



The Open Training College

Institutional Review
Self-Evaluation Report

January 2009





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Institutional Review: Core Documentation (submitted with this report)

1. Open Training College Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures Manual (Updated Sept 2008)
2. Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)
3. Open Training College QA Report for the Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability) for the Academic Year 2007/2008
4. College Brochure 2008/2009
5. 2008/2009 Student Handbook for HETAC accredited courses

Additional Information

Significant details and background information on the College can be found on the College website www.opentrainingcollege.com. In particular the College draws attention to publications on QA in the 'resources' section.

The College will issue the panel members with passwords prior to the visit to enable access to the College's e-learning resource section MyOTC.



SECTION 1: OPEN TRAINING COLLEGE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Origins

The Open Training College (OTC) is a third level Institution offering education and training programmes to staff who work in the disability and related sectors and to staff in the non-profit community/voluntary sector nationally. The College is a division of St. Michael's House, the largest provider of services to people with learning disability and their families in the greater Dublin region.

In the early 1990s, St. Michael's House (SMH) sought to formalise and accredit the extensive in-house training that was being provided to staff at that point in time, and to this end made an application for designation as a third level educational institute. On achieving designation St. Michael's House set up the Open Training College as the operational mechanism for the delivery of accredited training. St. Michael's House has an annual budget of approximately €89 million (2008), employs 1,367 staff (whole time equivalents, including 18 Open Training College staff) and provides direct service to 1,549 people with disabilities (children and adults) and their families. St. Michael's House operates under the auspices of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and is directly funded by it.

As part of the original designation St. Michael's House was required to offer the programmes and training it developed to staff in all disability services nationally. To achieve this objective, the organisation was highly innovative in developing a model of delivery based on a distance learning approach, but with significant adult-friendly supports built in. This model is known as the *Supported Open Learning Model (SOL)* and has been operated successfully by the College since 1992. More recently other educational providers and educational researchers have referred to this model as 'blended learning' (Vaughan, 2007¹).

1.2 Governance and Management

The College is managed on a day-to-day basis by the College Director who reports to the Deputy CEO of St. Michael's House, which is governed by a board of directors. Figure 1 overleaf outlines the relationship between the College and the main organisation. Section 5 returns to this matter in discussing Governance and Strategic Planning from the perspective of the College.

¹ Vaughan, N. (2007) Perspectives on Blended Learning in Higher Education. *International Journal of E-Learning*. 6(1), 81-94.



St. Michael's House Management Structure



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Figure 1: Management Structure of St. Michael's House

1.3 Student Population and Numbers

Up until 2006 OTC students were exclusively staff that work in services for people with a disability. However in more recent years there has been interest and application of College materials to other 'third sector' groups, which includes voluntary and community sectors. In 2005/2006 the College delivered its *Certificate in Applied Management* to managers employed in Youth Services. This initiative proved very successful and, following this experience and ongoing requests from graduates and agencies for management qualifications at higher levels, the College made a strategic decision to develop add-on programmes in the management area and to make these programmes available to the wider non-profit sector. This initiative was undertaken in compliance with the College's *QA Policy and Procedures Manual* (2004) resulting in the re-approval of our *Certificate in Applied Management* (Minor Level 6) and the accreditation of two new programmes, The *Higher Certificate in Arts in Applied Management* (Level 6) and The *Bachelor of Arts in Applied Management* (Level 7). This initiative cemented the College's move into the non-profit sector. Currently the College has approximately 800 students registered across all programmes.

1.4 Accreditation

The College works with three accrediting bodies (HETAC, FETAC, NUI Galway), and is also a FAS registered provider. While the objective of this review is the College's standing as a HETAC QA approved body, our QA systems equally apply to our other programmes. It is a



testament to the work and excellence of the College that it has achieved accreditation with other major bodies in the country. The programmes offered by the College and their accrediting body are detailed in Table 1.

Course Title	Level of Award	Accrediting Body
Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability)	7	HETAC
Honours Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability)	8	HETAC
Certificate in Applied Management	Minor 6	HETAC
Higher Certificate in Arts in Applied Management	6	HETAC
Bachelor of Arts in Applied Management	7	HETAC
Diploma in Training and Education in Supported Employment	7 (TBC)	NUI, Galway
Foundation Diploma in Training and Education in Supported Employment	N/A	NUI, Galway
Health Service Skills (2 modules)	5	FETAC

Table 1: Open Training College Courses and Accrediting Bodies

1.5 Mission Statement

"The Open Training College is committed to offering staff in the disability, non-profit and related sectors, learning opportunities, which are accredited, accessible and embody best practice".

1.6 College Ethos And Values

1.6.1 Valuing and enhancing the status of people in receipt of health and personal social services

The College seeks in all of its courses to enhance the status of people in receipt of health and personal social services, who may be excluded from mainstream society, through the use of positive language and imagery, and by supporting their inclusion into ordinary life.

