Quality Assurance System

Policy for Quality Assurance

SECTION 3 - POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Context

The quality assurance policies and procedures of CCT have evolved over the lifetime of the College and developed as a result of monitoring, review, feedback and consultation. The policies are underpinned by the principles of fairness and transparency and a commitment to equity and standards and provide an appropriate framework for the College to achieve its mission.

CCT is first and foremost, a teaching institution committed to excellence and quality in the design, development, and delivery of its academic programmes, its service provision in relation to those programmes, and research, scholarship, innovation and development activities in support of those programmes.

The College is committed to the ongoing review of effectiveness of the quality assurance system. The QE Committee monitors the effectiveness of policy implementation and incorporates findings into the College Quality Improvement Plan. All documented quality assurance policies are evaluated for their effectiveness and fitness for purpose on a cyclical basis with each section of the QA system being reviewed at least once in a five-year period. Under the direction of the QE Committee, each Departmental Head is responsible for the annual review of policies and procedures within their area of responsibility and proposing any updates.

The Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for the approval and oversight of the CCT quality assurance system and is supported in that by the Quality Assurance Committee. The Dean of Academic Affairs has executive responsibility for the day to day management and oversight of Quality Assurance within the College. Departmental Heads have responsibilities delegated to them and the Programme Board is responsible for matters relating to academic programmes. Each staff member is responsible for ensuring compliance with the policies and procedures documented within the CCT QA system.

As an employer and an education and training provider, the College is required to satisfy a range of obligations under legislation. Satisfaction of these requirements is, in the main, documented throughout the Quality Assurance Manual under the relevant headings.

QA Policy Statement

CCT embraces a quality culture where quality assurance and enhancement activities are used to inform decision-making at all levels within the organisation. As stated in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015, "*At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance*."[1]

The CCT quality assurance system serves to set and monitor attainment and maintenance of minimum standards and facilitate enhancement of College programmes, services, and the learner experience. It is central to protecting the College's academic reputation and ensuring the needs of all stakeholders are considered and responded to as appropriate. Quality enhancement is at the core of the quality assurance system, as exemplified through the required monitoring and review activities that encourage continual improvement. The system is also intended to provide guidance to stakeholders in relation to specific policies, procedures and regulations, in doing so, ensuring transparency and clarity around decision-making.

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[1] http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf, page 7

The QA system is the central operating system of the College, connecting all roles, departments and business activity. The QA Manual documents the system, but it is understood to be a live document that will be continually reviewed, revised and updated in response to business development, stakeholder feedback, and quality assurance activity outcomes. Within CCT, due to the integration of continual improvement and quality assurance, the term quality assurance is used as an all-encompassing reference to quality assurance and enhancement activities.

The quality assurance policies and procedures of CCT are guided by the following:

1. The Qualifications and Quality Act (Education and Training) 2012
2. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
3. All relevant QQI Policy and other such standards and guidelines as may be published from time to time.
4. The National Framework of Qualifications
5. Policies and Procedures formally approved and adopted through CCT processes.

CCT recognises that internal quality assurance and enhancement is the primary responsibility of CCT and that quality assurance and enhancement requires planning, resources and commitment from the College and the inclusion of stakeholders. In order to ensure this, a quality-based organisation structure is implemented where the QA system spans both the administrative corporate domain and the academic domain, with stakeholder representation at all levels. CCT values the contribution of learners as partners in quality assurance and enhancement and seeks to encourage, enable and promote learner representation and the views of learners in quality assurance and enhancement activities. Based upon the same principle, the College engages an advisory Board with expertise in higher education, industry, quality assurance, and education guidance.

The QA system does not exist in isolation but moreover draws upon overarching principles, such as the externality principle and the learning outcomes principle, as well as the quality improvement principle as espoused by the IHEQN and QQI.

In recognition of the significance of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, both within QQI policy but also as a benchmark for good practice, CCT applies these standards as the framework for its internal quality assurance. The CCT QA process covers the 10 ESG standards as follows:

1.   Policy for quality assurance

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.

The CCT policy for quality assurance is clearly articulated (this document) and details the approach for publication, revision and archiving. The policy statement accompanies the information of the governance structure within CCT and the principles for quality assurance. It reflects the overarching approach to quality assurance which is then exemplified through the detailed policies and procedures contained within the additional sections making up the QA Manual.

2.   Design and approval of programmes

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.

CCT documents detailed procedures for the design and approval of programmes leading to QQI awards. These are available in section 4 of the QA manual.

In accordance with good practice and QQI policy, all programmes are designed to address specific award standards to determine appropriateness for the positioning of the programme leading to a stated award on the National Framework of Qualifications. The use of clearly articulated learning outcomes is applied consistently to demonstrate suitability of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. CCT implements appropriate monitoring and approval mechanisms through its governance structure to ensure no application for validation or revalidation is put forward to QQI unless the Academic Council is satisfied the required development and review processes have been satisfied and the appropriate award standards addressed.

3.   Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

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.

CCT identifies itself as a teaching and learning institution and has designed and implemented its teaching, learning and assessment strategy to reflect that. A full version of the strategy is available in section on the College website. A diverse range of teaching and learning modes, tools and approaches are utilised within the College, informed by the programme content, intended learning outcomes, learning group, delivery mode and mechanism. Teaching and learning is designed to ensure learners are enabled to acquire the specified knowledge, skill and competence and also to facilitate them developing appropriate attributes specified in the award standards and those defined by CCT as graduate attributes.

Teaching and learning is planned carefully from the validation preparation stage and tested for its appropriateness through the validation process and subsequently through ongoing monitoring such as student satisfaction surveys and faculty self-evaluation reports. Data on student engagement, retention, progression and success is also used to inform decision-making in respect of teaching and learning. Students as stakeholders are recognised as making a significant contribution to teaching and learning in the College.

