# QUALITY ASSURANCE

# St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI)

| Document Title | SNMCI Quality Assurance Manual |
|---|---|
| Purpose | Reference for principles, guidelines, policies, procedures and practices upon which SNMCI QA mechanisms are based. |
| Approved by | Academic Board |
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| Effective from | Sep 2019 |
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| Update 1: | August 2020: Blended Learning updates |
| Update 2: | |

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# Section One:

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Legal Status

St. Nicholas Montessori College of Ireland (SNMCI) is a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) first incorporated in 1978, with Company Registration Number 64259

SNMCI is also a registered charity and operates on a not-for-profit basis under Charity Regulators Number 6193.

### 1.2 History of the College

SNMCI is based in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. The college is one of the three 'pillars' of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland (SMSI), the other pillars representing St Nicholas Montessori Schools and St Nicholas Montessori Ireland's Teachers' Association. The Society has been providing Montessori education and training since 10th May 1970 when the first committee of the St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland (SNMSI) was convened.

The summary timeline below describes major events in the history of the College. Alongside these developments the original SMSI School also flourished. Now that school, and a second SMSI school (SMSI Merrion) provide exemplars Montessori learning environment for our student teachers while educating 150+ pupils aged 3 to 12.

**Figure 1: College Timeline**
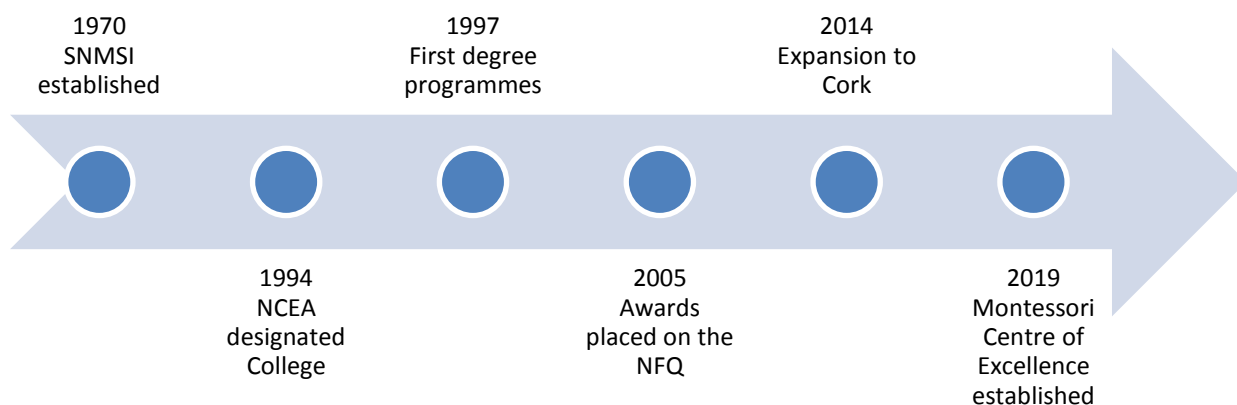
**1.3 Vision, Mission and Values**

Our vision is to bring excellence in Montessori education to the broader education landscape so that all young people are placed at the heart of their own educational experience and empowered to be independent, confident and creative lifelong learners.

We strive to achieve our vision through our Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education in which:

- We provide outstanding learning experiences, guided by the philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori, which meet the developmental needs of every individual.
- We prepare and develop Montessori educators who are able to leverage the full value of Montessori philosophy to support and nurture all learners to grow and develop as valuable contributing members of society.
- We advocate for the Montessori Method by supporting Montessori professionals to continually improve and reflect upon their practice, and by supporting the integration of Montessori philosophy into national education systems.

As we implement our mission, our actions and behaviours are guided by our core values:

- **Respect for the whole person** – we value the full diversity of strengths of the whole person and we seek to nourish the development of social, emotional, behavioural, spiritual and cognitive excellence in all learners
- **Freedom** – we believe in and value freedom of choice and independence in learning and in life and we seek to design personal choice and responsibility into everything that we do
- **Inclusion and diversity** – we believe that every learner should have access to high quality learning, and we seek to provide that opportunity to all learners regardless of race, religion, ability, location, or socioeconomic status
- **Social Impact** – we believe in the transformative power of the Montessori Method and we seek to harness that power to make a positive impact on our learners, our staff, local, national and international communities

**1.4 Strategic Plan**

2018 saw the 'rebranding' of St Nicholas Montessori Ireland and as part of the strategic plan **Society 2025**. This strategic plan supports the spirit of unity between the schools, the College and the teachers' association, all operating under the umbrella of St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland (SMSI). The College is committed not only to the development of new programmes but also to adaptation of delivery and flexibility of provision. The expansion of the schoolS enhances and showcases the work of the College, and the Teachers Association supports alumni and forges links with the wider community.

**1.4.1**  SNMCI as the Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education

To realise our vision of bringing the benefits of Montessori education to the broader education landscape to empower lifelong learners, we are establishing a national Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education which will:

- Build on SMSI's **academic expertise** in the development and delivery of Montessori education throughout the continuum of education
- Provide access to **exemplars** of Montessori best practice from birth to 12
- Be a recognised **centre for research**, promotion, and sharing of best practice in Montessori education, philosophy and practice
- Facilitate access to high quality Montessori education, training and continuing professional development on a **nationwide** and international basis, leveraging the full benefits of educational technologies to achieve this.
- Partner and collaborate with early years, Montessori and primary education providers to support them, as they seek to leverage the proven value of Montessori education in improving learning and social outcomes
- **Support** government agencies, early years and primary organisations, the NCCA, the Teaching Council and other stakeholders as they continue their journey of integrating Montessori philosophy into national curricula
- Facilitate access to Montessori education to **disadvantaged and minority groups** through the provision of bursaries and other modes of access
- **Reach** out to the **wider community** and support the introduction of Montessori philosophy to areas outside of traditional education settings

**1.5 Current Accreditation**

SNMCI is a provider of programmes leading to QQI awards. The College provides the following programmes:-

| No. | Programme Title | Level/Type | Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | BA in Montessori Education | 7/Major | Running with final cohort. |
| 2. | BA (Hons) in Montessori Education | 8/Major | One Year Full and Part Time Progression from Level 7 |
| 3. | Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education | 8/Major | Programme for graduates of any discipline who wish to follow a career in Montessori ECEC. |
| 4. | B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education | 8/Major | First cohort Sep2019 |
| 5. | B. Ed. Montessori Education | 7/Major | First cohort Sep2019 |
| 6. | Montessori Education for Dementia | 6/SPA | Validated June 2020 First cohort Oct 2020 |
| 7. | BA(Hons) Psychology | 8/Major | Validated June 2020 First cohort 2021 |
| 8. | Certificate in Special Education | Micro Credential | Validated Dec 2020 |

**1.6 Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)**

SNMCI is a founding member of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA). HECA offers the HECA PEL scheme which provides member organisations with two levels of protection for enrolled learners:

- Academic Bonding – SNMCI is bonded by the National College of Ireland (NCI) and the Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences (ICHAS) such that these Colleges have agreed to provide SNCMI programmes to SNCMI learners in the event that SNMCI is unable to do so itself.
- Financial Bonding – SNCMI pays an annual levy to the PEL scheme to support a sink fund that HECA PEL members can access to resource the delivery of programmes in the event that academic bonding is activated.

## 2. BLENDED LEARNING AT SNMCI

The College was granted Blended Learning Status in October 2020 and has made considerable advances in blended learning, with major investment in resources; human and technological. These advances are on-going, as College programmes continue to be adapted and written for the blended learning environment.

The College's *Blended Learning Strategy* recognises the far-reaching impact of the introduction of blended learning on all areas of College activity. The College has addressed and is continuing to address the use of appropriate systems, infrastructure, pedagogic supports and resources with reference to QQI's 2018 *Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning* which identifies three broad contexts which inform and frame the development and implementation of a Blended Learning strategy:

- **Organisational Context**
- **Programme Context including Development and Assessment**
- **Learner Experience Context**

### 2.1 Organisational Context

The organisational context includes institution wide areas of infrastructure, resources, staff qualifications and training. Blended learning has been a strategic consideration for SNMCI since 2018 and in the time that has elapsed since, the context of the organisation has evolved to one which is now well placed to begin the transition to a fully blended learning institution.

This developing context has been driven by leadership which has been fully transparent regarding how Blended Learning fits with the vision and mission of the College. The inclusion of Blended Learning as a core element of that mission has been robustly supported at Board level by a commitment to provide the financial resources needed to realise quality blended learning delivery.

For blended learning to become fully embedded as a mode of delivery it is crucial that both staff and learners feel confident that there is a long term institutional commitment to the resourcing of the required transitions. SNMCI is now in a position to provide that confidence.

### 2.1.1 Learning Technology Resources

- The College has chosen Moodle as the main Learning Management System (LMS) and Zoom for virtual classrooms.
- Further development of the College website and Moodle platform has included improved appearance, better organisation and use of accessibility features, enhancement and integration of library services and the College's student portal system (which provides a one stop shop for all student services).

- The College identifies reviews and tests additional learning technologies, such as private messaging systems and e-portfolio solutions to further enhance the blended learning experience for learners and staff
- All measures are taken to ensure that the physical and technical infrastructure is sufficient to support Blended Learning at an institutional and programme level.

### 2.1.2 Human Resources

- The IT Manager has responsibility for the design, implementation, maintenance and security of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- The IT Manager works closely with all staff members supporting them from a technical perspective, to maximise the benefits of the learning technologies employed by the College and to support the introduction of new technologies and applications.
- The Instructional Designer/Technologist has responsibility for pedagogical aspects and the development of online learning resources.

**Staff members have been, and continue to be, consulted with respect to the impact of blended learning on their roles and responsibilities.**

This feedback informs updates to job descriptions for all roles within the College, e.g.:

- Lecturers
- Programme Directors
- Programme Managers
- Student Engagement Officer
- Learning Support Officer

**The impact of teaching in a blended learning environment, including timetabling changes, has been discussed with staff.**

- Working hours and redefined workloads have been agreed with current staff
- These conditions are highlighted as part of the interview process for new staff

**Professional Development - many staff have already engaged in both formal accredited and formal non-accredited professional development with respect to Blended Learning.**

The College is supporting staff members to engage in formal learning and training provided by other institutions. In many cases this training will itself be delivered in a blended learning format.

To date, staff members have completed certified Teaching and Learning Programmes in Griffith College, IADT and UCD and non-accredited professional development webinars and seminars led by Dublin City University and supported by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. These webinars and seminars encourage institutions to share knowledge, good practice and innovations with fellow HEI's. They focus

on the development of educators' competencies on the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigComEdu). Topics have included:

- o Digital Content Creation (DCU)
- o Moodle (Hibernia College)
- o Creating and modifying digital resources (Maynooth University)
- o Universal Design for Learning: Accessibility and Inclusion (DCU)
- o Academic Integrity (International Centre for Academic Integrity [ICIA]and National Academic Integrity Network [NAIN])

The College's Policy **QA 4.3: Promoting Professional Development** is aligned with the National Forum's Professional Development Framework.

### 2.1.3 Learner Resources
Specific resources and trainings have been implemented to ensure that all learners are competent and confident users of learning technologies.

A "Blended Learning Induction Programme" (BLIP) has been launched to introduce all learners to online and blended learning. The BLIP programme will be further enhanced with online study skills development sections following in the coming months. The BLIP programme complements the College's other induction activities and events.

At induction a specific "Using Learning Technologies" induction programme is delivered to all learners. This is supported by specific programme handbooks, or parts thereof, focussing on learning through blended learning. Learners will be able to access all learning technologies from dedicated I.T. stations in the College's new campus (Jan 2021) and support is available via an online trouble ticketing system. The Learner Support Officer and Student Engagement Officer support learners engaging with blended learning.

### 2.1.4 Reviewing and Monitoring the Organisational Context for Blended Learning
**The following review mechanisms seek stakeholder feedback regarding the organisational context in which Blended Learning takes place**:

- Annual reviews of Moodle and associated Learner Systems (ITM)
- Monitoring of new developments in technology enhanced learning (ID)
- Staff and learner feedback (module/programme/exams office/externs) (PD's/DQAA)

**The following Q.A. policies impact on the organisational context in which Blended Learning takes place and are regularly reviewed according to the policy specific review timeline.**

- **QA 2.3:** Academic Framework
- **QA 3.1:** Programme Proposal Policy and Procedure

- **QA 3.2:** Programme Validation Policy and Procedure
- **QA 4.1:** Staff Recruitment
- **QA 4.2:** Lecturer Induction
- **QA 4.3:** Promoting Professional Development
- **QA 4.4:** Intellectual Property
- **QA 5.2:** Blended and Online Learning
- **QA 5.3:** Blended Programme Development

**The following key roles in the organisation impact on the organisational context in which Blended Learning takes place and they are aware of the resulting changing nature of their roles and responsibilities:**

- Board of Trustees (approval and commitment)
- CEO (institutional direction and strategic planning)
- HR (staff contracts, support, commitment to CPD)
- Finance Officer (financial viability)
- IT Manager (technical support, maintenance and development)
- Instructional Designer (development of pedagogical supports, training)
- DQAA (Quality Assurance Enhancement and Academic Oversight)

### 2.2 Programme Context

The programme context takes into account assuring quality in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of modules and programmes that include blended learning.

### 2.2.1 Existing Programmes

The College has, for many years, utilised Moodle for the purposes of supporting campus-based learners. Typically, this has included providing learning resources to learners via Moodle, managing assessments and, in some cases, making use of the social learning tools within Moodle such as the discussion fora.

More recently the College has embarked on two pilot studies in which a more carefully designed approach to the use of Moodle has been implemented along with specifically created learning resources. In summary, the programme context is one in which the tools of blended learning are now very familiar to both staff and many students. The transition to a fully blended learning institution includes a strategic approach to the design, development and delivery of blended learning programmes.

### 2.2.2 New Programmes

The College has had two new programmes validated for blended learning mode of delivery. Blended learning policy and procedure has been developed as part of the College's re-engagement process with QQI. This policy was used to inform the development of the College's first blended learning programmes,

- a special purpose award, titled *Montessori Education for Dementia* and

- a *BA (Hons) Psychology* .
- New programmes will be developed with reference to policy **QA 5.3: Blended Programme Development** which takes particular account of the issues related to the development of programmes for blended mode, in the first instance, rather than the adaptation of existing programmes.
- Existing programmes validated for face to face delivery, for which a need for blended learning mode of delivery is identified, will be updated and modified to include blended learning as a delivery mode, as and when required, or as part of the normal programmatic review process.

With respect to **QA 5.3:** Blended Programme Development, the following context applies:

- The College, using the skills and experience of the newly appointed Instructional Designer, is pursuing a range of pedagogical frameworks to inform the design and development of the blended learning experience
- Content and material has been selected and produced to ensure that all learning outcomes are met and with due regard to copyright and privacy policies
- Learning resources are produced, reviewed, and approved for academic content before becoming accessible to learners
- For programme development, programme outcomes and pedagogical approaches will be combined with care, in light of best practice in the design of teaching and learning online.

### 2.2.3 Transitioning to a True Blend

The overarching objective of the College is for blended learning to become fully integrated with existing delivery modes, such that the transition from one mode to another is seamless and effortless from both a learner and staff perspective.

SNMCI acknowledges that effective Blended Learning delivery depends on the successful interaction of the academic and the technical. Both aspects must work efficiently together, to provide a quality experience

The College is aware of the wide range of factors that impact on the harmonious combining of academic and technical aspects. These include:

- A systematic approach to programme development considering all QA aspects
- A systematic approach to programme development considering all academic aspects
- Plans and procedures to recruit appropriately qualified staff and staff support through training and/or CPD opportunities
- Reviews of existing provision
- Opportunities for feedback from all stakeholders
- Communication and information
- Cyclical review
- Review of virtual learning environment
- High quality interactive video and audio systems

- Real time technical support
- Monitoring of recorded material

## 2.2.4 Assessment:

SNMCI is committed to ensuring that there is a consistency of approach in assessment whether face-to-face or in blended format. Blended Learning at SNMCI will be 'content/pedagogy led' and 'technology supported'.

The College acknowledges, however, that the transition to a fully Blended Learning institution requires a more bespoke and strategic approach to the use of learning technologies to support assessment. In particular, Blended Learning provides opportunities to pursue innovation in assessment, for diversifying assessment and for flexibility in terms of time and location. There is an increased opportunity for a wider use of formative assessment, maximising the benefits of technology, e.g. discussion forums, quizzes and polling to check and respond to learners' needs.

