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## Supports for Learners

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### 1.1 Policy for Supports for Learners

<b>QA Area (s)</b>	Programmes of Education and Training Governance and Management of Quality Documented Approach to QA
<b>Applies to</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Learners only <input type="checkbox"/> Staff and learners
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Learner Support Coordinator

#### 1.1.1 ESG Standard 1.6: Learning Resources and Student Support

*Standard: Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and learner support are provided.*

#### 1.1.2 Purpose

The College recognises the need to balance the requirement for higher education, promoting self-directed learning and development with the provision of a nurturing and supportive learning environment that enables and empowers learners to attain their potential. The College requires all learners to demonstrate a commitment to their studies through high level attendance, strong in-class and on-line participation, and appropriate engagement with assessment activities. The College will support this through its commitment to the provision of appropriate academic and other supports, that are fit for purpose, to learners to facilitate them successfully completing their studies.

#### 1.1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all learners registered on programmes in the College.

#### 1.1.4 Policy

The College is committed to providing all learners with a fair, accessible and supportive learning environment which allows them to study effectively and with minimum disruption. This is done through careful consideration of learner needs, which are routinely monitored through ongoing learner feedback.

This document outlines the systems and resources available to all learners enrolled at the College, which are routinely monitored, reviewed and updated. The College is committed to ensuring that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that learners are aware of the services available to them.

#### 1.1.5 Equality and Diversity Policy (Learners)

The College values and promotes intercultural diversity, multiculturalism, and social integration. It supports an enriched international education experience for all members and stakeholders.

The College acknowledges its responsibilities and duties as an employer, and as an academic service provider, under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015, and therefore does not unlawfully discriminate on nine grounds, including gender, civil (marital) status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

The College regards equality as a critical component of QA which is aimed at improving the quality of education and academic and support services provided, while ensuring the maintenance of academic standards.

All College staff and learners are responsible for ensuring that they comply with this policy and that equal opportunity principles are respected across the College.

The College's specific commitment to educational equality includes:

- Promoting equality of access to all education programmes in the College.
- Continuing to develop, through the provision of appropriate support mechanisms, optimum individual educational attainment, as measured by completion rates, examination performance and progression.
- Promoting equality and fairness in the treatment of learners in interactions with College staff, within the learner body, in the conduct of assessments, and in the provision of academic and support services.
- Promoting equality of participation in positions of leadership and responsibility within the learner body.

### **1.1.6 Learning Environment and Academic Support**

The College is dedicated to creating a positive, safe and supportive learning environment, providing learners with reasonable access to support services and routinely serviced facilities. The College monitors and acts upon learner feedback in relation to this on an ongoing basis.

#### **1.1.6.1 Induction**

Induction is arranged to introduce College facilities, processes, supports and procedures, followed by programme specific induction arranged by the Programme Lead. The information will include induction to the virtual learning environment as well as details of rights and obligations of learners under the Learner Charter and the associated Code of Conduct.

Induction is designed not only to facilitate exchange of information but to provide a welcoming atmosphere, provide learners with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with their surroundings and meet other learners. An induction must also be arranged for any learners accessing the programme with advanced entry.

The College is considering the development of a fully online induction module so learners can attend in person or complete online, and always have access to that module as a reference point.

#### **1.1.6.2 Student Handbook**

All learners are provided with a Student Handbook covering all relevant information for the programme on which they are enrolled. It is the responsibility of the Programme Lead to produce a handbook for their programme.

The Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar approves the wording for the key information including:

- Whether or not a programme leads to an award and the name of the awarding body.
- The title of the award, whether it is recognised in the NQF and if so, the award type and NQF level.
- Programme opportunities for transfer or progression.
- Details of the PEL arrangements in place.

The Student Handbook is supplied at induction. It is also made available to the learner through the learner portal. Other relevant information includes:

- College Facilities.
- Internet Access Policy
- Supports available to learners including academic, pastoral and medical/counselling supports.
- Deferral Procedures.
- Reasonable Accommodations.
- Our Learners' Charter.
- Student Code of Conduct.
- Complaints Procedure.
- Disciplinary Procedure.
- Appeals Procedure.
- Assessment regulations, including Marks and Standards.
- Assessment briefs and other such relevant information.

The Student Handbook is reviewed and updated annually by the Admissions team and formally approved by the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar to ensure completeness and accuracy.

#### *1.1.6.3 Access to Information*

All learners have a right to request access to information relevant to their time in the College. Information is provided to registered learners to ensure they can access relevant learner supports, understand their rights and responsibilities, as laid out in the Learner Charter and ensure they can make informed decisions.

Sources of such information should be accessible, accurate, timely, current and comprehensive.

