

Respond! College Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures

**Post HETAC Validation (edition) November 2011
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Section 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Overview of Respond! Housing Association

Respond! Housing Association (RHA) was established in Waterford in 1982 as a not for profit housing association. It is a registered charity, number 6629. The following excerpts from the *Respond! Memorandum and Articles of Association (1982)* indicate the core rationale and approach of RHA activities:-

To “**prevent and relieve hardship and distress** amongst those who are homeless and amongst those in need who are living in adverse housing conditions for the benefit of the community as a whole”.

To “**advance education, relieve poverty** and to further other charitable purposes beneficial to the community.”

Achieve this by the provision of **housing in supported communities** and, where possible, **in integrated estates**. **We see the advancement of educational opportunities as a core vehicle in our aim to relieve poverty.**

When considering how RHA might best intervene to relieve hardship and distress in Waterford (its original base) a range of options were explored, including job creation training (in conjunction with FAS) and services for older persons. Following a city-wide survey of older persons, the decision to work through the medium of housing was taken.

RHA has pioneered estate and resident management systems in Ireland and has instituted practices that are now considered standard in social housing provision in this country. RHA has built 5200 homes nationwide with a further 350 under construction and provides homes for traditional and non-traditional families, lone-parents, older persons, homeless people and people with disabilities. It has developed a wide range of expertise in housing and has worked extensively with local authorities in providing education, training and consultancy services to management and staff.

Since inception RHA demonstrated a strong commitment to education and research and in 1992, when embarking on ‘general needs’ or family housing, it became the first voluntary housing association to appoint a full-time Education Officer. From 1992 to date the RHA has initiated and developed Pre- and Post-Tenancy Education and Training programmes in Ireland. These were developed initially for RHA residents to encourage them to participate in decisions that affected them, their families and their communities. Overtime this network was expanded and developed to incorporate all stakeholders across the housing and community sectors, offering estate-level, area-based training and a range of third-level education and development programmes.

The academic education programmes have expanded in recent years and the flagship programme is the Bachelor of Social Studies Degree Honours (BSS) in Housing and Community Studies, Level 8 award. This degree was developed in partnership with

University College Dublin (UCD) to address the increasing need for skilled professionals in the social housing sector and to develop and support a career path in this important sector.

In parallel, the College has recently received centre accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) to deliver a portfolio of their programmes. The CIH is the premier professional organisation for housing in the UK and Northern Ireland. Graduates of the BSS degree receive full professional membership of the Institute subject to completing appropriate certified work experience. This integration provides graduates with an excellent platform to develop their careers within the housing sector.

1.2 Summary of the Key Education Highlights since Formation.

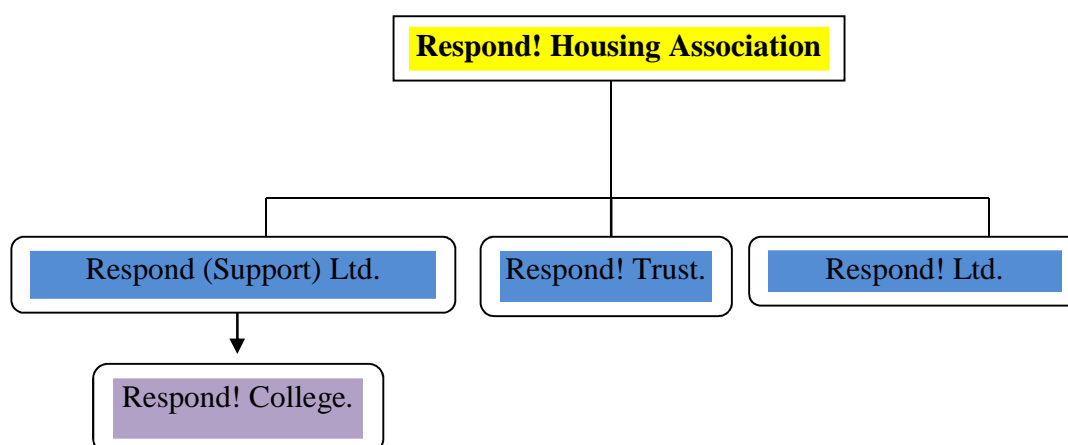
- First voluntary housing association to appoint a full-time Education Officer
- Pioneered Pre- and Post-Tenancy Training on Respond! estates.
- Developed regional seminars for local authority personnel.
- Training for Trainers (Tenant Participation in Estate Management; Housing & Community Development).
- Area Based Strategy (training/joint working with local authority personnel in adjoining counties).
- Established and facilitated Regional and National Networks of Local Authority Personnel in Tenant Participation in Estate Management. The networks are now under the remit of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- Respond! has been working in Kokstad, South Africa for the last five years and provide programmes on community health, skills development and family wellness.
- Approved centre for the Chartered Institute of Housing.
- Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited.
- Provided innovative estate-level education and training in conjunction with residents across the spectrum of ages, from toddler to parent, pre-school, through to adult and third level education.
- Bachelor of Social Studies Degree (Hons.) in Housing and Community Studies (BSS).

1.3 RHA Organisation and Governance

RHA has a four-person board of Directors, three of whom are voluntary, with Father Patrick Cogan, the founder of Respond! and current Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Under the *Respond! Memorandum and Articles of Association*, Patrons and Associate Members meet at least annually for an AGM to approve the business operation, activities and accounts. The Board of Directors normally meet eleven times each year.

The *Respond! Memorandum and Articles of Association* delegates all executive powers to the CEO who exercises these responsibilities through a number of support companies. Respond! (Support) Ltd. provides management and operational services to the RHA. Respond! College is an operating unit of Respond! (Support) Ltd.

Figures 1: Respond! Housing Association-Corporate Structure Overview



1.4 RHA Education Rationale and Overarching Objectives

From the beginning RHA placed a strong emphasis on education as a means for social change and transformation. The rationale for education provision is informed and based on the following:

- Mission statement with an anti-poverty focus.
- Education as a means to break the cycle of poverty.
- Legislative compliance: duties as social landlord, as employer and service provider to ensure defined standards in terms of competency, currency and quality assurance.

- Education as a means of developing critical consciousness, inviting an informed and compassionate understanding and commitment to social justice and inclusion. As an employer, RHA encourages staff to engage in personal and professional development. This seeks to create an environment conducive to human growth and development, for the wellbeing of individuals, families and society as a whole.
- Education endeavours to create a career pathway in housing and community for those in local government, public service, community and voluntary sectors.
- Education also seeks to influence and foster advocacy working for a just and inclusive society, informed by best practice.

RHA, in accordance with its mission statement has provided accredited education and training in partnership with a range of organisations since 1997 which includes:

- University College Dublin (UCD) - Partnership agreement with RHA in the delivery of a Bachelor of Social Studies Degree (Hons.) in Housing and Community Studies (*from 2003 to date*).
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) - recognised institution and are accredited to deliver a Certificate in Housing (*from 1997 to present*).
- National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) - delivery of a Certificate in Community Work in a Changing Ireland (*from 2009 to date*).
- FETAC registered provider of further education and training programmes and currently delivering a Level 5 (Major Award) in Applied Social Studies.
- University of Northumbria- accreditation to deliver a Certificate/Diploma in Housing Studies (*from 1997-2004*).
- Dublin Institute of Technology- accreditation to deliver a Certificate in Housing and Community Studies (*from 1998-2004*).

1.5 RHA- The next phase

In 2009 following a detailed review of existing education provision, the Board of Directors decided to apply to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) to become a registered provider. In support of this application process this Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures document (QAPP) has been developed by the Head of Education (HOE) and the Registrar to conform to the requirements of the various accrediting bodies and best practice in tertiary education. Consultation meetings and focus groups have been held with staff and learners and their opinion and ideas have been incorporated into this document.

As part of this application process it was decided to put in place a formal organisational structure which would facilitate the integration of the Education and Research & Development units. This culminated in the formation of Respond! College which utilises available resources in the most effective and efficient way.

The completion of the QAPP is an opportunity to have one unifying document for the College which establishes best practice and adheres to the requirements of the various accrediting bodies. The *National Strategy for Higher Education* or Hunt Report (2011) calls on the providers of higher education to accommodate a diversity of institutional missions that will be clearly articulated and defined. It is therefore the aim of the College to deliver a range of awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which are awarded by the appropriate body and which reflect the needs and wants of the various groups which the College serves.

HETAC, FETAC and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) as custodian of the National Framework of Qualifications, have a statutory role as a quality assurance agency and participate in policy and practice debates on quality assurance, both at a European and national level. The NQAI is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and operates under their guidelines. The QAPP takes due cognisance of the ENQA guiding principles and describes the key structures, processes, policies, procedures, performance measures and quality assurance mechanisms that facilitate a systematic approach to quality assurance within the College.

The QAPP is the definitive source of all College academic quality policies and procedures which are required to comply with appropriate legislation and the requirements of various accrediting bodies. The principal quality assurance procedures, as detailed in the Quality Assurance Manual, cover the following:

- Academic governance and management.
- Procedures for the design and approval of new programmes, subjects and modules.
- Procedures for on-going monitoring and evaluating programmes.
- Procedures for learner admission.
- Procedures for the assessment of learners
- Procedures for selection, appointment, appraisal and development of staff.
- Premises, equipment and facilities.
- Learning Resource Department and learner services.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

The document is owned and maintained by the Registrar's Office and it is intended to be

- Accessible.
- Easy to read.
- Easy to use.
- A comprehensive source of all regulations required to discharge the academic functions of the College.

While many of the procedures already operate within the College, the compiling of this document ensures that a structured process of evaluation and review is established to copper-fasten the quality assurance procedures and ensure they are effective and correctly

Respond! College Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures document (QAPP)

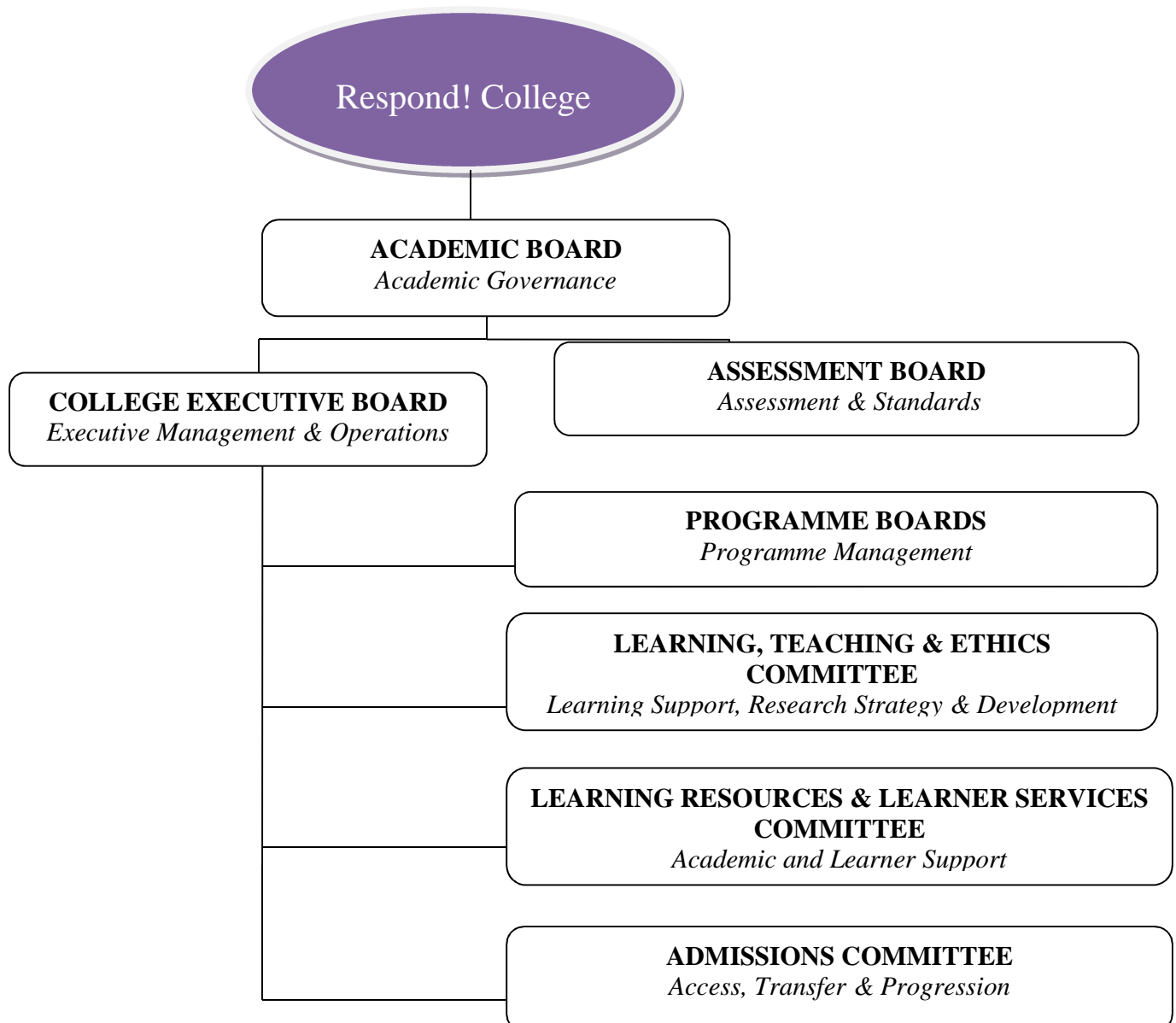
aligned to the needs of the learner and the College. The QAPP is reviewed and updated annually with the current version held on the H:\ drive in the National Education folder.

Section 2: Respond! Academic Management Structure

2.1 Boards and Committees

The Academic Board is the governing body of the academic affairs of the College. Its primary role is to protect and maintain academic standards and procedures in the College. All other boards and committees are subservient to the Academic Board with regard to academic matters. In discharging their responsibilities executive management are supported by a number of boards and committees.

Figure 2: Respond! Academic Structure



2.1.1 The Role of the Academic Board

The Academic Board has academic independence and a specific focus on the protecting academic standards. It makes recommendations to the College Executive Board. The Academic Board holds a minimum of four meetings per year.

Function

The functions of the Academic Board are as follows:

- To approve, protect, nurture and develop the academic quality and standards of all programmes offered by the College.
- Establish and monitor academic policies and academic standards relating to learner admission, teaching, learning, assessment and progression.
- Approve and appoint two external independent board members.
- Approve and appoint the external examiner(s).
- Ensure that the issues raised in internal and external reports are responded to in an appropriate and timely manner.
- Maintaining the quality and standards of staff appointment, staff development and research.
- Approve new programmes and amendments to programmes.
- Oversight of reporting requirements and liaison arrangements with HETAC, UCD, FETAC, NUIM and CIH and other external accrediting bodies, including approval of relevant reports.
- Provision of academic advice and support to the College Executive on all aspects of academic policy, including quality assurance.

The composition of the Academic Board is as follows:

- HOE (Chair)
- Two Independent External Academics
- Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Registrar (Secretary)
- Head of Research and Development
- Programme Leaders (UCD, FETAC, NUIM, CIH etc.)
- Librarian
- Learner representatives

The Chair and the Registrar are, respectively, *ex officio* members of the Academic Board. All other members of Board are chosen for a fixed term of office which has been set at three years.

The Independent External Academics will have a background in higher education and be familiar with the workings of a HETAC validated institution. They will be appointed for a period of three years. The draft schedule of the Academic Board meetings is prepared

by the Chair at the beginning of each year and agreed by the Academic Board. At least four meetings will be held each year, with additional meetings convened as required.

The Academic Board may establish committees or task groups, from time to time to investigate various issues and to prepare reports for the Board's consideration and review. Sub-committee membership is drawn from: members of the Academic Board; members of staff (from every area including academic, technical and administrative staff) who wish to be involved or who can bring special expertise; and outside members (from community, business, industry etc.) who may be co-opted at the discretion of the sub-committee in order to widen the experience and knowledge base.

2.1.2 The Role of the College Executive Board

The role of the College Executive Board is to ensure effective and efficient management of all aspects of academic provision and operations throughout the College. The College Executive Board provides a mechanism for:

- Review and confirmation of academic objectives, plans, priorities and standards.
- Overseeing the budget allocated to the College.
- Review of academic and operational issues, agreeing appropriate responses and ensuring that corrective action is taken in a timely and effective manner.
- Clarification of executive responsibilities for implementation of plans.
- Monitoring academic management and operations throughout the College, including review of operational reports and monitoring operational performance.
- Monitoring academic quality and standards and promoting standards of excellence.
- Monitoring academic developments and implementing special projects.

Membership

The membership of the College Executive Board is as follows:

- HOE (Chair)
- CEO
- Registrar
- Programme Leaders
- Head of Research and Development
- Head of HRM
- Company Treasurer
- Librarian

Function

An important function of the College Executive Board is the establishment of a culture and understanding of roles throughout College. The focus of the College Executive Board is on the areas of academic and operational priority and to ensure:

- Learners are awarded the qualification for which they have registered.
- Quality and standard of programmes including compliance with the standards, processes, procedures and general requirements of accrediting bodies.
- Standards, structures, processes and procedures required to deliver effective coordination of all aspects of academic management and support.
- Staffing and management of programmes, including monitoring staff performance and supporting the operation, retention and development of academic staff.
- Appropriate strategies and standards for coordination of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Commitment to high standards of customer service across all areas of operation.
- High standards of governance and ethics.

The College Executive Board meets monthly, with additional meetings arranged as required to deal with particular issues as they arise.

Agenda

The agenda for the College Executive Board meetings is focused on the areas of academic and operational priority outlined above and incorporates review of plans, priorities, on-going developments, issues, actions and outcomes.

Each member of the College Executive Board is required to present update reports at each meeting. These reports include updates on current plans, progress with implementation, a summary of academic and operational issues, and the actions being taken to address them.

In reviewing progress reports, the main concerns of the College Executive Board are to:

- Ensure that there is a consistent focus on objectives, plans and standards throughout the College.
- Ensure that issues are identified and that actions are being taken to address them.
- Provide support for individuals in discharging their responsibilities.

Appropriate arrangements are put in place as required for submission and review of interim and progress reports from committees dealing with matters relevant to the role of the College Executive Board.

The minutes of each meeting outline the action points agreed and identify responsibility for implementation.

Details on the Programme Boards and the Assessment Boards are given in Section 4.6 and Section 6.8 respectively.

2.2 General Committees

The functions of the general committees are focused and are evident in their titles. They share similar generic goals of proposing policies and procedures to deal with issues under their particular remit. The types of sub-committees change as developmental work reaches a conclusion and the Academic Board has the power to form new committees dedicated to new issues as the need arises. The following is the listing of sub-committees which are currently operating:

- Admissions Committee (See Section 5.5)
- Learning and Teaching and Ethics Committee (See Section 7.5)
- Learning Resources and Learner Services Committee (See Section 9.2)

All boards/committees have prescribed membership, meeting schedules, and clear terms of reference as to their responsibilities and authority. It is the objective of the College that the interrelationships between all boards, committees, and personnel should be unambiguous. An annual review of committees is conducted by the Academic Board.

