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Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of provider

1.1 Applicant Provider

| | |
|--|---|
| Registered Business/Trading Name: | St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland |
| Address: | Block C, Century Court, George's St Upper, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin |
| Date of Application: | 18 th October 2019 |
| Date of resubmission of application: | |
| Date of evaluation: | |
| Date of site visit (if applicable): | 23 rd January 2020 |
| Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee: | 8 th April 2020 |

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1.2 Profile of provider

Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI) was established as a higher education provider in Ireland in 1994. The College was first recognized by the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) and subsequently by the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC). Currently, SNMCI delivers programmes validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Prior to 1994, the Saint Nicholas Montessori Society ran evening courses in association with St Nicholas College London, and associated awards were granted by the London centre.

SNMCI works collaboratively with two other bodies under the umbrella of the Saint Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland. These are the St Nicholas Montessori School and the Saint Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association. According to the provider's application for reengagement, the vision of the Saint Nicholas Montessori Society is:

"to bring excellence in Montessori education to the broader education landscape so that all young people are placed at the heart of their own educational experience and empowered to be independent, confident and creative lifelong learners".

SNMCI delivers Higher Certificate, Higher Diploma and Bachelor programmes from NFQ 6 – 8 in Montessori Education and Early Years Montessori Education across its two locations in Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin and Cork. A diverse student body includes full and part-time learners from around Ireland, and an increasing number of international students. SNMCI is an independent college, and students are fee-paying.

SNMCI was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 1978, and is a registered charity operating on a not-for-profit basis.

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Part 2 Panel Membership

| Name | Role of panel member | Organisation |
|------------------|------------------------|---|
| David Denieffe | Chair | Registrar, IT Carlow |
| Catherine Peck | Secretary | Independent Education Consultant |
| Ruth Ní Bheoláin | Expert Panel Member | QA Officer, Hibernia College |
| Cora O Farrell | Expert Panel Member | Assistant Professor, Dublin City University |
| Conor Mc Guckin | Expert Panel Member | Assistant Professor, Trinity College Dublin |
| Sean Smyth | Learner Representative | Dublin City University |

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

At the outset, the panel commends SNMCI and its representatives on the quality and authenticity of the provider's submission for reengagement. The panel was impressed by the standard of documentation presented, and by the wholehearted engagement of the SNMCI community with the reengagement for QA process demonstrated throughout panel's site visit.

During the site visit, the panel explored various dimensions of the draft QA procedures that had been presented with SNMCI's representatives. Discussions unfolded across a number of meetings in which the panel interacted with members of the leadership team at SNMCI, as well as staff engaged in teaching, administrative and learner support roles. These discussions were wide-ranging, and in many instances the dialogue between the panel and the provider oriented toward potential enhancements to already robust processes. Given the ambitions of SNMCI to grow and diversify, the panel were also keen to ensure the provider's processes were scalable, sustainable and future-proofed.

The panel notes that in preparing for reengagement, SNMCI's management made a significant commitment of resources, including the appointment of a Director of Quality and Academic Affairs in summer 2018. SNMCI had taken an organisation wide, consultative approach to developing and updating its QA system, which resulted in a successful outcome for the provider. At the conclusion of the site visit, the panel were pleased to recommend to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI that SNMCI's draft QA procedures be approved.

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

| | Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Approve Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland draft QA procedures | X |
| Refuse approval of Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland draft QA procedures 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 Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland draft QA procedures | |



Part 4 Evaluation of provider capacity

4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

| | Criteria | Yes/No/ Partially | Comments |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| 4.1.1(a) | Criterion: <i>Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has submitted a Certificate of Incorporation on Change of Name (2016). The provider has a track record of certification and operations in the education sector in Ireland. |
| 4.1.2(a) | Criterion: <i>Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?</i> | Yes | As per the evidence cited in relation to Criterion 4.1.1(a) the provider is a legal entity with a substantial presence in Ireland. |
| 4.1.3(a) | Criterion: <i>Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?</i> | Yes | The provider does not currently have any collaborative provision arrangements in place. SNMCI has provided relevant information pertaining to the relationship between the College and the Saint Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland. |
| 4.1.4(a) | Criterion: <i>Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?</i> | Yes | There is no impact on the scope of access sought by the provider. |
| 4.1.5(a) | Criterion: <i>Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?</i> | Yes | The evidence provided in support of SNMCI's application is indicative of compliance with Irish/EU legislation. |
| 4.1.6(a) | Criterion: <i>Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrolls learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.</i> | Yes | SNMCI was established in 1994, and has a track record of programme delivery and certification in Ireland, formerly with the NCEA and HETAC, and currently with QQI. |

**Findings**

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by SNMCI is wholly consistent with the provider meeting this criteria in full.

