



**CARLOW
COLLEGE**
ST. PATRICK'S

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy

(2018–2023)

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Overview and context

One of the core objectives of the Carlow College, St Patrick's *Strategic Plan 2017–2022* is the 'development and implementation of a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy'.¹

The Carlow College Strategic plan was informed by national policies aimed at improving access to and widening participation in higher education.² It was also influenced by national initiatives for enhancing professional development of academic staff, the findings of the HEA Group set up to explore good practice in relation to learner engagement in Higher Education and the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE).³

In relation to teaching and learning Carlow College strategies are further informed by the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2009).⁴

In January 2017, a teaching and learning subgroup was set up to examine and review Carlow College policies relating to teaching, learning and assessment and, where necessary, to revise policies and/or create new policies and guidelines to ensure that Carlow College has in place a robust Quality Assurance framework in line with the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012*. The following documents were produced by this sub-group in consultation with the wider staff group:

- Teaching and Learning Policy Statement
- Assessment Policy Statement
- *Teaching and Learning policy*
- *Assessment policy*
- *External Examiners Policy*

¹ Carlow College, St Patrick's *Strategic Plan 2017–2022*.

² *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 - Report of the Strategy Group* (2011), pp 34-5.

³ *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (2016) <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/professional-development/>. National Student Engagement Programme (2016) <http://www.iaa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/HEA-IRC-Student-Engagement-Report-Apr2016.pdf>). Irish Survey of Student Engagement <http://studentsurvey.ie/>

⁴ <https://www.ahead.ie/launch-charter-inclusive-teaching-and-learning>.

The sub-group drafted the Terms of Reference (TOR) for a permanent *Teaching and Learning Committee* whose role is to ‘articulate, develop, and promote teaching and learning practice in the College consistent with best national and international practice and in-line with the strategic goals of the College’.⁵ This committee was set up in June 2017. It is chaired by the Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs and the *ex officio* members are Assistant Registrar for Strategic Development, Quality Assurance Officer, Library Representative, Programme Board Chairs, IT Officer and Director of Operations. The TOR allow for the nomination of two members of academic staff and one learner representative and the committee nominated Dr Lucy Bennett (Lecturer, Social Care and member of the PPAC) and Lisa Fortune (Head of Student Services) for the staff positions. The SU nominated Adam Kane (Education Officer) as the learner representative. The committee has produced the following documents:

- Revision of the *Plagiarism Policy* and completion of associated documents
- Guidelines for Academic Advisors
- Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards

The Committee has produced this *Teaching and Learning Strategy 2018–2023*. Its purpose is to provide a framework for the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment across Carlow College, St Patrick’s over a five-year period. The Strategy is accompanied by an implementation plan and will be reviewed mid-cycle (2021).

⁵ TOR for Teaching and Learning Committee.

Section 1: Carlow College Graduate Attributes

Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that are developed through the experience of attending a higher education institute and successfully completing a programme of study there. Carlow College, St Patrick's has identified a set of connected and interdependent attributes which, we seek to allow our learners to develop. We are committed to embedding and developing these attributes in all the activities of the College and reflecting them in the design, delivery and assessment of all our academic programmes. Some of these attributes relate to knowledge and understanding in the disciplines that are core to a learner's programme of study and to specific skills and competences in these areas. Other attributes are fostered by the institution as a whole and the experience of being part of the Carlow College community.

Our aim is that graduates of Carlow College, St Patrick's will be:

- Academically excellent
- Problem Solvers
- Effective Communicators
- Collaborative in approach
- Lifelong Learners
- Socially engaged
- Work and employment ready

Academically Excellent

Characterised by disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise; valuing of academic excellence and integrity; openness to discourse.

Our curricula, programme and module learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment strategies ensure that learners:

- engage with the core theorists, conceptual frameworks and perspectives in their disciplinary field;
- develop technical ability in relation to academic writing and appropriate research skills;
- are challenged to engage in multi and inter-disciplinary analysis of problems and issues.

All level 8 programmes include a capstone project or dissertation, helping graduates practice advanced research skills and self-directed study thus preparing them for postgraduate study. Academic excellence is recognised and valued by the institution and applauded at the graduation ceremony and in rolls of honour soon to be displayed in public spaces in College. Staff research is promoted and supported by the institution to ensure that learners have access to the most up-to-date and relevant teaching.

