



**CARLOW  
COLLEGE**  
ST. PATRICK'S

# Quality Assurance Policy

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**TITLE: *QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY***

<b>Effective Date</b>	07 February 2018	<b>Version</b>	02
<b>Approved By</b>	Management Board <i>and</i> Academic Council	<b>Date Approved</b>	31 January 2018 <sup>1</sup>
		<b>Review Date</b>	31 January 2021 <i>or as required</i>
<b>Superseded or Obsolete Policy / Procedure(s)</b>		<b>Owner</b>	
01 <i>Quality Assurance Handbook</i> (2011)		Quality Assurance Office	

**1: Purpose of Policy**

European co-operation in quality assurance has been a lasting legacy of the Bologna Declaration (1999) which put in motion the process whereby a European-wide development of comparable criteria and methodologies in the area of quality assurance were established.<sup>2</sup> With the advent of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (2010) and the publication of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (May 2015), a key goal of creating a robust quality system within the EHEA has been to develop a common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Carlow College, St. Patrick's (hereafter Carlow College) is committed to meeting and exceeding the standards laid out in the above mentioned guidelines.

In the context of higher education in Ireland, the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) were established in 2003 to ensure that all learning achievements were measured and related to each other in a coherent way; the NFQ was linked with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2009. The *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* has embedded quality assurance in higher education by mandating that all providers or linked providers 'establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services' each provider provides.<sup>4</sup> Responding to these statutory

<sup>1</sup> The *Quality Assurance Policy* was approved by Management Board 31 January 2018 and Academic Council 07 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education* (Bologna: Ministerial Conference, 19 June 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, Section 3, 28 (1).

requirements, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published in April 2016 statutory guidelines<sup>5</sup> underpinning their *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines*.<sup>6</sup>

These guidelines provide the framework for the *Quality Assurance Policy* (2018) at Carlow College. Furthermore, Carlow College is committed to creating a ‘quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels’.<sup>7</sup> At its very core, this ‘quality culture’ strives to be ‘all embracing and involves planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice’.<sup>8</sup> This Policy and associated documentation supersedes the *Quality Assurance Handbook* (2011).

## **2: Definitions**

*Higher Education Authority (HEA)*: leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system with the objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions.

*Institutional review*: a review to verify the effectiveness of an institution’s internal quality assurance and act as a catalyst for improvement.

*Programmatic review*: a provider-owned quality assurance procedure that addresses a single programme or group of related programmes.

*Quality Assurance*: the processes utilised to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality. It is also used to describe the enhancement of education and training provision and the standards attained by learners.

*Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)*: an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland and the validating agency for programmes of study at Carlow College.

## **3: Scope**

The *Quality Assurance Policy* extends to anyone involved in the provision of third level education at Carlow College, including, but not limited to: members of the Governing Body; staff members, learners and external stakeholders including those involved in activities that are subcontracted or carried out by other parties.

This Policy will be available to all Staff Members on the Carlow College Staff Portal and all learners on Moodle. Members of the public and external agencies can access this Policy on the Carlow College website.<sup>9</sup>

## **4: Policy Statement**

### **4.1: Governance and Management of Quality**

#### **4.1.1: Brief History of Carlow College, St Patrick’s**

Carlow College, dating from before the French Revolution, is Ireland’s oldest third-level Catholic institution. *Gardner’s Relief Act* (1782) led to the gradual relaxation of the Penal

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<sup>5</sup> *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines* (Dublin: QQI, April 2016).

<sup>6</sup> *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines* (Dublin: QQI, December 2015).

<sup>7</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *White Paper: Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines* (Dublin: QQI, February 2016), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> For the *Quality Assurance Policy* please visit:

[www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/QualityAssurance/QualityAssurancePolicy.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/QualityAssurance/QualityAssurancePolicy.pdf) and for the Appendices please visit: [www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/QualityAssurance/QualityAssurancePolicyAppendices.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/QualityAssurance/QualityAssurancePolicyAppendices.pdf).

Laws. Bishop James O’Keeffe of Kildare and Leighlin (1752–1787) took advantage of this relaxation to establish an institution of higher learning in Carlow. Carlow College was founded in 1782 and had its first admissions on 1 October 1793. From 1793 until 1892 Carlow College was both a lay college of the Humanities and a Seminary.

The 1840s proved to be a decade of particular growth for the College. In 1840 the second President of Carlow College, Fr Andrew Fitzgerald O.P. (1814–1843), successfully petitioned the University of London to accredit degrees at Carlow College in the Arts and Law. In 1844 the Foreign Missions Fund was established to provide bursaries to ecclesiastical students who were ordained for dioceses abroad; of the estimated 3,150 learners to be ordained at Carlow College, an estimated 2,050 were ordained for overseas dioceses. Another important development took place in 1847 when the third President of Carlow College, Dr James Taylor (1843–1850) purchased 127 acres in Knockbeg, Co. Carlow for the younger learners of the College.

With the *University Education (Ireland) Act 1879*, the Royal University of Ireland was established and the following year degrees offered at Carlow College were accredited by this educational body. In 1892 all lay learners of the College were transferred to St. Mary’s Knockbeg and Carlow College operated exclusively as a seminary for the education of priests until 1989. In 1990 Carlow College reclaimed its original remit by welcoming lay learners from all over Ireland to study third-level courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences. From 1990 the degrees at Carlow College were accredited by the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) (1990–2001), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) (2001–2012) and Qualities and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (2012–Present).

Since 1997 Carlow College has embarked on a building and renovation campaign which has seen the development of new lecture halls and the completion of the Kathleen Brennan Students Centre, P.J. Brophy Library and the Delany Archive (2006). As part of its on-going support for the arts the College donated land to the Carlow Local Authority for the development of the Centre for Contemporary Art and The George Bernard Shaw Theatre (VISUAL), an €18 million development project located in the heart of Carlow Town. In 2011 Carlow College refurbished Lennon House to provide on-campus accommodation. With future development in mind, in 2015 the College completed the purchase of a site adjoining its campus.

During its more than two-hundred-year history, Carlow College has educated generations of leaders, both lay and religious, in the public life of their day. Distinguished among its past learners were the Young Irelander, James Fintan Lalor, the Fenian, John O’Leary, pioneering churchman in Australia and the United States: John Therry and John England, the poet Richard D’Alton Williams, the impressionist artist, Frank O’Meara, and Paul Cullen, Ireland’s first Cardinal.

The College’s *Strategic Plan 2017–2022* builds on its distinguished history as a College of Teaching and Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The College is proud of its Catholic tradition and ethos and it re-affirms our commitment to social inclusion and equality of access to higher education: [www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Governance/StrategicPlan.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Governance/StrategicPlan.pdf).

#### **4.1.2: Vision**

Carlow College will educate, engage and inspire its learners through the provision of transformational learning and teaching experiences; it will enable a diverse learner and graduate population to achieve their academic and career potential and enable them to contribute to the ethical development of society at local, national and global levels.

### 4.1.3: Mission

In the shared enterprise of education, through teaching, learning, practice placement and research activity, Carlow College prizes excellence in all it does and endeavours to respond creatively to the changing needs of its learners, of potential employers and of society.

### 4.1.4: Values

The core values of Carlow College are its guiding principles and are built on our rich heritage as a Catholic higher education institution. They inform our day-to-day pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. The integrated college learning experience includes formal classroom instruction, critical engagement with ideas, exploration of links between theory, professional practice and lived experience. This develops the learners' capacity for academic excellence, leadership, social justice, career development and scholarship.

