QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of QA Procedures for Blended Learning

Part 1   Details of provider

1.1   Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	IICP College
Address:	Killinarden Enterprise Park Tallaght, Dublin 24
Date of Application:	
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of evaluation:	
Date of (virtual) site visit:	5th of August, 2020
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	10th of September, 2020

1.2   Profile of provider

IICP College began delivering training and education in the domains of counselling, psychotherapy and related disciplines in 2003. The College now has more than 600 learners, and offers programmes from Level 6 to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. To date, programmes have been offered on a part-time, face to face basis and facilitated in the College's long term leased premises in Tallaght. A strategic project has been underway within the College for the past two years to develop capacity and understanding of online and blended delivery. The College's application to extend its scope of provision to include blended learning is accompanied by an institutional strategy for blended learning and a policy and procedure suite specific to blended learning.

Notably, the virtual site visit for this evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activation of contingency procedures and pivot to fully online provision IICP experienced during the pandemic is distinct from the planned approach to blended learning and associated procedures under evaluation. However, it was noteworthy that the College's blended learning team had gathered and reviewed learner and lecturer feedback on the experience of online teaching and learning during the pandemic. A thematic analysis of this feedback, and associated insights into the particularities of technology enabled learning in the domains of counselling and psychotherapy, was submitted alongside the application documentation.

Part 2   Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
David Denieffe	Chair	Registrar, Institute of Technology Carlow
Dr. Catherine Peck	QA Expert & Secretary	Independent Education Consultant
Dr. Silvia Gallagher	Blended Learning Expert	Research Fellow, Trinity College Dublin

Part 3   Findings of the Panel

3.1   Summary Findings

The panel would first like to commend IICP on the systematic and planned approach taken to capacity building for the introduction of blended learning. This was reflected in both the detailed documentation submitted and in the dialogue between the panel and the provider's representatives during the virtual site visit. The panel were of the view that IICP leadership had given careful consideration to the College's stage of development and readiness in making the application, and this was clearly reflected in the documented use of the EMBED framework for self-assessment.

The panel offers a further commendation to IICP in relation to its commitment of appropriate resourcing and investment in the necessary infrastructure and staff development to implement blended learning effectively. IICP have demonstrated a strong commitment to a pedagogy first approach, notably through a commitment to engage additional expertise in learning design and develop capacity throughout the organisation in this area of practice. The panel would also like to commend IICP on its carefully considered articulation of approaches to teaching and learning in blended and online modes. These were not limited to generic approaches to curriculum and learning design. Rather, the approaches were presented with specific relevance to the College's education and training provision in the domains of counselling and psychotherapy, and drew upon examples of applications within the College's own programmes.

Finally, the panel would like to note and commend the open and constructive tone of the dialogue with IICP's representatives throughout the evaluation.

At the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel identified a singular Condition of Approval pertaining to one aspect of IICP's documentation, noted in Section 6.2 of this report. The panel offered additional items of Specific Advice for IICP's consideration moving forward, noted in Section 6.3. The panel reconvened to review evidence of implementation of the singular Condition of Approval on the 28th of August, 2020. The panel was of the view that IICP had appropriately addressed this, and notes that IICP had also responded to the panel's items of Specific Advice. The panel were pleased to be able to recommend that QQI approve IICP's draft QA procedures for Blended Learning.

3.2   Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve IICP's draft QA procedures for Blended Learning	X
Refuse approval of IICP's draft QA procedures for blended learning **pending mandatory changes** set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)	
Refuse to approve IICP's draft QA procedures for blended learning	

Part 4   Evaluation of draft QA Procedures for Blended Learning submitted by IICP College Dublin

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of IICP's quality assurance procedures for blended learning against QQI's Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning.

Panel Findings:

The panel's evaluation of IICP's quality assurance procedures for blended learning was closely guided by QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (2018). The guidelines outline expectations pertaining to the Organisational Context, Programme Context and Learner Context.

