[St Nicholas Montessori College, SNMCI]

2022 2020-2021

Annual Quality Report (SNMCI)

Reporting Period 2020-20212020-2021

[Higher Education Institution]

2022

Annual Quality Report (SNMCI)

PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Reporting Period 2020-20212020-2021

PREFACE

The **Annual Quality Report** (**AQR;** formerly AIQR) forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements.

The AQR, particularly part A, should assist with **document management** in the institutional review process and will facilitate institutions in providing review teams with procedural QA documentation in preparation for the external review process. It is an important part of the evidence base considered by external **review teams** as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, demonstrating that the institution's internal QA system is aligned with QQI's Core and relevant Sector- and Topic-specific Statutory QA Guidelines, and with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). It enables the review team to satisfy itself of compliance with these requirements for the purpose of the institutional review process.

Each AQR is **published in full on QQI's website**, providing transparency on the HEIs' assurance and enhancement of quality to external stakeholders. (As such, institutions should ensure that their submissions do not contain any data that they consider to be commercially sensitive.) Collectively, the AQRs comprise a single national repository of quality assurance practice in Irish higher education institutions.

Each year, QQI produces a synthesis report of the key themes highlighted across the AQRs, primarily arising from Part B of the reports.

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Legislation

- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended)
- Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 (as amended)
- Technological Universities Act 2018
- Universities Act 1997

QQI Documents

Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

- Core QAG
- Sector-specific QAG for Independent/Private Providers
- Sector-specific QAG for Designated Awarding Bodies
- Sector-specific QAG for Institutes of Technology
- Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes
- Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes
- Topic-specific QAG for Blended Learning

Other QQI Policy Documents

- QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards, 2012
- QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners, 2015
- QQI Policy Restatement on Access, Transfer and Progression, 2015

Other National/International References

- European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)
- IHEQN Guidelines on Collaborative Provision
- National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland
- Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes, 2019
- HEA National Framework for Doctoral Education
- The Salzburg Principles
- The Salzburg II Recommendations
- SOLAS Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices
- UN Sustainable Development Goals

[1] These links will be updated as further guidance documents are published.

PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Table 1

Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)				
AQR Part A Section	QQI QAG Core Sub-section No.	QAG Core Sub-section Title	ESG Standard No.	ESG Standard Title
1.0 - *Internal QA Framework*	**2.1**	Governance and Management of Quality	1.1	Policy for Quality Assurance
	2.2	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance		
2.0 - *Programme Development and Delivery*	**2.3**	Programmes of Education and Training	1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
4.0 - *QA of Research Activities and Programmes*				
8.0 - *Monitoring and Periodic Review*			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
5.0 - *Staff Recruitment, Development and Support*	**2.4**	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	1.5	Teaching Staff
2.3 - *Teaching, Learning and Assessment*	**2.5**	Teaching and Learning	1.3	Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment
	2.6	Assessment of Learners		
3.0 - *Learner Resources and Supports*	**2.7**	Supports for learners	1.6	Learning Resources and Student Support
6.0 - *Information and Data Management*	**2.8**	Information and Data Management	1.7	Information Management
7.0 - *Public Information and Communication*	**2.9**	Public Information and Communication	1.8	Public Information
2.0 - *Programme Delivery and Development*	**2.10**	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - *Monitoring and Periodic Review*				
9.0 - *Details of Arrangements with Third Parties*			1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
2.0 - *Programme Development and Delivery*	**2.11**	Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 - *Monitoring and Periodic Review*			1.10	Cyclical External Quality Assurance
4.0 - *QA of Research Activities and Programmes*	QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes			

Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the AQR for [St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland SNMCI] for the reporting period **1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021.**

It is to be submitted by **Friday, 26 February 2021**.

The AQR has been approved by The Academic Board of the College and is submitted by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.

SNMCI is a private college of education, established in 1970, based in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. The College offers accredited degree programmes through full-time, face-to-face and blended delivery mode.

Vision and Mission:

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.

Strategy:

SNMCI's document *Strategy 2025* identifies key priorities informed by the College's current activity, operating procedures and profile. Institutional Strategy is informed by consultation with all stakeholders, students, faculty, staff, employers and e.g., schools/other where students engage in placement. It is guided by national and International standards, national and international policy, engagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), national feedback initiatives, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and Professional Standards, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB'S) as appropriate. It is also informed by periodic reviews facilitated by external parties.

Development of AQR:

SNMCI and has a cyclical approach to quality assurance involving initiation, development, approval, implementation, monitoring and review.

The normal cycle of review may be influenced by external factors including:

- Changes in legislative frameworks;
- Changes in the national and international landscape;
- Change of requirements from the Awarding Body (QQI);
- Changes in requirements by other bodies e.g., Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI), Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Department of Education and Skills (DES), Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB).

Internal factors also influence the cycle of review including:

- Identification of a need for an amendment, refinement, addition or removal of information by persons/departments/programme committees in the College;
- Additional considerations that may arise subsequent to the drafting of the original policy, e.g., the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic;

- When processes change in respect to how programmes are delivered e.g., changes through differential validation, moves to blended or online learning or changes to assessment processes.

A Comprehensive System ensures that the promotion of quality is embedded in the governance, organisational and academic activities of SNMCI.

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

All new policies created and approved by the Academic Board adhere to QA 2.1 *Scope of Quality Assurance* and QA 2.2 *Formulation, Issuance and Enhancement of College Policies* or the *'Policy on Polices'* which contains a Template for College Policies.

The Template encourages the initiator/owner of the policy to:

- Develop policies according to the process set out in **QA 2.2.**
- Present policies in a standard format including illustrations.
- Follow through on policy approval process.
- Ensure that policies are accessible to all interested parties and are kept up to date.

It also requires:

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

The development of the Annual Quality Report is co-ordinated by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA). The DQAA maintains regular contact with all members of staff, monitoring

quality issues that may arise on an ongoing basis. Periodic meetings of the Quality Enhancement Committee are convened throughout the year to review and monitor the implementation of policies and procedures. Actions arising from these meetings are communicated widely.

Once complete the report is submitted to the Academic Board of the College before submission to QQI.

1.0 Internal QA Framework

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

The complexity of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in higher education was summarised by the European University Association (EUA) as'…*a culturally sensitive, relative and contested concept that is shaped by the institutional and national context, and given expression as an internal dynamic process with the objective of constant improvement' (*EUA, 2004). [1]

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

Institutional and national context:

SNMCI addresses Quality Assurance at two levels:

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

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

Internal dynamic process and constant improvement:

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

National Statutory Guidelines observed:

- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):** the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training.
- **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012)**: Section 28(1) of the Act requires all providers to *'establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the*

purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training and research and related services the provider provides'.

- **QQI Policy Framework for Cyclical Reviews of Higher Education Institutions (2016):** Observed to evaluate the **effectiveness** of the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the institution provides. This is a measurement of the institution's **accountability** for compliance with European standards for quality assurance with regard to the expectations set out in the QQI quality assurance guidelines, or their equivalent, and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures as established in the lifecycle of engagement between the institution and QQI. It is also an exploration of the institution's **enhancement** of quality in relation to impacts on teaching, learning and research, institutional achievements and innovations in quality assurance, alignment to the institution's mission and strategy and the quality-related performance of the institution relative to quality indicators and benchmarks identified by the institution (2016, p2).
- **QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines (Dec 2015, revised Apr 2016:** The principles which should permeate an institution's QA policies and Procedures include that they be, Provider-Owned, Contextual, Quality Culture, Learning Outcome, Implementation, Externality, Continuous Improvement, Transparency, and Public Confidence.
- **QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (May, 2016);** SNMCI's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework follows the main areas to be addressed, in provider quality assurance procedures, as outlined in the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* which are as follows:

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

- **QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (March 2018):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and in response to market intelligence, SNMCI was investigating how best to introduce blended learning opportunities to learners and had piloted blended learning in the College. The COVID 19 pandemic accelerated this move.
- **QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (2012):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) SNMCI is investigating transnational possibilities and is aware of its responsibilities in respect of the above policy. (n/a in this reporting period)
- **QQI Policy Restatement Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training (restated 2015):** SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression is committed to inclusivity and equality

of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates. The College provides clear information to learners, identifying pathways **to**, **from** and **within** programmes, and about awards and qualifications that may be achieved.

European Standards and Guidelines:

In the context of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG's), quality is considered *'mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose'* (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), May 2015, 2015, p.5)[2].

