



SNMCI

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy

*Wider Horizons*




St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI)



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	Policy/Strategy:Title	QQI/ QA Policy Area	Version	Date Adopted
	SNMCI Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy <b>Wider Horizons</b>	Teaching and Learning	3.0	Sep2021
<b>Monitoring /Review</b>	'Living document', reviewed in line with programme development and delivery.			
<b>Author</b>	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA)			
<b>Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s)</b>	Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA) Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board.			
<b>Scope</b>	DQAA, Programme Directors, Department Heads, all academic staff, all students			
<b>Implementation</b>	<p><b>The Teaching Learning and Assessment Board</b> is responsible for implementing the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Members of the Board will ensure that the principles of this strategy are actively and demonstrably applied to all programmes in the College and will communicate essential information to academic staff, at all levels, in an accurate and timely manner. Where members of the T,L&amp;A Board are also PD's, they will also:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• plan for the implementation of all aspects of the T,L&amp;A Strategy on their prograame/s;</li> <li>• establish channels of communication for staff to express their views and opinions on all aspects of T,L&amp; A across a programme;</li> <li>• include the T,L&amp;A Strategy in programme meetings, involving academic staff ,as appropriate, in the implementation of the strategy, and in planning for the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment;</li> <li>• act as change agents, as implemetors of the document, facilitators within programme teams and contributors to staff development and academic activities which enhance teaching, learning and assessment opportunities, across programmes;</li> <li>• ensure that the aims of this document are included as Key Performance Indicators in the Annual Programme Reports (APR's).</li> </ul> <p>All Academic Staff (lecturers, assessors, instructors, tutors, supervisors, learning support) who have any responsibility for effective teaching, learning and assessment in the College must engage with this strategy and work to uphold its principles and achieve its operational outcomes.</p>			



<p><b>Developed with reference to</b></p>	<p>Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) for programmes that meet the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications (2003)          QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013. Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Dublin. Available from:  <a href="https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf">https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf</a>          National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2016) A Conceptual Model for the Professional Development of Those who Teach in Irish Higher Education: Report on the Findings of the Consultation Process. Available from: <a href="http://www.teachingandlearning.ie">www.teachingandlearning.ie</a></p>
<p><b>Related SNMCI Policies / Forms</b></p>	<p>QA 3.2: Programme Validation  <a href="#">QA 4.3: Promoting Professional Development</a>  <a href="#">QA 5.2: Blended and Online Learning</a>  <a href="#">QA 5.6: Research Policy</a>  <a href="#">QA 5.11: Research Committee: TOR</a>  <a href="#">QA 6.1: Assessment Policy</a>  <a href="#">QA 6.3: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board: TOR</a>  <a href="#">QA 7.1: Student Engagement</a>  <a href="#">QA 7.8: Academic Integrity</a>  <a href="#">SNMCI: Assessment at SNMCI</a>          SNMCI: Blended Learning Strategy          SNMCI: Research Strategy</p>



## 1 Introduction

This is the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (TLAS) of St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI). It considers and embodies the mission and values of the College and places them in the context of Higher Education, and has been developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders; academic staff, programme developers, students and administrative teams.

It sets out the College's philosophy of teaching, learning and assessment and a 'whole College' approach, to ensure consistency for students, and a framework within which programmes of all disciplines can work.

The information in this document is set in the context of the College's current operating procedures. It is considered as a 'living document' subject to on-going review, mindful of upholding academic quality standards of teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes of the College.

The strategy describes SNMCI's current engagement with named priority areas and sets out strategic operational aims in each. It supports an institutional commitment to academic excellence and is fit for purpose in the context of the College's strategic plan: *Society 2025*, which is itself subject to ongoing oversight and review by the Academic Board of the College and also by the Board of Trustees.

The document is informed by:-

- national and international policies for improving access to, and widening participation in, Higher Education;
- the National Framework of Qualifications;
- national initiatives in relation to student engagement in Higher Education and the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE);
- national initiatives for enhancing professional development of academic staff;
- the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2009);
- Quality and Qualifications (QQI 2013) Assessment and Standards;<sup>1</sup>
- the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030<sup>2</sup>;
- the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education;
- the requirements and guidelines of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's) as appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013. Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Dublin. Available from: [https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment\\_and\\_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, Report of the Strategy Group, Department of Education & Skills, January 2011



## 1.1 Context

### THE COLLEGE

SNMCI is based in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. It part of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland (SMSI), CLG; a not-for-profit charity, governed by a Board of Trustees. It was established in 1970 and since then has made a unique contribution to higher education in Ireland.

A new era of expansion and development for SNMCI, which has consistently set and maintained quality standards in education, has enabled the College to extend its remit, in response to the changing needs of the Irish higher education landscape, by widening, not only, its scope of provision, e.g., into the field of psychology and community education, but also its range of delivery modes, e.g., blended delivery options.

The original College building was an extension of the St Nicholas School in Adelaide St., Dun Laoghaire. In 2008 SNMCI re-located to larger premises (100 Century Court, Dún Laoghaire) in response to growing demand for places on College programmes. Since then the College has made a further move (2021-2022) to a newly refurbished campus building in the centre of Dun Laoghaire. This new campus has provided students with modern, accessible and flexible teaching spaces, suitable for fully engaging with all programmes in the College.

The building is spread across three floors, where dedicated teaching, learning and research environments have been established. Environments range from traditional lecture rooms, to varied layouts for the facilitation of discussion groups and seminars. Open spaces, smaller meeting rooms, private study areas and recreation areas are also available to all. The building also allows for access to a full suite of campus facilities including library, I.T. facilities and a dedicated computer laboratory space for research purposes.

### VISION AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

SNMCI believes that education is a fundamental human right with the capacity to 'shape lives' and to act as a gateway to achieving other human rights. Our purpose is to make education accessible and to place our students at the heart of their own educational experience; empowered as independent, confident and creative lifelong learners.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment at SNMCI is research informed and takes place in the national and international context of Higher Education. The College strives to provide an environment where the spirit of learning and discovery is kept alive, across all programmes and all disciplines, based on the founding Montessori ethos of the College, that *'a passion for learning serves the spirit of all people, by enhancing their understanding of the times in which they live'*. The College supports the premise that 'true learning' is achieved by active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings. These principles of active, co-constructed and shared learning experiences are reflected in the *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy* and in practice.



## THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The College recognises that it is part of a wider community with interests in the development of quality education in Ireland. In today's highly competitive higher education market, partnerships of all kinds are increasingly valued e.g. employer, community and inter-institution. *The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* has identified a need for more community-based approaches and for greater coordination between institutions and sectors. This is particularly the case in the relationships between higher education the wider community. Partnerships of all kinds have the ability to fill gaps, bring new data and insights and to drive innovation.

### **National:**

The College has institutional membership of, and is represented at, many national organisations. Through these fora, the College contributes to national research, professional conversations and policy initiatives in the education sector.

