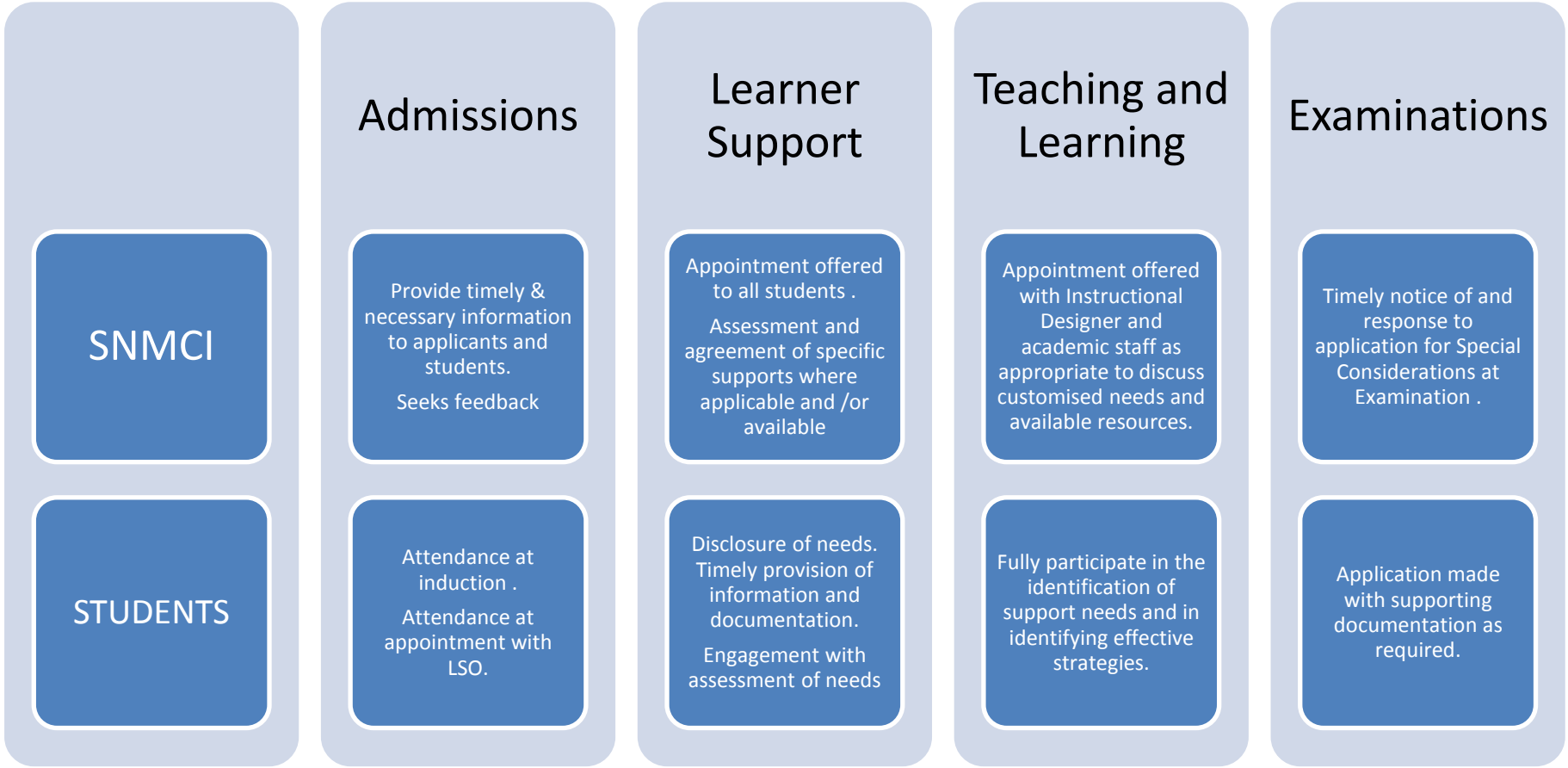
#	POLICY TITLE	POLICY AREA:	VERSION:	DATE:
7.15	Accessibility and Special Considerations	7. Support for Learners	1.0	April 2022



Introduction and Context: -

The purpose of this document is to

- outline a shared understanding of 'accessibility' for staff and students;
- document the on-going goals re accessibility of our physical and digital learning environments;
- document procedures, roles and responsibilities with regard to accessibility and special considerations for all students.