Problem Solver

Characterised by analytical critical and reflective skills; learners are enquiry-orientated, creative and innovative; learners demonstrate the ability to construct, deconstruct, synthesise and reconstruct knowledge.

Through the linking of theory and practice, our teaching, learning and assessment strategies ensure that learners:

- are exposed to case studies and problem-based learning;
- can reconcile conflicting interpretations and know how to deal with ambiguity;
- can draw on creative and innovative solutions to authentic problems.

Our pedagogic approaches include, wherever possible, practice placements and work-based learning.

Effective Communicators

Characterised by fluency and competency in a range of different media; learners are both articulate and good listeners, can address a variety of groups, are sensitive and appropriate to context (professional, cultural etc.).

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies provide opportunities for learners to:

- develop proficiency in digital skills and techniques;
- present to diverse groups (small groups, larger class groups, faculty);
- engage in seminars and debates;
- become active participants in a range of digital interfaces.

The College actively promotes staff/learner debates and debates between different groups of learners (mature, international etc.).

Collaborative in approach

Characterised by the capacity to form respectful, team-based work relationships; learners can work to group objectives, are open to the contribution of others and experienced in negotiation and facilitation. Learners develop leadership skills and demonstrate an awareness of the nature of group dynamics and the value of collective and partnership approaches to learning and the achievement of tasks.

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies:

- bring learners into contexts which moves learning from an individual to a group practice;
- incorporate class-based group-work and role-playing approaches;
- support peer learning;
- encourage self and peer assessment;
- devise criteria-based group projects.

The College encourages and supports learner societies, and Students' Union activity. Learners are represented at Programme Board, Academic Council, and on various college committees.

Lifelong Learners

Characterised by a love of learning and commitment to self-development and continuous personal development; learners will be proactive in seeking out opportunities for learning and will be open to the value of a range of disciplines.

Our curricula, programme, module learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment strategies ensure that learners:

- develop an appreciation of learning as a lifelong activity;
- have an awareness of current research developments including cutting-edge research;
- have been introduced to research methodologies and skills.

At Stage 4, all programmes have components or modules which focus on future directions and trends in the programme/discipline area. The Careers Office provides substantial information on postgraduate and CIPD options. The College regularly invites outside experts to give guest lectures

and promotes the College as a conference venue. The College maintains an up-to-date Alumni database to communicate with graduates and promote ongoing learning opportunities related to the areas in which the College is active.

Socially engaged

Characterised by awareness of personal responsibility attaching to choices made; learners are cognisant of the interdependence of culture, economy, environment and society. This attribute is fostered in the following ways:

- Our degree programmes are socially orientated in theory and practice;
- Curricula content includes elements from ethics, environmental studies, equality studies, gender studies and social justice;
- The College specifically supports and promotes learner involvement in clubs and societies aimed at developing socially engaged individuals and recognizes such activities at the graduation ceremony;
- The College hosts events, seminars and workshops in collaboration with public organisations to promote awareness around social justice issues for learners and the wider community;
- Integration of international learners in Carlow College and provision of study abroad opportunities for Carlow College learners.

Work and Employment Ready

Characterised by the ability to fit effortlessly into a variety of workplaces and deliver results; an understanding of how the workplace works; a professional attitude; a range of transferable skills.

This attribute is developed in our programmes by:

- Making employability a focus of learner learning and assessment;
- Fostering independent learning and a sense of responsibility;
- Assessments that are designed to be practice-orientated;
- Providing workplace experiences and links with professional and community bodies;

- Focusing on digital skills as well as spoken and written communication skills;
- Developing the conceptual framework to adapt and up-skill when and where necessary.

Section 2: Defining principles for curriculum design

Curriculum is often equated with course content but in fact it comprises all the experiences that learners have that enable them to reach their learning goals. Designing a curriculum involves deciding what you would like your learners to know, to do and to value at the end of their programme. In that sense it is necessary to consider learning outcomes, assessment strategies and teaching and learning strategies.

