

Quality Assurance Manual

Support For Learners



7. Support For Learners



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Foreword

The 2019 revision of the Dorset College Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) is in line with the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for use by all Providers[1] and the Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed by QQI for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary basis[2], as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, May 2015[3]. This revision also takes into consideration the evolving scope of Dorset College encompassing policies and procedures applicable to higher, further and English language education. The revision is within the context of overall governance and management structures in place to support the delivery of such programmes and specifically encompassing policies and procedures applicable to our current suite of programmes (Level 5 to Level 8) and in the future up to level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

This edition of the QAH was informed by consultation with key stakeholders of the College including but not limited to learners, staff and faculty and wider engagement with the further and higher educational community as well as external stakeholders for approval by Dorset College Academic Quality Committee upon review by an independent QQI panel.

[1] QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf>

[2] QQI's Sector Specific QA Guidelines

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Sector%20Specific%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines%20V2.pdf>

[3] European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

Policy Title	Support for Learners
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Date Approved	17/12/2018
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Effective From	02/01/2019
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Monitor	Registrar / QA Department
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Summary	This policy provides an overview of the policies directly related to the supports that the College has in place for its learners. These supports cover both academic and non-academic issues and are intended for a diverse learner body.
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Related Policies	
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Revision History & Commencement Date & Date of Next Review	Version 1 – 2019 Commencement Date (Version 1): 02/01/2019 Date of Next Review: Following Independent Assessment from Re-engagement process
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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide an overview of the learning supports that are made available by the College and the standards with which the College should maintain in this regard. It also is intended to outline how the learner perspective is incorporated in the College's management and operations, as well as the responsibilities of learners.

Scope

This policy applies to all learners on FET and HET programmes of Dorset College.

Policy Statement

Dorset College recognises that it has a duty to support its learners in a fair and reasonable manner. It also acknowledges that the College must ensure that its support provision is transparent, that learners are informed of these, and that the learner perspective is taken into account. Furthermore, the College also recognises the importance of outlining to learners how it expects its learners to conduct themselves. The policies in this section are intended to provide detail and clarity to these areas.



7.1

Academic Learning Supports

The College has in place a variety of academic learning supports for its learners to assist them during their programme(s). These academic learning supports include:

- _ Swift response to miscellaneous academic queries through liaison with the programme manager.
- _ Study support skills.
- _ English language support.
- _ Library services support.
- _ Work experience support.
- _ IT support.

Given the disperse nature of the supports on offer, the College recognises the importance of ensuring that the supports are integrated and that learners are regularly informed of these supports. To ensure this cohesion and information, the academic learning supports are coordinated by the QA Officer. Having a single person in charge of the coordination of these learning supports helps ensure a clarity for learners as to where to request any support and a cohesion of the supports that are offered. Furthermore, the College is committed to ensuring its learners are fully informed of these supports and will promote these through the College induction and VLE MOODLE, as well as through its learner handbook.



Academic Learning Supports

Study support skills

The College commits to the continued provision of study support sessions regularly during the academic year. These sessions are free for all learners to attend and cover areas such as: Academic Writing, Referencing, Essay writing, Research skills, in-class note taking, study skills, and examination preparation techniques. The provision of these sessions is coordinated by the College Librarian who ensures that learners are aware of these sessions and monitors who is attending them. They will also follow up with the attendees to assess if learners felt they benefited from the sessions and if learners would like other specific topics covered in future sessions.

English language support

The provision of English language support is facilitated by the College's English language school. However, should a learner wish to avail of such supports, they need to first discuss with the QA Officer who will liaise with the Director of Studies in the College's English Language School. These English language supports are not intended to compensate for learners who do not have the minimum required level of English language competency necessary for admission onto a programme – these must always be met. Instead, these support sessions are intended to provide specific supports that a non-native English speaker may need when undertaking an academic programme. These would include: an explanation of technical jargon specific to the cognate area of the programme being studied, clarification of assessment terminology, understanding of the meaning of examination questions.



Academic Learning Supports

Library services support

The library services support is facilitated by the College librarian, who provides regular information on the library facilities. These sessions cover: library resources available to learners, how to access information in the library, eResources available to learners. These sessions are open to all learners. The College Librarian will liaise with the QA Officer to assess attendance levels at sessions and with learners to get their feedback on sessions and what they would like in future sessions.