SNMCI is also mindful of the challenges this brings in terms of academic integrity, security and authentication. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that no learner experiences undue advantage or disadvantage in the assessment process.

## 2.2.5 Reviewing and Monitoring the Programme Context for Blended Learning
**The following review mechanisms seek stakeholder feedback regarding the programme context in which Blended Learning takes place**:

- Review of learning resources and multimedia produced as part of a module e.g. module templates created within Moodle to create one click course creation process which enables staff to focus on content creation and curation over and above Moodle administration.
- Feedback and lessons learned from both a pilot programme and the College's response to COVID19
- Annual Programme Reviews **(QA11.2)** to provide an opportunity for Programme Teams to identify, evaluate and address any issues surrounding the structure, content, delivery and resourcing of individual programmes and to incorporate action planning in support of continuous improvement

**The following Q.A. policies impact on the programme context in which Blended Learning takes place and are regularly reviewed according to the policy specific review policy.**

- **QA 3.13:** Terms of Reference of the Programme Committee
- **QA 5.2:** Blended and Online Learning
- **QA 5.3:** Blended Programme Development
- **QA: 6.1:** Assessment Policy

- **QA 6.2:** Lecturer/ Assessment Submission and Approval
- **QA 6.3:** Teaching Learning and Assessment Board
- **QA 6.4:** Assessment Control Principles and Procedures
- **QA 6.6:** Correction and Provision of Feedback
- **QA 6.7:** Internal Moderation Policy and Procedure
- **QA 6.8:** Examinations Policy and Procedures
- **QA 6.11:** Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners
- **QA 6.13:** Examinations Board
- **QA 7.8:** Academic Integrity
- **QA 11.2:** Annual Programme Review

**The following key roles in the organisation impact on the programme context in which Blended Learning takes place and they have adapted to the resulting changing nature of their roles and responsibilities:**

- Programme Directors
- Lecturing Staff
- Programme development teams
- Head of Examinations and Registrations
- Examinations Board
- External Examiners
- IT Manager
- Instructional Designer/technologist
- Admissions Officer
- Student Engagement Officer
- CEO/HR
- DQAA

### 2.3 Learner Context:

SNMCI is aware that in moving to blended delivery, it has a responsibility to support learners, both as individuals and as cohorts on particular programmes. Accessing third level education typically involves a transition to a less rigid learning environment and this becomes even more evident in the blended space, where learners need to develop considerable self-regulation and commitment to independent study. The College is committed to maintaining 'the blend' i.e. including face to face sessions, to support social interaction and to support learners to develop a sense of community.

### 2.3.1 Learner Support

SNMCI prioritises accessibility for all learners and is aware of the need to keep learners fully informed and supported at each stage of their learning journey. The College will:

- Provide blended learning specific induction activities for learners (and staff)
- Provide technical support before and during synchronous classes
- Inform learners of both the benefits and challenges of blended learning

- Inform learners of the requirements, (academic and resources) to successfully complete a programme in blended mode so that they can make informed decisions;
- Deliver online and face-to-face induction sessions designed to support learners and to address technical skills and technical problems; administrative issues; issues of 'netiquette', social interaction and study skills
- Allow learners to practice with technology
- Provide on-going support by the IT Manager and Instructional Designer/Technologist
- Provide opportunities for feedback
- Provide opportunities to engage socially in the online space, through the work of the Student Engagement Officer
- Provide opportunities for pastoral and academic support through the work of the Learner Support Officer and Student Engagement Officer.


**2.3.2 Reviewing and Monitoring the Programme Context for Blended Learning**
**The following review mechanisms seek stakeholder feedback regarding the learner context in which Blended Learning takes place**:

- Induction Survey
- **QA 3.14:** Learner Feedback
- **QA 7.7:** Learner Complaints
- **QA 7.11:** Learner Appeals


**The following Q.A. policies impact on the learner context in which Blended Learning takes place and are regularly reviewed according to the policy specific review policy.**

- **QA 3.4:** Admissions
- **QA 3.6:** Recognition of Prior Learning
- **QA 3.8:** Information for Learners
- **QA 3.11:** Learner Induction
- **QA 7.2:** Student Engagement
- **QA 7.3:** Student


**The following key roles in the organisation impact on the learner context in which Blended Learning takes place and they have adapted to the resulting changing nature of their roles and responsibilities:**

- Admissions Officer
- Programme Directors
- IT Manager
- Instructional Designer/Technologist
- Student Engagement Officer
- Learner Support Officer

## 3. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

*Figure 2: Overview of Governance Structure*
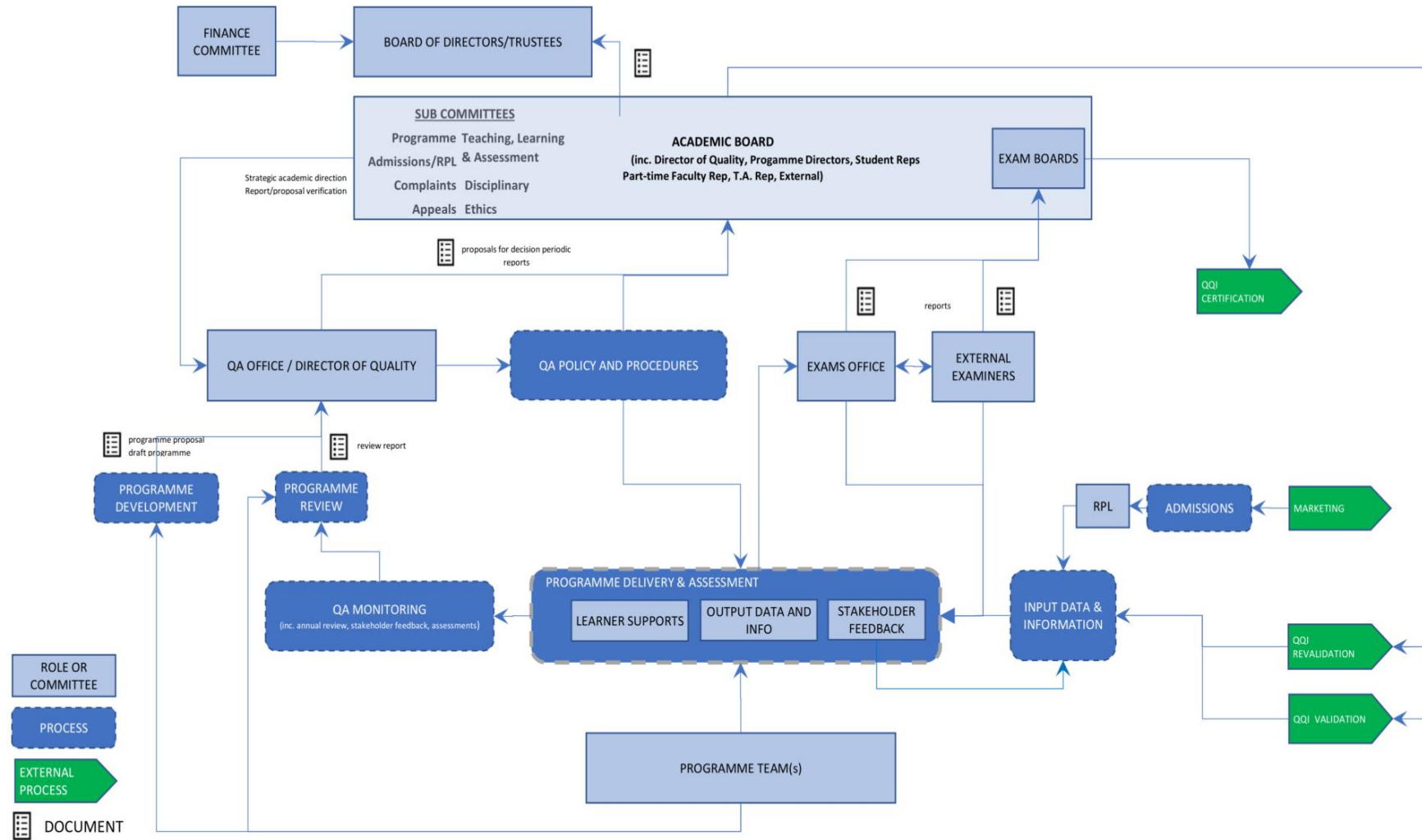
**3.1 Governance Infrastructure**

**Boards and Committees:**

The overarching governing body for the College is the Board of Directors of the Company, who also act as Trustees of the charity. The Board of Directors is responsible for the commercial and academic wellbeing of the College and seeks to provide a secure and stable context within which the College can pursue its vision and realise its strategic objectives.

The Board of Directors interface with commercial and academic operations via the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is responsible for human resources, commercial and business operations.

The Academic Board is chaired by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs and fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. It is the primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters.

The table below briefly describes the different boards and committees that form the governance and operational structures of SNMCI.

| BODY | FUNCTION | STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION |
|---|---|---|
| Board of Directors/Trustees | The function of the Board of Directors is to safeguard the strategic interests of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland and to ensure that all pillars of the Society, College, School and Teacher's Association function effectively and legally, in accordance with the vision, mission and values of the Society | External, representation financial, academic, industry based. |
| Finance Committee | The function of the Finance Committee is oversight of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland's current financial activity and consideration of long term financial plans and operations. | Institutional/management/ external auditors |
| Academic Board | The Academic Board fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. It is the primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters. | Academic, external 'critical friend', learner representation |
| Admissions Committee | The main function of the Admissions Committee is the monitoring of admissions data to ensure | Academic |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | compliance with standards, process and procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners. | |
| **RPL & RPEL Committee** | The main function of the RPL Committee is overseeing the implementation of procedures for the accreditation of prior learning and acknowledgement of prior experiential learning. | Academic |
| **Programme Committees** | Each programme in the College has a Programme Committee to undertake, on behalf of the Academic Board, responsibility for programme management, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in accordance with regulations stipulated by QQI and as agreed by the College's QA. | Academic internal/academic external/ learner representation (Industry at programmatic review) |
| **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board** | The main function of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board is to support and develop innovative learning and teaching practices linked to assessment of programme and module outcomes. The Board recommends, to the Academic Board, any strategies, policy, approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment it considers will be beneficial to all programmes in the College. | Academic, learner representation |
| **Quality Enhancement Committee** | The key objective of the SNMCI Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC)  is to guide the College in the development of policies and procedures to fulfil its responsibilities under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012, QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis (2016), the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and associated policies, | All staff/student/academic, administrative, learner representation |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | guidelines and codes | |
| **Research Committee** | The key objective of the SNMCI Research Committee (RC) is to guide the College in strategy, policy and approach to research activity in the College | Academic, learner representative |
| **Ethics Committee** | The key objective of the SNMCI Ethics Committee (EC) is to define the ethical standards required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI carried out by SNMCI researchers. The EC reviews and advises on all submissions for ethical approval made by researchers, be they staff or students. | Academic, external as required for staff research |
| **Pre Exam Board** | The Pre-Exam Board takes place once per year at the end of the first semester in order to ensure good management of Learner progression. | Academic internal /academic external |
| **Examination Board** | The Examination Board ratifies results of modules and stages in programmes, including degree classification at award stage. | Academic internal /academic external |
| **Disciplinary Committee** | The Disciplinary Committee reviews all information relating to breaches of good conduct, social and academic, and reaches decisions on the outcomes, with the imposition of appropriate penalties where applicable. | Academic internal and external as required |
| **Appeals Committee** | The Appeals Committee reviews all information relating to any learner appeal with regard to assessment outcomes or other academic decisions, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such appeal. It may also review appeals of examination and assessment grades where appropriate. | Academic internal and external as required |
| **Complaints Committee** | The Complaints Committee reviews all information relating to any complaint by a learner, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such complaint. | Academic and institutional / internal and external as required |

| ANNUAL CALENDAR OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Board Committee | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June | July | Aug | Notes |
| Board of Trustees | | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | | | | |
| Finance Committee | | x | | x | | | | x | | x | | | | |
| Academic Board | x | | | x | | x | | | | x | | | | Generally at these times but may be convened as needed. |
| Admissions Committee | | x | | | | | x | | | | x | | | Generally at these times but may be convened as needed. |
| RPL Committee | | (x) | | | | (x) | | | | | | (x) | (x) | As required but generally at these times |
| Programme Committee | x | | | | | (x) | | | | x | | | | (x) mid-year review |
| Ethics Committee | | | | | x | | | x | | | | | | Generally at time of student submission. As required for staff |
| Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board | | x | | | | x | | x | | | | x | | Generally at these times but may be convened as needed. |
| Quality Enhancement Committee | | | x | | | x | | | | x | | | | Generally at these times but may be convened as needed. |
| Research Committee | | | | x | | | | | x | | | | | Generally at these times but may be convened as needed. |
| Pre-Exam Board | | | | | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Exam Board | | x | | | | | | | | | x | | | |
| Disciplinary Committee | | | | | | | | | | | | | | As required. Generally in line with assessment periods |
| Appeals Committee | | (x) | | | | | (x) | | | | (x) | | | As required. Generally in line with exam periods |
| Complaints Committee | | | | | | | | | | | | | | As required |

| Body: | Board of Directors/Trustees |
|---|---|
| Sub –Body of | N/A |
| Composition | Chair of the Board of Directors<br>Company Directors<br>Charity Trustees |
| Frequency of meetings | 8 times per year |
| Function | To safeguard the strategic interests of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland and to ensure that all pillars of the Society (College, School and Teacher's Association) function effectively and legally, in accordance with the vision, mission and values of the Society |
| Operations | - Oversee strategic development;<br>- Ensure all activities are within scope of charitable organisation;<br>- Review and sign off on capital expenditure;<br>- Ensure best practice in corporate and academic governance; |
| Decision –making power | The Board of Trustees/Directors is the overarching governing body for the College. It is a decision making body responsible for the commercial and academic wellbeing of the College and it seeks to provide a secure and stable context within which the College can realise its vision. |

| Body | Finance Committee |
|---|---|
| Sub –Body of | Board of Directors/Trustees |
| Composition | Independent Chair<br>Company Directors<br>CEO<br>Finance Officer |
| Frequency of meetings | 4 times per year |
| Function | The function of the Finance Committee is oversight of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland's current financial activity and consideration of long term financial plans and operations. |
| Operations | - Review monthly and annual P&L and Balance sheet;<br>- Sign off on annual returns;<br>- Monitor and review budgets;<br>- Review capital expenditure projects;<br>- Financial monitoring and compliance; |
| Decision –making power | The Finance Committee is not a decision making body. It reports directly to the Board of Directors/Trustees. It has oversight of monthly and annual financial activity but all suggested strategies and innovations linked to finance must be referred to the Board of Directors/Trustees. |

| Body | Academic Board |
|---|---|
| Sub –Body of | Board of Directors/ Trustees |
| Composition | Director of Quality and Academic Affairs DQAA (Chair)<br>CEO<br>Programme Directors<br>Coordinator Cork campus<br>Head of Examinations and Registrations (Secretary)<br>Student Engagement Officer |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Independent External Advisor<br>**Elected members**: Learner Representative, elected by registered learners<br>**By invitation:** The Chairperson may invite an external party deemed relevant to the business of a meeting. |
| **Frequency of meetings** | 4 times per year |
| **Function** | The Academic Board fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. It is the primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters. |
| **Operations** | - Establishes the principles underpinning quality in SNMCI and approves the Quality Assurance Framework;<br>- Ensures that a fit-for-purpose academic administration system is in place and applied consistently to the entire learner experience and lifecycle;<br>- Ensures that the College academic policies relating to teaching and learning are consonant with the College mission and strategic plan;<br>- Ensures that appropriate academic standards are consistently adopted, applied and maintained in academic programmes;<br>- Monitors the design, development and implementation of programmes of study in accordance with College functions;<br>- Ensures that the quality and standard of provision is routinely monitored through annual monitoring, validation and review procedures;<br>- Ensures that the assessment and examination of learners is fairly operated;<br>- Approves External Examiner nominations;<br>- Establishes and approves the terms of reference of various subcommittees including their decision-making powers;<br>- Reviews reports and recommendations received from its sub-committees;<br>- Considers any matters referred to it, as appropriate, by other authorities or individuals within the College;<br>- Monitors and reviews College academic management; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Academic Board is a decision making body and is responsible for the academic integrity and quality of programmes of education in SNMCI. It approves decisions made by other Boards and Committees and is responsible for overseeing all aspects of academic governance to ensure compliance with external and internal academic regulations, policy and QA standards. The Academic Board reports to, and makes recommendations to, the Board of Trustees and in particular will seek the approval of the Board of Trustees in matters where a decision may have 'risk' implications for the College. |

| **Body** | **Admissions Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Admissions Officer (Chair)<br>Head of Examinations and Registrations<br>DQAA<br>Programme Directors as required. |
| **Frequency of meetings** | Normally take place three times a year but may convene as required where timely decisions are needed outside of the these meetings. |
| **Function** | The main function of the Admissions Committee is the monitoring of |