Our core values are:

- **Truth and Integrity** – We aim to create a research-led teaching and learning environment that is interdisciplinary in nature, that inspires openness to new ideas and critical thinking and that is ethical in practice.
- **Respect and Justice** – We recognise the diversity of our college community and seek to promote actively a spirit of inclusiveness, mutual respect and equality of opportunity and access.
- **Collaboration and Social Awareness** – By creating opportunities to work together, both internally and externally, we believe that collaboration and partnership can best contribute to the ethical development of local, national and global communities and society.
- **Friendliness and Service** – We are committed to maintaining a hospitable, learner-centred environment that recognises each learner's individual learning journey, and that promotes, values and supports their personal, social and cultural development.
- **Creativity and Innovation** – We believe that learning is about being open to new ideas and possibilities both in what we learn and how we learn. We are committed to being an educational space which promotes creativity and innovation as a way of responding to the contemporary world.

### 4.1.5: Governance

Carlow College is committed to developing and maintaining a governance and organisational structure that is effective, flexible, sustainable, transparent and viable. This commitment is outlined in the College's *Strategic Plan 2017–2022* whereby the following goals, in relation to governance and organisational structure, are prioritised: reviewing and monitoring on a continuous basis the effectiveness of organisational structures and processes within the College; outlining and revising key areas of accountability, roles and line management functions; continuing the development of a robust quality assurance system to inform and support governance and organisational structures; and ensuring that strategic targets set for the College have built-in mechanisms for monitoring their effectiveness.

The governance of Carlow College is managed by the Governing Body in accordance with the *Instrument of Governance* signed 22 November 2016. Their role is, in an overall capacity, to provide strategic guidance and to monitor the activities and effectiveness of the management of Carlow College; additionally, the Governing Body also has a statutory requirement to ensure

that the charitable mission of the College is safeguarded and carried out in accordance with the *Charities Act 2009*. The Governing Body constructively supports the President and the two decision-making bodies within the College, the Management Board and Academic Council. Both the Management Board and the Academic Council have reporting committees that have defined responsibilities which are published in their terms of references; all committees in Carlow College are required to have published terms of references in accordance with the *Template for Terms of References* (Appendix 1).

The Management Board is a high-level management body that supports the President in the development of the characteristic spirit of the College in accordance with its Catholic ethos and the fostering of scholarship and academic excellence, research and engagement with the educational sector. The Board makes decisions on all corporate matters of fundamental importance in accordance with relevant State legislation, and in alignment with policies and procedures as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills, QQI and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The Management Board, as the highest-level management body of the College, is responsible for managing risks and reporting annually to the Audit Committee of the Governing Body. This Board is supported by the Academic Council, Finance, Estates and Risk Committee and Strategic Development Committee.

The Academic Council is responsible for the governance and management of academic affairs and is appointed by the President under devolved authority from the Governing Body. It sets in place the academic governance framework and oversees the establishment, maintenance and development of quality assurance policies and procedures for all educational programmes within the College. The primary role of the Academic Council is to uphold academic standards at Carlow College. The Vice President for Academic Affairs / Registrar leads the Academic Affairs division within the College and, as chair of Academic Council, reports on a quarterly basis to the Academic Committee of the Governing Body. All areas of programme development, review and (re-)validation fall under the remit of Academic Council with specific leadership responsibilities being delegated to the Office of the Registrar comprising the: Vice President for Academic Affairs / Registrar; Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs and Assistant Registrar for Strategic Development.

The *Quality System Structure Chart* is presented in Appendix 2 and a summary of this quality system is detailed in Appendix 3.

#### **4.1.6: Management of Quality Assurance**

Carlow College is committed to maintaining and developing an organisation that can deliver its mission according to the values of the College. It has developed a quality assurance system that is based on these values and enhances the College's ability to meet its strategic objectives. The current management of quality assurance was initiated in September 2015 and supersedes the previous system. This system was based on a Listening Exercise with all staff. The resulting inputs led to a document that identified the areas of the institution that needed improvement. A dedicated team, comprising internal staff members, reviewed the inputs from the Listening Exercise and developed an organogram through inputs from the staff at a workshop in September 2016. The *Organisational Chart* is presented in Appendix 4 and a summary of the high-level functions within the College is detailed in Appendix 5. This whole process ensured the clarification of roles and responsibilities within the College.

While every staff member in the College has a role in quality assurance, the primary activities are carried out by the various committees within the College (see Appendix 2: *Quality System Structure Chart*). All activities of Carlow College are guided by its mission and the guidelines for the activities of the College are enumerated in college policies and procedures (see *Section*

2: *Documented Approach to Quality Assurance*). College policies and procedures inform staff and management activities, and inform learners and other stakeholders as to what they can expect of Carlow College.

Policies and procedures are implemented through the relevant offices; either through the Line Manager or through a consultation of the relevant committee within the area. Carlow College evaluates the management of quality assurance systems annually through staff workshops, feedback on specific policies through the Staff Portal and through the regular meetings of area offices.

#### **4.1.7: Embedding a Quality Culture**

Carlow College is committed to developing and embedding a quality culture in all its endeavours: a culture that embodies planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice. As such, the College is committed to empowering all stakeholders to participate in the development, maintenance and improvement of a robust and fit-for-purpose quality assurance system. Learners, staff and external stakeholders of the College are the pivotal actors in the process of embedding a quality culture to ensure that the ‘twin purposes’ of quality assurance activities, accountability and enhancement, are upheld to create trust in Carlow College’s institutional performance.<sup>10</sup>

##### *4.1.3.1: Learner Engagement in Quality Assurance*

Carlow College seeks to build a college community based on a culture of mutual respect, support for professional development, a learner-centred focus and a commitment to quality and excellence in all that we do. Learners are at the heart of Carlow College’s vision, mission and values. Their engagement in the quality culture of the College centres on education and participation, and is facilitated by the Quality Assurance Officer in conjunction with the Head of Student Services. The officers of the Students’ Union receive annual guidance at the start of each academic year to a) introduce key concepts surrounding quality assurance and b) empower this elected leadership team to lead in the planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice in the College.<sup>11</sup> Learners have an active on-going role in providing feedback to academic programmes<sup>12</sup> and in the daily life of the College.

##### *4.1.3.2: Staff Engagement in Quality Assurance*

Carlow College is committed to developing and promoting the College as a welcoming, friendly, hospitable and inclusive place for all staff, creating a working environment that is based on mutual respect, transparency, timely communication, collaboration, continual quality improvement, equitable practices, effective leadership and clear accountability. Carlow College recognises that engagement by staff is vital in providing input and feedback on strategic developments. To assist with embedding a quality culture, there are two staff workshops held at the beginning and end of the academic year to inform, review and consult with staff to determine areas for improvement and build on areas of strength. These workshops, underpinned by inclusivity, reflection and collaboration, provide bases for immediate, intermediate and long-term strategic planning. Throughout the academic year, the Staff Portal

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<sup>10</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> For more on learner engagement in programme development see Section 4.3.3.1.

<sup>12</sup> For more on learner engagement in the daily life of the College see Section 4.7 and Appendix 31: *Supports for Learners Within the College*.

on the College's website is utilised to garner responses and comments to promote a quality culture within the College.

#### *4.1.3.3: External Stakeholder Engagement in Quality Assurance*

Carlow College is committed to involving external stakeholders at the local, regional, national and international level to support the continuous improvement and enhancement of our quality assurance methods. External stakeholders are intimately involved in programme development and cyclical reviews, for example, by serving on independent panels or participating in quality surveys. The College also actively engages with employers of graduates to ascertain the benefits of having our graduates on their workforce and determine what steps are needed to improve the professional skills of our graduates.

An important graduate attribute of Carlow College is social engagement. A number of our graduates engage with volunteer organisations at the local and regional level to provide our learners with invaluable learning experiences, which in turn further enhance our academic programmes. Likewise, a number of our programmes have a practice placement component where agencies / schools provide feedback to both learners and staff members

## **4.2: Documented Approach to Quality Assurance**

Carlow College is committed to providing a comprehensive and documented approach to quality assurance to ensure that policies and associated documents are both effective and fit-for-purpose as outlined by the *Core Statutory Quality (QA) Guidelines* (2016). Recognising that college policies and associated documents should be easily accessible to both internal and / or external parties, Carlow College publishes policies and associated documents on its website; quality assurance related policies and associated documents are found under the Quality Assurance webpage. Office-specific policies and associated documents are found under the relevant office webpages. All staff members can access all policies and associated documents via the Staff Portal and learners can access all policies and associated documents via Moodle.

