COLÁISTE CHEATHARLACH
NAOMH PÁDRAIG
CARLOW COLLEGE
ST. PATRICK'S

Quality Assurance Policy

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TITLE: ***QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY***

Version	9.1	**Date Approved**	22 October 2025 (Academic Council) / 5 November 2025 (Management Board)
	Sections 4.4 and 4.12 were revised to reflect the approval of the Staff *Research Policy* and the following appendices were removed and linked to this policy: Staff Doctoral Bursary Form; Academic Staff Post-Doctoral Research Leave Application Form; Staff Book Publications Bursary; Carlow College Conference Attendance – Expenses and Procedures and Application for Symposia and Conference Funding Form.	**Review Date**	30 June 2026 *(or as required)*
Approved By	Academic Council and Management Board		
Owner	Quality Assurance Office		

Version Control		
Version No.	**Date Approved**	**Documented Changes**
1	6 December 2011	Initial Issue [Original title: Quality Assurance Handbook]
2	31 January 2018 (Management Board) / 7 February 2019 (Academic Council)	The Quality Assurance Framework at Carlow College was re-established to ensure alignment with European and national best practice, namely the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015) and the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (2016).

3	20 March 2019 (Management Board) / 3 April 2019 (Academic Council)	Following an internal gap analysis study of the Carlow College Quality Assurance Framework, the *Quality Assurance Policy* was revised further to include: organisational reports; academic monitoring and evaluation reports; data and information management policies; templates for inter-institutional agreements and implementation tasks and plans resulting from external panel recommendations.
4	26 August 2020 (Academic Council) / 23 September 2020 (Management Board)	The following revisions include: a revised high-level statement related to Section 4.11; updates to the following appendices – 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 38, 41, 53 and 55; the inclusion of direct links to all policies on the CCSP website to assist with document control and the addition of Appendix 56.
5	22 September 2021 (Management Board) / 29 September 2021 (Academic Council)	The high-level policy revisions include: the re-ordering of appendices to reflect changes to the policy; the addition of the following appendices 1, 2, 9, 10, 17, 25 and 40.1; an update to institutional reports (see Appendix 45) and the removal of all committee terms of reference.
6	16 November 2022 (Academic Council) / 30 November 2022 (Management Board)	Revisions to this policy include the: updating of high-level functions (Appendix 8); updating of programme development process to reflect current practice and allow for more than one validating body (Appendices 13-13.6); updating of academic monitoring and evaluation reports (Appendix 46); inclusion of Section 4.12 of the *Quality Assurance Policy* and Appendix 60.
7	15 November 2023 (Academic Council) / 29 November 2023 (Management Board)	Updates to this policy include: revisions to reflect changes of College personnel; review and revision of reporting dates and report titles; revision to Chaplaincy and LIRO Statement of Purpose and general updating of links and report titles.
8	23 October 2024 (Academic Council); 6 November 2024 (Management Board)	Policy revised to include the following updates (not an exhaustive list): inclusion of the Senior Management Team (Section 4.1.5), changes to processes governing programme development and approval (Section 4.3) and inclusion of the Information Security Management Framework (Section 4.8). The associated appendices were also revised.
9	24 June 2025 (Academic Council) / 18 June 2025 (Management Board)	Policy was revised to include the Blended Learning Framework (see Section 4.13); blended learning elements were added throughout the policy statement and appendices. Other additions included Sections 4.1.2, 4.1.6 and 4.1.7. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 were revised to align with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029 approved by the Academic Council on 11 December 2024.

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.[1] 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.[2] 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* and the *Amendment Act 2019* 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.[3] Responding to these statutory requirements, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) published in April 2016 statutory guidelines[4] underpinning their *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines*.[5]

In compliance with *Section 29 or 30 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, Carlow College formally applied to have its quality assurance procedures approved by QQI, this application and approval process was called Re-Engagement. Carlow College's quality assurance procedures were formally approved by the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) of QQI on 12 September 2019; PAEC made its decision based on the report submitted by the QQI Re-Engagement Panel that visited Carlow College on 17 June 2019. Carlow College submits the Annual Quality Report (AQR) to QQI, this annual report details the continued enhancement of the Quality Assurance Framework at Carlow College.[6]

[1] *Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education* (Bologna: Ministerial Conference, 19 June 1999).
[2] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 4.
[3] *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, Section 3, 28 (1).
[4] *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (Dublin: QQI, April 2016).
[5] *Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines* (Dublin: QQI, December 2015).
[6] For Staff, the Annual Quality Report can be found on the Staff Portal.

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 most of the 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 the Carlow College Student Portal. All activities related to quality assurance at Carlow College are found on our website.

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. *Gardiner's Relief Act* (1782) led to the gradual relaxation of the Penal Laws. Bishop James 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.

Since 1997, Carlow College has embarked on a building and renovation campaign that 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, beside the College. In 2011, Carlow College refurbished Lennon House to provide on-campus accommodation. With future development in mind, in 2015 and 2019 the College completed the purchase of sites 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.

Carlow College has a distinguished history as a College of Teaching and Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Moreover, 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. Carlow College is committed to providing an inclusive working and learning environment, valuing diversity and fostering a culture where the rights and dignity of all its staff and learners are respected. In 2022, Carlow College was awarded the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in recognition of the College's commitment to advancing gender equality across higher education. For more on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Carlow College, please click here. For more on our policy framework in this area, please see the *Equality Policy* (Appendix 1) and *Dignity and Respect Policy* (Appendix 2).