4.2 Resource, governance and structural requirements:

| | Criteria | Yes/No/ Partially | Comments |
|----------|--|--------------------------|--|
| 4.2.1(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has submitted evidence of tax clearance and auditor's confirmation letters for the three preceding years. |
| 4.2.2(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has consistent enrolments and there is evidence of ongoing demand for its programmes. |
| 4.2.3(a) | Criterion: <i>Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?</i> | Yes | The panel is satisfied that SNMCI has appropriate structures in place, and these are discussed further in Section 5.1 of this report. |
| 4.2.4(a) | Criterion: <i>Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has a track record of engagement and certification with QQI and its predecessor bodies. A Director of Quality and Academic Affairs is in place at the provider, and this role is supported by appropriate administrative infrastructure. |

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by SNMCI is wholly consistent with the provider meeting this criteria in full.



4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

| | Criteria | Yes/No/ Partially | Comments |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| 4.3.1(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has a track record of delivery of programmes of education and training in Ireland. |
| 4.3.2(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?</i> | Yes | SNMCI employs a core of approximately 20 full-time staff and approximately 40 part-time staff. These staff are appropriately qualified and supported through CPD. |
| 4.3.3(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?</i> | Yes | The panel is satisfied that the provider's track record of certification, and its approach to the re-engagement process reflects its capacity to co-operate with and assist QQI and provide QQI with information as specified in Section 45(3) of the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act. |
| 4.3.4(a) | Criterion: <i>Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?</i> | Yes | SNMCI's current premises have capacity for current provision needs. An investment has been made in new, larger premises in anticipation of the provider's plans to expand. |
| 4.3.5(a) | Criterion: <i>Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?</i> | Yes | The panel is satisfied that the arrangements presented are in line with QQI's criteria. |
| 4.3.6(a) | Criterion: <i>Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?</i> | Yes | The panel is satisfied that the arrangements presented are in line with QQI's criteria. |
| 4.3.7(a) | Criterion: <i>Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?</i> | Yes | SNMCI has PEL agreements in place with the National College of Ireland and the Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences to deliver key actions and |

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| | | | |
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| | | | responses in the event of PEL being triggered by SNMCI. |
|--|--|--|---|

Findings

The panel is of the view that the evidence submitted by SNMCI is wholly consistent with the provider meeting this criteria in full.

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4.4 Overall findings in respect of provider capacity to provide sustainable education and training

The panel is satisfied that SNMCI has met the Criteria in Section 4, which pertain to SNMCI's capacity to provide sustainable education and training. Where required, SNMCI has provided appropriate evidence accompanying its application. It should also be noted that SNMCI is an established provider, with a track record of programme delivery and certification in Ireland.

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Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by <Provider Name>

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) Sections 1-11 of the report follows the structure and referencing of the Core QA Guidelines.

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

QQI requires that academic decision-making is independent of commercial considerations. Following review of the provider's QA documentation and discussions during the site visit, the panel is of the view that SNMCI's structure and associated processes reflect an appropriate separation of corporate and academic considerations. An Academic Board, responsible for a number of subcommittees (for example, the Exam Board and programme committees) reports to SNMCI's Board of Governors. SNMCI's Chief Executive Officer oversees operations, is a member of the Academic Board and interfaces with the Board of Directors on behalf of SNMCI.

A further element of the 2016 Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines is the requirement that a QA system be integrated into the normal activities of a provider, and consistently applied. During meetings at the site visit, the panel was able to trace various processes and developments at SNMCI with the provider's representatives, for example, programme development, the Appeals process and the recent design of a Student Charter. This provided exemplification of how the provider's governance and decision-making processes worked in practice. At the conclusion of these discussions, the panel were generally satisfied that SNMCI had fit-for-purpose structures in place. The panel observed that a strong quality culture was in place at SNMCI, and that it was evident in discussions with the provider's staff that both responsibility for and awareness of quality is well-distributed throughout the organisation.