Minutes are prepared for all the board/committee meetings in accordance with agreed procedures and these minutes, which are retained by the board/committee secretary, are available for inspection by any member. The minutes of meetings record attendance, decisions made by the meeting, and follow up actions required. The master copy of complete meeting documentation is held in the Registrar's office.

It is College policy that a member of a committee shall not disclose to any person, not a member of that committee, the nature of the discussion of the meeting. Communication of the decisions taken at the meeting is permissible. However, the content of the associated discussion at the meeting should remain confidential.

The schedules of meetings of the Academic Board and its sub-committees/boards are agreed at the beginning of the academic year and are available with the academic calendar on the server (H:/). Some dates are subject to change and the calendar is updated accordingly. The dates of the Assessment Boards are set early in the calendar year for the relevant academic year.

2.3 Roles and Responsibilities of College Management

This section outlines the roles of the members of the College as applied to the management of taught programmes and service provision.

2.3.1 Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has ultimate responsibility for the development and management of all accredited partnerships across the College. The CEO is a member of the Academic Board and the College Executive Board.

2.3.2 Head of Education

The Head of Education (HOE) in consultation with the CEO is responsible for the character of education provision at the College and the formulation of strategy in relation to education.

The Head of Education

- Is an employee of Respond!
- Is a member of the Academic Board.
- Reports to the CEO and is responsible for the effective and efficient management of all academic programmes.
- Is responsible for the on-going development of learning and teaching.
- Is responsible for staff planning, deployment, management, review and development.
- Is responsible for strategic planning.
- Promotes and facilitates discussion and consultation between representatives of the College and other educational and research bodies and the local authorities in Ireland.
- Promotes international relationships with similar organisations in other countries.

2.3.3 Registrar

The Registrar has responsibility for academic affairs within the College, including responsibility for academic admissions, administration, academic regulations, academic quality and standards, academic records and liaison with accrediting bodies, which includes responsibility for coordinating academic relationships, validation events, programmatic reviews, institutional reviews and reporting arrangements.

The Registrar

- Is an employee of Respond!
- Is a member of the Academic Board.
- Reports to the HOE and is responsible for the effective and efficient management of the registrar's office.
- Is responsible for:
 - Creation, retention and maintenance of data relating to the registration and examination performance of learners, programme validation and content.
 - The admission, registration and deregistration of learners.
 - The management of examinations.
 - The promotion of quality assurance and liaison with accreditation bodies.
 - The provision of learner services: counselling, access, career guidance, health, learning and financial supports, sports and culture.
 - Supporting the operations of the Academic Board.

The Registrar is the Secretary of the Academic Board and is *ex officio* a member of any sub-committee formed by Academic Board.

2.3.4 Programme Leader

- Is an employee of Respond!
- Is a member of the Academic Board.
- Reports to the HOE and is responsible for the management of each programme.
- Is responsible for the for:
 - Day to day management including overall co-ordination of the team.
 - Liaising with programme administration on all aspects of programme organisation including timetabling, attendance, programme work, assessments and feedback questionnaires.
 - Communication with participants on programme related matters including lecture organisation and assignments, examinations and issues concerning progress and discipline.
 - Regular meetings with learner representative(s).
 - Counselling individual learners on programme related matters.
 - Reporting on programme progress to the Programme Board.

2.3.5 Company Treasurer/Head of IT

The Company Treasurer/Head of IT is responsible for:

- Financial management of RHA and the College.
- Health and safety requirements and compliance.
- IT services – internal networks, internet and world wide web connections.
- Provision of academic and administrative computing software, hardware and support services.

2.3.6 Human Resources Manager

The Human Resources Manager is responsible for:

- Management of staff recruitment, progression and retirement.
- Maintenance of staff records.
- The management and coordination of staff development and training.
- The monitoring of staff salary entitlements.
- Ensuring compliance with legislative and statutory requirements in relation to employment.
- The management and coordination of industrial relations.

2.3.7 Head of Research and Development

The Head of Research and Development reports to the HOE, is a member of the Academic Board and is responsible for:

- The overall management and promotion of research and development.
- The carrying out of research projects identified by the Board of Directors.
- Provision of research support and management to the College.
- The promotion of links with the wider community and with business and other enterprises.
- The development of research partnerships, nationally and internationally.
- The administration of research projects.
- The promotion and support of research and project funding.
- Identifying, in conjunction with other departments, the educational and training needs of staff, the industry, business and community.

2.3.8 Librarian

The Librarian reports to the Registrar and is a member of the Academic Board.

The Librarian is responsible for the provision of the learning resource services for learners and staff, including:

- The development of appropriate library and information resources.
- Ensuring the optimum availability of the library services.
- Liaising with staff in identifying materials to support learning and research activities.
- The promotion of library services and the Learning Resource Department.

2.3.9 Academic Administrator

The Academic Administrator reports to the Registrar and is responsible for the management of operations in the Registrar's Office including:

- Learner admissions and registration.
- Examinations.
- Learner records.
- Graduation ceremonies.
- Overall management of learner services.
- Contributing to the development and implementation of appropriate management information systems.

2.3.10 General Administration

The general administrator reports to the HOE and is responsible for supporting and coordinating the general administration of the College. Duties include:

- Secretary to the HOE.
- Administrative support to the Programme Leaders.
- General administration and support of recruitment campaigns.

2.4 Committees to be established

The College intends to establish two general committees to achieve specific goals.

2.4.1 Health, Safety and Welfare Committee

The Health, Safety and Welfare Committee will be established in compliance with the *Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1989*. Its key objective will be to promote health and safety issues within the College. The Committee will include the members of the NMT and staff representatives. The committee will provide an opportunity for staff and management to raise and consider relevant issues in a consultative forum. The Committee will meet once per quarter.

2.4.2 Learner Assistance Fund Committee/Bursary

This committee will oversee the allocation of bursaries and grants, where available, to learners in need of assistance from the learner bursary assistance fund. The committee will be comprised of the Company Treasurer, Programme Leaders, learner representatives, and one member of the Registrar's office staff. The key objective is to oversee the administration and distribution of any Learner Bursary Assistance Fund.

Section 3: Procedures for Design and Approval of New Programmes

3.1 Introduction

The portfolio of academic and professional programmes is continuously developing and expanding to include new programme offerings. New programmes are based on learner needs, feedback from learners and staff and the needs of the community. The College strives to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of its programmes and recognises the need to design and deliver programmes in an efficient and effective manner which reflects best education practice. There is an extensive process of consultation and research involved in developing a new programme from inception, through validation, to realisation and delivery. The various stages of the process involve individuals, groups and committees both in the College and externally.

Changes to modules, in terms of content and level on a particular programme are dealt with at the appropriate programme board. If substantial changes are proposed to a number of modules (25% of modules on a programme at a particular level), the Programme Leader will document these proposed changes and submit it to the Academic Board for discussion and approval.

The application of academic quality principles requires that the College satisfies itself and its accrediting bodies that a learner may attain knowledge, skill and/or competence for the purpose of an award, which is consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications and the UK Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, as appropriate, and fulfils the requirements of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in relation to access, transfer and progression. The application of these principles should ensure that programmes offered have academic and intellectual currency and standards, appropriate to the level of the award, and comparable to similar awards offered anywhere in the world.

The timetable for completion of the development and approval process for new programmes is normally one academic year. In general it should be done in good time to enable scheduling of all necessary meetings to facilitate evaluation and approval (internally and externally), as appropriate, in advance of the proposed programme commencement date.

3.2 Purpose of Procedures

The purpose of these procedures and associated guidelines is to ensure that new programmes are:

- Compliant with the Quality Assurance policies and procedures.
- Link with the mission, policies and strategic plans of RHA and the College.
- Fulfil an identifiable need at the local, wider community or national government.

- Of appropriate academic breadth and depth with learning outcomes that are consistent with the levels of knowledge skill and competence as prescribed by the NFQ.
- Flexible and provide routes which maximise opportunities for learners to avail of access, transfer and progression routes.
- Developed via a process that is consistent and identifies the academic, physical and human resources required to deliver the programme.

3.3 Procedures for the Validation of New Programmes

Typically, the stages in the development procedure for a new programme are as follows:

Stage 1: Programme Proposal Development

In the creation of a new Programme a lead time of at least one year is necessary from the initiating of a new programme to the academic approval by External Accrediting bodies (e.g. HETAC, FETAC, UCD, NUI, CIH) of that programme. This period should enable the Academic Board, the HOE, Programme Leaders, and the Registrar to successfully develop and process a new programme proposal. In the case of undergraduate programmes, it should provide appropriate time to liaise with the CAO (if applicable) and prepare promotional material for a new programme.

The preliminary proposal for a new programme may come from the Board of Directors, staff, learners or the wider community. Initial approval for the new programme is sought by the HOE via the College Executive Board.

The new programme proposal document will be prepared by the HOE in consultation with a designated Programme Leader and their team, and will seek to provide answers to the following questions:

- Does the proposed programme accord with the mission statement and ethos of RHA and the College?
- Will it have a positive impact on potential learners and the wider community?
- Does the proposal make a strong case that there is an identified need for the programme? Is this backed up by evidence of structured consultation in the marketplace, community sector, with learners and national government?
- Will the programme meet the identified need, in terms of level of qualification, curriculum, learning experience and throughput? What is the likely employment potential for graduates?
- Is the programme structure logical and well designed, in terms of programme schedules, syllabi, teaching and learning strategies, and assessment methodologies?
- Are the entry mechanisms, modes of study and progression mechanisms clear and appropriate for the programme?
- At what level on the NFQ should the programme be pitched and who is the most appropriate awarding authority?

- Are the entry mechanisms designed to facilitate access, transfer and progression?
- What are the proposed programme management arrangements and quality assurance arrangements? Will they ensure the proper management and operation of the programme?
- Is there a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to support the expected number of learners to be recruited?
- Is the programme proposal documentation suitable to proceed to external evaluation?

In developing the new programme proposal, a number of internal and external information sources are drawn on including:

- Previous institutional and programmatic reviews undertaken in the College.
- Module review information.
- Programme annual reports/annual college and programme review documents/programme self-assessment and action document.
- Consultation and feedback from learners on, and/or recent graduates from, similar/comparable programmes with RHA or from candidates on feeder programmes.
- Market research already conducted.
- Learner progression considerations.
- Identified additional research to be undertaken.
- Information on similar programmes offered in other institutions.
- Community/industry/employer requirements and appropriate consultation.
- External Examiners reports and consultation.
- Professional bodies requirements and correspondence.

Stage 2: Confirmation of Organisational Support

The new programme proposal document is completed by the HOE in consultation with the programme team and submitted to the College Executive Board for formal internal review and approval. The document is refined and any issues arising from these discussions are documented and the proposal is amended as required.

Following College Executive Board approval, the finalised proposal is submitted to the Academic Board for formal academic review and approval. The completed new programme proposal document and supporting materials are submitted to the Registrar's office for dispatch to the relevant accrediting body.

Stage 3: External Review of Programme

The procedure for approval of a new programme by way of the visit of an External Validation Panel is laid down by the relevant awarding body. An External Validation Panel is normally composed of four or five members including representatives from Industry, Academia and the External Accrediting Body.

Preparation for External Validation Event

The External Validation Event, which includes the visit by the External Validation Panel to the College is organised by the Registrar's office, in co-operation with the HOE. The Registrar's Office agrees a date and location for the External Validation Event with the External Accrediting Body and notifies the appropriate staff.

External Validation Event

The designated Programme Leader is chair of the new programme development team and undertakes the following duties in preparation for the External Validation Event:

- Ensures that copies of the new programme proposal document are distributed to the team members in adequate time prior to the validation event.
- Ensures that members of the Programme Committee have copies of all briefing documents (market research, industry survey etc.)
- Arrange internal mock validation event.
- Manages and organises meetings of the new programme team as appropriate.

At the conclusion of the validation event, the chair of the External Validation Panel makes an oral presentation of the findings and conclusion of the panel to the HOE, the Registrar, and the Programme Leader.

The External Validation Panel prepares a written report that is sent to the Registrar. This report is forwarded by the Registrar to the Programme Leader for response by the Programme Team.

If the report stipulates conditions and/or recommendations the Programme Leader arranges for the Programme Team to be reconvened. Any amendments or changes are forwarded to the College Executive Board for approval and then to the Academic Board for final sign off. The response or revised documentation is forwarded to the Awarding Body via the Registrar.

A copy of the signed Certificate of Programme Approval is held by the Registrar. If the programme is to be offered, the Registrar shall ensure that required details about the new programme are included in the relevant prospectus, public advertisements and other publications.

The new programme details are updated on both the RHA and College website and intranet. The title, duration, mode, award, curriculum and assessment structure are cross checked against the approved programme schedule.

Section 4: Procedures for On-going Monitoring and Periodic Appraisal of Programmes

4.1 Introduction

The College ensures that systematic processes exist and are managed in order to collect and analyse information supportive of the continuous improvement of programmes. The formal monitoring and periodic review and evaluation of programmes at regular intervals is an important means of ensuring that quality improvements are made to programmes and that programmes remain relevant to learner needs, including academic and labour market needs and changes in the social environment. There is on-going monitoring of programmes and a full formal evaluation of programmes is undertaken at least once every five years. This is otherwise referred to as the *Programmatic Review*. It will normally be carried out on an individual programme or on a group of related programmes.

The *Programmatic Review* examines the continuing validity of a programme's aims and the associated learning outcomes. It centres on a review of the development of programmes over the previous five years, with particular regard to the achievement and improvement of educational quality. A revised programme document is developed detailing revised aims and learning outcomes, revised programme schedules and a revised assessment plan. *Programmatic Review* is not limited to purely academic activities of the College but also encompasses an evaluation of the other activities, within the wider sphere of education, business and the wider community.

To date, *Programmatic Reviews* have been carried out on an annual basis and included in the end of year reports which have been discussed at assessment boards and seen by External Examiners.

4.2 Purpose of the Procedures

The purpose of these procedures is to make certain that the College operates monitoring and evaluation procedures of individual or group related programmes that:

- Ensure quality improvements are made to programmes.
- Make sure programmes remain relevant to learner needs, including academic and labour market needs.
- Correlate both internal and external information to ensure programmes retain their academic currency and currency within the sector.
- Are conducted in accordance with established international best practice.
- Monitor learner achievement in relation to stated learning outcomes of the programmes and to gauge the effectiveness of programme assessment mechanisms.

- Create a quality culture within the College at both staff and learner level such that stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to programme quality.
- Takes cognisance of the National Framework of Qualifications and implements the policies of the NQAI in relation to access, transfer and progression.

The experience gained from delivering the programme will be evaluated in the context of the programme's aims and the nature of a given learner cohort. This examination of the programmes should focus on the performance in and links between the programme modules, the demands on the learner, on staff, on resources, and the coherence of the programme delivered. Information obtained and gathered through the monitoring activities may ultimately result in modifications or improvements to delivery and assessment of programme modules during the academic period. In some instances, the information is used to enhance the academic quality of the programme and the learner experience in subsequent years, within the boundaries of the formal programme structure.

The procedures and guidelines outlined below are intended to help define the roles and responsibilities of both learners and staff on all programmes. Additionally, the intention is to help place these roles and responsibilities within the context of the wider quality assurance framework.

4.3 Monitoring

The monitoring of programmes involves the on-going systematic examination of programme delivery. Responsibility for the implementation of the on-going review of programmes rests primarily with the designated Programme Leader and issues are discussed at the Programme Board meetings. Each Programme Leader is required to present an *Annual Programme Board report* to the Academic Board which documents the progress and changes which have occurred in the programme. The Academic Board will in turn make comments and observations on this document and indicate any further improvements to be considered for the following year.

To support the efficient monitoring of programmes, the following information is gathered for each programme and is held by the Registrar:

- Copy of the original approval certificate/contract.
- Submission document.
- Details of Programme Board meetings/reports/responses.
- History of changes to programmes made following agreement of the Programme Board.
- Minutes of meetings held – Learner Representative meetings etc.
- Learner Surveys and Questionnaires-Summary reports.
- Qualitative feedback from learners.
- External Examiners reports.

4.4 Programme Boards

Each programme has a designated Programme Board. It is the main forum for annual routine programme monitoring and review within the College. Each Programme Board is responsible for conduct and development of the programmes under its remit. The Board is chaired by the Programme Leader and will meet at least four times per year to consider issues relating to the management, operation and development of the programme. Learner issues will be a standing item on the agenda. All teaching staff on the programme are eligible to attend as are the elected learner representative(s) and External Examiners.

The Programme Board has responsibility for:

- Development of aims, objectives and learning outcomes in line with programme specifications.
- Development and review of programmes in terms of content and delivery.
- Development and review of assessment methods.
- Development and review of learning and teaching.
- Review of learner progress, ensuring mechanisms are in place for informed learner progression.

The Programme Board also receive the minutes of the:

- Learner Representatives Meetings.
- Teaching and Learning and Ethics Committee.
- Learning Resources and Learning Services Committee.

The Programme Leader of each Board is responsible for circulating the agenda, recording the minutes and feeding back to the general learner population on decision points made at the Programme Board. The complete minutes and proposed actions are presented at the College Executive Board meeting. The chair provides an overview of the issues during their report to the College Executive Board for consideration. These are subsequently reported, via relevant minutes/reports, to the Academic Board.

The Programme Board will complete and present to the Academic Board an *Annual Programme Board Report* for each programme. An *Annual Programme Board Report* typically deals with the following:

- Analysis of performance/retention/progression.
- Feedback on programme from staff.
- Feedback on programme from learners.
- External Examiners reports.
- Training/resources.
- Programme modifications.
- Quality improvement suggestions.

Minor changes made to the curriculum annually will be agreed by the Programme Board and signed off by the Chair. These changes will be noted in the report. To introduce significant changes (>25% of curriculum) to a programme will require a new programme validation. The main focus of a Programme Board is to monitor and improve the on-going delivery of the programme(s) for which it is responsible.

4.4.1 Membership of Programme Board

- Programme Leader (Chair).
- Registrar or nominee.
- Teaching faculty on the programme.
- Learner Representatives.
- Representative from the Learning Resources and Student Services Committee.
- Representative from the Teaching and Learning Committee.
- Learner Services Representative*
- IT Representative*
- PR/ Marketing*

* by invitation of the chair, as required by the agenda.

4.5 Module/Programme Appraisal by Learners

It is the policy of the College that learners be given the opportunity to appraise the programmes anonymously. Programme appraisal by learners is obtained from the learner feedback questionnaires and carried out by the education administrator at least once per module delivered.

Questionnaires normally cover the following areas:

- General progress of the programme/module.
- Effectiveness of teaching and learning (including notes, reading materials, etc.)
- Learner understanding of material delivered and assessed.
- Adequacy of learner support resources.
- Learner attendance and participation.