4.1.2: Strategic Objectives

Since 2017, as recommended by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (previously the Department of Education and Skills) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and in keeping with the government's policy of regionalisation, the logical strategy for Carlow College is integration into the third-level sector in the South East Region. Whilst a clear direction of integration for the College has been identified, the vision, mission, values and objectives of Carlow College to provide the highest level of third level education remains unwavering. Carlow College has a published Strategic Plan, 2023-2028 that ensures Carlow College remains positioned to face all challenges and opportunities over the next five years.

4.1.3: 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.

4.1.4: 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.

4.1.5: Values

The core values of Carlow College are its guiding principles which 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 be an educational space which promotes creativity and innovation as a way of responding to the contemporary world.

4.1.6: Programmes at Carlow College, St. Patrick's

All undergraduate programmes at Carlow College are validated by QQI, with the following programmes in receipt of public funding through the Free Fees Scheme[7]:

- BA in Arts and Humanities, Level 7;

- BA (Hons) in Arts and Humanities, Level 8;

- BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community Studies, Level 8;

- BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care), Level 7 (professionally accredited by CORU);

- BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care), Level 8; and

- BA (Hons) in English and History, Level 8.

The BA (Hons) in Psychology, Level 8 (professionally accredited by the Psychology Society of Ireland) is a fee-paying programme that is not a registered programme of the Free Fees

[7] PEL is a legal requirement of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. PEL is calculated at 3% of the total programme cost and includes administrative costs. For programmes on the Free Fees Scheme, they are protected by the Irish Government. PEL payment is required from a learner that does not qualify for the Free Fees Scheme. Carlow College uses an insurance policy to satisfy the legal requirement for PEL.

Scheme.[8] There is currently one postgraduate programme, the MA in Leadership in Therapeutic Child and Social Care, Level 9 that is validated by QQI. This programme is a fee-paying programme and its registered learners are underwritten by an insurance policy for the purposes of compliance regarding PEL.

All other postgraduate programmes, including associated special purpose awards (certificate programmes) are validated by SETU. These programmes are fee-paying programmes and their registered learners are underwritten by an insurance policy for the purposes of compliance regarding PEL.

4.1.7: Graduate Attributes

The Carlow College Core Values are embodied in the key Graduate Attributes and focus on the learner as a person and as a contributing member of their community. These attributes underpin the strategic plan for pedagogical practices at Carlow College and are designed to encourage learners to be more thoughtful, more rounded and reflective in their own lives and to allow them to be better contributors to their communities and societies, including their workplaces. Learners who develop these attributes will be able to successfully transition from their academic experience into their workplace while reflecting these core values.

The Graduate Attributes at Carlow College are:

- Critical and Creative Thinkers:
- Collaborators and Clear Communicators
- Continuous Learners
- Conscientious Citizens

For more on the Graduate Attributes, click on the link for the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029*.

4.1.8: Governance

Carlow College is committed to developing and maintaining a governance and organisational structure that is effective, flexible, sustainable, transparent and viable. Carlow College is committed to 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

[8] The registered learners on this programme are underwritten by an insurance policy for the purpose of compliance regarding PEL.

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 *Committee Structure Chart* is presented in Appendix 5 and a summary of this quality system is detailed in Appendix 6.

4.1.8.1: Governing Body

The governance of Carlow College is managed by the Governing Body in accordance with the *Instrument of Governance* signed 6 October 2022 (revised). 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 President is responsible to the Governing Body for the day-to-day executive management, with the support of the Senior Management Team and the Management Board. The Academic Council has reporting committees that have defined responsibilities that 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 3).[9]

4.1.8.2: Senior Management Team

The Senior Management Team is a decision making body and is responsible for managing the operations and resources of the College effectively and efficiently to ensure that the strategic objectives of Carlow College are met. The Team is responsible for assisting the President in the day-to-day executive management and administration of the College in accordance with the Mission as outlined in Clause 1.7 (*Instrument of Governance*). All decisions made by the Senior Management Team are in accordance with directives from the Governing Body, and in line with legal, statutory, and fiduciary requirements.

The Senior Management Team provides direction to the Management Board and the Academic Council. The President of the College bears responsibility for leading and coordinating the Senior Management Team's work.

4.1.8.3: Management Board

The Management Board manages the operations of Carlow College. The Management Board supports the President and the Senior Management Team in the development of the characteristic spirit of the College in accordance with its ethos, the development and

[9] The terms of references for the committees within Carlow College are found: https://www.carlowcollege.ie/media/CommitteesTermsofReference.pdf.

implementation of its strategy, development of budgets and capital expenditure plans and the monitoring of corporate risks and performance, to progress the strategic development of the College. All decisions made by the Management Board are in accordance with legal, statutory, and fiduciary requirements.

The President of the College, as Chairperson of the Board, bears responsibility for leading and coordinating the work of the Management Board. As such, the work of the Management Board is reported by the President to the Governing Body.

The Management Board is responsible for identifying and maintaining the corporate risk register of the College and reporting to the Audit Committee of the Governing Body as detailed in the *Risk Management Policy* (Appendix 4).

4.1.8.4: Academic Council

The Academic Council is responsible for the governing and management of the academic affairs and is the primary decision-making body for all academic matters at Carlow College, St. Patrick's. 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. It reports to the Governing Body via the Academic Committee of the Governing Body (Carlow College, St. Patrick's, *Instrument of Governance*, Ref. 11.1). The Academic Council conducts its work in accordance with legal, statutory, and fiduciary requirements.

4.1.9: 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 organogram is reviewed and updated annually by Human Resources and Quality Assurance. The *Organisational Chart* is presented in Appendix 7 and a summary of the high-level functions within the College is detailed in Appendix 8. For more on Staff Recruitment, Management and Development, please see Section 4.4 below.

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 (Appendix 5). 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 4.2: 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.

