined review of external examiner/moderator reports, internal assessment audit and student and lecturer feedback to inform ongoing review and development of assessment tools and methodologies, and thereby ensure continued compliance with the policy.

Accountability: Directors of Studies

5.1 Assessment Principles & Practice

The principles that underpin the assessment of students at ICHAS are derived from *Assessment & Standards (HETAC, 2009)*. Accordingly, assessment strategies that complement the procedures governing the management and practice of assessment contained in this Quality Assurance Manual, should be documented for each programme offered by the College. The documented programme assessment strategy for each programme at ICHAS should:

- aim to ensure that the programme employs an appropriate balance of formative and summative assessment
- ensure that assessment methodologies are clearly linked to module and programme learning outcomes, as contained in the programme validation document or approved revisions of same
- provide a rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures and identify how fairness and consistency can be achieved across the range of tasks; in particular, it should describe how the validity, reliability and authenticity of the assessment tasks and procedures can be assured
- match the programme's assessment instruments to the requirements of the institutional grading system
- ensure that the programme's continuous assessment workload is planned and distributed in an appropriately balanced fashion
- describe special regulations that may apply to the programme e.g. in relation to pass by compensation, progression eligibility

Other principles of assessment that underpin the management and practice of assessment at ICHAS are:

- Students should receive feedback on their performance which is timely and clearly related to the assessment criteria and learning communicated in the Student and Programme Handbooks. Feedback should be formulated and delivered in such a way as to enable students improve their performance in future assessment tasks.
- Assessment should be consistent between different examiners and different course centres, and evidence of reviewing and assuring this consistency should be maintained.
- The Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Subjects (ACCS) System is in place to facilitate students who wish to study at their own pace and achieve a full award by studying component modules in a structured and planned way.
- Assessment strategies should be reviewed regularly and form part of the annual review by the relevant Programme Board. Changes to same should be formally approved and documented by the Head of Quality & Standards, following approval and recommendation by the Programme Board.
- The distribution of assessment over the course of the academic year should be planned so as to avoid a convergence of assessment or over-assessment /double-assessment across modules.
- Marking schemes and should be set and documented for each assessment in advance and be consistently applied by examiners and internal moderators

- To ensure that assessment and grading is fair and consistent, each module should be marked initially by the module lecturer and then sample second-marked by a member of the Internal Moderation Committee or its appointee. Where there is a discrepancy between the first and second marker, the Director of Studies (who chairs the Internal Moderation Committee) for that programme makes the final decision, subject to the approval of the Board of Examiners.
- Acts of plagiarism and collusion should be actively discouraged by lecturers and examiners, and means of detecting same should be incorporated into submission and marking procedures. All lecturers and markers should be made aware of the procedures to be applied when an incident of academic impropriety is suspected.
- Confidentiality is a key principle underpinning the development of assessment tools and marking schemes and this should be actively communicated to all faculty. Breaches of confidentiality around assessment are subject to the Disciplinary Procedure contained in the Lecturer Handbook, which is updated annually.
- Assessment materials should be held securely before and after the assessment takes place so as to protect the integrity of the assessment process.

5.2 Provision of Information on Assessment to Students

The ICHAS Student Handbook contains information on policies, procedures and regulations pertaining to assessment. Each student receives a copy of the Student Handbook upon induction in first year, and further revisions are signalled on the Portal and made available for download. The Student Handbook is reviewed and updated annually.

At the start of each academic year, students also receive a Programme Handbook, which supplements the Student Handbook. The Programme Handbook contains the specific academic information relevant to the individual's programme, notably module descriptors, learning outcomes, associated assessment strategies, booklists, and academic calendars. The academic calendar details lecture commencement and conclusion dates, as well as assignment submission dates and examination week dates. Within the first week of each module, students receive relevant continuous assessment assignment briefs for the modules being completed in that semester. The assignment briefs provide students with details of the assessment tool being employed, the learning outcome(s) it is designed to measure and what criteria will be applied to assess performance, and the deadline and means of submission.

The distribution of feedback and assessment results is the responsibility of the Office of Academic Administration & Student Services. All requests for further feedback area also handled by this Office. Respecting the principle of confidentiality outlined above, lecturers and examiners will refer any queries relating to the examination process or the Examination Boards to the Office of Academic Administration & Student Services.

5.3 Assuring the Quality of Assessment at ICHAS

The key individuals and organisational units that support the management and practice of assessment at the College are: the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services, the lecturer/internal examiner, the Programme Lead, Director of Studies, Programme Board, Internal Moderation Committee, Quality & Standards Committee (including Disciplinary Committee), and Board of Examiners (including Appeals Committee). Their individual duties and responsibilities are outlined in Chapter 2.

The administration and co-ordination of the assessment process is delegated to the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services, reporting to the Head of Quality & Standards. All associated documentation, scheduling and minuting of meetings, provision and distribution of information to examiners and moderators, the provision of information of students and other similar activities are the responsibility of this role-holder. This process and associated procedures are overseen and reviewed by the Head of Quality & Standards, while overall accountability for quality of the assessment process lies with the Director of Academic Affairs.

5.3.1 Head of Academic Administration & Student Services

- Developing timetables for assessment and examination timetables
- Ensuring that all internal examiners are appraised of their responsibilities and confidentiality requirements, including assessment deadlines and deadlines for return of grades and feedback
- Working with the Director of Studies, ensuring marking schemes/marketing criteria for each assessment are documented in advance and are distributed to internal examiners
- To liaise with external examiners....
- Distribute all documents and scripts to the External Examiner by registered process; ensuring that any mail related to assessment is securely sealed
- To provide external examiners with details of the requirements and responsibility of the external examiners role
- To provide the external examiner with all appropriate college and programme information: programme aims and objectives, programme learning outcomes, programme assessment strategies, College quality assurance procedures relating to assessment, and HETAC policy documents related to assessment
- To notify external examiners of the examinations schedule and calendar of meetings and events relevant to assessment
- To provide examinations papers, marking schemes and solutions for proofing and comment
- To provide sample scripts to the external examiner, in accordance with the sampling strategy agreed with the external examiner.
- To ensure assessment briefs and examination papers are ready/printed/ distributed
- Participate in the Internal Moderation Committee and the Board of Examiners
- Security and storage of assessment related materials
- To ensure that all sensitive and confidential information relating to student assessment is distributed via registered post or other secure means of delivery; to restrict communication by telephone to logistical and operational matters and the avoid the use of fax or electronic mail for sensitive, assessment-related communications.

- Compile the broadsheets of results in advance of internal moderation and the Board of Examiners meetings

5.3.2 Lecturer/Internal Examiners

The internal examiner for any given module is normally the lecturer responsible for that module. He/She is expected to:

- provide the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services with draft assessment questions and marking schemes in good time, for onward submission to the External Examiner
- take account of any suggestions and recommendations made by External Examiners
- reinforce the requirements for assessment of each module
- provide support and guidance to students as they complete assessment
- provide information on the marking criteria to be applied
- provide information to students on the structure and layout of examination papers
- remind students of assessment deadlines and submission methodology
- grade student work in accordance with the agreed marking criteria and so as to examine the stated learning outcomes of the module
- draft feedback for students in line with guidelines for feedback, focusing on strengths as well as weaknesses
- upload grades and feedback to the ICHAS portal on or before agreed deadlines
- take account of feedback from the internal moderation committee and engage in any review of papers and marking as deemed necessary by that group
- highlight suspected instances of plagiarism or collusion
- attend the meeting of the Board of Examiners

5.3.3 Internal Moderation Committee

The Internal Moderation Committee is chaired by the Director of Studies, is a sub-committee of the Board of Examiners and is convened at the end of each semester once marking of terminal examinations and assessments is complete. Its membership comprises the relevant Director of Studies, the relevant Programme Leads, the Head of Quality & Standards and the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services. The group is responsible for

- assessing the reliability and validity of the assessment process
- ensuring consistency of marking between internal examiners
- ensuring consistency with national standards for that level

The Committee meets before the Board of Examiners meeting and its findings are formally reported at the Board of Examiners. The Group is responsible for sample second marking the scripts for each programme. Normally, 20% of scripts at a minimum should be reviewed with respect to establishing if the scripts were marked in a way that is consistent with the marking scheme and the programme level. Where a significant discrepancy exists between the first and second marker, the Director of Studies enters into discussions with the two examiners to reach an agreement on the appropriate marking level. Where agreement is not reached, the decision of the Director of Studies is final.

