



**The Open Training College
Student Handbook
2010-2011**

(V 1.1 March 2011)

For students of the FETAC accredited programmes:

- ***Health Service Skills Certificate***
- ***Essential Skills for FETAC Trainers***

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Foreword

This Student Handbook has been prepared for students of the Open Training College who are undertaking programmes/modules accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC):

- Health Service Skills Certificate
- Essential Skills for FETAC Trainers

The Handbook introduces the Open Training College and describes its administrative arrangements and how these will affect you as a student. It also outlines, in detail, College regulations and procedures that you need to follow. It is intended to be used by you as a reference manual during the course of your studies. It is amended and updated at the beginning of each academic year to include relevant changes to College policy and practice. It is therefore essential that you read and familiarise yourself with the contents of the Handbook at the start of your programme/module.

The College wishes to emphasise that, while every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the material in this handbook is subject to alteration or amendment in the light of changes in regulations, or in policy, or of financial or other necessity.

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Welcome from the College Director

Dear Student,

Welcome to the Open Training College.

Since our foundation in 1992, the Open Training College has developed an excellent reputation in the area of disability and more recently the wider non-profit/voluntary sectors. As a college we are committed to adult education and to making high quality educational opportunities available to adults working or aspiring to work in human services. You can be assured that you have chosen to study with a college of repute. In 2010 the College received an Aontas star Award for its contribution to adult learning opportunities in Ireland. We are very aware that a large part of our success is due to the commitment of our students, a responsive and dedicated staff team and the agencies who have supported the College since its inception.

As a college we remain committed to the pursuit of excellence and a high standard of customer care. If, at any stage of your time with us, you feel we could improve any aspect of what we do, please do make your views known. Our wish for you is that your time with us will prove to be a challenging, rewarding and enjoyable experience. Please remember that we are committed to you and your learning and that your course tutor is there as your main support.

This handbook contains valuable information about the College, its services and regulations. Please read it carefully now and retain it where you may access it should need arise.

Best wishes for a successful, enjoyable and productive time with the College. Thank you for choosing to study with us and we look forward to working with you.



Karen Finnerty

College Director

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. COLLEGE BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The Open Training College was established in 1992 to provide accredited training to staff working in services for people with disabilities.

In its work the College aims to:

- ☑ Provide a strong inclusion focus, drawing on the tremendous surge of developments which have taken place in the disability and non-profit sectors since the late 1970's
- ☑ Attend particularly to the needs of staff working in services (disability and non-profit) with no formal third level qualifications
- ☑ Maintain a strong applied bias in the context of a clear theoretical framework
- ☑ Ensure academic rigour in all work with students
- ☑ Challenge students to evaluate present practices and to incorporate newer approaches into their work on an ongoing basis
- ☑ Ensure that courses are available nationally, equally accessible to staff in Donegal as in Dublin
- ☑ Ensure access, transfer and progression opportunities in line with national best practice
- ☑ Use the Supported Open Learning Model as a robust course delivery model which minimises attrition and ensures a high success rate
- ☑ Maintain and develop national and international links both to encourage the development of new approaches and enhance the standing of the College
- ☑ Respond to the ongoing changes and developments happening in the disability and non-profit fields nationally
- ☑ Secure its funding base through a range of approaches in the coming years
- ☑ Develop the scope and range of training products offered by the College

1.2. MISSION STATEMENT

The Open Training College will be recognised for our major role in the advancement of the inclusion of people with disabilities in Irish life; the excellence of our training; our commitment to our students; the quality of our relationships with agencies; our advancement of adult lifelong learning opportunities and our contribution to change and best practice at the level of the service-user, the staff member and the agency in the disability sector.

Section 2: Learning with the Open Training College

2.1. ACCREDITATION OF PROGRAMMES / MODULES

The Open Training College is a recognised and accredited provider of programmes by:

- Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)
- Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
- National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)

This Student Handbook is published for students of FETAC accredited programmes and modules.

2.2. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

All entry requirements are programme specific and are detailed in the programme brochure and marketing materials.

All of the Open Training College courses are delivered through English. Students are advised that proficiency in both written and spoken English is a prerequisite for all courses.