4.1.10: 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.[10]

4.1.10.1: 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 Director of Student Services & Learner Supports. 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.[11] Learners have an active on-going role in providing feedback to academic programmes and in the daily life of the College.[12]

[10] *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.

[11] For more on learner engagement in programme development see Section 4.3.3.1.

[12] For more on learner engagement in the daily life of the College see Section 4.7 and Appendix 41: *Supports for Learners Within the College*.

4.1.10.2: 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. To achieve these aims, the offices and departments within the College complete an Annual Quality Enhancement Report (Appendix 9) that allows for the offices and departments to reflect on the objectives they set the previous academic year, document quality enhancement projects throughout the academic year and set objectives for the next academic year. These reports are submitted to the Quality Assurance Office at the end of August, the identified objectives are then collated and all reports are submitted to the Management Board for approval. The Management Board also assesses the identified objectives contained in the reports and those objectives that are cross-functional will be progressed using the College's Project Management Template (Appendix 10); once completed, this is submitted to the Management Board for approval.

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

4.1.10.3: 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 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 Conscientious Citizens. 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. In the 2022 / 2023 Academic Year, the College established the Civic Engagement Hub to facilitate and

support its staff and students in their contributions to community engagement in the various different areas of community engagement activities.[13]

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 Assurance Guidelines* (2016). Cognisant 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.[14] Office-specific policies and associated documents are found under the relevant office webpages. All staff members can access policies and associated documents via the Staff Portal and learners can access all policies and associated documents via the Student Portal.

4.2.1: Documented Policies and Procedures

To comply with the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance 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* (Appendix 11), which contains, among other documents listed below, a *Template for College Policies*. 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 via the *Master List of Policies and Procedures in Carlow College, St. Patrick's* (Appendix 12).

4.2.2: A Comprehensive System

As stated above in *Section 4.1.10: 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

[13] For more on Civic Engagement activities at Carlow College, please visit: https://carlowcollege.ie/civic-engagement/.

[14] For more information regarding quality assurance activities at Carlow College, please visit: https://www.carlowcollege.ie/explore/leadership-structure/quality-assurance/.

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. 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* and the *Policy Implementation / Action Document*. The Policy Owner is responsible for monitoring the policy and ensuring that all associated documentation is updated as required. Policies may, from time-to-time, have minor changes made. In these instances, the changes will be made to the policy and sent directly to the approving body for approval. All policies at Carlow College will be reviewed every three years from the date of approval; unless changes are required owing to legal, statutory and / or organisation. Once a policy has completed its first three-year review cycle, it will be reviewed every five years from the date of approval. Please note that policies past their review date are still valid policies.

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 conform to the *National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)* (2003) and the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (2005). The academic programmes at Carlow College are validated by QQI and SETU.[15]

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* and *Amendment Act 2019*, which inform the *Policies and Criteria for*

[15] 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). See Section 4.1.6 above for more information.

the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training (2017) and *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (2016).

4.3.1: Programme Development and Approval

Carlow College places excellence in learning and teaching 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.

The process for programme development and approval is laid out in the document titled *Programme Development and Approval (Undergraduate / Postgraduate Programmes)* (Appendix 13). The process for programme review and revalidation is guided by the *QQI Provider's Programme Review Report Template* and the *Programme Validation Descriptor;* this process is detailed in the *Programme Review and Revalidation Process* (Appendix 14).

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 Oversight Group and the Establishment of Programme Design Teams* (Appendix 15) 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.[16] 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*.[17] The

[16] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 10.

[17] *Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training* (Dublin: QQI, November 2017), pp. 32-3.

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 16)[18] 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; and
- 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 and Procedures for Orientation and Induction of New and Continuing Learners* (Appendix 16.1).

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 and stage 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 (RPL)* (Appendix 16.2). Achievement and progression are

[18] For more information regarding guidelines and procedures related to Admissions, see https://www.carlowcollege.ie/study-with-us/prospective-students/admissions-office/.

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 23).

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 or SETU. Graduates of the College are conferred with their QQI or SETU degree parchment and provided with academic transcripts and their European Diploma Supplement (see Appendix 24).

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 Director of Student Services & Learner Supports, 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.[19] 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, see the *Guidelines for Changes Made to Programmes and / or Modules* (Appendix 17). 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.

[19] 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. For more information on programme monitoring and review see *Section 4.11: Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review*.

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 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.

Academic Staff Focus Groups

At the end of the academic year, opportunities are provided for staff who teach and administer each programme to participate in a facilitated focus group. This is an opportunity for Programme Directors to get feedback on specific aspects of programme management and delivery. This feedback is summarised in the Programme Monitoring Report (Appendix 18) and reflected in the action plan which each programme agrees for the coming academic year.

Programme Monitoring Reports

The evidence generated through the monitoring process is documented by the Programme Director in the *Programme Monitoring Report (PMR)* (Appendix 18). This report includes information on: learner feedback via surveys and learner representatives; staff feedback via Programme Board meetings and focus groups; 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 PMR and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar will draft the *Cross-Programme Monitoring Report (CPMR)* (Appendix 19).

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 primary 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 *Procedures for Module-Level Learner Feedback* (Appendix 20), and on programmes through an *Annual Programme Evaluation Form* (Appendix 21). Recent graduates are asked to complete a *Graduate Survey* (Appendix 22);

b) learners may approach their Academic Advisor in order to highlight specific problems relevant to that particular year or module of study.[20] 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; and

d) the Students' Union convenes regular meetings of all learner 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 Director to encourage a pool of potential candidates. Final approval for the appointment of external examiners is granted by the Academic Council (Appendix 23: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*). The written recommendations of the College and the external examiners are discussed with staff 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 PMR.