The aim of these questionnaires is to assess learner satisfaction with individual modules and with the overall programme. Specific issues emerging from learner surveys are given serious attention by the Programme Leader, and the larger issues are communicated to the College Executive Board. Every effort is made to address and rectify matters giving cause for learner concern or grievance.

Learner feedback questionnaires are processed as follows:

- Education administrator analyses the questionnaires and provides both qualitative and quantitative summary reports to the Programme Leaders.

- Where necessary to resolve the issue, the Programme Leaders meet with the learners involved to attempt to resolve any problem identified through the interview process.
- Subsequent feedback is provided to learners and staff member(s) concerned, as necessary, to demonstrate and confirm the close-out of actions.
- An overview of actions addressing identified issues is provided to the College Executive Board.
- Where module specific issues are identified, lecturers are requested by the Programme Leaders to provide a formal written response, indicating the intended short term and long term actions required to address the issues.
- Formal reports are produced by each Programme Leader to document issues raised and actions taken to remedy the issues in the short and long term. These formal reports form part of the report to the College Executive Board.

4.5.1 Individual Meetings with Learners

The HOE, Programme Leader and/or Lecturer, as appropriate, are available for one-to-one discussions with learners, by appointment. This is an on-going evaluation method and support mechanism held in either a formal or informal capacity. The meetings normally cover issues relevant to the particular learner e.g. attendance, examination/assessment progress and results, personal and/or academic problems, programme work, programme workload, attendance etc. These meetings are flexible to the needs/requirements of the learner.

The meeting are requested either by:

- HOE, Programme Leader and/or Lecturer, to discuss the individuals performance with respect to the programme, or
- Individual learner who may feel that none of the other channels of communication available are suited to their individual needs at that particular time.

The discussions at the meeting are briefly noted by the staff member in a way that maintains the personal confidentiality of the learner. Minutes/brief overview on the discussion of programme quality specific issues are included on the agenda of the next Programme Board meeting, allowing for the sensitivities involved and maintaining confidentiality where necessary and as appropriate.

4.5.2 The Learner Representative System

A learner representative is a learner enrolled on a programme chosen to assist and enhance communication between staff and learners in relation to programme matters and academic support. At the beginning of each academic year, two learner representatives for each level of each programme are elected by the learner members under the supervision of the relevant Programme Leader.

Consultation with current learner representatives is a more formal method of obtaining

learner feedback and is a vital source of information on academic matters and academic support systems.

Learner Representatives are members of all committees at all levels. They act as the voice of the learners, ensuring that the College takes into account the needs of learners in every decision that is made. Learner Representatives liaise with staff to address issues and optimise positive outcomes.

To facilitate feedback on issues of importance to the learner, a formal meeting process has been established. Each group of programmes have monthly learner representative meetings. The role of the learner representative meetings is to facilitate communication between learners and staff and to facilitate learner participation in periodic reviews of the provision of academic programmes. It is also a mechanism in improving quality and to provide a forum in which learners may raise any concerns they may have concerning academic or related matters.

Communication within a learner representative meeting is a two-way process as programme leaders can provide feedback on issues raised and addressed at previous meetings. A short report on current College activities is normally delivered, including new programmes and programmatic reviews, and how learners can and have engaged with these events. This facilitates learner input to policy decisions.

4.6 External Examiners' Report

External Examiners are appointed by the College in accordance with the procedures outlined in the External Examinations Policy, which can be found in the *Assessment and Standards document*. The procedures for appointing External Examiners on externally accredited programmes, such as with UCD, are determined by the external body.

External Examiners are required to submit a report by the end of October each year summarising the previous academic year's assessment cycle. An External Examiner's report is detailed in nature and provides important information for consideration at both Programme Board and Academic Board level.

The College requires that the issues raised by External Examiners be addressed in the first instance by the Programme Leader. The Programme Leader in consultation with appropriate staff formulate a response and propose action. Existing and proposed measures to redress any deficiencies raised in an external examiner's report will be documented in detail.

4.7 Graduate Destination Survey

The Education Administrator distributes a questionnaire to all learners receiving awards on graduation day. The questionnaire seeks to ascertain information on current employment and potential future employment. The graduates who were in employment prior to undertaking the particular qualification are asked to give details of any career

progression directly arising from successful completion of the programme. The survey also asks graduates who are pursuing further study to name the Institution, proposed programme of study etc. Where appropriate, learners outline why they did not continue their education at the College.

This information is analysed and used to update the list of employers and informs graduates' employment opportunities. New entrants to the employer list are contacted to see if they would be interested in making presentations to learners regarding job opportunities. The analysed results relating to employment, career progression and further study are fed back to the programme boards through the Programme Leaders. Important matters for the continued development of the programme arising out of the graduate destination survey will be considered by the Programme Leader and programme boards and be included in the programme board minutes and annual report.

There is an active BSS alumni which was launched in 2008 and which meets bi-annually. To date these meetings have included guest speakers from the local authority and social housing sectors and the event provides past graduates with an opportunity to hear about development in the sector and to network with former learner mates.

Section 5 Procedures for Learner Admissions

5.1 Introduction

The College welcomes all applicants and operates a fair and transparent admissions process. Applicants are selected on the basis of merit, ability and potential. The admissions procedures ensure the fair and equal treatment of all applicants without exception.

The Registrar's office manages and operates the admission process in accordance with agreed policies approved by the Academic Board and the College Executive Board. The admission requirements of the various accrediting bodies (e.g. UCD, NUIM, FETAC, CIH etc.) are a guiding influence in how the admissions procedures are carried out. The admissions procedures cover all elements of admission including all activities to attract, recruit, select, admit and register learners into all programmes. The fair and consistent implementation of these policies and procedures is the ultimate responsibility of the Registrar, supported by the admissions committee.

The College supports the application of access, transfer and progression policies as defined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

5.2 Admissions Policy

The College is committed to:

- Responsible marketing of programmes, with accurate and transparent promotional material.
- Fair and equal treatment of all applicants.
- Fair, transparent, timely, appropriate and explicit admissions procedures, which are implemented consistently.
- Supporting access, transfer and progression opportunities for learners to facilitate educational opportunity.
- Timely notification of the outcome of an application.
- Supporting applicants with disabilities or special needs as set out in the Disability Policy.

5.3 Programme Information and Advice

A range of printed and web based publications provide detailed information about programmes offered. The Marketing/PR unit and administrative staff provide information sessions and individual advice for prospective and continuing learners about programmes and education related matters.

An extensive campaign of targeting local authorities, community organisations, non-governmental organisations, schools, further education providers etc. advertising in press/journals/TV/radio is organised by the Marketing unit in liaison with the Programme

Leaders. All programmes will endeavour to have a mix of mature learners and school leavers.

The main target group for recruitment is social housing residents, local authority staff, government leaders, corporations, health boards, community workers (paid and voluntary), partnerships etc. Information is disseminated by:

- Working co-operatively with the media in providing information and press releases.
- Marketing materials sent to local authorities, community groups, and organisations funded by the HSE etc. informing them of new programmes.
- Publishing editorials for the media.
- Maintaining a media directory.
- Maintaining relations with public representatives and Government Ministers.

The second target group is school leavers. Marketing to prospective learners is conducted on a continuous basis and the main activities include:

- Publication of prospectus both online and in hard copy.
- Information in the CAO handbook.
- Marketing materials sent to schools and other education providers.
- Exhibitions in hotels around the country.
- Meetings with key stakeholders.

The College profile can be augmented by publicising the tangible results of RHA work, research papers focused on housing matters and the success of its graduates to the national and local community. This is achieved through the collation and publication of annual reports which have been made available to the public since 2007 and are formally launched at the annual all-Ireland conference. This is further supported by the production of promotional material and the holding of public meetings. Over the years, many RHA staff have participated in local events around the country to which the public have been invited and have served to build awareness of RHA and the College.

5.4 Application

Applicants are admitted to programmes in two main ways:

- Direct application to the College (in the case of mature entry)
- The Central Applications Office (CAO)

Admission requirements for each programme are published in the College prospectus, on the web and in the CAO handbook Admission is governed by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression.

The quality of the admissions policy and procedures is assured by the admissions committee which reports to the College Executive Board. Collaborative partners may opt to participate as full members of the committee, as in the case of UCD, or receive annual reports from the committee, as in the case of NUIM which is primarily concerned with recognition of prior learning (RPL) process. RPL outcomes are contained in each Programme Board Annual Report and are approved by the Academic Board.

5.5 Admission Committee

The Admissions Committee has responsibility for:

- Monitoring admission standards, processes and procedures.
- Considering any/all amendments or modifications.
- Academic oversight of the administration of the admissions system.

5.5.1 Terms of Reference

The Admissions Committee is a sub-committee of the College Executive Board with the following responsibilities in relation to the admission of learners:

- Advising the College Executive Board and the Academic Board on matters related to the admission of learners to undergraduate and professional programmes.
- Monitoring and developing as appropriate the admissions policy in relation to selection procedure.
- Monitoring the advanced stage admissions and transfer policy and developing methods for otherwise facilitating learners from other institutions transferring onto undergraduate and professional programmes.
- Evaluating new or alternative qualifications as a basis for determining admission while having regard to the admissions policy and the standards and procedures in other institutions, while supporting the access, transfer and progression procedures as defined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.
- Monitoring the admissions system and preparing such reports as may be considered appropriate or as requested by the Academic Board in relation to its operations having regard to procedures in the other institutions, changes in the requirements of accreditation/validation agencies, and/or other relevant developments.
- Carrying out such other functions as may be considered appropriate, subject to the approval of the College Executive Board and the Academic Board.

5.5.2 Membership

- Registrar (Chair)
- HOE
- Programme Leader as appropriate

5.6 Admissions Procedures

5.6.1 General Admissions

The admissions procedures in the College are under the remit of the Registrar. The Registrar is Chair of the Admissions Committee and provides academic oversight and review of the admissions procedures and processes. All applicants seeking admission to a first stage of an undergraduate programme can apply directly to the College, in the case of mature entry, or apply directly to the CAO as outlined in the CAO handbook for the year of admission (reference www.cao.ie for details/information). The CAO processes applicants to the first year of an undergraduate programme only. All applications for admission to any other stage of a programme must be made through the College administration unit. The Registrar co-ordinates the receipt, distribution, checking and processing of applications. All applications are recorded in the College learner record system. Applications and registration details are furnished to the appropriate awarding body by the Registrar.

5.6.2 Mature Entry Requirements

All applicants other than those seeking admission to a first year of an undergraduate programme through the CAO system must apply directly to Respond! College. A mature student is a person who is at least 23 years of age on January 1st of year of entry. There is no upper age limit.

Prospective learners are required to complete an Application form for mature learners. Candidates will be shortlisted for interview on the basis of the application form and interviews will be held approximately six weeks before the commencement of the programme. The interview panel will normally be comprised of the Registrar, the Head of Education and the Programme Leader. A Scoring sheet will be used during the interview and each applicant will receive a written response offering them a place on the programme or giving reasons as to why they were unsuccessful in obtaining a place on the particular programme.

All programmes will endeavour to have a mix of mature learners and school leavers in a ratio of 50:50. Admission to all courses is subject to availability, and space.

5.6.3 Applicants with Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that allows learners to gain admission to a programme of study or to gain exemptions/credit from some parts of a programme, based on demonstrated learning achieved prior to admission. RPL is a process by which prior learning is given a credit. The College accepts that knowledge, skills and competencies can be acquired from a range of learning experiences, including formal, non-formal and informal learning. This is in line with the aims of the NFQ to recognise all learning achievements by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by facilitating the recognition of prior learning.

The College must be satisfied that the qualifications which a learner presents for the purpose of RPL are of the required academic standard to complete the programme of study proposed. Where an applicant presents a qualification not previously approved then the admissions committee will assess and adjudicate on the status of the advanced standing, in accordance with the College and accrediting body's policy.

Applicants may be given credit for prior learning against specific elements of a programme (complete modules only) if their prior learning is judged to be equivalent to the learning outcomes of the proposed programme of study. In such cases, the learner is not required to take the elements of the programme for which credit has been given (exemption). Exemptions will not be granted after admission to a programme.

5.6.4 Standard Applicants

This category covers applications from those holding academic qualifications which are common in the Irish higher education sector, for example, holders of Higher Certificate (Level 6) qualifications awarded by HETAC. The standard category also includes less common Irish qualifications, and qualifications from EU and non-EU institutions, for which there are precedents in Respond! admissions' history.

Before a qualification is classified as standard, the learning outcomes for that qualification are examined and compared with the learning outcomes for the relevant Respond! programme(s). This process is implemented by the relevant Programme Leader or nominee, and is overseen by the Registrar. If sufficient comparability and equivalence is established, and after monitoring the progress of learners admitted with those exemptions for one year, the qualification is added to the standard list. All such additions must be approved by the Admissions Committee.

5.6.5 Non-Standard Applicants

Non-standard applicants are considered on a case-by-case basis. The process is implemented by the relevant Programme Leader or nominee, and is overseen by the Registrar. Where the application for exemption is based on a qualification that is not listed by Respond!, the application is deemed non-standard and is referred to the HOE for decision. The Registrar may make a preliminary recommendation.

The HOE reviews the application and, where additional academic scrutiny is deemed necessary, consults with Programme Leader. The applicant may at this stage be required to provide additional academic evidence, such as course syllabi and/or assessment papers.

The HOE records the decision and the basis for it, on the Exemption Application Form and signs the form accordingly. A copy of the decision is forwarded to the Admissions Committee for adjudication. The decision is then communicated to the applicant.

5.6.6 Applicants with Recognised Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

Prior experiential learning is defined as knowledge and skills acquired through life, work experience and study, not formally attested through formal certification. Credit for prior experiential learning is primarily intended for mature learners who may not have had structured formal education but who have learned from their involvement in employment, community activities, home duties, sport etc. This learning when evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively may entitle them to credits or exemptions from a programme of study. Such individuals may be in employment (including self-employed), unemployed or currently retired from employment. As a general principle, credit is given for *learning*, not for experience *per se*.

Applicants seeking RPEL exemptions from modules are required to demonstrate prior achievement of the majority of the learning outcomes of each module. To this end, they are provided with an outline of the module content and learning outcomes and are required to indicate, in writing, how their prior experiential learning can be deemed to provide equivalence.

The application pack and supporting portfolio in the first instance is referred to the Programme Leader or nominated personnel for decision. The Programme Leader reviews the application and, where additional academic scrutiny is deemed necessary, consults with the HOE.

The Programme Leader makes a recommendation, clearly stating the basis for it and refers the application to the Admission Committee. All decisions to grant exemptions based on RPEL require the approval of the Admissions Committee.

5.6.7 Stages in granting exemptions

1. Learners who wish to apply for RPL and RPEL are required to complete an Exemption Application Form and supply the required supporting documentation
2. The Education Administrator compiles a file for review by the Programme Leaders. The file includes the completed Exemption Application Form and the necessary transcripts (examined for equivalence).
3. The date the exemption request is received is noted on the Exemption Application Form by the Education Administrator and an exemption due date is stated (2 weeks after the date of receipt). This is the date by which Programme Leaders must return the completed Exemption Application Form to the Education Administrator.
4. The complete file is sent to the HOE or nominated personnel for review.
5. The HOE reviews the request for exemptions and, where additional academic scrutiny is deemed necessary, consults with the relevant Programme Leader. A rationale must be provided on the Exemption Application Form for all decisions made. The

Exemption Application Form is then signed and dated by the HOE. A copy of the decision is forwarded to the Registrar.

6. The file is then returned to Admissions where the learner is informed of the outcome of their application.

5.7 Registration

Following an offer of a place on a programme, learners must complete a registration form and the necessary registration processes, the payment of appropriate fees and provide any documentation required for their enrolment to be valid.

5.8 The Registrar's Office

The Registrar is responsible for ensuring that staff members who provide administrative and support services to learners are aware of their responsibilities. The Registrar is required to compile an end of year report which reviews the operation of the office and makes recommendations for changes to the College Executive and the Academic Board.

5.8.1 Academic Administration

The Registrar's office provides a range of learner administrative services to ensure that:

- Prospective learners have appropriate access to accurate information about programmes and support services.
- The selection and enrolment of applicants on programmes is based on merit and adheres to approved and advertised criteria and processes.
- Learner assessment, examinations, academic progress, individual academic records and learner's eligibility to graduate from a programme are effectively, efficiently and systematically managed in accordance with the Quality Assurance Procedures of the College.

5.8.2 Academic Learner Supports

Administration

Staff in the Education Office are often the first point of contact with learners, lecturers, guest speakers or members of the public. Their primary role is to refer queries on to the most appropriate source of information. Staff are aware that assisting learners is of the utmost importance and make it their priority to ensure that learner queries and needs are met expeditiously.

The HOE is required to carry out an annual audit of the overall administration of programmes and will make recommendations to the College Executive Board and the Academic Board for any changes or improvements which are deemed necessary.

Assessment

All learners following programmes leading to a recognised award are required to take assessments as prescribed for the programme. Details of assessment procedures (and any attendance requirements) are provided to learners at the start of the semester and are available in the learner handbook.

Learner Records

Each learner's academic record contains the results of all modules for which the learner has enrolled, including those failed or withdrawn from, together with the level of award for modules and programmes completed. A certified copy of results is provided to each learner following the final Assessment Board meeting. The learner may obtain a further certified copy upon payment of a fee. Transcripts are not released to a third party without the written consent of the learner. Learners may access their examination results confidentially via the web. Eligibility to graduate is confirmed by the Registrar and Programme Leader. Learners in poor financial standing with the College are ineligible to graduate until all outstanding fees/debt is paid.

Grants

Grant payments to learners are processed through the finance office in Waterford. The finance office liaises with the Registrar regarding learner attendance and payments. Prior to the processing of each grant cycle, the finance office conducts a thorough audit of payments due. Grant payments are not processed until the audit has been carried out to the satisfaction of the Finance Manager.

Queries in relation to grants are dealt with directly by the Registrar in conjunction with the Programme Leader. The awarding of grants is within the remit of the governments Student Grant Scheme, not the College.

5.9 Teaching and Learning Supports

The College is committed to supporting the development of teaching methods, assessment practices and the facilitation of learning, by encouraging innovation and the promulgation of best practice. Academic staff development, in the form of certified programmes in research techniques, teaching and learning, and supplemented by a variety of workshops and seminars, is made available to staff as appropriate.

5.9.1 Disability Support

The College is committed to supporting learners with disabilities and provides a range of support services including additional tuition, dedicated equipment and software, specific examination accommodations, sign language interpreters, personal assistants, and financial support for learners with disabilities. Learners are encouraged to indicate any

disabilities which may impact on their learning experience at the earliest possible juncture i.e. at application and/or interview stage. It is strongly recommended for learners to make early contact with the Programme Leader so that a timely needs assessment can be completed and agreed. There are many publications and information websites dedicated to assisting learners with learning difficulties. The Programme Leader provides advice and information to learners about how to make the college experience more enjoyable and rewarding. The service promotes inclusive learning and coordinates academic staff support provisions for individual learners.