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

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

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

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

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

AQR Part A Section	QQI/QAG Core Sub-section No.	QQI Core (Statutory) Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015	SNMCI Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
1.0 Internal QA Framework	**2.1**	**Governance and Management of Quality:** - Governance - Objectives, Mission, Strategy - QA provider owned	**From ESG 1.1 –ESG1.10** **ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:** Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1- QA 1.2**

	2.2	- Integrity in Academic Standards - Consideration of Risk - Internal, External Evaluation - Management of and embedding of Quality **Documented approach to Quality Assurance:** - Documented policies/procedures - Policies into Practice	management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 2.1- QA 2.6**
2.0 Programme Development and Delivery **4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes** **8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review**	**2.3**	**Programmes of Education and Training:** - Programme Development - Learner Admission, Progression, Recognition - Programme Monitoring	**ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:** Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. **ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification Standard:** Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification. **ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:**	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1- QA 3.8** **SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.4- QA3.8** **SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1-**

			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.	**QA 11.4**
5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	**2.4**	**Staff Recruitment, Management and Development:** - Systematic Approach to Recruitment - Staff Communication - Staff Development	**ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff Standard:** Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff.	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 4.1- QA 4.3**
2.3 Teaching Learning and Assessment	**2.5** **2.6**	**Teaching and Learning** - Quality T, L&A - Ethos that promotes learning - Reference to National and International Best Practice - Quality Learning Environments **Assessment of Learner Achievement –** - Assessment Framework - Materials - Processes - Assignments - Records	**ESG 1.3 Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard:** Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 5.1- QA5.10** **SNMCI QA Policies QA 6.1- QA 6.13**
3.0 Learner Resources and Supports	**2.7**	**Supports for Learners** - Learner Perspective - Integrated Approach - Learner Representation - Guidance -	**ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support Standard:** Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 7.1- QA 7.13**

6.0 Information and Data Management	**2.8**	**Management Information and Data** - Information Systems - Management of Information Systems - Planning - Completion - Records - Data Protection	**ESG 1.7 Information Management Standard:** Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities	**SNMCI QA Policies QA8.1- QA8.3**
7.0 Public Information and Communication	**2.9**	**Public Information and Communication** - Public Information - Learner Information - Publication of Reports	**ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:** Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. **ESG 1.8 Public Information Standard:** Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1- QA 1.2** **SNMCI QA Policies QA9.1- QA9.2**
2.0 Programme Development and Delivery **8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review** **9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties**	**2.10**	**Other parties involved in Education and Training** - Peer Relationships - External Partnerships - Expert Panels **Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.** - Provider -owned Review - Self-Monitoring - SER - Provider Owned QA	**ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:** Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned. **ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:**	**SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1- QA11.4** **SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1- QA 3.8**

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

Boards and Committees:

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

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

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

The table below briefly describes the different boards and committees that form the governance and operational structures of SNMCI. See QA 2.3 for more detailed Terms of Reference.

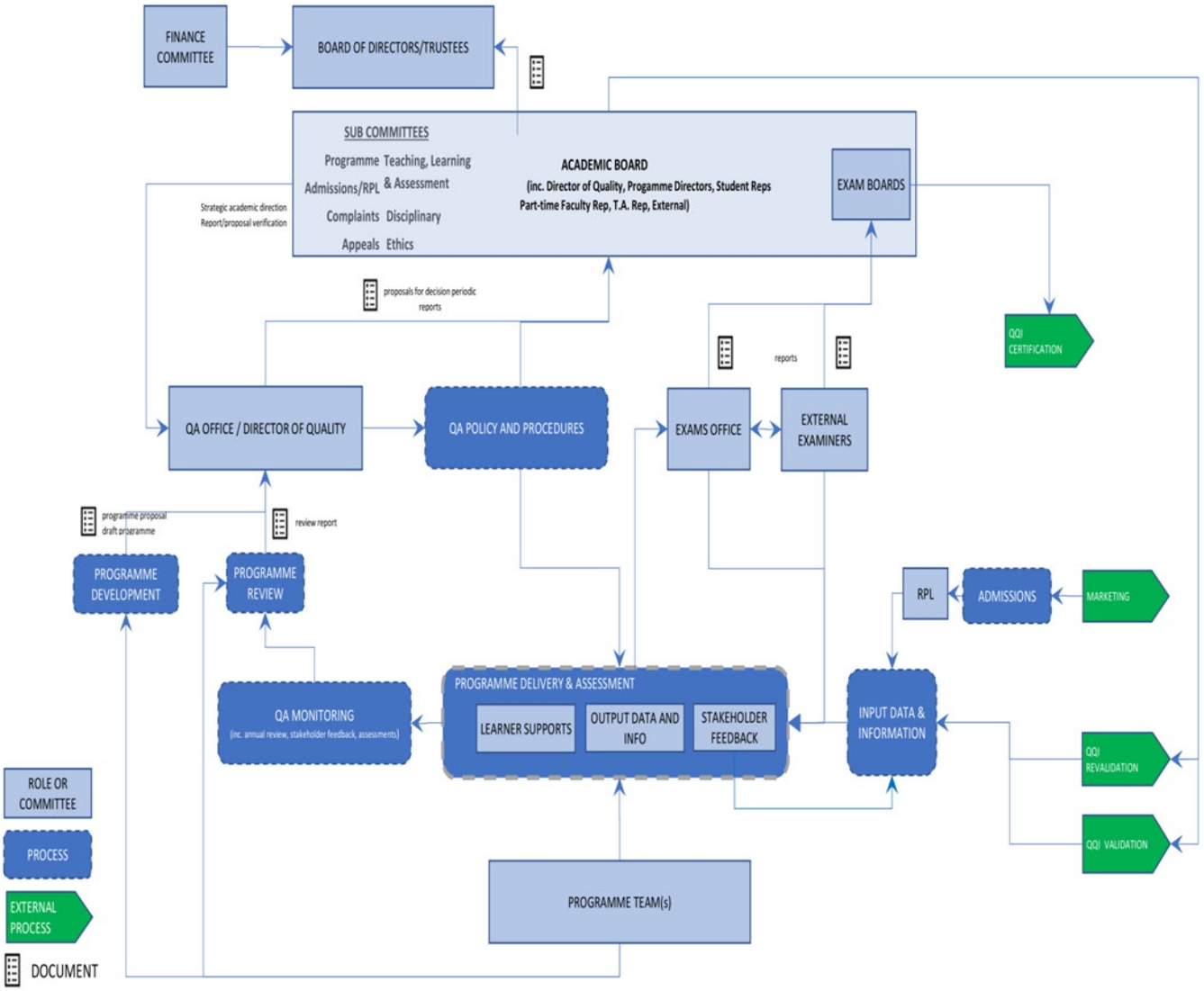
BODY	FUNCTION	STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION
Board of Directors/Trustees	Safeguard the strategic interests of SMSI to ensure that all aspects of the Society function effectively and legally, in accordance with its vision, mission and values.	External, representation financial, academic, industry based.
Finance Committee	Oversight of SMSI's current financial activity and consideration of long term financial plans and operations.	Institutional/management/ external auditors
Academic Board	Fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. Primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters.	Academic, external 'critical friend', learner representation
Admissions Committee	Monitoring of admissions data to ensure compliance with standards, process and procedures for access, transfer and progression.	Academic
RPL & RPEL Committee	Oversight and implementation of procedures for the accreditation of prior learning and acknowledgement of prior experiential learning.	Academic
Programme Committees	On behalf of the Academic Board, responsibility for programme management, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in accordance with regulations stipulated by QQI and as agreed by the College's QA.	Academic internal/academic external/ learner representation (Industry at programmatic review)
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board	To support and develop innovative learning and teaching practices linked to assessment of programmes and module outcomes. Consideration of strategies, policy, approaches to teaching, learning, and	Academic, learner representation

	assessment considered to be beneficial to all programmes.	
Quality Enhancement Committee	Guide the College in the development of policies and procedures to fulfil its responsibilities under national and international policies, guidelines and codes.	All staff/student/academic, administrative, learner representation
Research Committee	Guide the College's strategy, policy and approach to research activity in the College	Academic, learner representative
Ethics Committee	To define the ethical standards required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI carried out by SNMCI researchers. Reviews and advises on all submissions for ethical approval made by researchers; staff or students.	Academic, external as required for staff research
Pre Exam Board	Ensure good management of Learner progression.	Academic internal /academic external
Examination Board	Ratification of results of modules and stages in programmes, including degree classification at award stage.	Academic internal /academic external
Disciplinary Committee	Review and adjudication on all breaches of good conduct, social and academic with the imposition of appropriate penalties where applicable.	Academic internal and external as required
Appeals Committee	Review and adjudication on learner appeals.	Academic internal and external as required
Complaints Committee	Review and adjudication on learner complaints	Academic and institutional / internal and external as required

The interaction of the governance framework and allied committee structure, the quality assurance policies and procedures and the standard operating procedures for the development and delivery of programmes is described below.