1.6.2 Fundamental principles

All College courses are underpinned by the principles of supporting empowerment, honouring rights and working in partnership. We aim to ensure that on completion of courses these principles have not been 'studied' by students but have become part of their fundamental way of working with people.

1.6.3 Valuing students as colleagues

The College views students as colleagues committed to the common cause of enhancing the lives of people with whom they work. Accordingly, the College values the often considerable experience which students bring to their studies.



1.6.4 Close working relationships

In line with its mission, the College sees itself interacting directly with service delivery organisations, working with existing experienced staff in developing and improving the quality of services provided by non-profit organisations including organisations for people with a disability.

1.6.5 Cost-effectiveness and value for money

The College is committed to offering high quality, cost-effective training. The *Supported Open Learning Model* is particularly cost-effective for agencies as the amount of out-of-agency time for staff is defined and managed. In addition to limiting financial cost the model also significantly reduces the potentially negative impact on service-users of constantly adjusting to relief staff, as core staff are released for training/education.

1.7 Distinctive Profile and Purpose of the College

1.7.1 The College has a national and specialised focus

The Open Training College is the only third level Institution *specifically* focused on the disability and non-profit sector. As outlined above, the College offers its courses nationally utilising the *Supported Open Learning Model* (see Section 1.9 later).

1.7.2 All College students are employed adult learners

A second distinctive feature of the College is its student profile. The College does not provide courses for second-level school leavers; all students are in employment and therefore are adult learners. The age profile of students ranges from 21 – 60, and includes the full range of educational experience - from national school to one student with a PhD.

1.7.3 All students have relevant work experience

All students are working in areas related to the course content. For example, students on our management programmes have management/supervisory responsibilities in their day-to-day work. Social care programme(s) students are front-line workers in social care settings.

1.7.4 Assessment includes a strong focus on workplace application of learning

An element of the College mission is to promote best practice in services. As part of this commitment, there is a strong focus on the application of course learning to the everyday work of the student. Every course has a strong focus on application in the open learning materials and in the practical skills workshops and a significant portion of the marks for course assessment is allocated to work-based assignments.

1.8 College Critical Success Factors

In the College Strategic Plan 2003-2008 the following items were identified as critical success factors for the College.



- offering accredited training specifically developed for the disability and non-profit sectors to meet the challenge of delivering high quality, person-centred services grounded in the principles of rights, equity and empowerment
- a unique model of course delivery available to students regardless of their location
- access to third level qualifications for mature students
- offering agencies and workers access to on-going professional development
- cost-effectiveness and minimal disruption to agencies due to very low out-of-service time for staff on courses
- high quality materials and training experiences
- a strong focus on workplace application of learning
- progression routes to further qualifications
- working in partnership with agencies
- providing students with a support structure compatible with their individual learning needs
- developing a highly skilled staff team, well qualified academically and with experience of having worked as practitioners in the relevant fields

The self-evaluation process undertaken for this review has highlighted that these factors have supported and continue to support the growth and development of the College and its success.

1.9 The *Supported Open Learning Model*

As outlined above, the model of delivery used by the College is the *Supported Open Learning Model*. This model provides the student with a range of supports and key components, which facilitate the student through the learning process.

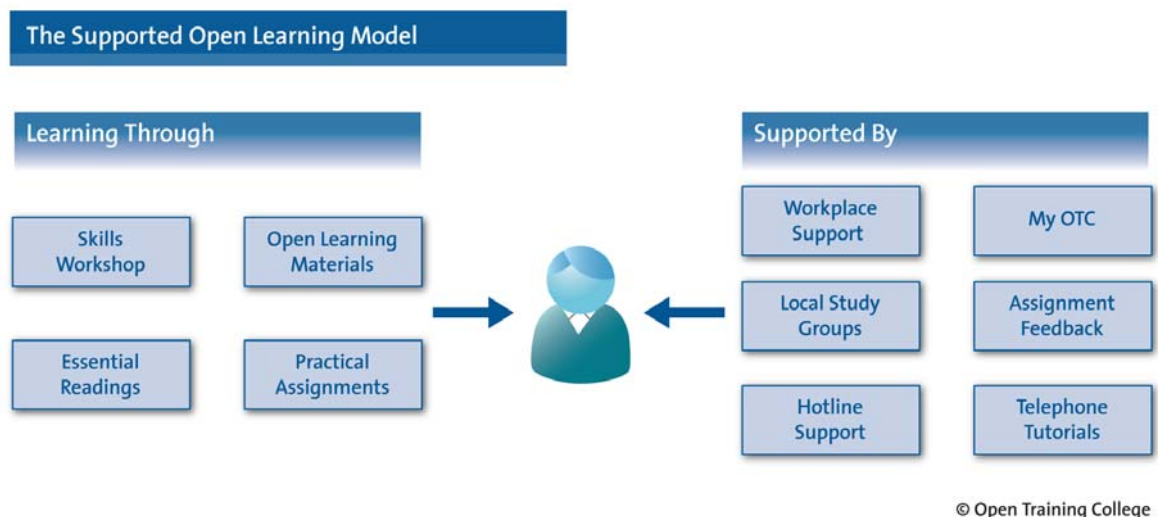


Figure 2: The Supported Open Learning Model



1.9.1 Elements of the Supported Open Learning Model

This model includes the following elements:

- Telephone Tutorials
- Hotline Support
- E-learning Support (MyOTC)
- Access to Study Skills online module
- Local Study Groups

Each of these elements is described in detail below.