2.3. THE SUPPORTED OPEN LEARNING MODEL - SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR STUDENTS

A major part of the College's ethos is the support structures it offers to students. In the delivery of all of its courses the College is committed to providing each student with an effective support system.

The Supported Open Learning Model includes the following supports for students:

Telephone Tutorials – Set days and times are designated during which tutors are available to be contacted by telephone to discuss student's progress with the module(s),

their understanding of the module content and to provide advice on any difficulties a student may be experiencing in completing the assignment.

Email Contact - Students can contact their tutor by email with any queries or issues they are facing. Tutors commit to respond to student e-mails within 48 hours.

Helpdesk Support- This ensures a student immediate access to a member of the course team over the telephone in the event of a major problem that cannot wait until the next tutorial date. Helpdesk Support calls must be made to the main College phone number (01 2988544), during the office hours of 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

Contact with their **Work-Based Supervisor** who is usually their line manager. This person mainly provides practical support in organising work-based assignments and facilitating the student's professional development, or may carry out assessment procedures, for specific modules.

The College encourages students to establish **Local Study Groups** (2 to 6 students from different agencies or backgrounds) which meet usually twice per module at a mutually agreed location and time. These groups are self-managed and usually focus on the revision of study topics and the planning of the practical assignments.

Because of the continuous nature of the assessment, tutors will provide **Written Feedback on Assignments** within eight weeks of submission.

2.3.1 Supports for students with a Disability/Specific learning difficulty

In keeping with the student centred ethos of the Open Training College, the College will endeavour to support and facilitate any student with a disability or specific learning difficulty, in an individualised and effective manner.

In order to provide effective and appropriate supports, it is necessary that students disclose the nature of their disability/difficulty and discuss appropriate supports with a member of the College team as soon as possible. Such disclosures and discussions will be dealt with in a sensitive manner, unique to each circumstance.

Students may be required to produce written confirmation from a medical practitioner of any medical condition or disability requiring additional supports, and in the case of a specific learning difficulty a psychologist's report not more than two years old will be required.

Some of the supports that have been provided to students within this category have included:

- ✓ Physical modifications to the training environment e.g. Seating arrangements, sound amplification etc.
- ✓ Learning materials provided in appropriate accessible formats.
- ✓ Spelling and/or grammar waiver for assessments.
- ✓ Alternative assessment formats e.g. Viva voce
- ✓ Additional time for examinations.

**Please note that these accommodations are provided to individual students to support and facilitate their successful participation on their course. The College remains cognisant of providing a fair and equitable service to all students, therefore these accommodations will not be available to any student without professional, written confirmation of disability/learning difficulty.*

2.3.2 Supports for students experiencing difficult personal circumstances

The College recognises that the majority of its student body is comprised of adults in full-time work with significant family and social commitments. To this end efforts will be made to support students who experience difficult personal circumstances during the course of their studies.

If a personal or professional situation affects your ability to complete your studies or to meet an assignment deadline it is imperative that you contact your tutor as soon as possible to explain the situation. Your case will then be discussed with the Course Coordinator/Manager and additional supports provided if deemed necessary.

**Please note that additional supports will only be provided in extenuating circumstances and are at the discretion of the tutor and Course Director. Independent confirmation of circumstances may be sought at the discretion of the Course Director.*

2.4. WORKSHOPS

Workshops are an integral part of the College's Supported Open Learning Model. Workshops (usually two days) will be a component of all modules a student undertakes with the College.

2.4.1 Purpose of Workshops

Each workshop provides a unique opportunity for students to:

- Meet and network with other students
- Meet tutors from the OTC
- Establish and maintain study groups
- Contribute their own experiences of learning and practice to the student group
- Learn from other students experiences of learning and practice
- Extend their learning from the course materials
- Widen their reference base for their assignments
- Where relevant, listen to and learn from professional practitioners
- Enhance their overall learning experience

- Evaluate and provide feedback on the workshop to the College
- Learn about opportunities to progress to further and higher education

2.4.2 Workshop Etiquette

Workshops provide a learning environment in which the College facilitates students to further their learning by listening to lecturers and specialist speakers, completing work in groups and taking part in discussions with tutors and fellow students.