[1] [1] EUA, Quality Culture Guidelines, Brussels, 2004; see also EUA Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education, Brussels (2007); EUA, Examining Quality Culture: Part 1 – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions, Brussels, 2010

[2] Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium.


FINANCE COMMITTEE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS/TRUSTEES
SUB COMMITTEES
Programme
Admissions/RPL
Complaints
Appeals
Teaching, Learning & Assessment
Disciplinary
Ethics
ACADEMIC BOARD
(inc. Director of Quality, Progamme Directors, Student Reps
Part-time Faculty Rep, T.A. Rep, External)
EXAM BOARDS
Strategic academic direction
Report/proposal verification
proposals for decision periodic reports
reports
QQI CERTIFICATION
QA OFFICE / DIRECTOR OF QUALITY
QA POLICY AND PROCEDURES
EXAMS OFFICE
EXTERNAL EXAMINERS
programme proposal
draft programme
review report
PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME REVIEW
RPL
ADMISSIONS
MARKETING
QA MONITORING
(inc. annual review, stakeholder feedback, assessments)
PROGRAMME DELIVERY & ASSESSMENT
LEARNER SUPPORTS
OUTPUT DATA AND INFO
STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK
INPUT DATA & INFORMATION
QQI REVALIDATION
QQI VALIDATION
PROGRAMME TEAM(s)
ROLE OR COMMITTEE
PROCESS
EXTERNAL PROCESS
DOCUMENT

1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

Collaborative provision of programmes, i.e., *where two or more providers are involved by formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training*	N/A for this reporting period
Transnational delivery of programmes, i.e., *the provision or partial provision of a programme of education in one country by a provider which is based in another country*	N/A for this reporting period
Linked providers *and their quality assurance, including procedures for approval, monitoring, review, withdrawal of approval and appeal. [Ref: QQI Statutory Sector-Specific Guidelines for Universities and DABs]*	N/A

2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

SNMCI has a systematic process for **proposing and developing** new programmes and for entering into the validation process with QQI. It has also clear guidelines for monitoring and delivery of existing programmes. **(QA 3.1: Programme Proposal)**

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

Programmes are proposed on the Programme Proposal Form **(FQA 3.1 A).**

This form has guidelines **(FQA 3.1B)** to assist the proposer and to allow for consideration of the following:

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

Recommendations and the outcome of a programme proposal is fed back by the Academic Board on Form **(FQA 3.1C).** Programmes that reach the stage of development, follow QQI guidelines **(QA 3.2)** for validation and the process is documented on a Programme Validation Control Sheet **(FQA 3.2A) below.**

QA 3.2A Programme Validation Control Sheet				
<Programme Title>				
Step	Description	Person/s Responsible	Date	Comment
1	Programme Proposal Form	Proposer		Initial programme idea
2	Academic Board Approval	Academic Board		Academic approval: In line with the mission, values and scope of provision of the College

3	Board of Trustee Approval	Board of Trustees		Commercial: A strategic fit with the College's mission statement. In line with market demand and financially viable
4	Convening the Programme Development Team	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Members to include, critical friend, external expertise, learners, expert staff
5	Programme Document Opened	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Beginning of documented process
6	Series of documented meetings	Lead by Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Learner profile/Graduate profile MIPLOS Access, Transfer and Progression Regulatory requirements Workload/Mode of delivery Learning environment
7	Review of programme QA implications	DQAA		All related QA
8	Desk Top Review of all documentation	DQAA		Review against criteria
9	Critical Review/Mock Panel			Critical Friend Mock panel of peer reviewers
10	Response of Critical Review Panel	Mock Panel		Edit
	Edit based on Critical Review	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Edit
	Application to QQI	DQAA		All documents to QQI via QHub for consideration at PAEC
	Initial Review QQI	QQI contact		Desk top review to ensure all components present
	Peer Panel Selection	DQAA/PD/QQI		Convening of validation panel
	Peer Panel Site Visit	SNMCI/QQI		Validation event
	Panel Report	Panel		Response of panel

	Response to Panel Report	DQAA		Answer to panel re initial report
	Panel response/agreement	Panel		Finalising
	Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)/Decision received	QQI		Official validation
	Academic Board Informed	DQAA		

Existing programmes, monitoring and review:

For existing programmes SNMCI QA Procedures allow for

- Annual Programme Review (QA 11.2)
- Significant Programme Modification (QA 11.3)
- Minor Programme Modification
- Programmatic Review (QA 11.4)

Programmes are reviewed on an ongoing basis by Programme Directors and Programme Committees (all staff involved in a programme). On-going reviews take the form of mid-year, end-of-year and beginning of year programme meetings **(QA 11.2).**

An Annual Programme Review **(QA 11.2)** is conducted at the end of each year to:

- To provide an opportunity for Programme Directors and College staff to identify, evaluate and address any issues surrounding the structure, content, delivery and resourcing of individual programmes
- To assess the continued relevance of the programme to the learning needs of learners / demands of the employment market
- To act as a source of information for the wider College on the operation of its academic provision
- To incorporate action planning in support of continuous improvement
- To discuss proposed programme modifications (NOTE: programme modifications agreed by the Academic Board are – if significant modifications - provisional until agreed by the relevant validating body. The Programme Director will document and justify any required changes. Changes will only be put into effect when the validating body has agreed to the proposed changes. The Programme document should be modified accordingly.)
- To provide a report on the 'academic health' of programmes to the Academic Board.
- To inform possible revalidation and/or programme development

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

Programmatic Review

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

- take an overall perspective on the development of the programme over the previous five years
- to consider whether it is continuing to meet current stakeholder needs and whether or not it will continue to address these needs into the future
- to decide whether to end or revalidate the programme

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

SNMCI has a 'foundation' policy on Access, Transfer and Admissions (QA 3.3).
This policy applies to all SNMCI programmes. It outlines SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression and our commitment to inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates.
This overarching policy is the foundation for, and is evidenced in a range of related policies:

- QA 9.1: Compiling and Approving Marketing Material and Public Information
- QA 3.4: Admissions
- QA 3.5: Admissions Committee TOR
- QA 3.6: Recognition of Prior Learning
- QA 3.8: Information for Enrolled Learners
- QA 3.11: Learner Induction
- QA 3.14: Learner Feedback
- QA 7.5: Cause For Concern

These policies are informed by:

- Qualifications and Quality Assurance *Education and Training Act* 2012
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013) *Assessment and Standards*, *Revised*
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2015) Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education (Restatement)

- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2015) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), (2nd ed.) Section 1.4.
- AHEAD and Higher Education Authority (2013) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*

Access policies, admission processes and criteria are established and implemented consistently and in a transparent manner in accordance with national policies and procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression. Entry requirements are set according to the demands and requirements of each programme, are detailed in QQI validated programme documents and made available through all normal channels. Students typically apply for a place in SNMCI either through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system or directly through the College's Admissions Management Portal. Applications for undergraduate programmes are typically made through the CAO. Applications from mature learners or for advanced entry are made directly through the Admissions Portal.

Progression:

SNMCI has a Marks and Standards Policy and all marks are provisional until agreed at the Examinations Board (QA 6.13)**.** The Examinations Board is the decision -making body to determine learner progression. Students have access to a range of supports to support them with any issues that may impact on progression for that year **(See https://smsi.ie/qa/ QA 7.1- 7.13).**

Recognition of Prior Learning:

The College has a robust Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) system, both for accredited learning and for experiential learning (QA 3.6).

2.3 Procedures for Making Awards

Guide

SNMCI is not an awarding body. Programmes in the College are validated by QQI. Awards are made in accordance with QQI Policy and Criteria for the making of an award by under the Education and Training Act 2012.

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

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. In line with the College's vision of education 'Teaching and Learning' at SNMCI is grounded in 'teaching for understanding'[1]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 Shore2015)[2].

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)[3]. 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)[4] 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. [5].

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'.

In deference to its founding ethos, the College has subtitled its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy as 'Wider Horizons'. The term itself is a conflated one, 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)[6] 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**.

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)[7]. 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.

Blended Teaching, Learning and Assessment: -

Blended learning (BL) is the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences (Garrison and Kanuak,2004[8], p96) cited in QQI, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning (2018, p3).

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;
- the Programme Context including development and assessment, and
- the Learner Experience Context.

<u>Learning Technology Resources</u>

- SNMCI's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is Moodle. This VLE is managed in-house and is integrated with the College's 'openSIS' 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

Teaching Methods and Strategies

SNMCI acknowledges the advantages of exposing learners to a wide range of teaching and learning methods across their programme of study. It further acknowledges the importance of staff development to provide opportunities to explore alternative approaches to teaching and raise the quality of traditional approaches.In choosing teaching methods and strategies SNMCI has considered the following…

- Learners experience the same teaching in different ways.
- Cultural background and beliefs can impact on student behaviour, interpretation and understanding.