5.3.4 External Examiners

Procedures for external examination are developed to ensure compliance with *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examination (HETAC, 2010)* and *Assessment and Standards (HETAC, 2009)*. These procedures are documented in Section 5.4.XX. For the purposes of quality assuring assessment, external examiners are responsible for ensuring that the appropriate standards are applied with regard to the various award levels and that the standard of assessment and consequent results is of a comparable standard to other higher education institutions. In particular, the External Examiner is expected to:

- acknowledge receipt of examination and assessment material and to take steps to ensure the confidentiality of all material while in his/her possession
- communicate all sensitive information relating to assessment via registered mail or other secure means of delivery
- see and approve drafts of all key examination papers, continuous assessment tasks, marking schemes and solutions; to make suggestions and amendments as they deem appropriate
- see a representative sample of examination material submitted by candidates, on the basis of a sampling strategy agreed with the College representatives, that will allow him/her judge the appropriateness of the marking at all levels
- assess in particular the marking associated with borderline cases, to discuss same with the appropriate College representative, and arrive a decision on grades for those students
- amend assessment marks as he/she deems appropriate
- attend the College at least once in the academic year to review student assessment work
- attend appropriate meetings of the Board of Examiners of the College and, in advance, to further review scripts and documentation provided as evidence of the assessment process.
- Complete an External Examiner Report in accordance with the College template and submit to the College on an annual basis

5.3.4.1 Appointment of External Examiner (s)

External examiners are appointed with a view to providing independent assessment of assessment adequacy in light of national and international norms. The External Examiner is a recognised independent expert in the broad field of learning and community of practice, whose qualifications and/or experience attest to his/her ability to fulfil the duties of the role outlined above. Any member of faculty may nominate an individual to the position of External Examiner. Such nominations are brought to the attention of the relevant Director of Studies who will present same to the relevant Programme Board for consideration. The Programme Board will ensure consideration of the need to ensure independence and transparency when appointing and external examination. Once a nomination has been approved, it is brought to Academic Council for approval. The Director of Studies makes initial contact with the nominee to discuss the proposed appointment and establish his/her availability for same. Once verbal agreement on the appointment and the nature of the roles and responsibilities is achieved, the details are formally confirmed in a letter from the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services to the external examiner. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of three years, after which time another external examiner is identified. External Examiner appointments

are communicated to HETAC each year, and are accompanied by the External Examiner's curriculum vitae.

5.3.4.2 Support of the External Examiner(s)

The Head of Academic Administration and Student Services is the person primarily responsible for the support of external examiners. Where queries relate to the academic content of a programme, this person will liaise between the relevant lecturer, programme lead and/or Director of Studies and the external examiner, facilitating communication and transfer of assessment materials between both parties. Once appointed, the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services will provide all relevant information to the External Examiner, including:

- Information on the College, including relevant contact details
- Programme aims and objectives
- Programme learning outcomes
- Programme assessment strategy
- Quality Assurance procedures relating to assessment
- Sample assessment briefs and marking schemes
- External examiner's report guidelines and template

All communication between the College and the External Examiner is channelled through the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services, and should take place through registered post or similar secure means of delivery. The External Examiner is required to acknowledge receipt of all assessment material from the College. The use of telephone, email, or fax is restricted to operational or administration matters.

5.3.5 Board of Examiners

The Board of Examiners is chaired by the Director of Academic Affairs, is a sub-committee of Academic Council and is convened bi-annually on dates agreed with HETAC (usually June and September). Broadsheets of results are presented by the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services while the Head of Quality & Standards acts as secretary to the Board. In addition to these individuals, its membership comprises the relevant Director of Studies, programme co-ordinators, internal examiners, internal moderators, and external examiners who have participated in the examinations for a given award.

5.3.5.1 Duties of the Board of Examiners

The Board of Examiners is responsible for:

- Review the combined outcome of internal examination, internal moderation and external examination process
- Discuss and review borderline cases and extenuating circumstances in advance of final decisions on grades being reached
- Recommend exemptions, if relevant, for candidates who fail individual modules

- Record the opinions of the External examiners on cases of disagreement between internal and external examiners
- In light of the above steps, endorse a broadsheet of results, which confirms and records total marks or grades awarded to each candidate in each course module and which indicates a candidate's overall result
- Review statistics and trends regarding assessment results of programmes under consideration, comparing same with national norms
- Recommend improvements in process that would enhance the quality of the assessment process
-

5.3.5.2 Guidelines for Conducting the Board of Examiners

The Chairperson normally clarifies the roles of board members, and the order of programmes and stages to be considered by the Board. He/She also states the process for recording changes on the original broadsheets.

Copies of broadsheets should be provided to all members on coloured papers for use during the meeting discussions. These are collected by the Secretary before the meeting is closed and shredded.

One original broadsheet for each programme will be held during the meeting by the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services, who will check results and record changes as results are read out by the Secretary to the Board. This amended broadsheet will be distributed for signing by examiners.

All attendees must be clearly informed that the proceedings and deliberations of the Board of Examiners are confidential and that, under no circumstances, should any discussion or decision of the Board be disclosed to any other person.

The Board of Examiners may convene and act notwithstanding the absence of one or more members if the Chairperson is satisfied that those in attendance constitute an appropriate quorum for the proper discharge of the Board's responsibilities.

The dates of meetings of the Board of Examiners shall be agreed annually between ICHAS and HETAC.

The Chairperson, Secretary and all examiners present should sign the Broadsheet(s) of Results and the Secretary should forward same to HETAC immediately after the meeting.

HETAC should be invited to have a representative attend the Board of Examiners.

5.4 Assessment Procedures & Regulations

5.4.1 Responsibilities of students in respect of assessment

Once students have been provided with information as outlined in Section 5.2, it is the responsibility of the individual student :

- To ensure all examination and programme fees are paid in advance of examination session
- To confirm the final examination timetable on the ICHAS portal two days before the first examination as there may be amendments to the provisional schedule
- To be familiar with all information relevant to assessments and examinations
- to be aware of the date, time and location of examinations relevant to him/her
- to be present in the examination hall 15 minutes prior to examination commencement
- to obey examination and assessment regulations
- to submit all examinable material by the appointed deadline
- to submit any request for extension of assignment submission dates in writing at least two weeks before the assignment deadline; this request must be accompanied by supporting documentation and/or a description of the extenuating circumstances which led to the request for extension
- for sudden incidents e.g. bereavement, to advise the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services of the occurrence that may adversely affect performance

The responsibilities of students in respect of assessment are contained in the Student Handbook and are also available for download on the portal.

5.4.2 Reasonable Accommodation for students with disabilities or special educational needs

ICHAS is fully committed to equality of educational access and attainment among students. Management will actively seek to develop and implement policies and procedures which promote equality and which avoid unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, membership of the Traveller community, marital status, family status, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

Students and potential students with recognised disadvantages or disability may be given special consideration during course delivery and assessment. A substantial disadvantage is one that entails time, inconvenience, effort or discomfort compared to other people or students and which is more than minor or trivial. A reasonable accommodation is any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage e.g. changing procedures, providing additional time at examinations.

Each request for a reasonable accommodation will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Academic Administration, and Student Services, the relevant Director of Studies and the Head of Quality and Standards. Each applicant with a disability or disadvantage has the responsibility to provide documentation from acceptable professional sources that verifies the nature of the disability and any disadvantage arising from that disability. All disability records will be treated confidentially and each applicant will be treated with dignity and respect.

It is the responsibility of each and any student with a disability or disadvantage to inform ICHAS of this when applying for the course of study and, where appropriate, at the start of each academic year. The appropriate accommodation to be made will be agreed with the student and will be formally confirmed

in writing in advance of assessments or examinations. This confirmation will expressly state the particular examinations and/or assessment to which the accommodation should apply.

5.4.3 Exemptions and Recognition of Prior Learning

ICHAS offers module exemptions to applicants who have successfully completed comparable accredited learning in another higher education institute. To be considered eligible for exemption, a candidate must supply the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services with evidence of:

- the level of previous study on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent)
- the specific content covered
- the grade attained

The credit value of exemptions awarded will not be greater than the credit value of the previous accredited learning. Where the exemption granted relates to a module that counts towards the overall result for an award, the granting of the exemption may result in the recommendation of an unclassified award to HETAC. In this instance, the student will have the option to decline the offer of exemption and carry out the normal assessment requirements of the module, the results of which will be put forward for the award to be classified.

