
Assessment and Standards

Policy for Assessment and Standards

QA Area (s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programmes of Education and Training• Governance and Management of Quality• Documented Approach to QA
Applies to	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff and Learners
Policy Owner	Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar

8.1.1 ESG Standard 1.3: Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Standard: Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

8.1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles underpinning Assessment of Learners at the College, in alignment with QQI's Assessment and Standards, 2013 and the Core Statutory QA Guidelines.

The policy recognises that prospective and enrolled learners at the College are diverse and may at times require reasonable accommodations and additional supports to facilitate their full and equitable participation in the programmes delivered by the College.

It includes Marks and Standards governing assessment on College programmes that lead to QQI awards.

8.1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all QQI validated programmes. This policy and the associated Marks and Standards apply to all members of faculty and support and administrative staff at the College who have contact with learners.

8.1.4 Policy for Assessment

This policy should be read in conjunction with (Teaching and Learning) of this Manual. The type(s) of assessment employed and their contribution to the overall grade are decided as part of the Programme Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy during Programme Design and Validation.

College programmes leading to QQI awards are governed by QQI's Assessment and Standards, revised 2013, the College's Marks and Standards and the approved programme schedule of the programme in question. Any special regulations are articulated on the approved programme schedule as part of

the validation process and are communicated to learners at the outset of their studies and as part of the assessment brief.

All lecturing staff involved in designing, implementing and grading assessments in the College are familiar with the specified assessment tools and techniques and are supported in developing their skills, knowledge and practice in respect of assessment.

The College's assessment regulations, Marks and Standards and QA policy reflect best practice as articulated in guidelines of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015.

The ESG sets out the basic principles underpinning assessment as follows:

'The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.'

QQ's Assessment and Standards elaborates on these principles under six themes, which the College adheres to in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies:

1. Learners are responsible for demonstrating their achievement.
2. Assessment supports standards based on learning outcomes.
3. Assessment promotes and supports effective learning and teaching.
4. Assessment procedures are credible.
5. Assessment methods are reviewed and renewed as necessary to adapt to evolving requirements.
6. Learners are well informed about how and why they are assessed.

8.1.5 Programme Assessment Schedule

It is College policy that a schedule of assessment be provided for all programmes. The assessment schedule will include:

1. The allocation of marks between Continuous Assessment (CA) and the final examination.
2. The number of CA elements and the associated weighting.
3. The type of CAs i.e. practical, report, presentation etc.
4. Whether the CA is group or individual.
5. The submission date for each CA element.
6. The method of repeating the assessment (i.e. exam only, CA only or both CA and examination).

The Assessment Schedule for the academic year is agreed by the Programme Board before teaching begins. The agreed Assessment Schedule is communicated to all learners during induction and made available on the VLE.

8.1.6 Definitions

QQI's Assessment and Standards offers the following definitions for the components of assessment:

8.1.6.1 *Summative Assessment:*

Aims to determine if (or sometimes the extent to which) a set of specified learning outcomes has been attained by a person and (typically) their entitlement to academic credit. It normally contributes to learner's results for a module or a programme. It includes results from continuous assessment, project work, oral assessment, written examinations etc.

8.1.6.2 *Formative Assessment:*

Supports the learner in attaining specified learning outcomes. It does not normally penalise error, or credit achievement. 'Formative assessment is concerned with how judgements about the quality of learner responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the learner's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial and error learning'. Formative assessment supports learning and should therefore involve formative feedback. It is an essential part of any programme of education and training.

8.2 External Examiner Policy

External Examiners are appointed who are recognised experts in their subject areas and are from institutions with excellent academic reputations. The College works closely with External Examiners to assure standards, to enhance teaching, learning and assessment and to support programme development.