Students are encouraged to articulate and discuss professional experiences that relate to the workshop content. Workshops provide opportunities for students to explore alternative viewpoints and this may involve challenging their own and their agencies perspectives and practices. It is therefore essential that students, tutors and speakers mutually create a learning environment in which all participants feel comfortable and respected, and that students behave in a manner which is professional and civil. It is expected that all those participating in the workshop will comply with the fundamental principles of the Open Training College as outlined in College Aims and the Code of Professional Conduct.

The following will not be tolerated during a workshop:

- Mobile phones being left on and ringing during a workshop presentation
- Mobile phones being used to either make or receive calls/texts during a workshop presentation
- Students disturbing the rest of the student group by talking among themselves during a workshop presentation
- Students interrupting the speaker or other students
- Students arriving late at the beginning of a workshop
- Students returning late from a break
- Students leaving a workshop early
- Sleeping during a workshop
- Students under the influence of alcohol or other narcotic substances

Any student who behaves in one of the ways listed above, or in any other way which is deemed to breach the College Aims, Ethos and Values and/or the Code of Professional Conduct will be given a verbal warning. If the behaviour continues, the student will be asked to leave the workshop immediately.

2.4.3 Code of Professional Conduct

Apart from ensuring that students successfully achieve an academic qualification, the Open Training College is also firmly committed to contributing to and informing best practice in respect to the developing roles of social care professionals and managers working within human services.

The definition of the social care profession, given by the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (2005), is that it is 'a profession committed to the planning and delivery of quality care and other support services for individuals and groups with identified needs.'

In addition to having specific areas of knowledge and skills, 'professionals' are recognised by the quality of their responsible practice based on a common code of ethics. Similarly, the expectations of managers are to manage and lead with a core set of values and ethics that keep the individual service user central to the delivery of service provision while respecting organisational objectives and values. Social care professionals work to ensure that self-interest does not in any way deflect from the quality of service delivered to people.

The Open Training College offers students the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to support their professional practice and to have these formally acknowledged by the accreditation of qualifications. The College Aims, Ethos and Values underpin the delivery, design and implementation of all its courses and practice. As developing professionals, students are expected to reflect these in their general attitudes and behaviour, and behave in a manner which is civil and professional.

Students of the Open Training College and are required to:

- attend and actively participate in all planned workshops and adhere to the code of etiquette for workshop attendance and participation
- comply with all assessment requirements and regulations
- submit assignments by dates identified
- clearly reference work that is not their own in assignments
- phone their tutor at their prescribed time for tutorials and/or keep in regular contact with their tutor via email
- in all dealings with the College, treat the College, its staff and other students with courtesy and respect at all times.

In return students can expect to be treated at all times by the College and its staff in a manner that is respectful, courteous, fair and equitable in accordance with the College Aims, Ethos and Values.

2.5. LEAVING OR DEFERRING YOUR COURSE OF STUDY

2.5.1 Procedures for Deferring

If for any reason a student needs to defer or leave a course of study the following procedure should be employed:

- The matter should be discussed with the Course Tutor or Coordinator. By agreement the request should be put to the Course Coordinator/Manager in writing.
- Students are welcome to apply to the College to return and continue with their course of study at a later date.

2.5.2 Protection for Learners

In the event of a future decision to cease the operation of the Open Training College or a specific course within the College, St Michaels House will honour its contract to students pursuing courses at that point in time. In effect this means the College will continue to operate until all students have completed their course of study. In the case of students who have deferred and need to avail of supplemental assessments, the organisation will provide those students with sufficient opportunities (not to exceed three rounds) to complete their studies.

Section 3: Assignments and Assessment

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of students' work is undertaken in the first instance by a tutor of the Open Training College. It is then subject to the Internal Verification and External Authentication processes before finally being ratified by the Results Approval Panel (each of these processes refer to a Quality Assurance process which has been approved and is monitored by FETAC). Each module is assessed separately. This system enables students to hold credits in the event of having to interrupt their course of study. This means that where a student has to take leave from their studies for a period of time due to ill health, family or personal matters the student retains the credits gained for those modules which have been successfully completed, assessed and ratified.