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

At SNMCI, teaching and learning is meditated via a wide range of strategies including (but not limited to) those outlined in its TLAS, as appropriate across programmes and disciplines.

For Blended Learning the College uses (among others) the COACT framework for Blended Learning (Johnston and Breakwell, 2011; Bailey et al, 2014)[9] This 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)[10] and later the ETL Project at the University of Edinburgh (Enwistle, 2009)[11]. This model is used as a base to create a sustainable approach to blended teaching and learning, by:

- creating a framework for module design that, if followed, guarantees higher-order learning takes place and learning objectives are explicitly addressed;
- ensuring the creation of truly engaging e-learning content;
- drawing on the full range of pedagogic tools available in order to create a richer learning experience;
- encouraging a move away from a dependence on tutor-led learning in order to create independent learners;
- enabling learners to acquire lifelong learning skills by equipping them for the knowledge-based society.

2.5 Assessment

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

Assessment at SNMCI: -

<table>
<tr><td>Is Valid:
Fit for purpose. Is based on valid assessment techniques and measures the skill or attainment it is designed to measure.</td><td>Is Transparent:
There is clarity and understanding by all involved in the assessment process</td><td>Is Fair:
Assessment is accessible to all students and provides equal opportunity for all students to succeed, using reasonable accommodations where appropriate.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Is Formative:
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</td><td>Is Summative:
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</td><td>Is Authentic:
Has real world applicability</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Reflects Quality:
Assessment is reliable and equitable and in line with all agreed standards and procedures.</td></tr>
</table>

[1]Learning to Teach in Higher Education", P. Ramsden, 2nd Edn, Routledge Falmer, London, 2003, p 146.

[2] 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.

[3] 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

[4] Rogers, C.R.& Freiberg, H.J. (1994) (2nd ed.) *Freedom to Learn.* New York: Pearson

[5] 32 Sahlberg, Pasi. (2007) Education policies for raising student learning: The Finnish approach. *Journal of Education Policy* 22, no. 2: 147-71.

[6] Biggs, J.B. (1999) *Teaching for quality learning in university*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

[7] Clancy, P. (2015) Irish Higher Education A Comparative Perspective. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

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

[9] Johnston, L. and Breakwell, N. (2011). THE COACT FRAMEWORK FOR ENABLING HIGHER-ORDER ING IN THE DESIGN OF ING 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

[10] 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)

[11] Entwistle, N. (2009). *Teaching for understanding at university: Deep approaches and distinctive ways of thinking.* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

SNMCI understands that the space, physical, social, cultural and intellectual, that surrounds students is important and has a great impact on learning, and that, not only formal, but also informal and non-formal education takes place in the environment. The ethos of the College supports a positive institutional climate. **Physically**: our learning spaces are adaptable to the needs of the learners. **Intellectually:** The College's underlying philosophy supports active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings. **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. See below

The Institutional climate at SNMCI:

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

Improving students' experience is central to SNMCI's ethos and we endeavour to ensure that all students have an opportunity to fully engage in their education experience, through a range of student support and guidance systems. SNMCI offers flexibility of delivery to accommodate not only school leavers but also learners who are working, those who wish to upskill and those who wish to return to education.

3.1 Learner Resources and Support

SNMCI students have access to a range of resources in a range of domains; human, physical, teaching and learning and quality assurance. They are supported in the following ways:-

- **Programme Director:** Each programme has a Programme Director who has responsibility for the good running of the programme.

- **Programme Manager:** Each programme has a Programme Manager who has responsibility for certain administrative aspects of the programme and who liaises with and supports students re assessment submission.
- **Instructional Designer:** The IE is available to staff and students.
- **IT Support:** IT support is available to staff and students.
- **Library Support:** Well stocked 'physical' library plus access to a wide range of online resources.
- **International Officer:** Provides support for a small cohort of international students each year
- **Student Engagement and representation:** The College has a Student Engagement Officer (SEO) who serves as a channel of communication between staff and students. The SEO plays a key role in enriching the campus experience across the non-academic spheres of student life and is called upon to provide rapid and insightful access to student opinion and challenges across all aspects of their College experience. Through the SEO students are encouraged to nominate representatives for committees and boards across the College. **(QA 7.1)**
- **Learner Support Office:** The College has a Learner Support Officer (LSO) and a Learner Wellbeing Service appropriate to its capacity. As we are a relatively small college the Learner Support Officer introduces herself to each new cohort of learners at the beginning of each year. The learner support office is clearly identified. Learners are given contact information and can contact the LSO in person or via the Programme Director. The College subscribes to a Health and Well-being Assistance Programme and information and contact details are available in the student handbook or from the Programme Directors or LSO.
- **QA 7.6:** Cause for Concern outlines the Policy and Procedures in place should there be concerns about any aspect of a learner's wellbeing that may impact on academic performance.
- **Complaints:** SNMCI has a fair and accessible Learner Complaints policy and procedure in recognition of a person's right to express a complaint, in the event they feel they have been unfairly treated or disadvantaged, as a result of the service provided by SNMCI, or the actions and behaviours of a member of College staff or the student body. **(QA 7.7: Learner Complaints)**
- **Appeals:** Learners have a range of routes through which to challenge any decision –making Board or Committee of the College, including assessment. **(QA 7.11)**
- **(QA 7.13)**

4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

4.1 Overview of the system for quality assuring research activity

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.[1] 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).

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;
- 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 support for research related costs.

Research at SNMCI

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

The College has a research strategy and a research committee to support and enhance the existing research activity within the institution; to further support student research and to drive staff research. Research is governed and quality assured in the following ways:-

Document	Description

SNMCI Research Strategy 2019/2020	SNMCI Strategic Research Objectives with key actions. Monitored by the Research Committee
QA 5.6 Research Policy	Commitment to shared principles of best practice in research for staff and students
QA 5.7 Code of Good Practice for Student research	Guidelines for any and all research activities undertaken by students.
QA 5.8 TOR for Submission of Proposals	Terms of Reference for the submission of research proposals
QA 5.9 TOR and OP of Ethics Committee	Defines the ethical standards required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI
QA 5.10 Guidelines on Supervision in Research	Guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in supervision in research
QA 5.11 TOR and OP of Research Committee	Governance, resourcing, monitoring and review of research activities across the institution.
Research Handbook for students	Guidelines for staff and students engaged in research and supervision of research

[1] 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

5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

Teaching has been described as 'a complex, cognitive ability that is not innate but can be both learned and improved upon' (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001)[1]. 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. In recognition that people are its most important asset, the College seeks to attract and retain professional academic and administrative staff with the expertise necessary to advance the teaching, learning and research agenda of the College.

Having appointed staff, SNMCI has a strong commitment to their on-going professional development 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)[2], document into its Promoting Professional Development Policy, QA 4.3, to acknowledge all types of Professional Development.

All recruitment activity is fair, effective, transparent and equal. In filling any vacancy, management and staff are required to follow a systematic process designed to ensure the most cost-effective deployment of current and potential employees.

QA 4.1: Staff Recruitment and Appointment clearly outlines the policy and procedures for staff recruitment with clear guidelines and instructions facilitating the College in appointing suitably qualified staff members to deliver its vision and mission. These guidelines include:

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

- Contract

SNMCI promotes best practice in recruitment by:

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

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

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

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

Erasmus+

Under Erasmus + opportunities are available to all staff, both academic and administrative. Travel abroad to participating colleges may consist of teaching, job shadowing, observation or programmes of CPD.

Conferences and opportunities to represent the College

Staff members are supported to attend and to participate in (through research /presentation) conferences, nationally and internationally. Staff are also given opportunities to represent the College on committees and working groups including e.g. Early Childhood Ireland, The Children's Rights Alliance, PLÉ, OMEP, the Early Years Forum, the Early Years Workforce Development Plan Stakeholders Group, the National Vocational Childcare Committee, the National Forum (NF) the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and its subgroups.

Staff Communication

It is vital that important information flows correctly throughout the College and SNMCI supports the practice of everyone being involved and responsible for good communication. This promotes an atmosphere where everyone feels included, informed and consulted. SNMCI has various internal pathways of communication to keep all employees informed on all relevant issues.

- Staff meetings allow for discussion on a variety of topics
- Minutes of all meetings are circulated and posted in a communal folder
- SNMCI publishes relevant documents and policies internally (staff drive) and on the SNMCI website, as appropriate.

- The College welcomes suggestions and ideas from its employees through one-to-one meetings between managers and staff, staff meetings, staff development days, email communications, committee meetings, shared folders, staff representation and an open-door policy where all employees can share their thoughts, ideas and concerns.
- Staff communication involves asking for the views of staff members as well as keeping staff members informed of issues relating to their roles, responsibilities and programme areas.
- The cycle of review of policies and procedures allows for the opinions, views and judgements of staff to add value and relevance to policy development.