5.4.4 Submission of Continuous Assessment materials

The method for assignment submission is communicated to students on the Assessment Brief. The preferred method of submission is through the ICHAS portal. In advance of programme commencement, all students are provided with personalised logon details, and an Assignment Submission Utility Guide is included in the Student Handbook and by download on the portal itself. The IT department provides practical telephone and online support to any student who experiences difficulties uploading an assignment by the agreed deadline. Where technical difficulties exceptionally prevent the upload of an assignment, an agreed extension on the assignment deadline is communicated to students who may then post or email the assignment to the relevant programme co-ordinator. Students are advised to retain a copy of all assessment work and project submitted.

5.4.4.1 Request for extension

Students wishing to apply for assignment submission extensions will be required to contact their module Lecturer in the first instance to discuss the reasons behind their decision to seek such an extension. Having done so, the completion of the Assignment Extension Request form must be undertaken. This must include documentary evidence.

Requests must be made at least **2 weeks** before the submission date. The duration or length of the assignment extension will normally not exceed **7 days**.

The following are the only grounds that may be acceptable for the late submission of coursework:

- **Medical:** the student has been absent from College due to illness/injury and submits a medical certificate covering a substantial proportion of the time allowed for completion of the work
- **Compassionate:** recent death or serious injury of a close family relative. The student must submit a letter explaining the circumstances

5.4.4.2 Late Submission

The grade for any assignment work not submitted by the assessment deadline will be given a maximum mark of 40%.

5.4.5 Plagiarism and Collusion

According to the Institute's Examination Regulations, work which is not undertaken under formal examination conditions and which counts towards a Student's degree or other academic award must be the Student's own work and must not contain plagiarised material. Collusion is a form of plagiarism that can occur as a result of inappropriate collaboration during group work. Collusion involves working with others without permission from the relevant lecturer to produce work which is then presented as an individual's own independent work. Use of plagiarised material in such coursework is treated as a disciplinary offence. The standard cover sheet which must be submitted with all assignments will require the candidate to confirm by signing it that the assessment material is entirely their own work and contains no plagiarised material. Essays will not be accepted unless they are accompanied by a completed cover sheet. If examiners suspect that plagiarism has occurred, they have a duty to report their suspicions to the Chairman of the Board of Examiners and prompt action will be taken to enable procedures to be set in motion quickly. Candidates may also commit a disciplinary offence by submitting coursework which has been written by someone else. Where internal examiners agree that there are grounds for suspicion then, subject to the approval of the programme coordinator the Student may be called in for a viva voce on the coursework. If the examiners' suspicions are confirmed by the viva voce, they will make a report to the Chairman of the Board of Examiners.

5.4.5.1 Procedures for Cases of Suspected Plagiarism and Collusion

In the first instance, an initial interview with the student will be undertaken by the lecturer/assessor and the relevant Director of Studies (or his/her nominated representative). The Student may be accompanied at the interview by a friend or advisor. During the interview the Student's work is discussed, with the aim of determining whether the allegations are founded and if so, what the appropriate penalty will be. The Director of Studies will also decide whether the offence is sufficiently serious to amount to a disciplinary offence under the Institute's Student Disciplinary Regulations. For proven first offences, the mark for the coursework will normally be set to zero but, in the case of plagiarism resulting from unauthorised group work rather than straight copying, an appropriately reduced mark, other than zero, may be awarded. In all cases a record is held and reported to the Board.

Should the student refute the accusation of plagiarism at this point, the matter will be referred to the Course Board and be brought to the Institute's Academic Council for consideration.

For a second offence, or one involving a project, the matter is dealt with by the Course Board and brought to the Institute's Academic Council.

5.4.5.2 Penalties for Plagiarism and Collusion

The Board of Examiners may impose any of the following penalties, or a combination of same, for collusion and plagiarism:

- a. award the Student lower marks than those which he or she would otherwise have been awarded, or award no marks, for the examination or coursework in which the Student committed the offence;
- b. award the Student lower marks than those he or she would otherwise have been awarded, or award no marks, for the unit of which the examination or coursework was part, or recommend this to the appropriate Board of Examiners;
- c. award the Student a lower class of degree or other academic award than that which he or she would otherwise have been awarded or recommend this to the appropriate Board of Examiners;
- d. exclude the Student from the award of a degree or other academic award, which may be either permanent or for a stated period and may be absolute or subject to compliance with stipulated requirements, or recommend this to the appropriate Board of Examiners.
- e. Preclude the student from attending the ICHAS conferring ceremony.

5.4.6 Examination Regulations

- Students must comply with all directions from the invigilators and corridor / toilet duty staff on the day of exams. Each student is to make themselves aware of the Fire Exits in the building
- Students shall display their student cards on the desk during each exam
- Mobile phones are to be switched off and placed in personal baggage which must be placed at the top of the exam hall for the duration of the exam (or outside the building e.g. in your car)
- Only authorised stationery and material will be allowed on the desk i.e. questions sheets, answer booklets, spare paper, pens and reading glasses.
- No pencil cases or food allowed on the desk – bottles of water can be left on the floor under your examination table.
- Other authorised stationary e.g. paper dictionary may only be used with the previous consent of the college.
- Students are required to arrive 15 minutes early for their exam so that they are seated and bags and mobile phones and all unauthorised material can be removed from the exam area.
- Students are not allowed into the exam hall for the first 15 minutes of the exam if they arrive late and no student will be allowed enter the exam hall once the first 30 minutes has elapsed.
- Students are asked to refrain from nervous tapping which causes unnecessary noise and distractions for other students.
- Students may leave the exam hall once the first 30 minutes have elapsed.
- Students are not allowed to leave during the last 15 minutes of the exam.

- Students may leave to go to the toilet during the exam. The invigilator will note the time the student left and the time of return. An invigilator on corridor duty will accompany the student to and from the washroom facilities.
- The invigilator will call the time at various intervals during the exam and when the exam is over.
- Students are advised in advance of the examination that they should advise the invigilator immediately if they perceive a difficulty with the procedure of the examination. The invigilator will immediately notify the Head of Quality & Standards and/or the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services who will enter the exam hall and seek to remedy the situation.
- It is the student's responsibility to return all exam booklets and rough work to the invigilator, to sign the log sheet when leaving the exam hall.
- Students must not confer with each other when leaving the exam hall and are requested to remain quiet at all times and not to linger outside the exam hall door.

5.4.6.1 Breaches of examination regulations

It is a disciplinary offence and a breach of examination regulations for a candidate to:

- Have unauthorised items or texts at his/her desk during the examination
- Make use of unauthorised items or texts during the examination
- Copy from the script of another candidate during the examination
- Dishonestly receive help from another person during the examination
- Dishonestly give help to another person during the examination
- Act dishonestly in any way (whether before, during or after an examination) so as to obtain or confer an unfair advantage to themselves or another candidate.

Should a candidate be suspected of breaching examination regulations, the invigilator will confiscate any unauthorised material, indicate on the candidate's script what has occurred, and remove the script. The candidate will then be given further examination books and permitted to complete the examination. The invigilator will seek an explanation from the candidate at the end of the examination and submit a report to the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services and the Head of Quality & Standards.

5.4.7 Marks and Grading

Explicit marking criteria (i.e. the broad learning outcome knowledge and skills requirements which are taken into account in awarding assessment marks) are necessary in order to enable consistent standards of marking and judgment to be maintained. They can also provide Students with a clear statement of what is expected of them and provide guidance on how performance can be improved.

Each Director of Studies will establish generic marking criteria relating to the classification of awards. Course marking criteria will be supplemented at the level of individual programmes, to reflect discipline-specific learning outcomes. Marking criteria will take into account the relevant nationally-set subject benchmarks.

Boards of Examiners will determine whether the extent to which the marking criteria are satisfied can vary between individual candidates, whether a candidate's strengths in one area can offset shortcomings in another and whether consideration will be given to factors such as differences of approach, style and interpretation.

The aim of the ICHAS marking procedure is to ensure accuracy and consistency of marking, for the individual Student and within the unit. Once marked, scripts will undergo an internal moderation process, where scripts are checked for consistency with the marking criteria and national standards. Internal moderators also verify that the marking criteria have been applied fairly and consistently across all candidates.