Objective 1: Aligning with internal and external requirements and good practice

At the outset of the process, curriculum designers should ensure that programmes:

- are clearly linked to the national Framework of Qualifications;⁶
- fit with Carlow College's mission as outlined in the strategic plan;
- have a structure that is modular and semesterised and compatible with National, European and International frameworks;
- incorporate the standards set down by professional bodies where applicable;
- demonstrate an awareness of the principles of *Universal Design for Learning* as well as AHEAD's *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2009).

Objective 2: Achieving consistency

During the process, curriculum designers should ensure that:

- programme development is informed by research and feedback from internal and external stakeholders including learners, staff, graduate employers and coordinators of graduate programmes;
- Programme Learning Outcomes are aligned to the relevant award standards;

⁶ <http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/>

- learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches and assessment methods are ‘constructively aligned’ in order to achieve maximum benefit;
- graduate attributes are consistently mapped into learning design, delivery and assessment.

Objective 3 – Adopting a staged approach and recognizing the importance of the First Year Curriculum

Curriculum designers should adopt a staged approach to programme design by:

- developing an integrated programme in which each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended programme learning outcomes;
- ensuring that the first and second year curriculum scaffolds independent learning engagement with module learning outcomes that are practical and focused on enabling learners to acquire and develop knowledge, skills and competencies;
- ensuring that the first and second year curriculum includes study skills, learning styles, time management, information and digital literacy and research skills;
- designing a third and fourth year curriculum which provides opportunities for deeper and more specialist learning, analysis and skills-application;
- making certain that learning outcomes are matched with appropriate teaching and learning strategies and assessment instruments at each stage.

Objective 4: Embedding choice and balancing theory and practice

- Programmes should include some level of choice for learners in terms of elective modules and also through negotiated assessment.
- Programmes should provide opportunities for learners to align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational goals and training needs.
- Programmes should strike a balance between theoretical and abstract knowledge and practical skills, creativity, self-understanding and interpersonal skills.
- Programmes should include opportunities for experiential learning.

Objective 5: Ensuring on-going development

- Curriculum should not be static but should be subject to on-going development to reflect and respond to developments in the disciplines, professions and graduate employment opportunities.
- Evaluation is an important part of curriculum design and regular evaluations by staff, learners and external stakeholders should play an important role in on-going development.

Section 3: Promoting learner access, progression, retention and achievement

The objectives outlined below are informed by and build on the Carlow College Student Services' *Settle, Stay, Succeed* focus.

Objective 1: Promoting Access

Carlow College will ensure that:

- prospective learners will be facilitated and provided with all the necessary information in order to allow them to make an informed decision on programme choice;
- learners will be able to ascertain all necessary details regarding topics to be covered, full reading lists, and assessment methods before choosing or beginning a module;
- all learners should be able to participate fully in their classes and be given the opportunity to meet learning outcomes;
- all learners will be welcomed and an explicit affirmation of inclusivity should be provided on programme documentation;
- the provision of resources and accommodations for learning are acknowledged in our programme design.

Objective 2: Promoting First Year Retention

Carlow College will:

- adopt an institutional approach to first year, bearing in mind that studies demonstrate that social integration is the most important consideration for young first year learners;
- in order to provide a coordinated learner support framework, establish a first year 'teaching team' comprised of academic advisors, academic resource officers and first year lecturers; identify troublesome concepts and take a team approach;
- monitor teacher/learner ratios at Stage 1;

- provide opportunities for higher year learners to interact with first year learners, thereby fostering the sense of college as community and encouraging leadership and communication skills in our learners;
- treat learners as being in transition right to the end of first year and into second year;
- systematically monitor and review learner retention and progression at programme board and Academic Council levels;
- use formative assessment instruments to identify learners who are having difficulties and provide the appropriate support for them.

Objective 3: Promoting Retention in subsequent stages

Carlow College will:

- provide reorientation for learners at each stage of their programme
- continue to use formative assessment instruments to identify learners who are having difficulties and provide the appropriate feedback and support for them
- maintain and enhance our provision of co-curricular supports for learners throughout their programme including advanced writing workshops;
- support learner transitions through the programme stages and out of College making sure that Academic Advisors, Academic Resource Officers, Careers Officer, Counsellors and other support services work together to enable the holistic development of the learner and their broader learning experience;
- systematically monitor and review learner retention and progression at programme board and Academic Council levels.