The External Examining Process Precepts:

- External examining is a QA mechanism employed by the College that supports public confidence in academic qualifications.
- The external examining process offers an objective interface: a principal outcome of external examining is the introduction of an independent element into the procedures for the assessment of learners.
- An external examiner is an independent expert who is a member of the broader community of practice within the programme's field of learning and whose accomplishments attest to their likelihood of having the authority necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.
- The scope of operation of the External Examiner is agreed with the College. It may be extended, for example, to provide advice and guidance to the programme team. An external examiner may be invited to comment on the design, structure and content of a programme and its constituent components.
- An External Examiner's term of appointment is sufficiently long to allow them to assess trends, and sufficiently short to provide diversity and maintain the required level of independence.

8.2.1 Role of External Examiners

The role of the External Examiner is to assure academic standards and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The External Examiner confirms that the academic standards of modules and the awards to which they lead are consistent with the academic outcomes specified and are comparable to those achieved in the subject nationally. The process assures the fairness, validity and rigour of assessment. Feedback provided by the External Examiner facilitates the academic departments to enhance teaching, learning and assessment and the overall learning experience.

The External Examiner undertakes to:

- a) Acknowledge receipt of examination and assessment material.
- b) Review all drafts of Examination papers/Assessment Briefs for 100% CA modules, marking schemes, worked solutions, etc. External Examiners shall have the right to make such suggestions, criticisms, and propose amendments as they deem appropriate.
- c) Review a representative sample of examination material presented by learners, including borderline cases. The sample, which should be drawn on a basis agreed between the Internal and External Examiner(s), should include sufficient material to enable the External Examiner(s) to form a judgement as to the appropriateness of the marking at all levels of classification.
- d) Probe the actual attainment of learners (actual programme learning outcomes) using information agreed with and supplied by the College.
- e) Compare and contrast both the Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes and the actual attainment of learners with the relevant awards standards, with the NFQ, and with corresponding data from other programmes in the same discipline in other higher education institutions in Ireland and internationally.
- f) Determine whether the applied procedures for assessment are valid, reliable, fair and consistent.
- g) Review the appropriateness of the programme assessment strategy and the assessment procedures and, flowing from this, consider subsidiary module assessment strategies.
- h) Review key assessment tasks prior to their assignment in light of the programme and module assessment strategies and learners' prerequisite learning. Where key tasks include key continuous assessment tasks, it might not be feasible to review them prior to assignment, but they should still be reviewed by the External Examiner.
- i) Attend at least one Examination Board annually, ideally that examination board when stage progression decisions are made. In any event, they must attend the award stage examination board. Before such examination boards commence, the external examiners must:
 - a. Review borderline cases.
 - b. Agree with the respective Internal Examiner(s) the proposed final marks for consideration by the appropriate Examination Board.
- j) Report findings and recommendations to the College and QQI as appropriate.

8.2.2 Extent of the External Examiner's Authority

The External Examiner does not mark or remark assessments; their primary role is to verify that standards are achieved.

Where an External Examiner determines that a mark or series of marks is not appropriate, they liaise with the Internal Examiner and Programme Lead. Where there is an issue with the Internal Examiner not agreeing with the External Examiner then the Head of Faculty or Director of Academic Programmes are informed and will attempt to facilitate a resolution. In very exceptional circumstances the Director of Academic Programmes may appoint a senior academic, independent of the College to arbitrate. This process will be managed by the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar.

8.2.3 Nominating External Examiners

The Programme Lead identifies potential External Examiners, reviews their experience against the criteria and liaises with them to determine their willingness to act as an External Examiner. The Head of Faculty then nominates them for appointment and provides the Director of Academic Programmes

with a rationale for the nomination and a CV of the proposed examiner. Where the Director of Academic Programmes endorses the nomination and is satisfied that it meets the criteria for appointment, the application is forwarded to the Academic Council to approve the nomination for appointment by it, or by the awarding body, where appropriate.

The nominated employee must have completed a conflict of interest declaration form before he/ she can be considered for appointment.

8.2.4 Appointment of External Examiners

At least one independent expert External Examiner is appointed for each award programme. The appointment is for three years. In some cases, normally to provide continuity in an examining team where appointments were made concurrently, the tenure of one External Examiner per programme may be extended for an additional year, subject to Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar's approval, on behalf of the Academic Council.

External Examiners are expected to attend all Examination Boards, at a minimum one per programme per annum.