1.9.2 Telephone tutorials

Course participants are allocated an individual tutor for the year. Regular contact is maintained through telephone tutorials during which any or all of the following areas may be discussed:

- course participant's progress with the learning materials
- assignment preparation and feedback
- work-based support
- revision of study topics
- local study groups
- additional issues that may arrive relevant to the learning process

1.9.3 Hotline support

Course participants have immediate access to a member of the course team by telephone in case there is an issue that needs resolution prior to the next tutorial. The College refers to this as 'hotline support'.

1.9.4 E-learning support (MyOTC)

In 2004, the College developed a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to support students with their studies. This resource provides the ability to communicate and collaborate online (both tutor-student and student-student), utilise email as an alternative to telephone tutorials and to have ready access to a wide range of resources to support both the main and the null curriculum.

The College's VLE was originally based singularly on Moodle, but evolved to become an online personal learning environment for each student, that provides access to Google education resources (My Mail, My Start Page, My Calendar, My Docs), a Moodle platform called My Learning Centre, an online library area using EBSCO and access to online plagiarism checking software, Turnitin. All of these supports are arranged under an umbrella called MyOTC.

The College has carried out research in this area to explore the usability of MyOTC and whether it benefits the student. The research has shown that students have found MyOTC to be a significant aid to learning, course participation and networking with other course participants. This research has been supported by positive feedback on MyOTC in the latest end-of-year surveys.



1.9.5 Access to Study Skills module online

This resource provides a series of how-to guides and resources that will help course participants get the most out of their study efforts. The areas covered include reading, becoming a course participant, taking notes, remembering what I read, learning styles, writing, referencing, revision and exams, using internet resources as a research tool, plagiarism and related policies, and tutorials. The platform allows for online discussion on the topics covered and the addition of other useful resources to support the learner.

1.9.6 Local study groups

The course participants themselves are responsible for organising small local study groups (from 2 to 6 participants) that meet usually every three weeks 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.

1.10 The Partnership Approach

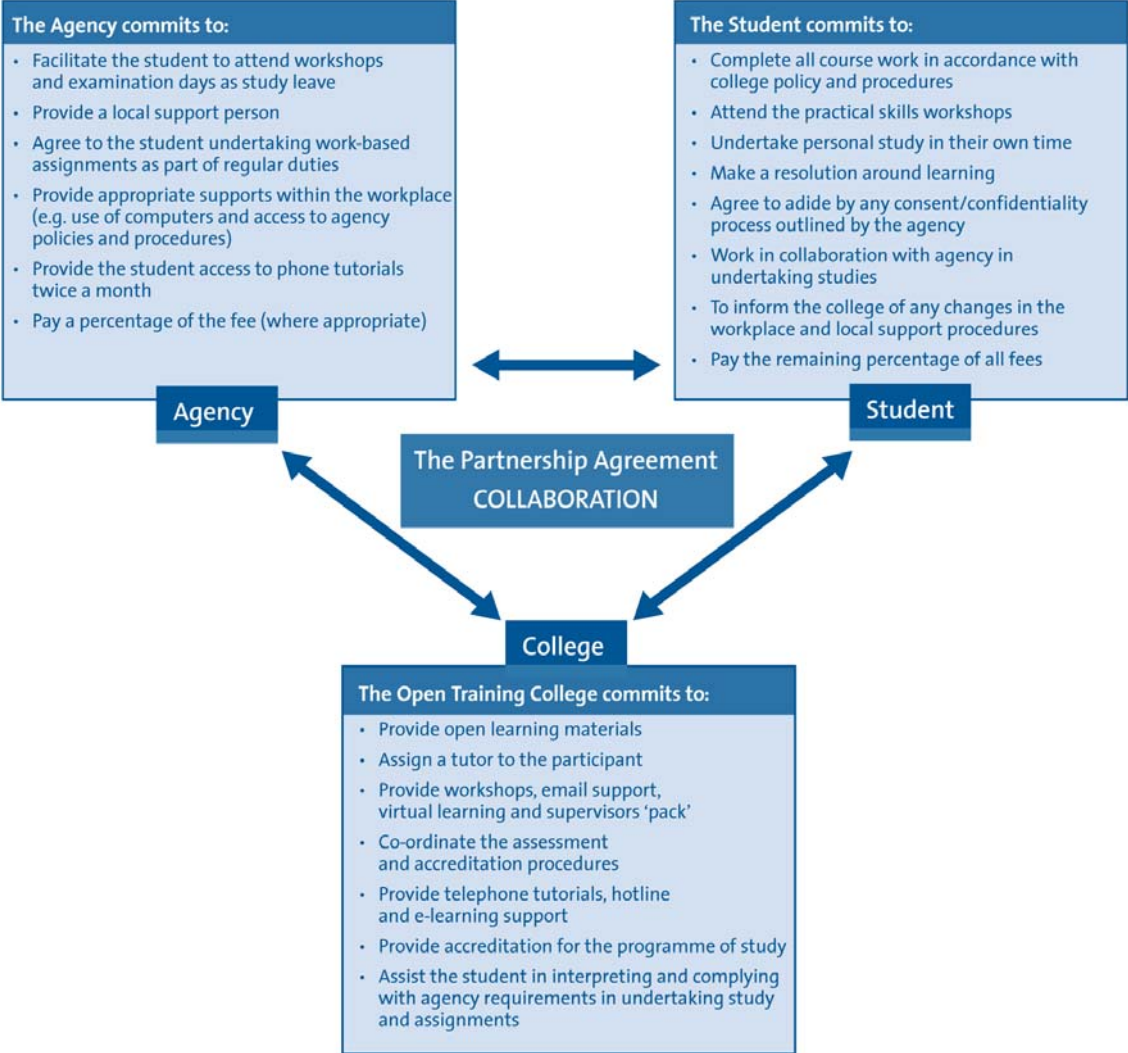
The College considers participation on its courses as a partnership between the student, the employing agency and the College. Through the *Partnership Agreement* the agency often pays a percentage of the fee (although increasingly students are self funding), allows time for attendance at workshops and nominates a work-based agency support person acceptable to the College and agrees the student may undertake work-based assignments as part of their regular duties.