#### *1.1.6.4 Internet Access and Internet usage policy*

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that learners can benefit from Internet access provided by the College, when on campus. Internet use and access is considered to be a study resource and privilege.

Internet access is provided as an educational resource to assist with study. As such, the College cannot commit to providing unlimited internet access at all times. Learners should confine themselves to accessing relevant and necessary material to support their studies. In the event that learner Wi-Fi access is unavailable due to external or internal issues, the College does not accept liability.

Learners may use the facility's Wi-Fi to access the Internet on their own devices. Learners are responsible for their own devices and to ensure that appropriate anti-virus and firewall software is in

place to protect their devices. The College is not responsible for damage to devices or for any security breaches or other issues encountered as a result of learners accessing third-party websites on their own devices.

In particular:

- All sites and downloads may be monitored and/or blocked if they are deemed to be harmful and/or not productive to business.
- As per the Student Code of Conduct, the posting of discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images relating to learners, staff or any other personnel, whether via the College Wi-Fi connection, or in any other capacity and from any other venue is unacceptable and will lead to immediate and severe disciplinary action.

Unacceptable activities include, but are not limited to:

- Using the Wi-Fi access to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy;
- Stealing, using, or disclosing someone else's password without authorisation;
- Downloading, copying or pirating software and electronic files that are copyrighted or without authorisation;
- Sharing confidential material, trade secrets, or proprietary information outside of the organisation;
- Hacking into unauthorised websites;
- Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the company, its products/services, colleagues and/or customers;
- Introducing malicious software onto the company network and/or jeopardising the security of the organization's electronic communications systems;
- Sending or posting chain letters, solicitations, or advertisements not related to business purposes or activities;
- Passing off personal views as representing those of the organisation.

#### *1.1.6.5 Information Technology and Computer Services*

The purpose of the IT Department is to provide suitable information technology and educational resources (including educational technology and any VLE provided as required by the College, identified at programme development and agreed at validation).

It is the responsibility of the Programme Lead and Head of Faculty to identify and specify the IT and computing requirements for programme delivery.

The IT department is responsible for the provision and the management of sustainable computing facilities accessible to staff and learners.

The IT department works with academics and the Executive Management Team to systematically upgrade hardware and software in line with technical developments and advise the College on more effective tools and methodologies to enhance the learner experience.

IT support services are available at all time during class delivery. Helpdesk support is available for learners and lecturers during normal office hours.

The IT Manager is responsible for maintaining a comprehensive list of IT and computing resources. The IT Manager is also responsible for ensuring that all software is properly licensed and copyright protocols are respected. Other responsibilities include management of firewalls, backups, etc.

#### *1.1.6.6 Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)*

The College takes a proactive approach in its use of virtual learning technologies. Moodle and GoToTraining form the basis of our VLE. Moodle is used extensively for all programme offerings in course management, content creation and delivery, communication and collaboration.

It is the responsibility of all lecturers to:

1. Comply with the minimum standards for online content included in the Blended Learning Strategy.
2. Upload module guides including assessment schedule and key submission dates prior to commencement of a programme.
3. Upload all lecture material or other class content before each lecture.

It is the responsibility of the Programme Lead to ensure all content is available on Moodle.

Forum activities in Moodle are used by lecturers, staff and learners for online discussions which promote collaborative working, engagement and interactivity with all members of the group.

The use of Moodle allows lecturers to provide and display content and allows users to access the content in a controlled, secure environment. It encourages communication and collaboration in learning tasks, thus encouraging cooperation, and adding to the learning experience of the learners.

Moodle is used to manage continuous assessments and feedback. All assignments are required to be submitted in soft copy via the relevant Moodle page and through the relevant plagiarism detection software where appropriate.

GoToTraining is an interactive on-line training delivery platform which can incorporate tests to evaluate knowledge and retention during the delivery, promote learner engagement through small-group interaction with breakouts and live chat facilities, and Whiteboard Sharing for enhanced delivery.

## **1.2 Academic Supports**

### **1.2.1 Retention Strategy**

The policy for the provision of academic supports is aligned to the College's retention strategy.

A significant element of the College's retention strategy is to ensure learners attend lectures and tutorials, in either face-to-face or through synchronous or asynchronous delivery mode. In this context, attendance means physical attendance at lectures or agreed registered attendance online. It is the responsibility of the Regional Programme Administration Managers to coordinate the formal recording of attendance.

Where a learner is not attending regularly, they will be contacted by the Regional Programme Administration Manager. In the event that a learner has not attended six or more consecutive classes, does not have mitigating circumstances and does not engage with the Regional Programme Administration Manager, it may be necessary to formally withdraw them from the programme. This process is implemented by the Programme Lead, in consultation with the Director of Academic Programmes.