If there are several External Examiners as members of a programme examining team, they are assigned, by agreement, to a module or group of modules as determined by the Head of Faculty.

The College reserves the right to recommend termination of an External Examiner's appointment at any time. This will be a decision made by the Academic Council and may be presented in writing to QQI with the reason for termination such as non-engagement with the agreed process.

Payment to External Examiners is made on receipt of their annual report.

8.2.5 The Criteria for the Appointment of External Examiners

Prior to its appointment of an External Examiner, the Academic Council must be satisfied that the proposed External Examiner:

- a) Possesses academic and professional qualifications that are appropriate to the discipline, programme or subject to be examined and at a minimum; and should not, unless in exceptional circumstances, be below the level of qualification to be awarded on the basis of the examinations in question.
- b) Has appropriate academic standing and expertise and has sufficient academic experience to adjudicate on comparability of standards.
- c) Has the capacity to discharge their duties in good time and is not examining at multiple centres.

Where an External Examining team is appropriate, it is expected that that expertise will be complementary. In such cases representation from industry or a relevant professional body may be appointed to provide additional insight, provided that they are supported by an academic member of the team.

An individual who has retired, but who remains active in academic life and continues to engage in teaching, research or other academic activities relevant to the extern examiner role, is eligible for appointment as an External Examiner.

External Examiners may **not** be selected from:

- College staff

- Staff who have worked in or have had a significant relationship with the College within the last five years
- The same institution, or constituent College of a merged institution, as their predecessor unless there is an adequate reason acceptable to the Academic Council.

An External Examiner who has acted previously should not normally be re-appointed until at least five years have elapsed since their previous appointment.

Once formally appointed, the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar will confirm their appointment, dates, role and responsibilities, in writing. The Director of Academic Programmes is responsible for ensuring the External Examiner and Programme Team are properly inducted in the external examining process. The Programme Lead is responsible for ensuring that the External Examiner has sight of all assessment material, as agreed and in good time before the assessment date. The Director of Academic Programmes is responsible for ensuring the External Examiner is supplied with all assessment materials required.

8.2.6 External Examiners Reports

On completion of the assessment process and after the final External Examination Board for a stage or award each External Examiner will produce an annual report and submit it to the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar. The objective of the report is to satisfy the Academic Council that:

- The External Examiner was provided with sufficient information in good time to discharge their duties effectively.
- The assessment process complies with the College policies and regulations.
- The assessment strategy and assessment instruments are fit for purpose.
- The marking was fair, consistent and transparent.
- The quality of the learner work is comparable to other institutions nationally.
- The External Examiner is satisfied that previous recommendations were properly considered, and any issues have been resolved.

In addition, the External Examiner provides specific feedback regarding the assessment to the lecturers and makes recommendations as appropriate.

All External Examiner Reports are reviewed by the Programme Team, the Director of Academic Programmes and the appropriated Head of Faculty. The Head of Faculty compiles a response to the External Examiner acknowledging comments and providing a response in respect of recommendations made. This response is endorsed by the Director of Academic Programmes and sent to the External Examiner. Copies of all External Examiner Reports and responses must be kept by the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar to ensure the recommendations are properly considered and are implemented where appropriate. Where the External Examiner has an issue with the institutional management of the assessment process then the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar compiles an additional response. The External Examiner may make a confidential report directly to the President where it is deemed necessary.

On completion of the process the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar compiles a summary of all External Examiner comments, recommendations and actions from the reports for information to the Academic Council.

The College will publish the names and affiliation of all External Examiners and make External Examiner Reports available to staff, learners, stakeholders and awarding bodies.

8.3 Conflict of Interest

Persons will not be appointed as examiners, external examiners and invigilators where there is any foreseen possibility of conflict of interest. Even the appearance of conflict of interest, where none exists, can damage the credibility of the person selected in this process.

Any person involved in the assessment process must be familiar with the College's Conflict of Interest Policy.

The instances listed below are given as examples. They are not intended to comprise an exhaustive list of situations where a conflict of interest might arise.