### **4.2.1: Documented Policies and Procedures**

To comply with the *Core Statutory Quality (QA) Guidelines* (2016) and to encourage a more comprehensive quality system, all new policies created and approved by either the Management Board and / or Academic Council will adhere to the *Policy on Policies* (see Appendix 6), which contains, among other documents listed below, a *Template for College Policies* (see Appendix 6.1). In compliance with changing legislative requirements at the national level, evolving best practice at the international level and changing circumstances within the College, policies and associated documents are continually self-monitored by the relevant owner of the policy as outlined in the 'Monitoring and Review' section of the relevant policy; the Quality Assurance Office tracks the overall management of policies and procedures within the College (see Appendix 7).

### **4.2.2: A Comprehensive System**

As stated above in *Section 4.1.7: Embedding a Quality Culture*, the College strives to embed quality assurance in all areas and at all levels. To achieve this objective, each policy created must not only embody and support the mission, values and strategic aim of Carlow College, but the policy owner should, during the drafting stages of the policy, actively engage with the principal parties affected by the policy to create a document that is fit-for-purpose and effective.

The procedural framework for developing policies and associated documents follow five key stages: initiation, development, approval, implementation and monitoring and review (see Appendix 6.4). Once the process for drafting a policy has been initiated, a committee within the College will begin the development stage of the process whereby a Sub-Group will be convened to explore all aspects of the proposed policy. After a period of robust consultation with potential stakeholders affected by the proposed policy, the policy is submitted to either the Management Board and / or Academic Council for consultation and approval. All policies brought for consultation and approval must contain the *Policy Consultation and Communication Plan* (see Appendix 6.2) and the *Policy Implementation Document* (see Appendix 6.3). The final stage for developing policies contains two sub-steps: monitoring and ongoing review. Best practice dictates that during the monitoring step a member of staff not tasked with the drafting of the policy evaluates the effectiveness of the policy; this should be undertaken during the first year after the effective date of the policy. The process for on-going review should be completed in accordance with the ‘Monitoring and Review’ section.

### **4.3: Programme of Education and Training**

Carlow College is committed to social inclusion and equality of access to higher education whilst maintaining the highest levels of academic attainment and achievement, focusing on the individual learner’s education, professional and personal development. At the core of this commitment is our programmes of higher education and training, built on the values of: truth and integrity; respect and justice; collaboration and social awareness; friendliness and service; creativity and innovation.

The academic programmes at Carlow College reflect the core mission of our College and align with our current *Strategic Plan 2017–2022*. They conform to the *National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)* (2003) and the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (2005). All academic programmes in the College are currently validated by QQI.<sup>13</sup>

Our academic programmes also conform to international and national standards regarding the provision of education, notably the: *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (2015); *Qualification and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, which inform the *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (2016) and *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (2016).

#### **4.3.1: Programme Development and Approval**

Carlow College places excellence in teaching and learning at the heart of programme design. All programmes are developed in accordance with a strong commitment to a learner-centred ethos. As such, programmes draw on the institutional experience and expertise, the history and heritage of the College. Simultaneously, Carlow College recognises that higher education has a responsibility to respond to the challenges and opportunities of national and local cultural, social and economic trends. Consequently, Carlow College programme development and approval is informed by current market research; contact with employers, policy makers, service providers and service users; contact with other education providers; public bodies, professional bodies and cultural institutions and relevant government reports, policies and regulatory initiatives.

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<sup>13</sup> Carlow College is compliant with section 65 of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* which mandates that the College have arrangements in place for the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL). Our learners are protected by the Department of Education and Skills.

The process for programme development and approval are laid out in the document titled *Programme Development and Approval (Undergraduate / Postgraduate Programmes)* (see Appendix 8). The process for programme review and revalidation are guided by the *QQI Programme Validation Manual* (2016) and adheres to the *QQI Programme Review Manual* (2016/17) and is detailed in the *Programme Review and Revalidation Process* (Appendix 9).

All programmes at Carlow College, regardless of whether they are a new programme or a programme seeking revalidation, are required to institute a Programme Design Team responsible for ensuring that all programme documentation is completed in line with Carlow College quality assurance standards and the above mentioned international and national standards regarding the provision of education. The *Guidelines for the Establishment of Programme Review and New Programme Design Teams* (Appendix 10) outlines the process for establishing the Programme Design Team responsible for New Programme Proposals and Programme Review and Revalidation.

#### **4.3.2: Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition**

Carlow College is committed to ensuring that pre-defined and published regulations are consistently applied covering all phases of the learner 'life cycle', e.g. learner admission, progression, recognition and certification.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the approved quality assurance policies and procedures related to Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition conform to the *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training*.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of these policies and procedures is to ensure clarity, transparency, accountability, efficacy and equity in relation to learner admission, progression and recognition at Carlow College.

##### **4.3.2.1: Learner Admission**

The *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy* (Appendix 11) of the College serves to ensure that prospective and / or admitted learners:

- are substantially and accurately informed regarding Carlow College, the programmes of education and associated pathways which we offer, and the learning environment and experience we provide;
- are at an appropriate stage in their learning development to be admitted to their specified programmes of education;
- have appropriate recognition of education and training qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- are assisted and supported in their introduction and transition to third level education.

In keeping with our learner-centred ethos, following admission, learners are orientated and inducted to the College and their academic programme of choice at each stage of their studies.

Our (re-) orientation and (re-) induction process is a collaborative initiative between senior academic management, academic staff, learner support services, existing learners and the Students' Union. This process is laid out in the *Guidelines for Orientation and Induction for New and Continuing Learners* (Appendix 11.1).

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<sup>14</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (Dublin: QQI, April 2016), pp. 32-3.

#### ***4.3.2.2: Learner Progression***

The recognition of learner achievement is signalled through progression and completion of programmes of education. Learner progression is subject to the achievement of prescribed learning outcomes, measured via a range of assessment modes and is conducted on a modular basis (see *Section 4.6: Assessment of Learners*). Minimum standards of achievement are set for learner progression to a higher stage of a programme of education. At each annual stage during this journey, learner achievement is assessed and feedback is provided to learners. Further details are provided in the *Admission Guidelines and Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning* (Appendix 11.2). Achievement and progression is recorded via external examination boards to which external examiners are appointed by the Academic Council of the College, this is detailed in the *Appointment of External Examiners Policy* (Appendix 17).

#### ***4.3.2.3: Learner Certification***

Learner achievement at progression stage is recognised through the publication of assessment results and at award stage is recognised through the provision of certification awards. All certified awards are made within the NFQ and certified by QQI. Graduates of the College are conferred with their QQI degree parchment and provided with academic transcripts and their European Diploma Supplement (see Appendix 18).

#### ***4.3.2.4: Learner Support***

The College places substantial emphasis on its learner-centred approach to education. The effective support of learners throughout the learner life-cycle is considered an important aspect of its duty of care. This duty of care, while held by the Office of the Registrar, is recognised throughout all functions of the College and is evident in the cross-function collaborative initiatives engaged in by staff (see *Section 4.7: Supports for Learners*).

### **4.3.3: Programme Monitoring and Review**

The programmes at Carlow College are monitored, reviewed and revised on a regular basis to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of learners and society.<sup>16</sup> Mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing programmes include: five Programme Board Meetings, learner feedback, external examiner reports and annual programme monitoring reports. The rigorous monitoring process allows for the adaptation of programme elements to ensure that programmes remain relevant and effective. Monitoring provides the opportunity to reflect on current practice and, in doing so, propose new changes to improve the delivery systems; thus, enhancing the learning experience. The evidence generated through the monitoring process forms an integral part of the cyclical programmatic review process conducted every five years.