All assessed work is also subject to external, independent moderation. Only after marks have been approved by the external examiner(s) will marks be submitted to the Examinations Board for approval. Students will be informed at the outset of their degree studies and at the beginning of each academic year of any obligation to make available assessed work which might be required for the purpose of moderation.

Grading is only applied to the overall award and not to individual modules. The following grading system applies to HETAC awards:

Ordinary Degree (Level 7)

- Distinction: At least 70% of the total marks available
- Merit Grade 1: At least 60% of the total marks available
- Merit Grade 2: At least 50% of the total marks available
- Pass: At least 40% of the total marks available

Honours Degree (Level 8)

- First Class Honours At least 70% of the total marks available
- Second Class Honours Grade 1 At least 60% of the total marks available
- Second Class Honours Grade 2 At least 50% of the total marks available
- Pass At least 40% of the total marks available

Masters Degree Taught (Level 9)

- First Class Honours At least 70% of the total marks available
- Second Class Honours At least 60% of the total marks available
- Pass At least 40% of the total marks available

ICHAS programmes are organised in clearly-defined stages. To be eligible to progress to a particular stage, a student is normally required to demonstrate achievement of the minimum intended learning outcomes of all the preceding stages.

5.4.7.1 Pass by compensation

The marks obtained in the examination subject(s) listed on the approved course schedule, being considered for compensation, must not be lower than 35% where the pass standard is 40% (equivalent of a D grade). In the case of Examination Subjects where the approved course schedule provides for a pass standard other than 40%, the minimum compensation level shall be as specified in the approved course schedule, and shall normally be at a level which is 5% (of the maximum marks) below the pass standard. Compensation can only be applied in the following circumstances

- The student has been assessed for all stage modules and no module in the stage has been failed outright (F or below 35%).
- The results of all modules in the stage are from first attempts.
- In the case of full-time students, the results are from the same sitting (session) i.e. candidates may not pass repeat examinations by compensation unless repeating all examination subjects.

Compensation may be applied only to enable a candidate to pass a stage (at the award stage, a student who passes by compensation remains eligible for honours). Compensation does not change the results of the modules passed in any way.

5.4.7.2 Grade recheck and grade review

Grade Recheck means the administrative operation of checking (again) the recording and combination of component scores for a module and/or stage. A request for Grade Recheck must be submitted in writing to the relevant Programme Coordinator within 5 working days after the examination results are approved. There is a charge of €25 per module rechecked payable with the form, which is refundable if the grade is changed as a result of a recheck. It is possible for grades to be lowered as a result of a recheck. The ICHAS staff member responsible for the module is required to return the completed grade recheck within 5 working days and the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services will notify the student in writing once the recheck decision has been confirmed. A student who is not satisfied with the result of a recheck may appeal the decision (in writing) to the Head of Quality & Standards. If you are not satisfied with the result of your recheck, you may appeal the decision.

Grade Review means the re-consideration by the examiners of all or part of the existing examination/assessment material, together with a re-consideration by the Board of Examiners of a full set of results. A request for review must be received by the Office of Academic Administration & Student Services no later than five working days after the date of posting results on the college portal. The request must contain a detailed submission identifying the element or elements of the examination for which the review is being sought. Students are required to state the grounds on which the review is requested and are advised to submit all information that is requested for consideration in the review.

There is a charge of €25 per module reviewed payable with the form which is refundable if the grade is changed as a result of the review.

5.4.8 Results & Feedback

Marks that contribute to examination results and overall grades will be disclosed to students once they have been submitted to internal moderation. At this stage, they are clearly marked as being provisional and subject to ratification by HETAC. Results and feedback are uploaded by lecturers to the portal, and are cross-checked by relevant personnel in the Office of Academic Administration & Student Services. They are then uploaded to a central location on the portal, where students can access their individual results on a pre-determined day, by keying in their unique logon details. In this way the anonymity of the student is protected.

5.4.9 Student appeals

Any student who wishes to appeal against the decision of the Board of Examiners, will in the first instance, set out the reasons for the appeal in writing to the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services. Appeals must be made in writing within 5 working days following the issue of results. Appeals can only be made in relation to exam process and not marks attained. The Academic Council will consider cases brought on the grounds of substantial irregularity in the conduct of examination or assessment. The Academic Council will convene approximately two weeks following the relevant Board of Examiners meeting and will communicate outcomes of any appeal to the student by post on the first working day after its meeting.

Appeals and Complaints may be considered by the Academic Council on the following grounds:

- The assessment process
- The conduct of the process
- The assessment criteria
- The relevance of the assessment tasks to the intended programme learning outcomes

5.4.10 Repeat Examinations

A candidate who fails to achieve an overall pass at a particular stage or year of a course may, at the discretion of the Board of Examiners, be exempted from further examinations in the examination subjects passed. The rules for compensation only apply in the case where a candidate is repeating all examination subjects at the repeat sitting. Any candidate who has been granted exemptions in examination subjects passed may exercise the right of waiving the exemptions in order to present for all examination subjects in the repeat sitting and therefore be granted the benefit of compensation. The waiver of exemptions cancels the original result(s) which cannot be restored for the purpose of further

attempts at the examination. Candidates are normally allowed a total of three repeat examinations sittings, i.e. the Autumn Repeat Examinations of the same year, and the Summer Examinations and Autumn Repeat Examinations of the following year. The maximum grade that may be awarded to a student who is required to repeat assessments is Pass.

5.4.11 Deferrals

The Board of Examiners may, in exceptional circumstances (such as illness or bereavement), recommend that a final decision on a candidate's result be deferred to enable the candidate to complete specific outstanding requirements of the course. Any deferral of a decision in relation to a candidate's result shall be for a limited period, not exceeding one academic year.

6 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING STAFF

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will ensure that its procedures for recruitment and selection of staff lead to the employment of suitably qualified and skilled individuals; the College will engage in an open and constructive process of providing feedback to staff feedback and will further engage in formal appraisal processes with a view to ensuring ongoing professional development.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)

Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HETAC, 2011)

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|--|---|---|
| Director of Graduate Studies Director of Undergraduate Studies Director of Corporate Affairs Programme Leads Head of Quality & Standards Head of Academic Administration & Student Affairs Head of Learning & Innovation HR Administrator | Performance Review Process Attendance at In Service Days Attendance at Relevant Training Events | External Examiner reports Student Feedback Reports Lecturer Review Forms Annual Appraisal Forms Feedback on In Service & Training Events HETAC Broadsheets |

Continuous Improvement Process

Agreement, implementation and joint review of Personal Development Plans with individual teaching staff members based on the findings of the Performance Review process.

Accountability: Directors of Studies in collaboration with Director of Corporate Affairs.

6.1 Recruitment and Selection

The effective recruitment and selection of staff is critical to the College's ability to achieve its stated strategic aims. With regard to teaching staff specifically, the purpose of ICHAS recruitment and selection procedures is to ensure that ICHAS identifies and appoints staff who have the necessary level of competence, as described in the personnel specification, to effectively teach on or provide support to its programmes of study. (This procedure will be expanded over the coming academic year to include procedures for the recruitment and selection of all staff, reflecting ICHAS' belief that all staff have a direct influence on the student learning experience).

Normally, the need to recruit teaching staff is identified by the Director of Studies or Programme Lead of a particular programme and is brought to the attention of the Director of Corporate Affairs. Agreement to commence recruitment and selection of teaching staff must be obtained from the Board of Management by the Director of Corporate Affairs. All vacancies are advertised internally and externally using the ICHAS portal, the ICHAS website and, where necessary, regional or national newspapers or online recruitment websites. All applicants and candidate for a post are assessed against criteria for the position as outlined in the job specification for that role. Candidates are shortlisted and are interviewed by a minimum of two people against interview criteria common to all candidates. Normally, candidates for teaching positions will be required to deliver a presentation and sample lesson plan as part of the interview process. All interview candidates are requested to bring copies of qualification certificates to the interview, which are kept on file together with the candidate's curriculum vitae. Successful candidates are issued with a fixed term contract and a formal letter of appointment.

6.2 Staff Training and Development

ICHAS seeks to ensure that teaching staff are given opportunities to develop and extend their skills and seeks to provide poor teachers with an opportunity to improve their skills.