4.3.3.2: Programme Review

Every programme is formally reviewed and submitted for revalidation to QQI or SETU 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*

[20] Please see the Carlow College *Academic Standards and Assessment Regulations*: https://www.carlowcollege.ie/media/RegulationsInRelationToAssessmentAndStandards.pdf.

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; the 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 relevant / appropriate skills and experience 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 to meet the needs of its learners and this is done by recruiting and retaining lecturers and professional support services employees who believe in delivering educational excellence. For a complete guide to employment at Carlow College, please see the *Employee Handbook* (Appendix 25). For a complete guide to Human Resources at Carlow College, please see https://carlowcollege.ie/human-resources/.

In May 2020, Carlow College formally approved the recognition of Trade Unions to represent their members, in any grade of College employment, both individually and collectively, and to negotiate on their behalf. Following a representation from the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), the College indicated its willingness to work with SIPTU and its representatives, both locally and nationally.

A set of guidelines has been developed titled the *Guidelines for Employer and Union Engagement* that guide the implementation of the process of Union representation and engagement with the College management. These guidelines are informed by best practice in employee / employer engagement and representation, and by the national legislative context. The College recognises that the right to join a Union and collective representation, alongside a human resources infrastructure and robust quality framework are critical to a fair workplace. The Guidelines sets out a series of guidelines pertaining to key roles, responsibilities, and processes to support this engagement. Moreover, a new group was formed called the Employee Engagement Group which consists of senior management, Human Resources and Shop Stewards. This Group meets monthly to discuss and work collaboratively on workplace activities and reports to the Management Board on any items that need discussion, decision and approval.

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, educational assistance, college days, hybrid working, succession planning and recruitment opportunities (Appendix 26: *Benefits Policy*).

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 (Appendix 27: *Recruitment and Selection Policy*). In addition to our policy on recruitment, the College has a *Staff Vetting Policy* (Appendix 28) which ensures that all potential candidates and current staff members, undergo Garda Vetting (where role is deemed relevant), 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 and Selection Policy* (Appendix 27) 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 contribute effectively and positively 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, union partners, focus groups, employee surveys, 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 turns 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.

The College has a Staff Portal that provides staff with news / event updates and information related to all College activities; staff can access this via the main page of the Carlow College website.

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 (Appendix 29: *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 that 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 (Appendix 30: *Probation Policy*). 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. To further support new employees, the College ensures they receive essential training in Data Protection, Dignity and Respect, Technology and Information Security, Health and Safety, Child Protection, College systems and Human Resources policies and systems.[21]

[21] This is not a comprehensive list of induction training as some other training may be required based on the role. For example, academic staff will receive training specific to learning, teaching and assessment at Carlow College. Staff members teaching on a blended learning programme will receive training outlined in Section 5 of the *Blended Learning Handbook for Staff*.

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 achieving our mission successfully 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, exam 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 (Appendix 31: *Study and Exam Leave Request Form*).

The College, in addition to the aforementioned learning and development activities, provides continuous learning and development training for Line Managers and Supervisors. This training enables our management team to provide effective leadership and management, providing consistency in our communication and management practices.

Carlow College provides Professional Leave in addition to all other continuous professional development leave. This leave is provided to employees who are required to attend approved business-related meetings and / or any other approved role related duties that require an employee on or off site to fulfil a business-related event and or duty. This facilitates ongoing and necessary business and College development for all staff members.

The *Staff Research Policy* (Appendix 32) sets out research supports available to staff. Academic Staff who register and complete a postgraduate diploma in higher education and / or complete their doctoral studies receive financial assistance (Staff Doctoral Bursary Form. Carlow College encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research by making available each year five days of post-doctoral (pro-rata for part-time staff) 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. (Academic Staff Post-Doctoral Research 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 often seek a financial contribution from authors to defray publishing costs. A grant in-aid of publication fund 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 (Staff Book Publications Bursary Form.

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 (Conference Attendance Application Form).

To foster a vibrant research culture, staff are encouraged to bring research conferences and symposia to Carlow College. Financial support is available to staff who propose conferences and symposia that will advance their own research agendas or as part of wider national and international research communities in which they may be involved (Application for Symposia and Conference Funding Form).

4.5: Learning and Teaching

Learning and teaching 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. By engaging with research-driven learning, experiencing authentic assessment options, participating in workplace learning and research and wrestling with global issues and concepts of sustainability, learners form a better connection with the world around them and are better equipped for their future role in society. 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 learning and teaching strategy that converted best practice into standard practice.[22] 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 learning and teaching by developing a clear *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy* that is informed by the national strategies and aligns with the *College Strategic Plan*. In addition,

[22] *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* (Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, January 2011), p. 52.

the College actively encourages and supports staff members to pursue postgraduate education and qualifications in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Moreover, the College has a dedicated Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee that is comprised of staff members and a learner representative and charged with ensuring that the *Learning and Teaching Policy* (Appendix 33) is placed at the core of our academic programmes.

4.5.1: Promotion of Learning and Teaching

Carlow College is committed to ensuring that learning and teaching practices within the College promote enquiry and critical evaluation and encourage learners to take an active role in the classroom. These qualities are reflected in the Carlow College Graduate Attributes, which inform all teaching practices at the College.[23] This learner-centred approach to learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating learners' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.[24] 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 continue to develop and implement an institution-wide evaluation process to inform our practice and identity 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 developments 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 learning and teaching experience that is learner-centred, research-led and research-informed. *For example, we look to support the individual learning*

[23] For more information on the Graduate Attributes, see: https://carlowcollege.ie/teaching-learning/graduate-attributes/.

[24] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 9.

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.