Organisations include:-

- The Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA): At a policy and operational level, HECA serves over 27,000 higher education learners in Ireland on over 370 QQI validated programmes. HECA provides policy, quality assurance, research and lobbying support to its members
- The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NF);
- AHEAD: the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability;
- Early Childhood Ireland (ECI);
- The HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum (HAQEF);
- The HECA Teaching and Learning Committee;
- The HECA Research Committee: The College is an active member of the HECA Research Group, encouraging staff and student research. The College successfully contributed to the first HECA student research competition.
- The Early Years Workforce Development Plan Stakeholders Group;
- OMEP: Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire Ireland;
- PLÉ;
- The Children's Rights Alliance;

### **International:**

SNMCI is a member of the wider international education and research community. This network includes: -

- SCoTENS, the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South, a network of 38 colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils and education centres on the island of Ireland, with a responsibility for and interest in teacher education.
- NEARI –the Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland;



- The Erasmus programme with mobility for both staff and students. ‘Staff mobility’ allows staff to build research relevant networks across Europe and beyond. Students from SNMCI travel to Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and Turkey (among others) and the College welcomes learners on study visits from Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey.
- Membership of the Montessori Europe Research Group<sup>3</sup> (MERGe); An international research community including scholars in renowned universities who publish in leading research journals, including for example *Science*, as well as dedicated Montessori research journals such as the *Journal of Montessori Research*<sup>4</sup> and the *Journal of Montessori Research and Education*<sup>5</sup>;
- Research focussed organisations such as the American Montessori Society<sup>6</sup> and the Montessori Foundation<sup>7</sup>.
- Kastalia: A network of European institutions of teacher education, with a wide spectrum of subject areas which arranges staff and student mobility to contribute to professional development and share academic activities.

## 1.2 Students

SNMCI is proud of the diversity of its student body. By day, the college has full-time students including school leavers, mature students and graduates wishing to change career paths.

Full- Time Students are for the most part recent school leavers. They take time to adapt to a more independent study mode and SNMCI is committed to supporting them by providing classes, activities and feedback designed to allow them, over time, to develop the necessary self-motivation and skills to succeed as independent lifelong learners.

Part -Time / Blended Mode Students range in age from 18 years upwards and typically have to juggle the demands of studying, with those of a job and family. They view the College as a means of advancing their careers with a relevant professional/ academic qualification. They are generally highly committed to their studies. Dolan (2012)<sup>8</sup> points out that the profile of students entering education has changed and that students often bring existing ‘rich knowledge bases’ to their studies. Programmes of study at SNMCI seek to find ways to ‘build cumulative knowledge’ and see knowledge creation as a process of co-construction. This is

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<sup>3</sup> <https://montessori-europe.net/working-groups/merge/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.ku.edu/jmr>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.journalofmore.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://amshq.org/Research>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.montessori.org/research/>

<sup>8</sup> Dolan, A. (2012) Reforming teacher education in the context of lifelong learning: the case of the BEd degree programme in Ireland. *European Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 35, No. 4, November 2012, 463–479





supported by Grossman's definition of a 'constructivist practice, centred around inquiry, reflection and lifelong learning and development'<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.3 Graduate Attributes

SNMCI's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy represents a commitment to the enhancement of academic quality, to ensure that graduates, through the course of their studies, will acquire and display certain key attributes and that, as they enter the next realm of work or study, they are:-

- **Knowledgeable:**  
SNMCI graduates have extensive specialist knowledge of core theorists, research and perspectives in their chosen discipline. Programme and module learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment strategies, on all programmes, ensure that graduates have the necessary academic skills, research skills and self-directed study capability to advance to work and/or postgraduate study. All programmes (level 8 and above) include a research-based capstone module.
- **Collaborative:**  
SNMCI graduates are good communicators. Throughout their studies they have engaged in collaborative relationships; working towards group objectives and developing professional skills e.g., valuing the contribution of others, negotiation, facilitation, awareness of group dynamics and the value of collaborative approaches to learning. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies also ensure that students are brought into meaningful contexts for their programme of study e.g. placement (where applicable), class-based group-work, role-playing approaches and self and peer assessment.
- **Creative:**  
SNMCI graduates are critical and reflective thinkers. Graduates of all disciplines have the capacity to build on their knowledge and to link theory and practice in authentic ways. They are research and enquiry-oriented; capable of 'constructing, deconstructing and re-constructing' knowledge in order to apply it, in creative and innovative ways.
- **Agents of Change and Lifelong Learners:** SNMCI graduates are 'agents of change'; proactive and responsive to sectoral needs across all disciplines. Programmes, curricula and teaching, learning and assessment strategies ensure that graduates have a 'mind-set' linked to the importance of lifelong learning, which in turn is supported by an emphasis on current research in all disciplines

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<sup>9</sup> Grossman, P. (2005, p. 445). Research on Pedagogic Approaches in Teacher Education. In M. Cochran-Smith, & K. M. Zeichner, *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* (pp. 425-476). Taylor & Francis Group.



- **Socially and culturally aware:** SNMCI graduates are socially and culturally responsive. Content on all programmes encourages personal responsibility and addresses ethical, environmental and social issues in the context of each field of study. SNMCI graduates have been encouraged towards an understanding of their own cultural values, preferences, characteristics, and circumstances and encouraged to learn about those of others they will meet, both professionally and personally.
- **Professional:** SNMCI graduates are nascent professionals and display integrity and ethical standards. Their programmes of study have prepared them for work and future study. They leave the College with a range of transferable skills appropriate to their future careers; capable of engaging with professional communities.



## 2 Wider Horizons: Priority Areas in Context

In deference to its founding ethos, the College has subtitled its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy as 'Wider Horizons'. The term itself is derived from translations of the work of Dr Maria Montessori, and describes what she considered to be a gradual, scaffolded progression of children's learning, socialisation and development, as they search for 'wider horizons', for ways to explore the world and to develop a sense of citizenship linked to membership of social groups.

The aim of the College's TLAS is to reflect this concept of 'wider horizons' in the provision of a **transformative experience for students** as they move through their programmes of study; widening their horizons, encouraging increased ownership of learning and the development of character traits and dispositions necessary for success in life.

SNMCI's TLAS also draws on Biggs (1999)<sup>10</sup> who sees teaching and learning as an integrated and balanced system, in which all components support each other; the **curriculum, the teaching and learning environment, the assessment process, the institutional climate**.

### 2.1 Priority Areas

As mentioned above (p.5) the TLAS is a 'living document' subject to on-going review. As such the following 'Priority Areas', reflective of Montessori's 'outward-looking' philosophy and Biggs' notion of an integrated system, outline SNMCI's current approach while also considering strategic operational aims in each area.