Objective 4: Supporting Progression and Achievement

Carlow College will:

- aim for all teaching and learning material to be accessible to all learners. (Providing on-line or digital versions of texts removes a number of barriers for learners including cost and often physical accessibility);
- at all stages make sure that learners entering a module have the prerequisite skills and knowledge necessary to participate effectively in the module;
- provide progressive opportunities for learners to integrate knowledge and skills.
- adopt a programme approach to assessment to ensure that assessment is fair, consistent and appropriate and that learner workloads are manageable;
- ensure consistency across modules with regard to the amount and level of difficulty associated with assessments;
- encourage, where feasible, cross modular assessment practices;
- Promote timely and appropriate feedback to assist learners in monitoring their progress and become more self-aware in terms of their own knowledge and learning practices.

Section 4: Defining and supporting good practice in teaching and learning

Carlow College is committed to a teaching and learning approach that fosters active learning and allows learners to take ownership of their learning. This approach encourages learners to actively engage with their discipline, interact with the content, link new knowledge with already known concepts and principles and become co-creators of new knowledge. It also embeds the concept of ‘constructive alignment’ where learning outcomes are aligned with appropriate modes of teaching and assessment and learners are facilitated in the construction of their own learning.⁷ In recognition of the emphasis that Carlow College places on providing education for learners from a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities, the teaching and learning approach is influenced by the principles of *Universal Design for Learning* as well as AHEAD’s *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2009). In this way all learners are supported to achieve the Carlow College graduate attributes.

Objective 1: Promote Deep Learning

Deep learning involves a critical analysis of ideas, linking them to already known concepts, principles and experiences which leads to personal understanding and long-term retention.⁸ It is the opposite of surface learning which focusses on memorisation of content for purposes of assessment. In promoting deep learning, the teacher’s role must shift from one who delivers content to one who facilitates and guides learning. The classroom becomes a productive place where teachers interact with learners to help them construct knowledge. Studies have shown that a number of strategies including group work activities, enquiry/problem-based learning, flipped class rooms and learner-led discussions facilitate deep learning and reduce surface learning.⁹ Lecturers are encouraged and assisted through CPD to shift incrementally their teaching approaches to ones which promote deep learning.

Objective 2: Support Inclusive Teaching

Inclusive teaching means recognising, accommodating and meeting the learning needs of *all* learners. This is best achieved by moving away from reliance on any one teaching style and

⁷ J. Biggs, (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University – What the Student Does*. 2nd edn. SRHE / Open University Press, Buckingham.

⁸ S. Toohey, (1999). *Designing Courses for Higher Education*. SRHE/ Open University Press, Buckingham, p. 11.

⁹ B. Danker, ‘Using Flipped Classroom Approach to Explore Deep Learning in Large Classrooms’, *The IAFOR Journal of Education*, Volume III - Issue I - Winter 2015, 171-186.

assessment instrument and providing a variety of methods of instruction. Teaching staff should be able to draw on a variety of methods of instruction which should be facilitated and supported by CPD and by the physical and technological infrastructures. Programme Boards should make an audit of module teaching modes to make sure that learners with disabilities or different learning styles are not inadvertently excluded. Lecturers are encouraged to use the VLE (Moodle) to keep learners informed and engaged, to interact with learners, to assess and provide feedback to learners, to provide reading lists in advance and to make notes/powerpoint slides available ahead of class. Throughout the academic programmes, teaching staff should strive to make all the learners partners in the pursuit of knowledge by encouraging questions, and showing openness to new ideas and different perspectives. An inclusive teaching strategy recognizes that the experiences of learners from a variety of backgrounds can enhance the learning environment for everyone.

Objective 3: Provide Opportunities for Collaborative Learning

Collaboration among learners can have a very positive impact both on learner engagement and learner retention.¹⁰ Opportunities should be provided for learners to interact and collaborate with each other and with the teaching staff. Peer learning can become part of the teaching and assessment strategy. For example, study groups can be established in class and encouraged to meet outside of class time where possible. Group study topics/questions can be set to help structure the study time and boundaries can be set and formalised. Online discussion boards can be set up using Moodle.