6. The role of third level education in developing individual capacity for autonomous learning and critical engagement with the world. *We encourage universal design for learning practices (UDL) in the classroom, steer learners toward engaging with, and exploring, sustainability issues and provide workplace-learning opportunities within our programmes.*

7. The importance of technology in enabling new modes of instruction, assessment, and educational pathways. *We are committed to ongoing investment in our IT infrastructure and in requiring learners to develop an enhanced IT literacy*. *In addition, we are committed to providing digital opportunities for teaching and learning and exposing learners to current and future technologies such as generative AI.*

8. The importance and impact of the functionality and use of the built environment and infrastructure of the College. *We are committed to further developing learning environments that meet current and future pedagogical and technological needs.*

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 B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care); the B.A. (Honours) in Social, Political and Community Studies; the B.A. in Arts and Humanities (if enrolled in the Workplace Learning Experience Module); the B.A. (Honours) in Arts and Humanities (if enrolled in the Workplace Learning Experience Module); and the B.A. (Honours) in English and History (if enrolled in the Workplace Learning Experience Module).

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.[25]

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 *Learner Vetting Policy* (Appendix 55) and safe practice through the *Fitness to Practice Policy* (Appendix 34).[26] Learners enrolled on the Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme, also adhere to the *Breach of Professional Conduct (Professional Social Care) Policy* (Appendix 35). 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 environments along with ensuring that learners have placement opportunities and experiences that 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 learning and teaching 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 (Appendix 36: *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, which is contained within the *Research Ethics*

[25] For more information on the Graduate Attributes, see: https://carlowcollege.ie/teaching-learning/graduate-attributes/.

[26] Learners enrolled on the Workplace Learning Experience Module, and who are going into an educational facility, will adhere to the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, 2nd edn (Teaching Council of Ireland, 2016).

Advisory Policy (Appendix 36), involves the design and conveyance of ethical guidelines, checklists and consent forms to all supervisors involved with learners at undergraduate level in Carlow College. 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 Learning and Teaching

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). An inclusive teaching strategy recognises that providing for the needs of learners from a variety of backgrounds can enhance the learning environment for everyone. Academic staff are encouraged to incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which includes providing a variety of learning opportunities and incorporating learner-centred, experiential learning in their modules. In addition, 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'.[27] In all our assessment practices Carlow College adhere to the policies, criteria and guidelines outlined in the QQI documents: *Assessments and Standards* (Revised 2022) and *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers* (Revised 2022).

Carlow College is committed to a learning and teaching 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.

[27] 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.

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 (Appendix 37: *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. For a complete guide to all assessment regulations and standards, see the Regulations in Relation to Assessment and Standards (Appendix 37.1); this document is regularly monitored and revised by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

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 Learning, Teaching 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 2022). 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 and academic staff are encouraged to utilise the principles of UDL. There is a balance between formative and summative assessment as well as continuous and end-of-term assessment; thus, allowing

learners to apply their learning in further assessments through engaging in both low-stakes assessment and iterative assessment.

Assessment begins early in 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 (see Section 4.5.4 above).

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. All written assessments are submitted through Turnitin and feedback is provided through this platform. The use of Generative AI in learning and teaching is currently being evaluated.

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. The College has a marking bands criteria which programme and individual module marking schemes and rubrics must align to.

All continuous assessment is 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 (see Appendix 38: *Assessment Re-Check, Review and Appeals Policy*).[28]

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 and there are clear guidelines on plagiarism and penalties for same (Appendix 39: *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy*).

[28] Please see the Carlow College *Academic Standards and Assessment Regulations*: https://www.carlowcollege.ie/media/RegulationsinRelationtoAssessmentandStandards.pdf.

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 (Appendix 23: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*).[29]

A Plagiarism Registry is maintained and learners who are found to have plagiarised are referred for training and support and / or subject to disciplinary action as per the *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy* (Appendix 39). Turnitin provides similarity reports which can be used to identify potential plagiarism. Turnitin also provide a generative AI value, however this is unreliable and staff cannot use it as evidence of Generative AI use.

The College is committed to identifying and developing a process to further address assessments that are vulnerable to Generative AI misuse.

4.6.5: Inclusiveness in Assessment

Lecturers and tutors are encouraged to use UDL assessment practices that value, promote and take account of learner 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 that enhance the learner experience and assist our learners in meeting the demands of their academic goals, professional aspirations and personal commitments.[30] Carlow College recognises its responsibility to support learners to complete their studies. For a vast majority of learners, progression to completion of their studies is uneventful with little or no need for additional supports. This is not always the case however. In certain circumstances there is a need for a formalised coordinated response to support a learner in distress. The *Fitness to Continue in Study Policy* (Appendix 40) is expressly intended to be supportive of individual learners who may be in distress or difficulty whilst also recognising the right of the wider College community to study, work and live free of undue duress / distress caused by others.

Learner resources and supports play a vital role in fostering a positive, warm and nurturing learning environment that 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

[29] For programmes validated by SETU, the Exam Boards and the Appointment of External Examiners are governed by SETU policies and procedures.

[30] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 14.

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 (Appendix 41: *Supports for Learners Within the College*).

Carlow College has developed a *Learner Health and Wellbeing Policy* (Appendix 42) to encourage and support positive mental health and wellbeing as part of a holistic approach to learner development and success within the College and to ensure that the promotion and protection of mental health and wellbeing is part of the overall college experience of our learners.

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 (Appendix 16.1: *Guidelines and Procedures for Orientation and Induction of New and Continuing Learners*).

- *Learner materials:* Learner handbooks, induction material, induction website, 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, '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. There is also a robust Communications Portal on the Staff Portal.