Priority Areas include:-

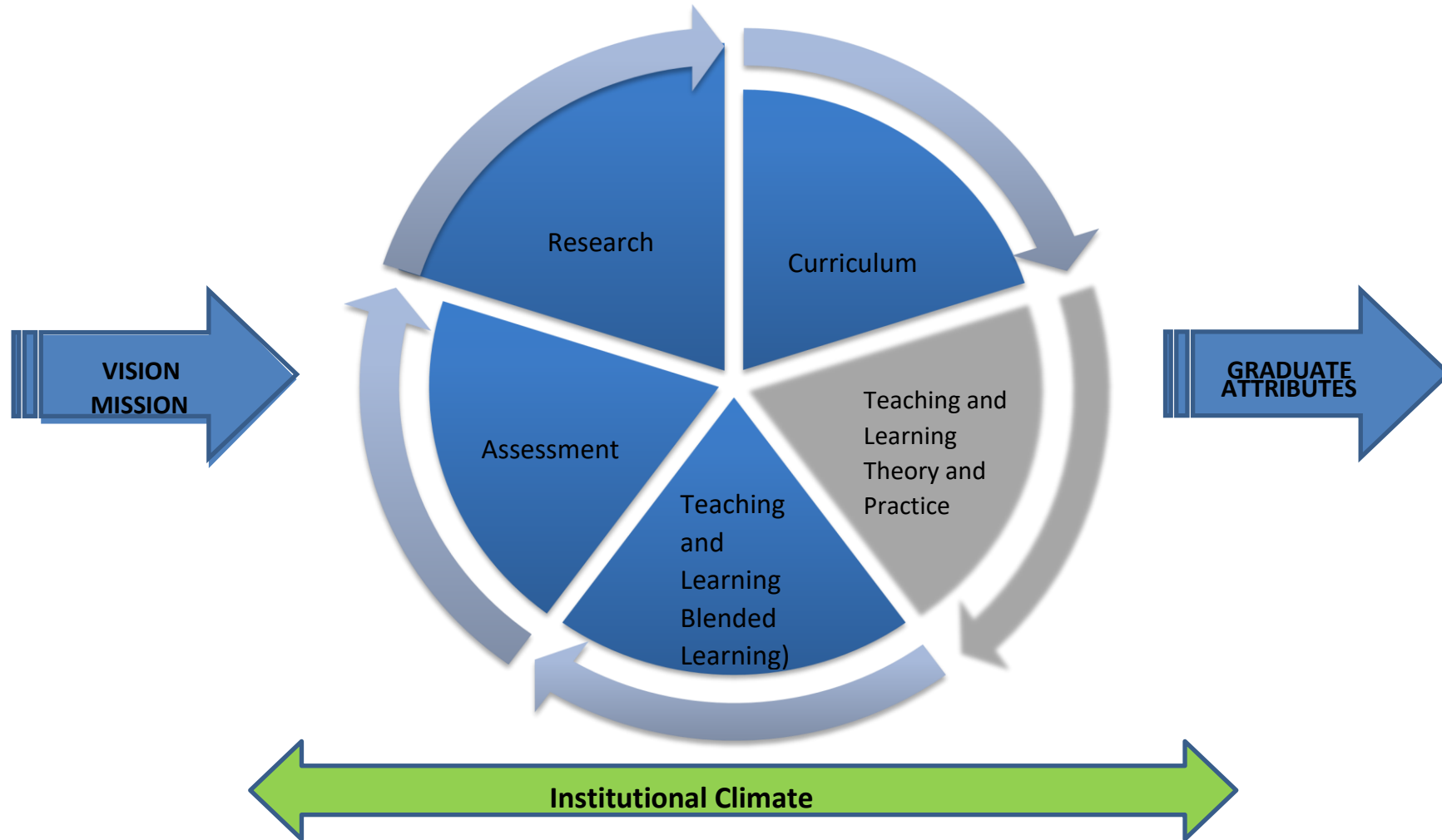
1. Curriculum/Programme Development;
2. Teaching and Learning (Theory and Practice);
3. Assessment;
4. Research;
5. Institutional Climate;

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<sup>10</sup> Biggs, J.B. (1999) *Teaching for quality learning in university*. Buckingham: Open University Press.



## 2.2 Priority Areas in Context





## 2.3 Curriculum Design

### THE CURRICULUM AT SNMCI

<b>Is based on national and international standards of academic quality</b>	<b>Is research-informed and research -based and responsive to market needs</b>	<b>Considers previous learning and experience: RPL/ RPEL</b>
<b>Is relevant: based on current research in all disciplines</b>	<b>Is flexible</b>	<b>Fosters skills for ‘real world’ applicability and employability</b>
<b>Is aware of the need for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills</b>		<b>Is evaluated and reviewed</b>

SNMCI recognises that any curriculum represents a carefully crafted learning journey for the student, from the beginning to the end of their programme of study (Clancy 2015)<sup>11</sup>. In designing a curriculum SNMCI considers:-

- what students should know; knowledge breadth and kind;
- what skills students should develop; complex and varied;
- how this knowledge and skill set will be applied; future applicability;
- the insight and attitudes acquired by graduates across their studies; personal, professional societal values.

Programmes at SNMCI:-

- are, in the first instance, research- informed and research-based in collaboration with stakeholders and in light of feedback;
- are modular and designed in terms of ‘Learning Outcomes’ at programme and modular level;
- are described in terms of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in terms of student-load etc., and located on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ);
- adhere to the Council of Europe’s recommendation that programmes of Higher Education should represent:-
  - preparation for sustainable employment;
  - preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;

<sup>11</sup> Clancy, P. (2015) Irish Higher Education A Comparative Perspective. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.



- personal development; and
- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base;
- look to national and international best practice;
- are supported by discipline experts; staff and related organisations;
- seek out 'critical' friends with valuable expertise;
- abide by formal approval processes;
- provide clear information for students;
- offer well organised and rewarding work/placement opportunities to support classroom learning (as applicable);
- encourage research based practice and continuing professional development.

### STRATEGIC AIMS RE CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT:-

<p><b>1. Planning for future programme development through research and staff development;</b></p>	<p><b>2. Diversification of programmes in line with faculty expertise e.g. psychology, special education, primary education, CPD, sociology and community education;</b></p>	<p><b>3. Increasing access routes e.g. work/study options and admission routes for those who have valuable life/work experience wishing to return to education;</b></p>
<p><b>4. Increasing flexibility of delivery including short programmes and blended delivery options;</b></p>	<p><b>5. Building on the success of community programmes which combine expertise of the College e.g., <i>Montessori Education for Dementia</i>;</b></p>	<p><b>6. Expanding on current provision of micro-credentials and short programmes of professional development</b></p>

## 2.4 Teaching and Learning Environment: Theory and Practice

### THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT SNMCI

<b>Is respectful And collaborative</b>	<b>Is Humanist and Constructivist: challenges and allows students to demonstrate understanding and reach their full potential</b>	<b>Is student focused</b>
<b>Uses a wide range of methodologies; is Is reflective and reflexive</b>	<b>Links theory to practice</b>	<b>Teaches for understanding and encourages independence and self- regulation</b>
<b>Is fully supported by pedagogical experts</b>	<b>Encourages faculty to question and evaluate approaches to teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Is fully supported by technical experts</b>
<b>Leverages the benefits of learning technologies</b>	<b>Explicitly seeks to support and encourage an online community of learners</b>	<b>Applies robust QA policy and procedures to all teaching, learning and assessment activities.</b>
<b>Supports Professional Development for faculty</b>	<b>Supports faculty to develop technology skills</b>	<b>Supports students to develop graduate dispositions and skills</b>

Philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, educationalists, sociologists, and others have all contributed to understanding how people learn. 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)<sup>12</sup>. 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*

<sup>12</sup> Whitaker, T. (2017) *A Handbook and Tool Kit for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Independent Higher Education Institutions in Ireland*. Dublin: HECA



*considered alongside, an understanding of theories about learning*'. (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall 2009)<sup>13</sup>.