Objective 4: Encourage research-informed teaching and enquiry-based learning

Teaching staff are encouraged to be active researchers and to keep up to date with current research and publications within their discipline and within the broader area of pedagogy. This experience and knowledge can then be applied to the design and teaching of the curriculum and, in addition, offers the chance to model academic integrity standards. The curriculum should include opportunities for learners to develop research and enquiry skills from the start of their programmes. Stage 1 modules should introduce learners to the skills and methodologies of

¹⁰ Beth Hurst, Randall Wallace, and Sarah B. Nixon, 'The Impact of Social Interaction on Student Learning', *Reading Horizons*, Volume 52, Issue 4 (2013), 375-398.

research in their disciplinary areas and these skills should be developed and refined in the middle stages of the programme through enquiry-based learning approaches. In the Stage 4 capstone, learners are given the opportunity to use their skills to produce a research-based dissertation which adds to knowledge in their discipline/professional area.

Objective 5: Provide opportunities for learning outside the classroom and in the workplace

Teaching staff should identify opportunities to move the focus of learning outside the classroom to utilize other parts of the campus (libraries, archive, IT resource room, social gatherings), nearby institutions (Museum, VISUAL, GBS Theatre) and organise fieldtrips to regional and national institutions/attractions. Such activities can be an important means to help learners feel more involved in their discipline as well as allowing them the opportunity to engage more informally with their lecturers and peers thus helping to foster a community ethos. In addition, pedagogic approaches should include, wherever possible, practice placements and workplace experiential learning. This offers learners the chance to understand the relevance of their academic studies within authentic scenarios. In addition to the experience of applying classroom skills in the workplace, learners can also bring workplace skills back to the classroom. Such work integrated learning can enhance employability and foster transferable skills in the areas of communication time management and leadership.

Objective 6: Encourage teaching staff to seek regular feedback on learning to facilitate informed change and development

Teaching staff should actively seek out feedback from learners and from peers. Several strategies can be used in-class to test whether learners have achieved the learning outcome of the class or session. Comments on wider teaching strategies can be invited via anonymous questionnaires, periodically filled in by the learners. It can also be beneficial to ask a peer to sit in as an observer in your class and then to provide feedback on teaching and class dynamics. Feedback should always be considered and responded to and should contribute to regular evaluations of programme teaching and learning strategies. The TLA committee will carry out a review of learner feedback mechanisms.

Section 5: Defining and supporting good practice in assessment and feedback

Carlow College aims to produce learners who are self-directed and autonomous, responsible for making judgements on their learning. Effective assessment and feedback is key to this process of self-regulation and critical evaluation.

Objective 1: Adopt a programme approach to assessment

It is vital to ensure a consistency of approaches to assessment and to locate such approaches in a coherent fit-for-purpose frame. Therefore, each Programme Board (including learner representation) should design an assessment strategy which links the programme's assessment instruments to the *Programme Learning Outcomes*. It should provide a rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures and address their fairness and consistency. Programme assessment strategies should also address the quantity, balance and timing of assessments, bearing in mind the overall staff and learner workload and avoiding over assessment. Programme Boards should explore opportunities for integrated assessments, both horizontal (between modules) and vertical (between stages), where knowledge and skills on two or more modules can be tested by a single piece of assessment. This type of assessment encourages integration of learning allowing the learner to draw on a range of knowledge and skills to demonstrate competence.

All assessment modes and weightings on all modules and programmes should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate for the programme. Feedback from learners and from external examiners will be considered in this periodic review, as will any changes to module or programme content or delivery. Reductions or increases in learner numbers will also inform this review.