#### ***4.3.3.1: Programme Feedback***

##### *Programme Boards*

The Programme Board meets five times each academic year with a primary function to oversee: operational control and programme monitoring; learner feedback; programme planning and development. These meetings are important for highlighting issues as they develop during the delivery of any programme or module. The remit of the Programme Board includes monitoring: learner enrolment data; attrition and completion data; graduate progression to employment or other educational programmes; and evaluations of the programme by learners and academic

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<sup>16</sup> This is in keeping with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), pp. 12-13.

staff. Decisions and / or recommendations made by the Programme Boards are referred initially to the Office of the Registrar and subsequently to the Academic Council.

The evidence generated through the monitoring process is documented by the Programme Board Chairs in the *Programme Board Monitoring Report (PBMR)* (see Appendix 12). This report includes information on: learner feedback via surveys and learner representatives; pass rates, attrition / retention initiatives; external examiners reports and suggested actions (where appropriate); and it documents decisions and actions taken at the Programme Board level. The Office of the Registrar will review each PBMR and will draft the *Cross Programme Review Report (CPRR)* (see Appendix 13).

### *Learner Feedback*

In order to ensure that all programmes continue to provide an effective learning experience, it is essential to have a multi-faceted approach to gathering / collating learner feedback. There are four avenues through which learners contribute to the ongoing monitoring of programmes:

- a) learners are given the opportunity to comment on the delivery of modules through a *Teaching Effectiveness Questionnaire* (see Appendix 14), and on programmes through an *Annual Programme Evaluation Form* (see Appendix 15). Recent graduates are asked to complete a *Graduate Survey* (see Appendix 16).
- b) learners may approach their Academic Advisor in order to highlight specific problems relevant to that particular year or module of study.<sup>17</sup> The issue can then be raised by the Academic Advisor at the Programme Board level and be considered at higher levels (e.g. the Office of the Registrar and / or Academic Council).
- c) all programmes have an elected learner representative for each stage on their respective Programme Board. The learner representative can raise learner matters for consideration at the Programme Board level, which can also be brought to the attention of Academic Council;
- d) the Students' Union convenes regular meetings of all learners representatives and members of the Students' Union represent the student body on different college committees.

### *External Examiner Reports and Feedback*

Carlow College complies fully with the *Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining (Revised February 2015)*. The annual reports and feedback received from external examiners are essential to ensuring that our programmes 'are reaching the standard that is certified by their qualification (award) in the context of the National Framework for Qualifications.' The nominations of external examiners are sought via the Programme Board Chair so as to encourage a pool of potential candidates. Final approval for the appointment of external examiners is granted by the Academic Council (see Appendix 17: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*). The written recommendations of the College and the external examiners are discussed with staff so as to reappraise how programmes are delivered to learners. The written recommendations of external examiners are discussed at the Programme Board level. Any consequent decision taken by the Programme Board is put to the Academic Council for consideration and documented in the PBMR.

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<sup>17</sup> Please see the Carlow College *Academic Standards and Assessment Regulations*: [www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Registrar/AcademicStandardsandAssessmentRegulations.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Registrar/AcademicStandardsandAssessmentRegulations.pdf).

#### **4.3.3.2: Programme Review**

Every programme is formally reviewed and submitted for revalidation to QQI on a cyclical five-year basis. The programme revalidation approach follows a similar process to programme development and approval (see *Section 4.3.1: Programme Development and Approval*). However, in addition, the formal review draws on the evidence generated through all of the review mechanisms outlined above. It also takes into consideration: specific revision to programme content vis-à-vis current research in the relevant discipline; the needs of contemporary society; emerging trends in teaching, learning and assessment; ever-changing learner learning environment. The programme revalidation approach follows a similar process to programme development and approval.

### **4.4: Staff Recruitment, Management and Development**

Carlow College is committed to employing and retaining talented people with the right skills whilst at the same time complying with recommended best practices and legal requirements. The College believes that organisations must strive to recruit and retain the highest calibre of employees in order to meet the needs of its learners and this is done by recruiting and retaining lecturers and support services employees who believe in delivering educational excellence in accordance with our *Strategic Plan 2017–2022*, which incorporates our core vision, mission, values and goals.

#### **4.4.1: Staff Recruitment**

In order to attract, develop and retain a highly talented workforce, Carlow College prides itself as an employer of choice with a strong and diverse workforce, strong leadership skills, opportunities for career growth and development skills, a commitment to work / life balance and providing its employees with the opportunity to add value to their roles and positions. This is done through our benefits packages which includes our Employee Assistance Programme, 10% contribution towards employee pension schemes, sick leave, training and development, succession planning and recruitment opportunities etc.

Carlow College invests considerable time and financial resources into the recruitment process, ensuring a satisfactory result for both the candidate and the College. Successful recruitment depends on the success of each stage of the recruitment process (see Appendix 19: *Recruitment Policy*). In addition to our policy on recruitment, the College has a *Garda Vetting Policy* (see Appendix 20) which ensures that all potential candidates and current staff members, undergo Garda Vetting, thus ensuring that pre-defined and published regulations and legislation are consistently adhered to.

The College believes that all recruitment activities should provide fairness, effectiveness, transparency and equality for all involved during the recruitment process. In filling any vacancy, both Line Managers and staff members are required to follow a systematic process designed to ensure the most cost-effective deployment of the Colleges' current and potential employees. Carlow Colleges' *Recruitment Policy* provides comprehensive information, steps and guidelines to all involved throughout the recruitment process, ensuring clear instruction, hence facilitating the College in appointing suitably qualified staff members to deliver its vision, mission and ethos, thus providing a centre of educational excellence for its learners.

#### **4.4.2: Staff Communication**

Carlow College believes that open, effective communication is essential to producing an efficient and motivating work environment of mutual understanding and confidence. Carlow College endeavours to keep all employees informed on all relevant issues and encourages

employees to participate in the communication process, thus ensuring that communication is a two-way process, with important information cascading correctly throughout the organisation. We believe that every employee has a responsibility to ensure they play their part in developing effective communications practice. The College continuously welcomes suggestions and ideas from its employees as it provides a space and forum for employees to effectively and positively contribute to continuous improvement of College business activities (see *Section 1: Governance and Management of Quality*).

The College succeeds in achieving this through many different streams and methods of communication such as one-to-one meetings between Line Managers and staff members, staff days, staff meetings, staff consultation through our Quality Assurance System, email communications from Line Managers, committee meetings, staff representation, regular communication from HR and the provision of an open-door policy where all employees can channel their thoughts, ideas and concerns. The College believes that regular and ongoing communication provides for better working relationships, which in turn fosters a positive culture for change, thus maintaining a progressive and positive working and learning environment. Creating an environment and atmosphere where everyone is involved and responsible for good communication promotes a mutual and supportive environment where everyone feels included, informed and consulted, which is always at the forefront of the College's communication approach.

#### **4.4.3: Staff Development**

Carlow College strives to provide an environment where all employees understand the impact their contributions have on the achievement of the Colleges' strategic plan, vision, mission and goals. The College continuously supports employees who are eager to develop professionally and the College provides the opportunity for ongoing professional growth. The College reinforces this belief through the Performance Management and Development Programme that culminates in a review of annual performance (see Appendix 21: *Performance Management & Development Policy*). The College's Performance Management and Development Programme ensures that the work performance and learning of every employee is managed effectively and fairly. This is done through regular one-to-ones and ongoing feedback between the relevant Line Managers and their team including the annual review / appraisal which provides goals for Line Managers and employees that emanate from the department / function and overall College strategic plans.

The College is committed to supporting new staff members and ensuring their smooth transition into their new positions. Prior to starting their employment, the new staff member meets with their Line Manager who will make sure that there is total clarity around responsibilities and procedures. If the new employee is replacing a previous employee, the Line Manager should ensure that the necessary documents, emails, contacts *et cetera* are handed over; all necessary introductions should also be made. A mentor will be identified, who may be the Line Manager, but can also be a member of staff with whom the new employee will be working. The mentor will be available to answer day-to-day queries and provide guidance and support.