5.9.2 Counselling Service

Programme Leaders act as a resource for learners whereby any individual in the College who is experiencing personal difficulties can access counselling services which are professional and confidential in nature. RHA already has long established links with professional services located near the campus. The College have established links with the Irish Association for Counselling and Therapy (IACT) who provide lists of approved counsellors who work with clients using a range of counselling techniques and interventions. The College have also agreed a subsidised fee for Counselling services with the Elmwood Centre in Baggot Street, Dublin 2. Programme Leaders pass on the relevant information to learners who are encouraged to access the support they need.

More informal supportive workshops are also offered to the learners in areas such as study skills, exam techniques and stress management. The education office will provide a range of information sheets on topics including; adjusting to College, self-confidence, anxiety/panic attacks, depression, family/relationship difficulties, eating disorders and alcohol/drug use.

5.9.3 Medical and Health Service

The College has links with a number of GPs in close proximity to the High Park campus and this information is provided to learners via the education office. The Omni Medical Centre in Santry, Dublin 9 have agreed a reduced fee for medical services for learners enrolled in the College. As the campus and learner enrolment increases, the possibility of having a part-time nursing service located on the campus will be explored. This service will place an emphasis on preventative medicine, health education and healthy lifestyles.

5.10 Health, Safety and Welfare

The College is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for learners and staff in accordance with the Health and Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1989. In order to maintain health and safety standards learners are obliged to comply with certain rules, regulations and procedures as contained in the learner handbook or as updated from time to time. A number of staff members are trained in first aid and first aid kits are available throughout the College. The education office keeps detailed records on all accidents and incidents and reports are provided regularly to the Health Safety and Welfare Committee and the HOE.

All staff and learners are required to sign a record book when entering and leaving the building in compliance with fire regulations. Learners are also required to sign an attendance sheet at each class/lecture.

5.11 Other Learner services

As the College is in the initial phase of being established, it is planned to include further learner services as required. These will include *inter alia*, a learners union, a sport and recreation service, a pastoral care office and a learner accommodation service. The Learning Resources and Learning Services Committee as detailed in Section 9 is the main forum for the discussion of other learner services. Learner representative feedback as collated by the Programme Leaders is another mechanism whereby learner services will be proposed and requested from the College Executive Board.

5.12 Learner Induction

The College has established the practice of having an introductory day for all learners. Induction activities include information sessions delivered by the Programme Leader, opportunity to meet module leaders, tours of facilities, learning resources centre and social activity. The induction process is organised by the Registrar's Office in cooperation with the Programme Leaders. It is reviewed each year to ensure its relevance and attraction to learners. Following the completion of the initial induction process learners join their programme groups and participate in further induction activities specific to their particular programmes. As part of continuing induction, staff from other services visit each new first year learner group, during the academic year, and remind learners about the range of learner services and facilities available.

5.13 Communications of Service Provision to Learners

Every learner is given a copy of the learner handbook at registration. The handbook is designed in a user friendly way and learners are encouraged to refer to it regularly throughout the academic year. It outlines the range of services and facilities available to learners. It also introduces learners to the personnel involved (photos, names, contact phone numbers) in the delivery of other learner support services. The handbook also contains a summary of the Rules and Regulations, and general Code of Discipline. The *Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures Manual* will be available to be downloaded from the website, www.respond.ie

5.14 Communications of Service Provision to Staff and the Wider Community

It is the policy of the College to communicate continuously and effectively with all stakeholders. Having regard to the nature of RHA it is vital that the mission and objectives, operations and activities are communicated in a manner appropriate to each category of stakeholder and are clearly understood. The College recognises the vital role of communications both internal and external and endeavours to have open and

transparent dialogue with and between residents, learners, staff, and the local and national community. The mission and information on operation and activities are disseminated through a range of media, which include printed and electronic publications, research reports, position papers and community events.

All board and committee meetings throughout the College are formally recorded and there is an agreed template for recording minutes of meetings. All Academic Board and associated committee minutes will be placed on the staff intranet. The website, www.respond.ie, is used at present as a mechanism for communicating information widely both within the College and to the wider community. In addition extensive use is made of the e-mail system for communications between staff, between staff and management and through internal e-mail groups. Staff can access their email accounts via a portal on <https://mail.respond.ie/owa>.

In order to promote the more effective and efficient use of the computer network and improve service to learners all staff are encouraged to use a number of dedicated server drives where all College management and administration documents are stored.

Use of the e-mail is subject to protocols issued from time to time by the National IT Co-ordinator of RHA. E-mail is also an efficient way of ensuring that part-time academic and general staff are kept up-to-date on all matters pertaining to College activities.

Section 6: Procedures for the Assessment of Learners

6.1 Introduction

These procedures provide a guide to all staff with responsibilities for learner assessment. They are also relevant to all staff and external assessors involved in the validation of new programmes. The procedures for the assessment of learners are developed to be fair and consistent and compliant with structures and systems determined by the various accrediting bodies. The College has a systematic arrangement for evaluation and auditing the effectiveness and efficiency of learner assessment procedures.

6.2 Purpose of the Procedures

The purpose of the procedures is to ensure that the College operates assessment methods that:

- Are fair, consistent and transparent.
- Comply with standards determined by the various accrediting bodies.
- Comply with the standards in respect of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
- Assess and evaluate learner learning on the programme.
- Are effective in measuring the achievement of the desired learning outcomes of the programme.
- Provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate application of knowledge, attitudes or skills where appropriate
- Provide timely feedback to learners to assist them in improving their performance.

6.3 Scope

These procedures apply to full and part-time learners on accredited programmes where the College has responsibility for the development of the programme and the assessment of learners. Staff and learners on the various programmes leading to qualifications awarded by external awarding authorities are required to familiarise themselves with the assessment guidelines and regulations of the relevant awarding authority e.g. HETAC, UCD, NUIM, CIH etc.

6.4 Assessment Procedures

It is necessary to evaluate the quality of learning and the effectiveness of teaching methods on the programmes offered. Assessment enables lecturers to determine what, and how well, learners are learning. Assessment informs and supports lecturers in fine tuning teaching methods and provides the means by which learners are measured against formal criteria and forms a constructive part of the learning process. The assessment strategies used depend on the programme, and most programmes lend themselves to a wide variety of methods. During programme induction and training sessions, staff are encouraged to reflect on best practice in the writing of learning outcomes and the development of assessment strategies. Given the particular profile of learners attending

Respond! College, lectures are encouraged to use formative and summative assessment techniques which can be used to demonstrate assessment of learning as well as assessment for learning.

6.4.1 The Regulations Concerning Assessment

The regulations concerning assessment are described in the *Assessment and Standards Document* of each programme e.g. HETAC, FETAC, UCD, NUIM, CIH, etc. These standalone documents are available in the Registrar's office and are supplied to all learners and staff on each programme.

The core information in these documents covers the following areas:

- Responsibility for assessment within the College.
- Role and responsibility of Internal Examiners.
- Role and responsibility of Internal Moderators.
- Role and specific duties of External Examiners.
- Procedures for the processing of assessment marks/grades.
- Meeting of assessment boards.
- General requirements for assessment and awards.
- Approved programme schedule.
- Minimum pass mark.
- Alphabetic grading scheme.
- Grades to be awarded to each programme.
- Assessment of aggregate performance.
- Award classifications.
- Post-award achievements.
- Borderline cases.
- Programmes structured in semesters.
- Examples of calculation of grade point average (GPA).
- Operational guidelines for modification of results.

6.4.2 Role of Internal Examiners

Module leaders are delegated responsibility for assessing learners and shall be deemed to be Internal Examiners. The role of an Internal Examiner is to:

- Prepare assessments in line with the approved programme schedule.
- In consultation with the Internal Moderator submit continuous assessment and examination papers and marking schemes to the Registrar's office from where they are forwarded to the External Examiner(s).
- Take account of feedback, deletions, additions or amendments proposed by the External Examiner(s).
- Mark the assessments, and arrange for internal moderation.
- Submit marks to the Registrar's office.

- Return scripts and any associated forms to the Registrar's office.
- Process feedback from the External Examiner(s).
- Agree grades/marks to be awarded at a pre assessment board.
- Attend meetings of the assessment board, to verify marks and contribute to the deliberation of grades and awards.

6.4.3 Role of the Internal Moderator

An Internal Moderator is appointed, for each module, by the relevant Programme Leader. The primary role of the internal moderator is to report on the assessment process and to comment on whether or not the assessment process has been rigorous, fair and consistent.

An Internal Moderator will normally review all scripts awarded a first learner mark, all fail scripts and a 10% sample of the remaining assessed work. All assessed work will be reviewed if there are less than 20 scripts in total.

The role of the Internal Moderator is to ensure that:

- Assessment is appropriate, consistent, fair, and transparent and does not unintentionally discriminate against any learner.
- Module leaders receive on-going advice and support in the discharge of their duties.
- The appropriate programme schedule is being applied.
- Learners are clear about assessment requirements and are given opportunities to achieve against the assessment criteria.
- Learners are facilitated to present their work in a manner that supports the moderation process.
- Evidence of learner achievement is mapped to the assessment criteria.
- Resulting award of credit is valid, reliable and consistent.
- All relevant and appropriate assessment material is available for inspection by the External Examiners.

6.4.4 Role of the External Examiner

The External Examiners are appointed to a particular programme, subject or module. Their role is to provide independent quality assurance for the assessment process. Their function is to ensure that standards appropriate to the award level are maintained and that standards are consistent with national standards and comparable to other institutions. Details on the appointment of External Examiners are provided in Section 6.9.

6.5 Assessment Standards

A separate document Respond! *College Assessment Guidelines* gives full details of all assessment standards.

All draft examination papers and continuous assessment briefs must be in the standard College style and must be consistent with previous papers/briefs in the same subject/module.

For each examination paper or assessment brief drafted by an internal examiner, a suitable marking scheme must be prepared and attached to the draft paper. The marking scheme must be sufficiently detailed to allow the Internal Moderator and External Examiner to observe clearly:

- The structure and layout of the assessment.
- The nature of the answer required to each question, or each part of a question.
- The number or percentage of marks allocated to each part of the required answer.

The procedure for all assessment mechanisms and marking schemes is as follows:

- The examination paper or assessment brief is drafted by the examiner(s). Where there is more than one lecturer contributing to a paper or brief the Module Leader who is appointed coordinates the collation of the paper.
- The assessment is then reviewed by the designated Internal Moderator. The Internal Moderator should establish that the assessment is in accordance with the programme schedule and is free of typographical or grammatical errors. Amendments considered necessary are discussed and agreed with the Internal Examiner. When the assessment and marking scheme is approved, the Internal Moderator completes and signs the Internal Moderation Form.
- The Internal Examiner then forwards, the approved draft of the assessment, the marking scheme and the Internal Moderation Form, to the Registrar's office, where receipt is formally recorded.
- The Registrar's office forwards this material to the designated External Examiner(s) for review and approval.
- Any issues raised or changes proposed by the External Examiner are returned to the Registrar's office and forwarded to the appropriate examiner. The views of the External Examiner(s) are given serious consideration and the paper and/or marking scheme are amended if/as necessary.
- The final draft of the assessment and marking scheme is stored in the Registrar's office and it is sent for bulk copying, usually a minimum of fourteen days before the date of the examination.

6.6 Conduct of the Written Examinations Process

It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to ensure that the paper, given to learners at their examination, is appropriate and correct. The Internal Examiner or a substitute communicated to and approved by the HOE, is required to be present at the examination centre for the first 20 minutes to verify that the correct paper has been used, and to provide any necessary clarification to learners on examination requirements or specific questions. The Examiner is required to remain nearby and be contactable for the duration

of the examination.

The Chief Invigilator is responsible for the supervision of learners during examinations. Where a learner is suspected to be acting improperly during an examination, the facts are recorded by the invigilator and the learner is permitted to finish the examination. Any unauthorised materials discovered by invigilators are confiscated and attached to the Learner's script. These are retained as evidence of alleged academic impropriety. The Chief Invigilator is required to complete a report on the conduct of the examination. The reports are maintained in the Registrar's office and accessed as required by the Assessment Board or for an appeals process etc.

Where alleged academic impropriety has occurred, the Examiner in such cases is required to mark the script as normal. The Examiner may subsequently be asked to re-examine the script for evidence of engagement in impropriety.

The Examiner is required to collect the scripts and other relevant material, from the Registrar's office, including:

- Copy of the examination paper.
- Copy of the approved marking scheme.
- Copy of the exam attendance register.
- Set of printed component marks sheets, divided between full and part-time learners.
- Additional results sheet for any learner(s) who may have been inadvertently omitted from the printed component marks sheets.
- Returned examinations check-list to ensure the examiner has completed all required tasks.
- Forms for the Examiner's and Internal Moderator's reports.

The Examiner is then responsible for the safe handling and storage of the scripts. It is emphasised to all examiners that scripts should not be unnecessarily exposed to risk of access, loss theft, or destruction. For example, scripts should never be left unattended in a public area, or vehicle. Marked scripts, together with the associated documents, must be returned to the Registrar's office on or before the published deadline.

6.7 Continuous Assessment

A wide range of continuous assessment methods are utilised in the College. These include essays, group work assignments, case studies, formal presentations, poster presentations, portfolio work, tutor verification, skills demonstration, work placement reports etc. In all continuous assessment it is critical that the aims and objectives of the assessment are compatible with the stated learning outcomes of the programme / module and that the assessment is rigorous, fair, consistent and transparent.

The Programme Leader has responsibility for ensuring that learners are informed of the continuous assessment schedule and the dates for submission of continuous assessment material. Regulations regarding continuous assessment are described in the *Assessment and Standards* document for each programme.

6.7.1 Provision of Appropriate Feedback on Continuous Assessment

The mark obtained by a learner for an element of continuous assessment work should be provided to the learner within a timely period after the submission of the material for assessment. Learners shall be informed regularly of their academic standing in continuous assessment work. Their attention is drawn to the requirement of a minimum pass mark in continuous assessment work before overall results are considered by the assessment board.

Feedback to the learner in relation to continuous assessment material should be given in a timely fashion, normally within three weeks from submission. Feedback should be meaningful to the learner and should serve to inform the learner about the merits and demerits of their work with the view to further improvement. Since what constitutes meaningful feedback for continuous assessment work may be unique to each module in a programme, the Programme Leader will:

- Identify the feedback mechanisms appropriate to the module.
- Determine the relevant timescales, within which feedback should be provided, and which are appropriate for each module in a programme.

6.7.2 Script Marking

When marking scripts the Examiner awards marks in accordance with the approved marking scheme which was provided at the paper preparation stage. The Examiner is required to clearly record the marks awarded for each part of a question on the script (e.g. 6/8) in the column provided on the right-hand side of the script for this purpose.

The total mark for each question should be clearly recorded by the Examiner as follows:

- In the script on the right-hand side column, at the end of the question on the front page of the script.
- On the marks sheet.
- The total examination mark and the overall percentage mark (if different) should be clearly recorded on the front page of the script and on the marks sheet.
- Marks awarded for a module or subject should not contain fractions or decimal places. Marks should be rounded up or down as necessary.
- The overall percentage mark should not be within 1% of a threshold, i.e. not 39% for 40%, 69% for 70% (or 34% for 35% if relevant).

The Examiner should investigate any “gaps” in the completed marks sheets by checking that all learners who have signed the examination attendance register have a script

available for correction. If a candidate signed the examination attendance sheet, but there appears to be no script available this must be investigated. If the script is found by the Examiner, the marks for that candidate are written onto a separate marks sheet provided for this purpose. If the script is not found, the Examiner should report the matter at once to the Registrar's office to initiate a full investigation and possible corrective action, if appropriate.

Once all scripts for a module have been marked, the Examiner is required to complete an examiners report. This involves completing a statistical breakdown, based on analysis of the marks sheets, by learner group and overall cohort. Additionally the Examiner is required to comment on each question and on overall performance and make any recommendations for action that are considered necessary.

The Examiner must pass all the examination material for review to the designated Internal Moderator by the appointed deadline. Following reflection on the assessment material, the Internal Moderator completes a formal Internal Moderator's report in which he/she may recommend:

- Full adoption of the Examiners marks.
- Report adjustment of marks for individual scripts.
- A global adjustment of marks.

Any such adjustments should be discussed and agreed with the Examiner. Differences of opinion should be resolved by the Programme Leader. The Internal Moderator then returns the examination material to the Registrar's Office.

Where it is agreed between the Registrar's office and the External Examiner that only a selection of scripts is to be made available, the principles for such selection must be agreed in advance. The guiding principle for selection is that the External Examiner must have sufficient evidence to determine that internal marking and classifications are of an appropriate standard and that they are rigorous, fair and consistent.

Where External Examiners see only a selection of scripts it is usual to provide the selection which was used by the internal moderator. As previously indicated this sample would include all scripts awarded a first learner mark, all fail scripts and a 10% sample of the remaining assessed work. All assessed work will be reviewed if there are less than 20 scripts in total. It would also include scripts of learners for whom personal mitigating circumstances exist.

The Registrar's office personnel forward the internally moderated sample of scripts to the External Examiner, together with the following documents:

- The Examiner's Report.
- The Internal Moderators Report.
- Learner results sheets for both examination and continuous assessment.

- Learner overall results sheets (continuous assessment and examination combined).
- Learner attendance sheet for the relevant examination.
- Examination paper and marking scheme.
- External Examiner Module Report Form for completion.

When the External Examiner has returned the completed External Examiner Module Report Form, the Registrar's office provides a copy to the Programme Leader who discusses the report with the Examiner. Any recommendations made by the External Examiner are normally accepted and implemented. Where there is an issue with any such recommendation, the examiner and the Programme Leader discuss the matter with the External Examiner and a resolution is reached through consensus.

The Examiner is responsible for the accuracy of marks entered into the computerised learner records system. The marks are inputted as soon as the first marking has been completed. Once marks have been entered on the system, the Examiner submits a print-out, along with the handwritten marks to the Registrar's office. The Internal Moderator reviews the marks, as input, against the marks sheets to ensure that they are entered correctly on to the system. If there is any disagreement with entered marks, the examiner and Internal Moderator discuss to resolve and clarify the mark.

When the process is completed all materials are forwarded to the Registrar's office for retention in archive in accordance with the record management policy of the College.

6.8 Assessment Boards

Assessment Boards are responsible for the monitoring and moderation of the assessment process, for determining learner progression and for recommending the conferring of the relevant awards of the accrediting bodies. Assessment Boards also deal with issues pertaining to alleged cheating, plagiarism and collusion. These guidelines consolidate current regulations and examples of good practice relating to the conduct of assessment boards. They set out practices by which boards can safeguard the probity, consistency and hence the authority of their decisions.

- An Assessment Board is associated with each stage of a taught certificate/diploma/degree.
- Academic staff members who are Internal Examiners and teach and examine on a relevant module, the marks of which are before a Board, are *ex officio* members of the corresponding assessment board.
- External Examiners, as approved by the Academic Board, are members of assessment boards.
- The Assessment Board makes recommendations to the Academic Board for the ratification of the results for each level of a certificate, diploma, degree (ordinary and honours), programmes, including the final award.