In line with the College's vision of education (p6, above) 'Teaching and Learning' at SNMCI is grounded in 'teaching for understanding'<sup>14</sup> and underpinned by both constructivist and humanist philosophies.

**Constructivism** is a learning theory with a belief in a learner's active construction of their own knowledge and meaning, in a progressive spiral, building on prior experience and knowledge. Key aspects of constructivist theory, e.g., that learning is social, the benefits of collaboration and partnership are integral to all programmes, as is the importance of inquiry-based learning (Walker and Shore 2015)<sup>15</sup>.

**Humanist** theories of education derive from the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow and focus on the 'qualities' of the learner; emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills (Ainsworth et al, 2004)<sup>16</sup>. Humanistic education, or person-centred education, acknowledges the need for an holistic view of education which seeks to engage the 'whole person' including the intellect, social life, emotional feelings, and artistic and practical skills. A 'scaffolded' and 'person-centred' learning environment supports the development of learners' self-esteem, their ability to set and achieve appropriate goals, and their development toward full independence, so that they can work across the curriculum to realise their potential. Rogers & Freiberg (1994)<sup>17</sup> suggests that, in a humanist approach to education, a particular climate is fostered, wherein students develop natural tendencies '*to learn, want to grow, seek to find out, hope to master, and desire to create*'.

Similarly, Sahlberg (2007) described a successful approach to teaching and learning as one which is focussed on deep and broad learning, giving equal value to all aspects of an individual's growth in terms of personality, morality, creativity, knowledge and skills.<sup>18</sup>

SNMCI balances a spiral, constructivist focus on foundational knowledge bases, technical skills and competencies, with a humanistic approach. In line with broader research in the field of Higher Education, students are encouraged to set out on a lifelong learning journey in pursuit of such professional characteristics as resilience, adaptability, confidence and vision, in the context of the development of the 'whole person'.

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<sup>13</sup> Fry, H., Ketteridge, s. & Marshall, S (2009) A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) New York: Routledge

<sup>14</sup> Learning to Teach in Higher Education", P. Ramsden, 2nd Edn, Routledge Falmer, London, 2003, p 146.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, C. L., & Shore, B. M. (2015). Understanding Classroom Roles in Inquiry Education: Linking Role Theory and Social Constructivism to the Concept of Role Diversification. *SAGE Open*, 1-13.

<sup>16</sup> Ashworth, F., Brennan, G., Egan, K., Hamilton, R. and Saenz, O. (2004) 'Learning Theories and Higher Education', Available at: <http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=engscheleart>

<sup>17</sup> Rogers, C.R.& Freiberg, H.J. (1994) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *Freedom to Learn*. New York: Pearson

<sup>18</sup> 32 Sahlberg, Pasi. (2007) Education policies for raising student learning: The Finnish approach. *Journal of Education Policy* 22, no. 2: 147-71.





	HUMANIST	CONSTRUCTIVIST
<b>Main Theorists</b>	Abraham Maslow Carl Rogers	John Dewey; Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky; Barbara Rogoff
<b>View of the T&amp;L process</b>	A personal act to fulfil potential	Construction of meaning from experience
<b>Locus of learning</b>	Affective and cognitive domains	Individual internal construction of reality
<b>Purpose of education</b>	To become self-actualised, autonomous	Construct knowledge
table assembled with reference to whitaker, 2017, p. 75. <sup>19</sup>		

### THE BLENDED TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Blended learning (BL) is the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences (Garrison and Kanuak, 2004<sup>20</sup>, p96) cited in QQI, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning (2018, p3).

SNMCI believes that ‘blended learning’ has the capacity to draw on the strengths of each learning space, to give students control over some aspects of **time**, **place** and **pace** during their studies, to optimise student engagement and to increase flexibility of delivery in an academically effective way. The nature and details of the ‘blend’ depends on the nature of the programme, the nature of the teaching and learning activities, the capacity of the organisation, the engagement of learners and the ability and willingness of lecturers to develop their technology enhanced teaching and learning skills.

The College has blended learning status and supports BL options to enhance access and delivery, where appropriate. From an institutional and an academic perspective SNMCI is meeting all of the challenges associated with introducing BL while valuing a face-to-face component, in recognition of the centrality of the ‘in-person’ experience.

The College’s Blended Learning Strategy 2020-2022 was formulated in light of QQI’s *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes* (2018) and addresses the three broad contexts which inform and frame the development and implementation of a Blended Learning strategy, i.e.

- the Organisational Context;

<sup>19</sup> Whitaker, T. (2017) *A Handbook and Tool Kit for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Independent Higher Education Institutions in Ireland*. Dublin: HECA

<sup>20</sup> Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). [Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education](#). *The internet and higher education*, 7(2), 95-105.

- the Programme Context including Development and Assessment, and
- the Learner Experience Context.

Programmes at St. Nicholas leverage several of the most widely-used educational technology platforms across higher education: Zoom for video conferencing/live sessions; the Google Workplace suite for email, file sharing and asynchronous collaboration; and Moodle for its Learning Management System (LMS). These are the three main technology components of the blended learning infrastructure.

### Programme Technology Infrastructure



1. Zoom: Videoconferencing and live sessions.



2. Google Drive: Document production and collaboration



3. Moodle: Learning Management System (LMS)

### Learning Technology Resources

- SNMCI's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is Moodle. This VLE is managed in-house and is integrated with the College's 'Open SIS' which supports staff and learners. This system has use of accessibility features, enhanced integration of library services and the College's student portal system (which provides a one stop shop for all student services), e.g., students can enter virtual classrooms at the click of a button, access timetables, request IT support, contact staff etc.
- Accessibility is a key concern and we strive to keep the technological barriers as low as possible.
- SNMCI's Instructional Designer (ID) has instituted a programme of workshops, consultations, and online resources to support learners and staff. There is an internal support portal where video tutorials and walkthroughs of 'online session facilitation techniques' are outlined for lecturing staff.

### 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.



- The Instructional Designer also develops a range of 'technical skills' modules and resources and leads CPD events for staff in the role of co-chair of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board.

### **Learner Resources**

- Specific resources and trainings are implemented to ensure that all learners are competent and confident users of learning technologies.
- A "Blended Learning Induction Programme" (BLIP) introduces all learners to online and blended learning. The BLIP programme complements the College's other induction activities and events.
- At induction specific "Using Learning Technologies" induction programmes are delivered to all learners.
- The College is engaged in on-going provision of resources based on experience and feedback; continually expanding its range of supports from a universal design perspective.
- Specific programme handbooks or parts thereof, focus on learning through blended format. Learners can access all learning technologies from dedicated I.T. stations and support is available via an online trouble ticketing system.
- Programme Teams, the Learner Support Officer and the Student Engagement Officer also offer additional support to learners engaging with blended learning.
- Students and staff are also encouraged to reach out to the Instructional Designer (academic) and the IT Officer (functional) for direct support when needed. See the student-facing technology requirements resource here on the SMSI website: [smsi.ie/blended-learning-tech-requirements](https://smsi.ie/blended-learning-tech-requirements)

### **TEACHING METHODS AND STRATEGIES**

SNMCI acknowledges the advantages of exposing students to a wide range of teaching and learning methods across programmes 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 considers the following:

- learners and lecturers are both responsible for making learning 'happen';
- 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';
- 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.