The College strives to achieve high standards of performance and service at all times. It is our goal to train and support all employees to carry out their roles to a high standard and to help them achieve and work to the best of their ability. It is essential that employees are engaged and have a rewarding role in the College with opportunities to develop their potential and use their abilities to maximise their contributions. Continuous development is necessary to grow

our capability at both College and individual level to operate successfully in a dynamic and changing environment.

We recognise that the key to successfully achieving our mission lies in developing and harnessing the talents and energies of our employees. We recognise the unique contribution of individual employees and are committed to providing the necessary supports to enable employees to contribute effectively to our strategic development whilst fulfilling their personal career aspirations and goals.

Therefore, as part of the Performance Management Development Programme, the College identifies learning requirements and needs and provides support for employees to attend internal CPD workshops and external conferences and events, study leave, on the job training, role specific training, technological training of Microsoft Office through our IT Academy training etc. The College may offer other financial assistance for other educational programmes in addition to the aforementioned supports, which have been identified within the Performance Management Development Process and which demonstrates value and benefit to the College and the role in which the employee encompasses. The College will treat each case individually and employees are requested to seek information from the Human Resources Office (see Appendix 22: *Professional Leave Request Form*).

Academic Staff who register and complete a postgraduate diploma in higher education and / or complete their doctoral studies receive financial assistance (see Appendix 23: *Staff Doctoral Bursary*). Carlow College encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research by making available each year five days of professional / post-doctoral leave for academic staff members to pursue research interests externally, e.g. visit libraries and archives, meet with publishers or collaborators, attend committee meetings of professional associations etc. (see Appendix 24: *Staff Postgraduate Study Leave Application Form*).

Carlow College seeks to encourage and facilitate staff members to publish their research in book form. The College recognises that academic publishers increasingly seek a financial contribution from authors to defray publishing costs. A grant in-aid of publication funds has therefore been put in place to which staff members can apply when they are at the stage of submitting a manuscript to an established and respected publisher (see Appendix 25: *Staff Book Publications Bursary*).

Carlow College recognises that the process for attending high-profile conferences and presenting academic papers is at the core of good academic teaching and research practice. These presentations are seen to enhance both the reputation of academic staff and Carlow College. Wherever possible, members of academic staff will be facilitated to attend conferences where they have been invited to make a presentation of their work. Financial support is available to such staff to enable them to attend and present at both national and international conferences (see Appendix 26: *Academic Conference Attendance Expenses Guidelines and Procedures*).

#### **4.5: Teaching and Learning**

Teaching and learning at Carlow College is rooted in a holistic vision of education, which promotes the professional development of learners and staff, including their aesthetic, intellectual, cultural, emotional, creative, moral, social, political and spiritual development. This vision of education provides vital opportunities for the development of awareness and the appreciation of cultural values, always mindful of Irish, European and global contexts.

Informed by the Bologna Process and emerging international trends, the *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* prioritised the need for a uniform and consistent teaching and learning strategy that converted best practice into standard practice.<sup>18</sup> Building on this strategy, the following year the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* was established to enhance teaching and learning for all learners in higher education. Carlow College has responded to these new initiatives in the area of teaching and learning by actively encouraging, and supporting, staff members to pursue postgraduate education and qualifications in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Moreover, the College has a dedicated Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee that is comprised of staff members and a learner representative and charged with ensuring that the *Teaching and Learning Policy* (see Appendix 27) is placed at the core of our academic programmes.

#### **4.5.1: Promotion of Teaching and Learning**

Carlow College is committed to ensuring that teaching and learning practices within the College promote enquiry and critical evaluation and encourage learners to take an active role in the classroom. This learner-centred approach to teaching and learning plays an important role in stimulating learners' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.<sup>19</sup> Our commitment to creating a learner-centred teaching and learning environment is reflected in the following principles:

1. The provision of programmes of education which are appropriate to, and consistent with, the standards set-out under the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. *We require all of our certified programmes to be validated under the NFQ rubric. Where professional bodies establish criteria for professional award standards, the College will ensure that these standards are incorporated into the relevant programmes.*
2. The need for ongoing measurement and evaluation as a means to continuous improvement in the learning experience and outcome. *We will develop and implement an institution-wide evaluation process to inform our practice and identify areas for ongoing investment.*
3. The ongoing development and enhancement of pedagogical practice. *We are committed to the development and delivery of a teaching strategy informed by current development in the field and directed towards the fullest utilising of the advantages of small group practice.*
4. The diverse nature of our student body and the growing requirement for promoting inclusiveness in the design and delivery of programmes of education at third level. *We look to respond to this need through the development of flexible progression pathways and the use of a variety of delivery channels.*
5. The provision of a teaching and learning experience which is learner-centred, researched and research-informed. *For example, we look to support the individual learning journey of each of our learners, maintain a high ratio of fulltime faculty qualified at doctoral level, and encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research.*

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<sup>18</sup> *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* (Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, January 2011), p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 9.

6. The role of third level education in developing individual capacity for autonomous learning and critical engagement with the world. *For example, our degree programmes are designed to require and support for learners to develop these capacities as they progress through their final two years in particular.*
7. The importance of technology in enabling new modes of instruction, assessment, and of educational pathways. *We are committed to ongoing investment in our IT infrastructure and in requiring students to develop an enhanced IT literacy.*
8. The importance and impact of the functionality and use of the built environment and infrastructure of the College.
9. The value of ongoing staff development and research engagement. *We will provide support for staff in the development of their teaching practice and in maintaining a research engagement with their disciplinary communities.*
10. The nature and promotion of the staff and student body as a collegial community of learning. *As a collegial community of learning we value the personal and professional development of both learners and staff and seek to foster an open community that values critical reflection and engagement. For example, we express this in our teaching methodologies, an openness to inter and multi-disciplinary discourses, and in staff-learner relationships characterised by respect.*

#### **4.5.2: Placement Experiences**

Carlow College has a recognised tradition of providing high quality placement opportunities for learners on a range of programmes with an applied or professional remit. This is evidenced by our experience delivering the BA in Applied Social Studies in Social Care, the BA in Humanities and the BA in Citizenship and Community Studies. The practice placement within the specified programmes gives practical expression to the core mission of our College, namely, to produce ethical practitioners and responsible learners who understand and can apply the level of professional attitudes and behaviour required of them throughout their programme of study.

Practice placement also builds on our relationship with public and professional bodies and responds to relevant government reports, policies and regulatory initiatives. The objective of placement is to support learners to develop the relevant knowledge, skills and competencies in preparation for the professional working environment in their chosen field. Placement in our academic programmes complies with current legislation, policy and standards and is cognisant of emerging trends with professional practice. Specifically, we are committed to compliance with the national legislative context through the Carlow College *Garda Vetting Policy* (see Appendix 20) and to safe practice through Fitness to Practice.<sup>20</sup> While the legislative context is essential in terms of meeting our statutory requirements, it also helps to inform our overall assessment of learners on an individual basis in relation to their fitness and suitability for practice.

Placement is a core element of the learner experience and the management of the placement component within our programmes adheres to best practice in teaching, supervision, learner support and assessment. This requires providing appropriate and relevant learning

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<sup>20</sup> Learners enrolled on the Applied Social Studies in Social Care programme, adhere to the *IASCE Fitness to Practice Policy* (Irish Association of Social Care Educators, 2017). Learner enrolled on the Humanities programme, and who are enrolled on the Catechetics Module, adhere to the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, 2nd edn (Teaching Council of Ireland, 2016).

environments along with ensuring that learners have placement opportunities and experiences which are representative of the breadth and diversity of the field. We emphasise the development of reflective and analytical thinking skills through experiential learning which they can relate to their future professional practice. The placement component is subject to ongoing monitoring and review with internal and external stakeholders in order to remain relevant to both learner and employer needs. The process is underpinned by a commitment to equality of opportunity, transparency and fairness and the appropriate staffing and resourcing of placement working in partnership with placement providers.