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| | admissions data to ensure compliance with standards, process and procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners. |
| **Operations** | - Establishing policies and procedures for the admission of students to programmes in the College;<br>- Reviewing and developing admissions policy and practice;<br>- Ensuring compliance with admissions criteria and requirements;<br>- Ensuring that all documentary evidence required to evidence fulfilment of those criteria is supplied by applicants;<br>- Liaising with the RPL Committee on issues of advanced entry;<br>- Promoting fairness and consistency in admissions policy and procedures;<br>- Revising the application form as required;<br>- Providing an annual report on its activities to the Academic Board including information on standard and non-standard admissions; admissions with advanced standing, and admission of mature learners; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Admissions Committee is a decision making Committee and reports directly to the Academic Board. |

| **Body** | **RPL Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Head of Examinations and Registrations (Chair)<br>Admissions Officer<br>Programme Directors as relevant<br>DQAA (RPEL and as required) |
| **Frequency of meetings** | As required |
| **Function** | Overseeing the implementation of procedures for the accreditation of prior learning. |
| **Operations** | - Give value to all learning, both certified and experiential;<br>- Provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression in education and training;<br>- Maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and its awards;<br>- Monitor the College's policy for advanced entry and transfer;<br>- Monitor policy for facilitating learners from other institutions transferring onto undergraduate SNMCI with due regard to their academic standards and the maintenance of quality;<br>- Evaluate all qualifications as a basis for determining admission to SNMCI while having regard to the College's Admissions Policy and the standards defined by QQI for Access, Transfer and Progression;<br>- Compiles annual report for Academic Board; |
| **Decision –making power** | The RPL Committee is a decision making Committee and reports to the Admissions Committee. |

| **Body** | **Programme Committee/s** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | The Programme Director: Chair [ex-officio]; |

|  | The Deputy Programme Directors [ex-officio] |
|---|---|
|  | The Programme Manager [ex-officio] |
|  | Full-time members of academic staff teaching on the programme; |
|  | Part-time members of academic staff teaching on the programme – co-opted as appropriate; |
|  | A learner representative selected by democratic election by his/her class group with due respect to gender balance (student members may be excluded during discussion of reserved confidential items, e.g. matters relating to individual students);[1] |
|  | The Programme Director may further extend the participation at certain Programme Committee meetings to other College and/or external participants to support fuller discussion of specific agenda items; Note: The DQAA may attend all PC meetings |
| **Frequency of meetings** | Normally take place twice a year (June/August) with a smaller review meeting at the end of Semester One (Jan) |
| **Function** | Each programme in the College will have a Programme Committee to undertake, on behalf of the Academic Board, responsibility for programme management, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in accordance with regulations stipulated by QQI and as agreed by the College's QA. |
| **Operations** | - To monitor the implementation of programmes of study as defined in the Programme document and Approved Programme Schedule; <br> - To review annually the structure, content, entry requirements, curriculum and assessment strategies of the programme; <br> - To ensure the maintenance of academic and professional standards for the programme/s concerned, ensuring they conform to benchmarks and sectoral conventions determined by QQI and the criteria contained in the National Framework of Qualifications; <br> - To ensure that all proposed changes to Programmes are dealt with as per QA 11.3: Programme Modification; <br> - To ensure that any minor changes are recorded in the Minutes of the Programme Committee at which they were agreed, and sent to the Academic Board for approval, prior to being incorporated into the running of the Programme; <br> - To maintain a record of the evolution of the programme of study since its approval by QQI; <br> - To participate in the Quality Assurance Procedures as defined and agreed by the Academic Board in relation to internal evaluation of programme/s and to participate in such periodic external peer reviews as required e.g. Programmatic Reviews, and Institutional Reviews; <br> - To contribute as appropriate to the implementation and ongoing review of Quality Assurance policy and procedures within the |

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[1] The Programme Committee reserves the right to carry out reserved business in the absence of learner participation should the need arise.

| | College, e.g. those relating to evaluation of student experience, RPL, Access, Transfer and Progression, Learner Information, Learner Induction etc;<br>- To oversee routine operational matters for staff and students;<br>- Monitoring and recording student performance on each stage of the programme in line with the assessment strategies approved for the programme as a whole, and providing the Programme Manager with the necessary information to keep and maintain formal records of assessment for each student;<br>- Compiles Annual Programme Report; |
|---|---|
| **Decision –making power** | Programme Committees are not decision-making bodies.  Proposed changes emerging from Programme Committee meetings are referred to the Academic Board for approval. |

| **Body** | **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | DQAA (Chair)<br>Programme Directors<br>Head of Examinations and Registrations<br>Instructional Designer |
| **Frequency of meetings** | 4 times per year |
| **Function** | The main function of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board is to support and develop innovative learning and teaching practices linked to assessment of programme and module outcomes. The Board recommends, to the Academic Board, any strategies, policy, approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment it considers will be beneficial to all programmes in the College. |
| **Operations** | - Facilitate best practice in teaching, learning and assessment by raising awareness of current initiatives;<br>- Liaise with PD's  on issues in teaching, learning, and assessment pertaining to their Programmes;<br>- Oversee academic standards for programmes in the College;<br>- Promote staff professional development;<br>- Promote academic integrity;<br>- Organise learning and teaching workshops for staff;<br>- Review the academic rules, regulations and assessment strategy for all programmes (assignments, examinations and assessment schedules;<br>- Produce an Annual Report for the Academic Board; |
| **Decision –making power** | The T, L &A Board makes decisions on all assignment briefs and examinations. For all other activities it refers any suggested strategies or innovations  to the Academic Board |

| **Body** | **Quality Enhancement Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | DQAA (Chair)<br>Programme Directors<br>Head of Examinations and Registrations<br>Admissions Officer<br>Instructional Designer |

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|---|---|
| | Student representative<br>Any member of staff may contribute /propose r |
| **Frequency of meetings** | 3 times per year |
| **Function** | The main function of the Quality Enhancement Committee is to support the College's mission and strategy for excellence in teaching, learning, research and related College activities through developing and embedding a culture of quality enhancement based on the outcomes of robust ongoing reviews and analysis. |
| **Operations** | - foster a quality culture throughout the College through innovation, the sharing of good practice and development of excellence in teaching, learning, research and related services;<br>- oversee the development of College's quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures, informed by national and international policy developments, that support strategic goals for excellence and the identification of good practice;<br>- facilitate student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement activities;<br>- ensure that College quality review policies and procedures meet the national and European requirements;<br>- recommend policy and procedures for ensuring the integrity of programmes in the College;<br>- review and analyse the outcomes of quality processes and identify any required strategic enhancement activities;<br>- Produce an Annual Quality Report for the Academic Board and submission to QQI; |
| **Decision –making power** | All policies and QA enhancement activities will be brought to the Academic Committee. |

| **Body** | **Research Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Chair Nominated (CEO AS OF 2020)<br>DQAA<br>Three nominated members<br>Three academic staff (application)<br>One student representative Instructional Designer |
| **Frequency of meetings** | Twice per year |
| **Function** | The key objective of the SNMCI Research Committee (RC) is to guide the College in strategy, policy and approach to research activity in the College |
| **Operations** | - To promote excellence in all areas of research in the College;<br>- To review the goals and monitor the implementation of the College's Research Strategy;<br>- To consider and make recommendations to the Academic Board on issues relating to research;<br>- To liaise with the Ethics Committee on the monitoring and review of research activity, (staff and students);<br>- To contribute to the development of policy to ensure that there are appropriate procedures for addressing ethical, integrity and governance issues raised by the research of staff and students; |

|  | - To contribute to the development of College infrastructure supporting the development of research and scholarship;<br>- To use staff research to enhance teaching and learning, fulfilling the College's mission to support and encourage students as self-directed, life-long learners. |
|---|---|
| **Decision –making power** | The Research Committee is a subcommittee of the Academic Board. The Research Committee will refer any suggested strategies or innovations to the Academic Board. |

| **Body** | **Ethics Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Chair: Nominated<br>Programme Directors (of programmes where research is a factor)<br>Academic Staff x2 |
| **Frequency of meetings** | Normally twice per year but may convene as needed. |
| **Function** | The key objective of the SNMCI Ethics Committee (EC) is to define the ethical standards required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI carried out by SNMCI researchers. The EC reviews and advises on all submissions for ethical approval made by researchers, be they staff or students. |
| **Operations** | - To foster an environment that encourages best ethical practice in all areas of research;<br>- To promote awareness of relevant legislation and best practice in research;<br>- To continue to improve and upgrade awareness in respect of ethics, research and integrity;<br>- To ensure that the College policies relating to research are in agreement with the College mission and strategic plan;<br>- To ensure the implementation of the research regulations of the College;<br>- To review and advise on all submissions made to the EC for ethical approval, be they for exemption or review;<br>- To convey to applicants in a timely manner all constructive comments, suggestions and recommendations identified during the review process; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Ethics Committee is a decision-making body for approval of student and staff research. For all other activities it refers any suggested strategies or innovations to the Academic Board. |

| **Body** | **Pre-exam Board** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Examinations Board |
| **Composition** | DQAA  (Chair)<br>The Head of Examinations and Registrations;<br>The Programme Directors for all programmes with assessment being discussed at the Board;<br>The Deputy Programme Directors for all programmes with assessment being discussed at the Board;<br>The Programme Managers for all programmes with assessment being discussed at the Board; |

| Frequency of meetings | Once a year |
|---|---|
| Function | The Pre-Exam Board takes place once per year at the end of the first semester in order to ensure good management of Learner progression. |
| Operations | - Confirm, with the Examinations Officer, that all marks presented are accurate and authentic;<br>- Discuss documented Mitigating Circumstances raised by Programme Directors and make determinations regarding reassessment procedures;<br>- Discuss issues of reassessment where there were no Mitigating Circumstances and make determinations regarding same;<br>- Review borderline grades for Learners who are not in the award stage of their programme;<br>- Agree results to be formally approved at the Examination Board;<br>- Approve the release of provisional results to Learners; |
| Decision –making power | The Pre-exam Board makes decisions reissues of mitigating circumstances arising in the first semester. It agrees results to be brought to the Exam Board and approves the release of provisional marks. It is **not** authorised or expected to make decisions on borderline award classifications. It refers its findings to be ratified by the Exam Board. |

| Body | Exam Board |
|---|---|
| Sub –Body of | Academic Board |
| Composition | DQAA Chair [ex-officio]<br><br>Head of Examinations and Registrations Secretary [ex-officio]<br><br>The Programme Director (or nominee) for each programme under consideration [ex-officio]<br><br>The Deputy Programme Director/Evening cohort [ex-officio]<br><br>The External Examiner for each programme under consideration [ex-officio]<br><br>Academic staff involved in determining learner grades, moderating the provisional marks awarded on the programme/s being considered.<br><br>The Programme Manager for each programme under consideration [in -attendance]<br><br>The Chairperson may invite an external party deemed relevant to the business of a meeting. [in-attendance by invitation]<br><br>The validating body (QQI) may also choose to be represented at an Examination Board.<br><br>No learner may be a member of an Examination Board |
| Frequency of meetings | Twice a year |
| Function | Ratification of results of modules and stages in programmes, including degree classification at award stage. |
| Operations | - Consider all assessment findings and determine assessment results for each of the learners presented;<br>- Consider the recommendations of all assessors, external examiners, and other members of staff on the programme/s under consideration;<br>- Determine the summative assessment outcomes for all learners on all modules on all programmes validated by QQI leading to |

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|---|---|
| | - Determine the award classification for all learners in the award stage of programmes validated by QQI leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications; <br> - Make decisions concerning applications for mitigation circumstances submitted by learners in respect of their assessments; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Exam Board is a decision making body to determine learner progression on programmes and, where appropriate, the conferment of an award of the relevant validating body. The Exam Board also makes decisions on borderline award classifications and endorses a broadsheet of results, which confirms, and records, total marks awarded to each candidate in each course module and which indicates each candidate's overall results. |

| **Body** | **Disciplinary Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Three persons chosen by the Academic Board independent of the matter being investigated. <br> A note-taker |
| **Frequency of meetings** | As required |
| **Function** | Reviews all information relating to a suspected case of academic misconduct and reaches a decision on the outcome, with the imposition of appropriate penalties where applicable. |
| **Operations** | - Outlines the procedure to be followed; <br> - Consider the evidence presented; <br> - If appropriate, call witnesses; <br> - Establish if on the balance of probabilities, the alleged breach of regulation has or has not occurred; <br> - Where it is considered that no breach of academic integrity has occurred to close the matter; <br> - Where a breach of academic integrity has occurred to reach a consensus; <br> - Where relevant, assign a penalty to the student; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Disciplinary Committee is a decision making Committee and reports directly to the Academic Board. |

| **Body** | **Appeals Committee** |
|---|---|
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Three persons chosen by the Academic Board independent of the matter being appealed. <br> A note-taker |
| **Frequency of meetings** | As required |
| **Function** | Reviews all information relating to any learner appeal with regard to assessment outcomes or other academic decisions, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such appeal. |
| **Operations** | - To conduct the appeals process in a transparent manner; <br> - To hear an appeal where there is evidence that SNMCI did not follow correct procedures; <br> - To hear an appeal where there is evidence that there were |

| | circumstances or information of which the original decision-making body was not aware when its decision was taken;<br>- To hear an appeal where there is evidence of substantive bias by one or more of the decision-makers; |
|---|---|
| **Decision –making power** | The Appeals Committee is a decision making Committee and reports directly to the Academic Board. |
| **Body** | **Complaints  Committee** |
| **Sub –Body of** | Academic Board |
| **Composition** | Three persons chosen by the Academic Board independent of the matter being investigated<br>A note taker |
| **Frequency of meetings** | As required |
| **Function** | Reviews all information relating to any Complaint by a learner, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such Complaint. |
| **Operations** | - To follow the rule of 'natural justice';<br>- To recognise a person's right to complain, where they feel they have been mistreated or disadvantaged as a result of the College's provision of programmes or services, or the behaviour or actions of members of College staff or the student body;<br>- To establish facts and to seek clarification;<br>- To agree the findings of any deliberation and to determine a fair resolution;<br>- To prepares a report for the Academic Board; |
| **Decision –making power** | The Complaints Committee is a decision making committee. It reports to the Academic Board |

### 3.2 Separation of Academic and Commercial Agendas

SNMCI is a not-for-profit charity and a company limited by guarantee.

**The Board of Trustees** work to ensure that the viability of the organisation is secured by considering both the commercial and academic imperatives guiding the strategy and development of the organisation. While the commercial imperative is apparent, since the organisation seeks to make a surplus for the purpose of furthering its mission, it is less to the fore than in for-profit private education providers. There are no shareholders or beneficiaries of any surplus generated other than the St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland itself.

**The Academic Board** has full independence and authority to drive the development and delivery of academic programmes for the benefit of learners. The Academic Board is the ultimate protector of quality standards and of the brand of St. Nicholas Montessori and in that regard seeks to evaluate the impact of academic developments, firstly, on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, before considering the commercial implications of any such developments.