The student makes a commitment to complete course work in accordance with the College policies and procedures, abide by any consent/confidentiality process outlined by the agency, work in collaboration with his/her agency in undertaking studies, pay fees or to contribute a percentage of the fees, complete course assessments, attend the practical skills workshops, undertake personal study in his/her own time and to inform the College of any changes in the workplace and local support procedures.

The College provides open learning materials, web-based supports (MyOTC), assigns a tutor to the student, provides telephone tutorials and hotline support, facilitates workshops, co-ordinates the assessment and certification of the courses, and assists the student in interpreting and complying with agency requirements in undertaking study and assignments. Figure 3 provides an overview of the Partnership Approach.



The Partnership Approach and the Partnership Agreement



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Figure 3: The Partnership Approach



1.11 College Location

The Open Training College administrative offices are located at Prospect Hall, Willowfield Park, Goatstown, Dublin 14. The College uses a range of locations in the delivery of its courses including the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin and various hotel and conference facilities around the country.

1.12 Funding Base

The College is primarily funded by student fees (some of which are often paid by the student's employing agency). The College also secures income by engaging with appropriate and relevant commercial contracts. Administrative offices are provided by St. Michael's House as are services including HR, Finance, IT, Buildings Maintenance and Health and Safety. In the past St. Michael's House has provided a subvention to the College when required.





SECTION 2: THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

The Open Training College agreed its Terms of Reference for Institutional Review (IR) with HETAC in July 2008. This followed two initial consultation meetings earlier in 2008 during which the College sought clarification on the process and the relationship between Institutional Review, Programmatic Review and Strategic Planning. Based on the discussions and outcomes of those meetings, resource implications and overall workload demand, the College, jointly with management in St. Michael's House, decided to proceed in the first instance with Institutional Review, followed closely by Programmatic Review of the Social Care programmes (panel currently planned for April 2009) and to re-engage with Strategic Planning late in 2009 informed with the outcomes and experience of both Institutional Review and Programmatic Review. The Terms of Reference agreed with HETAC are:

1. To enhance public confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the Institution and the standards of the awards made.
2. To contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance in the Institution.
3. To assess the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements operated by the Institution.
4. To confirm the extent that the Institution has implemented the national framework of qualifications and procedures for access, transfer and progression.
5. To provide recommendations for the enhancement of the education and training provided by the Institution.

No special considerations were identified as part of the Terms of Reference for the Institutional Review of the Open Training College.

Following agreement of the Terms of Reference the College sought further clarification from the HETAC representative (at that time) and outlined the particular approach and interpretations to be adopted to the Institutional Review process.

Specifically, key interpretations of the College were:

- A significant focus on objective 3 (Quality Assurance) and objective 4 (Access, Transfer and Progression) as these two objectives have a legal basis.
- Objectives 1 (Public Confidence) and 2 (Governance and Strategic Planning) while important have less focus (no legal requirement). Also our governance situation is different to other Institutions since we are a part of St. Michael's House, which as a charity is subject to the *Charities Bill 2007* (soon to be enacted).
- Cognisant of resources and workload the College is holding off development of a new Strategic Plan to late 2009, although some initial work had been completed in 2007 and early 2008.
- The IR process itself contributes to the achievement of objectives 1 and 2.