At SNMCI, teaching and learning is mediated via a wide range of strategies including (but not limited to) the following, **as appropriate across programmes and disciplines**.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
<p><b>Didactic lectures with opportunities for discussion and activity</b></p> <p><b>Large Group</b></p>	<p>Didactic lectures are employed for theoretical sessions. Lecturers are aware of the ‘diminishing returns’ concept so these sessions must provide opportunities for engagement by students. Lecturers are encouraged to interrogate their practice and to continually monitor the style, delivery, content, usefulness to the learner etc. Lecturers are encouraged to be organised and enthusiastic, to outline learning objectives and to link content to experiences, either past or to come, e.g. placement or work situations (programme dependent).</p>
<p><b>Active Learning</b></p>	<p>Research has shown that audience attention in lectures wanes every 10-20 minutes. Using different approaches during a class, i.e. changing the way students are engaged, rather than changing topics, can promote recall and deeper understanding of material, as students are engaging with the content, rather than simply listening to it. Lecturers are supported to use active learning approaches and to evaluate and share what works, between peers. Active learning is also a useful way of preparing students for future employment. Integrating activities such as case studies and problem based learning scenarios provides the opportunity for students to practice transferrable skills for future study and practice.</p>
<p><b>Inquiry based Learning</b></p>	<p>Inquiry based learning and problem based learning are similar; yet not the same. They are both based on the notion that education begins with the curiosity of the learner. Inquiry based learning can link well e.g. with the concept of the flipped classroom because it begins with ‘questions’ and proceeds to discussions and new understanding. Inquiry based learning raises questions and supports reflection and so is a useful teaching and learning strategy. It offers learners a chance to interpret information, to ask questions and hypothesise, and to direct their own learning.</p>
<p><b>Problem based learning</b></p>	<p>Problem based learning begins with inquiry but goes beyond that. It can anticipate ‘real world’ problems that educators may face. It requires the lecturer to be a facilitator, as students are encouraged to higher order thinking skills. Problem based learning looks for solutions. As it draws on prior knowledge and skills, it is a useful teaching and learning strategy for later stages of a programme. It</p>



	offers learners a chance to identify a problem, research information and data, outline goals and plan towards a solution.
<b>Laboratories and practical learning</b> <b>Experiential</b>	The general aim for practical/laboratory classes is to enhance students' understanding of the methods of scientific enquiry relevant to their programme of study. This is pursued in a variety of ways, e.g., students are given the opportunity to undertake experiments; tackle problem-solving exercises; carry out survey and project work and experience at firsthand how the theory and principles of their discipline are applied. Students consolidate subject knowledge, have hands-on experience of disciplinary methods and procedures, develop technical skills, cognitive skills and teamwork skills. Practical aspects of a programme also tend to increase motivation.
<b>Tutorial</b> <b>Small Group</b>	These are beneficial for students and lecturers, and are based on dialogue and collaboration. They complement knowledge from lectures and offer opportunities to expand concepts and to consider practical application of knowledge. Lecturers must define their objectives and learn how to 'read' the group. Students need to be prepared, and benefit from the level of formative feedback.
<b>Flipped classroom</b> <sup>21</sup>	The Flipped Classroom approach fits in with the active learning stand of the College. It can be advantageous to both lecturer and student provided there is 'buy-in' on both sides. Students can engage with material at their own pace and lecturers are present and observe when 'new' learning takes place.
<b>Workbased Placement or Practice</b> <b>Programme dependent</b>	Work-based/placement learning is a vital aspect of many programmes. Students immerse themselves in a particular field and interact with mentors who are experienced professionals. Student placement allows for strengthening of connections between research and practice. For example in programmes of teacher education Cochran-Smith (2003) emphasised the 'vital' importance of such learning both for 'teachers and teacher educators' ongoing education'. <sup>22</sup> Authentic experiences, under supervision, delivered through a meaningful partnership between students, mentors/employers and the College offer opportunities for learning. Teaching, Learning and Assessment while on placement allows students to hone their academic and application skills. An aspect of the College's TLAS is to establish sustainable partnerships with other organisations in order to offer programmes that are realistic and cognisant of the realities of life after graduation.
<b>Supervision of</b>	One-to-one supervision is useful for discussing current strengths and

<sup>21</sup> Bergmann, J. & Sams, A., (2014). *Flipped Learning: Gateway to Student Engagement*. USA, ISTE.

<sup>22</sup> Cochran-Smith, M. (2003, p. 7). Learning and Unlearning: The education of teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

19. 5-28. 10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00091-4



<p><b>research</b></p> <p><b>Individualised</b></p>	<p>weaknesses, encouraging students to plan for taking the work forward, setting short-term objectives, setting up a more detailed time and action framework. It allows supervisors/tutors to reflect on their role e.g. at which stage(s) of the research/project or dissertation will they be in a 'teaching' role and at which stage(s) in a a facilitator's role? Lecturers need to consider the skills required at both ends of the spectrum.</p>
<p><b>Blended Delivery:</b></p> <p>The COACT framework for Blended Learning (Johnston and Breakwell, 2011; Bailey et al, 2014)<sup>23</sup> is a practical framework that supports lesson design and structure in blended learning environments, with a view to ensuring that higher-order learning is achieved. The framework 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)<sup>24</sup> and later the ETL Project at the University of Edinburgh (Enwistle, 2009)<sup>25</sup>. This model is used as a base to create a sustainable approach to blended teaching and learning, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating a framework for module design that, if followed, guarantees higher-order learning takes place and learning objectives are explicitly addressed;</li> <li>• ensuring the creation of truly engaging e-learning content;</li> <li>• drawing on the full range of pedagogic tools available in order to create a richer learning experience;</li> <li>• encouraging a move away from a dependence on tutor-led learning in order to create independent learners;</li> <li>• enabling learners to acquire lifelong learning skills by equipping them for the knowledge-based society.</li> </ul> <p>The definition of the word 'CO-ACT' is at the heart of the student learning experience: COACT = 'CO': 'together' + 'ACT': 'to take action, do something'. This definition, upon which the framework is based, represents a mutually constructed, active approach to learning. The model breaks the learning experience down into a five-stage process, as shown in the table below. These five stages reflect a progression from lower-order towards higher-order learning, towards 'seeking meaning' through interpretation, critical analysis and application of knowledge.</p>	

<sup>23</sup> Johnston, L. and Breakwell, N. (2011). THE COACT FRAMEWORK FOR ENABLING HIGHER-ORDER LEARNING IN THE DESIGN OF LEARNING MATERIALS FOR THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT. EDEN 2011 Annual Conference, UCD, Dublin. [http://www.eden-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Annual\\_2011\\_Dublin\\_BOA\\_0.pdf](http://www.eden-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Annual_2011_Dublin_BOA_0.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Gibbs, G.; Morgan, A.; Taylor, E. (1982). A review of the research of Ference Marton and the Goteborg Group: A phenomenological research perspective on learning In *Higher Education*, vol. 11 (pp )

<sup>25</sup> Entwistle, N. (2009). *Teaching for understanding at university: Deep approaches and distinctive ways of thinking*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.