Students with additional support needs in relation to assessment are required to notify their tutor immediately upon starting their course so that appropriate measures can be implemented.

3.2. PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

1. To ascertain that students meet the standards agreed with FETAC in order to qualify for the award for their programme / module.
 2. To provide a mechanism through which to give students feedback on certain areas of their learning.
 3. For tutors and the College to evaluate the efficacy of the Supported Open Learning Model in delivering knowledge and in facilitating the development of skills and professional attitudes.
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3.3. ANONYMITY AND CONSENT

For legal and ethical reasons it is important that information concerning an agency and the people who live and work there, be used respectfully and with care, within the context of assignments.

To ensure anonymity, students are required to change the names of their organisations and the names of the service users in their assignments so that identification of the same is not possible. You will be advised on individual requirements for assignments at the workshop.

Students are encouraged to seek advice from supervisors, and/or tutors concerning permission with regard to the use of information about service-users in their assignments.

3.4. ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

It is the responsibility of the student to familiarise him or herself with all information relating to assessment.

3.4.1 Submission of Assignments

Students are required to submit assignments according to the guidelines provided on the Assessment Brief, which is supplied at the workshop. Typed or handwritten assessments will be accepted. All assessments should be presented on white A4 size paper, stapled together once in the top left hand corner, without any folders or binders (except in cases where a booklet has

been supplied). When typed, assessments should be double-spaced and in font size 12. All students are advised to keep a copy of their work, as work submitted to the College cannot be returned.

Students will be given a posting date for assignments at the workshops. Students are required to post a complete copy of their assignments to the College on or before this date. Students are advised to send their assignment by registered post or to request a receipt of posting from the post office.

3.4.2 Assessment Process

The Open Training College implements carefully designed assessment procedures for the assessment of modules. This process is governed by the FETAC agreed policy and procedures for the *Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners*. These ensure that each student's work is considered on its own merit, and is marked to the same standard and at the appropriate level agreed with the accrediting body. Marks are awarded for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the module, between theory and practical application.

Students' work is assessed against specific criteria from a standardised marking scheme, which has been designed in accordance with the learning outcomes of the associated module. These are clearly stated in the learning materials at the beginning of each module and in the module descriptors.

This approach ensures that although different tutors mark assignments, each assignment is marked in exactly the same way. To ensure that this process is undertaken in accordance with the scheme, a sample of assignments from each module are cross-marked by an additional tutor. In exceptional circumstances (for example where a discrepancy exists between a first and a second marking) a third marking may be carried out by the Programme Co-ordinator or Manager.

To further verify the assessment process, and to ensure that the assessment procedures meet the standard required by the accrediting body, each student assessment is subject to the Internal Verification and External Authentication processes.

3.4.3. Feedback on Assignments

Detailed written feedback will be posted to students within 8 weeks of the assignment submission.

3.4.4 Security and Storage of Assessment related materials

For the duration of their studies with the College work submitted by learners for assessment is stored securely by the Programme Coordinator. On conclusion of the Results Approval Panel meeting hardcopies of all assessments and related materials, which have been ratified by the panel, will be destroyed (using a certified document destruction contractor) within 4 weeks. Materials pertaining to any learner results which have been appealed will be retained until the completion of the College and FETAC appeals process timeframes. Records of all modules successfully completed by learners, and grades awarded are maintained indefinitely by the College in secure electronic files.

3.5. LATE SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

In adverse personal circumstances, or where a student experiences a period of ill health, students may apply for a two-week extension for submission of an assignment.

The procedures for the late submission of an assignment are as follows:

- 1) In the first instance the request must be discussed with your tutor. Pending agreement with your tutor, an assignment late submission form must be completed in full by the student and forwarded to the College. Students are supplied with a copy of the Late Submission Form in their workshop pack. Where the student is applying for a late submission due to ill-health, a medical certificate is required and must be attached to the late submission form.
 - 2) If a student needs to extend the period of time for submission of an assignment the same procedures apply.
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3.6. GRADING SCHEME FOR ASSIGNMENTS

The grading scheme used by the College in relation to FETAC Level 5 courses is as follows:

80-100%	Distinction
65-79%	Merit
50-64%	Pass
0-49%	Unsuccessful

3.7. RESUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

If an unsuccessful grade is awarded, the student will be facilitated to resubmit this assignment.