Under this dimension of QA, QQI also requires that a provider have a system of governance in place that engages sufficient externality and considers risk. Discussions therefore explored the composition of the Board of Directors vis-à-vis externality and balance, and the sustainability of SNMCI's processes independent of key individuals (for example the CEO and the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs). The panel also queried how SNMCI's strategic planning may mitigate risk in the future, for example, with regard to diversification of its programme offerings. The panel was satisfied that there is an awareness of risk and a willingness to interrogate established practice and engage with new ideas at SNMCI. Further, processes are embedded across the organisation, mitigating the risk of overreliance on leadership figures.

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2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

With regard to this dimension of the provider's QA, the panel has already offered a well-deserved commendation in Section 3 of this report. The documentation is clear, comprehensive and appropriately detailed. The documented procedures also reflect a stated aim of SNMCI's representatives, which is to use language and formatting that ensures the processes are readily accessible and transparent to new staff or learners entering the College.

During the site visit, the panel explored the extent to which the development of the QA system had engaged learners and other stakeholders. SNMCI's representatives explained that the development process had required staff to work in teams on designated action areas and had enabled them to make input through consultation. The provider's staff reflected on this during discussions with the panel, and noted that participation in the development process had facilitated a growth in the overall culture of the organisation. Within the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that SNMCI runs for its staff, time was allocated for the communication of new elements of the QA system. This was of particular importance for part-time staff, as due to scheduling some had less direct involvement with the teams working on designated action areas. Learner input and feedback had also been sought, and taken into account. Teaching staff at SNMCI noted that multiple QA resources existed, including the learner and staff handbooks available on Moodle, and stated that the QA system functioned effectively as a support manual to their day to day work and the College's operations.

A central learner support email service is being piloted at SNMCI. This will offer learners and staff an additional support for questions they may have relating to QA processes. While available to all members of the College community, this service is being provided with a view to expanding support for learners, and is intended to augment, rather than replace, the culture of personal, individually managed assistance in place at the College.

The panel notes that SNMCI presented an authentic QA system for reengagement, framed as a work in progress. The provider had self-identified areas where they perceived ongoing vulnerabilities existed, and priorities for ongoing development. Consequently, the panel is of the view that there is a positive disposition toward continual improvement at SNMCI, which will enable the provider to further develop and enhance the comprehensive QA system that has been established.

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3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI presented a comprehensive set of processes encompassing programme proposal, development and validation in chapter 3, Volume 2 of its QA documentation. This chapter also includes the processes pertinent to learner access, transfer and progression, and the terms of reference for the Programme Committee.

During the site visit, the panel explored specific dimensions of SNMCI's QA in relation to learner access. The panel sought to understand how learners requiring special consideration or reasonable accommodations could make requests and disclosures. The panel also queried the requirements for learners in receipt of Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grants to pay a substantial, refundable deposit. These discussions were constructive and enhancement-oriented, and SNMCI representatives indicated their openness to the perspectives offered by the panel.

SNMCI states in its QA documentation that it is committed to ensuring procedures for gathering learner feedback are fair, transparent, confidential and in keeping with best practice. Procedures exist for obtaining both formal and informal module and programme feedback, as well as feedback on associated supports and services. In addition to the use of surveys, learners are invited to provide feedback on programmes informally, and learner representatives will be invited to attend and contribute to Programme Committee meetings. The Programme Committee's terms of reference include monitoring other appropriate indicators, such as learner performance at each stage of a programme.

The panel notes that SNMCI's strategy includes the development of new programmes within associated domains in the coming years. The panel is of the view that the processes in place at the provider are appropriately robust to facilitate a systematic approach to these ambitions.

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4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

In keeping with QQI's requirements, SNMCI has procedures to support fair, effective, transparent and equal recruitment, and these are presented within Volume 2 of the provider's QA documentation. SNMCI have approximately 20 full-time and 40 part-time staff members. Notably, many of the part-time staff have been with the provider for many years, and staff turnover is relatively low. These staff are also typically employed in industry-relevant roles, and viewed as an asset to SNMCI in relation to the practical skills and insights they bring to their teaching, and the currency of perspective they offer to programme review and development processes.