<b>STAGE ONE: CONCEPT</b>		
<b>TEACH</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe and contextualise main concepts</li> <li>Place concept in social and historical context.</li> <li>Compare and contrast with previous concepts and recent developments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess existing understanding of the concept and identify relevance in own setting.</li> <li>Identify supporting and opposing concepts from previous work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Text, podcast, video introduction to concept.</li> <li>Blog on personal understanding.</li> <li>Discussion in forums with colleagues.</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE TWO: OVERVIEW</b>		
<b>TEACH</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarise expectations, including objectives and outcomes.</li> <li>Give a brief overview of the session as a whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the session structure and be aware of how to achieve the learning outcomes.</li> <li>Identify one or more outcomes which may be challenging and explore reasoning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online needs analysis/pre-test tool.</li> <li>Polling and surveys to identify students' needs.</li> <li>Blog learning/diary to track progress towards outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE THREE: ACTIVE DISCOVERY</b>		
<b>TEACH</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate active and collaborative discovery of evidence and data to support the main concept.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with academic content to add detail to the concept framework.</li> <li>Share learning with peers, co-construct content and solutions to problems.</li> <li>Track learning development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web-quests, reading resources, video, lectures, flash simulations. Podcasts, classroom workshops, instant chat, forums, blogs, wikis, collaborative creation.</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE FOUR: CRITIQUE</b>		
<b>TEACH</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasise essential features and empower students to construct evidence based critiques of concepts.</li> <li>Support students in evidence based analysis and promote self-correction based on this analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse and synthesise discovered data to support main concepts, preparing to justify conclusions.</li> <li>Contribute to group work and refine understanding as a result of critique.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual classrooms, class workshops, case studies, presentations, blogs, wikis, collaborative creation, social networking.</li> </ul>
<b>STAGE FIVE: THINK</b>		
<b>TEACH</b>	<b>LEARN</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage reflection on relevance and importance of concepts.</li> <li>Exemplify ways of thinking and facilitate understanding of the concepts within students' reality.</li> <li>Identify progression.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflect on/apply essential concepts to a personalised setting.</li> <li>Evaluate meaning of concepts and identify and critique the effect of existing knowledge on present understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case studies, forums, blogs/diaries, social networking, concept mapping.</li> </ul>

In planning lessons, authors 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.

The intended outcome of this approach is that the graduated 'journey' through the learning shifts the educator's focus towards the best format to allow learners to achieve the learning outcomes. Because such decisions are made on a lesson-by-lesson basis, this in turn ensures that lessons are varied and draw on a large variety of resources.





Blended Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy is supported by specific quality assurance policy and procedure:

[QA 5.2](#) Blended and Online Learning and [QA 5.3](#) Development of Online Learning Resources

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Teaching has been described as ‘a complex, cognitive ability that is not innate but can be both learned and improved upon’ (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001)<sup>26</sup>. A key determinant of the quality of a programme 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 support to all staff and promotes 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](#)) 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.

The College has integrated the National Forum’s *National Professional Development Framework for all Staff who Teach in Higher Education* (2018)<sup>27</sup>, document into its Promoting Professional Development Policy, [QA 4.3](#), to acknowledge all types of Professional Development.

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<sup>26</sup> Saroten, A. & Amundsen, C. (2001) Evaluating University Teaching: Time to take stock. In *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol 26 (4) pp.341-353

<sup>27</sup> National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2016) *National Guidance for the Professional Development of Staff who Teach in Higher Education*. Dublin: National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education





Non-Accredited Professional Development			Accredited
Collaborative Informal	Collaborative Formal	Structured	Accredited Programmes of Study
<p><b>Examples: –</b> Conversations with colleagues; Peer networking; Peer observations; Online blogs; Discussion forums.</p>	<p><b>Examples</b> Reading and discussion of research articles (hosted by RC); Following social media; Self-study; Watching video tutorials; Keeping a reflective teaching journal; Keeping a portfolio; Preparing an article for publication.</p>	<p><b>Examples</b> Induction; Workshops; Seminars; MOOCs; Conferences; Summer schools; Structured collaborative projects. Teacher mobility; Reviewing Policies and Procedures; Co-teaching;</p>	<p><b>Examples</b> Professional Certificate; Graduate Diploma; Masters; PhD; Ed.D. in Teaching and Learning; E Learning; Leadership in Education; Education Policy.</p>
Type	Type	Type	Type
<p>Learning from these activities comes from their collaborative nature. It recognises and supports the development of communities of practice</p>	<p>These activities are independently led by the individual. Engagement is driven by the individual's needs/interests. Individuals source the material themselves.</p>	<p>These are organised activities (by an institution, network or disciplinary membership body). They are typically facilitated and have identified learning objectives. They encourage staff to link with established best practice. They support the scholarship of Teaching and Learning</p>	<p>Accredited programmes of study (ECTS or similar credits)</p>



### STRATEGIC AIMS RE THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. Continue to embrace the student partnership mode of delivery with increased student input into programme development and assessment practices;	2. Support academic practice that includes a balance of commitments: to teaching and research;	3. Ongoing staff development at individual, programme, department, faculty, College and national level to ensure quality teaching and learning;
4. Support for staff to engage with professional development; informal and formal accredited.	5. Support staff to complete teaching and learning programmes and other CPD opportunities to enhance their teaching and learning capability in all domains;	6. Seek and collect feedback to closely monitor blended learning implementation;
7. Select, test and review learning technologies that best serve learner needs;	8. Support the COACT approach while investigating other models of best practice in blended and online delivery.	9. Continue to develop and increase technical and pedagogical support for faculty and learners;

#### 2.5 Assessment

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.
- For Quality Assurance and enhancement: providing evidence of academic standards and student progress to staff and stakeholders
- To inform teaching and curriculum enhancement.



### ASSESSMENT AT SNMCI

<p><b>Is Valid:</b> Fit for purpose. Is based on valid assessment techniques and measures the skill or attainment it is designed to measure.</p>	<p><b>Is Transparent:</b> There is clarity and understanding by all involved in the assessment process</p>	<p><b>Is Fair:</b> Assessment is accessible to all students and provides equal opportunity for all students to succeed, using reasonable accommodations where appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Is Formative:</b> Assessment designed to provide feedback on students' learning. It can help students by providing them with information to self-monitor their academic progress. May or may not be graded</p>	<p><b>Is Summative:</b> May be Continuous Assessment (CA) i.e. an essay or presentation that occurs mid semester/year, or an assessment that occurs at the end of a semester/year e.g. a terminal examination, project or dissertation</p>	<p><b>Is Authentic:</b> Has real world applicability</p>
<p><b>Reflects Quality:</b> Assessment is reliable and equitable and in line with all agreed standards and procedures.</p>		

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. 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. The Teaching, Learning & Assessment Board meet several times a year, to discuss issues related to assessment, for the outgoing year, and to propose and review assessment for the upcoming year



### Range of Assessment

The table below draws on assessment across a range of programmes. Knowledge based assessment tools e.g, exams and essays may appear on many programmes and other assessment tools are programme dependent.