- It was not necessary to rectify a problematic situation in relation to Academic Council and Programme Boards prior to the panel visit. It was legitimate to review and outline the situation in the Self-Evaluation Report and to seek input from the panel during the visit in finding a workable solution.

Following the above decisions, clarifications and interpretations the College proceeded with the self-evaluation phase. Our aim was to complete a self-evaluation process that was rigorous, systematic, evidence-based and comprehensive enough to meet all objectives of the Terms of Reference (within the interpretation as outlined). Using the *HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for Institutional Review* and the *Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures* rigorously as a guide, the College implemented the following process for completion of the internal self-evaluation phase.

2.1 The Internal Audit Team

An internal audit team was established. This team consisted of the College Director, Assistant College Director, Manager of Academic Affairs and a Course Director. This team of individuals was selected for the broad scope provided by their roles within the College, ensuring all aspects of management, quality assurance, programme development and delivery, student and staff perspectives were represented.

The responsibilities assumed by the internal audit team included a detailed review of the HETAC policies and guidelines for Institutional Review; determining the OTC strategy for engaging with Institutional Review; defining the necessary steps and actions for the process; assigning responsibilities for tasks and monitoring progress on those tasks; arranging for internal and external stakeholder consultation to take place and ensuring the flow of information and communication between the internal audit team and the relevant stakeholders. The audit team met regularly to review progress made and plan for subsequent requirements. All meetings were recorded; these minutes are available on request. A timeline for completion of the project outlining major tasks and milestones to be met was also produced in the form of a Gantt chart, which is also available for review on request.

2.2 Conducting the QA Effectiveness Review

Following a detailed review of the HETAC documentation and analysis of how it related to the current policies and procedures of the Open Training College it was considered most appropriate to begin the self-evaluation process with the review of effectiveness of the QA policies and procedures (objective 3). The rationale for this included the legislative requirement to conduct such a review and the detailed supplementary guidelines available for this objective, which gave great support to this new and previously untested process. The audit team also felt that the QA policies and procedures were the backbone of all aspects of College functioning and therefore a thorough review of QA was critical to the full Institutional Review process.



This review of the College's QA system consisted of a series of steps and actions, each of which involved significant and rigorous analysis of documentation, and discussion both within the audit team and with the wider staff group of the College. The outcomes of the work completed in each step were presented in a report outlining the findings and outcomes of that step. These reports are available as part of the supplementary documentation for the review (see Appendix A) and are titled:

- Report A:** *Comparative Evaluation of OTC QA with European Standards and Guidelines for QA: Part 1 (2005).*
- Report B:** *Document Analysis of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008.*
- Report C:** *Review of Objective Evidence of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008.*
- Report D:** *Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI).*
- Report E:** *OTC Internal Self-Assessment of Access, Transfer and Progression.*

These reports will be referred to at relevant points during this report. *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)* has been submitted as part of the core documentation and the remaining reports are available from the College prior to or during the panel visit. As objective 3 is a major component of the review, the steps and work undertaken is discussed again in detail in Section 3 of this report. Briefly the steps implemented were as follows:

- i. The College *QA Policies and Procedures Manual*, originally drafted in 2003, was reviewed in detail and updated to reflect the current practices and position of the College. These updated policies and procedures are an important reference point for the self-evaluation phase of Institutional Review and as such are presented as part of the core documentation for the review.
- ii. A comparative review of the College QA policies and procedures with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1 (2005)* was then conducted. This desk-based review involved identifying the specific elements required of a QA system and comparing these requirements with the current College system. The results of this comparative review are discussed in more detail later in this report and are presented in Report A.
- iii. Next, an analysis of the documentation produced by the implementation of the QA policies and procedures was carried out. This analysis sought to highlight the amount of internal evidence available to support each of the QA policies and procedures. This evidence would be necessary to enable a judgement regarding effectiveness to be made. The findings of this analysis are recorded in Report B.
- iv. Objective evidence i.e. provided by external sources, in support of each QA policy and procedure was then identified and analysed. The results of this can be found in Report C.

Based upon the internal and external evidence identified, the internal audit team assigned an effectiveness rating to each element of the QA system operating in the College. These ratings



were recorded in a first draft of *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)*, in preparation for internal consultation with staff.

2.3 Review of Access, Transfer and Progression arrangements

The NQAI (2003) document *Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners* informed the review of this area. The process used here followed the same structure as for the previous objective. A comparative evaluation of OTC procedures and practices was conducted against the NQAI requirements; all supporting documentation, internal and external evidence was reviewed and a rating was assigned to each element indicating the extent to which the OTC complied with the requirements. The results of this process were recorded in *Report E: OTC Internal Self-Assessment of Access, Transfer and Progression*. Findings are discussed in more detail later in Section 4 of this report.

2.4 Stakeholder Consultation

2.4.1 Internal consultation with staff

Internal consultation involved a detailed briefing session and two intensive review days with all staff of the College, both of which are discussed in greater detail later in Section 3 of this report. The determinations made and ratings assigned to objectives 3 and 4, were discussed, reflected upon and agreed with all staff of the College. Initial plans for implementation of recommendations were also made in consultation with staff members. The findings and recommendations of the internal audit team presented to staff in Draft *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)*, were finalised internally following this staff consultation process.