QQI's guidelines also require a provider to offer opportunities for development, based on a systematic approach to the identification of their CPD needs. During the site visit, the panel queried the provider's leadership, and later the provider's staff about the opportunities and support for CPD that existed at SNMCI. Specifically, the panel sought to understand how the process of requesting support worked in practice. Staff outlined the availability of support for further studies or conference attendance, as well as internally facilitated CPD. Provider representatives noted that the review of the QA processes undertaken to prepare for reengagement had led to the formulation of a new policy in relation to staff development. This enabled the College to recognize different forms and levels of CPD, and support these differentially. For example, GDPR training that was closely aligned to the staff member's role would be likely to be supported and fully funded. Further study that may be more tangential to the staff member's role in the organisation, or not as closely aligned to the strategic direction of SNMCI, may be supported in part. Staff at SNMCI also outlined other means of CPD in which they engage, for example, collaborating with colleagues to undertake action research cycles.

The panel queried the degree of transparency surrounding how support for elective CPD, for example conference attendance or further study was supported. SNMCI representatives acknowledged that the current process of decision-making in allocating resources in this respect was not fully transparent, and that this could usefully be amended as the provider pursues its plans to expand. The panel endorses this intention, and also notes that it was evident in discussion that SNMCI staff feel there is a disposition among leadership to support their personal and professional development ambitions wherever possible.

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5 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

QQI's guidelines require providers to enable flexible learning pathways, which acknowledge the diversity of learners and their needs. During the site visit the panel engaged in discussions with SNMCI about various modes of learning, teaching and assessment that were in use, or could potentially be used, in its programmes. SNMCI representatives discussed how assessment practices (and associated learning activities) within the provider's programmes had shifted to reduce the number of essay-based assessments, while maintaining a focus on developing literacy and communication skills appropriate to the professional contexts learners would work in, and interactions that would be expected with parents and colleagues. An awareness of diversity and learning differences has also influenced teaching and learning practices and the presentation of learning materials as SNMCI.

QQI's guidelines under this dimension of QA also demand that providers give consideration to off-campus learning in work placements if these are integrated into a programme. SNMCI has processes within its documented QA pertaining to the allocation of placements. These include suitability criteria and delineate the roles & responsibilities of various parties in relation to a placement. During the site visit, the panel discussed the challenges associated with facilitating placements for learners who wish to undertake a placement outside of South Dublin. Currently, SNMCI has a network of placement sites within a limited geographic radius of the College, and allows 3rd and 4th level learners to self-source placement opportunities. Learners who wish to undertake placements in more remote locations, for example, Galway, are currently required to pay an additional fee to contribute to the cost of the staff member's travel to visit the learner while on work placement. SNMCI representatives acknowledged that future plans to shift toward Blended Learning delivery modes in some programmes are likely to lead to a review of the current model.

Within the dimension of teaching and learning, QQI's guidelines also require procedures to be in place for dealing with complaints and appeals. SNMCI's processes are documented within its QA, and discussions with the panel during the site visit were oriented to potential enhancement in this area. The panel explored the extent to which the appeals process was accessible to learners experiencing difficulties and supported learners to request adjudication on decisions they felt to be unfair. This discussion focused on the possibility of extending the current 5 day period allocated for learners to make an appeal, noting that learners in extenuating circumstances may at times struggle with this requirement. SNMCI representatives discussed the supportive approach taken in practice by the provider, and indicated willingness to reflect further on this area.

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6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

During the site visit, the panel furthered its understanding of practices surrounding assessment at SNMCI through a wide-ranging discussion. This encompassed modes of assessment, feedback practices and the procedures surrounding submission, grading, dealing with borderline marks, moderation and verification. SNMCI representatives stepped the panel through the journey of a piece of assessment from submission to the exam board, enabling insight into how Moodle was used, and the current practice of exporting grade books from Moodle. Not all feedback is provided using Moodle, as assessment tasks also take forms such as presentations and portfolios. Overall rubrics are provided to learners, with specific marking criteria made available for each individual assignment.