Section 5 of the QA manual details the range of quality assurance policies and procedures in place to promote effective teaching and learning in the College. More recently CCT has looked to strengthen the relationship between teaching and research. This is articulated within the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and further reinforced within the QA policy for professional development, innovation, and research available in section 8 of the QA manual.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

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.

CCT College is a higher education institution that seeks to promote access and widen participation to facilitate progression for learners from diverse backgrounds. Section 6 of the QA manual documents the policies and procedures in place to ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to support this ambition.

Access, transfer and progression proposals for individual programmes, including specific pre-requisite qualifications or statements of knowledge, skill and competence are proposed pre-validation and endorsed by Academic Council prior to being considered as part of the validation process. Suitability of approved arrangements are monitored on an ongoing basis through the completion of admissions audits and the analysis of learner retention, progression and completion data.

Certification for awards of QQI remains the statutory responsibility of QQI. CCT has documented, secure and reliable procedures in place to ensure the timely and accurate provision of data to QQI to facilitate monitoring and certification.

5. Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

CCT recognises that effective teaching and learning is not possible without assuring itself of the competence of its teaching staff and other personnel who contribute to the wider learning experience and the assurance of a quality. Section 8 of the QA manual documents policies and procedures for assuring the quality of teaching staff and other human resources.

Specifications of required personnel are put forward as part of any new programme proposal process. Where existing personnel are in place, consideration is given to their availability and workload capacity to determine realistic availability. Where there is limitations within existing capacity or where there is an absence of expertise, the Academic Council secures assurance from the College President of the College commitment to invest in the required resources, in a time appropriate way, prior to approving a programme proposal and validation application for submission to QQI.

Ongoing monitoring of teaching staff recruitment and development, along with deployment, is undertaken by the QE Committee, reporting to Academic Council.

6. Learning resources and student support

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

CCT College commits to the ongoing funding for teaching and learning resources and student support services. It has a proven history of investment in this area with increasing expertise and facilities being made available year on year. Section 9 of the QA manual documents the policies and procedures relating to this area.

Where specialist resources and supports are required due to a particular discipline, mode of study, of student demographic, these are given consideration by the Senior Management Team and appropriate mechanisms and funds are made available, as part of the programme proposal

process. Academic Council is notified of this commitment and proceeds on that basis. Monitoring of suitability and effectiveness of resources and supports is incorporated into the cyclical review process through student satisfaction surveys, learner exit interview data, learner progression and completion data analysis, and departmental and programme monitoring reports.

6. Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

CCT utilises stakeholder feedback and learner data in respect of admissions, progression, retention and completion to inform decision-making relating to programme provision, resourcing, marketing, admissions requirements and processes, teaching, learning and assessment and the ongoing viability of programmes.

The College considers learner progression data as a strong indicator of supports for learners and suitability of teaching and learning within its programmes. This is on the premise that learners recruited presented genuine potential to succeed. Thus, admissions data monitoring is also undertaken.

The College operates in accordance with Data Protection Legislation and ensures all personnel are aware their obligations and responsibilities in that regard. Section 10 of the QA manual provides the policies relating to information management within CCT.

8. Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

The CCT website is the main vehicle for the publication of information about CCT activities, including its programmes. The College is mindful of its publications obligations under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, and has introduced detailed procedures to ensure the accuracy, currency and accessibility of all information published. Section 11 of the QA Manual documents the policy for public information. The specific matter of Protection for Enrolled Learners is addressed within section 7.

9. On-going monitoring and peer review of programmes

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.

CCT College believes that the objective of providing high quality, effective teaching and learning and a positive learner experience cannot be fulfilled without the completion of ongoing monitoring and review.

Section 12 of the QA manual details the range of monitoring and review activities undertaken by the College. In summary, these comprise of:

- Student satisfaction surveys
- Faculty self-evaluation module reports
- External Examiner reports
- Departmental annual monitoring reports
- Exam Board Audits
- Admissions Audit

- Data monitoring
- Annual programme monitoring
- Programme review

Section 4 provides in greater detail the requirement for the annual monitoring of programmes and for the quinquennial review of programmes in preparation for revalidation. Academic Council receives the reports of all monitoring activity and also reviews learner data. Collectively the outcomes inform the College Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The Academic Council monitors the implementation of the QIP by the QE Committee and receives reports on progress twice yearly.

10.   Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

As a provider of programmes leading to QQI awards, CCT is subject to QQI Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions, 2016, within which it is considered a voluntary provider. The College is aware of its obligations to QQI and commits to adhering to all such review requirements. The policy for cyclical external quality assurance is documented within Section 12 of the QA Manual.

It is CCT policy that it will maintain a virtual quality assurance manual, comprising of easily identifiable and navigable sections and component policies and procedures which are individually listed with hyperlinks to the relevant policy and accompanying procedures. The quality assurance manual will be publicly available on the College website. Policies and procedures will be drafted in a standard format and accompanied by a policy control document detailing historical revisions. Revised or replaced policies and procedures will be removed to an archive file, retained by the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, available on request. Individual policies and procedures will have hyperlinks to other relevant documents mentioned in the text to permit quick and accurate cross-referencing.

Official hard copy editions of the current version of the QA manual will only be printed when approval of quality assurance procedures is being renewed with QQI or the College is conducting Programme Validations and Programmatic or Institutional Reviews.

The web document will only be able to be changed with the express permission of Academic Council, normally on completion of the review process. This virtual manual will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, to ensure currency of dates and references. It will incorporate all approved new policy and procedures (including version number and date). All stakeholders will have 'read only' access to the current QA manual.

In the event of a dispute, the current published web QA manual will be preeminent, over all printed versions.