A range of policies and systems are in place to recruit staff, to support them to carry out their work effectively, and to encourage ongoing personal and professional development (QA 4.1; QA 4.2; QA 4.3).

[1] Saroten, A. & Amundsen, C. (2001) Evaluationg University Teaching: Time to take stock. In *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol 26 (4) pp.341-353

[2] 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

6.0 Information and Data Management

Information Systems

All staff and learners are obliged to read QA 8.2: Privacy Policy which clarifies why SNMCI collects information, outlines how data is used and supplies reasons why any data gathered may be shared. Details of the purpose of collecting data, the type collected and the legal basis for doing so may be found in this document.

Management System:

The College uses management systems adequate to its capacity. The College's information systems record and store data to be used as an information source in relation to programme completion rates, awards and overall grades for final year students, and this is available for all external agencies as appropriate. SNMCI is currently (2021-2022) transitioning from the 'Scholar System' for registering student information, documenting grades, transcripts and exam results to the newer openSIS Management System. Both systems are secure repositories for current learner records and also for past learner records and can produce data, as needed for quality purposes e.g., to inform programme reviews and development, to supply information to QQI, the Teaching Council or to other agencies e.g. SUSI. New programmes automatically use the openSIS system and Scholar will remain in place to see a selection of programmes through to their upcoming revalidation dates.

A separate data management system (ZOHO) handles information such as enquiries, applications, offers, acceptances and recruitment.

Learner Information Systems

SNMCI uses the VLE Moodle; a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. Moodle is used for programme content, information for learners and is also used to generate attendance records. Learners are also obliged to read QA 8.1: Principles, Terms and Conditions of Use of the College's Information and Communications Technology and sign the corresponding form FQA 8.1: Each learner signs this document on a yearly basis.

Records Maintenance and Retention

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

SNMCI only collects and processes data for purposes which are:-

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

Data Storage

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

Retention of Data

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

Disclosure of Data

- Data will only be disclosed to the persons or organisations as identified.

Disposal of Data

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

Assessment Data:-

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

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

7.0 Public Information and Communication

Public Information

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

The College makes publicly available the following minimum information:

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

The College publishes information to prospective students and the general public about the College, its programmes and other related events and activities, and there are procedures for compiling and approving academic material before publication. **QA 9.1: Compiling, & Approving Marketing Material and Public Information**

Learner Information

In the first instance information for prospective students is available in print and online. The Admissions Office takes all enquiries by phone, e-mail or drop-in. It is College policy to reply to all enquiries promptly and factually.

The College also hosts Open Days (in person and virtual) where the Admissions Officer and academic staff members are available, to answer questions about programmes in the College.

Prospective learners are provided with information related to the College and its academic programmes. All information for prospective and enrolled learners is:

- Written in plain English
- Consistent with the SNMCI brand and values
- In line with the requirements of any accrediting and/or professional bodies where applicable
- Transparent
- Accurate, complete and up to date
- Respectful and inclusive

Publication of Quality Assurance Reports

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

SNMCI'S AQR for 2019-2020 is available on the QQI website.

8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

Institutional:-

Cyclical Institutional Reviews evaluate the effectiveness of the College's QA procedures for the purposes of establishing, maintaining and improving the services provided. They encourage a quality culture, emphasising ownership of quality assurance across the College. The appointment of a Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (2018) to lead reengagement addressed the need for systematic oversight in the College, and ensured that QA is compliant with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines (2016) and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015)

The College's '*quality assurance mechanisms and procedures'* have been carried out with QQI Core Statutory Guidelines for QA in mind. Those guidelines address: -.

Governance: -

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

Administration: -

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

Information and Communication: -

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

Academic Management: -

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

Programmes at SNMCI are monitored, reviewed and revised on a regular basis to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of leaners and the workforce. Regular review encourages compliance with all relevant legislation, policy, and standards, ensures transparency and supports public confidence in the College as a quality provider of programmes of education and training. They also link with the College's Strategic Plan. **QA 11.1: Cyclical Review and Self-evaluation**

Programme Review: -

The process of annual programme review allows for monitoring of all aspects of all programmes and is a general measurement of the 'health' of the programmes. Learner feedback is addressed as soon and as comprehensively as possible, e.g with regard to resources, adjustments to assessment and scheduling. Stakeholder feedback is addressed, e.g., for improved communication with placement. External Examiner feedback is addressed for enhancement of all academic aspects of the programme. Feedback leads to review, to adjustments, to amendments and initiatives for improvement.

QA 11.2: Annual Programme Review policy and procedure

QA 11.3: Programme modification

QA 11.4: Programmatic Review: -

Each programme of the College is subject to programmatic review (every 5years), to review the continuing validity of the programme in terms of structure, content, currency and quality as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery. Our programmes are informed by regulatory and professional policies e.g., The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs (DCEDIY), The Department of Education and Skills (DES), The Qualifications Advisory Board for Early Learning (QAB) etc., and those related to Initial Teacher Education e.g., The Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI), The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) to ensure compliance and to assure the place of our graduates in the workforce.

External Examiners and Independent Board/Committee Members: -

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

QA 6.10: Nomination and Appointment of External Examiners

QA 10.1: Appointment of Independent Board/Committee Members

9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of Arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	1 (plus one in train)
Awarding Bodies	1
QA Bodies	1

1. Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):	Awarding Body
Name of Body:	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
Programme Titles and Links to Publications	BA in Montessori Education (final students) BA (Hons) in Montessori Education (extended) Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education (final students) B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education (/Sep 2019) B. Ed. Montessori Education (Sep 2019/differential Dec 2021) Montessori Education for Dementia (June 2020) B.A. (Hons) in Psychology (Sep 2020/PSI application in train) Certificate in Special Education (August 2021) Certificate in Discovering Montessori Education (April 2021) Certificate in Pedagogical Leadership in EY (April 2021)
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	Various /ongoing
Next Review Year	Various /ongoing

2. Type of Arrangement	PRSB
Name of Body:	Teaching Council
Programme Titles and Links to Publications	BA (Hons) Montessori Education Restricted recognition through Route 4 for Special Education Teachers
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	Extended in Oct 2019 for remaining cohorts
Next Review Year	n/a

3. Type of Arrangement	QA Body
Name of Body:	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
Programme Titles and Links to Publications	BA in Montessori Education (final students) BA (Hons) in Montessori Education (extended) Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education (final students) B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education (/Sep 2019) B. Ed. Montessori Education (Sep 2019/differential Dec 2021) Montessori Education for Dementia (June 2020) B.A. (Hons) in Psychology (Sep 2020/PSI application in train) Certificate in Special Education (August 2021) Certificate in Discovering Montessori Education (April 2021) Certificate in Pedagogical Leadership in EY (April 2021)
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	Reengagement 2019 here.
Next Review Year	Ongoing

9.2 Collaborative Provision

n/a in this reporting period

9.3 Articulation Agreements

n/a in this reporting period

[St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland SNMCI]

2022

2022

Part B: Internal QA System

Annual Quality Report (SNMCI)
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2020-2021

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

The College's *Contingency Plan 2 August 2020*, outlined plans for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in the academic year 2020-2021. The plan was reviewed and agreed at a meeting of the Academic Board on August 5th 2020 before being submitted to QQI. While preparing for all eventualities SNMCI intended to begin the academic year 2020-2021 by delivering all programmes in blended format. At that point the College had submitted its *'Blended and Online Learning Implementation Plan'* to QQI for consideration (June 23rd) and was scheduled to meet with a panel on August 24th 2020. Blended Learning was approved in September 2020, see below.

COVID 19, conditions notwithstanding the period under review was one of growth and change for SMSI.

- **QA Area: Programmes of Education and Training: Extension of Scope of Programme Disciplines:**

SNMCI **achieved its strategic objective** to diversify its programme base, through research, staff development and the utilisation of expertise in the College. In September 2020 (just outside of the last reporting period) the College's BA (Hons) Psychology Level 8 was validated by QQI. This programme also included a blended delivery option to tie in with the College's application for blended learning status (see below). In preparation for an application to the Psychological Association of Ireland (PSI) (in train), the College accepted a small cohort of students.

QA: Diversification and the validation of the BA (Hons) Psychology required a review of QA to ensure an 'all student' 'all College' focus rather than a specific QA focus (in parts) as written for the College's traditional scope of programmes (education). Following a successful 'reengagement' the previous year the principles underlying QA policies were found to be clear and appropriate and only minor modifications to terminology were required. A review of the 'programme development process also occurred, in relation to the requirements for QQI validation of programmes with a blended option and also for the requirements of external professional regulatory bodies as applicable.