Type of Assessment	Skill/Knowledge/Role	Comment
<b>Attendance and Engagement Formative</b>	Listening Communication Participation	The introduction of a small percentage of marks available, for participation and engagement with in-class task/s is new to our overall strategy. Learner feedback suggests that this is a positive and fair step and supports attendance.
<b>Exams</b>	Information retrieval skills Information synthesis	There are advantages and disadvantages to exams. SNMCI programmes place value on strong knowledge bases for core subjects. Once content is familiar, students can be encouraged to reflect and integrate that knowledge, in other ways. Surprisingly, assessment surveys indicate that learners find them familiar and more equitable than some other forms of assessment.
<b>Practical: Presentation of materials, Formative and Summative</b>  <b>Programme Dependent</b>	Enquiry, Linking of theory and practice, Creativity, Performance Competence	Manipulation and presentation of didactic materials is an important part of many SNMCI programmes. First presentations are a 'low stakes' formative form of feedback to allow learners a risk free engagement with the materials. Later presentations may be assessed for a mark.
<b>Essays</b>	Critical thinking, Evaluation, Analysis, Academic Skills	Essays are a good test of written communication. They are applicable to any topic that requires the ability to construct and sustain a written argument. They allow for individual expression and research and can show breadth of learner knowledge. Students also receive on-going feedback on academic skills. Correctors need to be aware of objectivity and the 'halo' effect, i.e. the level of an essay just marked can impact on expectations of an essay about to be marked. As with any substantial written piece, issues of academic integrity may also arise.
<b>Project based assessment</b>	Enquiry, Reflection, Planning, Writing, Creativity, Problem solving, Contextualising ideas and applying them to practice.	For example, ESD projects allow learners to reflect and to interrogate their own beliefs about the importance of ESD. This process is vital, as e.g. on ITE programmes the enthusiasm of the student teacher is directly related to pupil engagement with the subject.



<b>Development of didactic materials</b>  <b>Programme dependent</b>	Problem solving, Creativity, Practical application Writing Links theory and practice Reflective	Material making is a good assessment for learners and is closely linked to Montessori principles of concrete and active experiences. It has ‘thinking’, ‘doing’, ‘writing and reflective aspects’ which gives learners different modes of knowledge demonstration. It fosters linking of theory to real world practice.
<b>Showcase</b>  <b>Programme dependent</b>	Creativity, Performance, Teamwork, Reflection, Communication	Creative Showcases with reflection encourage learners to be creative, self-directed and collaborative. Team work involves learning how to negotiate and work as part of a team and has real world value for students.
<b>Reflection and Reflective Journals</b>	Insight, Critical Thinking, Ethics,	Reflection is an essential on-going practice. Students encounter material that is new and related to their personal lives as well as to their profession. They are encouraged to note points of interest, personal response, ‘lightbulb’ moments etc. Reflective journals encourage students to be independent thinkers and to develop their own capacity to problem solve.
<b>Academic Article Review</b>	Academic Reading and Writing Skills, Retrieval of information	Academic skills of reading, writing, sourcing of information etc. are vital at all stages of all programmes. Article reviews stimulate and develop critical thinking and can help students to understand existing knowledge in their field. They are useful for later research activities and expose students to a wide range of reading.
<b>Blogs</b>	Computer Literacy, IT Skills, Individual response, engagement with others.	Blogs are a good assessment as they allow learners to respond in a format that may be more user- friendly for them. Asking for a blog response where e.g. formal academic language and grammar etc. are not judged, allows learners to have more freedom in their replies, and to concentrate on a ‘response’ to assigned material. Commenting and responding to peers fosters respect for others opinions and allows students to learn from each other in a safe space. (i.e. a space with rules re respect etc.)
<b>Creation of Business Plans</b>  <b>Programme Specific</b>	Planning, business acumen, organisation, teamwork, communication	As applicable/ Engaging with a business presentation and producing marketing materials etc. makes learners aware of all of the strands entailed in owning and operating a business in terms of legislative, quality, community etc.



<p><b>Show and Tell</b></p> <p><b>Programme dependent</b></p>	<p>Decision making, organisation, research, making connection between theory and practice, communication, argument with supporting evidence.</p>	<p>This is good assessment tool for any level depending on how it is pitched. It is usually short, and a good way of easing learners into longer presentations at later stages. Dividing the assessment into <b>Show</b>, involves choice, making the right decision about what to present; <b>Tell</b> involves thinking about the choice in relation to theory and practice and providing a rationale. Students learn both from the experience of presenting and from each other.</p>
<p><b>Resource File</b></p>	<p>Organisation, Professional Planning, Sourcing of Information</p>	<p>Producing a resource file allows learners to source, make decisions about, evaluate and present material in an organised way. It is also something that can be added to and that showcases some of their achievements for placement purposes.</p>
<p><b>Case Study</b></p>	<p>Analysis, Problem-solving, real world skill,</p>	<p>Case studies help students demonstrate theoretical concepts in real-life issues. In general, teaching materials can be a short journal or news article or a scenario etc. As an assessment piece it is important to gauge the level of difficulty i.e. at what stage of the programme it is set. Case studies require clear and detailed instructions.</p>
<p><b>Placement Performance and Evaluation</b></p>	<p>Initiative, Linking theory to practice, Communication, Teamwork, Organisation, Classroom Management, Planning, Reflection and Reflexive Practice.</p>	<p>Vital to assess student achievements while on placement. Students have the opportunity to build on feedback and to demonstrate progression and engagement in real world settings.</p>
<p><b>Portfolio Building</b></p>	<p>Professionalism, Planning, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Organisation, Reflection</p>	<p>A portfolio is a cumulative assessment that represents students work and documents their performance. This type of assessment usually spans an entire academic year. As portfolio building is usually time consuming, students are offered supportive interim formative assessment opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Poster: Creation and Presentation</b></p>	<p>Assimilation of knowledge, Capacity to present findings, Creativity, Design, Verbal and non-verbal communication</p>	<p>A poster will allow the learners to think about module topics and to be creative in the ways that they assimilate knowledge and make it evident in their practice. They add a visual element to assessment which may benefit some students. They allow for peer-to-peer interaction and generally develop a wide range of skills.</p>