- *Follow-up learner communication:* Follow-up 'Settle, Stay, Succeed' emails sent to learners advising them of the services and supports available, designated Student Services Moodle pages, college events, information campaigns through college social media channels 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 Student Affairs Ireland, the Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS), the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD), Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN), Chaplaincy Network at Third Level (CN3), Irish Student Health Association (ISHA) and the Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland (PCHIE).

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 (Appendix 9: *Annual Quality Enhancement Report 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 that include one learner representative from each stage of the programme. Programme Boards typically meet five 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. Carlow College has an Information Security Framework that was developed to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data and is aligned to ISO 27001.

As part of this framework, there is an Information Security Management Review Team in place that is responsible for ensuring the effective delivery of the Information Security Management System and its continual improvement. Key components of its remit are:

- to systematically examine the College's information security risks, taking account of the threats, vulnerabilities, and impacts;
- to design and implement a coherent and comprehensive suite of information security controls and / or other forms of risk treatment (such as risk mitigation, avoidance or transfer) to address those risks that are deemed unacceptable; and

- to adopt an overarching management process to ensure that the information security controls continue to meet the College's information security needs on an ongoing basis.

For more on the remit of the Security Management Review Team, see its terms of reference.

As part of the Information Security Framework, Carlow College has a suite of policies to help and secure information through technology. The overarching policy that governs this framework is the *Information Security Policy* (Appendix 47). Moreover, Carlow College has a *Data Protection Policy* (Appendix 45)[31] and *Freedom of Information Policy* (Appendix 46) that meets our legislative requirements.[32] Carlow College utilises the *Code of Practice for Freedom of Information for Public Bodies* (FOI Central Policy Unit, Department of Expenditure and Public Reform, September 2015).

For a complete list of all policies associated with Carlow College's Information Security Framework, please see: https://carlowcollege.ie/information-security-framework/.

4.8.1 Student Records Management System

At present, learner information is recorded through our online Student Records Management System (SRMS), which captures application, registration and generation of student records. Our SRMS is a comprehensive cloud-based learner information system that captures learner data, which allows 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 (Appendix 43: *Organisational Reports*).[33] Carlow College also conducts monitoring and evaluation of our academic programmes to ensure that that programmes remain relevant and effective (Appendix 44: *Academic Monitoring and Evaluation Reports*).

The Information Security Management Review Team work 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 (Appendix 48: *Records Management Policy*). The system comprises a series of policies, procedures and measures to ensure:

- the creation and capture of required information and data in the recordkeeping system;

[31] For more information on Carlow College's Data Protection Initiatives, see https://www.carlowcollege.ie/explore/leadership-structure/data-protection/.
[32] For more information on Carlow College's Freedom of Information Initiatives, see https://www.carlowcollege.ie/explore/leadership-structure/freedom-of-information/.
[33] For a *Flowchart of Organisational Reports* see Appendix 43.1 and for *Committee Reports* see Appendix 43.2.

- 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 SMRS and the wider recordkeeping system increases efficiency which ensures that the College meets it reporting obligations, while also enhancing transparency and accountability to promote confidence in how the College goes about its business. Staff are provided with ongoing training and awareness workshops to familiarise themselves with efficient data management in line with policies that have been designed for this purpose.

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.[34] 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 that regularly take place in the College and other venues such as VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art & The George Bernard Shaw Theatre, which is located on campus.

Carlow College is committed to appropriate and effective communication with all stakeholders, both internally and externally. Carlow College has developed a robust *Marketing and Communications Policy* (Appendix 49) with associated procedures to ensure that all stakeholder communication is appropriate, timely and relevant. The College regularly publishes and disseminates information owned by, or relating to, the College through

[34] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (May 2015), p. 12 and QQI's *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners* (August 2024).

multiple communication channels. The *Marketing and Communications Policy* (Appendix 49) and its associated procedures are concerned with managing the transfer of this information.

Surveys play an important role in the College's communication with both current learners and graduates. All College surveys are carried out online. The Digital Communications and Marketing Department manages college surveys and the role of the Digital Communications and Marketing Department in the survey process is to prepare and issue the survey; once complete, the results are then issued to the relevant staff member for processing. Ad hoc surveys, which are not annual, must be approved by the Office of the Registrar before being sent to the Digital Communications and Marketing Department for circulation.

The College is regularly involved in public events, which may be hosted within the College or take place at external venues throughout the country. These events enable the College to further personal communication and build relationships with our stakeholders.

4.9.1: Public Information

The College regards its website (www.carlowcollege.ie) as a primary point of contact with our stakeholders and the main resource for public information. The Digital Communications and Marketing Department is responsible for developing and maintaining the College website, along with official College social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Moreover, the Digital Communications and Marketing Department, in collaboration with Student Recruitment, is responsible for the production of the annual College prospectus. In addition to this prospectus and its digital presence, Carlow College annually publishes programme and service specific publications. These highlight specific services and areas of interest within the College. All publication development must follow the approval process outlined in the *Publication Approval Flowchart* (Appendix 50).

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 digital format, the College Prospectus.[35] 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 Prospectus is a first step introduction to the College with more detailed information available on the College website. 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

[35] The Prospectus is published one year in advance of learner entry during the month of August. The current prospectus can be viewed at: https://carlowcollege.ie/prospectus/

settle into their studies and successfully progress through their academic programmes at Carlow College; we endeavour to help our learners 'settle, stay and succeed'. Arrival and orientation take 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. As part of our mission to promote academic success, the College has a Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO). Although the academic imperative is at the heart of the process, it does not operate in isolation from other college functions that offer support-related guidance and advice.[36]

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.[37] College-wide policies and procedures are currently published on the Staff Portal and the Student Portal. Policies governing academic activities are published online on the Policies A-Z page.