6.8.1 Composition of Assessment Boards

The composition of the Assessment Board shall be in accordance with the requirements of the accrediting body and College procedures. Current regulations of accrediting bodies shall be used in conjunction with these procedures where appropriate.

The number and composition of individual assessment boards varies depending on the nature of the academic programme. The generic *ex officio* composition for an Assessment Board for taught academic programmes is:

- HOE (Chair)
- Registrar
- Internal Examiners
- Programme Leaders
- External Examiners relevant to programmes
- Education administrator/Secretary to the Board.

The number and remit of assessment boards is overseen by the Academic Board.

The quorum for an Assessment Board normally consists of the Chair, Registrar or nominee, at least one External Examiner and an Internal Examiner or Programme Leader for all assessed modules under consideration. All present must sign the result sheets, which are generated by the Registrar's office.

No learner may be a member of an Assessment Board or attend any other Examiners' meeting, other than as a learner for assessment (in the case of a *viva voce*), except where a member of academic staff or approved External Examiner is registered as a learner on another programme within the College. In that instance he/she is not be disqualified from membership.

The Chair is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that at least one member of academic staff representing every module on the programme is present at an Assessment Board, such that the interests of all learners are properly addressed. At meetings to determine learner progression on the programme only, (e.g. following referred assessments) at least one External Examiner is normally present. At meetings to determine or recommend academic awards, all External Examiners appointed to have that responsibility are normally present.

Examiners may be required to defend their marking and are expected to be prepared accordingly.

Each Assessment Board shall meet at times throughout the year when needed to fulfil its duties under the scheme of assessment defined in the definitive programme documents e.g. Spring, Summer, Autumn. One of the meetings should be held in conjunction with the annual visit of the External Examiner(s).

6.8.2 Knowledge of Programme Regulations

In order to contribute to the Assessment Board's decisions, all members of the board must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the assessment regulations.

- The Registrar's office will circulate copies of the current programme assessment regulations to all members of the board. Members of the board should be made aware of any changes to the regulations in advance of any board meetings.
- Academic staff members of the board are encouraged to raise any questions concerning programme assessment regulations at Programme Board Meetings.
- The Chair of the Assessment Board should give a short verbal overview of the key regulations at the start of each board meeting, in particular to point out the confidentiality of proceeds and no part of the Assessment Board deliberations may be communicated to third parties.

6.8.3 Preparation for the Assessment Board

In order to conduct business effectively and efficiently all the necessary information must be clearly presented and provided in a timely way. The following procedures will be observed:

- An internal review meeting will be held in advance of the Assessment Board. This meeting is held to test the veracity of data to be presented to the assessment board, identify possible issues with or gaps in the available information, and to identify required supplementary information e.g. personal mitigating circumstances (PMC) supporting documentation to facilitate the efficient running of the planned Assessment Board.
- Marks should be presented to the board using the required format of the accrediting/awarding body.
- In exceptional circumstances, it may be deemed necessary to make global changes to marks. Although not part of the guidelines or regulations, this may only be done in consultation with the Registrar and with the specific approval of External Examiners (when they are involved at that level of the programme) and of the Assessment Board.
- PMCs will normally only be considered if the procedures for dealing with PMCs have been applied.

These meetings are scheduled and coordinated by the Registrar. The pre-meeting involves all Internal Examiners. The objective is to:

- Ensure that the marks to be presented to the Assessment Board are complete and correct.
- Formulate recommendations to the Assessment Board, identifying particular areas where the advice of External Examiner is needed.
- Consider reports from the Learner Investigatory Panel (LIP).

- Identify any further information needed by the Assessment Board e.g. evidence of PMCs.
- Collate reports of supervised work experience (where appropriate).
- Prepare case(s) in support of proposed learner awards as required.

The internal review meeting cannot compel an Examiner to review their assessment findings or replace the recommendation of an individual Examiner with that of its own.

Minutes are recorded at the meeting but are not presented to the Assessment Board.

6.8.4 Conduct of Assessment Boards

The role of an Assessment Board is to review the marks presented and make recommendations as to the overall result for each candidate.

- The proceedings and deliberations of the assessment boards are strictly confidential.
- The External Examiners are appointed in accordance with section 6.9.
- The Registrar's office, prepares the schedule for Assessment Board meetings in consultation with External Examiners and accrediting bodies.
- The Registrar's office makes all of the arrangements for the provision of the board with facilities.
- The Assessment Board decides on the marks for each module for each learner, including the breakdown of assessment and continuous assessment, and have due regard to award classifications in considering the overall result for a learner. In discharging this responsibility the Assessment Board may exercise discretion in marginal cases by minor modification of marks.
- Individual learner marks are not normally changed without consulting the Internal Examiner(s) who awarded the original mark. It follows that the board does not normally change a mark without the relevant Internal Examiner being present. However, if a relevant Internal Examiner's other obligations prevent him/her from attending the Board; he/she may be consulted in advance about the potential for moderating the mark. Pre-meetings are a useful vehicle for such consultation.
- Changes to marks by an Assessment Board otherwise should only be permitted if:
 - Clerical or administrative error in transmission of marks has occurred.
 - Late change to a mark is recommended by an External Examiner.
 - In both instances above the change should be submitted in writing with explanation to the Assessment Board. The resulting adjustment of marks

should be made before the results are considered by the Board.

- To confirm the result/award being made by the Assessment Board, the Chair reads out the decision that the board has adopted immediately after and in respect of each individual case. The Secretary may also be required to read back to the board the recorded decision.
- A hard copy of the agreed mark sheets are signed by all attending the board meeting.
- Where the Assessment Board is unable to reach a consensus regarding a learner's mark, progression or award, the Chair of the Board, with the agreement of the External Examiners, may decide the result by majority vote. If any member of the Board wishes to dissent from the decision of the Board, it should be recorded in the minutes.
- The minutes of the Assessment Board meeting should be concise. Discussion relating to the individual learners will be recorded only in marginal cases and in the cases of plagiarism, collusion and cheating.
- PMCs should be recorded for future reference, and then in a summary form. There should be no recording of any discussion relating to individuals clearly passing, failing or being referred. The results list should be regarded as the primary record of the meeting. Any general comments made by the External Examiner(s) about the assessments should be recorded, but the External Examiner's written report should be regarded as the definitive document.
- In order to ensure that the recorded decisions of the Board are unambiguous, the minutes should follow the terminology and conventions set out by the relevant awarding body.
- An attendance sheet is provided by the Registrar's office to record attendances and apologies.

6.8.5 Action Following the Assessment Board

- In addition to maintaining formal records, consisting of minutes of Assessment Boards and the results lists, the Registrar's office arranges for the final agreed marks to be entered into the learner database. These final marks or grades are available to the individual learner, as a transcript and on request under the Data Protection Acts. The marks in individual papers or sections are not to be released to a third party except on the written request of a learner (e.g. applying for exemption from further professional assessments or seeking to enter another educational establishment).

- The Registrar's office prepares a results list (pass, fail, refer, etc.). This result list is signed by the Chair of the Assessment Board and at least one External Examiner. The results list is published and posted on a specified date, which is decided and notified by the Registrar's Office, but is still subject to ratification, by the Academic Board.
- The Registrar's office maintains the original signed results list and archives same in accordance with the Colleges record management policy.
- Transcripts of individual learner's results are sent by post on the same or following day as the results list is posted in the College.
- The full name of the learner being given an award by the Assessment Board will appear on the award parchment. If a learner subsequently changes his/her name, it is not possible for the parchment to be reissued in the new name.
- As soon as practicable after the meeting of the Assessment Board, the Registrar's office produces minutes of the meeting that, following review and agreement by the Chair, are circulated to all members of the Assessment Board and the master is filed as the official record in the Registrar's office. These minutes are presented to the next meeting of the Assessment Board for review and approval.
- At the end of each year a summary report is prepared by the Registrar's office and distributed to the HOE and Programme Leaders for review by the Programme Boards, and submitted to the College Executive Board. The report includes a statistical analysis of learner performance, including progression statistics for each programme. The report also includes a reflective commentary on any general teaching, learning or assessment issues that have surfaced at the Assessment Board meetings.
- On completion of the assessment cycle, all assessment material is returned to the Registrar's office for retention in archive in accordance with the Colleges record management policy.

6.9 External Examiners

6.9.1 Appointment of External Examiners

External Examiner reports are considered an indispensable element of peer judgement in monitoring the quality and standard of each programme in the College. The appointment and approval of External Examiners varies with the accreditation body.

External Examiners are nominated by the HOE and such nominations are endorsed by the relevant Programme Leader based on the criteria as indicated in Section 6.9.2 below. The candidate is then formally invited to become an External Examiner for modules/subjects

within their field of expertise. Details are provided of the relevant programmes, including dates for terms, semesters and academic years, and the customary timing of External Examiner activities in the College context, as well as the terms and conditions of appointment.

Upon receipt of acceptance from the candidate, a formal contract of appointment is issued and completed by the candidate, who also submits their Curriculum Vitae to the College. The proposed External Examiners Curriculum Vitae is reviewed/approved by the Academic Board before it is forwarded to the awarding body (if appropriate), by the Registrar. The candidate is then provided with programme documentation and each of the relevant module *proformae*.

All External Examiners are supplied with a copy of the HETAC *Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining* (2010).

6.9.2 Criteria for the Appointment of an External Examiner

The following criteria are adopted by the Academic Board when considering the appointment of External Examiners.

Each External Examiner's academic/professional qualifications should be appropriate in level and subject for examining the programme(s). Both the level and the subject of the examiner's qualifications should generally be in a cognate discipline to what is to be examined in the programme.

Each External Examiner's standing, expertise and experience should be such as to enable fulfilment of his/her responsibility in the maintenance of the academic standards of the programme(s) in the context of higher education both nationally and internationally.

External Examiners should be drawn from academic life and, where appropriate, from business, industry and professional practice. Standing, expertise and breadth of experience may be indicated by:

- Present (or last, if retired) post and place of work.
- Range and scope of experience across higher education/professions.
- Current and recent active involvement in research/scholarly/professional activities in a relevant field of study.

There must be an appropriate balance and expertise in the team of External Examiners. The proposed External Examiner should complement the external examining team in terms of expertise and examining experience. Where possible a balance between academic and professional practitioners should be employed.

Where possible, each external examiner should have had significant recent examining experience as an Internal Examiner or comparable related experience to indicate competence in assessing learners in the subject area. If the proposed Examiner has no

previous External Examiner experience at the appropriate level, their nomination can be supported by either:

- Other external examining experience.
- Extensive internal examining experience.
- Other relevant and recent experience likely to support the External Examiner role.

However, consideration is given in those exceptional situations where the pool of potential External Examiners is especially limited. This is most likely where provision of the subject is particularly limited within the sector. Every effort is made to mentor proposed External Examiners without prior experience. Where possible they would join an experienced team of External Examiners or, where there is only one examiner, they should initially work alongside an experienced currently-appointed external examiner, on a related programme. External Examiners should be drawn from a wide variety of institutional/professional contexts and traditions in order that the programme benefits from wide-ranging external scrutiny. If any conflicts of interest are identified during the application process, then the application will not be progressed.

There should not be current reciprocal external examining between departments (i.e. nominees should not normally be members of a department in an institution where a member of the nominating department is serving as an external examiner). External Examiner nominations/appointments should be such as to ensure maximum objectivity in relation to the College.

For any one programme, External Examiners should not be appointed consecutively from the same institution. The College should seek to draw nominations from a variety of institutions, and should avoid multiple nominations from the same institution within a single discipline.

External Examiners should not be over-extended by their external examining duties. As a norm, an External Examiner should not hold more than two concurrent external examining appointments for taught programmes. This policy can only be waived in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of Academic Board, and with cognisance of the awarding organisations policies in this regard. Should a conflict of interest arise during tenure of office, the Registrar will prepare a report setting out the circumstances. This report is referred to the Academic Board for discussion and decision.

The College takes due cognisance of the desirability of gender balance when nominating External Examiners.

6.9.3 Communication with External Examiners

Communication with External Examiners is via the Registrar's office and takes place in a number of contexts throughout each academic year. The principal points of contact through the year are:

- External moderation of assessment papers and marking schemes at the paper preparation stage.
- Review of continuous assessment and examination scripts, marks and examiners reports.
- Attendance and participation at Assessment Boards.
- Input to programme design, development and review (on request by the Programme Leader/HOE).
- End-of year report.

Briefing sessions for External Examiners are held annually. These sessions cover the relevant procedures and documentation and seek to ensure that there is common understanding of requirements and responsibilities between the College and the External Examiners.

In addition to their role as external moderators of programme and module assessments, External Examiners are a very valuable resource in the context of academic development and growth of the College. It is College policy and practice to invite External Examiners to provide input to the design and development of new programmes as well as the periodic review of existing programmes.

6.9.4 External Examiner`s Report

The end of year report by each External Examiner is an important document in the broad context of academic quality management. Each External Examiner is asked to comment on a number of academic matters including:

- Academic standards.
- Assessment processes and documentation.
- Effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning.
- Operation of Assessment Boards.

The External Examiner reports are reviewed by programme and module leaders and are a valuable input to programme review and development. Any issues raised by the External Examiners are carefully considered and, where appropriate, actioned. Any cross-programme issues are progressed through the HOE and a summary of issues raised and good practice commended is presented at the appropriate programme board and where appropriate, the College Executive Board and ultimately the Academic Board.

A formal response to each External Examiners report is prepared by the programme leaders in consultation with the HOE. The response is sent to the Registrar's office for forwarding to the External Examiners.

It is the responsibility of the Registrar to ensure that all External Examiner reports are received and duly responded to. Issues highlighted and appropriate actions are detailed in the relevant Programme Board and annual reports. This information also feeds into the programme development and periodic review process.

6.10 Grading Scheme and Progression

The College operates an award level by percentage requirement grading scheme for all programmes. Variations to this scheme may apply to learners on programmes under the aegis of different accrediting bodies.

The Approved Programme Schedule indicates the programme requirements and allocation of marks in terms of mandatory and elective modules. The distribution of credits across and between modules is designed to ensure that the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies are reflective of the award and standards for that particular stage and type of award.

A pass in a module is a positive statement of achievement, and a demonstration that the minimum intended learning outcomes have been met. To progress from stage 1 to stage 2, or stage 2 to stage 3, the learner is required to pass all mandatory modules, and the prescribed number of elective modules (where appropriate) as outlined in the Programme Schedule. The minimum mark required to pass a module is 40% and marks awarded for the individual assessment components, need to be passed, unless otherwise stated in the Programme Schedule.

A learner who fails to achieve a pass mark in one module may be awarded a pass by compensation, provided that:

- (i) they fall within the 35-39% band and
- (ii) they have attained marks in excess of 40% in at least one other module equivalent to double the deficiency in the module which is being compensated.

When pass by compensation has been awarded, the numeric result obtained will remain on the transcript for award calculations, but the transcript will indicate a “pass by compensation”.

Pass by compensation can be applied to a maximum of one module per stage and then only if all other modules at that stage have been passed at the first attempt. Where all of the modules at a stage are not taken at one sitting, the learner should be counselled to resit the failed module. Part-time learners need to complete all modules at a particular stage before they are eligible for compensation.

A learner is exempt from further examination in each module in which a pass has been awarded. Deferral of examinations/assessment can only be considered if state or medical documentation is forwarded directly to the Registrar’s Office, before the commencement of the assessment in question, and accepted by the PMC Committee.

6.10.1 Recovering Failed Modules

Where a learner fails a module they will normally be allowed three further opportunities

to recover the failed module. The nature of the reassessment, either by examination or continuous assessment, or both, should be agreed at the Assessment Board. Where the assessment was an unseen assessment (e.g. a written examination) the repeat task should not be the same as the original. Any failed assessment must be attempted at the next available sitting date. The learner is permitted to carry one module into the next stage.

6.10.2 Classification of Awards

The award class of the degree is calculated on the credit-weighted mean value of the grades that contribute to the award. RC applies a percentage grading system. The class of the honours degree award will be based on a weighted average percentage mark, which will be calculated as follows:

- Award Stage modules is calculated at 70% weighting Stage 3 modules and 30% weighting Stage 2*

**The weighted mean of stage 2 modules should be taken from the best modules worth 30% (2 of 6 modules) comprising the stage.*

Where a learner is being classified on the basis of the modules taken in the Award Year only, as in the cases of direct entrants to the final year, then the award classification is based on 100% of the final year credits.

For award purposes, a learner must satisfy all of the assessment and other requirements set for the programme. The learner must complete their award within the registration period for that award.

To be eligible for an Honours award all modules must be passed at the first attempt in the final stage.

Classification Thresholds

Honours Bachelor's Degrees (Level 8)	
First Class Honours	>70%
Second Class Honours Grade 1	60-69%
Second Class Honours Grade 2	50-59%
Pass	40-49%
Pass by compensation	35-39%
Fail	Less than 35%

The threshold will be interpreted by the Assessment Board in general, rather than in absolute, terms. The Board may make an award at a grade above the threshold specified in the table in cases where the Board feels that the circumstances for the learner merit such action.

Learners may be considered by the Board for an award higher than that indicated by their mark, where:

1. The final award grade is very close, normally within 1%, of the higher classification

Boundary

AND

2. The overall performance at Stage 3 is significantly better than that at Level 2 (exit velocity).

When PMCs are evident, the Assessment Board may exercise discretion in a manner appropriate to the individual case.

6.10.3 Attendance

Regular and punctual attendance at lectures and tutorials are essential to successful academic achievement. Each learner is responsible for all work from the first day of class and must make satisfactory arrangements with lecturers and the programme leader regarding any anticipated absences. Learners who do not maintain a satisfactory level of attendance are hindering their overall academic performance.

In order to encourage high attendance levels, RC will keep attendance records for all classes.

When absence from assessment or examinations is caused by illness or other special circumstances, the Registrar's Office should be informed in writing and documentary evidence (e.g. a medical certificate and completed PMC form) should be provided. Time limits for presentation of medical certificates apply and are detailed in the programme handbooks.

6.10.4 Assessment and Personal Mitigating Circumstances

When, due to personal mitigating circumstances, a learner is unable to complete an assignment or an examination, or where a learner considers that their performance in an assignment or examination may have been adversely affected by such circumstances, a completed Personal Mitigating Circumstances Form should be submitted to the programme leader. Personal Mitigating Circumstances applications must be submitted to the Programme Leader within seven days of the due date for assignment submission or the examination date.

Personal circumstances are envisaged as serious adverse factors, which may have affected the performance by the learner in coursework or examinations, such as illness or bereavement. Supporting evidence (e.g. medical certificate or bereavement notice) must be attached to the form submitted. Reasons for mitigation are confidential and they should only be discussed with the Programme Leader.

A learner may request deferral of assignments or examinations or both. Deferral of selected exams in a sitting will not be allowed.