A clear policy and procedure is in place for new programme development, within which both academic and commercial imperatives are assessed.
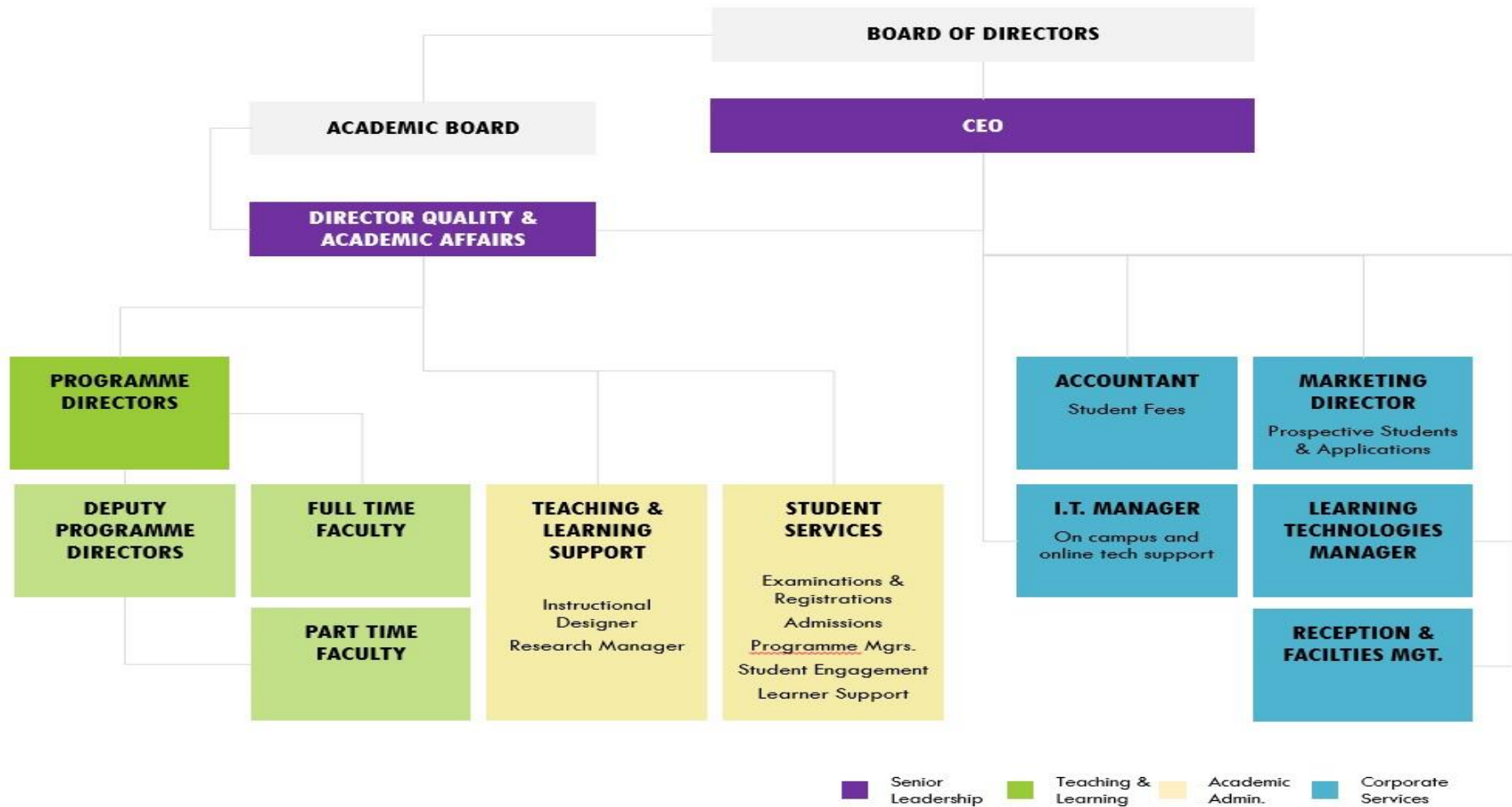
The Board of Directors, the CEO and the Academic Board and are also mindful of the fact that St. Nicholas Montessori has a role to play in protecting and enhancing the standards of the Montessori brand more widely. In recent years, Montessori philosophy has become integrated into national curricular frameworks such as Aistear. While the formal introduction of Montessori methods in early years settings is to be welcomed, there is also a very real danger that the many benefits of a Montessori education will not be fully leveraged in these settings if the environment is not an authentic one. As the only provider of authentic Montessori education degrees in Ireland, the governing bodies of the College have an additional responsibility to maintain and enhance the quality of Montessori education in Ireland. This is a factor which is also very much to the fore when evaluating the academic and commercial pros and cons of developments in the College.

### 3.3 Governance and Quality Management

The Governance Infrastructure described above relies on strong and aligned performance from the staff members involved. The College operates with a relatively flat structure with

- CEO taking overall responsibility for College HR and commercial operations
- Director of Quality and Academic Affairs having overall responsibility for assuring and enhancing the academic quality of the College's provision.

*Figure 3: Roles and Responsibilities*



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

**CEO**

**DIRECTOR QUALITY & ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

**PROGRAMME DIRECTORS**

**DEPUTY PROGRAMME DIRECTORS**

**FULL TIME FACULTY**

**PART TIME FACULTY**

**TEACHING & LEARNING SUPPORT**

Instructional Designer
Research Manager

**STUDENT SERVICES**

Examinations & Registrations
Admissions
Programme Mgrs.
Student Engagement
Learner Support

**ACCOUNTANT**
Student Fees

**MARKETING DIRECTOR**
Prospective Students & Applications

**I.T. MANAGER**
On campus and online tech support

**LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES MANAGER**

**RECEPTION & FACILTIES MGT.**

Senior Leadership | Teaching & Learning | Academic Admin. | Corporate Services

# 4. MANAGEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RISK

This section outlines the procedures the College has in place to ensure that the College does not engage in activities or partnerships that might undermine the integrity of the education and training offered or the awards in the National Framework of Qualifications to which they lead, either in Ireland or abroad. This section also covers institutional risks arising from external factors such as the macroeconomic environment and education legislation.

This section does not cover risks associated with academic integrity or the lack thereof, resourcing, staffing or other programme specific risks. The management of these non-institutional level risks are covered in appropriate sections of the Quality Assurance Handbook.

**4.1 Policy Statement on Risk Management**

The purpose of this risk management policy is to provide a framework in which the College can deliver on its mission whilst minimising threats to students, staff and other stakeholders. The policy serves to protect future financial sustainability and to support compliance with relevant laws and regulation. This policy applies to all operations within the College.

This policy is enacted on the understanding that all decisions and actions are subject to an element of risk. The purpose of this policy is not to seek to rule out risk, but rather to ensure that risks are identified, appraised objectively and managed through a range of risk mitigation measures, which are quite often embedded in other quality assurance policies and procedures.

The management of institutional level risk is the responsibility of the CEO acting on behalf of the Board of Directors/Trustees. The Board of Directors holds ultimate accountability for reviewing the system of risk management that the College has in place. The Board of Directors will advise on, review and approve the Risk Register on an annual basis. This Policy supports the Board of Directors in meeting its responsibilities with respect to the management of risk.

**4.2 Risk Register**

The College Risk Register is prepared by the CEO and published following approval by the Board of Directors and the Academic Board. The Risk Register is updated annually and contains information on risks which have the potential to significantly impact the operations of the College and/or the teaching and learning experience.  The Risk Register ranks each identified risk terms of probability and threat level which then informs a summary RAG (Red, Amber, Green) risk flag for each identified risk. For example, Competition from other

providers in the current market is rated as a red (most serious) risk since the probability of competition is very high, in fact certain, and the threat (i.e. the potential impact on the College) is also very high, in the worst case scenario leading to weak enrolments and the loss of financial sustainability.

## 4.3 Risk Mitigation

Each risk has an accompanying risk mitigation strategy. This includes a high-level description of the actions and development planned to reduce the level of risk and associated quality assurance policies which support these actions. In many cases, the quality assurance policies are themselves risk mitigation strategies. Risk mitigation strategies are updated annually unless a risk increases in probability and/or threat level during the year, in which case the CEO will review the risk mitigation strategy and seek approval from the Academic Board and Board of Directors.

# 5. EMBEDDING A QUALITY CULTURE

The SNMCI approach to Quality Assurance emphasises a commitment to comprehensive, open and inclusive processes that are effective, fully aligned with the mission and strategic objectives of the College and compliant with both statutory based national objectives and European standards.

The complexity of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in higher education was summarised by the European University Association (EUA) as '…a culturally sensitive, relative and contested concept that is **shaped by the institutional and national context**, and given expression as an **internal dynamic process** with the objective of **constant improvement**' (EUA, 2004)

### 5.1 Institutional and national context

SNMCI addresses Quality Assurance at two levels:

1) **College community:**  on a day-to day basis, the College community needs evidence to assure itself that quality procedures are applied systematically across all aspects of College life and that the quality assurance policies and procedures are effective in enabling the College to achieve its goals

2) **External and public interest nationally and internationally:** the College is aware of the need to create and sustain public confidence in its quality procedures, and in its capacity to provide programmes that achieve national and international standards, appropriate to the relevant level in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

### 5.2 Internal dynamic process and constant improvement

In practice, quality assurance and enhancement at SNMCI is supported through a combination of College -wide policies and procedures implemented on an on-going basis, and a system of review. To ensure that quality assurance is seen as a dynamic concept there is a continual enhancement of procedures, informed by review (internally and externally), feedback from all stakeholders, staff and learner participation, innovation and examples of best practices in other Colleges.

### 5.3 National Statutory Guidelines

- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):** the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training.
- **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012)**: Section 28(1) of the Act requires all providers to "establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training and research and related services the provider provides".
- **QQI Policy Framework for Cyclical Reviews of Higher Education Institutions (2016):** Observed to evaluate the **effectiveness** of the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the institution

provides. This is a measurement of the institution's **accountability** for compliance with European standards for quality assurance with regard to the expectations set out in the QQI quality assurance guidelines, or their equivalent, and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures as established in the lifecycle of engagement between the institution and QQI. It is also an exploration of the institution's **enhancement** of quality in relation to impacts on teaching, learning and research, institutional achievements and innovations in quality assurance, alignment to the institution's mission and strategy and the quality-related performance of the institution relative to quality indicators and benchmarks identified by the institution (2016, p2).

- **QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines (Dec. 2015, revised Apr. 2016): The principles which should permeate an institution's QA policies and Procedure**s include that they be, Provider-Owned, Contextual, Quality Culture, Learning Outcome, Implementation, Externality, Continuous Improvement, Transparency, Public Confidence.

- **QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (May, 2016);** SNMCI's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework follows the main areas to be addressed, in provider quality assurance procedures, as outlined in the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* which are as follows:

    1) Governance and Management of Quality
    2) Documented Approach to Quality Assurance
    3) Programmes of Education and Training
    4) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
    5) Teaching and Learning
    6) Assessment of Learners
    7) Supports for Learners
    8) Information and Data Management
    9) Public Information and Communication
    10) Other Parties involved in Education and Training
    11) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

- **QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (March 2018):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and in response to market intelligence, SNMCI was investigating how best to introduce blended learning opportunities to learners and had piloted blended learning in the College. The COVID 19 pandemic accelerated this move. (Next reporting period)

- **QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (2012):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) SNMCI is investigating transnational possibilities and is aware of its responsibilities in respect of the above policy. (n/a in this reporting period)

- **QQI Policy Restatement Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training (restated 2015):** SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression is committed to inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates. The College provides clear information to learners, identifying pathways **to**, **from** and **within** programmes, and about awards and qualifications that may be achieved.

### 5.3 European Standards and Guidelines

In the context of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG's), quality is considered 'mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose' (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), May 2015, 2015, p.5).

The Quality Assurance Framework at SNMCI is monitored and updated to ensure that it is, as QQI advises, 'appropriate to our context' and as the ESG's advise 'fit for purpose'. The revised 2015 ESGs regard the following as significant indicators of quality:

- The design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes of study;
- Supports and training for teaching staff;
- Regular student feedback and complaints procedures
- Well established  mechanisms such as the external examiner system and the institutional strategic planning functions
- The learning environment.

The revised ESGs contain Ten Standards, with a standard defined as an "agreed and accepted practice for quality assurance in higher education in the European Higher Education Area and should, therefore, be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned in all types of higher education provision" (ESG, 2015, p.7).

The Standards are strongly reflected in the QQI Core Guidelines and woven through the SNMCI Quality Assurance Framework.  **See table below**

*Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG) with link to SNMCI QA*

| AQR Part A Section | QQI/QAG Core Sub-section No. | QQI Core (Statutory) Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016 | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015 | SNMCI Policies, Procedures and Guidelines |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.0 Internal QA Framework** | **2.1**<br><br><br><br><br><br>**2.2** | **Governance and Management of Quality:**<br>- Governance<br>- Objectives, Mission, Strategy<br>- QA provider owned<br>- Integrity in Academic Standards<br>- Consideration of Risk<br>- Internal, External Evaluation<br>- Management of and embedding of Quality<br>**Documented approach to Quality Assurance:**<br>- Documented policies/procedures<br>- Policies into Practice | **From ESG 1.1 –ESG1.10**<br>**ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:**<br>Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1- QA 1.2**<br><br><br><br><br>**SNMCI QA Policies QA 2.1- QA 2.6** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2.0 Programme Development and Delivery**<br><br>**4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes**<br><br><br>**8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review** | **2.3** | **Programmes of Education and Training:**<br>- Programme Development<br>- Learner Admission, Progression, Recognition<br>- Programme Monitoring | **ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:**<br>Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.<br>**ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification Standard:** Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.<br>**ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:**<br>Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned. | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1-QA 3.8**<br><br><br><br><br><br>**SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.4-QA3.8**<br><br><br>**SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1-QA 11.4** |
| **5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support** | **2.4** | **Staff Recruitment, Management and Development:**<br>- Systematic Approach to Recruitment<br>- Staff Communication<br>- Staff Development | **ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff Standard:** Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff. | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 4.1-QA 4.3** |
| **2.3 Teaching Learning and Assessment** | **2.5**<br><br><br><br>**2.6** | **Teaching and Learning**<br>- Quality T, L&A<br>- Ethos that promotes learning<br>- Reference to National and International Best Practice<br>- Quality Learning Environments<br>**Assessment of Learner Achievement –**<br>- Assessment Framework<br>- Materials<br>- Processes | **ESG 1.3 Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard:** Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 5.1-QA5.10**<br><br>**SNMCI QA Policies QA 6.1-QA 6.13** |

| | | Assignments  Records | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3.0 Learner Resources and Supports** | **2.7** | **Supports for Learners**  - Learner Perspective  - Integrated Approach  - Learner Representation  - Guidance  - | **ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support Standard:** Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 7.1- QA 7.13** |
| **6.0 Information and Data Management** | **2.8** | **Management Information and Data**  - Information Systems  - Management of Information Systems  - Planning  - Completion  - Records  - Data Protection | **ESG 1.7 Information Management Standard:** Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities | **SNMCI QA Policies QA8.1- QA8.3** |
| **7.0 Public Information and Communicati on** | **2.9** | **Public Information and Communication**  - Public Information  - Learner Information  - Publication of Reports | **ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:** Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.  **ESG 1.8 Public Information Standard:** Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1- QA 1.2**   **SNMCI QA Policies QA9.1- QA9.2** |
| **2.0 Programme Development and Delivery**   **8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review**   **9.0 Details of Arrangement s with Third Parties** | **2.10** | **Other parties involved in Education and Training**  - Peer Relationships  - External Partnerships  - Expert Panels  **Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.**  - **Provider -owned Review**  - **Self-Monitoring**  - **SER**  - **Provider Owned QA** | **ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:** Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.  **ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:** Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1- QA11.4**   **SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1- QA 3.8** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. | |
| **2.0 Programme Development and Delivery**<br><br>**8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review** | **2.11** | | **ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:**<br>Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.<br><br>**ESG 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance**<br>Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis | **SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.2-QA11.3**<br><br><br><br>**SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1-QA11.4** |

### 5.4 Principles of Quality Assurance and the Learner Journey

Quality assurance does not happen in a vacuum and in seeking to develop and to embed relevant, usable and clear policies SNMCI follows the following principles:

**Learning Outcome Principle**

Higher education and training exists, principally, for the purpose of enabling people to learn. In line with our vision and mission, SNMCI seeks to place all young people at the heart of their own educational experience and accordingly, provision is designed, implemented and evaluated with learning outcomes in mind.

**Implementation Principle**

All approved quality assurance procedures are fully implemented by SNMCI. To ensure that we remain on mission, we map our Quality Academic policies and procedures to the learner journey. This exercise provides both a compelling visual overview of the impact of quality assurance throughout the learner lifecycle and a concise audit of the scope of quality assurance as the learner progresses from pre-enrolment to post-graduation.
Figure 3 describes our quality assurance policies and procedures in the context of the learner journey.

**Externality Principle**

SNMCI exercises great care when selecting, and makes appropriate use of, independent external persons who are expertly qualified.  For example, External Examiners are carefully chosen by the College to gain the full benefit of objective counsel. Critical friends are sought and feedback from expert panels is used when programmes are being developed, reviewed and revalidated.