<b>MCQ</b>	Quick thinking, Decision making, Broad synthesis of knowledge.	There are advantages and disadvantages to an MCQ. They can be good for covering the syllabus, can be carried out quickly, can show how fast students think, and can include a test of interpretation and decision making as well as basic information retrieval. Issues to consider include the skill needed to design the questions and to ensure academic integrity.
<b>Creative File</b>	Creativity, Reflection,	According to the World Economic Forum, creativity' will be one of the top three skills required to thrive beyond 2021. Graduates with an understanding of the pedagogical importance of 'The Arts' and what it is to be creative in the wide sense of the word, will be better equipped to succeed in all professional contexts.
<b>Group Presentation</b>	Research, Teamwork, Communication, Organisation of information, Enquiry, Presentation skills. Question and answer skills.	Group presentations are assessed for content, teamwork and presentation skills. Students tend to take presentations seriously and they learn from their own and everyone else's presentations. They cannot be anonymous and there can be issues around perceived contribution of individual members.
<b>Teaching from a lesson plan to meet objectives</b> <b>Lesson Planning</b>  <b>Programme Dependent</b>	Professionalism, Planning, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Organisation, Reflection Confidence and Competence in teaching and application	The development of lesson plans allows learners to retrieve and utilise information in curriculum documents and to create age appropriate learning experiences. It is one thing to plan a lesson and quite another to deliver it. A 'live lesson' is a good assessment and students learn more about planning, pitching to the right level, the adult's role and the child's role, level of resources required, pacing etc. through the experience of teaching, than they do in hours of preparation to teach. Feedback is motivational and directed at improvement.
<b>Individual Presentation</b>	Communication, Presentation Skills, Professional Skill, Confidence, Choosing from a range of information.	Similar issues arise here as with group presentations. Some students prefer the comfort of the group while others are clear that they prefer individual presentations. They have their own stressors (stage fright, lack of confidence etc.) but some students prefer to succeed or fail by their own efforts rather than 'relying' on others.
<b>Research Skills</b> <b>Research dissertation</b>	Research, Ethics, Citizenship,	Research skills are vital to many disciplines. This type of assessment has a high level of individual work and allows the student to demonstrate advanced understanding. Dissertations are supervised and carefully moderated so the quality of the assessment is assured. As assessment pieces they require a high degree of attention to detail by correctors.



<p><b>Specialised assessment for supporting special needs education.</b></p> <p><b>Programme dependent</b></p>	<p>Critical thinking, Problem solving</p>	<p>IEP and Transitioning documents for example are specialised professional skills that all educators will come across in 'real world' working environments.</p>
<p><b>Symposium</b></p>	<p>Leadership, Communication, Organisational Skills</p>	<p>This type of assessment fits well into a final year and can be considered as almost a second 'capstone' module. It allows learners to let go of the mantle of 'student' and finally emerge as nascent professionals. They work best when they are student led and organised.</p>

### STRATEGIC AIMS RE ASSESSMENT

<p><b>1. Engage in consultation with other HEI's and validating bodies, researching best practice in assessment.</b></p>	<p><b>2. On-going staff development for assessment.</b></p>	<p><b>3. On-going review of assessment to align with programme outcomes.</b></p>
<p><b>4. On-going review to avoid over-assessing and to maintain quality and promote innovation in assessment.</b></p>	<p><b>5. Increased opportunity for student engagement and contribution to the development of assessment</b></p>	<p><b>6. Pursuit of academic integrity in all assessment including fair and transparent procedures to fairly address breaches of academic integrity.</b></p>



## 2.6 Research

Research indicates that students are at a disadvantage when they ‘are not learning in an HE environment that is informed by research, and in which it is not possible to access research-related resources’. Research and teaching are essential and intertwined characteristics of a College of Higher Education.<sup>28</sup>

### RESEARCH AT SNMCI

SNMCI is committed to developing and enhancing its research activity for both faculty and students. SNMCI has both a Research Strategy and a suite of Research Policies to support and enhance research activity within the College ([See QA 5.6](#)).

The Research Strategy promotes a range of research themes across the College and supports staff and students as members of a growing research community.

<p><b>Current Research and Institutional membership of research groups informs Teaching, Learning and Assessment and Programme Development.</b></p>	<p><b>Staff: Research active staff related to discipline areas and further study</b></p>	<p><b>Staff: Sectoral engagement through collaborative initiatives with e.g HECA ICEP National Forum</b></p>
<p><b>Staff: Conference presentations and journal submissions</b></p>	<p><b>Student: Capstone Research and presentation of research with mentor guidance</b></p>	<p><b>Student: Engagement with student research seminars and competitions e.g. HECA Student Research Seminars</b></p>

A key aim of SNMCI’s Research Strategy is to ‘adopt an interdisciplinary research approach that supports excellence in teaching and learning across the College’.

The key actions associated with this objective are as follows:

- Encourage ethical research;
- Enhance existing research capacity by identifying and providing CPD opportunities for faculty to support research;
- Invest in research e.g in physical infrastructure and resources and in the recruitment of research active staff;

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<sup>28</sup> UK Research Forum (2004) “The relationship between research and teaching in institutions of higher education.” Available online at [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/forum’s\\_advice\\_to\\_ministers\\_on\\_teaching\\_and\\_research\[1\].pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/forum’s_advice_to_ministers_on_teaching_and_research[1].pdf)



- Ensure that research skills and methods are embedded in all degree programmes;

The College has a range of incentives to promote research including

- timetabled research time for faculty within a workforce planning framework;
- financial support for conference attendance;
- financial support for research related costs.

**STRATEGIC AIMS RE RESEARCH**

<p><b>1. Ensure that the College Research Strategy is fully integrated with Teaching, Learning and Assessment.</b></p>	<p><b>2. Fostering a climate of research to drive all aspects of College life.</b></p>	<p><b>3. Hosting research conferences.</b></p>
<p><b>4. Supporting and encouraging staff research.</b></p>	<p><b>5. Encouraging student presentation and publication of research.</b></p>	<p><b>6. Institutional investment: physical resources and staff recruitment</b></p>

## 2.7 Institutional Climate

### THE INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE AT SNMCI

Is diverse and promotes inclusive practices	Is learning-centred throughout the student journey	Is based on respect
Supports a community of practice	Provides lines of communication and support for all; staff and students	Encourages life-long learning
Supports staff CPD		Encourages staff and student mobility through Erasmus and wider connections.

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 learners. Teaching environments range from traditional lecture rooms, to varied layouts for the facilitation of small group discussion, practical work, research laboratory work and the arts.
- **Intellectually:** learners are encouraged to be active in the learning process and to interact and confer with peers and lecturers. The College extends invitations to guests to speak about their specialist subjects. The College's underlying 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 to become critical thinkers with a range of subject specific and transferrable skills. Learners on all programmes are 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 by-product of a good institutional climate and SNMCI expects all members to take responsibility for an inclusive, supportive environment, where everyone is valued and encouraged to reach their goals.

### **STRATEGIC AIMS RE INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE**

<p><b>1. Recognition of students as partners and not merely consumers.</b></p>	<p><b>2. Ongoing review of the processes that impact on student success.</b></p>	<p><b>3. Transparency in the feedback process e.g. when, how and if student feedback is used.</b></p>
<p><b>4. Ongoing opportunities for staff CPD.</b></p>	<p><b>5. Support for students (all ages and stages) making the transition to third level education</b></p>	<p><b>6. Ongoing involvement of students in review of student engagement policy and activity.</b></p>



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