All new staff are inducted into ICHAS by an appropriate member of the Board of Management, in conjunction with the Human Resources Administrator. At this point, staff are provided with a Staff Handbook that details working practice requirements common to all staff members. Lecturers meet are provided with the current Lecturer Handbook, and usually meet with the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services who provides an induction to the programme (including programme and module learning outcomes, programme and module assessment strategy), the role of the lecturer, the ICHAS portal and the quality assurance procedures associated with the delivery of programmes and assessment of students.

At the commencement of each academic year, a Faculty Induction Day takes place, and all current faculty members are requested to attend. The Induction Day is led by the Director of Academic Affairs or his/her representative and the day focuses on providing new and returning lecturers with all relevant

programme and administrative information required for effective programme delivery and management of assessment.

A Lecturer Inservice Day is held during the second semester. An agenda for same is developed and circulated in advance and all lecturers are invited to make suggestions for items to be included on the agenda. Specific training and information is given at this session reflecting developments in programmes, programme delivery methods or any other item related to the programmes of study. A large proportion of the day is allocated to lecturer workshops and discussion fora on items of particular interest to the academic team at that point in time. Recommendations from faculty are recorded for further consideration by programme boards of the Board of Management and delegates are formally invited to complete an evaluation form for the day and make recommendations for further inservice days.

The College organises professional conferences and CPD workshops through the Institute of Open Learning. All faculty are encouraged to attend such conferences and workshops which are available to them free of charge.

Specific training for staff to support programme or institute developments are organised as needed. All staff receive training in teaching through a blended learning medium. All staff are supported by the relevant Programme Lead or Director of Studies in developing skills in assessment and teaching.

6.3 Performance Review

The purpose of procedures in this area is to ensure that teaching staff receive constructive feedback on teaching performance, to allow them identify key strengths and areas for improvement, and to agree action plans around same. Performance Review is based on a number of different feedback and evaluation techniques:

- Student Module and Programme Evaluations
- Lecturer Self Review
- Feedback from Programme Lead and Director of Studies

Based on the composite feedback and evaluation from these sources, a Performance Review Report is collated and given to the relevant lecturer. A performance review discussion takes place once the lecturer has had an opportunity to review the evaluation. The review discussion can take place in person, via live meeting or skype, via conference or email as necessitated by the overall conclusions of the Performance Review Report. During this discussion, development needs are identified and appropriate actions to be taken to support this development are agreed. A record of this discussion is retained by the Director of Studies.

6.4 Support for Poorly Performing Staff

Staff who are not performing to the standard required by the role are notified of same through the Performance Review Discussion or at any relevant point during the academic year by the Programme Lead or Director of Studies. The latter will seek to deal with the shortcomings on an informal basis, through discussion, counselling and appropriate developmental assistance. Where a subsequent improvement in performance is not evident, the disciplinary procedure outlined in the IC HAS Lecturer Handbook is invoked, with a view to assisting the member of staff achieve the necessary improvements. Records of all informal and formal interventions are retained by the Programme Lead and/or Director of Studies

6.5 Removal of Poorly Performing Staff

Any staff member who fails to meet the required standards for the position following application of formal and informal interventions (within the full scope of the ICHAS Disciplinary Procedure) will be subject to dismissal.

7 LEARNING RESOURCES & STUDENT SUPPORT

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will provide a coherent and integrated range of learning resources and student supports, which will be actively promoted and communicated within the College, and which will be responsive to student feedback, to the evolving needs of students and to the requirements of robust academic governance.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)

Charter for Inclusive Learning (AHEAD, 2009)

Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Criteria (HETAC, 2011)

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|---|--|---|
| Board of Management Academic Council | Interim QA Audit Programme Board Reports Student Feedback Lecturer Feedback Feedback from Office of Academic Administration & Student Services | Academic Council Reports & Recommendations Annual QA Audit Report Programmatic Review Institutional Review |

Continuous Improvement Process

Periodic and ongoing consideration of programme board reports, academic council reports and student and lecturer feedback to inform review and continuous improvement of resources available for the support of student learning.

Accountability: Board of Management

7.1 The Office of Academic Administration & Student Services

The Office of Academic Administration & Student Services is the unit responsible for the co-ordination, management and development of all learning resources and student support. While students will contact lecturers directly relating to module-specific academic queries, all other queries are dealt with by this office. The team in the Office of Academic Administration & Student Services deals with all student support areas, including admissions, registration, student induction, handbooks, timetables, assessment and examinations, complaints and compliments, and student records. Students are encouraged to direct all queries to the relevant programme co-ordinator within the Office, who will either deal with the query personally or forward the query to the relevant internal staff member. The Programme Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that the query is dealt with and that the student receives a reply and any supporting that may be necessary, liaising with other team members and academic staff where necessary.

7.2 The Learning Environment

7.2.1 Physical Classroom

For all classroom environments, whether on-campus or off-campus, the following set of quality guidelines must be adhered to:

- The room must be of a size capable of taking the number of participants required.
- The room must be well ventilated and/or heated as required.
- The room must have access for those with disabilities.
- There must be toilet facilities, including toilet facilities for those with disabilities.
- The facilities must have access to the required number of electrical sockets for any IT elements of the programme.
- There should be consistency in regard to the room used for the duration of the programme.
- There must be access to projectors, other IT equipment and flip charts as required.
- Chairs must be of a suitable standard and, where requests are made for specific chair types, these must be addressed.
- There must be access to tea/coffee/canteen facilities.
- All unnecessary interruptions and noise disruptions should be kept to a minimum

In the Limerick campus, the facilities and classroom environment are monitored daily by the programme co-ordinator and also periodically by the Health & Safety Officer. These guidelines are used to determine the suitability of off-campus centres and are used when selecting and monitoring a centre. Formal agreements are in place with the centres, and centre managers are made aware of the importance of ongoing adherence to the quality standards. Students are encouraged to provide feedback about their centre and lecturers are formally advised that any deviation from standard must be reported to the Programme Co-ordinator at the earliest opportunity. The quality of standards in

place at off-campus centres is also monitored by the relevant Director of Studies when visiting off-campus centres over the course of the academic year.

7.2.2 Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle)

The College has adopted the Moodle open source VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) as the platform for its student portal and blended learning programmes. Moodle is a very widely used learning management system and was chosen for its rich functionality for the delivery of online content and includes a number of web 2.0 tools. It supports standards such as SCORM 1.2 which means that content developed in that standard can be easily imported and used within Moodle. Most third party content providers support this standard. It is essentially a content agnostic site meaning courses can be created using various formats of content (SCORM, AICC, word, PDF, video, audio etc) combined with a number of internal activities and tools. These internal tools include a very comprehensive online assessment engine, forums, wikis, chat facilities, integrated email, assignments, survey and choice modules among many others. The system also offers a intuitive user friendly interface for students, lecturers and administrators which makes the system extremely easy to use.

7.2.3 Practice Placement Learning Environment

Learners are responsible for arranging their practice placement in consultation with the Practice Placement Officer. Learners submit details of their proposed placement to the Practice Placement Officer, and placements are authorised by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. The Director of Undergraduate Studies has ultimate responsibility for the academic judgement that determines the suitability of a particular placement in light of the learning outcomes for the practice placement module. Supervised professional placement that will be approved by the College for these modules will be ones in which learning opportunities are identified and are agreed as appropriate by the Director of Undergraduate Studies (or the Practice Placement Officer on his/her behalf).

While placements are initially authorised on the basis of suitability, checks are also in place during the period of placement to ascertain that the placement remains suitable to the learning needs. Learners are required to complete monthly feedback forms, submitted online, and reviewed by the Practice Placement Officer in conjunction with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Where concerns regarding any placement are identified, a tripartite meeting will be arranged including the Practice Placement Officer, a representative of the host organization and the learner, at which point remedial actions will be agreed. In the case where remedial action is not forthcoming or possible, NCPH will ensure that the learner is afforded alternative opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes e.g. sourcing another placement or providing a simulated work practice environment.

7.3.3 Consistency of the learning experience across blended learning platforms

ICHAS will seek to ensure that the student experience of online learning is at least equal to that of directed learning and the courseware to support this is of the highest standards through:

- Developing course content that is well structured, academically sound and engaging;
- Encouraging close collaboration between the Module Authors and key management staff throughout the analysis, design and implementation of all blended modules;

- Ensuring developed materials meet the expected requirements of the academic course team, are appropriate to the student demographic and enable students to fulfil their learning objectives;

Continually reviewing content and the online platform to ensure it is relevant, up to date and fit for purpose.