Organisational Context
Providers applying for approval to deliver programmes in blended learning modes are required to demonstrate a strategic approach to blended learning, to make appropriate investment in infrastructure and identify accountable key roles. IICP submitted the College's blended learning strategic plan for evaluation, which was developed in the context of the institutional strategic plan. The panel was of the view that the alignment demonstrated between these documents was strong, and was well-reflected in discussions with provider representatives during the site visit. IICP outlined appropriate and systematic investments made in developing and expanding the College's infrastructure and staff capacity. This included investment in Moodle 3.8, a Zoom Education Package and other software and applications.

Within this area of QQI's guidelines, providers are also required to have robust and consistent systems across the organisation to manage assessment processes. These must be capable of guarding against cheating, plagiarism and other kinds of unfair advantage. During the site visit, the panel explored how this area of practice is managed at IICP. At the conclusion of this discussion, the panel identified an item of Specific Advice for IICP in relation to this. As IICP's operations in this area are not supported by any technical applications, the panel is of the view that the philosophy and practices underpinning this choice could usefully be documented.

Programme Context
Providers are required to develop processes that enable close collaboration between academic subject specialists and those responsible for online education technology and/or instructional design. Processes also need to be in place to ensure that all online learning materials and media are subject to informed peer comment, and meet clear quality standards. During the site visit, the panel queried how this was planned to occur at IICP, as this was not made explicit within the application documents. This dialogue clarified for the panel that the team at IICP were cognisant of standards for online learning resources, and that the practice of informed peer review of learning materials and resources is well-established at IICP in relation to face to face teaching. While the panel has confidence that there is a positive disposition to the development of clear standards within the College, the panel has identified the documentation of these (to include an explicit requirement for informed peer review) as a Condition of Approval. The panel notes that minimum standards for online learning materials can be presented effectively as a checklist, encompassing key points from QQI's guidelines, for example that they are learner-centred, that there is a focus on interaction, that different media used are integrated and supported, and that digital materials and Open Education Resources (OERs) used are of sufficient quality. Standards will typically also include aspects of QQI's guidelines pertaining to equality of opportunity, including accessibility.

Under this dimension of the guidelines, providers are required to demonstrate that arrangements are in place for the continuing professional development of staff involved in either developing online resources or teaching online. IICP's documentation states that the College gives equal weight to digital infrastructure and to the development of digitally capable staff and students. The College provided the panel with a comprehensive overview of continuing professional development undertaken by staff members directly relevant to the application in the documentation, and discussed this further with the panel during the site visit. The panel was satisfied that IICP is actively engaging with external opportunities to build capacity in this area, for example, DCU's OpenTeach, and is complementing this with internally facilitated activities, ranging from 'how to' technical sessions to ABC curriculum design workshops.

Learner Context

Providers are required to ensure that learners are able to make informed choices about participating in blended learning programmes, and that learners have identified and available contacts (academic, administrative and technical). Moreover, providers must ensure that learning and teaching activities and associated resources provide all learners with equitable, fair and realistic opportunities to achieve intended learning outcomes.

During the virtual site visit, the panel discussed the range of supports offered at IICP in its face to face provision, and how these would transfer to delivery in online and blended modes. A feature of IICP's provision is an extensive range of academic and non-academic supports, including daily student care hours, a 'by your side' suite of tailored resources as well as access to a technical support service. The College has already moved a significant amount of support to the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has gained valuable experience of replicating its face to face student care, academic counselling and other services in the online environment. IICP representatives were responsive to feedback from the panel regarding the developing induction on Moodle, and discussed an intention to develop flow charts for learners to more easily signpost the supports available to learners who may not be on-campus and receive immediate direction to these from administrative staff.

Part 5   Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures for Blended Learning, Conditions and Specific Advice

5.1   Mandatory Changes

There are no Mandatory Changes

5.2   Conditions of Approval

At the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel established one Condition of Approval.

5.2.1 Develop and document online standards for learning materials and resources, and the process for ensuring these are subject to informed peer review.