- A staff member with access to an examination paper with a personal link or professional association to one or more learners sitting the examination, that might influence his/ her ability to be objective.
- Where a staff member is also a learner of the College.
- Persons who have potential future conflict of interest.

The Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar will make appropriate arrangements to safeguard the integrity of the assessment process; in the case of any doubt, advice should be sought in advance from the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar.

Since cases can arise where the possible appearance of a conflict of interest is not generally known, the primary responsibility for disclosing such a possibility rests on the prospective independent evaluator.

Prospective individuals involved in the assessment process are required to declare any relevant interests and potential conflicts of interest prior to appointment. If there are no relevant interests or conflicts this should be declared, by completing the conflict of interest declaration.

Where a potential conflict of interest emerges after appointment, they should inform the College without delay.

8.4 Policy for Reasonable Accommodation and Additional Supports

The College is committed to facilitating fair, equitable and accessible participation in learning and assessment for learners with disabilities, learning differences or medical conditions of a temporary or ongoing nature. Accordingly, the College will make Reasonable Accommodations and provide Additional Supports for learners as far as is reasonably practicable. Learners and prospective learners at the College are encouraged to disclose any specific or additional needs to the College's representatives in order to facilitate this. The College and its staff will at all times strive to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The College does not have the expertise or capacity to undertake medical or psychological assessments, or to determine the supports required to accommodate the needs of learners who seek reasonable accommodations or additional support (defined as actions taken to alleviate substantial disadvantage due to disabilities, learning differences or medical conditions). Therefore, the College

will, under normal circumstances, require learners seeking reasonable accommodations or additional supports to provide documentation from a medical consultant, educational psychologist or appropriately qualified expert (this requirement is exercised at the discretion of the College). This documentation should include recommendations regarding the form or nature of the accommodations or supports required.

N.B. The College's adoption of the screening tools QuickScan and StudyScan may help learners in this regard by potentially giving an early indication of a possible underlying issue that may affect their pace or style of learning.

Following the disclosure of specific or additional needs to the College by a learner, the allocation of reasonable accommodations and additional supports will be guided by the following principles:

8.4.1 Principles Guiding Reasonable Accommodation & Additional Support

- Reasonable Accommodations and/or Additional Supports remove disadvantages.
- Reasonable Accommodations and/or Additional Supports do not provide advantages.
- The College reserves the right to require that appropriate evidence of a disability, learning difference, medical condition or other form of disadvantage be submitted by the learner before committing to the facilitation of Reasonable Accommodations and/or Additional Supports.
- The College reserves the right to decide what is reasonable.
- Reasonable Accommodations and/or Additional Supports cannot, under normal circumstances, be applied retrospectively.
- Reasonable Accommodations for assessment activities will be restricted to the minimum changes/amendments required and will not dilute the standard of learning to be obtained.
- All learners, including those requiring Reasonable Accommodations, must demonstrate attainment of learning outcomes in order to pass.
- Where Reasonable Accommodations and/or Additional Supports are deemed practicable and reasonable, they will be provided by the College. Within reasonable limitations, the College will strive to provide these at no additional cost to the learner. Examples of accommodations and supports are:
 - Extra time in assessment
 - Spelling waivers
 - Advance access to learning materials and course readings
 - Changes to font types or sizes
 - Changes to the assessment/examination environment
 - Use of assistive technology

8.5 Policy for Moderation

The College has developed processes to ensure that assessments are fair, consistent and capable of resolving the standards of knowledge, skill and competence established at validation for the award.

In pursuance of this, it has developed moderating processes. These moderating processes are twofold:

1. Major summative assessments proposed by the internal examiner are subject to review by the Programme Lead, before being forwarded to the external examiner for review.
2. Assessment outcomes are internally moderated by faculty and externally reviewed, by external examiners. This element of moderation is where a second internal examiner (moderator) will consider a sample of assessments from a first marker to assure that the appropriate mark has been awarded, thus helping to ensure the quality and reliability of marking standards. Variation in grading between the first examiner and the moderator is discussed between the two in order to reach agreement.