- **QA Area: Teaching and Learning: Extension of Scope of Delivery:**

SNMCI **achieved its strategic objective** to Increase flexibility of delivery (beyond COVID measures), maximising the potential of its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle and utilising current learning technologies to introduce flexible, blended programme provision. Substantial investment was made in terms of infrastructure, resources (human and physical) and systems, to support a submission to QQI for blended learning status. The College had flagged this strategic intention at reengagement/ here.) with the development of initial policies in this area. Findings from a blended 'pilot' event informed the College's *Blended Learning Strategy* and subsequent application to QQI. The College was granted blended learning status in September 2020.

QA: The inclusion of Blended Learning involved a total review of the College's QA for a 'validation event', to factor in any implications arising from blended provision.

- **QA Area: Teaching and Learning: Learning Environments, Purchase of new Building:**

SNMCI **achieved its strategic objective** to provide a new physical learning environment, equal to the support its existing programmes, mindful of the resources required for newly validated and submitted programmes and with the capacity to grow in response to future objectives.

The new SNMCI building is located at 12-13 Cumberland St., Dún Laoghaire. It is within walking distance of the original SMSI building and maintains the College's connection to the Dún Laoghaire area. It is easily accessed by public transport with frequent bus services and the DART. Teaching space is spread across three newly refurbished floors and includes traditional lecture rooms, varied layouts for the facilitation of discussion groups and seminars, open spaces, smaller spaces, private study areas and a dedicated research lab for student research projects. The building also provides for staff office space and staff and student social areas.
Investment in this new building demonstrates SNMCI's commitment to the provision of quality higher education programmes in the long term.

1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

No.	Planned objectives (Previous AQR) Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable	Update on Status Provide brief update on status, whether completed or in progress. If an action was planned in the previous AQR, but not completed, provide reasons/short reflections for the delay/non-completion.
1	**QA Area: Teaching and Learning: Scope of Delivery:** Increase flexibility of delivery (beyond COVID measures) Blended Learning Application to QQI	**Status: Achieved** Granted Blended Learning Status in September 2020.
2	**QA Area: Programmes of Education and Training: diversification** Through research and staff development /broaden scope of provision (major programmes).	**Status: Achieved.** BA (Hons) Psychology Level 8 Validated Sep 2020. PSI application in train
3	**QA Area: Other Parties Involved in Education and Training** Application for Transnational Delivery Approval	**Status: Stalled** Documentation produced. Conversations with other party delayed.
4	**QA Area: Programmes of Education and Training: diversification** B.Ed. Primary Teaching Micro-credentials	**Status: On-going/Submitted** **Status: Achieved and ongoing**
5	**QA Area: Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Research** Foster a climate of research	**Status: Achieved and ongoing** Research Strategy in place Research Committee instituted. (QA/TOR) Recruitment of Research Active staff Participation in HECA Research Committee and student research seminar.
6	**QA Area: Support for Learners/: Programmes of Education and Training:** Enhanced technical support	Status: **Achieved and ongoing** Upgraded Moodle platform Transition in Management System. New openSIS system with improved services for students.
7	**QA Area: Support for Learners** Review of Student Engagement Policy	**Status: Ongoing** Case study. Delay to final outcomes, expected in next academic year

8	**QA Area: Programmes of Education and Training/Access/Admissions** Review of RPL	**Status: Ongoing** Change to policy proposed

1.3 Governance and Management

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

ANNUAL CALENDAR OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES														
Board Committee	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Notes
Board of Trustees		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				
Finance Committee		x		x				x		x				
Academic Board	x			x			x			x		Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.		
Admissions Committee		x					x				x	Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.		
RPL Committee		(x)				(x)						(x)	(x)	As required but generally at these times
Programme Committee	x					(x)				x		(x) mid-year review		
Ethics Committee					x			x				Generally, at the time of student submission. As required for staff		
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board		x				x		x				x	Generally, at these times but may be convened as needed.	

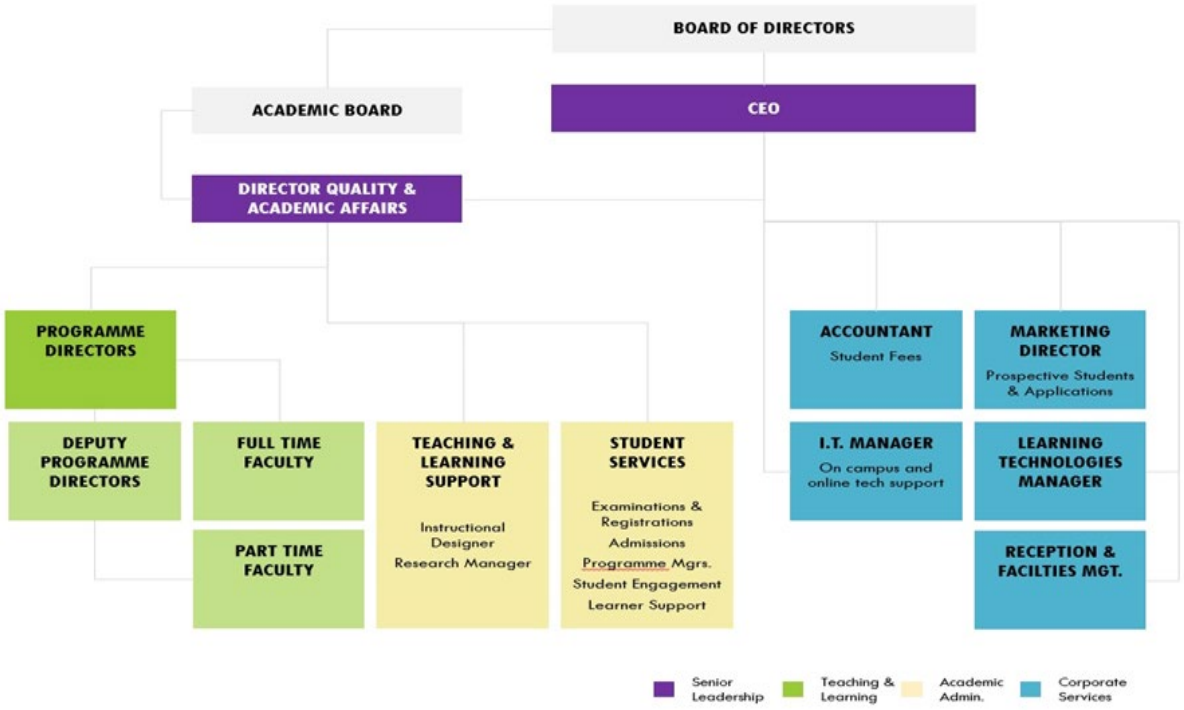
Quality Enhancement Committee			x			x				x		Generally, at these times but may be convened as needed.
Research Committee				x					x			Generally, at these times but may be convened as needed.
Mid-year Review Board						x						Mid-year
Exam Board		x									x	
Disciplinary Committee												As required. Generally, in line with assessment periods
Appeals Committee		(x)					(x)				(x)	As required. Generally, in line with exam periods
Complaints Committee												As required

1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

The structural, management and leadership initiative embedded during reengagement and in the following academic year (2019-2020), to correspond with growth across all areas of the College, remain consistent for this reporting period. (See AQR 2019-2020). In summary these were: -

Structural	
Academic Board	Changed from Academic Committee
Admissions Committee	Instituted
Teaching Learning and Assessment Board	Instituted
Quality Enhancement Committee	Upgraded
Research Committee	Instituted
Roles	**Changes**
Chief Executive	Changed from College Director
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.	Instituted
Student Engagement Officer	Enhanced role
Learner Support Officer	Enhanced role
Instructional Designer	New appointment during this reporting period

Governance and Quality in Academics Management Roles and Responsibilities:


BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ACADEMIC BOARD
CEO
DIRECTOR QUALITY & ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
PROGRAMME DIRECTORS
DEPUTY PROGRAMME DIRECTORS
FULL TIME FACULTY
PART TIME FACULTY
TEACHING & LEARNING SUPPORT
Instructional Designer
Research Manager
STUDENT SERVICES
Examinations & Registrations
Admissions
Programme Mgrs.
Student Engagement
Learner Support
ACCOUNTANT
Student Fees
I.T. MANAGER
On campus and online tech support
MARKETING DIRECTOR
Prospective Students & Applications
LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES MANAGER
RECEPTION & FACILTIES MGT.
Senior Leadership
Teaching & Learning
Academic Admin.
Corporate Services