The panel reconvened to review evidence of implementation of the singular Condition of Approval on the 28th of August, 2020. The panel was of the view that IICP had appropriately addressed this in the online standards and peer review process developed.

5.3   Specific Advice

At the conclusion of the virtual site visit, the panel offered the following items of Specific Advice to IICP for consideration as the provider moves forward with the validation and implementation of programmes delivered in blended modes.

5.3.1   IICP are encouraged to look for opportunities for the integration of Blended Learning suite of QA policies and procedures to the overall organisational QA.

5.3.2   Document the rationale and processes in place to safeguard academic integrity, specifically, how this is ensured in the absence of technical applications for plagiarism detection.

5.3.3   Rename the IT department to more appropriately reflect its function within the organisation, for example, as the Academic Technology Team.

5.3.4   Reconsider the language used within the Blended Learning Strategy, given that accessibility has a specific connotation in the online learning environment.

The panel notes that concurrent to addressing the Condition of Approval noted in Section 5.2, IICP also responded to these items.

Part 6   Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures for Blended Learning of IICP College .

Name: _____

Date: 28th August 2020

Annexe 1: Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

Document	Related to
No further documentation was provided during the virtual site visit.	

Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name	Role/Position
Dr. Marcella Finnerty	College President
Caitriona Kearns	Director of Registry & Operations & Blended Learning Team
Dr. Aine O'Reilly	Senior Manager in Quality Assurance
Mr. David O'Regan	Head of Academic Studies & Blended Learning Lead
Ms. Marisa Finnerty	Legal Counsel
Mr Eddie Darby	Chair of Senior Manager Team
Mr. Roderick Smyth	Financial Controller
Mr. Kevin Smyth	Technology Manager & Blended Learning Team
Ms. Frankie Brown	Lecturer & Blended Learning Team
Ms. Pamela Patchell	Lecturer & Blended Learning Team
Mr. Dermot O'Neill	Lecturer

Appendix: Provider response to the Blended Learning QA Approval Panel Report

QQI APPROVAL OF BLENDED LEARNING POLICIES

Response to Panel Report

August 2020

1. Introduction:

IICP College would like to express its appreciation to the panel for the thoughtful and considered review of the documentation, their insightful questions and commentary and their engagement at both the virtual site visit and via the panel report. This document sets out the IICP College Response to the Condition of Approval and the Specific Advice provided by the panel.

2. Condition of Approval

Condition of Approval: Develop and document online standards for learning materials and resources, and the process for ensuring these are subject to informed peer review.
The College has developed, documented and included within its QA procedures online standards for learning materials and resources. These are now contained in Section 8 of policy 11.2. Section 8.1 sets out the standards. Section 8.2 sets out a checklist and guidelines pertaining to accessibility. This will be supported by Accessibility Guidance for programme lecturers, tutors and designers. The College has revised its QA procedures to ensure that resources, materials and delivery mechanisms are subject to informed peer review.

3. Specific Advice

Specific Advice 1: IICP are encouraged to look for opportunities for the integration of Blended Learning suite of QA policies and procedures to the overall organisational QA.
IICP College welcomes this advice, which we see as fostering our strategic aim of making use of technological advances to contribute to the development of flexible, high quality programmes in counselling and psychotherapy.
Specific Advice 2: Document the rationale and processes in place to safeguard academic integrity, specifically, how this is ensured in the absence of technical applications for plagiarism detection.
The College is currently documenting its rationale and processes in place to safeguard academic integrity in the absence of technical applications for plagiarism detection. It is also undertaking research to consider the range of plagiarism detection applications available, and how they might fit with the College's context. The College is committed to bringing its rationale and findings to the Academic Council for consideration over the next academic year.
Specific Advice 3: Rename the IT department to more appropriately reflect its function within the organisation, for example, as the Academic Technology Team.
The IT department is now renamed "Academic Technology Team."
Specific Advice 4: Reconsider the language used within the Blended Learning Strategy, given that accessibility has a specific connotation in the online learning environment.
The College has amended its Blended Learning Strategy to describe its goal to provide flexible rather than accessible learning opportunities.