Attendance records and trends are reviewed at Programme Boards for analysis and action if appropriate, and are included in the Programme Monitoring Report to the Academic Council.

### **1.2.2 Meeting with Academic Staff**

The lecturers, Programme Lead, Head of Faculty and Regional Programme Administration Manager are available to meet with learners by appointment.

### **1.2.3 Additional Tutorial Support**

In addition to timetabled tutorial sessions and where a need has been identified, the Regional Programme Administration Manager liaises with the Head of Faculty to organise formal tutorial support where learners can come together to work on particular areas in more detail. This tutorial support is particularly relevant to support learner retention.

Additional tutorials on request, may be provided by the College in advance of reassessment opportunities, to support learners' potential assessment success, and ultimately their retention and progression.

### **1.2.4 Support for the prevention of Academic Misconduct**

It is the policy of the College to ensure all learners are aware of what academic misconduct is, how it can be avoided and the penalties if learners were to engage in academic misconduct which undermines teaching, learning and assessment. This is communicated at induction and refreshed at the start of each academic year.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar to ensure that there is adequate information supplied in respect of academic misconduct to both staff and learners.

The College hosts an anti-plagiarism software support package which learners can access through the Student Information System prior to the submission of their assessment material through Moodle. This facilitates a learner to reflect on the content of their assessment item and the associated referencing before final submission.

The College uses TurnItIn which is integrated with Moodle.

### **1.2.5 Library and Information Services**

It is the responsibility of the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar to ensure the provision of library and information services, support teaching, learning and assessment, based on the requirements of the validated programmes. These need to be fit for purpose, relevant, current, comprehensive, accessible to all learners and enhance the learning environment.

The College does not currently require a qualified librarian on its staff and it is envisaged in the early stage of programme delivery that this function will be carried out by the Learning Support Co-ordinator, and will include academic counselling, academic misconduct awareness etc.

As the number of programmes offered by the College increases, the College is committed to recruiting a qualified librarian to its staff.

### **1.2.6 Library Services**

The College currently has a limited technical library and holds licenses for online journal access to a number of technical databases. It has entered into preliminary discussions with Griffith College to provide access to that institution's physical and on-line library resources. The College is also committed to expanding its own licensed resources. These allow learners access to the latest peer-reviewed journals and academic papers on and off campus.

Objectives of the library service are to:

- Identify and provide access to the learning resource services required to support the learning, teaching and assessment activities of the College.
- Manage those resources efficiently and effectively.
- Maintain effective links with staff of the College in order to understand and, where necessary, respond to changes in education, approaches to learning, and corporate policy.
- Continuously monitor, review and enhance the provision of library and information services.
- Provide information and training to learners on Evaluating information, Plagiarism and Referencing.

It is the responsibility of the Programme Leads to ensure all lecturers provide the library with updated reading lists for each of the taught modules.

It is the responsibility of the Library function to review the collection and to maintain a comprehensive list of all library and learning resources for review. Library staff liaise closely with faculty and admin staff to guarantee learners the highest possible standard of teaching and learning support.

## **1.3 Non-Academic Supports**

Student Affairs, headed by the Learner Support Coordinator, is responsible for the provision of pastoral care, disability support services, procurement of counselling services, and learner events.

The Learner Support Coordinator is available as an advisor to the Academic Council and its committees.

### **1.3.1 Pastoral Care**

For the purposes of this Quality Assurance Manual, pastoral care is defined as the range of learner supports and services that are provided for learners' emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing.

It is the responsibility of all College staff to support where possible, the pastoral care and wellbeing of learners. Lecturers, Academic staff and Regional Programme Administration Managers are particularly well placed to observe behaviour in the learning environment that might indicate that a learner is in need of support. The College is committed to providing relevant and timely pastoral support.

Learners may approach or be referred to the Learner Support Coordinator to identify relevant supports.

### **1.3.2 Disability Support Services**

The College intends to offer a screening service to all learners, based on the QuickScan tool, that identifies their learning style. QuickScan is a computerised test that can help the learner and the Disability Support Service determine whether or not they are dyslexic. The tool has the added benefit of producing a report, which is helpful for planning their study. The test will be carried out as part of the induction process and is voluntary. The results may advise the learner that a more detailed test should be carried out.

In general, disability support requirements should be identified by applicants at the time of their admission to the programme to ensure the College can evaluate any additional supports required in order to make reasonable accommodation. Once registered on a programme the learner can access the disability service or Reasonable Accommodations via Student Affairs.

The College's detailed policy and procedures for seeking reasonable accommodation is included in the College's Marks and Standards.