#### **4.5.3: Commitment to Conducting Ethical Research**

Research is at the core of all teaching and learning in third-level institutions. Significantly, at the core of all research are the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity. The Research Ethics Approval Committee (REAC) is a committee that ensures that all individuals involved in research projects via Carlow College are familiar with, and adhere to, the appropriate ethical guidelines, policies and procedures laid down by their disciplinary or professional body (see Appendix 28: *Research Ethics Advisory Policy*). REAC places a special focus on the concept that particular attention must be paid to any research involving vulnerable participants. One role of REAC involves the design and conveyance of ethical guidelines, checklists and consent forms to all supervisors involved with learners at undergraduate level in Carlow College (see Appendix 28.1: *Ethics Checklist for Learners*). A second role of this committee involves the discussion and consideration of approval to undergraduate learners who wish to involve vulnerable participants in their research projects when these matters are brought to the committees' attention by the dissertation supervisors. A third role of REAC involves consideration of granting ethical approval to postgraduate learners before any research involving human or animal participants commence.

#### **4.5.4: Inclusiveness in Teaching and Learning**

Carlow College is committed to ensuring that our academic programmes promote inclusive strategies that support all learners, including learners with 'hidden disabilities' (such as learners with learning differences and / or mental health conditions). Academic staff work collaboratively with the Academic Resource Office and Student Services to ensure that all learners have equitable access to the learning environment (see *Sections 4.6: Assessment of Learners* and *4.7: Supports for Learners*). These strategies are informed by the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2009).

#### **4.6: Assessment of Learners**

Carlow College recognises that the assessment of learners is one of the most important elements of higher education. Assessment is a 'potent strategic tool for educators allowing them to spell out the types of learning that will be rewarded and thus guide learners into effective approaches to study'.<sup>21</sup> In all our assessment practices Carlow College adhere to the policies, criteria and guidelines outlined in the QQI documents: *Assessments and Standards* (Revised 2013) and *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers* (Revised 2013).

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<sup>21</sup> R. James and C. McInnis, *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities* (Victoria: Centre for the Study of Higher Education University of Melbourne, 2002), retrieved from <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/docs/AssessingLearning.pdf>.

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 understand their subject, interact with the content and link new knowledge with already known concepts and principles. Our policies on assessment reflect this approach.

#### **4.6.1: Provision of Information on Assessment to Learners**

Carlow College ensures that clear information on assessment components and procedures is made easily available via the College website and other public fora to assist prospective learners in making informed choices about programmes and modules (see Appendix 29: *Assessment of Learners Policy*).

Learners on our programmes have easy access to assessment information via Moodle, their learner handbook and / or the College website. This information will include scheduling of assessments, proportion of marks carried by each assessment component, marking criteria for different types of assessment, past examination papers and any other relevant details.

Programme and module coordinators will make sure that learners are regularly reminded of the relevant assessment regulations and of their obligations and entitlements. In particular, learners are made aware of the consequences of late or missed assignments and failure to present themselves for examination.

#### **4.6.2: Best Practice in Assessment**

Carlow College ensures by means of annual review and monitoring of our programmes that assessment of learners is carried out professionally and in accordance with the extensive scholarship that is available on this topic. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee play a key role in these processes. This committee includes learner representation to ensure that learners are involved in the review of assessment procedures.

Lecturers and tutors receive training in best practice in assessment to ensure that the assessments they set support the principles for assessment as outlined in *QQI Assessments and Standards* (Revised 2013). This ensures that assessments are set and marked by people who understand the relationship between assessment and learner achievement of knowledge and skills.

Module and programme design teams make certain that assessment components are explicitly linked with intended learning outcomes and appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative. They also ensure that overall assessment workloads are reasonable and are as varied as possible.

Following current best practice in assessment, learners on Carlow College programmes experience as many different types of assessment as possible. There is a balance between formative and summative assessment. Assessment starts right from the beginning of the first-year modules to provide opportunities for early feedback to learners about their learning progress and information to teaching staff about what types of learning support might be needed by individual learners.

The purpose of different assessment components will be explained to learners, in particular their 'real world' application. Learners are encouraged to become active participants in the assessment process and are given opportunities for self-review and / or peer review.

Lecturers and tutors exploit the benefits of technology to enhance formative and summative assessment and feedback.

### **4.6.3: Guaranteeing Consistency and Fairness**

Our policies ensure that assessment is fairly applied to all learners and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures. All assessments are criterion-based and grading criteria are made available to learners in advance on Moodle, their learner handbook and / or the College website.

All assessments are marked in a timely fashion so that learners can track their progress and feedback can be effectively acted upon.

There are clear, fair and consistent guidelines for dealing with absence from assessments and late submission of written work. There are also clear fair and consistent guidelines for dealing with mitigating circumstances and for learner appeals.<sup>22</sup>

### **4.6.4: Guaranteeing Academic Integrity**

Assessment is fully documented and subject to checks within the quality process. Assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the guidelines and procedures. There are regular administrative verification checks to ensure accuracy.

There are clear guidelines on plagiarism and penalties for same (see Appendix 30: *Plagiarism Policy*).

Carlow College complies with QQI regulations around the makeup of the Board of Examiners, the frequency of meetings of the Board and decision-making procedures of the Board. Each programme has at least one expert external examiner. There is a policy in place for the appointment of external examiners and clear guideline on the responsibilities and duties of external examiners (see Appendix 17: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*).

### **4.6.5: Inclusiveness in Assessment**

Lecturers and tutors are encouraged to use inclusive approaches to assessment which value, promote and take account of diversity.

## **4.7: Supports for Learners**

Carlow College endeavours to support our learners' academic success by providing a variety of resources, professional services and supports which enhance the learner experience and assist our learners in meeting the demands of their academic goals, professional aspirations and personal commitments.<sup>23</sup>

Learner resources and supports play a vital role in fostering a positive, warm and nurturing learning environment which supports the well-being and integration of diverse learner groups into our college community. In partnership with college functions, academic programmes, Students' Union and our student body, we strive to ensure that the supports offered enable our learners to 'settle, stay and succeed' in their studies at Carlow College. A coherent and integrated range of supports and services exist within the College which are freely available to our learners (see Appendix 31: *Supports for Learners Within the College*).

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<sup>22</sup> Please see the Carlow College *Academic Standards and Assessment Regulations*: [www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Registrar/AcademicStandardsandAssessmentRegulations.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Portals/0/Registrar/AcademicStandardsandAssessmentRegulations.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 14.

#### 4.7.1: Quality Assurance Processes

Quality assurance processes are in operation to ensure that our services and supports are fit-for-purpose, accessible and that our learners are aware of the resources that exist. Information about the range of services available is communicated to our learners through:

- *Pre-admission activities:* College prospectus and website, service presentations and provision of information leaflets for school visits, recruitment fairs, open days, mature student interviews, and Further Education link modules.
- *Inductions and orientation programmes:* Information sessions delivered by Student Services and Supports during new and continuing learner inductions and orientations (see Appendix 11.1: *Guidelines for Orientation and Induction of New and Continuing Learners*).
- *Learner materials:* Learner handbooks, induction folders, service information leaflets, electronic noticeboards within the College and through the Academic Help Desk in the P.J. Brophy library.
- *Students' Union:* Information boards, emails, *Paddy's Spiel* Magazine, 'shout-outs' in class, and through the Class Rep structure.
- *Staff communication:* Resources and supports are actively promoted to academic, administrative and support staff through start of year meetings and regular emails sent to college staff throughout the year.
- *Follow-up learner communication:* Follow-up emails sent to learners advising them of the services and supports available, college events, information campaigns and workshop schedules.

Our commitment to continuous quality improvement is evidenced by the importance placed on our professional development through individual membership held by staff in their respective professional bodies. The College also benchmarks its services and supports through the institutional membership it holds of professional organisations such as the Confederation of Student Services in Ireland (CSSI) and the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD).