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

[36] For a complete guide to the learner information provided at induction and orientation, please see Appendix 16.1: *Guidelines and Procedures for Orientation and Induction of New and Continuing Learners*.
[37] For more information on Carlow College's Quality Assurance Initiatives, see https://www.carlowcollege.ie/explore/leadership-structure/quality-assurance/.

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 appropriate 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 NFQ. Our programmes leading to these awards are designed and structured on the basis of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (see Appendix 24: *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. We also have Certificate Programmes, Higher Diploma Programmes and Postgraduate Programmes validated by SETU. 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.[38]

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.[39]

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. Carlow College has Memoranda of Agreements (Appendix 51) in place to establish and commit to a relationship between the practice placement host organisation and Carlow College to enable an educational experience for the learner on practice placement. This

[38] For more information on these procedures, please see the Admissions pages at https://carlowcollege.ie/study-with-us/prospective-students/admissions-office/.

[39] *Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval* (Dublin: QQI, 2021).

agreement will provide the learner undertaking practice learning as part of their programme the opportunity, if they are successful, to gain QQI academic credits.

Carlow College's approach for engaging with international institutions / organisations is to:

- inform, enrich and enhance the teaching and learning experience of all learners by increasing the diversity of the learner body; and
- provide staff of Carlow College with increased educational linkages that inform and lead teaching and research activities.

Through its inter-institutional partnerships, Carlow College remains cognisant of all legislative requirements underpinning the various strands of collaboration it is engaged. At present, Carlow College has a range of partnerships, exchanges and collaborations of varying degrees of complexity and engagement (Appendices 52 and 52.1). In particular, 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 Educations institutions in the United States. Reciprocal arrangements enable learners from these institutions to spend a semester in Carlow College (Appendix 53: *Template for Inter-Institutional Agreements with International Affiliates*).

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 or SETU. 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 overseen by the Vice President for Academic Affairs / Registrar 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 (Appendix 23: *Appointment of External Examiners Policy*). In the case of programme development and cyclical reviews, Carlow College documentation is independently evaluated under QQI policies and procedures; this includes establishing terms of reference for Independent Panels.[40]

[40] For programmes validated by SETU, the Exam Boards and the Appointment of External Examiners are governed by SETU policies and procedures.

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 created by QQI, the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance 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. Moreover, this Committee is responsible for reviewing the Annual Quality Report (AQR) ahead of it being sent to the Academic Council for approval; this report is submitted to QQI annually in February.

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. This quality culture is articulated in the *Quality Assurance Consultation, Feedback and Action Cycle* (Appendix 54). All reports as part of the external programme review and institutional review are published on the Carlow College website and any recommendations emanating from the reviews are implemented and monitored.

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.[41] 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.

[41] 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.

Programmes at Carlow College undergo a formal external cyclical five-year programmatic review guided by the process laid out by QQI.[42] The first phase of this process is a self-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.

4.11.2: Institutional Reviews

Carlow College, as a higher education institution operating in Ireland, undergoes an external institutional cyclical ten-year institutional review, CINNTE Review, guided by the process laid out by QQI.[43] Institutional reviews are important as they verify the effectiveness of an institution's internal quality assurance and act as a catalyst for improvement.[44] 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.

[42] *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* (Dublin: QQI, 2016); *QQI's Provider's Programme Review Report Template and QQI's Programme Validation Manual.* For SETU validated programmes, contact the Office of the Registrar for SETU policies and procedures governing cyclical reviews.

[43] *Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions* (Dublin: QQI, February 2016).

[44] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (Yerevan: Ministerial Conference, May 2015), p. 13.

4.12: Quality Assurance of Research Activities and Programmes

Carlow College has a research active staff and a vibrant research culture. Carlow College recognises that staff research activities contributes to the College's institutional standing, strategy and mission, staff development, teaching and learning, inter-institutional collaboration and partnerships, and public outreach.

Staf at Carlow College are act vely engaged in research that has regional, nat onal, and global horizons. A number of Carlow College staf are recognised as experts in their disciplinary f eld. Carlow College staf have a track-record of producing high-quality research outputs in the form of books, peer-reviewed art cles, and chapters in edited collect ons. They also regularly present their research at nat onal and internat onal conferences and symposia while promot ng knowledge transfer through appearances as subject experts on TV, radio, print media, podcasts, and public events. Carlow College staf also act vely engage with key stakeholders in Carlow and the southeast region more broadly. The Research Hub holds an annual Research Week every February. The *Staff Research Policy* (Appendix 33) sets out the contexts for College research and the research supports available at Carlow College.

The contexts for and objectives of the Research Hub are set out in the *Research Hub Framework Document* (2018). These include:

To achieve the aim to develop the research profile of Carlow College, the Academic Framework establishes six strategic goals:

- to identify existing areas of research within the College so as to develop a global picture of College research;
- to support and promote Staff research;
- to foster a research agenda that aligns with College Strategy, mission and ethos
- to connect the College's research expertise with local and national organisations, communities and institutions; and
- to play a supporting role in College programme development by identifying, utilising and enhancing existing and potential areas of College research and expertise.

College research activities are captured principally through the Research Hub. The Research Hub functions as both a support for and promoter of staff research activities and seeks to achieve the goals set out in the Research Hub Framework (2018). The Research Hub produces an annual report, which is a record of all known College research activities; this report is submitted to the Strategic Development Committee. Staff are periodically invited to submit information of research activities to the Research Hub, which publishes that information on the Research Hub webpage, on Twitter and Instagram, and in quarterly newsletters to staff.

The Research Hub also supports staff research activities through the organisation of events such as book launches and a research week, and is an engine for the promotion of research activities. Staff profiles also contain details of research staff interests and publications.