The panel notes that SNMCI places emphasis on the provision of feedback to learners, and commends this. CPD for staff in this area has focused on the importance of feedback comments providing justification for marks awarded, and ensuring that this was transparent to both the learner and an external examiner. The panel also queried the impact of feedback practices on staff workloads. Staff confirmed that not all assessments were essay-based, and that some assessment and moderation was live, for example, when two staff members were present and grading concurrently during presentations.

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7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI has a strong culture of learner support, encompassing learners administrative and academic as well as pastoral care needs. During the site visit, the panel gained better insight to practices around IT support, which is routinely provided at the commencement of each year in an induction format, and subsequently available as needed directly at the College on an individual basis. SNMCI has a learning support officer, who also currently meets with learners on an individual basis. This service supports learners requesting reasonable accommodations in the learning environment or assessment tasks. Given the strategic intent of SNMCI to expand and diversify its learner profile, the panel's discussions with the provider focused on how this culture of individualised support would be sustained alongside the College's growth. This discussion encompassed what specific supports may be needed for a growing cohort of international learners, and how these might be additional or distinct from what is currently offered. The profile of current library resources, and potential enhancements needed to support additional programmes was also discussed.

8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI's QA system includes comprehensive information on its information systems and data management. This includes a policy on collecting, storing, processing and retention of data, and a summary of document retention schedules at the provider.

During the site visit, the panel traced the administrative processes of data handling in relation to assessment. These are designed to mitigate risks associated with manual processing of data, and additional refinements are planned pending further integration of IT systems.

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The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI's QA system contains a comprehensive policy for compiling and approving marketing material and public information. This policy reflects a high level of awareness of the provider's obligations under this dimension of QA. Notably, SNMCI submitted sample learner handbooks, sample marketing information and a range of other documents alongside its draft QA manual, and these documents were therefore considered by the panel in the process of evaluation.

10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (incl. Apprenticeships)***Panel Findings:***

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI does not currently engage in any collaborative provision with external partners or second providers. SNMCI's relationship to the Saint Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland and an associated school and teachers' association is transparently and clearly outlined in its documentation.

The QA system contains a policy for the appointment of independent board/committee members at SNMCI as required. The documentation also contains policies nomination and appointment of external examiners, and additionally contains a comprehensive policy outlining the roles and responsibilities of those appointed.

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11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Panel Findings:

The panel was satisfied that SNMCI had addressed QQI's guidelines in relation to this dimension of QA.

SNMCI undertakes monitoring, review and revision of its programmes on a regular basis to ensure they are responsive to learner needs and aligned to developing needs in the workforce. The provider's QA system includes policies on cyclical review and self-evaluation, annual programme review, programme modification and programmatic review/revalidation. Learner feedback is sought and considered at programme level, and in relation to associated support services.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The panel again acknowledges the demonstrated commitment of SNMCI to systematically developing and embedding a quality culture across all levels of the provider's operations. The panel has made a number of commendations to SNMCI in relation to this in Section 3.1 of this report.

The panel has additionally included a number of items of specific advice to SNMCI (Section 6.2). This advice is oriented to the enhancement of the provider's QA system, with a view to sustaining the quality of its operations alongside planned growth and diversification.

It should be noted that while the panel believes the advice may be of benefit to SNMCI, acting upon these items is not mandatory.



Part 6 Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

6.1 Mandatory Changes

There are no proposed mandatory changes.

6.2 Specific Advice

At the conclusion of the site visit, the panel identified several items of specific advice for SNMCI. These items were formulated as an outcome of constructive and enhancement oriented discussions between the panel and the provider at the site visit. The panel is of the view that implementation of this advice will further strengthen aspects of SNMCI's QA system.