7.4 Academic & Educational Support

7.4.1 Academic Guidance and Advice

Academic Guidance and Advice is primarily provided to students by the module lecturer. Given the relatively small class sizes at the College, direct lecturer-student interaction is generally possible and encouraged. The lecturer's role is supplemented by the Programme Leads and Directors of Studies for each programme/suite of programmes, and queries and/or students are directed to these individual as appropriate. The Head of Academic Administration and Student Services is also experienced in the academic counselling for students and deals with queries relating to study skills, time management, preparation for assessment and examinations. This role is further supported by the Programme Co-ordinators.

7.4.2 Library

Science Direct is one of the largest online collections of published scientific research in the world. It is operated by the publisher Elsevier and contains nearly 10 million articles from over 2,500 journals and over 6,000 e-books, reference works, book series and handbooks across various disciplines including the Social Sciences, the Humanities and Health Sciences. All ICHAS learners are entitled to access Science Direct to support their research, learning and assessments. Information on registration and access is provided below. Registration information is provided to learners at their induction.

7.4.3 Practice Placement Support

The following sections outline the support structures in place for learners at the key points of placement sourcing, clinical and academic supervision and placement assessment. A range of supporting documentation is provided to students, host organizations and supervisors is prepared and reviewed in advance of each academic year and circulated to relevant stakeholders at the commencement of each academic year and/or upon placement commencement (as appropriate). This documentation includes:

- Student Practice Placement Information Pack
- Host Organisation Practice Placement Requirements
- Clinical Supervision for Practice Placement Requirements (for relevant programmes)
- Student Code of Ethics
- Placement Code of Practice

The College has also developed a bespoke web-based Information System which integrates the current College Management System and streamlines administration associated with practice placements across the College. The system can be accessed by learners, host companies and supervisors.

Host organisations are informed of the expectations of learners while on practice placement, the programme and module learning outcomes, and of the obligations of the host organisation itself when accepting learners on work placement. The host organisation accepts the terms and conditions of the placement through the online system. Specifically, host organisations are expected to provide clinical supervision and managerial supervision to the learners. If clinical supervision is not available within an organisation, the student must identify a third-party supervisor who is approved by the College. The person responsible for the managerial supervision of the student within the placement submits log sheets verifying the student's attendance. The managerial supervisor also submits a report on the student's overall performance and general conduct during the placement, which is verified by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. The host organization must comply with the code of practice agreed with ICHAS.

The exposure to and engagement with practice is designed within the programme to afford opportunities to have structured and graded exposure across each year and this element of the programme is considered so essential to learning that practice placement assessments must be passed in order to achieve their final award. Within the context of this special regulation it is required that learners prepare a reflective journal which will be assessed formally on completion of the theory/practice integration module. This will afford the learners the opportunity to demonstrate the integration of practice, theory and academic learning. This approach combines the use of both formative and summative assessment structures.

Within the Learning Portfolio the learner will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of key domains of practice in Counselling & Psychotherapeutic practice and address areas of their key personal and professional learning over the period of practice. Full details of all requirements relating to the production of a reflective learning journal are provided in writing to learners. Learners are informed of the expectations and requirements of the theory practice integration module at the beginning of the academic year. This is communicated using the NCP11 portal and a step-by-step guide on how to access the online system for registering and completing this module is given. Learners are also invited to attend a briefing session hosted by the Director of Undergraduate Studies and Practice Placement Officer. All supplementary information and guidelines are published on the College Portal where they are available for download. Learners are required to complete their reflective learning journal by the required date.

7.4.4 *Supports for students with disabilities and special educational needs*

ICHAS is fully committed to equality of educational access and attainment among learners. Management will actively seek to develop and implement policies and procedures which promote equality and which avoid unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, membership of the Traveller community, marital status, family status, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

Learners and potential learners with recognised disadvantages or disability may be given special consideration. ICHAS will take reasonable steps to ensure that it does not place a student with a

disability or a student covered by any of the nine grounds of Equality legislation at a substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled student. A substantial disadvantage is one that entails time, inconvenience, effort or discomfort compared to other people or students and which is more than minor or trivial. A reasonable accommodation is any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage e.g. changing procedures, providing additional time at examinations.

Each request for a reasonable accommodation will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Academic Administration and Student Services, the relevant Director of Studies and the Head of Quality and Standards. Each applicant with a disability or disadvantage has the responsibility to provide documentation from acceptable professional sources that verifies the nature of the disability and any disadvantage arising from that disability. All disability records will be treated confidentially and each applicant will be treated with dignity and respect.

It is the responsibility of each and any learner with a disability or disadvantage to inform ICHAS of this when applying for the course of study and, where appropriate, at the start of each academic year. The appropriate accommodation to be made will be agreed with the learner and will be formally confirmed in writing in advance of assessments or examinations. This confirmation will expressly state the particular examinations and/or assessment to which the accommodation should apply.

7.5 Counselling Support Service

A Counselling Liaison Officer is available to any learner who may wish to seek assistance in identifying a suitable counselling service for personal purposes. Each year, the College assembles a panel of independent counsellors, whose members are geographically dispersed around the country. The panel normally consists of counsellors who have completed a degree programme and who are seeking to complete the requisite number of professional counselling hours for accreditation or qualification purposes. The panel members must be contractually independent of the College and their services are not retained by the College for any other purposes. In this way, conflicts of interests are avoided and ethical standards in counselling are respected. The service is offered to students of the College at a minimal fee. The role of the Counselling Liaison Officer is to have a preliminary conversation with the student in order to identify his/her particular needs and, based on this, to refer the student to the most appropriate counsellor on the College panel. Neither the College nor the Counselling Liaison Officer play any part in the student/counsellor relationship once initial contact has been made between the student and the panel counsellor.

7.6 Cessation of Programmes and Protection for Learners

In compliance with Section 43 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, Learner Protection arrangements have been put in place in the form of a €700,000 bond held with Ulster Bank (reference TFPDUJ901331). Where possible, arrangements with alternative providers are put in place.

7.7 Student Complaints

Informal Complaints

ICHAS endeavours to deal with all complaints on an informal basis until such time as the complainant feels it necessary to engage with the formal complaints procedure. Informal mechanisms can include discussions with Programme Coordinators or members of the Academic Team, or any other intervention deemed fit to resolve the issue. Informal complaints would normally be considered by the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services.

Formal Complaints

1. The College has a robust formal complaints procedure which seeks to provide a fair and straightforward system to enable learners to raise concerns and which ensures a timely and appropriate response. The procedure is as follows: Learners have the right to complain about the services offered by the Institute, both general and specific.
2. Learners have the right to complain without fear of reprisal from any Institutional source.
3. Formal complaints should be documented using the **Learner's Complaint Form**, (available on the college portal) within 5 working days of the issue arising. The complaint form may be submitted via the portal or directly to the Head of Quality & Standards.
4. Once a formal complaint has been made using the Learner's Complaint Form, the complainant will be informed in writing that the complaint has been received.
5. Upon receipt of a formal complaint, a letter acknowledging receipt of such will be forwarded to the complainant outlining the procedures and steps to be followed.
6. At all levels of the complaints procedure, whether formal or informal, the complainant may have a representative with them during the procedures. It is the responsibility of the learner to ensure that this representative accompanies them.
7. Formal complaints will be dealt with in two specific stages outlined below

Formal Complaints Procedure Stage 1

1. On receipt of the formal complaint Stage 1 of the complaints procedure will be enacted. The Head of Quality & Standards will write to the complainant outlining a time and date for the complaint to be heard. This will normally take place within 7 days of the complaint being received.
2. Where a complaint is made against an officer of the institute, a representative may be appointed to enact the complaints procedures and report directly to the Head of Quality & Standards.
3. The Head of Quality & Standards and a second staff member will meet with the complainant to hear the complaint.
4. Following proper investigation of the complaint the Head of Quality & Standards will issue their findings in writing to the complainant outlining the appropriate course of action.

5. On receipt of the written findings of the complaint at the end of Stage 1 of the procedure the complainant may, if dissatisfied with the findings or procedures, appeal the matter(s) arising to Stage 2 of the procedure.
6. This must be done within 7 days of the findings being issued.
7. Where the formal complaint cannot be dealt with through Stage 1 of the complaints procedure, Stage 2 of the complaints procedure will be enacted.