Definition:

SNMCI's definition of 'accessibility' is in line with the Irish *Equal Status Act* which mandates the provision of *special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service'*[1], and that of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education, which states that 'accessibility' is achieved when a person with a disability is afforded *the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability*, with substantially equivalent ease of use. [2]

Policy Statement:-

SNMCI is committed, in principle and in practice to the provision of equitable access to all dimensions of College life **(as can reasonably be provided).** SNMCI is committed to promoting awareness of accessibility issues across the SNMCI community and to encouraging students to disclose specific needs:-

- to ensure that students have the resources and support they need in order to learn most effectively;
- to provide the opportunity for all students to present a positive image of their strengths and talents;
- to enable students to gain access to the accommodations and to the range of supports available including e.g. special considerations at exam time;
- to reduce stress and to provide greater freedom to ask for help when it is needed;[3]

Principles:-

1. SNMCI considers accessibility a priority in all areas of campus life; physical and virtual spaces.
2. SNMCI is committed to an inclusive and equitable campus environment and sees accessibility as a design approach that benefits the diverse needs and preferences of all students.
3. SNMCI approaches 'accessibility' as a proactive need rather than a reactive response and the College will maintain a process for evaluating accessibility; an ongoing, iterative process of building, refining, and improving access for all.
4. The College will publish an 'accessibility statement' on its website which will be reviewed as appropriate.

[1] https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/human-rights-and-equality-in-the-provision-of-good-and-services/what-does-the-law-say/equal-status-acts.

[2] (Source: US Dept. of Ed. Compliance Review No. 11-11-6002)

[3] https://ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/pay/AHEADGoodPracticeGuidelines.pdf

5. Accessibility considerations and assistive technology resources will be addressed at induction for all incoming students.
6. SNMCI is aware that the decision whether or not to disclose that they have a disability belongs totally to the student. However all students are strongly encouraged to:-
   - Identify themselves as needing assistance (as early as possible) so that suitable accommodations can be put in place;
   - Provide appropriate documentation, such as psychological reports, to support their application for accommodations or funding for student supports;
   - Accept/request an appointment with the Learner Support Office which will allow for full discussion;
   - Fully participate in the identification of their support needs and in finding effective strategies;
   - Make staff aware of any difficulties being experienced. [4]
7. Exceptions to the policy are permitted when:-
   - full compliance would impose an 'undue burden' on the resources of the College (see legal obligation below);
   - when an accessible format constitutes a fundamental alteration to the nature of the programme of study, service, or activity;
   - when an accessible version of the materials does not exist.

Legal Obligations: [5]

- SNMCI is aware of the legal obligation of all HEI providers under Section 4 of the Equal Status Act (2015) to *'**do all that is reasonable** to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service'.*
- In line with the stipulations of the Act, SNMCI will make every accommodation within its capacity, *'unless such provision would give rise to a cost, other than a nominal cost, to the provider of the service in question'*. The meaning of nominal cost will depend on the size and resources of the organisation.
- Where a College is linked to the HEA Fund for Learners with Disabilities, *the reasonable accommodation duty is only triggered where there is actual or constructive knowledge of the learner's need. Where a learner chooses not to comply with a request for medical evidence/certification of the disability, this may relieve the service provider from their duty to reasonably accommodate*[6]

Goals and Objectives:-

Campus Accessibility:-

A strategic aim of the College is ongoing review of the design of all teaching and Learning spaces to minimise challenges posed to all with mobility difficulties on campus.