The Assessment Board may take such action as it sees fit taking into account the

evidence provided by the learner. While there may be an acceptance that personal circumstances have resulted in poor performance in coursework or examinations, the Assessment Board will normally require the student to complete the learning outcomes for a module. Except in very exceptional circumstances information of this nature shall not be considered if presented after the meeting of the Assessment Board.

6.11 Placement Assessment and Evaluation Procedures

This section deals with work placements and how they are monitored and assessed.

6.11.1 Introduction

A well-structured and relevant industrial or work placement as an integrated part of a programme of study can provide the learner with a valuable learning experience of the day-to-day organisation, structure and management of an organisation, regulatory affairs, technical operations etc. The learner is afforded the opportunity to develop a range of personal and team skills appropriate to the industry, business or service.

The challenges presented for the learner on a work placement should be both relevant and appropriate to their level of academic study and the potential learning from the placement should complement their academic learning and training.

6.11.2 Placement Learning Objectives

The objective of the placement is to enable the learner to integrate classroom theory with practice in a work environment within an appropriate employment context. The learner will be introduced to structured employment which will develop in the learners an understanding of the organisation, its procedures and processes and technology. The learning objectives should be clearly outlined in the programme specification together with enabling statements on how the specific learning outcomes will be achieved.

6.11.3 The Placement Partnership and Procedures for Assessment and Evaluation

A successful placement relies on a clear understanding by each of the key players of their roles and responsibilities. Each learner will be assigned an academic tutor and a workplace mentor. The success of the placement will be determined jointly by the mentors and the learner, whose roles and responsibilities are listed and clearly defined in the relevant documents, which are available from the Registrar.

6.12 Plagiarism, Cheating and Collusion: Policy and Procedures

Every programme has a learner handbook which sets out the regulations regarding plagiarism, cheating, collusion and any other attempts to gain unfair advantage in assessments. The handbooks are distributed at induction and learners are informed of the

seriousness of all forms of academic impropriety. It is the responsibility of learners to acquaint themselves with the regulations pertaining to academic impropriety and that it constitutes a very serious offence. Penalties can range from the reduction of module marks to the exclusion from the College.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty that is used by a person to gain benefit from another person's work. Plagiarism can include *inter alia*:

- Failure to properly cite an author or contributor for ideas incorporated into a piece of work.
- Failure to cite sources of information and data used in a piece of work.
- Directly copying a piece of work by another person.
- Cutting and pasting paragraphs from different websites or documents to produce a piece of work.
- Deliberate and detailed presentation of another's concept as one's own.

Cheating

Cheating includes:

- Any form of communication with or copying from any other source during an assessment.
- Introducing any form of written or other material into an examination (including that stored electronically) other than that specified in an examination paper.
- Use of any technology during an assessment save that provided for in the assessment instructions.
- Forgery, alteration or misuse of College documents, records or identity cards.
- Submission of false claims of prior qualifications, research or experience in order to gain credit for prior learning.

Collusion

Collusion includes:

The conscious collaboration, without official approval, between two or more learners in the preparation and production of work which is ultimately submitted by each in an identical or substantially similar form and/or is represented by each to be the product of his or her individual efforts. Collusion also occurs where there is unauthorised co-operation between a learner and another person in the preparation and production of work, which is presented as the learner's own.

6.13 Procedures for dealing with plagiarism, cheating and collusion

Staff members who identify either accidentally or deliberately a case of plagiarism, cheating or collusion must in the first instance inform the HOE and the appropriate Programme Leader.

The staff member will prepare a report concerning the alleged offence and attach it to the piece of assessment which has to be submitted to the appropriate Programme Leader. The Programme Leader must establish a Learner Investigatory Panel (LIP) consisting of three members of academic staff, two of whom including the Chair must not be members of the programme team.

The Chair must inform the suspected learner(s) of its investigation and the nature of the allegation. The learner(s) must be given the opportunity to state his/her case orally and/or in writing at the learner(s) choice. If the learner(s) chooses to present his/her case s/he must be given the opportunity to do so in the presence of a third party. The learner(s) may choose not to attend a panel meeting.

The panel must decide whether the offence is proven or not and must prepare a report in writing, including all evidence, to the Chair of the Assessment Board. The report must indicate if the finding was unanimous and advise on any mitigating circumstances.

All correspondence and documentation will be maintained in the relevant learner file. A record is kept by the Programme Leader and master record by the Registrar's office as this record allows recidivism to be identified and acted upon. It is the responsibility of the Programme Leader to ensure that the record is kept up to date. The record can be considered in any subsequent sanction process. Learners may appeal the Assessment Board outcome.

6.14 Learner Appeals

The Assessment Board is the ultimate authority for decisions relating to Academic Impropriety. Learners wishing to appeal a decision of the LIP to the Assessment Board must inform the Registrar's Office in writing not later than seven days after notification of the original decision of the LIP.

A written submission must be received by recorded post, together with supporting documentation (as appropriate). Learners should note that the only permissible grounds for appeal are as follows:

- a) If there is evidence of irregularity in the administration and procedures and/or in the manner in which those procedures were executed.
- b) If there are circumstances that the LIP was not aware of when its decision was taken.

The submission must specify the grounds on which the appeal is requested, and it must

contain all information that the candidate wishes to have taken into account. Appeals are considered at the next available sitting of the Assessment Board. An appeal is only considered if the Registrar is satisfied that there are *prima facie* grounds for appeal, as outlined above. The Assessment Board, having considered the submission by the learner, has the authority to revise earlier decisions, including the matter of penalties. The decision of the Assessment Board is communicated to the learner by the Registrar.

Section 7: Procedures for the Selection, Appointment, Appraisal and Development of Staff

7.1 Purpose of the Procedures

The purpose of these procedures is to ensure that the College operates recruitment and selection methods that are fair and consistent and comply with RHA *Staff Policies and Procedures Manual (June 2006)*. The College has developed recruitment and selection procedures which ensure that sufficient, appropriately qualified teaching, management, administrative, professional, technical and support staff are employed to meet academic and quality requirements.

Staff involved in recruitment will adhere to RHA and College policy and receive training in recruitment and selection processes. Decisions to recruit will be made in the context of an overall staffing plan which takes into account longer term academic or operational needs including anticipated retirements and resignations.

It is the responsibility of the Human Resources Manager to develop, manage, evaluate and implement appropriate selection, recruitment and appointment practices and procedures. To the extent that each manager is involved in the process, s/he is responsible for ensuring compliance with the recruitment and selection policy.

RHA provides a booklet to members of interview panels to inform them of the procedures governing the interview process. This is to ensure that there is a consistency of approach by all members of an interview panel.

Academic staff vacancies are advertised in national newspapers and on the RHA website. For each position advertised, the requisite academic qualifications, lecturing experience and, where appropriate, business experience is clearly stated. Only candidates that satisfy the minimum criteria specified are considered for appointment. Applications are screened by the HOE and a short-list of qualified candidates is drawn up. Those on the short-list are invited to present for interview. An appropriate interview panel is constituted, which is normally chaired by the HOE or Programme Leader.

For all lecturer appointments, candidates presenting for interview are required to give a 15 to 20 minute presentation on an allocated topic within their subject area. The presentation is attended and evaluated by a group of fellow academics. A Lecturer Evaluation Form is completed by each attendee and returned to the HOE to inform the selection decision. These documents are retained on the HR files of successful candidates and can later be used for induction, and further training and development.

Each candidate is required to provide the names of two referees and these are followed-up prior to a decision being confirmed or an offer made. On acceptance, a contract of employment is provided to successful candidates. It is the College policy to issue a contract within three working days of receipt of acceptance.

New appointees are provided with an induction programme which provides a valuable information reference and guide for lecturing staff across a range of areas. All new members of academic staff undergo an induction process, which is the responsibility of the relevant Programme Leader. The following are the main elements of this process:

- Introduction to RHA and the College, its background, ethos and culture, structure and organisation
- Roles and responsibilities of academic staff
- Programme preparation and materials to be provided to learners
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies
- Academic and administration procedures and regulations
- General terms and conditions of employment
- HR and staff development policies, procedures and regulations

The principles underpinning the recruitment process are those of fairness, transparency, credibility, equal employment opportunity and merit.

7.2 Equal Opportunities

RHA is committed to working towards equality of opportunity in all aspects of its business for staff and learners. Equality of opportunity is defined as the right of all persons to receive fair, equal, and non-discriminatory consideration in access to and the processes of education and employment, as outlined in various equality and anti-discrimination legislation. RHA believes that our commitment to principles of fairness and respect for all helps create a climate that is favourable to the free and open exchange of ideas, and the welfare of staff and learners. RHA endeavours to ensure that all of its activities are governed by principles of equality and opportunity, and that all staff and learners are encouraged to achieve their full potential.

RHA is committed to promoting equal opportunities in education and employment in recognition of the principles of equity and social justice, and in conformity with equality and anti-discrimination legislation. RHA promotes the rights of individuals and groups to be free from discrimination and harassment on the grounds of marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community

The College affirms the right of all staff and learners to work in an environment free from harassment and bullying and does not tolerate discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation of customers by employees and non-employees. Behaviour of this kind may lead to disciplinary action and other sanctions at the discretion of the College.

In line with this commitment, RHA has developed a series of policies to support its endeavours and a copy of this document is available from Human Resources Department.

7.3 Staff Development Policy

The College is committed to ensuring that academic staff:

- Have the academic and/or professional expertise to deliver College programmes.
- Are qualified to a level commensurate with the programmes being offered.
- Link with other providers of further and higher education to ensure that they are familiar and engage with best practice in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Engage with the activities of other providers of higher education, or accreditation bodies by involvement as External Examiners, validation panel members, etc.
- Avail of staff development opportunities to enable them to develop and enhance their professional competence and scholarship.
- Continually focus on their own professional development and are guided in this area by the HOE.
- Are informed of, and provided with guidance on, policies and procedures for programme design, monitoring and review.
- Have relevant experience and knowledge of curriculum development and assessment design and engage with such training programmes the College deems appropriate.

7.4 Research Policy

The College is committed to:

- Develop and encourage pedagogic research.
- Develop and encourage research activity focused on the needs of business and the professions, particularly in the areas of housing and the community.
- Encourage traditional, subject specific academic research.
- Integrate that research with teaching and knowledge transfer developments.

The College is strongly of the view that knowledge and understanding of current developments in research and advanced scholarship in a discipline directly informs and enhances teaching and learning. Therefore academic staff are expected and encouraged to maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in research and scholarship in their subjects, and to be proactive in engagement in the pedagogical development of their disciplines. The College encourages and supports academic research in all areas which are relevant to the ethos and mission of the company. Details of the research policy can be found in *College Research Strategy* document.

7.5 Teaching and Learning Committee

The Teaching and Learning Committee is a sub-committee of the College Executive Board. Comprising members of the executive and others, as required, it meets formally

four times a year to consider plans relating to teaching and learning and how these relate to the various programmes.

(a) Terms of Reference

- To oversee teaching and learning carried out in the College and provide all learners with the highest quality teaching and learning experience.
- To identify and disseminate information regarding best practice in each of the areas.
- To enhance the quality of the learning experience for all learners, be they full-time, part-time or flexible learners.
- To adhere to the key objectives outlined on teaching and learning in the **National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030** or Hunt report.
- To enhance the flexibility of programme provision and strengthen the focus on learning outcomes to ensure that all graduates acquire the key transferable skills and core competences that the economy and society of the 21st century demand.
- To convene and consider applications for staff development in this area as required.

(b) Membership

- HOE
- Registrar or nominee
- Head of Research and Development
- Programme Leaders
- Library representative

7.6 Research and Ethics Committee

The Research and Ethics Committee is a sub-committee of the College Executive Board. Comprising members of the executive and others, as required, it meets formally four times a year to consider plans relating to research and ethics and how these relate to the various programmes.

(a) Terms of Reference

- To oversee research and ethics carried out in the College.
- To manage the College research policy as found in the College *Research Strategy* document.
- To identify and disseminate information regarding best practice in each of the areas.
- To convene and consider applications for staff development in this area as required.
- To monitor the procedures for ethical approval of all research and ensure they are current.

(b) Membership

- HOE
- Registrar or nominee
- Head of Research and Development
- Programme Leaders
- Library representative

7.7 Teaching and Learning Strategy

The College Teaching and Learning Strategy is based on a set of key principles and sets out specific goals and objectives for learning, teaching and assessment. Among the main goals of the Teaching and Learning Strategy are the following:

- Flexible and lifelong approaches to learning.
- Holistic curriculum design.
- Networking with other higher education providers.
- Production of academic papers for publication.
- Professional development.
- Research informed curriculum.
- Inclusive and accessible curriculum.
- Learner support.
- Achievement and progression.
- Assessment as learning.
- Employability.

The strategy has taken into account external reference points on knowledge, skill and competence standards expressed as the subject benchmark statements by academic quality assurance bodies, and described within the NQAI National Framework of Qualifications. The HOE in consultation with the Programme Leader is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all programmes offered by the College adhere to these general principles.

7.7.1 Approaches and Methods

Teaching and learning methods are intended to facilitate learners taking ownership of, and responsibility for, their own learning in partnership with the academic faculty. The teaching strategy is a learner-centred approach under which lecturers introduce learners to subject areas and act as guides and facilitators to learners in their study of the subject. Given the participatory nature of our pedagogic approach, class sizes will be controlled to a maximum of 50 for lecture style practice and 25 for facilitative approaches.

In programmes, where a Freirean, popular education approach is adopted, the starting point for a learning episode can be the experiences of learners which are uncovered and

validated against the experiences of others. Through this dialogic approach, the learners lived experience becomes course content and the theoretical inputs provided are led by these generative themes of learners. The role of the academic/tutor is to draw these out so they can be shared and validated by others. Academic theories, research and case studies from elsewhere are introduced in a way that enables an analysis of lived experiences and a comparison with the experiences of others.

Within this overarching philosophy, teaching staff are encouraged to develop their own pedagogic practice. For some, methodologies employed may be highly experiential, participatory and hands-on introduced through facilitative processes. Others may rely on more structured lecture-style inputs which will also have participation from learners.

Learners are provided with varied learning opportunities and experiences which include:

- Formal lectures.
- Workshops.
- Seminars.
- Case studies.
- Small group discussions.
- Role-plays.
- Learner presentations.
- Video presentations/Web based material.
- Site visits (national and international).

This range of teaching styles and methods adopted by staff are reinforced by placing greater emphasis on practically focused assessment.

In degree programmes, as learner's progress through the various years, the subject matter of their studies becomes increasingly complex and challenging. The focus of learning moves from acquisition of knowledge and understanding to critical analysis and application of conceptual knowledge to practical situations. In the final year, in particular, learners learn to critically evaluate and apply knowledge and skills which they have developed through earlier years of the programme. Ultimately, learners are brought to a position where they can demonstrate, through a variety of assessment processes, that they have achieved the learning outcomes of the programmes.

Section 8: Premises and Facilities

8.1 Introduction

The College is located in the RHA Building in High Park, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. The building houses facilities for teaching, research, estate design, estate management, and community development with office and general support services. There is a full canteen/restaurant which serve staff and learners.

RHA and the Academic Board regard the provision of facilities as very important for the learner, teaching staff and, most importantly, the learning and teaching environment. Within the boundaries of budgetary constraints, RHA is striving to improve and upgrade its facilities on an on-going basis. Presently, the main lecture room is equipped with IT facilities including a high beam projector and screen.

The HOE liaises with the Respond! Regional Manager in terms of overall facility issues which are raised both directly and indirectly by staff and learners. The normal channel for observations and issues relating to facilities is through learner and staff feedback forms and Learner Representative meetings.

The Regional Manager, in consultation with the HOE, is directly responsible for and committed to the provision of a high quality environment which is conducive to the efficient and safe use of the College facilities for all learners, staff and visitors. The role of the Regional Manager in relation to premises, equipment and facilities can be summarised under the following headings:

Evaluation and Maintenance of Buildings

This work is carried out by a number of service contractors both on a planned preventative basis and through call-out arrangements. The areas covered include maintenance of mechanical and electrical equipment, plumbing, heating and drainage installations, boilers, air conditioning plant etc.

Facilities Management and Evaluation

This includes services provided by external contractors such as contract cleaning, catering, grounds maintenance, static security, pest control, CCTV, fire alarm and intruder alarm. All of the main facility services are put out to public tender every three years in line with public sector procurement procedures. The quality of contracted services is monitored on an on-going basis by the Regional Manager.

Energy Management

The Regional Manager maintains records of the consumption of natural gas, water and electricity. They are responsible for making recommendations to the NMT on the most appropriate and cost efficient supplier of energy services.

Health and Safety

The Regional Manager or their nominee is responsible for health and safety matters within the grounds and the building. Health and Safety files are held in the Design Office on the second floor of the building. All staff are provided with training in the area of health and safety and are required to complete incident reports and other such documentation as and when situations arise.

Disabled Access and Facilities

The building has a very good level of access for persons with disabilities. The High Park building was redesigned in 2003 in accordance with the relevant section M of the Building Regulations that was in force at the time of construction. The HOE in conjunction with the Regional Manager will make recommendations to the College Executive Board for further building modifications as the need arises.

8.2 Overall Evaluation of Premises, Equipment and Facilities

In common with other service areas in the College the Registrar's office gathers feedback from learners as part of the process of quality monitoring and enhancement. This is seen as most important to ensure quality is maintained in the provision of physical teaching and learning facilities.

Feedback from learners is gathered via the learner surveys and Learner Representative meetings. As well as inviting comment on programme and module related matters, the questionnaires and meetings specifically provide an opportunity for learners to convey their opinions as to the quality of the physical teaching and learning environment. The information is collected by the Programme Leaders and issues raised are addressed via Programme Boards as a matter of priority. Where necessary and when budgetary approval is required these issues are escalated to the College Executive Board. Feedback to learners and decisions made in relation to facilities is organised through the Programme Leaders.

An ongoing refurbishment and redecoration programme is in place in High Park to ensure that the physical environment remains conducive to the learning and studying activity. RHA remains firmly committed to its policy of continuous improvement of the physical College environment and all associated teaching and learning facilities.

8.3 Procedures for Out-of Hours Access to College

Staff or learners must obtain the permission from a member of staff, at Programme Leader level or higher, to obtain access to the College outside of the normal opening hours. The Programme Leader must satisfy him/herself that the procedures being carried out are safe for the member of staff/ learner to perform. If there is any doubt about this, the Programme Leader must carry out a risk assessment, or have a risk assessment carried out by a competent person. Access can only be granted if the procedure is deemed to be safe.

The member of staff who gives permission for such access must make a request, by e-mail to the Regional Manager, or in his absence, the Deputy Regional Manager, at least 24 hours before access is required. The Regional Manager /Deputy Regional Manager will arrange for the member of staff/learner to collect and sign for a key from the Education Office. S/he will also inform staff in this office when they intend to call to the Organisation and will write this into the diary in the office in order that security staff will be aware of the time and date of the visit.