Objective 2: Promote a broad range of assessments at the module level

Module assessment strategies should ensure the achievement of each module learning outcome in the areas of knowledge, skills and competencies. Teaching staff should draw on a wide variety of assessment types and consider, where appropriate, substituting some of the following assessment mechanisms for the more traditional exam and essay: learning logs, portfolios/e-portfolios, reflective journals, group projects, group facilitation, presentations (including learner videos uploaded to Moodle), literature reviews, theatre/film reviews, self-assessment exercises, peer-

group assessment, multiple choice quizzes, group projects, oral defences, assessment through Moodle (such as contributions to databases, quizzes, wikis, glossaries, discussion boards), construction of bibliographies including annotated bibliographies, assessment through responses to feedback, mind maps and other cognitive types of assessment. Deploying a wide range of assessments ensures that every learner, no matter where their particular strength lies, has the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and maximize their potential

All assessors should develop a wide understanding of the purpose of assessment and the characteristics of different types of assessment. The emphasis should be on assessment that will assess deeper learning and skills of synthesis and application rather than an ability to memorise and recall information. Assessors should be aware of the value of assessment *for* learning and set formative assessment tasks that provide an opportunity for a learner to practice a skill which will later be assessed in a summative way. There may also be opportunities to introduce assessment *as* learning into modules. For example, learners might collaborate to develop their own shared assessment criteria and be encouraged to self-review and/or peer review.

Stage 1 assessments should focus on encouraging learners to engage with the course, acquire key skills and build their confidence. Assessors should consider scaffolding assessments for Stage 1 learners – i.e. breaking them down so they can be tackled in stages. The weightings of assessments should also be considered in that early assessments should be low-stake ones, building to more high-stake ones as the learner progresses. Assessments at Stages 2-4 should demonstrate a progression from previous stages offering opportunities for the learners to practice and hone what they have previously learned. In this context, assessment methods should reflect not only what is learned in a single module, but in previous modules.

Objective 3: Ensure Clarity, Transparency and Fairness

Learners must have complete clarity about what is expected of them and complete confidence in the fairness and transparency of summative assessment. Continuous assessment briefs, including submission deadlines and procedures, percentage carried by the assessment, word counts and presentation conventions are to be explicit and clear and made available to learners well in advance of the deadline, preferably at the beginning of the module. All summative assessments must be accompanied by assessment criteria and marking rubrics that are explicit and clear to all concerned

(assessors, those being assessed and moderators reviewing the process). Carlow College procedures regarding penalties for late submission, application for extensions, extenuating circumstances and opportunities for repeat are to be accessible on Moodle and the College website. Learners should be familiar with these from the outset of their Programme Exam Regulations, including applications for deferrals, extenuating circumstances and opportunities for appeals and repeats are similarly to be made available and consistently implemented.

Objective 4: Place Feedback at the Heart of the Assessment Process

Feedback must be at the heart of the assessment process if assessment is to be integral to learning. Assessors should create opportunities to deliver formative feedback as early in their modules as possible. This feedback should be detailed, comprehensive, meaningful to the individual and supportive. It can be delivered in many ways, face-to-face, in-class collective feedback or via technology. Feedback should focus on constructive actions that can be taken by the learner. This is sometimes referred to as feed-forward. This is when the assessor suggests what can be done next and it is especially helpful when received during the progress of the work so that adjustments can be made in an ongoing manner. This type of feedback fits well with scaffolded assessments, allowing learners to reassess and rectify their work. In order to be effective, feedback must be prompt and comply with Carlow College guidelines on turnaround time for corrections. In addition, the learners should be encouraged to draft feedback plans, indicating how they intend to act upon the feedback they have been given.

Objective 5: Promote Technology-enabled Assessment and Feedback

As an institution, we will undertake to develop technology-enabled mechanisms to streamline assessment administration and delivery of feedback. Assessors will be provided with relevant CPD around the pedagogic use of technology in designing, setting and correction of assessments (including delivery of feedback).

Section 6: Enhancing the learning environment – physical, social and technological

The physical, social and technological environment is a significant support to teaching, learning and assessment methods. Fit-for-purpose and well-designed teaching and learning spaces can create an attractive and supportive/inclusive learning environment which fosters a sense of academic community. Efficient and appropriate use of technology for communication, provision of teaching materials, assessment and feedback can enhance learner experience and engagement by providing multi-modal learning opportunities which promote self-directed, independent learning and monitoring of progress.¹¹

Objective 1: Review our provision of a range of teaching and learning spaces

The physical teaching space has a significant impact on the educational experience of all learners. Educationalists have identified three essential types of spaces that can be used to encourage learning.¹² The ‘campfire’ where people gather to learn from an expert; the ‘cave’ a private space where an individual can think and reflect and the ‘watering hole’ an informal space where peers can share information and discoveries. Carlow College already has a number of spaces in each of these categories but there are additional spaces that can be assigned a learning function as well as existing spaces that can be adapted to a variety of uses. Carlow College will review its provision of teaching and learning spaces ensuring that they support a diversity of teaching and learning modes, both traditional and innovative. We will also ensure that the needs of learners with limited mobility are taken into consideration.