Work based learning support

The College will have a dedicated liaison person who will support learners who avail of the work-based learning modules, where they are offered on programmes. This will ordinarily be a member of the College's teaching faculty. This person will be the point of contact for the learner for any work-based learning queries they may have. They will also provide support for the learner during their work-based learning and will inform the Programme Manager if a learner is experiencing difficulty during their work-based learning experience.

IT Support

The College has dedicated ICT personnel who provide technical support for learners. This technical support is available as a drop-in service, or learners can make an appointment with the College's IT staff through Moodle. The IT support covers all aspects of how learners interact with their programme through the use of technology.



Academic Learning Supports

This would include support for the use of IT hardware provided by the College, access issues that the learner may experience when trying to logon from their IT equipment to eResources provided by the College, downloading and use of software related to the programmes that they are studying in the College.

7.2

Non-Academic Learning Supports

To supplement the Academic Learning Supports outlined previously, the College also has an array of Non-Academic Learning Supports. These non-academic learning supports include:

- _ Pastoral Care
- _ Counselling service
- _ Careers Support Service
- _ Learners with additional learning needs or disabilities
- _ Class Representative support
- _ International Learners
- _ Healthcare

Given the diverse nature of the supports on offer, the College recognises the importance of ensuring that the supports are integrated and that learners are regularly informed of these supports. To ensure this cohesion and information, the academic learning supports are co-ordinated by the QA Officer. Having a single person in charge of the co-ordination of these learning supports helps ensure a clarity for learners as to where to request any support and a cohesion of the supports that are offered. Furthermore, the College is committed to ensuring its learners are fully informed of these supports and will promote these through the College induction and VLE, as well as through its learner handbook.



Non-Academic Learning Supports

Pastoral Care

The College is aware of the adjustment that learners can face in transitioning into a further or higher education programme, whether they are coming from secondary school, returning to education or transitioning to the Irish education system from another country. Furthermore, learners may also struggle during their academic career as their coursework proves challenging or personal circumstances impede their ability to complete their academic tasks as competently as possible.

Therefore, the College has in place pastoral care support, which assists the learner with their transition to further or higher education, as well as supporting learners during their studies with the College.



Non-Academic Learning Supports

Counselling Service

The College has a fully qualified counsellor on its staff who fulfils the role of learner counsellor, in addition to other roles. Should a learner wish to avail of this service, or if a member of staff recommends that a learner avail of the College's counselling service, they should liaise with the QA Officer who will arrange a session in conjunction with the learner. The College provides up to four fully subsidised counselling sessions, and an additional four sessions are partially subsidised. Should a learner wish to avail of further counselling sessions, the College would consider further subsidising on a case-by-case basis.

Learners with Additional Learning Needs or Disabilities

The College is committed to ensuring access to its programmes are not restrictive to learners with additional learning needs or disabilities, and that all learners are supported during their studies. Therefore, once a learner has demonstrable evidence that minimum entry requirements have been met, the College will provide assistance to learners to support their achievement on their programme.

Central to how it facilitates learners is the College's adherence to the principles of Universal Design, as set out by Ahead. The College is committed to ensuring that these are embedded across its Teaching, Learning and Assessment:



Non-Academic Learning Supports

Teaching:

- The College will ensure that course notes are made available to learners in a format appropriate for them.
- The College will provide CPD training for faculty on teaching in accessible formats.
- The College will support faculty to integrate the 7 principles of universal design into their teaching methodology.

Learning:

- The College will provide study skills sessions for all learners, and specific sessions on study skills for learners with disabilities.
- The College will encourage learners to bring any additional academic needs to their attention at the earliest possible instance (ideally at registration).

Assessment:

- The College will provide all reasonable accommodations required for the assessment of its learners.
- The College will provide clear information on the assessments, and expected criteria, that it will use.
- The College will facilitate, if possible, alternative assessment instruments to be used, where required.



Non-Academic Learning Supports

As the College premises consists of listed buildings, the ability of the College to provide accessible infrastructure is limited. However, the College does try to ensure its premises are as accessible as possible, whilst working within these restrictions.

Class Representative Support

The College recognises the important role that class representatives perform in ensuring that the learner experience is as positive as possible. They can often act as a vital link between the College's management and administrative staff and its learners and ensure that issues that arise for learners can be resolved in a timely manner.