Where not identified on admission, any disabilities, specific needs or any ongoing issue that may affect performance should be declared to the Learner Support Coordinator as soon as practical. The Learner Support Coordinator is responsible for identifying supports and coordinating with the appropriate staff to ensure reasonable and adequate supports are in place.

To register for Reasonable Accommodations the Learner Support Coordinator will record the application and liaise with the Director of Academic Affairs and Registrar to approve. The Learner Support Coordinator will then liaise with academic staff to ensure classroom and examinations supports are implemented where appropriate.

### **1.3.3 Health Services including Counselling Services**

Student welfare, including mental health, is considered a top priority at the College. It intends to enter into an arrangement with a medical practice who will offer professional help at a fixed rate that is subsidised by the College. Similarly, it intends to enter into an arrangement with an external professional counselling service provider with a nationwide network of clinics to provide consultations to learners for a reduced fee, subsidised by the College. The College encourages any learner who is experiencing difficulty or distress during their time in the College is encouraged to avail of these services. The services operate on a self-referral basis. Details of the service will be included in the Student Handbook.



### **1.3.4 Careers Service**

The College provides extensive information and guidance to learners regarding careers. The process starts with initial career information being presented to an applicant at the application stage. The College believes this is an important input into the applicant's decision-making process around the suitability of the programme for them and potential career options.

During induction learners are made aware of the Career Support that will be an integral part of their programme of study. All learners will be able to avail of support to help meet their career planning, job search, career development and management. The Regional Programme Administration Managers and Programme Leads will be responsible for ensuring that all learners receive regular updates on further study opportunities, regional job vacancies, internship and work placement opportunities, and relevant career events.

In addition to in-class and individual mentoring, the College has an on-line portal which will support learners in providing additional information on CV and cover letter writing, job interviews and assessments.

The College regularly invites guest lecturers from professional bodies, industry and recruitment to support learners and graduates career aspirations; to facilitate their engagement with employers and professional bodies, and to also consider post-programme progression options. This also enables the College to promote its programmes to employers of graduates.

The College plays an active role in monitoring the career progress of the graduates. Regional Programme Administration Managers are responsible for communicating employment outcomes to the Programme Leads at regular intervals throughout and post completion of the programme.

## **1.4 Learner Representation**

### **1.4.1 Class Representative System**

A class representative is an enrolled learner elected to facilitate communication between staff and learners regarding programme matters and academic support and provides another point of contact for learners.

At the beginning of each academic year, class representatives for each stage of each programme are elected by the class under the supervision of the relevant Regional Programme Administration Manager to ensure fairness but not to influence selection. There should be at least one class representative per stage of a programme, and they will continue as class representative until the end of the stage, usually one academic year. Once elected, class representatives are trained and supported through the Learner Support Coordinator.

Class representatives sit on various committees including Programme Boards, the Academic Council and any appropriate committees. They represent learners and ensure that they are involved in the decision-making processes of the College.

#### **1.4.1.1 Class Representative Meetings**

There is normally one class representative meeting per semester for each programme. These are arranged in advance of the relevant programme board and to ensure maximum attendance from the class representatives. The availability of part-time learners, where appropriate is considered. A call for agenda items is issued by the Regional Programme Administration Manager in advance of the

meetings and learners are required to feed issues back through their Regional Programme Administration Managers to inform the agenda. The agenda for the meeting is posted on Moodle prior to the meeting and emailed to all attendees. The meeting is chaired by the Learner Support Coordinator.

The function of the class representative meeting is to facilitate communication between learners and staff within the College; to provide a forum in which learners may raise any concerns they may have about teaching or related matters within the College; to provide feedback on issues addressed; to identify and disseminate examples of good practice; to provide documentary evidence of the participation of learners in the QA and development of programmes delivered by the College and to facilitate learner participation in periodic reviews of the College provision of academic programmes, with a view to improving quality.

Issues raised at the class representative meetings are recorded and considered by the Regional Programme Administration Manager and may feed into the Annual Programme Review. The agenda of the Class Representative meeting includes these standard agenda items:

- Membership.
- College Update.
- Student Affairs Update.
- Issues invited from each programme by stage.
- Academic / Facilities and support issues.
- Positive initiatives / good practices.
- Revalidation / other reviews as appropriate.
- Other Issues.

#### **1.4.2 Related Legislation, Regulation or Guidelines**

- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Sector Specific (Independent/Private) Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
- Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training 2017 (QQI)
- Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2014 (QQI)
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015).
- Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (QQI).
- Policy for Determining Awards Standards – QQI, 2014
- NFQ Awards Standards
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) User Guide –2015

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) – UNESCO, 2011.