Carlow College recognises the important of staff development in ensuring excellent research-led teaching. The College has also committed to ensuring that staff 'are enabled to keep up to date with contemporary advances and research in their professions, academic disciplines'.[45] In particular, the College has identified as a strategic objective the promotion of post-doctoral research, publication and advanced professional training by academic staff through clear support mechanisms. These support and research-incentive mechanisms are, namely:

- research allocation of up to 40% on the Academic Workload Allocation;
- the promotion and recognition of staff research activities through the Research Hub;
- a staff doctoral bursary;
- the Academic Staff Post-Doctoral Research Leave;
- a Staff Book Publications Bursary;
- the College's Conference Attendance – Expenses and Procedures; and
- the Application Procedures for Symposia and Conferences Held at Carlow College.

Carlow College gives special recognition to the important nexus between teaching and research in its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2024-2029.

4.13 Blended Learning Framework

Carlow College is committed to full compliance with the QQI *Guidelines for Providers of Fully Online and Blended Learning Programmes* (2023) and ensuring that the Blended Learning Framework is fully integrated into the Quality Assurance Framework at Carlow College. In particular, the Blended Learning Framework at Carlow College aims 'to enhance educators' ability to provide high-quality and responsive instruction, increase learner engagement and generate more inclusive and equitable learning opportunities'.[46]

Carlow College currently delivers one undergraduate blended learning programme, the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme; this programme is validated by QQI. The Independent Validation Panel (2024) for this programme

[45] See the *Learning and Teaching Policy*, p. 3.
[46] *Guidelines for Providers of Fully Online and Blended Learning Programmes* (QQI, 2023), p. 5.

recommended to the College to 'progress the application for an extension of scope for blended and / or online delivery to increase accessibility and flexibility of the programme offering to better support learners managing competing demands on their time and potentially increase the programme's appeal to graduates from other institutions.' Utilising the temporary extension of providers' scope of provision brought in by QQI to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, Carlow College piloted the delivery of this programme for blended learning during the 2024-2025 Academic Year. Carlow College used this academic year to develop and embed its Blended Learning Framework to ensure that it complies with the QQI *Guidelines for Providers of Fully Online and Blended Learning Programmes* (2023); Carlow College formally submitted an application to have its Blended Learning Framework approved by QQI in June 2025.

Carlow College currently delivers a higher diploma, two postgraduate and a suite of special purpose blended learning programmes validated by SETU:

- Special Purpose (certificate) programmes (Levels 7 and 8);
- Higher Diploma in Politics and Society (Level 8);
- Postgraduate Diploma in Irish Regional History (Level 9); and
- MA in Irish Regional History (Level 9).

Prior to the introduction of the Carlow College Blended Learning Framework, approved in June 2025, these programmes were governed by the SETU *Blended Learning Policy*.

Carlow College has a *Blended Learning Strategy* and the College's Blended Learning Framework is fully documented in the College's *Blended Learning Policy* (Appendix 56) and operationalised in the *Blended Learning Handbook for Staff* (Appendix 56.1). Learners and staff should also consult programme-specific handbooks as these documents will contain further guidance that is programme-specific.

Below is the high-level aims of the Carlow College Blended Learning Framework:

(1) The overall approach to the provision of blended learning programmes has been benchmarked against the statutory *Guidelines for Providers of Fully Online and Blended Learning Programmes* (2023).

(2) The development of blended learning programmes at Carlow College is an integral aim of the *Carlow College Strategic Plan 2023-2028* to build on the current range of programmes and seek opportunities to establish new course offerings at all higher education levels, including the development of more flexible modes of delivery, enhancement of learner

employability, professional development needs, and to ensure the College's responsiveness to regional and national skills needs.[47]

(3) The College has a planned, strategic and policy-driven approach to exploring different delivery modes regarding blended provision at Carlow College for postgraduate and certificate programmes, as indicated in the College's *Blended Learning Strategy* and *Programme Development Strategy 2023-2028*.[48]

(4) Annual IT reviews are conducted to determine that there is sufficient technological capability though investment in information technology infrastructure that it is fit-for-purpose and can support interactive learning and teaching opportunities for all learners and staff.[49]

(5) The College's pedagogical approach to blended learning programmes is governed by the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2024-2029*. As part of this strategy for online and blended learning, the college will develop expertise in educational technologies and tools and as well as providing training for staff in the use of technologies and online pedagogy.

(6) Learning, teaching and assessment regarding and blended learning programmes are subject to Carlow College's *Learning and Teaching Policy*.[50] This policy recognises the importance of a learning environment that supports the achievement of both general and specific learning outcomes, namely: (a) Maintaining and developing the learning environment in relation to the delivery, learning and assessment modes; (b) Learner accessibility to the built environment and to online resources used in the College.

(7) Carlow College has in place support for learners registered on blended learning programmes with equivalent access to Carlow College support systems and academic resources, namely Student Counselling Service, Chaplaincy Services, Student Health Service, Disability and Learning Support Service, Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO), Careers Office, IT Service and Library Service.

(8) Blended learning programmes are robustly governed, subject to College quality assurance policies and procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes.

[47] See *Carlow College Strategic Plan, 2023-2028*, p. 6.
[48] *Carlow College Programme Development Strategy, 2023-2028*, p. 3.
[49] *Strategic Plan*, p. 10.
[50] *Carlow College Learning and Teaching Policy*, p. 3.

5: Roles and Responsibilities

The Quality Assurance Office, working with the Management Board, Academic Council and Quality Assurance Committee, has the principal role and responsibility for ensuring that the *Quality Assurance Polic*y 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.

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), Student Portal (Learners) and Quality Assurance page of the Carlow College website for external stakeholders.

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*.