1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted)	Links to relevant publications
Programme review **(internal)** **Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years (level8) Montessori Education** Annual Programme Report (APR) Further review as programme comes to the end of its validation period.	(Completed for Sep 2019-Oct 2020) Decision made at Academic Board not to revalidate. There is no clear indication from the QAB as to whether Higher Diplomas in EY Education will continue to be recognised for the purpose of higher capitation rates in the EY workforce. **Minutes AB**	
Programme review **(internal)** **BA (Hons) Montessori Education**. (Level 8). Application for extension to coincide with final year of TC Route 4. Annual Programme Report (APR)	Completed and extension approved by QQI Completed for Sep 2019-Oct 2020	
Programme review **(internal)** **Montessori Education for Dementia (level 6)** Annual Programme Report. (APR)	Completed for Sep 2019-Oct 2020	
Programme review **(internal)** **B.Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education** Annual Programme Report (APR) Further review and submission for Differential Validation to offer 2 Award Routes	Completed for Sep 2019-Oct 2020 Submitted July 2021	
Health and Safety	In line with ongoing government initiatives and guidelines related to the pandemic, the	In place Oct 2020

	College's Health and Safety Statement was reviewed and updated. This included a staff survey re working conditions and needs for remote working.	H&S Policy
Admissions and RPL.	Review Change in scope of delivery prompted a review of admissions and RPL.	Ongoing/Amended policy proposed.
Student Engagement	Planned review in conjunction with learners	Begun with some progress. Case study to be completed in next academic year. Delayed at learners' request due to ongoing issues related to COVID 19.

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels[2] involved in IQA

Panels convened in this reporting period, by QQI, who retain panel details re number/composition /outcome etc.

A. Application for Blended Learning Status /virtual/ 4 members

A. Application for extension /BA (Hons) Montessori/desk review
B. Programme Validation /BA(Hons) Psychology/virtual/5 members
C. Programme Validation /Certificate in Special Education/desk review/micro credential/

(i) Expert Review Team/Panel Size and Related Processes

	Total	Academic Schools/ Department	Professional Services/Support Unit	Approval/Review of Linked Provider	Programme Approval	Programme Review	Other
Number of review/ evaluation processes							
of those:							
On-site processes							
Desk reviews							
Virtual processes							
Average panel size for each process type*							

*

[2] QQI acknowledges that the terminology used to describe the groups of individuals that conduct peer review/evaluation varies from institution to institution.

	Total	Gender			Internal	National	International			Institution Type	
Type of Expert/ Role on Panel		*Male*	*Female*	*Other, or unspecified*			*UK, incl. NI*	*Other European*	*Outside of Europe*	*Similar*	*Different*
Chair											
Secretary											
Academic/Discipline Specific											
Student Representative											
QA											
Teaching & Learning											
External Industry /Third Mission											

2.0 IQA System – Enhancement and Impacts

Relevant to this reporting period: -

A) Governance and Management of Quality:

Interim SMSI COVID Emergency Response Team:

- Completion of risk assessments related to COVID 19.
- Planning and preparation to uphold the academic integrity of programmes and to provide positive student experiences in all eventualities related to the next academic year.

B) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development:

As indicated in the last AQR SNMCI has initiated a clear process for staff recruitment based on a needs analysis. The College continues to **recruit research active staff** in line with its research strategy and programme development plan. In tandem with a focused recruitment policy, there is an ongoing commitment to CPD for FT and PT staff. **In-house CPD** for this reporting period included sessions related to Correcting, Moderating, Placement Supervision, Research Supervision, maximising the VLE and a review and update of how blended learning material is presented on Moodle module pages, using a modified version of COACT.

C) Teaching and Learning:

There were two strategic developments during this reporting period; diversification of programme base e.g., to include psychology and extension of scope of delivery to include blended delivery. SNMCI achieved its strategic objective to diversify its programme base, through research, staff development and the utilisation of expertise in the College. In September 2020 (just outside of the last reporting period) the College's *BA (Hons) Psychology* Level 8 was validated by QQI. This programme also included a blended delivery option to tie in with the College's application for blended learning status (see below). In preparation for an application to the Psychological Association of Ireland (PSI) (in train), the College accepted a small cohort of students.

Through further sectoral research, a suite of micro-credentials was also developed from existing 'parent' programmes.

A. Certificate in Special Education: (level 7) Validated 2021.
B. Certificate in Pedagogical Leadership in EY (level 8) (submitted/validated just outside of this reporting period)
C. Certificate in Discovering Montessori Education (level 7) (submitted/validated just outside of this reporting period)

Quality Assurance:

Validation of the BA (Hons) Psychology required a review of QA to ensure an 'all student' 'all College' focus rather than (in parts) a specific QA focus, as written for the College's traditional scope of programmes (education). Following a successful 'reengagement' the previous year the principles underlying QA policies were found to be clear and appropriate and only minor modifications to terminology were required. A review of the 'programme development process also occurred, in relation to the requirements for QQI validation to include blended options and also for the requirements of external professional regulatory bodies as applicable.

Blended Learning Status was granted in Sep 2020 which necessitated a complete review of QA to assess the implications for blended delivery, beyond the emergency COVID measures. The College took a structured approach to this review, developing a mapping template (pre QQI template) to assess all QA policies in light of the three contexts outlined in the *Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning:*

- Organisational Context
- Programme Context including development and assessment, and
- Learner Experience Context.

Following 'reengagement' the previous year the principles underlying QA policies were found to be robust and appropriate and adaptations for many policies were related to the attached 'procedures' which needed amendments related to 'online' protocols. Many of the adaptations had already been underway due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the forced move to online delivery. COVID 'measures' were assessed for **long term applicability**.
Adaptations occurred for the main in the following areas: -

- QA 3.4: Admissions process.
- QA 3.14: Process for Feedback.
- QA 3.11: Learner Induction.
- QA 4.2: Lecturer Induction.
- QA 4.3: Professional Development; staff.
- QA 4.4: Intellectual Property.
- QA 6.4: Assessment Control Procedures
- QA 7.8: Academic Integrity.
- QA 8.1: Principles, Terms and Conditions of Use of the College's Information and Communications Technology.
- QA 8.2: Privacy Policy
- QA 7.1: Student Engagement. Online 'netiquette' and responsibilities.

All reviewed and adapted policies were approved by the Academic Board.

SNMCI approached the introduction of a blended learning (BL) delivery mode through the appointment of staff with appropriate expertise, the professional development of existing staff members, investment in resources and a QA review process.
Investment: a large investment has been made in the integration of the College's VLE Moodle, with the College's new 'openSIS' which supports staff and learners.
Recruitment: Moodle is managed in-house by the **Information Technology Manager (ITM)** SNMCI has also recruited an in-house **Instructional Designer**/ Educational Technologist (ID) whose remit is to work with academic staff to support programme delivery. In acknowledgement that learner success

in a blended environment may depend on prior experiences, personality, personal circumstances etc. and that there exists the likelihood of barriers to participation for some learners e.g., related to resources and wellbeing in the virtual space, SNMCI has expanded the roles of its **Student Engagement Officer (SEO) and Learner Support Officer (LSO).** A new SEO was recruited, not only to support current students but to investigate learners' on-going issues and experiences in BL with a view to future expansion of this area of Student Support. New processes for liaising between the LSO and Programme Directors, instituted during COVID, have been retained and formalised.

Oversight and enhancement of BL: SNMCI's approach to BL is 'content-led' and 'technology enhanced'. In practice, SNMCI places equal importance on in-house teaching and learning. All content developed for BL delivery is reviewed by the *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board* to ensure the academic integrity of each programme is maintained in the online environment. The ID co-chairs the T, L& A Board, serving the interests of blended programmes and blended elements of f2f programmes.

Resources for staff and learners:

A series of staff and student-facing instructional and support resources for BL has been developed.

E) Supports for Learners:

<u>Learner Support Officer:</u>

The work of the Learner Support Office increased during this reporting period, which fell within the second year of the COVID pandemic. Increased communication, processes and procedures between the LSO and Programme Directors ensured that all learners were supported, from a personal perspective but also within the parameters of College policy and procedures, to ensure fairness for all and the academic integrity of programmes.

New processes for liaising between the LSO, Programme Directors and learners, instituted during COVID, have been retained and formalised. The LSO attends induction for all cohorts so that learners can 'put a face to the name' and so that the role of the LSO can be explained. The LSO also provides all learners with an individual opportunity to meet during the initial weeks of each programme; to touch base and/or disclose issues that they feel will/may affect their learning going forward.

During the academic year the LSO meets with learners, who have contacted the LSO directly, or who have been referred by their Programme Director (PD), who need academic support for example, a Study Support Plan (SSP) or a Personal Progression Plan (PPP), due to unforeseen circumstances impacting their progress.