The Programme Manager would meet with the class representatives regularly during the semester and would meet with all class representatives collectively at least once per semester. This is to ensure that the learners' voice is incorporated into the College's planning, management and decision-making mechanisms.

Furthermore, given the importance of the class representative role, the College recognises that class representatives need to be informed and supported in the role that they are undertaking. To support its class representatives, the College provides class representative training that is aligned to the NStEP programme. This covers the following areas:



Non-Academic Learning Supports

- _The Class Rep role
- _The Student Learning Experience
- _Gathering Student Opinion
- _Effective Feedback
- _Developing Solutions
- _Making Change Happen
- _Closing the Loop

It is also the College's intention to become part of the NStEP programme.

International Learners

The College recognises that international learners (For the purposes of this policy, 'international learners' refers to non-EEA learners) may need dedicated supports. It also recognises and commits fulfilling all of its obligations in line with QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners. The College endeavours to follow the principles of learner integration, transparent and up-to-date information provision and facilitating feedback mechanisms that are embedded within the QQI Code of Conduct.

Non-Academic Learning Supports

Specifically, the College will:

- _ Ensure Protection for Learners arrangements are in place for all programmes that international learners enrol on and that learners are aware of such arrangements.
- _ Publicise its refund policy and make this available to all learners and potential learners.
- _ Ensure that the information provided to international learners prior to enrolment, such as that in its marketing material, is clear, transparent and accurate. It will also provide details of who an international learner may contact for more information prior to enrolment, if they so wish.
- _ Provide programme specific information to international learners prior to the commencement of their programme, such as programme start dates, attendance policy etc.
- _ Ensure learners are aware of all costs associated with a programme prior to commencing on that programme. This would include medical insurance costs and other auxiliary costs.
- _ Ensure that learners are aware of how the College collects fees and the schedule for this.
- _ Engage in due diligence to ensure that it works with reputable international recruitment agencies.
- _ Provide clear details of the entry requirements for its programmes to international learners.
- _ Provide any necessary supports for international learners who may need assistance transitioning to Irish society or the Irish education system.

NOTE:

The list above is not intended as a replacement for the obligations of the College as set out in *QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners*. The College is fully committed to the obligations of the Code of Practice.



Non-Academic Learning Supports

Healthcare

Should a learner wish to avail of healthcare services, the College has an agreement in place with a local GP, who will provide their services to learners of Dorset College at a reduced rate. Information on this is made available to learners through a range of communications.

Personal Mitigating Circumstances Procedure

	Procedure Stage	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	<p>Inform College: If a learner foresees their absence from an assessment, they should inform the Programme Manager/Academic Operations, who will request the learner to complete a Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs) form, and any supporting documentation.</p>	<p>Learner</p> <p>Programme Manager/Academic Operations</p>	<p>Personal Mitigating Circumstances form</p>
2.	<p>Review of Personal Mitigating Circumstances request: All PMCs are reviewed by the Academic Management Group, who will make a decision to grant or reject an extension or deferral based on the details of the PMC and the weight of supporting documentation supporting this.</p> <p>Ordinarily, a deferral will only be granted when there are significant personal</p>	<p>Academic Management Group</p>	<p>Minutes of AMG</p>

Personal Mitigating Circumstances Procedure

Procedure Stage

Responsibility

Evidence

circumstances that impede a learner from submitted, or sitting for, an assessment on the set date. Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the following:

— Death of a family member.

— Illness to themselves or close family member where a doctor has recommended that the learner not attend, or is incapable of submitting, an assessment or sitting an exam.


3.

Response to Learner:

The learner will be notified by email of the decision of the AMG, with reasons for the decision. Should a deferral be approved, the learner will be advised of a new assessment submission or sitting date.

**Academic Management
Group**

Email to learner


**Personal
Mitigating
Circumstances
Procedure****Procedure Stage****Responsibility****Evidence**

If the deferral is not approved, the learner will be advised that they are required to submit or sit for the assessment at the previously agreed date.

7.3

Attendance Policy

The College recognises the importance of attendance and the correlation that this is shown to have on assessment performance. It also recognises the obligations that it has with regards fulfilling the student visa requirements of its non-EEA learners. Therefore, the College is committed to ensuring it maintains accurate and detailed records of the attendance of learners.

The College uses its VLE to record attendance. It also records attendance through an attendance register that learners must also sign during class. This allows for a learner's attendance to be "live" and fully accessible to the learner when they login to Moodle. The signed attendance sheets allow for the College to be able to cross reference the validity of a learner's attendance.