*Figure 5: Learner Journey*

Overleaf
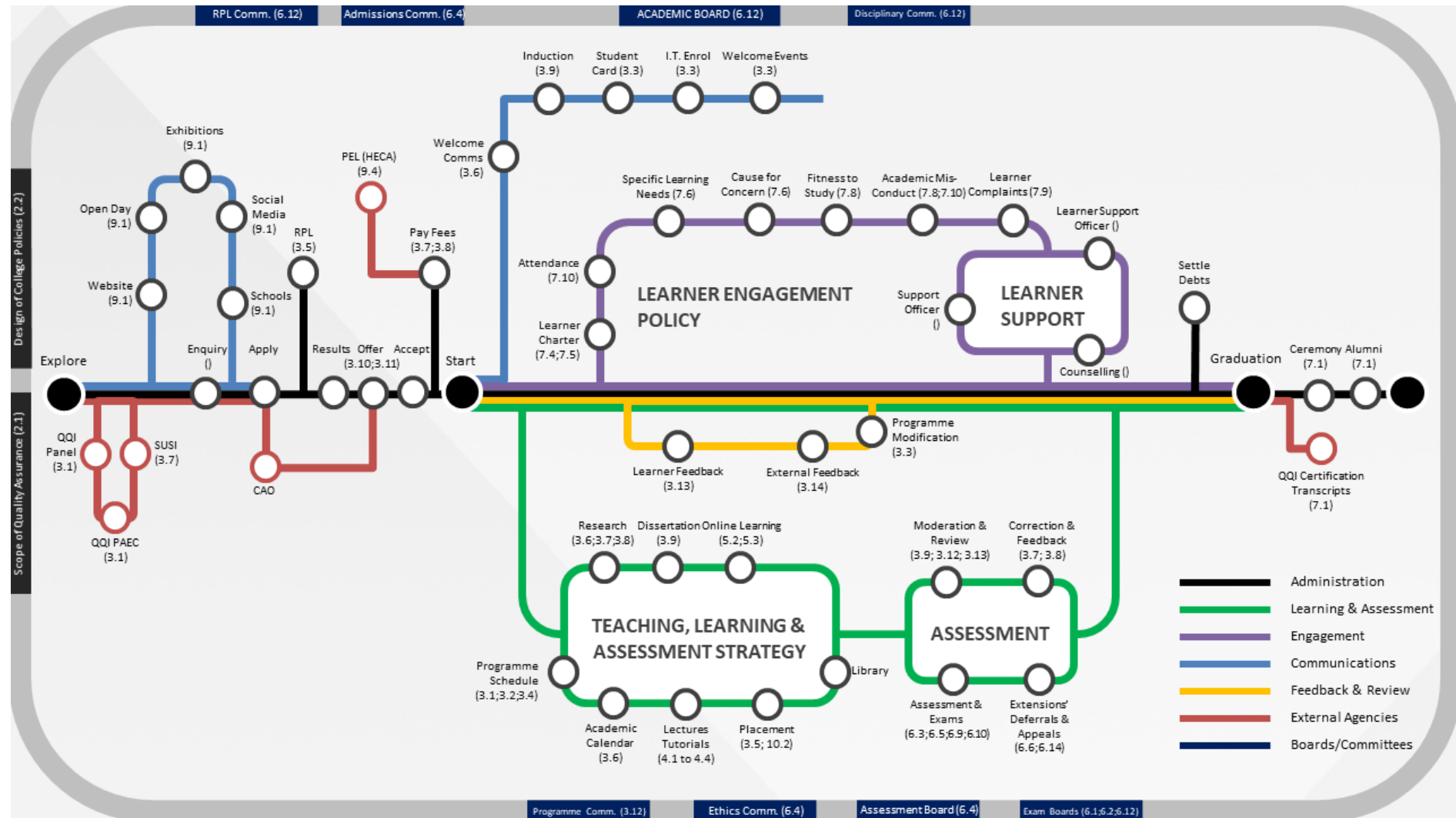
# Section Two

## 1. INTRODUCTION

SNMCI is committed to delivering high quality programmes in education and related areas and strives to uphold a Quality Assurance System that is fully documented, evaluated and maintained to ensure that there are robust policies and procedures in place that are fit-for purpose as outlined in *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* (2016).
Policies and procedures, both academic and organisational, are developed to ensure consistency and fairness, and to aid effectiveness and performance. They underpin all aspects of the College as a Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education.

## 2. DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

### Overview

The office of the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA) maintains regular contact with all members of staff, monitoring quality issues that may arise on an ongoing basis. Periodic meetings are convened throughout the year and annual meetings are convened to review and monitor the implementation of policies and procedures. Meeting decisions are recorded and any required corrective action is communicated to all staff and learners (as appropriate).

### Cyclical Review

SNMCI and has a cyclical approach to quality assurance involving initiation, development, approval, implementation, monitoring and review.
The normal cycle of review may be influenced by external factors including:
- Changes in legislative frameworks;
- Changes in the National and International landscape;
- Change of requirements from the Awarding Body (QQI);
- Changes in requirements by other bodies e.g. Teaching Council (TC), Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), Department of Education and Skills(DES);

Internal factors also influence the cycle of review including:
- Identification of a need for an amendment, refinement, addition or removal of information by persons/departments/programme committees in the College;
- Additional considerations that may arise subsequent to the drafting of the original policy;
- When processes change in respect to how programmes are delivered e.g. blended or online learning or changes in assessment submission (Moodle/learning platforms etc)

The overall approach to review is supported by ongoing dialogue and communication across stakeholders and responsibility for the drafting, development and review of policies and procedures is spread across all areas of the College as appropriate.

Academic programmes are monitored, evaluated and reviewed to ensure that all aspects of programme provision are effective and fit-for-purpose. Review includes:
- Learner Feedback
- Lecturer Feedback
- External Reports
- Programme Committee Reports

Reports and minutes are circulated as appropriate and learner feedback is available to external examiners.

## A Comprehensive System

The promotion of quality is embedded in the governance, organisational and academic activities of SNMCI.
- SNMCI is committed to the continuous development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality and quality enhancement in all College activities.
- SNMCI encourages staff and student insight and participation in the development, review, implementation and testing of policies and procedures.
- Staff and students are represented on the Academic Board of the College
- SNMCI sees it as the responsibility of all employees to become familiar with and have ownership of the College's QA policies and procedures. This process is promoted through induction and ongoing engagement facilitated by Programme Directors, the DQAA and the CEO as appropriate.
- Programme Committees meet at the beginning and end of the academic year to discuss significant programme issues.
- General staff meetings are held regularly to facilitate information sharing regarding the aspirations and concerns of management and staff
- Programme Directors are available to provide clarification to staff members and to raise issues at meetings on their behalf.
- Stakeholder feedback is obtained regularly through face-to face and online methods
- SNMCI endeavours, through the use of the website, Moodle and shared folders, to ensure that all information circulated is appropriate, relevant, reliable and accessible.

All new policies created and approved by the Academic Board adhere to **QA 2.1** *Scope of Quality Assurance* and **QA 2.2** *Formulation, Issuance and Enhancement of College Policies* or the *'Policy on Polices'* which contains a Template for College Policies.
The Template encourages the initiator/owner of the policy to:
- Develop policies according to the process set out in **QA 2.2**
- Present policies in a standard format
- Include illustrations
- Follow through on policy approval process
- Ensure that policies are accessible to all interested parties
- Keep policies up to date using the attached Policy Control Sheet.

It also requires:
- A context for each policy
- The policy statement

- The scope of the policy
- The staff involved
- The associated procedure outline, stating, at each point, a) Person/s Responsible and b) Records generated to ensure evidence of follow through and closure of the process.

| # | POLICY TITLE | POLICY AREA: | VERSION: | DATE: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST.NICHOLAS MONTESSORI | | | | |

| Diagram | | |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction and Context:<br>The purpose of this document is to | | |
| Policy Statement: | | |
| Staff Involved: | | |
| | Person/s Responsible | Records generated to ensure evidence of follow through |
| Procedure Outline | | |

POLICY CONTROL SHEET

| Policy | |
|---|---|
| **Version** | |
| **Adopted/Effective** | |
| **Supersedes** | |
| **Monitoring/ Next Review Date** | |
| **Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s)** | |
| **Scope** | |

REFERENCES

| **SNMCI Policy area** | |
|---|---|
| **Developed with reference to** | |
| **Related SNMCI Policies / Forms** | |

REVISION

| Revision Number | Revision Description | Originator | Approved By |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |

| # | POLICY TITLE: | POLICY AREA: | VERSION: | DATE: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST.NICHOLAS MONTESSORI | **2.1 Scope of Quality Assurance** | 2) DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE | 3.0 | OCTOBER 2020 |

**Introduction and Context:**

**Objective:**

- To define the scope of applicability of the College's Quality Assurance Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines.
- To outline the relationship between the College QA Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines and those of external academic and professional agencies recognising or validating the College's awards.
- To define the relationship between the College QA Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines and the wider legislative environment within which the College operates.

The College Quality Assurance Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines apply to programmes delivered by SNMCI, where SNMCI is understood to incorporate SNMCI Dublin and SNMCI Cork. In particular the scope of the College's QA system extends to:

- All programmes provided by the College which lead to higher education academic awards governed by Irish bodies.
- All forms of programme delivery and study mode, including full-time, part-time and blended (See QA5.2)
- All forms of programme delivery and study mode, including transnational (See QA 2.6)

**Policy:**

- The College is committed to ensuring that its QA Policies, Procedures, Practices and Guidelines continue to reflect and comply with all prevailing national and international legislation as it evolves, for example, in the case of employment legislation and the protection of learners.
- The College is committed to advancing and embracing national and international educational developments. Where possible it will serve to champion these development opportunities amongst its staff, learners and the wider educational community.
- The College recognises and welcomes the ongoing contribution made by the external legislative and educational agencies in enhancing the development of the College's own activities.
- Where the College provides a programme leading to the award of an external agency, it is understood that the quality assurance measures used to govern the programme include all those prescribed by the external agency in addition to those described in the College QA manual.
- In the event that the quality assurance requirements of a particular external agency differ in some respect from those outlined in the College QA manual, the College complies with the conditions stipulated by the external agency in respect of the associated programmes involved.
- This manual is subject to annual review by the Academic Board to support the

| | College's ongoing commitment to Quality Assurance and Enhancement. |
|---|---|
| - | QQI will be notified of changes |
| - | The Director of Quality Enhancement and Academic Affairs will keep a detailed record of all changes made to policies, procedures and guidelines. |

**Policy Control Sheet**

| Policy | **QA 2.1  Scope of Quality Assurance** |
|---|---|
| Version | 3.0 |
| Adopted/Effective | Oct 2020 |
| Supersedes | Version 2.0 |
| Monitoring/Next Review Date | 2022 or as appropriate due to extension of scope of provision |
| Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s) | Director of Quality and Academic Affairs |
| Scope | College wide |

**References**

| SNMCI Policy area | **2) Documented Approach to Quality   QA Vol 2** |
|---|---|
| Developed with reference to | The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012). |
| | QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) |
| | QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (March 2018) |
| | QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (2012) |
| | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) |
| Related SNMCI Policies / Forms | All QA Policies, procedures and guidelines |

**Revision**

| Revision Number | Revision Description | Originator | Approved By |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 (Oct 2020) | For Blended Learning Status | Office of DQAA | AB |
| | | | |

| # | POLICY TITLE: | POLICY AREA: | VERSION: | DATE: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST.NICHOLAS MONTESSORI | **2.2 Formulation, Issuance and Enhancement of College Policies** | 2) DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE | 3.0 | OCTOBER 2020 |
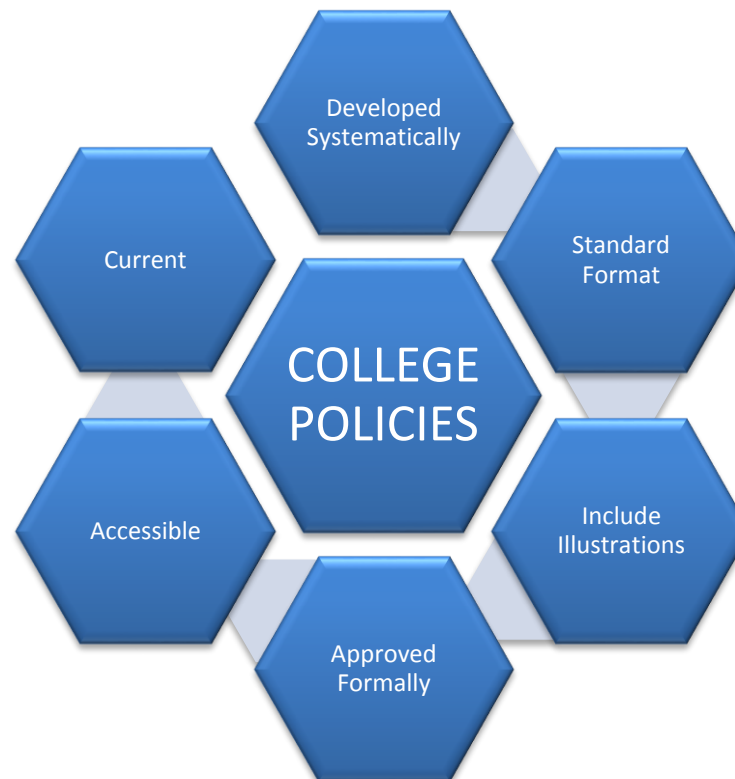
**Introduction and Context**

SNMCI continues to develop its QA processes in light of experience gained in delivering its programmes, direction provided by external agencies, in line with its Vision and Mission and with a commitment to quality enhancement. The objective of this policy, also known as the **'Policy on Policies'**, is to:

- Identify the principles underpinning the College's QA policies, procedures and guidelines
- Outline the College's approach to the development, approval and maintenance of its QA policies, procedures and guidelines

It is expected that as new policies are developed or existing policies are amended, that they will adhere to the provisions set out in this policy.
**Note:** The requirements for the formulation and issuance of College policies set out here, apply, where an existing policy is revised or replaced in future, after the date of approval of this policy

**Principles of QA development**

Through experience and evolving practice SNMCI has identified the following principles for the design, agreement and implementation of its QA policies. By following these principles, it should be possible to develop and maintain a quality system, involving staff and learners, where the responsibility for quality is accepted by all. It should be possible to assemble policies that are:

- appropriately developed and designed in consultation with all those involved in their implementation;
- agreed in a collaborative environment;
- designed to reflect the College's culture;
- learner centred;
- Communicated through a variety of media;
- easy to find, read and understand;
- informed by external input;
- consistent with the College's mission;
- compliant with applicable laws;
- consistent with best practice;
- regularly updated;

**Scope:** This Policy applies to all departments of the College, management, academic and administrative (hereinafter collectively referred to as

| the College). |
|---|
| **Legal and Regulatory Context** |
| - This policy is designed with regard to QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines2 requirement that the College has and implements a policy for, and a documented approach to, quality assurance. |
| - It also has regard to a more specific set of sector and topic-specific QA guidelines tailored for private/independent providers3and for providers who wish to introduce aspects of blended -learning into their programmes. 4 |
| - This policy is the College's overarching approach to fulfilling its legal requirement to have policies and procedures in place for quality assurance as per Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 20125 |

**Definitions**

**Policy -** A policy is a statement of intent which can be used to guide decisions. A policy may stand on its own or can be implemented through procedures or protocols.  College policies help to promote compliance with applicable laws or regulations, best practice, ethical norms and pursuit of the College's mission.  They can also assist in the reduction of risk.

**Procedures -** A procedure establishes who, what, where and when in relation to a given activity, as well as establishing accountability in support of the implementation of a policy. As with College policy, College procedures will:
- be written in a format that is easy to follow
- be reviewed and updated in tandem with the latest versions of the related policy

**Policy Owner -** The Policy Owner is the appropriate person in the College whose remit / responsibility covers the subject matter of the policy.

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2 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, Sections 1.2, 2.1. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf .

3 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, Section 3. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Sector%20Specific%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines%20V2.pdf .

4 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2018), Topic Specific: Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes, 2016, Section 3. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf

5 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Section 28.1. Available at: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/html

The Policy Owner will be responsible for the substance of policy documents and for promoting compliance with the policy unless as specified otherwise within the policy.

**Policy Statement**

College policies will be:

**A) Developed according to the process set out in this policy**

The Policy Owner will be responsible for the drafting of new or revised College policies, ensuring policies are up to date, consulting with interested parties and for steering the policy through the process required for approval.

The Policy Owner will also arrange for the policy's publication, when approved, on the College's website.

**B) Presented in a standard and common format**

The drafting of College policies will adhere to the format set out in the Policy Template referred to below in the section on related documentation. The format/template **may be amended** to add clarity to a policy.

**C) Include illustrations**

Include illustrations (where appropriate) 'describing and explaining the quality assurance feed-back and feed –forward paths'. (QQI, 2016, p.8)

**D) Formally approved by the relevant College Authority**

All proposed Quality Assurance ad Enhancement policies and supporting documentation are subject to the approval of the College Academic Board which meets four times a year and has overall responsibility for safeguarding the Quality Assurance and Enhancement practices of the College.