- 6.2.1 The panel endorses SNMCI's commitment to investing further in its library resources, including the intent to engage a part-time librarian. Links or collaborations with the professional community of librarians in Ireland will be recommended.
- 6.2.2 The panel recommends SNMCI review the research strategy and professional development for staff in relation to research to ensure that they are consistently aligned to enhancing the learning experience.
- 6.2.3 The panel recommends that the college review the current application and admission process for learners that are supported by SUSI grants, which requires a 500 euro deposit. This process could be adjusted to better reflect the positive and inclusive ethos of the college, and ensure prospective learners are not inadvertently placed under financial pressure or forced into disclosure of personal financial challenges.
- 6.2.4 The panel recommends that SNMCI could usefully clarify in its documented processes certain good practices which are currently employed, but are operationally reliant on shared understandings, organisational culture or informal communications. Examples of this include moderation practices in relation to considering borderline grades and decision-making processes in relation to how resources to support staff development are allocated. Making these processes explicit will strengthen SNMCI's documented QA as it progresses its plans to develop and expand.
- 6.2.5 The panel recommends that SNMCI review the appeals process to ensure that it allows an appropriate period of time for learners to make a formal application to appeal, and to ensure a level of externality is visible.
- 6.2.6 The panel recommends that SNMCI consider the implications of growth and diversification for the current learner support systems, in terms of scalability, formality and ensuring ongoing quality. Within this consider articulating the college's approach to access and inclusion for learners with additional requirements, and ensure this is visible and consistent in the documented QA system.
- 6.2.7 The panel recommends that SNMCI formally close the loop on learner feedback to ensure that learners have an understanding of how the feedback they provide the college is being considered and actioned.

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Part 7 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

| NFQ Level(s) – min and max | Award Class(es) | Discipline areas |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 6 - 8 | Major | Education, Special Education, Early years |



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Part 8 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 of St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland

Name:



DAVID DENIEFFE

Date:

6th February 2020

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

| Document | Related to |
|---|-----------------|
| Copy of Provider's Presentation – Meeting 1 | QA Reengagement |
| Copy of SNMCI Learner Journey Graphic | QA Processes |
| Copy of Plans for New Premises | Resourcing |

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

| Name | Role/Position |
|-----------------------|--|
| Dr Nicholas Breakwell | CEO |
| Ann King | Director of Quality and Academic Affairs |
| Roger Galligan | Chair of Board of Trustees |
| Bernie Owens | Cork Coordinator; Lecturer |
| Audrey Johnston | Learner Support |
| Stephen Corkery | Head of Examinations and Registrations |
| Tara O'Leary | Programme Director |
| Siobhan O'Reilly | Programme Director |
| Sadhbh Bhreathnach | Marketing and Lecturer |
| Mackenzie Young | Admissions and Student Engagement |
| Bernie Gilsean | Programme Administration |
| Pauline Murphy | Programme Administration |

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Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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|---------------------|-----------------|
| Dr Fabiola Neto | Lecturer |
| Irina Pochinkova | Finance Officer |
| Dr Michael Flanagan | Lecturer |
| Edris Azizi | IT |
| Dr Kamila Sobiesiak | Lecturer |
| Dr Siobhan Doyle | Lecturer |

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI): Response to Reengagement Panel Report

In response to the report, SNMCI wish to place on record our thanks to the panel for their collegial, respectful and supportive approach during the site visit on January 23rd 2020.

We appreciate the panel's attention to detail in the review of our submission. All staff members were heartened by the panel's commendations and acknowledgement of our *'ongoing commitment to embedding a quality culture across all levels of our operation'*. The outcome of the reengagement process will also confirm, for learners and all other stakeholders, the College's commitment to the pursuit of its mission *'to bring excellence in Montessori education to the broader education landscape'*.

Specific Advice: The panel offered seven specific advices.

| Point | Response | Target Date |
|--|--|---|
| 6.2.1 The panel endorses SNMCI's commitment to investing further in its library resources, including the intent to engage a part-time librarian. Links or collaborations with the professional community of librarians in Ireland are recommended. | The College anticipates a move to larger premises where there will be increased library space and increased IT/research resources for both staff and learners. Staff recruitment needed for this expansion is already under discussion and will include library personnel. The College will, through its membership of e.g. HECA/National Forum etc reach out through the office of Academic Affairs and seek the support of the professional community of librarians to support this expansion. | New premises Sep 2020 New library staff Sep 2020 Connections to library experts Underway |
| 6.2.2 The panel recommends SNMCI review the research strategy and professional development for staff in relation to research, to ensure they are consistently aligned to enhancing the learning experience. | The newly formed Research Committee has had its inaugural meeting since reengagement, and a work plan is being developed to support staff research. Research activity and Professional Development are seen as interlinked and the DQAA is working on a plan to formalise PD activity and document processes here, for transparency and as a formal record of PD activity in the college. | Underway |