Meetings are also held during first two months of each programme to provide advice to learners around application for Special Considerations for exams and to provide 'follow up' and/or 'study skills' support meetings as appropriate. Learners who have contacted the LSO directly or who have been recommended by their PD due to personal situations, for example, dealing with illness, bereavement, emotional or mental health issues are, in the first instance, given contact details for the College Counsellor. Regular weekly, biweekly or monthly meetings are arranged with these

learners, which continue for the duration of the semester/ academic year. These meetings range from 30-minute discussions to 5-minute check-ins as time goes on; the aim being that even regular short check-ins help the learner feel supported.

Blended Learning Supports:

In acknowledgement that even with a *Safe Return to Campus*, an element of BL is contained in all programmes (f2f and dedicated BL) the College is engaged in on-going enhancement and provision of resources, based on experience and feedback; continually expanding its range of supports from a universal design perspective.

- 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.
- 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.

F) Student Engagement: -

Student engagement was listed for review in this reporting period. A working group was established and began quite strongly. This work is ongoing.

What was involved: -

The nature of this review was to ensure continuous improvement and engagement in relation to student involvement in the College. Feedback from students and their perception of themselves as active in college life, as major stakeholders, plays a vital part in college planning and processes. Dialogue with students is central to the day-to-day running of the College and the past two years have highlighted a need to be proactive in encouraging the student/ College relationship and in identifying clear communication and feedback routes at service, programme and college levels.

Aims of Review: -

- To determine students' perspective on the student/College relationship
- To determine students' perspective on use of the 'virtual space' for student engagement issues
- To determine the fitness for purpose of the current QA 7.1: Student Engagement policy

- To review the Student Charter
- To make amendments as proposed, to QA 7.1 and to the Student Charter

Hoped for Outcomes: -

- Production of Student Resources explaining the nature and importance of student engagement and 'routes' to feedback
- Student and College mutual understanding of what represents Student Engagement
- Student -informed input into policy and processes
- Student- led initiatives for social and community events

Persons Involved:

- Student Engagement Officer (SEO)
- Programme Director
- Programme Director
- Programme Manager
- Learner Support Officer (LSO)
- Lecturer
- Student Representatives
- Focus groups x 2 (following initial meeting)

Data collected: -

- minutes from 'working group meetings';
- minutes focus groups;
- 'word pool' created by students to best describe student engagement;
- survey results;
- 'Idea generation' activity;

Insights to date: -

Some advancement was made on answering the question 'what is Student Engagement'(SE)? Students, especially those who began their studies during COVID, report that they are looking forward to meeting staff and classmates in person; to forming friendships and engaging in social events.

Initial feedback seems to indicate that the COVID 'situation' fore- fronted the need for social and personal aspects of SE. Students were generally positive about 'virtual' measures put in place during

COVID and some of these initiatives are seen as enhancing communication and should be continued following a return to f2f contact, e.g., 'virtual student lounges.

Initial feedback also seems to indicate that learners at SNMCI perceive 'student engagement' as friendships, peer interactions, clubs, societies, social and community activities and strong communications between staff and students. Whereas this perspective has positive aspects and does to some extent share a sense of allegiance and commitment, it is more in line with a 'market model' of student interaction, where learners are seen as consumers who appreciate and respond to what is offered by the College.

The ongoing work of this group should pursue, with students, a more 'developmental' model emphasising the importance of student involvement in governance, management and quality assurance.

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

SNMCI Considers Academic Integrity:

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

Staff members have continued to monitor the work of NAIN e.g., by attendance at National Academic Integrity Week 2020 and additional webinars related to fostering Academic Integrity. The College is also a member of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and its quality enhancement subgroup HAQEF. Professional engagement with these groups and other fora for sharing best practice, allows SNMCI to monitor its strategy and policy related to academic integrity.

Based on the work of NAIN, and in recognition of the challenges of balancing support for students and upholding the academic integrity of programmes, SNMCI's policy was renamed, from Academic Misconduct to **QA 7.8: Academic Integrity.** Although the notion of support for first time instances of plagiarism, and of being focused on the action, rather than labelling the student, was inherent in the existing policy, these are now more explicit and more in line with the mission and values of the College. This policy also focuses on a renewed importance of academic integrity in the 'blended space'.

Associated documents include: -

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

Academic Integrity was considered in the review of assessments in SNMCI's Contingency Plan 2, in particular in relation to Open Bok Examinations. Open Book Examinations were applied to those subjects where application of theory and learner's own analysis and understanding were required, i.e., as opposed to exams that merely required demonstration of 'knowledge-bases'. The College is aware of a link between 'student stress' (especially in COVID times) and the number of incidents of breaches of academic integrity. Learners are continually reminded of supports available and the College policies with regard to deferrals and of personal responsibility with regard to academic integrity and the need to ask for support before being tempted by e.g., the services of 'essay mills' or other. The College has provided additional supports on the Learner Platform e.g.-

- The contact details of an academic writing and referencing tutor who will offer advice and assistance.
- The contact details of the Learner Support Office
- Study Skills Guide
- APA Referencing Guide
- Instructional Video

3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

Guide:

- This section should describe QA and QE activities for the upcoming reporting period and demonstrate how these are aligned to the institution's mission and strategic objectives. The congruency of QA procedures and enhancements with the institution's mission and goals should be evident in this section.

- Where an institutional review process has been completed, or reengagement process has occurred, planned objectives/actions to address review recommendations or reengagement advices may be included here. Alternatively, institutions may include links to where quality improvement plans, implementation plans, or follow-up reports produced post institutional review/reengagement are published on their websites.

Please include *inter alia*:

- a description of plans and preparations undertaken for annual monitoring and reporting;
- the plans and preparations for institutional review.

Please delete guide text before submission.

No.	**Relevant objectives** **Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable**	**Planned actions and indicators** *Note: Include details of unit responsible, and how planned action will address the relevant strategic priority and/or reengagement advice/CINNTE recommendation.* *If the institution is preparing for cyclical review, include how the planned actions will address the relevant review objective(s).*
1	Society Strategic Planning	**Responsibility:** Board of Trustees/CE/DQAA/Academic Board **Planned Action:** Outside consultation sourced to facilitate the development of the next Strategic Plan for the College. **Driver:** Pivotal time for the College and within the timeframe for a strategic and quality review.
2	Application for Transnational Delivery Approval	**Responsibility:** CE/DQAA/Academic Board

		Planned Action: Review of QQI guidelines re Transnational Provision with a view to applying for this facility, in line with our vision and strategic objective of bringing Montessori Education to a wider community. **Driver:** The College has ongoing proposals re the delivery of its Montessori Programmes transnationally where demand is arguably higher than in the Irish sector.
3	Ongoing review and enhancement of Blended capability	**Responsibility:** ID/CE/DQAA/Academic Staff **Planned Action:** Sectoral consultation /feedback/ review of current delivery **Driver:** Need for ongoing monitoring and review of new policy and procedures and assessment of 'success' of blended initiatives.
4	Programme Development	**Responsibility:** CE/DQAA/Programme Directors/Academic Board **Planned Action:** Submit Programme of Primary Education to Teaching Council. Expand provision through sectoral research and benchmarking linked to strategic goals. **Driver:** The primary education programme has been completed (just outside of this reporting period) and is in line with the strategic objective of supporting Montessori influenced primary education programmes. Other programme development links to new strategic goals.
5	Continue to support the SNMCI Research Agenda	**Responsibility:** Research Committee/Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board **Planned Action:** Increase staff publications. Achieve Research objectives related to student publications and hosting of College Research Seminar.

		Driver: 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.[1] 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). [1] 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
6	Continue Student Engagement Initiative	**Responsibility:** SEO/DQAA/Programme Directors/Students **Planned Action:** Build on work of the group to date to revise SE policies based on student input. **Driver:** Embedding the principles of Student Engagement and to move to a more developmental model of SE rather than a market model.

3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

3.2.1 Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

Please provide a composite update on new and continuing objectives arising from previous reviews here.

Please delete guide text before submission.

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
GDPR	MAY 2022	2019
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy	SEP 2021	2019
Blended Strategy	Jan 2022	2020

3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

Provide a link to the published review schedule for any reviews beyond the upcoming reporting period.

4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

Guidance for Drafting Case Studies

QQI recommends that written case studies should:

- Be between half a page and two pages in length;
- Relate to a specific time- and subject-bound issue;
- Avoid long descriptions of processes, but rather focus on the any challenges encountered (and how these were overcome) and impacts (intended and unintended) achieved;
- Include an introduction that sets out a brief overview of contextual matters;
- Include any relevant supporting data and data analysis;
- Include links to any sources cited;
- Include a clear concluding paragraph with overview of key outcomes/learning.

Although case studies will generally be in written form, institutions may also provide links to audio-visual/multimedia case studies. QQI does not prescribe a format for case studies.

Please delete guide text before submission.