**E) Accessible to all parties with an interest in the policy's subject matter**

The majority of policies will be accessible and published on the College website and elsewhere as deemed appropriate. Documents which are for staff use only will also be published on the College website but may only be available to current members of staff.

**F) Kept up to date and current within a framework of an organized system of change control**

The Policy Owner for each policy is responsible for keeping the policy up to date and for ensuring that only approved versions of the policy are accessible via the College website. Policy Owners will periodically review policies which fall under their remit. Each policy will state the date on which it was approved.

**Policy Control Sheet**

| Policy | QA 2.2: Formulation, Issuance and Enhancement of College Policies |
|---|---|
| Version | 3.0 |
| Adopted/Effective | Oct 2020 |
| Supersedes | Version 2.0 |
| Monitoring/Next Review Date | 2022 or as appropriate due to extension of scope of provision |
| Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s) | Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA) |
| Scope | College wide |

**References**

| SNMCI Policy area | 2) Documented Approach to Quality: QA Vol 2 |
|---|---|
| Developed with reference to | QQI Standards and Guidelines; The Irish Qualifications and Quality Act (Education and Training) 2012; European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area. |
| Related SNMCI Policies / Forms | **1) Policy template:**<br> The policy template sets out the prescribed layout to be used when drafting College policies. (FQA 2.2 A)<br>**2) Guidelines on Policy Development:**<br>The guidelines on policy development set out the issues to consider when drafting College policies (FQA 2.2 B)<br>**3) Terms of Reference of the Academic Board (QA 2.4)** |

**Revision**

| Revision Number | Revision Description | Originator | Approved By |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 (Oct 2020) | For Blended Learning Status | Office of DQAA | AB |
|  |  |  |  |

# 3. PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## Programme Development and Approval

SNMCI has a systematic process for proposing and developing new programmes and for entering into the validation process with QQI.

Programmes are proposed on the Programme Proposal Form **(FQA 3.1 A).**
This form has guidelines **(FQA 3.1B)** to assist the proposer and to allow for consideration of the following:

- The strategic fit with the College's direction
- The relative market demand for recruitment purposes
- The programme learning outcomes and expected learner profile
- The academic coherence of the programme as a whole
- The internal capability to fully develop the programme
- The resource (human and otherwise) implications of delivering the programme
- The appropriate mode(s) of delivery
- Compliance with external requirements for validation / accreditation
- The financial viability of the programme

Recommendations and the outcome of a programme proposal is fed back by the Academic Board on Form **(FQA 3.1C)**

Programmes that reach the stage of development follow QQI guidelines **(QA 3.2)** for validation and the process is documented on a Programme Validation Control Sheet below **(FQA 3.2A).**

| QA 3.2A   Programme Validation Control Sheet | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <Programme Title> | | | | |
| Step | Description | Person/s Responsible | Date | Comment |
| 1 | Programme Proposal Form | Proposer | | Initial programme idea |
| 2 | Academic Board Approval | Academic Board | | Academic approval: In line with the mission, values and scope of provision of the College |
| 3 | Board of Trustee Approval | Board of Trustees | | Commercial: A strategic fit with the College's mission statement. In line with market demand and financially viable |
| 4 | Convening the Programme Development Team | Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead | | Members to include, critical friend, external expertise, learners, expert staff |
| 5 | Programme Document Opened | Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead | | Beginning of documented process |
| 6 | Series of documented meetings | Lead by Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead | | Learner profile/Graduate profile MIPLOS Access, Transfer and Progression Regulatory requirements Workload/Mode of delivery Learning environment |
| 7 | Review of programme QA implications | DQAA | | All related QA |
| 8 | Desk Top Review of all documentation | DQAA | | Review against criteria |
| 9 | Critical Review/Mock Panel | | | Critical Friend Mock panel of peer reviewers |
| 10 | Response of Critical Review Panel | Mock Panel | | Edit |
| | Edit based on Critical Review | Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead | | Edit |
| | Application to QQI | DQAA | | All documents to QQI via QHub for consideration at PAEC |
| | Initial Review QQI | QQI contact | | Desk top review to ensure all components present |
| | Peer Panel Selection | DQAA/PD/QQI | | Convening of validation panel |
| | Peer Panel Site Visit | SNMCI/QQI | | Validation event |
| | Panel Report | Panel | | Response of panel |
| | Response to Panel Report | DQAA | | Answer to panel re initial report |
| | Panel response/agreement | Panel | | Finalising |
| | Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)/Decision received | QQI | | Official validation |
| | Academic Board Informed | DQAA | | |

## Existing Programmes:

For existing programmes SNMCI QA Procedures allow for

- Annual Programme Review **(QA 11.2)**

- Significant Programme Modification **(QA 11.3)**

- Minor Programme Modification **(QA 11.3)**

- Programmatic Review **(QA 11.4)**

This process is documented each year in the Annual Programme Report **(FQA 11.2)**

**<u>Programmatic Review</u>**

Each programme of the College is also subject to programmatic review, normally every five years.  The purpose of the Programmatic Review is for the Programme Committee (chaired by the Programme Director) to report on the overall health of the programme in terms of structure, content, currency and quality as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery.  The Programmatic Review builds on the ongoing and annual review and monitoring processes. Whilst the need for programme changes may be addressed from time to time over the five-year period, the Programmatic Review provides an opportunity to

- take an overall perspective on the development of the programme over the previous five years

- to consider whether it is continuing to meet current stakeholder needs and whether or not it will continue to address these needs into the future

- to decide whether to end or revalidate the programme

**Learner admission, progression and recognition**

SNMCI has a 'foundation' policy on Access, Transfer and Admissions. **(QA 3.3)**
This policy applies to all SNMCI programmes. It outlines SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression and our commitment to inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates.
This overarching policy is the foundation for, and is evidenced in a range of related policies:
- **QA 9.1:** Compiling and Approving Marketing Material and Public Information
- **QA 3.4:** Admissions
- **QA 3.6:** Recognition of Prior Learning
- **QA 3.8:** Information for Enrolled Learners
- **QA 3.11:** Learner Induction
- **QA 3.14:** Learner Feedback
- **QA 7.5:** Cause For Concern

This policy is informed by:
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance *Education and Training Act* 2012
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013) *Assessment and Standards*, *Revised*
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2015) Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education (Restatement)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2015) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), (2nd ed.) Section 1.4.
- AHEAD and Higher Education Authority (2013) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*

Access policies, admission processes and criteria are established and implemented consistently and in a transparent manner in accordance with national policies and procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression.
Entry requirements are set in order to identify prospective students who will be able to deal with programme demands and who have the interest and commitment to complete programmes. Criteria for entry are detailed in programme documents which are validated by QQI.

Students typically apply for a place in SNMCI either through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system or directly through the College's Admissions Management Portal.
Applications for undergraduate programmes are typically made through the CAO whereas applications for part-time programmes or Higher Diplomas are typically made directly through the Admissions Portal.
The College has a robust Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) system, both for accredited learning and for experiential learning **(QA 3.6)**.

Throughout the academic year students have access to Programme Directors, Deputy Programme Directors and a Learner Support Officer to help with any issues that may impact on progression for that year **(See QA 7.1-7.13)**. Feedback is given both formally and informally, at module level, during the programmes, as students engage with content and

assessment. Indicative marks are given but these are provisional until agreed at the Exam Board **(QA 6.13).**

Attendance is routinely monitored and students whose attendance is unsatisfactory have opportunities to meet with Programme Directors to discuss reasons for unsatisfactory attendance and to discuss possible supports to improve attendance **(QA 7.10).** Students who fail have the opportunity to take repeat exams in August. Options available to students are outlined in the student handbook.

All academic programmes are subject to Programme Review. Programme Reviews coincide with the production of Annual Programme Reports, inform the next academic year and, in particular where programmes are coming near to the end of their 5 year cycle, they inform future decisions re programme revalidation and/or new programme development.

# 4. STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

## **Staff Recruitment**

SNMCI recognises that people are its most important asset and values the contribution of all staff without whom the College would be unable to sustain its vision as a Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education.

SNMCI seeks to attract and retain excellent academic staff with the expertise necessary to advance the teaching, learning and research agenda of the College. The crucial role of administrative staff is also recognised. Policies and systems are in place to recruit staff, to support them to carry out their work effectively, and to encourage ongoing personal and professional development (**QA 4.1; QA 4.2; QA 4.3**).

SNMCI promotes best practice in recruitment by:

- Ensuring that recruitment processes conform with relevant legislation
- Providing a transparent, systematic, framework for recruitment which enables fair selection decisions
- Ensuring that Programme Directors and any staff with recruitment responsibility are aware of SNMCI's recruitment policies and procedures and the importance of adhering to best practice.

SNMCI believes that all recruitment activity should be fair, effective, transparent and equal. In filling any vacancy, management and staff are required to follow a systematic process designed to ensure the most cost-effective deployment of current and potential employees. **QA 4.1** clearly outlines the policy and procedures for staff recruitment with clear guidelines and instructions facilitating the College in appointing suitably qualified staff members to deliver its vision and mission. These guidelines include:

- Needs Analysis
- Decision to Recruit
- Job Specification
- Shortlisting
- Interview and Selection
- References and Conditional Offer
- Contract

**QA 4.2** outlines SNMCI's commitment to staff induction

## Staff Communication

It is vital that important information flows correctly throughout the College and SNMCI endeavours to create an environment where everyone is involved and responsible for good communication. This promotes an atmosphere where everyone feels included, informed and consulted. SNMCI has various internal pathways of communication to keep all employees informed on all relevant issues. All members of staff are encouraged to take responsibility and play their part in developing effective communications practices.

- Staff meetings allow for discussion on a variety of topics
- Minutes of all meetings are circulated and posted in a communal folder
- SNMCI publishes relevant documents and policies internally and on the SNMCI website, as appropriate.
- The College continuously welcomes suggestions and ideas from its employees through one-to-one meetings between managers and staff, staff meetings, staff development days, email communications, committee meetings, shared folders, staff representation and an open-door policy where all employees can share their thoughts, ideas and concerns.
- Staff communication involves asking for the views of staff members as well as keeping staff members informed of issues relating to their roles, responsibilities and programme areas.
- The cycle of review of policies and procedures allows for the opinions, views and judgements of staff to add value and relevance to policy development.

## Staff Development

A key determinant of quality in any organisation is the capacity of those who are responsible for its day-to-day running; academic and administrative. Having appointed staff, SNMCI has a strong commitment to their on-going professional development. The College is committed to providing on-going feedback and support to all staff and is keen to promote professional development initiatives as appropriate and beneficial to the individual and to the College as a whole.

Professional development initiatives grow and develop in response to programme needs identified through review and monitoring processes such as Programme Reviews **(QA 11.2;**

**QA 11.3)** and also through less formal discussion and consultation which takes place on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Professional development initiatives also grow as a result of supportive and useful feedback.

SNMCI's Policy on Promoting Professional Development **(QA 4.3)** includes provision for the support of staff training and development activities, study and examination leave and attendance and participation at conferences.

SNMCI's policy and practices for Professional Development are developed with reference to:

a) QQI Core: Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)
b) ESG: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area(ESG, 2015)
c) National Forum: National Professional Development Framework for all Staff who Teach in Higher Education (2018)

**Intellectual Property:**

The move to blended learning and the aspiration to develop the College's research base has highlighted the need to broaden policy re ownership of teaching and learning, materials and resources developed for programme delivery. Identifying and creating Intellectual Property (IP) is now an objective and in this context, SNMCI is committed to ensuring that IP arising from its Teaching, Learning and Research activities is used in support of the objectives set out in its Mission Statement, and in accordance with its legal obligations, for the benefit of the College, those who create the IP, and the wider society.

An introductory policy has been developed **(QA 4.4) t**o meet the current scope of the College, to provide guidance on how to make decisions concerning IP and covers;

- ownership of and right to use the IP;
- procedures for identification, evaluation, protection and management of IP;
- guidelines on the **sharing of profits** from successful exploitation; provide legal certainty;

It is hoped that this policy, will nurture an environment that supports and encourages innovation and development, will encourage staff to consider opportunities and benefits for the College and themselves will provide a fair balance for any conflicting interests and ensure compliance with applicable national laws and regulations.

# 5. TEACHING AND LEARNING

**A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning**

Dr Maria Montessori (1870-1952) believed that children were not simply empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but rather that they should be active agents in their own education and socialisation. She believed that children should be the 'drivers' of their own education and that they learned from themselves, from each other and from the environments around them. True learning, she said, is best achieved through active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings.

Through their studies our graduates are encouraged to bring these ideas of learning into classrooms for children of all ages. St. Nicholas Montessori College aspires to 'practice what it preaches' and to provide learning opportunities for its students to direct their own learning and to realise their potential as educators.

We are confident that we are working from a strong pedagogical foundation, evidenced by the fact that our graduates are consistently in demand in many educational contexts.

The SNMCI Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy reflects the Montessori concept of 'wider horizons' and also draws on Biggs (1999) who sees teaching and learning as an integrated and balanced system, in which all components support each other. Biggs outlined some of the components of this balanced system: the curriculum we teach, teaching and learning environment, the assessment process and reporting of results, and the institutional climate.

Dr. Montessori used the term 'wider horizons' to describe the physical, cognitive, social and moral progression of children moving through new 'planes of development'. As children grow, she wrote, they have an urge to look for wider horizons beyond those prepared for them by adults, to go out and explore the world and to develop a sense of morality closely linked to membership of social groups.

Similarly, SNMCI sees education as a transformative experience for students as they move through their programmes of study, depending less on tutor support, developing the character and skills necessary for success in life.

The priority areas of SNMCI's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy reflect Montessori's 'outward-looking' philosophy and Biggs' notion of an integrated system.

Quality in Teaching, Learning and Assessment is about planning and preparation. Programme Committees meet at the end of the academic year to review the year gone by, and meet again before the new academic year to plan, based on feedback and evaluation. Programme Committees sign off on module outlines and plans for the academic year.

Assessments are reviewed and sent to the Teaching Learning and Assessment Board for approval. Handbooks (general and placement) are reviewed to ensure that they supply all relevant information for incoming learners re programmes, expectations and requirements. Detailed processes, procedures and supports are in place to ensure that students are supported throughout their learning journey and that they engage optimally with their programmes of study. These include handbooks, study guides, policies on Attendance, Learner Support, Assessment, Placement, Research etc.

Ongoing review of programmes, policies and procedures is central to enhancing and maintaining a quality environment. Programme Managers collect student feedback following module delivery, through questionnaires and other means. Each programme has an external examiner, chosen carefully by the College, who operates under the College's policy on external examiners. Such feedback informs Annual Programme Reports and subsequent teaching, learning and assessment in the College.

A Student Charter is in place to identify the rights and responsibilities of students and the responsibilities of all College members in supporting students. The Student Engagement Officer also liaises on matters of mutual interest and concern between staff and students.

Alongside student support and development, SNMCI also has a policy to support continuing professional development for members of staff **(QA 4.3).**

## **National and International Effective Practice**

Because of the international nature of Montessori education, management at SNMCI has always encouraged and promoted international exchange of learners and staff, membership of international organisations, invitations to distinguished visiting lecturers and the sending of delegates to international Montessori conferences. The College was a founding member of Montessori Europe and will host the 2019 Montessori Europe Conference.
SNMCI is a long-standing member of the **Kastalia** network and each year is represented at their annual conference. Kastalia is a network of European institutions of teacher education, with a wide spectrum of subject areas. It covers all levels of education from pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary up to the research level. The network arranges both learner and staff mobility, develops professional teacher-education-learner profiles, develops ways of co-operating in different educational areas and shares academic activities.
Each year learners from SNMCI go on **Erasmus** placements from January to April. Our learners have travelled to Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and Turkey, and to date we have welcomed learners on study visits from Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey.
Key Action 2 of the Erasmus programme involves strategic partnerships for innovation and exchange of good practice. SNMCI participated with six other colleges in a project with the

theme of inclusive education. This project culminated in a two week workshop in Izmir, Turkey, attended by four SNMCI learners and two teachers. New projects are being planned for the coming academic years.

Each year, the College welcomes learners from the Bundesbildungsanstalt fur Kindergartenpadagogik, in **Linz, Austria.** These learners, from programmes of early and primary education, spend some time on placement experiencing Montessori environments and studying the Montessori Method of education.

As part of **Society 2025** SNMCI will continue to maintain existing connections and forge new links with international organisations in order to realise our vision and also to learn from best practice in other education systems.

