

Appendix XII – Modes of Programme Delivery



Modes of Programme Delivery

Learning and Teaching

The educational strength of an Institute can only be monitored using multiple avenues, including assessment of its planning for learning and teaching, the learning environment provided for learners, teaching quality, quality assurance measures and learner outcomes (including learner progress, satisfaction and employability). Quality Standards that monitor current dynamism and improvement (Leading and Learning) are even more important in these aspects of Institute life than Quality Standards that reflect past achievements (Lagging). It is characteristic of Institutes that the programmes and the approach to teaching them are not standard. Programmes, even professional programmes, are rarely readily or directly comparable. There will always be diversity. Quality and standards have to be benchmarked in ways other than common nationwide examinations. Nevertheless, benchmarking is essential because everyone associated with Institutes has a major stake in educational quality. Learners and their parents seek information about the Institutes reputation, competitiveness, entry requirements, programme content, teaching quality and graduation standards. Internally the Institute itself needs to know the academic quality of its curricula, how well organised and up-to-date the programmes are, how rigorous and systematic the teaching is, and whether the arrangements for tutorials, assignments, marking and other details are appropriate.

The practice in SETU Carlow has been to assess these matters via internal annual academic reviews through Academic Council and School Programmatic Reviews every 5-years. Programmatic Review Boards, most often including peer professionals from other institutions, the private sector and QQI, are given terms of reference that allow them to examine the gamut of learning and teaching matters within the programme. Programmatic Review Boards begin with self-appraisal submissions from the academic unit under review, but go on to interview staff, sit in on lectures, discuss teaching with learners, review standards of assignment and tests and audit completed assignments and examinations scripts.

Learning and Teaching Plan: A Learning and Teaching plan (LTP) is an essential framework because the possibilities of programmes that may be on offer.

Programme establishment processes: The quality of the learning environment depends upon the quality of curriculum development, accreditation, processes, the access and support facilities available to learners and the quality of teaching. This is the specific area of responsibility of the Academic Council. Academic Council initiates and maintains responsibility for policies and implementation processes that lead to continued, demonstrable improvements in learning outcomes. From the perspective of learners good curriculum practice requires intelligible and reliable programme descriptions, knowledge of programme requirements, clarity about standards, the amount of work required and the outcomes sought. Accessible programme descriptions are fundamental. Other matters, such as prompt and helpful assessment of assignments, fairness of marking, the availability of coaching in learning skills and applicability of the skills acquired to the employment world are also matters of concern to learners. Curriculum quality depends also upon accreditation processes and time frames that are rigorous enough to ensure high quality outcomes. More broadly, the breadth of scholarship and research of those contributing to the curriculum and the regularity of up-dating of programmes, the structuring of offerings to meet the regularity of up-dating of programmes, the structuring of offerings to meet the needs of learners and the utilisation of modern flexible delivery methods, determine the outcomes for learners. The presence and effectiveness of processes covering assessment of immediate and on-going demand for programmes, the development and renewal of programmes, quality assurance and the replacement of out-of date subjects / programmes are important considerations. So too are delivery methods of assessment of knowledge and skills and the quality of the results achieved. It is envisaged that there is careful matching of the characteristics of their learners with the curriculum profile, organisational practices, delivery methods, learning support and library, AV and IT support of SETU Carlow, with sufficient resources devoted to all essential aspects to make possible the learning outcomes.

Teaching Quality: Good teaching is fundamental where SETU Carlow ensures:

A scholarly approach embracing well chosen, modern content;

Clear goals;

Adequate preparation;

Appropriate methods;

Significant impact;

Effective presentation; and

A reflective critique.

Induction of new teaching staff;

Matching of staff workloads with their experience;

A system of supervision;

Appraisal of teaching effectiveness;

Mentoring; and
Development opportunities.

SETU Carlow programmes are designed to achieve particular outcomes that demand mastery of content and acquisition of skills but are always broader than that. Many Institutes have defined the attributes their graduates should exhibit. Some even claim, without the basis of the claim being clear, that their graduates have those attributes, or that the Institute teaches in ways that enable their graduates to develop them. Benchmarking against the desired attributes is an important way of measuring fitness for purpose. Typically the desired attributes range across such matters as, written and oral communication skills, enquiry and research, critical thought and analysis, problem solving, teamwork, numeracy, information literacy, effective use of technology, independence, life-long learning skills and ethical values.