Internally, regular team meetings are held for each function which are supported by the Learner Resources Committee, a representative sub-committee of Academic Council charged with overseeing the promotion, co-ordination, monitoring and development of the learning resources, services and supports available to the student body (see Appendix 32: *Terms of Reference for the Learner Resources Committee*).

The 'settle, stay, succeed' focus is integral to the Student Services reporting system where each service reviews the achievements of the previous year and identifies goals and measurements for the next academic year which contribute to these themes (see Appendix 33: *End of Year Reporting Template*).

From induction to graduation, we monitor our learner perspectives on the quality of resources and learner supports through learner feedback surveys. These assist our understanding of our learners' needs and allow us to continue to develop and improve the services and supports we offer. Evaluations and any arising recommendations are considered on a cyclical basis and are reported through the College's strategic management processes.

Learner representation is actively sought, encouraged, valued and influential. Learner representation is evident at all levels within the College decision-making structure: Governing Body; Management Board; Academic Council and associated sub-committees. The College also operates Programme Boards which include two learner representatives from each stage of the programme. Programme Boards typically meet four times per year and learners are invited to meetings and encouraged to participate. Feedback from learners is a standing agenda item and offers an opportunity for class representatives to give their opinions on programmes and to bring forward any concerns their classes might have for discussion.

#### **4.8: Information and Data Management**

Carlow College recognises that information and data are important assets which comprise evidence of our activities, and facilitate informed decision-making and strategic planning.

At present, learner information is recorded through several channels and formats, including online registration, manual files and digital files, typically utilising the Microsoft Office suite of software. Qualitative and quantitative measures are compiled by staff using Excel spreadsheets. The current system is labour-intensive and we intend to introduce a comprehensive cloud-based learner information system to capture learner data, which will more easily enable the College to generate reports required for both internal purposes, such as internal quality management and improvement, decision-making and forward planning, and external purposes such as reports required by regulatory and professional bodies such as QQI. The learner information system will also store registration information, and will be capable of generating class group information and result management. The introduction of the new learner information system is scheduled for Autumn 2018.

Carlow College gathers information about learner satisfaction rates through teaching effectiveness questionnaires, and from graduates, about postgraduate studies and career paths, through various surveys, co-ordinated by the Careers Officer. The learner information system will be capable of storing such data.

Currently, Carlow College hold records in both manual and digital formats but there are few policies guiding the management and maintenance of this information. Carlow College have IT and Data Protection Policies which are currently under review, and which will be complemented by a suite of related policies, including policies to comply with the forthcoming General Data Protection Regulation. Carlow College utilise the *Code of Practice for Freedom of Information for Public Bodies* (FOI Central Policy Unit, Department of Expenditure and Public Reform, September 2015). A Freedom of Information Officer has recently been appointed and is currently creating a *Freedom of Information Policy*.

The IT Officer and Archivist are working together to create and implement a comprehensive records, information and data management system, to ensure the better integrity, protection, management and confidentiality of all information and data in the control of the College (see Appendix 34: *Records Management Policy*). The system will comprise a series of policies, procedures and measures to ensure:

- the creation and capture of required information and data in the recordkeeping system;
- appropriate management and maintenance of information and records;
- effective security and access management controls, both for manual and digital records;
- identification of vital records and implementation of disaster recovery measures to help mitigate risk of loss of critical data and information;

- timely, authorised and secure disposal of expired records;
- the identification and protection of records which require permanent retention as archives;
- reporting and analytical tools to measure key performance indicators to assist with important decision-making;
- that information in digital systems is accessible for as long as it is required.

Together, the new learner information system and the wider records management system will increase efficiency, ensure that the College meets its reporting obligations more easily, enhance transparency and accountability, and promote confidence in how the College goes about its business. We will provide staff with training on the new systems, and the introduction of comprehensive systems and documented policies and procedures will assist staff in going about their duties.<sup>24</sup>

## **4.9: Public Information and Communication**

Carlow College recognises that public information and communication are an essential means by which the College mediates its message to prospective and current learners as well as for graduates, other stakeholders in education and the public. The College acknowledges that institutional visibility and public awareness are vital in maintaining public confidence in the College.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the College publishes and disseminates information about itself through multiple modern media platforms. The College sustains a public profile through its website and through several publications and public events which regularly take place in the College.

### **4.9.1: Public Information**

The College regards the website ([www.carlowcollege.ie](http://www.carlowcollege.ie)) as a major initial point of contact with the public and the main resource bank for public information. The Marketing Office is responsible for developing and maintaining the College website, along with other social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. In addition to its virtual outreach, Carlow College publishes, on an annual basis, programme- and service-specific brochures aimed at more fully documenting activities within the College.

### **4.9.2: Learner Information**

Carlow College is committed to providing prospective and current learners with up-to-date and accurate information on all activities of the College; especially as it relates to our academic programmes and learner services. Prospective learners, other stakeholders in education and the public, can obtain, in both print and electronic version, the College Prospectus.<sup>26</sup> The Prospectus provides information documenting all aspects of the College (i.e. programme-specific information; admission requirements; information detailing fees and grants; available learner services and College facilities). The content found in the Prospectus is more thoroughly

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<sup>24</sup> Section 8: Information and Data Management will undergo a comprehensive review during June, July and August 2018 following the commencement of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by 25 May 2018.

<sup>25</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (May 2015), p. 12 and *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes in Education and Training to International Learners* (July 2015).

<sup>26</sup> The Prospectus is published one year in advance of learner entry during the month of August. The current prospectus can be viewed at: [www.carlowcollege.ie/Potals/0/Prospectus/Prospectus.pdf](http://www.carlowcollege.ie/Potals/0/Prospectus/Prospectus.pdf).

detailed on the College website under the respective programme, office or learner support service.

As an institution of higher education that strives to be a learner-centred institution, Carlow College provides information to its current learners through many platforms. Supporting the arrival and orientation of new and continuing learners is an important activity in helping them settle into their studies and successfully progress through their academic programmes at Carlow College. Arrival and orientation takes place over a short period of time and assists learners with finding their way around the College, beginning the process of meeting new people and making friends, and settling into academic life. Induction takes place over a longer period of time and is viewed as a process, rather than a single event, that supports learners to become embedded into college life and study. Although the academic imperative is at the heart of the process, it does not operate in isolation from other college functions which offer support-related guidance and advice.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the academic year, the e-learning platform Moodle is used for the dissemination of information to current learners, and also provides a means of gathering information on learner activity and satisfaction through surveys and questionnaires. This platform contains all learner policies / procedures, programme and module specific information including module syllabi, programme handbooks, academic timetables, assessment dates / requirements and other academic resources.

#### **4.9.3 Publication of Quality Assurance Evaluation Reports**

The Quality Assurance Office at Carlow College has a dedicated profile on the Carlow College website where it publishes the Carlow College: *Quality Assurance Policy*; external quality assurance feedback and reports from institutional reviews and programmatic reviews and revalidations. College-wide policies and procedures are currently published on the Staff Portal and the e-learning platform Moodle; there are plans to expand the availability of these documents on the College website.

#### **4.10: Other Parties Involved in Education and Training**

Carlow College recognises that it is part of a wider educational endeavour in Ireland and internationally. In particular, the College is an integral part of the educational system in Ireland and of the system of Higher Education quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications in Europe. The College understands and welcomes that being part of these systems confers substantial benefits to the College and to our learners. Accordingly, where the College works with other parties involved in education and training it does so within the context of national and international frameworks and processes of quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications. Similarly, the College recognises its responsibility as part of a system of education with multiple levels of learning, the proper functioning of which is dependent on the quality assurance procedures related to learner progression between levels. Accordingly, the College operates and maintains the quality assurance procedures required to ensure that the proper progression of learners into the College and out of the College is achieved.