Formal Complaints Procedure Stage 2

1. In writing to the Director of Studies, the Learner must outline that they wish to appeal the decision of the preceding complaint stage.
2. A formal complaints meeting will be held within 7 days.
3. This meeting will involve the Director of Studies (or an officer acting on his/her behalf) and other appropriate staff members, as decided by the nature of the complaint.
4. The finding of this committee will be binding (save judicial review) and will be issued to the complainant within 7 days

7.8 Garda Vetting Procedures

Certain College programmes require that students submit their personal details for Garda Vetting, to determine whether they have criminal convictions which may make them unsuitable for practice placements in areas such as childcare, counselling and psychotherapy.

Students are informed that they must fully and honestly complete the Garda Vetting Form. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction automatically renders what may appear to be a very minor offence, unrelated to children or minors, to be a serious breach of ICHAS regulations. That is, it will be interpreted as an attempt to mislead and deceive the College.

Should Garda Vetting disclose a criminal conviction against a prospective student, the College reserves the right not to register that individual for a programme of study. Should a person already be a registered student, the Institute reserves the right to cancel his/her registration, thus removing him/her from a course of study.

Should a criminal conviction be deemed to be unrelated to a student's ability to perform in the relevant fields, note that this is a judgment that will be made by the Director of Corporate Affairs in consultation with the Office of the Director of Academic Affairs.

Should a criminal trial be 'pending' at the time a student completes the Garda Vetting form, he/she shall, be deemed innocent of the charge. However, students are requested to inform the College of (a) of the nature of the charge and (b) of the outcome of the trial.

7.9 Disciplinary Procedures

The Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences is committed to maintaining the highest standards across all sectors of the organisation. In most instances, misconduct can be dealt with to the satisfaction of all parties via informal means, through short discussions or telephone calls. For minor offences or first offences of a less serious nature, the College may rely on informal methods of action such as face-to-face meetings or discussions with Programme Coordinators, the Academic Team or Finance Department. Formal disciplinary actions will be enacted where serious offences occur or where offences are repeated following informal interventions. Any Learner who is the subject of a disciplinary procedure has the right to appeal and to have that appeal heard with due consideration and haste. Disciplinary actions may be enacted for a number of reasons including, but not exclusively:

Minor Offences:

- Minor incidents of disorderly conduct or conduct which obstructs the activities of the college or any person carrying out their normal duties
- Smoking, eating and drinking in unauthorised areas
- Causing minor damage to property
- Being in unauthorised areas without permission
- Failing to identify oneself on request
- Use of computer disks and usb keys that have not been checked for viruses.

Major Offences:

- Breach of examination and assessment regulations
- Plagiarism
- Collusion
- Furnishing false information to the college with intent to deceive
- Forging, alteration, or misuse of college documents, records, or identification cards
- Physical abuse or assault of another person on the college campus
- Malicious destruction, damage or misuse of college property, including library materials, or of private property
- Possession and use of offensive weapons
- Possession of illegal drugs
- Occupation of college buildings or grounds
- Interference with safety equipment, fire fighting equipment

The disciplinary procedure for the College involves four separate steps:

- Verbal warning
- 1st Written Warning
- Final Written warning
- Termination

The first three steps of the disciplinary process can be enacted by the Head of Academic Administration & Student Services, Head of Quality & Standards or the relevant Director of Studies. Step 4, can only be enacted by the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Corporate Affairs of the Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences. Where a matter is considered grave enough, the Directors may begin proceedings up to and including step 4 without recourse to any of the preceding steps. Where the Institute has a statutory requirement to report an incident to an appropriate authority it will do so with all due haste.

All disciplinary proceedings must be noted in writing (including verbal warnings) on the appropriate forms. All warnings must be signed and dated and filed appropriately. A Learner must be given a copy of the warning under cover of registered post and a copy of the receipt therein added to the Learner file. A Learner must also be given a copy of the appeals form. Should a warning be given and a period of one academic year pass without further recourse to the disciplinary system, then the warning shall cease to be valid and the Learner record amended accordingly. Should a person be terminated from the Institute then any future access to the Institute will be by the expressed permission of the Academic Council. Once a formal warning has been issued a Learner has 14 days in which to appeal the decision. All appeals must be in writing on the appropriate form.

Where a Learner is given a 1st verbal warning or a 1st written warning and wishes to appeal the decision their appeal will be heard by two other course co-ordinators (other than the issuing co-ordinator). Where a Learner is given a final written warning or has been terminated and wishes to appeal the decision, their appeal will be heard by two other course co-ordinators and a member of the Academic Council. Appeal decisions will be forwarded to the Learner in writing and under cover of registered post within 7 working days of the appeal being heard. Where a Learner is unhappy with the final decision of the appeals board and wishes to appeal to a judicial system, the decision of the appeals board will not be binding until the decision of the judicial process is made known. Where the judicial process overturns or nullifies the decision of the appeals board this decision will be deemed to be binding.

7.10 Procedures to monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of Learning Resources and Student Support

The Quality & Standards Committee monitors the implementation of learner supports and is responsible for the ongoing review and enhancement of such supports. Any recommendations for change or improvement are presented to the Board of Management by the Head of Quality & Standards for approval.

8 INFORMATION SYSTEMS

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will develop knowledge systems that allow for the collection, analysis and use of pertinent and accurate information by management so as to ensure the effective support and development of academic programmes and associated activities.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| Head of Learning & Innovation & Head of Quality & Standards (reporting to the Board of Management). IT Manager and contracted IT services. | Annual Audit of Reports Minutes of Management Meetings | Academic Council Reports Annual QA Audit Institutional Review Governing Authority Feedback |
| <p>Continuous Improvement Process</p> <p>Periodic and ongoing consideration of Academic Council Report, Board of Management minutes and QA Audit findings to inform review and refinement of knowledge management systems. Accountability: TBC/Board of Management/HLI/HQS</p> | | |

THIS PROCEDURE IS UNDER REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT AND IS SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION BY NOVEMBER 2011.

Data that is currently identified as critical to the ongoing provision and development of quality programmes are:

- Student Registration, re-registration and de-registration numbers
- Deferral and withdrawal numbers
- Programme and stage completion rates
- Assessment Results
- Staff and student feedback
- Survey participation rates
- Graduate Destination Statistics
- Internal Progression Rates

- Geographical participation rates
- Age Analysis

9 ASSURING QUALITY IN BLENDED LEARNING

POLICY STATEMENT

ICHAS will develop and delivery blended learning programmes which will provide a pedagogically sound content delivery mechanism to serve students and faculty needs, while conforming to national and international standards and best practice.

European Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009)
Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HETAC, 2011)
Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (QAA, 2004)
Quality Assurance of E-learning (ENQA, 2009)
E-learning quality: Aspects and criteria for evaluation of e-learning in Higher Education (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008)

| Implementation | Measurement | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| Head of Learning & Innovation & Head of Quality & Standards IT Manager and contracted IT services. | Bi-annual IT Report Programme Board Reports Student Feedback Lecturer Feedback Feedback from IT Support Providers Feedback from Office of Academic Administration & Student Services | Academic Council Reports & Recommendations Annual QA Audit Report Programmatic Review Institutional Review |

Continuous Improvement Process

Accountability: Head of Learning & Innovation

THIS PROCEDURE IS UNDER REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT AND IS SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION BY NOVEMBER 2011. THE GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA THAT ARE BEING OBSERVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROCEDURE ARE OUTLINED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

9.1 Overview

ICHAS is committed to adopting a formal blended learning strategy which will optimise and expand the College's current online student portal (Moodle) as a platform for the delivery of its part-time programmes. The strategy is largely informed by current national and international best practice and is managed by the Head of Learning and Innovation.