Objective 2: Review spaces for social learning

The college is committed to teaching practices that promote collaborative learning and encourage a sense of community. We will review the use of space in college buildings and increase the number of communal/cluster spaces where learners can share ideas, ask questions, prepare

¹¹ Cynthia Luna Scott. THE FUTURES of LEARNING 3: What kind of pedagogies for the 21st century? UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Paris [ERF Working Papers Series, No. 15].

¹² L. Scott Webber, (2004). *In Sync: Environmental Behavior Research and the Design of Learning Spaces*. Society for College and University Planning.

groupwork assignments and explore issues with each other. We will ensure that the needs of part-time, international and postgraduate learners are considered as part of the planning process.

Objective 3: Continue to enhance the technological environment

We will ensure that all current teaching spaces are well equipped with a fit-for-purpose technological, teaching and learning infrastructure. We will promote the use of our IT Resource Room for skills practice and work towards the provision of a larger computer room to meet the needs of our skills-based modules. We will maintain and enhance the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment, which plays a key role in the implementation of universal design for learning principles and in ensuring that our resources are accessible and supportive for learners. Library digital resources will also be reviewed to ensure that there is a comprehensive match with programme and module needs. Making full use of our new learner records system, we will improve administrative communications to ensure timely delivery of information, smooth submission of assignments and confidential delivery of feedback.

Section 7: Enhancing teaching, learning and assessment through CPD

Continuous professional development is necessary to grow our capability at both College and individual level to operate successfully in a dynamic and changing environment. Carlow College supports staff development at programme, institution and national level.

Objective 1: Increase the number of staff with qualifications in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Carlow College, through its financial support for staff undertaking post-doctoral qualifications, has demonstrated its commitment to up-skilling teaching staff in teaching, learning and assessment. We will continue this support and, along with our partners, develop flexible mechanisms to enable staff to acquire these qualifications. We will encourage staff to undergo training in specific areas (for example technology-enabled teaching and assessment) so that they can share their expertise with their peers. The possession of a teaching-related qualification will be an important criterion in the recruitment of new staff.

Objective 2: Provide on-going CPD opportunities for academic and support staff

We will encourage staff to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning by designating specific periods of the academic calendar to staff development (both non-accredited and accredited). During these periods (a week in June and two days during the Autumn and Spring mid-terms) the calendar will be kept clear to allow for workshops and seminars facilitated by experts in teaching and learning as well as more informal peer-to-peer discussion groups and events. Slots can also be used for technological instruction on Microsoft Office through our IT Academy training. The programme of events will be arranged by the *Teaching and Learning Committee* and will be informed by national policies, feedback from staff surveys and staff evaluations. During the academic year we will facilitate staff to attend events organized by the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning* and promote their initiatives such as the National Seminar Series, Digital Badges etc. We will also explore the possibility of subscribing to online CPD training packages.

Objective 3: Improve accessibility of teaching, learning and assessment resources

We will provide a dedicated teaching and learning space on the staff portal where new and continuing staff can access policies, guidelines and handbooks as well as scholarship of teaching and learning resources and links to useful online articles. This space will be managed by the Teaching and Learning Committee but will also have mechanisms to assist staff in sharing good practice and building ‘communities of practice’. We will also designate a space where hard format resources are available to staff.

Objective 4: Promote research-led and research informed teaching

Carlow College has a range of incentives to promote scholarly activity to strengthen the link between teaching and research, including doctoral and post-doctoral research leave, publication bursaries and financial assistance in attending conferences to deliver papers. We will review these incentives and, in partnership with staff, enhance and develop new initiatives to strengthen the teaching-research nexus.