Access to College which is requested outside normal working hours is monitored by the HOE and the Regional Manager and recommendations for changes to these hours (if applicable) is made to the College Executive Board.

8.4 Timetabling

The Registrar co-ordinates the timetable for each programme in consultation with the Programme Leader and HOE. Discussions are also held with the Regional Manager of the RHA building. This is necessary because there are multiple uses of some of the facilities in the building, namely the canteen and lecture rooms. The Regional Manager carries out room audits to review the accuracy of the timetable by verifying actual room usage.

Section 9: Services Related to Programmes of Higher Education and Training

The College provides a range of supports and services to augment the delivery of the educational and training programmes. This section of the QAPP gives an overview of the Learning Resource Department and describes the role and function of the Learning Resources and Learner Services Committee (LRLSC).

9.1 Learning Resource Department

RHA considers the Learning Resource Department as a core resource in the development of a College and are committed to establishing a Learning Resource Department in High Park, Drumcondra which will encompass the library and computing service requirements of learners as new programmes are developed and accredited. The users of the Learning Resource Department service are not a homogenous group and have very different needs and preferences. They encompass a range of undergraduate programmes from certificate, diploma to honours degree.

9.2 Learning Resources and Learners Services Committee

The College provides a wide range of learner support services, both administrative and learner support, to assist all learners to access and participate in programmes, to enhance their learning experiences and opportunities for academic success, and to encourage their career development. The College endeavours to ensure that all learners are advised of, and have reasonable access to the services required.

Learning support activities at the College are co-ordinated by the LRLSC, which meets monthly to review the general progress of the various support mechanisms and to initiate improvements where appropriate. The committee provides a valuable forum for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the learning support system - a system that is intended to make an important contribution to learner success and well-being in the College. The Committee is supported by staff from the Registrar's office.

The objectives of the Committee are to:

- Implement and monitor learning support activities in the College.
- Develop best practice, such as using Moodle, and other software and virtual learning platforms as it relates to learning and teaching.
- Organise learning and teaching symposiums/workshops in the academic year.
- Make explicit to learners/staff the importance of assessed academic skills.
- Standardise, where possible, learner support delivery across programmes.
- Promote innovative pedagogical approaches.
- Provide support, guidance and counselling services to learners as required.
- Assist in organising learner events.

The membership of the Committee comprises:

- Registrar or nominee.
- Programme Leaders.
- Librarian.
- Head of IT.
- Regional Manager.
- Learner Representative from each programme.

Minutes are prepared and provided to Programme Boards and the College Executive Board for review and action as appropriate.

9.3 Library

Improvements to the library, in High Park, are underway to enhance the learning experience. At present the library houses approximately 1000 print items which comprise books, print journals and reports covering various subjects such as: housing, globalisation, community, social analysis, law, economics, social partnership and management. There are 140 part-time learners studying on existing programmes, with approximately 30 to 40 learners potentially using the library in High Park on a weekly basis for study purposes. This is due to the fact that the current programmes are run in conjunction with other colleges such as UCD and NUIM where learners can use the study facilities there. The library seats 16 people and rooms adjacent to the library have been assigned for overflow purposes and group study sessions.

In order to encourage the learning community to use the Learning Resource Department, opening hours are in line with the academic year, with extended opening hours of the premises prior to and during exam periods.

9.3.1 Learner Support and enhancement of services

The development and enhancement of the library is being directed by HOE and the Librarian, who holds a Masters in Library and Information Systems. As part of this development a number of mechanisms are being implemented to ensure a proper system of support is available to learners. In particular emphasis is placed on: giving learners the opportunity to provide feedback and promoting user education so that learners acquire the ability to effectively source, retrieve and exploit material.

9.3.2 Feedback

The College is aware that feedback from learners can be a vital component in achieving quality assurance in Library and IT services. A number of continuous improvement and feedback mechanisms are being implemented in order to evaluate the provision of service on a regular basis and ensure effectiveness of the library in meeting the learning community's needs. Steps in creating these mechanisms include:

- Generating an annual library survey.

- Establishing a Library Committee or review board who would meet once or twice a year to address current issues. Members of the library committee would include the Librarian, HOE, Academic Staff, IT Manager and Learner Representatives.
- Reviewing issues raised in Learner Representative meetings concerning service quality and user expectations.
- Adopting appropriate performance measures such as analysing usage statistics to assess the effectiveness of the library resources and the library users' perceptions.
- Respecting anonymity by having a learner feedback box available in the library. Any issues raised would be either addressed immediately where appropriate or discussed at the library committee meetings.
- Observing the needs of users through day to day interaction.

Currently, matters emerging from learner representative meetings are addressed, where possible, by the Programme Leaders. Issues requiring higher-level decisions are referred to the College Executive Board. A variety of performance measures, such as usage, will be reviewed on an annual basis. The HOE reviews the information and acts on it accordingly in collaboration with the Librarian. The library budget is allocated on a yearly basis in accordance with programmes offered. Each year the Librarian submits a budget request to the College Executive Board.

9.3.3 User Education/Information Literacy

The College is committed to developing information literacy skills amongst the College's learning community and to work collaboratively with academic staff to incorporate an information literacy component into all teaching programmes. The aim of the information literacy programme is to encourage independent research and promote lifelong learning by equipping all library users with the skills to identify their information needs and enable them to locate, use and evaluate library resources effectively. Delivery of the Information Literacy Programme will entail:

- Offering elective library classes to academic staff and learners on: referencing, assignment writing, accessing resources, internet searching, plagiarism etc.
- Providing library guides in print and electronic format where possible to complement teachings from the library classes. These guides would be extended to providing instructions on how to use the catalogue and information on useful online resources.
- Offering a library tour and induction programme to incoming learners and academic staff.
- Providing learners and academic staff tutorials where required.
- Providing access to material in the library that will assist learners in the course of their study such as referencing guides, study aids and academic writing books.

9.3.4 Communications

As the College develops, the library will expand the range of information resources available to learners. As this is taking place, it is essential that those responsible actively communicate with learners and academic staff on any important updates concerning the library development. In many cases, unfortunately users fail to clearly appreciate the value library resources can offer towards their educational enhancement. Therefore the College is putting into action a CORE communication process in anticipation that library users and stakeholders would ultimately realize the importance of library resources. This communication process involves:

Collaboration: Establishing a library committee whereby the Librarian will outline the benefits of information resources in the library to key stakeholders. Amongst these stakeholders would be learner representatives and academic staff who in turn could advise their respective learners of the merits of using the library. Another key stakeholder is IT support without which delivery of essential online services would be hindered.

Openness: Most of the learners in the College are currently mature learners and thus might have information needs that differ from the general student population. For instance some learners who have been away from education for a significant period might experience some library anxiety. Therefore it is essential the library presents itself appropriately as an open environment whereby learners are given every opportunity to communicate their queries or concerns. This could be achieved: through the feedback mechanisms outlined above; by creating a point of personal contact in the library by way of an information desk and by treating learners attending the library with care and respect.

Responsiveness: It would be futile to implement a range of feedback and quality improvement mechanisms without taking any steps to respond to learners needs. Depending on the issue raised, some concerns could be adequately addressed while others - owing to certain policy decisions - may not be changed. Either way it is important that the Librarian clearly outlines the purpose behind each decision.

Education: Communication is a key element to educating users on how to maximize their use of library resources. The possibilities of this are wide ranging and some have already been outlined above. These possibilities include: induction sessions, tutorials, library classes, library guides, meetings, online forums and user education at the information desk.

9.4 Information Provision

The College is dedicated to providing the best information sources available to learners. The means of achieving this is twofold, namely acquiring the most appropriate resources and providing access to library resources.

9.4.1: Acquiring the most appropriate resources

Collaboration between the Librarian and academic staff is the best method of determining what resources would be most suited to the learners needs. Academic staff can inform the Librarian of the core text books needed and advise on the various subjects they wish to cover. In turn the Librarian can inform academic staff of complementary resources available that might enhance student learning. When acquiring information resources both parties need to consider currency, relevancy, authority and accuracy.

9.4.2 Providing access to library resources

Electronic Resources: As new programmes are developed the range and scope of resources available to learners will be expanded. One such means of achieving this is by providing access to electronic resources that are relevant and conducive to the student's information needs. The following steps are taking place:

1. Subscription to an online database: A variety of databases have been reviewed by the librarian and a purchase of the most suitable product(s) will be discussed at the College Executive Board meetings. The databases which the College may subscribe to include: Ebscohost SocIndex, Ebscohost Academic Search Complete, Project Muse and HW Wilson Social Sciences Full text.
2. Subscription to Journals: The librarian has reviewed subscription access to various online journals. Considerations are taking place on whether to subscribe to a select number of direct relevant journals, or to subscribe to a database. The nature of the courses being developed by the College will be core to any decisions made here.
3. Open source material: Taking into consideration that RHA is a charitable organisation, it is essential it capitalises on the vast array of online/educational resources that are freely available on the internet while at the same time keeping in line with its standard information requirements. These resources would include:
 - Institutional Repositories such as OpenDoar and Rian.
 - Peer Review Open Access Journals such as DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)
 - Search Engines and Websites such as Google Scholar and OAIster
 - Educational Resources such as ERIC
 - Legal Resources such as Baillii.org.
4. Library Web: Development of a library web presence that can act as an access point for the above mentioned database and online resources. It would also be an opportunity to act as an information point to learners and academic staff where library guides, updates and links to relevant online resources could be uploaded.

5. Assistive Technology: The College is committed to responding to the needs of all learners and thus plans to purchase assistive technology equipment and software to assist learners with learning difficulties. As well as this the College is keen to provide access to open source assistive technology, so as to widen the scope available to learners and to keep in line with any budgetary limitations that may occur. Open source assistive technology could include freemind, adobe read out loud function and virtual magnifier.
6. E-books: The librarian will also review the provision of E-books to learners and staff.

Print Resources: The College will also acquire, organise and provide access to relevant print material such as books, reports, policy documents and reference material. Even though facilities are in place to allow learners to borrow books, the following measures are being implemented.

1. Library Management System: The benefits of implementing a Library Management System are that it will allow for greater security, acquisition and fair usage of library material. Moreover, it will assist learners in locating material that is relevant to their subject areas. The College is planning to install a system that could be open source or proprietary, depending on the user's needs and would include the following features:
 - A web based interface such OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) that is simple and clear and can be accessed on and off camps by all library users.
 - Customized searching options.
 - Web 2.0 facilities such as tagging and RSS Feeds.
 - Acquisitions, circulation, cataloguing and inventory modules.
 - Inputting cataloguing system via ISBN.
 - Facility to notify library users regarding overdue materials.
 - A reading list feature.
 - Option to bar code.
 - If possible a system that can link in with the Student Management System.
2. Collection Development Policy: The Librarian is working in collaboration with Academic staff to devise a collection development policy. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that library resources adhere to the teaching, learning and research objectives. In particular emphasis will be placed on key factors such as: user needs, budgetary considerations, selection criteria and resource development.
3. Cataloguing and Classification of Library Materials: All library material will be catalogued according to ACCR2 rules or equivalent. All material will be classified in accordance with the Dewey Decimal Classification system. The purpose of this is such that library material can be systematically arranged to allow for easier retrieval and access.

Other library sites: The College recognises the key benefits in arranging physical access for learners to other library sites. Currently College learners have access to UCD and NUIM libraries. The College is reviewing the possibility of arranging physical access to College libraries that are in closer proximity to High Park.

9.5 Computing Facilities

Two computers are available for use in the library and ten laptops are available for hire. Plans are currently underway to have wireless broadband available in all areas of High Park including the library which will provide learners greater access to online facilities throughout the campus.

The RHA IT Department enables and supports the use of computing and Information Technology by all sections of the College. It manages a large variety of critical services and the technology is crucial to the effective delivery of the complete spectrum of activities. The major services and systems provided are:

- Secure and resilient network infrastructure to service the needs of all users.
- Security services including Firewall, VLAN, DMZ's, IDS, controlled web access and secure access to systems and services.
- E-mail, printing and copying services for all staff and learners.
- Provision of back-up services which provide archive and recovery for all servers.
- Provision of server rooms with high standards of environmental facilities to house all servers.
- Management Information Systems (MIS).
- Web services including Internet and Intranets for staff and learners.
- Video conferencing.

College IT support is provided via the *SysAid Centre* which can be contacted on 0818 357 901. IT support services and facilities are evaluated on an annual basis from the perspective of learners and staff in the annual learner and staff surveys. The HOE reviews the information and addresses issues raised in consultation with IT.

9.5.1 Remote access and distant learning

The College will be installing Moodle and an Open Source Programme Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS). This is a very popular system among educators as a tool for creating online dynamic web sites for their learners. Current learners use Blackboard via UCD portal and will be transferred to the Moodle system over time. The use of Moodle will enhance the delivery of the BSS programme and other programmes which may be developed in locations outside High Park, namely Cork, Limerick, Galway or Abbeyleix. Learners will also be able to use Moodle for:

- Programme and module files download.
- Assignment submission.
- Discussion forum.
- Moodle instant messages.
- Online calendar.
- Online news and announcement (College and programme level).

Section 10: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures

10.1 Introduction

The College is committed to ensuring that both the operation and control of its quality assurance processes are effective and that they contribute to an on-going process of continuous improvement. The quality ethos is embedded in the operational procedures in all areas of the College. To this end the College implements a series of internal and external reviews of its quality assurance procedures. The key purpose of the reviews is to obtain objective evidence to assess whether the quality process or system under review is fit for purpose and to address any issues or gaps identified. The *HETAC 2002 Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training* is used as a template for evaluating the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Procedures and a checklist is included in Appendix Three.

10.2 Responsibility for Evaluation of Processes and Procedures

The Academic Board has responsibility for the formulation of Quality Assurance policy and for maintaining and improving institutional quality. It has oversight for the overall academic monitoring of the review processes that relate to the provision of education and training, services and supports. The HOE reports to the College Executive Board who oversees all processes and procedures.

It is recognised that all processes and procedures relating to Quality Assurance should demonstrate the core attributes of clarity, transparency, fairness and equity, efficiency and adherence to best practice. The College has clearly defined procedures in relation to the implementation of quality review recommendations as a means of responding to the issues raised in all reviews and record closure. It is the responsibility of the College Executive Board to ensure that these procedures are carried out.

10.3 Internal Review Mechanisms

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, Section 28(4) requires that from time to time the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the College are reviewed, and the outcome of the review is forwarded to the NQAI. The College conducts its own internal reviews at institutional level and programme level which incorporates external feedback from External Examiners.

In reviewing the Quality Assurance processes the key questions are:

- What is the process trying to achieve?
- Are the resources in place to enable the procedures to be implemented satisfactorily?
- How is this assessed?
- How is this verified?

Operational reviews of all programmes take place every year. A more detailed review takes place prior to, and as part of the preparation process for, Programmatic and/or Institutional Reviews. These reviews are informed by wide ranging consultation with all stakeholders such as External Examiner feedback, meetings of Programme Boards, learner feedback via focus groups and learner representative meetings, and feedback questionnaires from all College staff. Details of the procedures and scope for the evaluation of each programme are outlined in Section 6 of this document.

It is the responsibility of the HOE to instigate and oversee these reviews. It is the responsibility of the Programme Leader to conduct these reviews and monitor follow up actions.

10.4 External Institutional Review Mechanisms

The College participates in reviews which are initiated and conducted by the various accrediting bodies.

External monitoring processes used by the College to review quality assurance include:

- The involvement of external experts in the evaluation of all new full-time programmes.
- The involvement of External Examiners in all assessed programmes delivered by the College.
- The involvement of external experts appointed by the awarding body to conduct Institutional Reviews.

The accrediting body advises the terms of reference, and establishes a review panel comprising academics and experts appropriate to the programme under review.

A standard approach for an Institutional review normally consists of six phases:

1. Terms of reference for the review are set following consultation with the awarding body.
2. Self-study by the College.
3. Visit by expert panel appointed by the awarding body (where appropriate) and written panel report.
4. Response by the College including implementation plan.
5. Panel report and response published.
6. Follow-up report submitted by the College.

The self-study is based on broad consultation with internal and external stakeholders of the College especially learners. The report should be analytical and succinct with substantiating evidence retained for examination by the expert panel. The College will publish the self-study report.

The full External Institutional Review Report is discussed at the Academic Board and any required action is carried out by the HOE in consultation with Programme Leaders and other appropriate staff e.g. Librarian, Head of IT etc. Changes adopted as a result of the external review findings are documented and forwarded to the Academic Board.

10.5 Conclusion

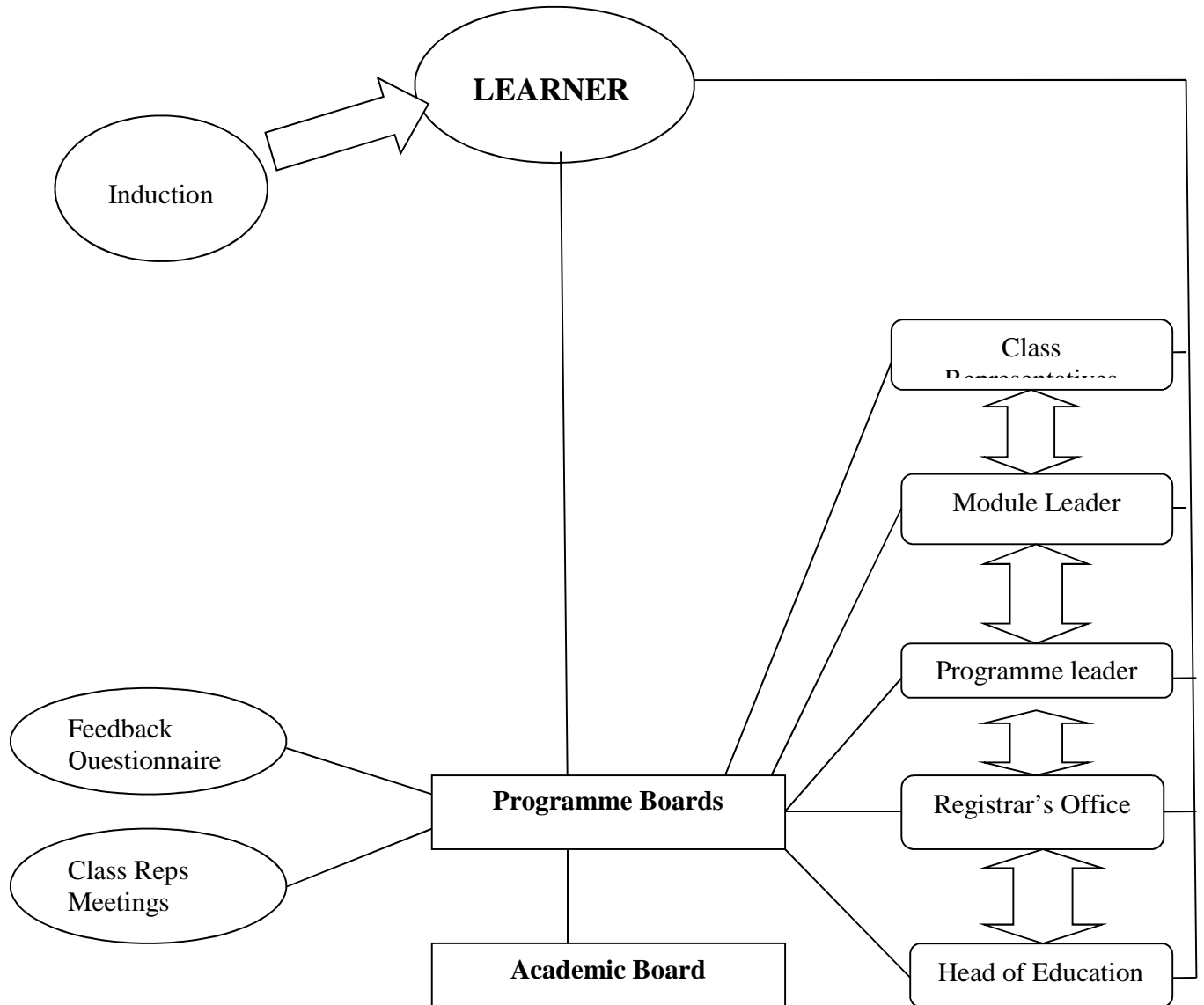
The College has clear structures in place to systematically monitor and assess quality assurance issues and is committed to ensuring that both the operation and control of its quality assurance processes are effective and efficient; incorporate educational best practice and contribute to continuous improvement. One of the distinct advantages of a small College campus is the comparative ease with which quality issues can be identified and changes implemented.