The primary drivers for the implementation of a blended approach include but are not limited to the following:

- Enhancing the quality of the student learning experience
- Ensuring the quality and consistency of programme content and delivery from both a modular and holistic (programme) viewpoint
- Facilitating leading practice and innovative approaches to teaching and learning
- Providing flexibility of provision and broadening access to support a diverse and geographically disperse student population
- Enriching the student support experience, particularly for learners based off campus
- Increasing competitiveness in building new student markets enabled by flexible and innovative program delivery

9.2 E-Learning Quality Model

Policy aspects pertaining to blended learning, where relevant, will be embedded in the Institution's policies and procedures to ensure a consistent approach to associated systems, processes and responsibilities. The E-learning Quality Model provides a key framework for the development of policies and procedures of blended learning. The framework comprises ten quality aspects, considered crucial when assessing quality in e-learning:

1. Material / Content
2. Structure / Virtual environment
3. Communication, cooperation and interactivity
4. Student assessment
5. Flexibility and adaptability
6. Support (student and staff)
7. Staff qualifications and experience
8. Vision and institutional leadership
9. Resource allocation
10. The holistic and process aspect

9.2.1 Material/Content

The main quality issues that concern material and content are the selection and sequencing of material, and the quality of the material used and produced on a course.

Quality criteria:

- a) Policy and guidelines for selection and production of digital material, including explicit pedagogical and technical criteria

- b) Policy and guidelines for copyright issues
- c) Known and implemented a) and b)
- d) Internal evaluation and subsequent improvement of a), b) and c)

9.2.2 Structure / Virtual Environment

Pedagogically useful features of a virtual environment include easy and structured ways of finding information and of communicating with peers and teachers. The technical infrastructure must be robust, reliable, intuitive, adaptable, accessible and user-friendly. The virtual environment is one of the most dynamic and rapidly changing features of e-learning environments therefore systematic improvement and updating are needed on a continuous basis. The choice of virtual environment should be based on pedagogical considerations and the institution’s technical environment.

Quality criteria:

- a) A virtual environment that is:
 - selected on pedagogical needs
 - reliable and robust
 - aligned with the institution’s technical infrastructure
- b) Internal evaluation, updating and improvement of a)

9.2.3 Communication, Cooperation & Interactivity

Communication, cooperation and interaction are at the core of learning. One main difference compared to full face-to-face directed programmes is that more planning is required to facilitate communication in blended learning programmes. The communication structure chosen for a particular blended learning module depends on the available infrastructure, level of teacher and student proficiency and the objectives of the course. Online communication, as part of a blended learning module can be organised within four dimensions of time and space (Table 1).

| | Same Place | Different Place |
|----------------|--|--|
| Same time | 1. Technology-supported teaching– Demonstration programs– Visual presentation programs | 3. Synchronous communication– Video conference– Chat/Instant messaging– IP telephone– Whiteboard– Audio chat |
| Different time | 2. Technology-supported learning– Self-studies (simulations, animations etc...) | 4. Asynchronous communication– E-mail– E-forum– Audio forum– Online video lectures – Text messaging |

Table 1: Information and communication technology related to time and place in e-learning

Different approaches to designing communication in blended learning modules can be identified. Some approaches focus on dialogue between teachers and learners, which requires technology that enhances

and enriches the communication channels. In these approaches, communication needs to be organised according to a communication contract that regulates teachers' working hours, use of communication channels, response time and support. Other methods focus on pre-fabricated content and interactive learning activities, where interactivity and learning take place without teacher guidance. Intermediate models combine these two approaches in various ways.

Quality criteria:

- a) Explicit strategy for communication, cooperation and interactivity according to pedagogical needs, available technology and human resources
- b) Implementation of a)
- c) Evaluation and improvement of a) and b)

9.2.4 Student Assessment

There is no fundamental difference between the assessment of learning outcomes of full face-to-face modules and modules which are delivered through blended learning. In certain cases continuous assessment components of blended learning modules will include marks given to online discussion posts which assess specific learning outcomes as per programme and module assessment strategies.

Online assessment basically implies an opportunity for increased variation in methods of group dynamics, time and place. Learning online adds possibilities for diversifying assessment methods, including simulations, virtual seminars and asynchronous group work. This entails a radical change in how learning processes are designed and hence in how student assessment is performed. Assessment methods should encourage creativity, critical thinking and in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. Flexibility in terms of time and location offer the possibility of enhancing these aspects. At the same time, flexibility entails problems of security and authentication. Procedures and regulations have to be in place to certify accessibility, student identity and the authenticity of each individual student's knowledge contribution.

Quality Criteria:

- a) Strategy for fair, flexible and pedagogically justified assessment
- b) Implemented policy for dealing with plagiarism, legal security and identification of students
- c) Implementation of a) and b)
- d) Evaluation and improvement of a) and b)

9.2.5 Flexibility and Adaptability

One crucial quality aspect of modules which involve an element of online learning is the degree of flexibility. A lot of people want to learn, but are restricted by working hours, family life, location, economy, available time, etc. Flexibility can be construed in many ways: flexible starting times, open course (no formal prerequisites), flexible study pace, flexibility of content and tasks (students can select

and specialise), flexibility of location (where studies are pursued), flexibility of study method (communicated through many channels/modes) and ability to adapt to people with special needs. Nonetheless, flexibility has to be balanced against structure.

Quality Criteria:

- a) Strategy for increasing the flexible features of education based on pedagogical considerations and students' needs and demands
- b) Implementation of a)
- c) Evaluation and improvement of a) and b)

9.2.6 Support (Student and Staff)

A large number of studies have shown that support is crucial for successful e-learning implementation.

E-learning support can be categorised into four areas:

- Faculty support for students;
- Social support for students;
- Support from employers;
- Support for faculty.

The main barriers to blended and online learning have been found to be:

- Administrative issues;
- Social interaction;
- Academic skills;
- Technical skills;
- Learner motivation;
- Time and support for studies;
- Cost and access to the Internet;
- Technical problems.

Quality Criteria:

- a) Strategy for student support including technical, administrative and social support on demand
- b) Strategy for faculty support including technical, ICT and information competence support on demand
- c) Implementation of a) and b)
- d) Evaluation and improvement of a), b) and c)

9.2.7 Staff Qualifications and Experience

Whilst the need for in-service training is not specific to lecturers on blended modules in addition to normal professional development it might include the following objectives:

- Increasing awareness of using new technology

- How students learn through different media
- Expectations of and a critical approach to new technology
- Developing formative evaluation skills for improving learning design

It is also important to construct new models for the recruitment and retention of academic staff.

Quality Criteria:

- a) Strategy for staff competence development
- b) Implementation of a)
- c) Evaluation and improvement of a) and b)

9.2.8 Vision and Institutional Leadership

One of the most important issues is the alignment of the policy for e-learning with the overall vision of the institution. Organisational leadership has to be explicit about who it is attempting to serve, how and why) and how e-learning fits into that vision. The adaptability of policy and planning must also keep pace with an increasing rate of change in pedagogical possibilities.

To encourage innovation, it is also important that ICHAS has both earmarked resources and a clear strategy for research, quality assurance and development in e-learning.

Quality Criteria:

- a) A strategy plan for e-learning with a visionary perspective, including research, quality assurance and development activities, and strategic local, national and international alliances related to short, medium and long term objectives
- b) Implementation and evaluation of a) and b)
- c) Feedback, follow-up and monitoring of national as well as international trends, and strategic management from the institutional administration

9.2.9: Resource Allocation

When dealing with e-learning technologies, resources have to be reallocated from physical locations to technical infrastructures, support organisations and staff development. In blended education, both the technical infrastructure and physical localities need to be financed. Workloads and a shift in working hours for staff also have to be taken into account. The development of interactive content and online lectures require special financial resources as well as copyright regulations. A new financial strategy will be needed for marketing e-learning in order to reach new target groups.

Quality Criteria:

- a) A strategy for the reallocation of existing resources and the generation of new resources based on the specific needs of e-learning
- b) A strategy and plan for dealing with changes in workload and working hours as well as with ownership of and financial rights to virtual lectures and other digital material
- c) Implementation of a) and b)

9.2.10 The Holistic and Process Aspect

E-learning and blended learning consists of multiple components, e.g. learning material, learning software, academic and technical support, presentation of content and interaction. All components must work together in an efficient manner. A holistic perspective implies that all quality aspects together constitute a functional system. Therefore a change in one quality aspect, due to new technology, changed behaviour etc., usually requires adjustments of one or more of the others.

Quality Criteria

a) A functional and systematic approach for e-learning implementation encompassing all previously mentioned quality aspects:

1. material/content
2. structure/virtual environment
3. communication, cooperation and interactivity
4. student assessment
5. flexibility and adaptability
6. support (student and staff)
7. staff qualifications and experience
8. vision and institutional leadership
9. resource allocation.

b) Internal evaluation, updating and improvement of a) using a holistic approach