## <u>Learning Environments</u>

Philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, educationalists, sociologists, and others have all contributed to understanding how people learn, but in general there is consensus that *'there is no agreed theory of learning, only a range of theories to choose from'* (Carlile & Jordan 2005 cited in Whitaker 2017). It is important that learning communities reflect on their own beliefs and theories about teaching and learning to avoid teaching in 'the way, it has always been done'. *'Choice of teaching, learning and assessment methods should be grounded in, and considered alongside, an understanding of theories about learning'*. (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall 2009).

Teaching and Learning at SNMCI is Humanist and Constructivist in nature. Humanism focuses on 'emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills' and constructivism is a learner centred theory that believes that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning and build on prior experience and knowledge (Ashworth et al., 2004, p.5)

|  | **Humanist** | **Constructivist** |
|---|---|---|
| **Main Theorists** | Abraham Maslow Carl Rogers | John Dewey Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky Barbara Rogoff |
| **View of the T&L process** | A personal act to fulfil potential | Construction of meaning from experience |
| **Locus of learning** | Affective and cognitive domains | Individual internal construction of reality |
| **Purpose of education** | To become self-actualised, autonomous | Construct knowledge |
| Table assembled with reference to Whitaker, 2017, p. 75. | | |

SNMCI acknowledges the advantages of exposing learners to a wide range of teaching and learning methods across their programme of study. It further acknowledges the importance of staff development to provide opportunities to explore alternative approaches to teaching

and raise the quality of traditional approaches. In choosing teaching methods and strategies SNMCI has considered the following…

- Learners experience the same teaching in different ways.
- Cultural background and beliefs can impact on student behaviour, interpretation and understanding.
- Knowing this, lecturers/tutors must modify their approaches.
- An understanding of where learners are starting from is vital, to properly scaffold learning to the next level, and to avoid gaps in learning.
- Feedback and discussion are important so that learners and lecturers can both be satisfied that accommodations of new understanding are 'correct'.
- Learners and lecturers are both responsible for making learning 'happen'.
- All learners bring their own valuable knowledge and experiences to learning.
- Learners need to be encouraged to engage and internalise new knowledge and to draw on prior knowledge.
- Learner involvement and choice increases motivation.
- Small peer group work and discussion can be a powerful learning tool.

**Teaching Methods and Strategies**

Lecturers at St. Nicholas have been working within a blended paradigm since March and are acclimating to blended pedagogy as a cohort on an ongoing basis, with training and support from a newly appointed Instructional Designer. Through an ongoing programme of staff meetings, consultations and workshops, staff are being introduced to pedagogical frameworks and strategies that enhance blended learning design.

In particular the College is focusing on the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000) as a guide to enhance social presence and instructor presence in the online environment, while extending the social cohesion of the face to face learning environment.

At modular level the Instructional Designer is employing a modified version of the ABC Learning Design model to collaborate with staff on curriculum mapping. This learning design model has been adopted by UCD's Teaching Enhancement Unit and DCU's Teaching and Learning Unit as an efficient method for collaborating with staff to produce a visual storyboard of their curricular design, to ensure the learning activities and assessments match the module learning outcomes.

The SNMCI blended programme design also integrates principles of the COACT framework to ensure a balance of instructor-led activities and student interactions to achieve higher-level learning (Johnston and Breakwell, 2011; Bailey et al, 2014). The COACT model is a practical framework that supports lesson design and structure in blended learning environments that builds on Säljö's (1979, 2004, 2010) seminal work on the hierarchy of learning that underpins work by The Goteburg Group (Gibbs et al., 1982) and later the ETL Project at the University of Edinburgh (Enwistle, 2009).

This social constructivist model was developed in order to improve the overall student learning experience and create sustainable approaches to teaching and learning by:

- Creating a framework for course design that, if followed, assures higher-order learning takes place and learning objectives are explicitly addressed
- Encouraging a move away from a dependence on tutor-led learning in order to create independent learners
- Focuses on student engagement with the material and each other to co-create knowledge
- Enabling learners to acquire lifelong learning skills, equipping them for the knowledge-based society

The model breaks the learning experience down into a five-stage process that reflect a progression from lower-order towards higher-order learning, towards 'seeking meaning' through interpretation, critical analysis and application of knowledge. In planning lessons, lecturers are required to explicitly work through each step in the framework to ensure that each level is addressed. Within the structure of the framework, however, authors are free to choose whatever learning objects or teaching methods they feel are most suitable to achieve the learning outcomes, which ensures the lessons are varied and draw on a large variety of resources.

## SNMCI TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is available as a separate document.

## BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGY

The College's Blended Learning Strategy is available as a separate document.
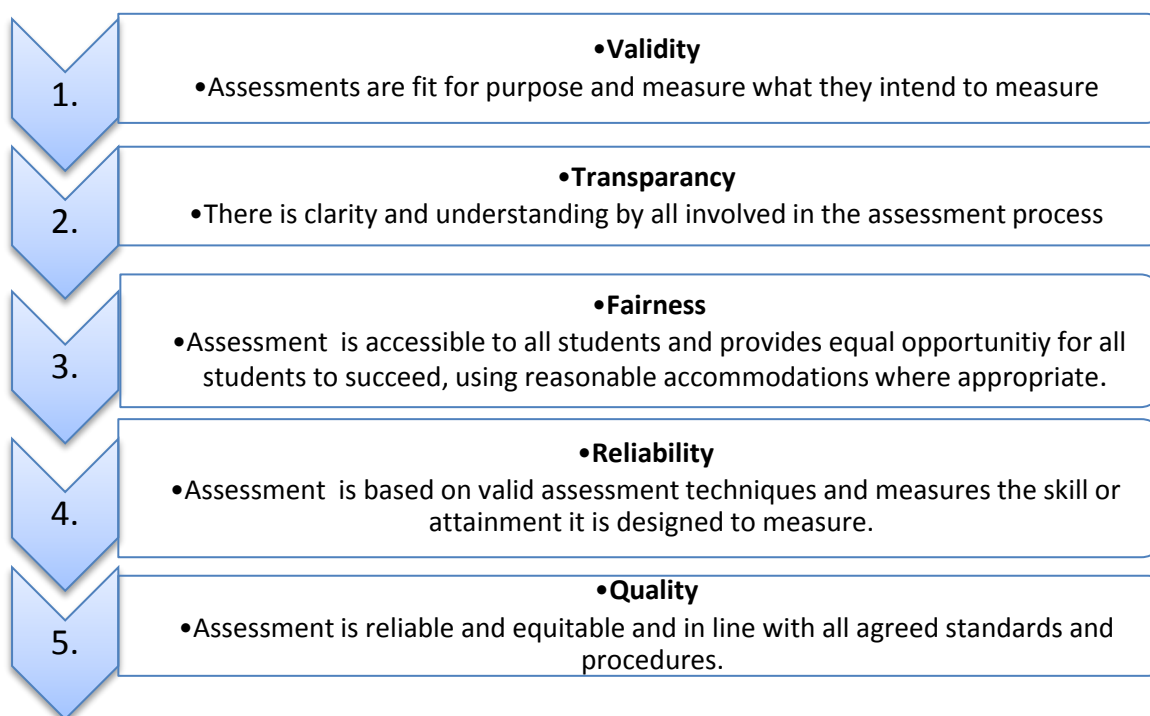
# 6. ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

## Assessment of Learners

Assessment is a systematic process for gathering and evaluating information on a student's academic progress. It can be used for one or more of the following purposes

- To provide certification: identifying different levels of achievement of the learning outcomes for the purposes of making an award, upon completion of a module or programme of study.
- To improve student learning: motivating students and creating a learning environment. Allowing students to assess their progress.
- Quality assurance and enhancement: providing evidence of academic standards and student progress to staff and stakeholders
- To inform teaching or curriculum enhancement.

Principles Underpinning SNMCI Assessment Strategy

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | **•Validity**<br>•Assessments are fit for purpose and measure what they intend to measure |
| 2. | **•Transparancy**<br>•There is clarity and understanding by all involved in the assessment process |
| 3. | **•Fairness**<br>•Assessment is accessible to all students and provides equal opportunitiy for all students to succeed, using reasonable accommodations where appropriate. |
| 4. | **•Reliability**<br>•Assessment is based on valid assessment techniques and measures the skill or attainment it is designed to measure. |
| 5. | **•Quality**<br>•Assessment is reliable and equitable and in line with all agreed standards and procedures. |

## Assessment of Learning Achievement

SNMCI's assessment strategy has been developed with an eclectic approach to ensure a wide range of academic knowledge, skills and competences are assessed and to accommodate different learning styles. Assessments are developed and approved in line with module learning outcomes. Each programme strives to provide a balance of assessment within each semester, across each stage and across each programme as a whole.

Continuous assessment (e.g. essay, presentation) is applied to assess learning against expected outcomes and is a method of assessing learning as it is occurring. The focus is on constructive learning, where feedback is motivational and directed at improvement. Other types of assessment (e.g. terminal examination, dissertations or projects) tend to occur at the end of a semester or stage.

All assessment techniques have advantages and disadvantages. Programme developers and lecturers in SNMCI are expected to consider their modules carefully and choose from the range of assessments techniques available, to find those capable of allowing learners to demonstrate how well they are learning in any given module.

Programme Committee meetings (**QA 3.12:** Role of the Programme Committee) at the end of the academic year, include a review of assessment. A learner representative is invited to these meetings. Assessment is also included in Learner Module Feedback. Each programme reviews and evaluates its assessment processes and the Assessment Board meets both at the end and at the beginning of each academic year to discuss issues related to assessment, for the outgoing year, and to review and approve assessment for the upcoming year. From time-to –time a general Assessment Survey is issued to students to gain an overall sense of student engagement with programme assessment.

**Information** about assessment is contained in each programme document, in handbooks and in module descriptors. Lecturers are expected to follow guidelines on the development and issuance of assignments and examinations. Assignments are issued in good time, are explained, and have clear and detailed briefs with specified criteria. Marking rubrics are devised and used for consistency in grading and to allow for richer feedback to students. **(QA 6.2:** Lecturer submission of exams and assignment briefs for approval by the Assessment Board.)

**Feedback** is provided in a timely manner and in a variety of ways: detailed comments on hardcopy, marks and comments on Moodle submissions, individual meetings and general class feedback. Formative feedback is on-going in class, sometimes with a grade (low stakes) and sometimes with no grade but with the intention of giving learners confidence in their ability to complete an assignment or grasp a concept. (**QA 6.5:** Correction and Provision of Feedback)

There are procedures in place to safeguard assessments and to ensure control over assessment (coursework or examinations) from the time of submission to correction, to moderation, until the release of approved results, and beyond to the conclusion of the appeals process. (**QA 6.3:** Assessment Control Principles and Procedures; **QA 6.6:** Internal Moderation; **QA 6.7:** Examination Regulations)

**Examinations** are organised by the Head of Registrations and Examinations and there are procedures in place for scheduling examinations, publishing exam timetables, internal and external review of exam papers, invigilating examinations and marking papers. Procedures are also available on Moderating and the Role and Responsibilities of the External Examiner.

Indicative marks are issued to students during the year. These marks are provisional until they are considered and ratified by the Examinations Board. Results of summative assessments are entered by individual lecturers in Moodle, the student learning platform. The process of producing overall broadsheets of results and transcripts for students is overseen by the Head of Examinations and Registrations.  Results are made available to the external examiners for review before the Examinations Boards. External Examiners provide an end of year report which form part of the Annual Programme Report for each programme (**QA 6.10:** Role and Responsibilities of External Examiners; **FQA 6.10:** External Examiner's Report Template) Students may access Moodle using their secure password to view results and overall results are emailed to students immediately following the Exam Boards.

**Accommodations** are in place for students as advised by the Learner Support Officer.

**An Appeals**/Recheck process is in place, where a student is unhappy with a mark (**QA 6.13:** Assessment Appeals; **FQA 6.13:** Assessment/Recheck Appeals Form) and Repeat Exams are organised prior to the beginning of the academic year, approved by the External Examiner and available as appropriate.

# 7. SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

## Support for Learners

SNMCI understands that the space, physical, social, cultural and intellectual, that surrounds students is important and has a great impact on learning, and that, not only formal, but also informal and non-formal education takes place in the environment.

The ethos of the College supports a positive institutional climate. **Physically**: our learning spaces are adaptable to the needs of the learners. Teaching environments will range from traditional lecture rooms, to varied layouts for the facilitation of small group discussion, to practical work with the Montessori materials and spaces for art, music and drama. **Intellectually:** learners are encouraged to be active in the learning process and the range of teaching and learning approaches offer many opportunities for them to interact and confer with peers and lecturers. The College extends invitations to guests to speak to learners about their specialist subjects.  Montessori philosophy supports active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings. The College supports students to direct their own learning and encourages them become critical thinkers with a range of subject specific and transferrable skills. Learners are also be encouraged to engage with on-line resources, including Moodle and library databases. **Socially and culturally:**  the very presence of individuals and groups from different backgrounds results in diversity, but SNMCI is aware that it is the experiences of individuals and groups and the quality and extent of the interaction between those various groups and individuals, that speaks to the institutional 'climate' of any organisation. A sense of personal responsibility is the bye-product of a good institutional climate and SNMCI expects all members to take responsibility, and be committed to building an inclusive, supportive environment, where everyone is valued and encouraged to reach his or her highest potential.

**The Institutional climate at SNMCI:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Is inclusive, diverse and welcoming of all ages and nationalities. | Is student- cenred: Information, induction, materials, opportunities for feedback. | Encourages life-long learning for students and staff | Is a Community of practice: staff, students, school, teachers and parents' associations. |
| Provides lines of communication and support for students: Student rep, Programme Directors and Learner Welfare  etc. | Is based on respect | Supports  Staff CPD | Encourages  staff and student mobility through Erasmus programme. |

Improving students' experience is central to SNMCI's ethos and we endeavour to ensure that all students have an opportunity to fully engage in their education experience, through a range of student support and guidance systems.  Learners are also supported by Programme Managers and IT personnel.

SNMCI offers flexibility of delivery to accommodate not only school leavers but also learners who are working, those who wish to upskill and those who wish to return to education following a long period of time working in the sector.

## Student Engagement: QA 7.1: Student Engagement

The College has a Student Engagement Officer (SEO); a channel of communication between staff and students.  The Student Engagement Officer plays a key role in delivering a suite of initiatives aimed at enriching the campus experience across the non-academic spheres of student life and co-curricular activity. In addition, the Student Engagement Officer is called upon to provide rapid and insightful access to student opinion and challenges across all aspects of their College experience. This role focuses on supporting strategies and projects that enhance all aspects of student engagement activity outside the spheres of learning. The role also coordinates the capturing of data and insight into the College community, particularly with regards to the needs and expectations of groups such as international, mature, postgraduate, commuting students, etc. In addition, the SEO leads key initiatives such as Welcome Week and any other student experience related projects as required.
 The student voice is heard through:

- Student Representatives for each cohort;
- The Student Council;
- Liaising with Student Engagement Officer;
- Representation on Academic Board;
- Representation on Programme Committees;
- Opportunities to contribute to College policies and processes;
- Opportunities for feedback: modules, services, assessment etc

Student Engagement **(QA 7.1)** is increasingly being seen as a defining characteristic of quality teaching and learning in higher education. However, research indicates that it is difficult to come to one definitive definition of student engagement, and that the meaning of student engagement shifts and changes across place and time. An institutional understanding of student engagement is shaped by the context in which it operates and by the meaning of 'non-engagement' (Vuori, 2014).

SNMCI's sees Student Engagement as an on-going and staged process that firstly seeks to foster understanding between the College and the Learners. Increased understanding will allow for engagement and consultation, leading to some authentic opportunities for partnership and eventual student leadership.

Understanding ➡ Consultation ➡ Partnership ➡ Leadership

**Learner Support: (QA 7.5 & 7.6)**

The College has a Learner Support Officer (LSO) and a Learner Wellbeing Service appropriate to its capacity. The LSO plays a key role in delivering a suite of initiatives aimed at ensuring that all students can access learning support, health and wellbeing support and access to external services including the College counsellor.

As the College is a blended learning institution the LSO works towards providing a high quality support for learners who are attending both on campus and online. Wherever possible the LSO ensures that the service and support that learners receive is not impacted by their location.

As we are a relatively small college it is possible for the Learner Support Officer to introduce herself to each cohort of learners at the beginning of each semester. The learner support office is clearly identified. Learners are given contact information and can contact the LSO in person or via the Programme Director. The College subscribes to a Health and Well-being Assistance Programme and information and contact details are available in the student handbook or from the Programme Directors or LSO. The LSO also supplies information re a counselling service retained by the College. Learners who require special conditions or everyday class supports etc. can apply through the Learner Support Officer. E-mails and notices are posted in good time to allow learners who require special conditions at exam time to apply for same.