8.6 Policy for Academic Misconduct

8.6.1 Definition of Academic Misconduct

The College defines the serious academic offence of Academic Misconduct as:

- The possession use or attempted use of unauthorised material, books, notes, electronic aids or other materials in an examination.
- Obtaining access to an examination paper content ahead of its authorised release.
- Unauthorised collusion, i.e. either aiding or obtaining aid from another candidate or any other person, where such aid is not explicitly permitted in the assignment.
- Acting dishonestly in any way, whether before, during or after an examination or other assessment so as to either obtain or offer to others an unfair advantage in that examination or assessment.
- Deliberate plagiarism in any assessment.

Severe academic misconduct includes:

- Any case where a learner has previously been penalised for academic misconduct.
- Taking notes into or using any unauthorised device in an examination, even if they are not used.
- Impersonating another person during an examination or arranging for another person to impersonate any individual during an examination.
- Purchasing material from 'essay sites' to submit as own work.
- Misconduct within a dissertation or thesis of a taught postgraduate programme.
- Where the College suspects that any of the underlying data used by the learner has been either falsified or fabricated.

8.6.2 Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is a serious offence and consists of submitting work which includes parts from other sources which are not acknowledged. The approach of the College is to:

- Make it very clear what plagiarism is.
- Actively work to prevent plagiarism through the use of software and the provision of assessment guidelines.
- Provide a clear framework for dealing with cases of plagiarism.

The College defines plagiarism as:

The act of presenting as your own, the words or ideas of someone else, whether published or not, without proper acknowledgement, within one's own work.

There are three main types of plagiarism, which could occur within all modes of assessment (including examination):

- Direct copying of text, images and other materials (electronic or otherwise) from a book, article, fellow learner's essay, handout, web page or other source without proper acknowledgement.
- Claiming individual ideas derived from a book, article etc. as one's own and incorporating them into one's work without acknowledging the source of these ideas.
- Overly depending on the work of one or more other sources without proper acknowledgement of the source, by constructing an essay, project etc., extracting large sections of text from another source and merely linking these together with a few of one's own sentences.

Programme Leads will ensure that plagiarism is explained to students at learner induction. In addition, academic staff members are responsible for re-enforcing students' understanding of plagiarism. Departments will, in conjunction with the library function, ensure that appropriate training in citation and citation software is provided to students. The College will provide training for academic staff in:

- 1) Assessment design to avoid plagiarism; and
- 2) Use of software for detecting plagiarism to both detect plagiarism and also to foster awareness of plagiarism with the emphasis on how to avoid it.

Individual assignments may have specific requirements. The College actively supports the prevention of plagiarism by ensuring that all students are fully informed about plagiarism, and its serious consequences. Both Academic staff and students have access to software for detecting plagiarism.

8.6.3 Academic Misconduct Committee:

The Director of Academic Programmes reviews all academic misconduct cases presented to them and makes a judgement if there is a *prima facie* case to answer. If they determine there is a case to answer, they shall convene a meeting of the Academic Misconduct Committee.

The Academic Misconduct Committee has the following composition:

- I. Chair: Director of Academic Programmes.
- II. Members: Two members of academic staff not involved in the assessment of the learner.

A member of the Office of the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar in attendance as recording secretary.

8.6.4 Responsibility

- The **Academic Council** is responsible for approving this policy and associated procedures pertaining to assessment and delegating appropriate responsibility to the Examination Board.
- The **Director of Academic Programmes** and the **Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar** with the help of the **Programme Lead** has responsibility for the implementation of policy and procedure pertaining to Assessment in the context of a specific programme.

- The **Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement** is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the overall alignment of College policy and procedures pertaining to Assessment to QQI's guidelines and policy statements.

8.6.5 Related Legislation, Regulation or Guidelines

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Sector Specific (Independent/Private) Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Assessment and Standards – QQI, Revised 2013.
- Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers – QQI, Revised 2013.
- Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining – QQI, Revised 2015.
- The Policy, Guidelines and Procedures for the Granting of Reasonable Accommodations in Examinations to Students with Disabilities - Disability Advisors Working Network.