##### **4.10.1: Peer Relationships with the Broader Education and Training Community**

Carlow College provides programmes of education and training which are designed in-line and consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Our programmes leading to

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<sup>27</sup> For a complete guide to the learner information provided at induction and orientation, please see Appendix 11.1: *Guidelines for Orientation and Induction of New and Continuing Learners*.

these awards are designed and structured on the basis of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (see Appendix 18: *Sample Diploma Supplement*). Currently, we provide, programmes of education and training leading to awards at NFQ Levels 6, 7, 8 and 9. These programmes are accredited by QQI. In our entry, progression and transfer arrangements we recognise the standing of the awards of all other institutions operating with the same quality assurance and award level system. Where applicants for entry hold qualifications under other systems, procedures are in place to ensure careful articulation of qualifications between systems.<sup>28</sup>

Where the College provides programmes of education and training which, while leading to an award under the NFQ, part or all of which may be recognised by Professional Associations and Regulators as necessary for professional practice, the College engages with such Professional Associations and Regulators to ensure the appropriate content and quality of the relevant programmes of education and training.

#### **4.10.2: External Partnerships and Second Providers**

In all cases where Carlow College enters into engagements with external partners or second providers, quality assurance procedures are in place to ensure our learners receive the appropriate learning opportunities and that our learners are safe and protected.

The College offers a number of programmes of education and training which have, as a core or optional part of their content, opportunities for learners in the context of a work placement. These occur in award programmes certified by QQI.

The College offers many of our learners the opportunity to study abroad for one-semester as a part of their programme of study. These occur in award programmes certified by QQI. The study abroad opportunities arise from affiliation agreements the College has with a number of Higher Education institutions in the United States. Reciprocal arrangements enable learners from these institutions to spend a semester in Carlow College (see Appendix 31.7: *International Affiliations*).<sup>29</sup>

#### **4.10.3: Expert panellists, examiner and authenticators**

The programmes of education and training offered by the College and which lead to an award level on the NFQ are accredited by QQI. On an annual basis, all assessment and progression of learners in these programmes are subject to peer review by external experts. The selection and appointment of all peer reviewers is conducted by the Senior Academic Officer of the College. Specific guidelines are in place relating to the selection of peer reviewers for all our academic programmes. The role and function of peer reviewers is formally set out and made known to reviewers prior to their appointment. The independence of appointed reviewers is assured on an annual basis (see Appendix 18: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*).

#### **4.11: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review**

Carlow College is committed to having a robust, fit-for-purpose quality system that enhances the learning experience of its learners. The Quality Assurance Committee is responsible for the development and maintenance of the *Quality Assurance Policy* at Carlow College by ensuring that this Policy is compliant with both national and international benchmarks. Nationally, the Committee will ensure that the *Quality Assurance Policy* is compliant with the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* and the complementary guidelines

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on these procedures, please see the Admissions pages at [www.carlowcollege.ie](http://www.carlowcollege.ie).

<sup>29</sup> For more information on our affiliations with institutions in the United States, please see: <http://www.carlowcollege.ie/InternationalAffiliations>.

created by QQI, *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines* (2016). Internationally, this Committee will ensure that the *Quality Assurance Policy* is compliant with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (2015). In addition to the *Quality Assurance Policy*, the Quality Assurance Committee is responsible for the development / implementation of quality processes and quality assurance / quality improvement activities across academic and administrative areas of the College (see Appendix 35: *Terms of Reference for the Quality Assurance Committee*). All reports general as part of the external programme review and institutional review are published on the Carlow College website.

#### **4.11.1: Programme Monitoring, Review and Revalidation**

The programmes at Carlow College are monitored, reviewed and revised on a regular basis to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of learners and society.<sup>30</sup> Mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing programmes include: Programme Board meetings five times a year, learner feedback, external examiner reports and annual programme monitoring reports and cross-programme monitoring reports (see Section 4.3.3: Programme Monitoring and Review). The rigorous monitoring process allows for the adaptation of programme elements to ensure that programmes remain relevant and effective. Monitoring provides the opportunity to reflect on current practice and, in doing so, propose new changes to improve the delivery systems; thus, enhancing the learning experience. In addition to annual monitoring, programmes at Carlow College undergo an internal mid-cyclical self-evaluation and review every two and a half years. This self-evaluation and review process includes, but is not limited to:

- ensuring that programmes remain appropriate;
- ensuring that programmes achieve their objectives set for them and respond to the needs of learners and the changing needs of society;
- reviewing learner workload;
- reviewing learner progression and completion rates;
- reviewing the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of learners;
- informing updates of the programme content, delivery modes, teaching and learning methods, learning supports and resources and information provided to learners;
- updating third party, industry or other stakeholders relevant to the programmes; and
- reviewing quality assurance arrangements that are specific to that programme.<sup>31</sup>

Upon completion of the internal mid-cyclical self-evaluation, Carlow College programmes will publish a self-evaluation report and an improvement plan which will be considered by Academic Council and the standing Academic Committee of the Governing Body.

Programmes at Carlow College undergo a formal external cyclical five-year programmatic review guided by the process laid out by QQI.<sup>32</sup> The first phase of this process is a self-

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<sup>30</sup> This is in keeping with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), pp. 12-13.

<sup>31</sup> *Programme Validation Manual (2016) for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships (FET and HET)*, Pilot Version, edn 2.15 (Dublin, QQI, 2016), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* (Dublin: QQI, 2016); *Programme Review Manual 2016/2017* (Dublin: QQI, December 2016) and *Programme Validation*

evaluation (listed above) as well as agreeing terms of reference with QQI. The second phase of this process is the conducting of an external evaluation and reporting with an agreed to independent panel. Once the second phase is completed, programmes are submitted to QQI for revalidation (see Appendix 36: *Illustration of the phases and stages of Programme Review to Revalidation*).<sup>33</sup>

#### **4.11.2: Institutional Reviews**

Carlow College, as a higher education institution operating in Ireland, undergoes an external institutional cyclical ten-year institutional review guided by the process laid out by QQI.<sup>34</sup> Institutional reviews are important as they verify the effectiveness of an institution's internal quality assurance and act as a catalyst for improvement.<sup>35</sup> As such, the purposes of institutional reviews are:

- to encourage a quality assurance culture and enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within institutions;
- to provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance;
- to improve public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness;
- to support systems-level improvement of the quality of higher education; and
- to encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.

As per the policy guidelines published by QQI, the single model is used for institutional reviews which will review five main purposes: the publication of Terms of Reference; an institutional self-evaluation report; an external assessment and site visit by a team of reviewers; the publication of a review report including findings and recommendations; and a follow-up procedure to review actions taken.

### **5: Roles and Responsibilities**

The Quality Assurance Officer, working with the Management Board, Academic Council and Quality Assurance Committee, has the principal role and responsibility for ensuring that the *Quality Assurance Policy* is robust and fit-for-purpose. This involves monitoring and reviewing the Policy and working on quality assurance development / enhancement throughout the College.

Quality assurance extends to all aspects of college function. As such, all staff members and learners have a responsibility to inform themselves, and adhere to, current quality assurance systems.

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*Manual (2016) for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships (FET and HET)*, Pilot Version, edn 2.15 (Dublin, QQI, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> The process for revalidation is set out in the *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* (Dublin: QQI, April 2016).

<sup>34</sup> *Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions* (Dublin: QQI, February 2016).

<sup>35</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 13.

## **6: Associated Documentation**

All associated documentation related to the *Quality Assurance Policy* are found in the document titled *Quality Assurance: Appendices*. This document can be found on the Staff Portal (Staff Members), Moodle (Learners) and Quality Assurance page of the Carlow College website for external individuals / agencies.

## **7: Monitoring and Review**

The *Quality Assurance Policy* is approved by the Management Board and Academic Council. The Quality Assurance Office, in consultation with the Quality Assurance Committee, will monitor and review this Policy annually. Any changes made to the policy document will follow the formal policy development and approval process mandated by the *Policy on Policies*. The associated documentation found in the document titled *Quality Assurance: Appendices*, will be continuously updated and published on each of the digital platforms listed under *Section 6: Associated Documentation*.