2.4.2 External consultation with graduates and agencies

Consultation with external stakeholders is a significant focus of current QA mechanisms within the College. Feedback from students and other stakeholders provided considerable input into the documentation and sources of evidence considered for all objectives of the Terms of Reference. To gather additional feedback an online survey was conducted with graduates of the College and representatives from employer agencies. The findings of this survey are available as part of the supplementary documentation and will be discussed in more detail in Sections 4 and 6 of this report.

2.4.3 External consultation with service- users

The process of engaging with Institutional Review has highlighted for the College the need to systemically gather feedback from service-users (i.e. people with disabilities who are clients of the agencies with whom the College and its students work). In response to this identified need, the College has in the last month contracted an independent researcher to conduct research with service-users for the purpose of Programmatic Review of our Social Care Programmes. It is anticipated that this will mark the beginning of a regular consultation process with service-users to help inform the continued development and improvement of College programmes and services. However, it is important to note that the College has not been completely remiss in



this area. In the past we have sought views of people with disabilities and their advocates through their participation on Programme Boards and Academic Council, research for the development of new programmes and by their participation in College programmes. Rather we need to formulate a more thorough and consistent policy and practice in this area and this will form a recommendation of this review.

Finally, following a desk review and discussion of the additional objectives of Public Confidence and Strategic Planning and Governance by College Management, all findings for all objectives were collated by the internal audit team, recommendations were identified and are now presented in this Self-Evaluation Report for Institutional Review.

2.5 Self-Evaluation Report: Document Structure

The structure of this Report follows closely the process and approach of the College in conducting the self-evaluation, focusing significantly on QA Effectiveness and Access, Transfer and Progression and using the process itself to inform the objectives relating to Public Confidence and Governance and Strategic Planning:

- Section 1** provides the background and current status of the College.
- Section 2** details the process and rationale for the approach the College took to Institutional Review.
- Section 3** details the review of our QA policies and procedures. This is the most detailed section of the report representing the level of work and effort the College attributed to this objective.
- Section 4** details the work completed in relation to Access, Transfer and Progression. This section also received a great deal of attention during the self-evaluation process.
- Section 5** presents findings and information relating to Governance and Strategic Planning.
- Section 6** presents findings and information on Public Confidence.
- Section 7** presents the recommendations from the self-evaluation process structured under each of the objectives of the Terms of Reference.

This Report should be read in conjunction with the core documentation listed on page 2, and submitted with this report for the purpose of Institutional Review.





SECTION 3: REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Terms of Reference: Objective 3:

“To assess the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements operated by the Institution”.

The Open Training College developed its QA policy and procedures in 2003 in compliance with the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act* (1999). Following the formation of HETAC, also under the 1999 Act, and the development of their *Guidelines and Criteria for QA Procedures in Higher Education and Training* (2002), the Open Training College was the second of the private education providers to agree their QA policies and procedures with HETAC in early 2004. The College’s commitment to quality is evidenced by this early approval of its quality procedures.

This section begins by providing a response to each of the key issues of the QA effectiveness review posed by the *HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for Institutional Review* (p.31-33) and concludes by reflecting on the process and outcomes using the questions posed by section 5.4 (p.14) of the same document, which provides guidance for preparing the self-evaluation report. Objective 3 relating to effectiveness of QA was the subject of considerable time and effort by the internal audit team and the wider staff team of the College prior to drafting this report, thus the information presented here is supported by additional internal reports² reflecting each stage of the review process.

3.1 Key Issue: How has the QA system evolved in the Open Training College?

The current QA system within the Open Training College was developed in 2003 in accordance with the *HETAC Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training* (2002), and agreed with HETAC in 2004. Since that date the QA system has had a very strong influence on all aspects of College service delivery.

The self-evaluation process has highlighted that the practice of quality in the College has developed beyond the parameters set by the documented *OTC QA Manual* (2004). This evolution of the QA policies and procedures occurred organically, primarily as a result of the ongoing feedback generated by the annual QA reports³ and the growth experienced by the College in the last few years both in terms of the number of students participating in programmes and the variety of programmes on offer. The guiding principles outlined in the *OTC QA Manual* (2004) and the culture of QA that has developed within the College have ensured that these modifications and improvements to the QA system have followed structured and monitored processes. The development of rubrics and formative assessment tools are good examples of improvements made to College practices outside the parameters of the

² Please refer back to page 15 for the list of additional internal reports.

³ The College produces and publishes an annual QA report for all HETAC programmes. A sample QA report has been supplied as part of the core documentation.



documented QA system, yet were informed by best practice and current research and thinking in the area. The process taken in developing these tools illustrates the commitment to QA among the College team.