 Learners may be allowed to enter the classroom up to 15 minutes after the starting time, if the lecturer permits. If a learner is regularly late, the lecturer can refuse entry to the class or ask the student to wait until the break.

 Learners are responsible for all material covered in their absences, and they are responsible for the academic consequences of their absences. The lecturer does not have to save class material for a learner.

 If a learner is sick, they are expected to inform the College by phone or email in a timely manner and to present a sick certificate, if applicable, on their return. This sick certificate will be kept on the learner's file.



Attendance Policy

- _ If a learner knows that they will be absent for a foreseeable reason, such as a dentist or hospital appointment, they should inform the College beforehand.
- _ Learners who have student visas are required by G.N.I.B. to attend a minimum of 85% of classes per semester and/or academic year.
- _ Any absences must be reported and explained to the College, if possible beforehand.
- _ The GNIB will be advised by the College about any learner who leaves before the end of their course.
- _ It is not possible for students to change class times from those originally presented to the GNIB at the point of registration.
- _ Any learner who misses more than 50% of classes over a six-week period will get a warning from the College.



Attendance Policy

_If the learner continues to be absent they will get a second warning letter two weeks subsequent to the first warning letter.

_If attendance has not improved in in the subsequent 2 weeks, GNIB will be informed and the learner will be removed from the programme.

_Should a discrepancy be found in a learner's attendance, such as the learner being marked present when they are in fact absent, the College will treat this as a serious disciplinary matter and will follow the appropriate disciplinary process.

7.4

Refund Policy

Whilst Dorset College does not ordinarily provide refunds after the imminent commencement of its courses, it also strives to offer support for learners or potential learners whose life circumstances change dramatically.


_In normal circumstances, course fees are non-refundable one week before a course has commenced.

_Up to one week prior to the commencement of a course, an applicant is entitled to a refund of course fees paid, minus an administration fee of €350.

_A learner may avail of a refund after a course has commenced where they have had a valid and documented visa refusal. In such instances, the learner must provide the College with the relevant documentation for their visa refusal. If such documentation is in order, the College will refund the learner the course fees paid, minus an administration fee of €300.

_Where the College facilitates examinations for external bodies, the College will charge a fee to learners to undertake such examinations on its premises. These examination fees are non-refundable.

_For certain courses, the College may charge additional administrative and/or examination fees. Where it does, this will be clearly indicated to the learner. These fees are non-refundable.



Refund Policy

_Where the College facilitates the provision of health insurance from external providers, the College will charge a fee to learners. These health insurance fees are non-refundable.

_Where an applicant has applied from outside Ireland, and is refused a visa, or is refused access into Ireland upon arrival, a full refund will be provided, minus an administration fee of €300, subject to the College receiving valid supporting documentation.


_Where a learner withdraws from a course after it has commenced without any mitigating circumstances, no refund will be provided.

_Where a learner withdraws from a course after it has commenced with mitigating circumstances that are accepted by the College, the College will provide a refund. However, in such instances, the mitigating circumstances should be considered significant enough to impede the learners ability to successfully participate on the course.

_Where a learner has paid fees for a scheduled course that does not subsequently run, a full refund of course fees paid will be provided.

Refund Procedure

	Procedure Stage	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	<p>Submit Refund Request Form: If a learner wishes to apply for a refund, and deems they are eligible for such a refund after review of the College's refund policy, they should make a formal request for this through one of the College's Admissions Officers.</p>	<p>Learner</p> <p>Admissions</p>	Refund request form
2.	<p>Review of Refund request: All Refund requests are reviewed by the Sales & Marketing Director, who will make a recommendation on whether the refund should be granted or not. The Head of Admissions will then confirm this recommendation with the Managing Director</p>	<p>Sales & Marketing Director</p> <p>Managing Director</p>	
3.	<p>Response to Learner: The learner will be notified by email of the</p>	<p>Sales & Marketing Director</p> <p>Financial Controller</p>	Email to learner



Refund Procedure

Procedure Stage

Responsibility

Evidence

refund decision, with reasons for the decision. Should a refund be approved, details will be sent to the College's Accountant who will arrange the refund.



7.5

Learner Feedback Policy

The College recognises the value of learner feedback and importance of accommodating the learner perspectives in its management, operations and administration.