[4] https://ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/pay/AHEADGoodPracticeGuidelines.pdf

[5] https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/human-rights-and-equality-in-the-provision-of-good-and-services/what-does-the-law-say/equal-status-acts/

[6] https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/fund-for-students-with-disabilities

Online/Virtual Accessibility:-
Existing standards for online accessibility: In the design of our digital learning environment, we aspire to comply with the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

Virtual Learning Environment: Moodle:-
SNMCI uses the Moodle Learning Management System as the primary online environment for hosting our learning materials as well as the submission and grading of student work.
SNMCI's goal is to provide equal functionality and information to all people. This means that there should be no barriers for people regardless of disabilities, assistive technologies that are used, different screen sizes and different input devices (e.g. mouse, keyboard and touchscreen). You can read more on Moodle's accessibility compliance here.
In addition to the core set of Moodle tools, an Accessibility Toolbar feature across all Moodle modules, will allow users to customise Moodle to their visual needs. It supports changing of text sizes and colour schemes, and it offers a text-to-speech feature in the browser.

Remote Synchronous Lectures: Zoom Conferencing
For synchronous (live) online class sessions, SNMCI uses the Zoom conferencing platform. Zoom's development team adheres to the WCAG 2.1 AA recommendations and ongoing design and development of every feature will ensure that accessibility considerations are prioritised. Read about Zoom's accessibility compliance here.

Learner support:-
Incoming students will be offered opportunities to meet directly with the Learner Support Officer to discuss any particular needs they might have and what supports are available to them. Similarly, the Instructional Designer will direct incoming students to the Assistive Technology Toolkit available through the MySMSI portal.

Staff support:-
Following the cues of the National Forum for Teaching and Learning, and professional development events at peer institutions, on-going staff support and CPD (in the form of annual workshops as well as one-on-one consultation) on designing learning materials with enhanced accessibility in mind, will be offered by the Instructional Designer.

Staff Involved:-
The Instructional Designer, Learner Support Officer, Programme Directors
Other: Accessibility is an all staff/all programme issue.

	Person/s Responsible	Records generated to ensure evidence of follow through
Procedure Outline The College website will contain an 'accessibility statement'.	**DQAA/LSO/ID**	**Statement**
Information re accessibility will be made available to prospective students on the website and during Open Days	**Admissions Officer** **Marketing**	**College documentation**
For direct- entry, students will be encouraged to specify any specific support needs they have and will be offered an appointment with the Learner Support Office. All students entering via CAO will be offered an appointment with the Learner Support Office to discuss any support neds they may have.	**Admissions** **Learner** **Learner Support Officer (LSO)** **Student**	**Application Form** **LSO records**
Students with specific learning requirements e.g. specific /customised technology needs will be offered an appointment with the Instructional Design Office.	**Instructional Design (id)** **Student**	**ID records**
Special Considerations Examinations: - In advance of the exam period, the Head of Examinations will post a notification (by email and on Moodle) asking all students who require Special Considerations to complete an application form and to send it with supporting documentation to the Examinations Office. - Students* may contact the Examinations Office directly or through the Learner Support Officer (if they require support or advice on the completion of the Special CONSIDERATIONS application form). **Note:** Special Considerations, once granted, are in place for all of the student's College examinations except that a change of accommodation has been requested and approved. *Students, in the case of Examinations, may be those in receipt of ongoing support or those only seeking special considerations or accommodations during summative examinations.	**Head of Examinations** **Student** **LSO** **ID**	**Minutes of meetings for Spec Considerations** **LSO records** **ID meeting records**

Policy Control Sheet

Policy	**QA 7.15 Accessibility Statement and Special Considerations**
Version	1.0
Adopted/Effective	May 2022
Supersedes	n/a
Monitoring/ Next Review Date	December 2022
Responsible Officer(s) Designated Reviewer(s)	LSO; ID; DQAA
Scope	College wide

References

SNMCI Policy area	7) Support for Learners QA Volume 2
Developed with reference to	QQI (2016) *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* QQI (2016) *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis* *Irish Equal Status Acts* (2000-2018) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), May 2015 HEA*, Good Practice Guidelines for the Providers of Services for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education* (HEA) European Higher Education: *Universal Design for Learning: A Best Practice Guideline* (EU Erasmus)
Related SNMCI Policies / Forms	QA 6.8: Examination Regulations FQA 6.8: Application for Special Considerations

Revision

Revision Number	**Revision Description**	**Originator**	**Approved By**
			AB Apr 2022