The first exercise completed in this review of QA effectiveness was to compare the QA system of the College with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1* (2005, p.15). The results of this comparison revealed that, based on available evidence, the College could be rated as compliant with 84% of the specific requirements⁴ of the guidelines across the seven areas of QA covered by Part 1 of the European guidelines. This result was viewed favourably by the audit team given that the *OTC QA Manual* (2004) was developed two years prior to the publication of the European guidelines.

Further analysis of the results of this comparison reveals that we are partially compliant for 11% of requirements, leaving just 5% of requirements not addressed to date. This 5% relates to areas that have never been problematic for the College. Firstly it relates to a policy for individual staff appraisal and a policy for the removal of poorly performing staff.

In the Open Training College all staff are fully competent in their role and there is an ongoing commitment to Continuing Professional Development by both staff and College management. Policies relating to staff must be developed with reference to both the Health Service Executive and St. Michael's House guidelines requirements. Currently a policy exists within St. Michael's House in relation to the removal of poorly performing staff but this requires inclusion in the *OTC QA Manual* (2008). An individual staff appraisal system has never been agreed within the HSE. A team based performance system was piloted in 2007/2008. St. Michael's House is currently considering the rollout of this team based system but this will be subject to adequate resources being made available by the HSE.

The second area of the 5% identified as non-compliant relates to the practice of benchmarking with other similar organisations. The College is interested in the concept of benchmarking but has found it difficult to identify an Institution(s) with a similar speciality regarding subject areas and student population, and also regarding mode of programme delivery. However, the College remains committed to the principle of benchmarking and will continue to investigate opportunities to further this as a practice.

While the HETAC guidelines relating to the self-evaluation process, proved extremely useful in identifying the strengths and potential weaknesses of our QA system it was necessary for us to apply several of the requirements in a context-specific way, given the particular programmes, services and mode of delivery employed by the College. For example, guidelines in relation to the employability of graduates require a different interpretation since all of our students are employed in appropriate positions during their studies to allow them to apply their learning directly to the workplace. In addition, all new programmes of the College are developed based on a labour market analysis and research carried out with potential employers, ensuring that qualifications are continually matched with employer needs on the ground.

⁴ These specific requirements were determined by the audit team and are detailed in supplemental document, Report A.



Full results of the comparative analysis between the College QA policies and procedures with the European Guidelines are presented in supplemental *Report A: Comparative evaluation of OTC QA with European Standards and Guidelines for QA: Part 1 (2005)*⁵.

3.2 Key Issue: How does the Institution manage its QA systems (including any changes to the QA system)? What changes have been made to QA procedures agreed with HETAC?

The work undertaken for this self-evaluation highlighted that some policies and procedures had been modified (for the reasons highlighted previously) but these changes had not been recorded in the *OTC QA Manual (2004)*. Therefore a first major exercise completed for the review process was to update the *OTC QA Manual (2004)* to include information relating to all new areas and practices that have been introduced in the last four years. This updated version of the QA policies and procedures manual has been submitted as part of the Institutional Review core documentation. While the *OTC QA Manual (2008)* is now accurate a further recommendation is made at a later stage to re-format the manual in line with the seven elements of the *Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1 (2005)*.

3.2.1 Changes incorporated into the QA manual

Sections 1 and 2 of the *OTC QA Manual (2004)*, which relate to QA policy and College background have remained relatively unchanged. Section 3, which outlines the procedures for the design and approval of new programmes, subjects and modules, has been implemented in its entirety twice since its agreement with HETAC in 2004. The first implementation was in 2004, which saw the development and rollout of the *Honours Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies (Disability)* and the second time in 2008 when it was used to guide the development of the *Higher Certificate in Arts* and *Bachelor of Arts in Applied Management (Human Services/Non-Profit)*. The self-evaluation process highlighted that the system worked well (the programmes were accredited with minor conditions attached), but that it may be overly complex, particularly as it relates to minor, special purpose or supplemental awards. The procedure has been highlighted for further review and modification during 2009.

The most significant changes in QA procedure and/or practice were observed in Sections 4 and 5 of the *OTC QA Manual (2004)*. Section 4 details the procedures for the assessment of learners within the College. This area has experienced rapid change and development in line with best practice developments in the assessment of adult learners participating in blended learning and also in line with new technologies that the College has embraced to support the delivery of programmes and the assessment of learning.

A significant change implemented by the College in relation to assessment is the coordination of module learning outcomes with the assessment for that module. This has been greatly aided by the use of rubrics in place of the previous marking schemes. The rubrics have also aided the provision of detailed feedback to students on their performance in assessments. A second

⁵ This report is part of the supplemental documentation and will be available to all members of the panel during their visit.



major development has been to refocus and further develop formative assessment to support and guide learning throughout the whole process of students completing a module. Both of these developments emerged from the observations and knowledge of teaching staff of national and international developments in assessment and were subsequently developed with reference to research and good practice guidelines. The implementation of these developments and their impact on learners will be tracked and evaluated as part of the QA system during the 2008/2009 academic year.