Students who need to resubmit an assignment will be notified by the College and will be provided with supports to assist them to complete the resubmission. Such supports will include detailed feedback on their original submission and additional telephone tutorials.

However, resubmitted assignments may not be ratified by the Results Approval Panel until the following year.

3.8. APPEALS PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO THE ASSESSMENT OF ASSIGNMENTS

Following assessment grades and feedback being issued to students tutors will be available to discuss these with students who wish to query their assessment outcome or who require assistance with understanding their assessment outcome.

Where a student is dissatisfied with the application of the assessment process in relation to their work the following appeals procedure applies:

Students may appeal to the College for their work to be re-checked and/or reviewed.

Please note that any request for an appeal must be made in writing to your tutor and signed by you in order for it to be given consideration.

- RE-CHECK means the administrative operation of checking the recording and the addition of marks
- REVIEW means the re-consideration in detail of all or part of the existing assignment and examination material where feasible by an internal tutor and/or the External Authenticator

The following steps apply to either of the above procedures.

- 1) The grounds for re-checking and reviewing must be specified under the following three headings:
 - i. The assessment/examination procedures of the College have not been properly implemented.
 - ii. The procedures do not adequately cover the student's individual requirements
 - iii. Compassionate circumstances were not adequately taken into account in the assessment process.
- 2) The written submission for an appeal must identify the elements of the assignment or examination for which the re-check or review is being sought. It must also specify the grounds on which the re-check/review is sought and must contain all the information that the student requires to have taken into account in the recheck or review.
- 3) The appeals process is as follows:
 - i. Having specified the details required in sections one and two above, the student may appeal in writing to his/her tutor within two weeks of receiving the grade/feedback and additional feedback will be given.
 - ii. If, following discussion with his/her tutor, the issue has not been resolved to the student's satisfaction, he/she may request in writing to the Course Coordinator/Manager that their work be further cross-marked by the Course Coordinator/Manager and feedback will be given.
 - iii. If, following steps one and two, the student wishes to make a further appeal, he/she may request in writing to the College Director (within a period of three weeks) that his/her work be reviewed through the External Authentication and Results Approval processes.

- 4) The decision of the Results Approval Panel is final and the result will be forwarded to FETAC. Students are advised that, as a result of any appeal their grades may go up or down.
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3.9. FETAC APPEALS PROCESS

Module results can also be appealed to FETAC. This option is available only after the internal appeals process has been completed and where the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal appeals process. In this instance FETAC will check that the providers assessment policy and procedures have been implemented appropriately in relation to the work being appealed, i.e. Learners appeal the outcome of the provider's assessment and appeals process *only*; not the assessment result. There is a cost of €19.00 for such appeals, payable by the student.

Appeals to FETAC should be directed through the OTC.

FETAC Learner Charter

FETAC formally recognises learning by making relevant quality assured awards at Levels 1-6 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

Meeting learner needs is central to the work of FETAC.

FETAC will strive to:

Make world-class awards that open up opportunities personally, socially, in education, training and employment

Make sure our awards are relevant to current and future economic and social needs

Promote our awards, nationally and internationally, with employers and other stakeholders
Promote progression through the National Framework of Qualifications

Promote equality of opportunity and the recognition of the diversity of learner groups

Publish relevant and clear information about awards and programmes through our website

Recognise learning – regardless of how or where it is achieved

Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes, courses and services, including learner feedback, so as to maintain and improve quality

Make sure that all major awards may be achieved in parts so that learning can be achieved at an appropriate time and pace

Make sure that assessment is fair and consistent

Require providers to give learners high-quality, accessible information about the programme, services and associated FETAC awards

Issue certificates when awards are achieved, frequently and responsively

Consult with learners in the development and review of policies, awards and our service

Deal with queries, correspondence and complaints in a professional, consistent and timely manner