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|--|---|-------------------|
| <p>6.2.3 The panel recommends that the college review the current application and admission process for learners that are supported by SUSI grants, which require a 500 euro deposit. This process could be adjusted to better reflect the positive and inclusive ethos of the college to ensure prospective learners are not inadvertently placed under financial pressure or forced into disclosure of personal financial challenges.</p> | <p>The College accepts this recommendation and the admissions policy, with regard to learners who have applied for SUSI grants, will be amended for the next round of admissions.</p> | <p>Sep 2020</p> |
| | | |
| <p>6.2.4 The panel recommends that SNMCI could usefully clarify, in its documented processes, certain good practices which are currently employed, but are operationally reliant on shared understandings, organisational culture or informal communications. Examples of this include moderation practices in relation to considering borderline grades and decision –making processes in relation to how resources to support staff development are allocated. Making these processes explicit will strengthen SNMCI’s documented QA as it progresses its plans to develop and expand.</p> | <p>The College accepts this recommendation. Re Assessment: CPD sessions on assessment are already underway to discuss College-wide assessment issues. Shared understandings and practices will be clarified here and policies will be updated accordingly. The assessment handbook for lecturing staff will also be updated to reflect clarifications of good practice. Re allocation of Staff Resources: This item is on the agenda for the next Academic Board. It will also feature as a link to research opportunities at a meeting of the Research Committee. Policy QA 4.3 will be updated with a detailed procedure, based on the outcomes of these meetings, to provide transparency and a clearer process for staff pursuing PD.</p> | <p>Feb 2020</p> |
| | | |
| <p>6.2.5 The panel recommends that SNMCI review the appeals process to ensure that it allows an appropriate period of time for learners to make a formal application to appeal, and to ensure that a level of externality is visible.</p> | <p>The College has come to the end of one assessment period and will review the instances of appeals to assess if the time allotted is sufficient for learner appeals. The appeals process is one of the policies on the agenda for the next</p> | <p>April 2020</p> |

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| | meeting of the Quality Enhancement Committee. | |
| 6.2.6 The panel recommends that SNMCI consider the implications of growth and diversification for the current learner support system, in terms of scalability, formality and ensuring ongoing quality. Within this, consider articulating the college's approach to access and inclusion of learners with additional requirements and ensure this is visible and consistent in the documented QA system. | The College accepts this recommendation and the LSO will formulate a plan based on anticipated expansion. | Sep 2020 |
| 6.2.7 The panel recommends that SNMCI formally close the loop on learner feedback to ensure that learners have an understanding of how the feedback they provide the college is being considered and actioned. | It is hoped that continued learner engagement and participation on all Boards and Committees will assist in this process. The appointment of a Student Engagement Officer (SEO) has also proved to be a good conduit between learners and staff. Programme Teams will supply a short statement on how learner feedback has fed into Annual Programme Reports (APR'S), to be issued to learners by the Student Engagement Office. | June 2020 |

Factual Accuracy Feedback Form

Provider: St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland

Application: Reengagement

Date: Feb 17th 2020

| Provider feedback | | Panel use only | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Stated in Report ¹ | Suggested Correction | Correction accepted? <i>Yes, No, Partially</i> | Rationale Where Suggested Correction Partially Accepted or Not Accepted |
| Annex 2 | Add: (In attendance) Dr Kamila Sobiesiak /Lecturer Dr Siobhan Doyle /Lecturer | | |
| Annex 2 | Remove: (Not in attendance) Mary Farrelly Niamh Gaine | | |
| Annex 2 | Spelling error Sadhbh Bhreathnach | | |
| St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland is satisfied with the factual accuracy of the reengagement report and has no corrections to suggest other than the above amendments to the list of staff members. | | | |

Dr Nicholas Breakwell: CEO

Ann King: Director of Quality and Academic Affairs

Date: February 17th 2020

¹ Please identify the relevant text, paragraph and page number