Therefore, the College will:

- _Survey its learners once per semester to ascertain their overall experience of the College.
- _Get qualitative feedback from its learners annually on their perspective of the sufficiency and quality of the learner resources and supports at their disposal.
- _Include learners in appropriate Groups and Committees in the College to allow for a learner perspective to be included in College decision-making.
- _Consult with learners at least once per annum through a Learner Forum, where a cross-section of learners meets with members of the Academic Operations and the Director of Academic Operations. The agenda for this is set by the learners.

The feedback obtained from the learners through these consultative processes will be considered, and any necessary follow-up actioned, by the College's Academic Management Group.

7.6

Learner Code of Conduct

The Learner Code of Conduct sets out the expectations that the College has for learner conduct and behaviour. It is intended to help facilitate a harmonious and collegial learning environment for all learners, and a positive work environment for College staff and faculty.


The Code of Conduct states:

_Learners will be respectful and courteous to their peers, College staff, faculty and other stakeholders at all times.

_Learners will not intentionally behave in a manner that may bring themselves, their peers or the College's name into disrepute.

_All College communication will be respectful and collegial. Communication that is confrontational in nature will not be tolerated.

_Learners are responsible to ensuring their regular and punctual attendance at their scheduled classes. Learners will not attempt to enter a class after the recommended time if the lecturer does not permit entrance to the classroom.



Learner Code of Conduct

_Learners are responsible for proactively notifying the College if they are scheduled to be absent for a period of time.

_Learners will be respectful of the College's property and facilities.


_Learners should ensure that they are informed of the College's policies and procedures.

Should a learner not abide by this Code of Conduct, they may be subject to the Learner Misconduct Procedures.




Learner Misconduct Procedure

	Procedure Stage	Responsibility	Evidence
1.	<p>Complaint: If a member of College staff, faculty, learner or other stakeholder wishes to make a complaint about a learner's behaviour, they should do so in writing to the Director of Academic Operations. The complaint should be supported with any documentary evidence to support the complaint, or details of others who may have witnessed an incident.</p>	<p>Academic Operations Director of Academic Operations</p>	<p>Written Complaint</p>
2.	<p>Investigation: The Director of Academic Operations will then arrange for the incident to be investigated. Ordinarily, the Academic Operations Director will assign a member of the College's staff to lead the investigation. This person should have no involvement with the incident being investigated.</p>	<p>Staff member assigned as investigator</p>	



Learner Misconduct Procedure

	Procedure Stage	Responsibility	Evidence
	<p>The investigator will verify the validity of any supporting evidence submitted. The investigator may also interview the person who made the complaint, the person who the complaint has been made against, and/or any other person who was involved or witnessed the incident in question.</p>		
3.	<p>Investigation report: The investigator will submit a report to the Academic Operations Director of their investigation. This report will include a recommendation. The Academic Operations Director will consider this report with the AMG, who will then collectively make a decision regarding this incident.</p> <p>In making a decision, the AMG will determine if the complaint merits the following:</p>	<p>Academic Management Group</p>	<p>Notification to Learner (if applicable)</p>



Learner Misconduct Procedure

Procedure Stage

Responsibility


Evidence

- No misconduct
- Minor misconduct
- Major misconduct
- Gross misconduct

Should the AMG decide on No misconduct, no further action should be taken.

Should the AMG decide on Minor misconduct, the learner will receive a written warning and informed that three such instances of minor misconduct will result in a temporary suspension of the learner.

Should the AMG decide on Major misconduct, the learner will be suspended from the College for a period of 1 week.



Learner Misconduct Procedure

Procedure Stage

Responsibility

Evidence

During this time the learner's attendance will be counted as absent and the learner will not be allowed to sit or submit an assessment if an assessment date falls during the suspension. A record of this misconduct will be kept on the learners file for the duration of their studies with the College, and the learner will be informed that two such instances of Major misconduct will result in their expulsion from the College.

Should the AMG decide on gross misconduct, the learner will be expelled from the College.

In making the decision, the AMG must use only the available evidence from the investigation.



7.7

Review of Support for Learners Policies and Procedures

The College will review these Support for Learners policies and procedures on an annual basis. This review will assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the support services offered, as well as the learning environment.

The following individual(s) will be involved in this review:

Registrar

Director of Academic
Operations

QA Officer

1 Lecturer

College Librarian

1 Learner



Thank you.