The particular nature of RHA as a friendly, community focused, supportive organisation, facilitates close relationships between staff and learners, allowing for issues to be addressed both formally and informally and in a timely manner.

Appendix 1

Learner Engagement Diagram

Learner Engagement Diagrammatical Overview



Respond! College, April 2011.

Appendix 2

Guide to the Policy on Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs)

Guide to the Policy on Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs)

Introduction

As a learner, you may face a number of unforeseen difficulties during the course of your studies. It is possible that you may experience difficulties which will cause you to miss a substantial number of classes, significantly affect your ability to study or complete assessments (both continuous assessment and/or examinations) on time or at all or may have adverse effects on your performance in any assessments you undertake. Respond! College has a procedure to consider such circumstances and this Guide is designed to take you through that process.

Key points to note

Respond! is committed to the principle of equity in the treatment of all our learners and applications for personal mitigating circumstances are considered on an individual basis and with great care. The policy is designed to help if you face a significant challenge or difficulty during your studies.

The key point to note is that this policy relates to unforeseen or unpreventable circumstances. If you miss an assessment deadline or an examination because of any of the circumstances outlined on page 2, your first step must be to contact the Programme Leader as soon as possible. They may be able to offer you a quick solution. This policy will be appropriate only in the event that a quick local solution is not possible.

If you know **in advance** that for good reason you will be unable to complete a piece of continuous assessment, you should apply for an extension to the submission deadline by submitting the Application Form for Late Submission of Coursework to the relevant Programme Leader.

Learners who require on-going support and accommodations on the grounds of a verifiable disability are encouraged to discuss this with the Programme Leader.

Remember: PMCs are granted in a small number of cases and only after careful consideration by the Board of Examiners. Before you submit an application, you should ask yourself the question: “would one expect these circumstances to directly negatively affect the performance of anyone who encountered it?”

What are Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs)?

Personal Mitigating Circumstances are serious unforeseen circumstances beyond your control which prevented you from meeting the requirements of your programme which might include:

- Failing to submit all or any part of any continuous assessments by the due date.
- Missing an examination or test.

- Performing below your ability in work submitted or examinations attended.
- Circumstances that persisted throughout the semester or a substantial part of it that affected your performance.

Extenuating circumstances may include:

- Involvement in an accident.
- Victim of crime.
- An acute illness or serious on-going medical condition.
- Ongoing life-threatening illness of a close family member or partner.
- Bereavement of a close family member or partner.
- Acute or on-going serious personal/emotional circumstances.
- Domestic upheaval at the time of the assessment (e.g. fire, burglary, eviction).

The following are examples of what may not normally be considered grounds for PMCs and any applications citing any of the following are unlikely to be considered by the Programme Assessment Boards:

- Typical symptoms associated with exam stress (e.g. anxiety, sleeping disturbances etc.)
- Minor illnesses such as a common cold.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Financial difficulties.
- Holidays during the academic year.
- Accommodation issues.
- Commuting issues.
- Misreading the examination timetable.
- Paid employment or voluntary work.
- IT and/or computer failure.
- English is not your first language.
- Multiple assessments in a short time.
- Failure to plan study schedule.
- Sporting commitments.
- Debs/weddings/social events.
- Election/campaigning commitments.

Please note: the above examples are not definitive, and are intended only as a guide. In all cases, the Programme Assessment Board has ultimate authority to use its discretion, taking into account the full circumstances of a particular case.

How do I make an application?

You must complete the Application Form for Personal Mitigating Circumstances which is divided into six sections (A to F).

Section A – Personal Information

General personal information required: name, learner number, contact number, e-mail address, programme, stage.

Section B – Requested Action

In this section, you must state which specific consideration you wish the Programme Assessment Board to take into account in determining your final grade. You must also list the module codes and titles. Take great care that you specify the module codes correctly. The considerations you may seek are:

- Request that particular circumstances be taken into account in determining your final grade.
 - Request permission to withdraw from a module without academic penalty.
 - Request permission to complete outstanding component/s of a module without penalty.
- Please list the modules and the outcome per module you are requesting and ensure that the correct modules codes are given.

On page 2 of the Application Form the following details are required:

1. Indicate the impact of the circumstances on your work and relevant dates.
2. Provide details of assessments missed, dates etc (if applicable).
3. Confirm whether or not you have contacted the relevant Programme Leader and list any action that they suggested.

Section C – Nature of your PMCs

This provides you with the opportunity to express the nature of your extenuating circumstances and the impact you perceive these to have had on your ability to fulfil your assessment requirements. You must describe as clearly as possible the circumstances which have affected you and the extent to which you have been affected.

You need to be candid because the better the understanding that those reading the form develop of your circumstances, the more appropriate will be the outcome for you. You can be assured that confidentiality is maintained and the people will read your application form only on a “need to know” basis.

You will also need to indicate, using the categories available, which type of circumstances best reflect your situation.

Section D – Evidence supporting your application

When submitting an application, you must provide verifiable written confirmation that supports your application for extenuating circumstances, the purpose of which is to help the College to understand and verify the nature of the circumstances which have affected you. This evidence must express an opinion as to the extent to which your performance or ability to perform has been affected. If any of the circumstances are sensitive, you should discuss with the person providing the evidence the need to express the impact of the circumstances along with necessary information regarding the incident/situation.

Please note:

- Evidence must relate to the specific application for extenuating circumstances being made.
- You may not use a family member to provide evidence.
- The documentation provided must be consistent with the application in terms of matters such as dates, circumstances etc. The Programme Assessment Board reserves the right to reject any application in cases where there are serious discrepancies between the documentation and the application.
- The Programme Assessment Board reserves the right to verify and seek further details on this documentation.

Only evidence from one of the following qualified professionals will be accepted:

- Registered medical practitioner/health professional
- Member of An Garda Síochána
- Registered counsellor/psychotherapist
- Psychologist

Any evidence must be on headed paper and must be legible, stamped and dated.

Section E –Student Declaration

You must sign and date the application form.

Section F – Received by the Programme Office

It is recommended that you retain a copy of the application and supporting documentation for your records as supporting documentation is non-returnable.

Who makes the decision?

The Programme Assessment Board makes the decision about your extenuating circumstances.

What are the possible outcomes?

If your application for PMCs is accepted, one of the following outcomes will apply:

• Outcome 1

If you asked that your special circumstances be taken into account by the Programme Assessment Board in determining your final grade for the module(s), the Board involved will have taken this into account when submitting a final grade for your module. You will not be given details of the decisions made and the grade changes made (if any).

• Outcome 2

If you are granted the opportunity to have specific components of a module assessed on a further occasion without academic penalty, you must contact the Programme Leader for details on how to complete the assessment for the module. Your result will not be capped. You must complete the component (or components) of assessment, or complete some equivalent assessment(s) set by the Programme Leader, within a period prescribed by the Board but no later than the end of the subsequent semester in which you are registered.

• Outcome 3

If you are permitted to withdraw from the module without academic penalty and take the module on another occasion, this will appear on your record. Your final result will not be capped. You may substitute another module for this module in accordance with rules for substitution of modules.

Appendix 3
Personal Mitigating Circumstances
(PMCs) Application Form

Application Form for Personal Mitigating Circumstances

A. Personal Information			
Learner Name		Learner Number	
Telephone Number		E-mail Address	
Programme		Stage	

B. Requested Action

By making an application for Personal Mitigating Circumstances, you are requesting one of the following outcomes for each module named. You may specify different outcomes for different modules where the reasons for this are explained in your accompanying documentation.

Outcome 1 That my special circumstances are taken into account by the Assessment Board in determining my final grade(s) in the module(s) listed below.

Outcome 2 That I wish to have specific components of the module(s) listed below assessed on a further occasion, without academic penalty.

Outcome 3 That I wish to withdraw without academic penalty from the module(s) listed below and attempt the module(s) fully when next offered or substitute with another module if permitted.

Please list the modules and tick the appropriate outcome box per module you are requesting. Please ensure that the correct modules codes are given.

Module Code and Title	Outcome 1 - Circumstances taken into account	Outcome 2 - Opportunity to complete later	Outcome 3 - Withdrawal sought

Learner Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print name _____

Please indicate the impact of these special circumstances on your work				
Complete one, or both of the statements below:				
Unable to attend College or an examination or assessment	<i>from</i>		<i>to</i>	
Capacity to work and study affected	<i>from</i>		<i>to</i>	

Details of Assessments Missed (if applicable)		
Please complete a separate line in the table for each assessment missed, stating the module code, module title, type of assessment and the date of the assessment.		
Module Code and Title	Type of Assessment missed, e.g. Assignment, exam, presentation etc	Date of Assessment

Action already taken by Programme Leader (if applicable)

Have you made the Programme Leader aware of these special circumstances?

YES NO

If yes, please explain what action they have taken or suggested in relation to each module:

Module Code and Title	Suggested Action/Action Taken

C. Nature of your PMCs.	
<p>Please describe the circumstances (use an additional page appended to this form if necessary). Please be specific as to the impact of these circumstances on your academic performance. Your confidentiality is assured. Only those people who will consider your circumstances will have sight of this form. Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied.</p>	
<p>Please tick the box below which best describes your extenuating circumstance: The College requires that these circumstances are confirmed by the professional indicated in each case below. Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied. Supporting evidence is non-returnable. Where appropriate, please ask the professional providing supporting evidence to be as specific as possible in outlining the impact of your circumstances on your ability to meet the demands of your academic programme.</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical illness, injury, accident or hospitalisation	Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied by a registered medical practitioner, health professional, registered counsellor/ psychotherapist or psychologist.
<input type="checkbox"/> Family illness (Specify relationship)	Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied by a registered medical practitioner or other health professional.
<input type="checkbox"/> Bereavement (Specify relationship)	Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied.
<input type="checkbox"/> Other personal or emotional circumstances	Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied by a registered medical practitioner, health professional or student support professional.
<input type="checkbox"/> Victim of crime	Section D must be completed by a member of An Garda Síochána, or use the previous option if the crime has resulted in serious personal or emotional circumstances.
<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify: _____	Appropriate original supporting evidence must be supplied.

D. Supporting Evidence

Supporting Evidence Provided: YES NO

Supporting evidence from one or more of the following competent professionals must be included. Please note that original documentation must be supplied and is non-returnable. It is recommended that you retain a copy of the application and evidence for your records. Documentation should be confined to the facts of the case and the nature of the impact only.

Please indicate the source of the supporting evidence you are attaching to the application:

- Medical Practitioner
- Garda
- Other health professional (please specify) _____
- Other (please specify) _____

E. Learner Declaration

I confirm that I have read and understood the Learner Guide and that the information given in this form is true and factually correct. I confirm that this information may be disclosed, where necessary, to academic and administrative staff of the College involved in determining my grades.

Print name: _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____

F. Received by the Programme Office

Office _____ Signed: _____

Print name: _____ Date: _____

Check List

Personal Mitigating Circumstances refer to cases of serious **unforeseen** and/or **unpreventable** circumstances. Before submitting an application, remember to ask yourself “would one expect these circumstances to directly negatively affect the performance of anyone who encountered them?”

Please make sure that the following have been completed prior to submitting the form:

A Personal Information completed

B Requested Action specified

Give details of Assessments missed if appropriate

Informed the Programme Leaders and stated the action taken or suggested

Remember: Module Codes **AND** Module Titles must be entered

C Nature of your PMCs described

D Supporting Original Evidence from a competent professional provided

Remember: Supporting evidence is non-returnable

E Signed **AND** dated

A photocopy of the Front Page of the application, signed or stamped by a Programme Office staff member may be given to the learner as a receipt

It is the responsibility of the learner to ensure that this form is submitted to the relevant Office within the permitted timeframe.

Learners are encouraged to submit applications as soon as possible after the occurrence of the circumstances outlined in the application. However, applications must be received within 5 working days of the end of the semester assessment period.

Applications received after the submission deadline will not normally be accepted.

Appendix 4

Examination Regulations- For Learners (hand-out)

Examination Regulations

1. Instruction to Candidates

Each Learner has a personal responsibility to make themselves familiar with the following regulations as they pertain to all examination sittings at Respond! College.

2. Examination Regulations

2.1 The term “examination” in these Regulations should be construed to include reference, as appropriate, to written and oral examinations, assessment of programme work, project-work etc., examination of theses, dissertations and similar work, and such other forms of assessment of candidates’ performance as may have been approved or prescribed by Respond! in relation to any programme of study or instruction, and cognate expressions should be construed accordingly.

2.2 A breach of examination and assessment regulations should be deemed to have occurred when any actual or attempted form of:

- Cheating.
- Plagiarism.
- Misrepresentation.
- Bribery.
- Falsification.
- Impersonating or other such form of deception.
- Possession of copies of examination question or examination paper, in advance of the examinations being held.
- Untrue claims to have carried out experiments / research.

is perpetrated by a candidate whether acting alone or with any other person or persons.

2.3 Candidates should assemble 10 minutes before the advertised time of an examination but should not enter the examination room until requested to do so.

2.4 Smoking in the examination room is not permitted.

2.5 Except with prior approval of the Registrar, no eating or drinking is permitted in an examination room.

2.6 No candidate shall bring into the examination room or have in his/her possession

- while in the room, any **materials other than those expressly permitted for the examination. Pencil cases are not permitted on desks.**
- 2.7 Candidates should seat themselves at the desk indicated by their designated desk number as displayed on the notice board at the examination room entrance. They should not move any of the papers on the desk or commence writing until requested to do so.
- 2.8 Candidates are asked to leave their Learner identity cards visible on their desks for the purpose of checking.
- 2.9 The Invigilator will advise all candidates on how to complete the cover sheet of the answer booklet and will indicate that their registration numbers and/or any other number should be used. Candidates are requested to read the instructions at the top of the examinations paper before starting work.
- 2.10 Candidates must comply with an Invigilator's directions at all times.
- 2.11 Candidates may use slide rules, drawing instruments, dictionaries and other reference **books/documents if expressly permitted. Mathematical tables, if required, will be supplied. Candidates may not bring their own mathematical tables or statistical tables into the examination room. If a candidate wishes to use anything other than that is expressly permitted for that examination, this must have been previously agreed with the Examinations Office.**
- 2.12 Silent non programmable calculators may be used provided that the rules of any Relevant external **examining bodies do not specifically exclude them. It is the responsibility of each Learner to ensure that his or her calculator is in working order. It is advisable to bring a spare battery. Candidates will not normally be permitted to borrow materials from another candidate.**
- 2.13 Candidates shall not bring into the Examination room, nor have in their possession while in such examination room, any computing equipment, including electronic organisers and programme calculators, mobile phones, recording equipment, radio books, notes, paper, or any source of information pertinent to the examination or which might influence examination performance. Retention of any unauthorized material shall be construed as a serious breach of Exam Regulations.

- 2.14 No candidate will be admitted to the examination room more than thirty minutes after the start of the examination. In exceptional circumstances, however (and provided that no other candidate has left the examination room) a candidate may be admitted later, at the discretion of the Invigilator. Extra time is not normally allowed.
- 2.15 If, after reading the examination paper, a candidate wishes to leave the examination room, he or she may not be allowed to do so until after thirty minutes from the start of the examination.
- 2.16 Candidates wishing to temporarily leave the examination room may not do so unless accompanied by a **nominated attendant**. **In any event, no person may leave the examination room without the Invigilator's permission and no candidate may leave within the last thirty minutes of the examination period.**
- 2.17 At the end of the examination candidates must remain in their place until an Invigilator has collected **their script(s)**. **It is a candidate's responsibility to ensure that his/her script(s), answer sheets and unused answer books are handed to the Invigilator before leaving the examination hall.**
- 2.18 If a candidate is absent from the examination for medical or other unavoidable reasons, a **Personal Mitigating Circumstances Form**, must be submitted to **the Programme Leader without delay, together with a medical certificate if the absence was due to illness**. **Details of submission of this form are listed on the form.**
- 2.19 **A candidate must not, on any pretext whatsoever, speak to or have any communication with any other candidate; such communication will be regarded as a breach of the examination regulations. If candidates need to ask questions they should raise their hands and one of the invigilators will attend to them. Spare paper etc. is to be obtained only from the Invigilator.**
- 2.20 A candidate who is found to have unauthorised materials in her or his possession in the examination room **shall be deemed to be in breach of the examination regulations. Books, notes, bags and coats must be left in designated areas.**
- 2.21 Any written or printed materials not written on the official answer booklets or examination paper(s) shall **be considered to be unauthorised materials. The unauthorised materials shall be removed and retained by the Invigilator. The same procedure will be followed where a candidate or candidates is or**

are considered by the Invigilator to have copied or attempted to copy another candidates answer(s) to an examination question(s).

- 2.22 In case of impersonation, the impersonator and the personated shall be deemed to be in breach of the examination regulations.
- 2.23 If any candidate shall be adjudged to have violated any of the examination regulations, or in any other **way acted improperly, the Academic Board will refer such matters to the Learner Investigatory Panel.**
- 2.24 An invigilator shall be empowered to inspect any material in the possession of a candidate during an examination.
- 2.25 Rough work should be included in the answer book and identified as such.
- 2.26 The candidate may NOT remove from the examination hall any items provided by the College other than the examination paper.
- 2.27 Examination Results: The official result of the learner examinations will be sent to the learner at the Address shown **on our records. The learner should ensure that the record is correct. Do not telephone Respond! College, as results will not be given over the telephone.**