**QA 7.6:** Cause for Concern, outlines the Policy and Procedures in place should there be concerns about a learner's wellbeing that may impact on academic performance. These concerns may be academic, physical, emotional, spiritual, medical or behavioural.

- **Role of Learner Support Officer : -**

   - To introduce himself/herself to learners during Induction Days
   - To meet with all learners during the first few weeks of semester
   - To be the first point of contact for learners who are struggling with problems of a non-academic nature on a programme.
   - To provide support to learners who may be experiencing social or emotional issues or who may require extra support during lectures or at exam times.
   - To provide learners with relevant, accurate and appropriate information relating to potential support options that are available to them and the implications of these
   - To liaise with the College's Counselling Service to ensure that learners have the appropriate support and access
   - To be responsible for and keep accurate records in line with data protection policies and College  procedures
   - To ensure the appropriate dissemination of learner information to relevant people/teams, in line with data protection legislation, to enable effective learner management and progression.

- To liaise with Programme Directors to ensure the smooth and successful running of the programme(s).
- To report data in a succinct manner that can be used by senior management for internal and external purposes

**Academic Integrity: QA 7.8: Academic Integrity**

The College's policy on Academic Integrity **(QA 7.8)** is one of the most important. **SNMCI** uses the following definition of Academic Integrity as per the International Centre for Academic **Integrity (ICAI, 2013) i.e.**

Academic Integrity is

- *'a commitment, even in the face of adversity to five fundamental values: honour, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility'.*

**Academic Integrity is important:-**

- To uphold the academic reputation of the College and to ensure that stakeholders see SNMCI as a reputable college that maintains the standards of its awards
- To ensure that learners receive due credit for the work they submit
- To protect  the interests of all learners so that there can be no academic advantage or disadvantage
- To meet SNMCI's reporting and compliance obligations as a Higher Education Provider delivering QQI validated awards.
- To assure employers that our graduates, who have been awarded degrees, have met the standards and professional requirements for the program of study e.g. Teaching Council, CORU, PSI, DCYA. .
- To assure employers that our graduates, who have been awarded degrees, have met the professional expectations of honesty, ethical standards, respect and responsibility.
- Because it is an extension of personal integrity.

**SNMCI Considers that Academic Integrity is:**

- something to be achieved through good practice rather than 'misconduct' to be avoided;
- goes beyond understanding and avoiding plagiarism, although this is a key part of it.
- involves the learner demonstrating knowledge and understanding through a process of evaluation and research, expressing understanding and original ideas independently, honestly and in an appropriate academic style, using good referencing and acknowledging all sources;

The policy was recently reviewed and adapted to underscore the mission and values of the College. Although the notion of support for first time instances of plagiarism and of being focused on the action, rather than labelling the student, was inherent in the existing policy,

these are now more explicit. This policy also focuses on a renewed importance of academic integrity in the 'blended space'. Associated documents include

- **GQA 7.8 A:** Guidelines on Academic Integrity for learners;
- **GQA 7.8 B:** Academic Integrity Faculty Checklist
- **1QA 6.8:** Open Book Examination Information
- Special considerations during online assessment
- General information re open-book exams
- Academic Integrity pledge

# 8. INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

## Information Systems

Information on learners gathered by SNMCI includes personal details, contact information and examination results. The College also gathers other information such as, module feedback and feedback on services and supports.

All staff and learners are obliged to read **FQA 8.2: Privacy Policy** which clarifies why SNMCI collects information, outlines how data is used and supplies reasons why any data gathered may be shared.

Learners are also obliged to **read** QA 8.1: Principles, Terms and Conditions of Use of the College's Information and Communications Technology **and sign the corresponding form FQA 8.1:** Each learner signs this document on a yearly basis.

**See below an outline of the purpose of collecting data, the type collected and the legal basis for doing so.**

| Purpose | Type: May include | Legal Basis |
|---|---|---|
| To provide Higher Education Services | - Identity Data;<br>- Garda Vetting Data;<br>- Medical Data;<br>- Professional/Academic Data;<br>- Assessment Data;<br>- Engagement and Attendance Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Obligation to provide service to learner;<br>- Legal Compliance;<br>- Explicit Consent (medical); |
| Protection of Enrolled Learners | - Identity Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Obligation to provide service to learner;<br>- Legal Compliance; |
| Processing of Applications and Recognition of Prior Learning | - Identity Data;<br>- Financial Data;<br>- Garda Vetting Data;<br>- Medical Data;<br>- Professional and/or Academic Data;<br>- References Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Obligation to provide service to learner;<br>- Legal Compliance; |
| To provide information about new programmes and/or services | - Identity Data;<br>- Technical Data;<br>- Usage Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Duty of College; |
| Information needed for Government and legal purposes. | - Identity Data;<br>- Garda Vetting Data<br>- Attendance Data | - Compliance with legal and policy obligations; |
| To manage financial aspects; fees; fee | - Identity Data;<br>- Financial Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Obligation to provide service to |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| schedules; fee recovery. | | all learners; |
| To engage with learners in the development of a mutually beneficial relationship | - Identity Data;<br>- Usage Data;<br>- Technical Data;<br>- Engagement and Attendance Data;<br>- Survey Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Improvement of products and services;<br>- Obligation to provide service to all learners; |
| To measure the effectiveness of marketing , advertising | - Usage Data;<br>- Technical Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Grow the College;<br>- Inform strategy of College; |
| To improve and protect our website, internal operations, (e.g. troubleshooting the online environment, surveying) programmes, customer and learner relationships and experiences. | - Usage Data;<br>- Technical Data;<br>- Identity Data;<br>- Assessment Data;<br>- Engagement and Attendance Data;<br>- Survey Data; | - Legitimate interest of the College;<br>- Defining our customer base and products and services;<br>- Grow the College;<br>- Inform strategy of College; |

**Management System:**

The College uses management systems adequate to its capacity. 'Scholar' is used to register learners, document grades, produce transcripts and manage information such as student contact details, student status and exam results. Scholar is a secure repository for current learner records and also for past learner records. The Scholar system can produce data, as needed for quality purposes e.g. to inform programme reviews and development, to supply information to QQI, the Teaching Council or to other agencies e.g. SUSI.
A separate data management system **(ZOHO)** handles information such as enquiries, applications, offers, acceptances and recruitment.

**Learner Information Systems**

SNMCI uses the VLE Moodle; a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. Moodle is used for programme content, information for learners and is also used to generate attendance records.

## Further Planning

SNMCI has an IT Manager who is responsible for the day -to -day running of all IT systems. The IT Manager is also responsible for IT review and development, to ensure that the system meets the needs of the College, administrative, programme delivery, record-keeping etc., in line with the College's strategic aims.

## Completion Rates

The College's information systems record and store data to be used as an information source in relation to programme completion rates, awards and overall grades for final year students, and this is available for all external agencies as appropriate.

## Records Maintenance and Retention

Collection and utilisation of information by SNMCI is done in compliance with the College's policy on storing, retaining and disposing of data **(QA 8.3)**. This policy has an attached schedule detailing how long data is retained and how it is disposed of.

SNMCI only collects and processes data for purposes which are:-
- Relevant to the provision of SNCMI programmes and/or for the protection of learners of all ages
- Necessary for the fulfilment of accreditation and legal obligations
- Lawful and fair
- Clearly explained to the data provider before the data is collected
- We seek to ensure that data is accurate, relevant and in proportion to the data usage purpose.

**Data Storage**
- Data is stored securely, either in digital or concrete formats.
- Data is stored so that it is easily accessed by those with appropriate authority and in a format which is suitable for processing.

**Retention of Data**
- Data is retained no longer than is necessary to fulfil the purpose for which the data was originally collected or for the period that it is required to be retained by law or accreditation agency, whichever is the longer.

**Disclosure of Data**
- Data will only be disclosed to the persons or organisations as identified in the data access authority record.

**Disposal of Data**
- Data will be deleted as soon as the retention period has expired.

**Assessment Data:-**
Programme Managers and the Head of Examinations and Registrations have overall responsibility for ensuring that all data related to assessment is complete, accurate and secure.

**FQA 8.3 A: Document Retention Schedule for documents in SNMCI**

| Documents/Records | Requirement | Final Disposition Hard Copy (if applicable) | Final Disposition Soft Copy (if applicable) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Board of Trustees** | | | |
| Minutes of meetings, and official correspondence | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Strategic plans | Three Years | Shred | Delete |
| Reports | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| **Finance Committee** | | | |
| Copies of financial procedures | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Insurance documentation | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Budget files and correspondence | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Signed financial statements and audit reports | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Legal documents and correspondence | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Purchase invoices | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Paid expense claim forms. Copies of fee refunds Monthly creditors statements. Copy payslips | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| All payroll reports for weekly, monthly and part-time staff | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| P35s and P30s and P60s | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Bank statements | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Bank correspondence. Reconciliation records | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Audit files as prepared for the comptroller and auditor general | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Minutes of meetings relevant to the Finance office. | 3 years | Shred | Delete |
| Creditors' records/statements | 6 years | Shred | Delete |
| Copy payslips | As long as required by Inspector of Taxes | Shred | Delete |
| **CEO/HR** | | | |
| Employee Personnel Records | Permanent | Archive | Archive |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Administration - staff structures, letters, circulars, pay scales | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Health and Safety Records | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Staff Training | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Staff lists, addresses and contact numbers | Duration of Employment | Shred | Delete |
| Application forms and documentation presented by applicants who are not offered positions | One year | Shred | Delete |
| Copy of public advertisement, schedule of interviews, short-listing criteria and recruitment screening form | One Year | Shred | Delete |
| General Correspondence | Three years | Shred | Delete |
| **IT Network** | | | |
| Network account usernames | Until 3 months following individuals departure | Shred | Delete |
| Internal staff details on e-mail and telephone systems | Until 3 months following individuals departure | Shred | Delete |
| **Academic Board** | | | |
| Minutes of meetings, backup materials | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| General correspondence | Three Years | Shred | Delete |
| **Learner Records** | | | |
| Student Information: name, address, date of birth, places of employment, prior education. | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Student Information: next of kin, PPS number. | Duration of Studies + 1 year | Shred | Delete |
| Forms and evidence submitted by students | Duration of Studies + 1 year | Shred | Delete |
| **Awards and Assessment** | | | |
| Examination scripts | 1 year following the final appeal date | Shred | Delete |
| Examination results - broadsheets | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Examination results - | Permanent | Archive | Archive |

| Examination Appeals documentation | 2 years after the student ceases to be a registered student of the College (barring litigation) | Shred | Delete |
|---|---|---|---|
| General correspondence | 2 years after the student ceases to be a registered student of the College (barring litigation) | Shred | Delete |
| External examiner reports. Records of exam board meetings. Assessment results | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| **Admissions** | | | |
| Application forms (successful applicants) Supplementary documentation | Duration of programme + 1 year | Shred | Delete |
| Information (unsuccessful applicants) | 1 year | Shred | Delete |
| Garda Vetting (Record of Vetting) | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| **Programmes** | | | |
| Approved programme schedules | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| QQI Validation Certificates P | Permanent | Archive | Archive |
| Correspondence, documentation and reports from external bodies | 1 Year from final appeal date | Shred | Delete |
| Student attendance records | 2 Year from final appeal date | Shred | Delete |

# 9. PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

**Public Information**
SNMCI recognises the importance of providing accurate and timely data about its academic provision to all stakeholders.

The College makes publicly available the following minimum information:
- The legal name of the College and the company and its charitable status
- Profiles of the Board of Trustees, CEO and staff (academic and administrative)
- Details of the College's legal and accreditation status with all professional, regulatory and statutory bodies
- Details of the College's Protection of Enrolled Learners arrangements (PEL)
- The SNCMI Quality Assurance Manual
- Outcomes of external quality assurance and accreditation engagements
- Information about the College's research activity where applicable
- Information about the use of personal data and a person's right to privacy
- College contact details

The College publishes information to prospective students and the general public about the College, its programmes and other related events and activities, and there are procedures for compiling and approving academic material before publication.

**Learner Information**
In the first instance information for prospective students is available in print and online. The Admissions Office takes all enquiries by phone, e-mail or drop-in.  It is College policy to reply to all enquiries promptly and factually.
The College also hosts Open Days (in person and virtual) where academic staff members are available to answer questions about programmes in the College.
Prospective learners will be provided with information related to both the College and Academic Programmes. All information for prospective and enrolled learners is:
- Written in plain English
- Consistent with the SNMCI brand and values
- In line with the requirements of any accrediting and/or professional bodies where applicable
- Transparent
- Accurate, complete and up to date
- Respectful and inclusive

**Publication of Quality Assurance Reports**

SNMCI 's Reengagement report is available on the QQI website.

# 10. OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Peer Relationships with the Broader Education and Training Community**

SNMCI recognises that it is part of the wider educational sector in Ireland and internationally. Our programmes are developed using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and in-line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The College maintains its QA policies and Procedures to ensure learner progression between stages and learner opportunities for transfer and progression based on mutual recognition of qualifications and quality systems.

Our programmes are informed by regulatory and professional policies e.g those relating to Early Years, The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), The Child and Family Agency (TUSLA), etc., and those related to Initial Teacher Education e.g The Teaching Council Guidelines, to ensure compliance and to assure the place of our graduates in the workforce.

**Expert panellists, examiners and authenticators**

The programmes of education and training offered by SNMCI are accredited by QQI. External examiners, monitor all aspects of academic programmes. Recommendations from the external examiner inform Annual Programme Reports and instigate reviews and action plans.

Specific guidelines are in place relating to the selection and appointment of external examiners and all independent board/committee members.

**QA 10.1: Appointment of Independent Board/Committee Members**

# 11. SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

**Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review**

The programmes at SNMCI 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 leaners and the workforce. Reviews at SNMCI improve the overall learner experience, identifying areas for improvement and innovation. They promote good practice by a process of benchmarking against examples of good practice nationally and internationally.
They provide feedback about College-wide effectiveness and evidence of 'follow through' on the College's vision, mission and strategy. They ensure compliance with all relevant legislation, policy, and standards and ensure transparency and encourage public confidence in the College as a quality provider of programmes of education and training. They link with the College's Strategic Plan

**QA 11.1:** CYCLICAL REVIEW AND SELF-EVALUATION
**QA 11.2:** ANNUAL PROGRAMME REVIEW POLICY AND PROCEDURE
**QA 11.3:** PROGRAMME MODIFICATION
**QA 11.4:** PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW/REVALIDATION

**Programme Review:-**
The process of annual programme review allows for monitoring of all aspects of all programmes and is a general measurement of the 'health' of the programmes.
Learner feedback is addressed, if possible for the current cohort and for the upcoming year.
Lecturer feedback is addressed, for example, for resources, adjustments to assessment, scheduling.
Stakeholder feedback is addressed, for example, for improved communication with placement.
External Examiner feedback is addressed for all academic aspects of the programme.
Feedback leads to review, to adjustments, to amendments and initiatives for improvement.

**Programmatic Review:-**

Each programme of the College is subject to programmatic review (every 5years), to review the continuing validity of the programme in terms of structure, content, currency and quality as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery

**Institutional:-**

Cyclical Institutional Reviews evaluate the effectiveness of the College's QA procedures for the purposes of establishing, maintaining and improving the services provided. They encourage a quality culture, emphasising ownership of quality assurance across the College. The appointment of a Director of Quality Enhancement and Academic Affairs will address the need for systematic oversight in the College and ensure that QA is compliant with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines (2016) and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015

*Quality assurance refers to the mechanisms and procedures adopted by providers to assure a given quality, or the continued improvement of quality* (QQI). All of the College's evaluation procedures (both annual and based on reengagement) have been carried out with QQI Core Statutory Guidelines for QA in mind. Those guidelines address:-.

**Governance:-**

The College has reviewed and updated its vision, mission, organisational structure etc. as part of its Strategic Plan, Society 2025.

**Administration:-**

The College continuously monitors, reviews and updates processes with regard to human resources, record management and data protection, management/student information system, accessibility, general learner supports and services,

**Information and Communication:-**

The College continuously monitors, reviews and updates processes with regard to GDPR, communication with public, marketing and information for enrolled learners.

**Academic Management:-**

The College's strategic plan is initiating programme development. All policies and processes are developed and updated with regard to , information for students (and prospective students), managing assessment and standards, managing validation processes, external examining, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards, assessment of students, evaluation by students, benchmarking (national and international comparisons, information systems, and public information.