Learner outcomes: There are five valid learner outcome measures, learner progress, equity group outcomes, learner satisfaction and employability.

Learner Progress: Quality Standards relating to learner progress provide significant information about an Institute, in terms both of how well it cares for learners and how efficiently it manages the teaching programme. In principle an Institute should only enrol those learners it considers have the capacity to complete the programmes of their choice. It should ensure that learners are well enough prepared to complete programmes successfully by guiding under-prepared learners to preparatory programmes. When an Institute enrolls learners it should support them sufficiently to maximise the chances of success. It is clear that some enthusiastic, properly prepared learners do in fact fall by the wayside whether through immaturity, lack of resources, poor teaching, inability to cope with the workload or the standards required, or other reasons. It is equally clear that Institutes should not counter such wastage by lowering standards, simply to achieve higher learner success ratios. Thus a perfect pass rate is not possible. Nevertheless, the ratio of successful subject passes to subjects attempted is an essential quality standard of the success of any Institutes targeting of enrolments, of the support it provides to learners and of the response to its teaching approach. Part-time and distance education learners, who can only take one or two subjects per semester or year, are more likely than full-time learners to drop out or postpone studies. The reasons are easy to understand. They are more often mature learners with family, business or community responsibilities, which intervene and cause them to interrupt their studies. Other impediments to high progress and retention rates may come about because of the characteristics of the learner drawing area within which the specific Institute operates. Institutes enrolling significant numbers of equity group learners or mature age second chance learners, claim they have difficulty achieving desirable rates of learner progress and retention than those enrolling learners who were uniformly high achievers at school. It is, however reasonable in principle to expect that learners should complete those individual academic subjects for which they have enrolled, if well enough counselled and having planned their other commitments to make this possible.

Progression ratios may be collated for the specific Institute as a whole, by individual Department and Schools, or for programme completions. The learner progress ratio) is a good overall indicator of learning and teaching effectiveness. However, even though an Institute may be achieving a high percentage progression, this does not adequately reveal that the progress rates for learners from equity groups is low enough to demand special attention, or that international learners have different progress ratios. The sub-ratios in this quality standard monitor the progress of those groups against the rate for learners not in those groups.

Retention: Year-on-year retention of learners, particularly from first to second year, is regarded by many Institutes as a diagnostic benchmark of considerable importance. Although year-on-year retention is subject to the effects of the same learner progress variables, such as proportions of full and part-time enrolments, Institute location, proportions of equity learners, etc. those variables are sufficiently constant influences within a particular Institute to make year-on year trends of great significance. A subject or programme that shows a significant upward or downward trend of retention of learners from first to second year is illustrating whether the programme is being well received. Many Institute administrators believe learner retention trends, especially the rate of change, provide the best early warnings of something important happening that may need attention.

Equity: The success of an Institute in responding to equity issues is best benchmarked in two ways. The first, the extent to which equity planning, activity, monitoring and review are an integral part of other quality assurance and enhancement processes within the institution. Second, quantitative performance indicators of learner outcomes, that is, access, participation, apparent retention and success are monitored.

Learner Satisfaction: From the point of view of learners as consumers it is desirable to measure the quality of their academic experience, both directly and indirectly. The most direct way is to measure their perceptions of their learning experiences. Learner Satisfaction monitors, the learner's rating of their experience of teaching goals and standards assessment practices, workload, generic skills and overall satisfaction, as measured by in-house questionnaires. While there are many challenges to the usefulness of this information, there is an established correlation between its results and other data about teaching quality. SETU Carlow administers questionnaires, such as Irish Survey of Learner Engagement (ISSE) with current learners and use the outcomes for internal management purposes.

Employability: QQI and the HEA annually survey the destinations of learners following their graduation. This gives a measure of those in employment, the proportion unemployed, and those in further study. Employment rates are important because the aspiration of all Institutes is to provide relevant programmes of sufficiently high standard, which give learners entry to employment.