Section 5, procedures for the ongoing monitoring of programmes, is the second section of the *OTC QA Manual (2004)* that has experienced significant change in the last four years. Again, change in this area has been necessary to respond to the needs of an expanding Institution that has set high standards for itself. Considering the level and amount of evaluation the College conducts to gather feedback from students, developments in this area have been aimed at avoiding evaluation paralysis and making the evaluation procedures as user-friendly as possible. In doing this, the specific evaluation procedures of the College were critically reviewed to ensure that only those relevant and necessary were a regular feature of monitoring but that the system remained sufficiently flexible to conduct additional evaluations when necessary. Information and communication technology have aided the advancement of evaluation procedures that are quick, accessible, user-friendly, intuitive and which provide a prompt feedback loop. This same technology has given the Institution ready access to information in formats that allow easy analysis and sharing of results.

3.3 Key Issue: How are the agreed procedures operating 'on the ground'?

How the QA policies and procedures are operating 'on-the-ground' was evaluated using the process of documentation analysis described in the HETAC *Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures* (p.10). This exercise aimed to identify all of the available documentation to evidence the operation of QA policy and procedures as specified in the *OTC QA Manual (2008)*. The evidence gathered was overwhelmingly positive in that evidence was available for all policies and procedures agreed in 2004 and for the modifications implemented in the intervening years. Furthermore, evidence also highlighted that QA feedback from stakeholders was acted upon contributing to a continuous cycle of QA improvement and development in the College.

In conducting the review of documentation for QA a rating scale was used to indicate whether 'too much', 'correct amount' or 'too little detail' in documentation was maintained for each area of QA. This was a subjective rating scale agreed by the audit team where 'correct amount' meant that the College had sufficient evidence to effectively review the procedure. Of 47 requirements⁶ (identified by the College from the European Guidelines) there was the 'correct amount' of detailed evidence available for 40 areas. Three areas were rated as having too much detailed evidence available. Specifically these related to procedures for the development and approval of new programmes. A possible reason for this is that the process had not been tested at the time of writing in 2004 and therefore it possibly was written in an over-cautious detailed manner. As mentioned above this procedure will be subject to review in 2009.

⁶ The list of 47 requirements are detailed in Report B (see list of supplemental documents, Appendix A)



The remaining areas where too little detail was identified, relate in the first instance to the area of assessment where information gaps exist. However, College staff have been very active in responding to the consultation process initiated by HETAC on this area. Secondly, too little detail was available for the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements of College staff. Staff development is a strong practice within the College with support available for all staff to attend relevant training/development events and to continue their education to Masters and Doctorate levels. This QA effectiveness review highlighted the need for a more structured and proactive process in relation to staff CPD requirements. This will be addressed in the Strategic Review process scheduled for work in Autumn 2009.

Publication of College information was the final area with too little detail available (largely because the College has not published its QA manual online). However, commitment of the Open Training College to the publication of information has been demonstrated by the resources dedicated to the website and the QA information that has already been made available there. College documentation published on the website demonstrates openness, transparency and a commitment to ongoing continuous improvement. The full details of the findings of the documentation analysis are presented in supplemental document *Report B: Document Analysis of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008*.

3.4 Key Issue: How is feedback from the Institution's stakeholders obtained and how does it inform decision-making?

The exercise of reviewing objective evidence⁷, helped greatly to answer the questions posed here. Analysis and reflection on this objective clearly indicated stakeholder consultation as a strength of the College. The amount of information the College gathers from stakeholders on an annual basis is striking (see sample QA report provided as part of core documentation). Feedback from current students represents the bulk of this information, gathered through direct and indirect evaluation of programmes and services. Each student of the College is invited to provide feedback regularly during the academic year by completing short surveys, and at the end of the year by completing a longer survey, which addresses all aspects of College services and supports. Feedback is also gathered informally through the regular communications between tutors and students and the individual tutor-student relationship, which facilitates the sharing of opinions and information.

Other important stakeholders that are regularly consulted for feedback include the External Examiners and the Academic Council, who also fulfil the role of providing expert opinion. Programme Boards have historically included graduates, representatives of agencies of people with disabilities and people with disabilities themselves. While Programme Boards are currently under review the College remains committed to the inclusion of the views of all stakeholders in its work. In addition to the above, in the development of new programmes and review of existing programmes the College also seeks direct input from the sector. Recent examples include the establishment of an advisory board in the development of the *Honours Bachelor of Arts in*

⁷ The review of objective evidence was the third step in the process of the QA effectiveness review, as outlined on page 15 of this report.



Applied Social Studies (Disability); extensive research and sector involvement in the development of the new management programmes; direct consultation (using an external consultant) for current Programmatic Review of the Social Care programmes.

3.4.1 How stakeholder feedback informs College decision-making

The College is very conscious of making the best use of the information that is gathered. The first step in doing this is to ensure that a feedback loop exists for all aspects of feedback gathered. For example, all QA evaluation findings are published in an annual QA report⁸ for each programme, and the new survey technologies (online questionnaires) enlisted since 2006 now allow survey feedback to be shared with respondents almost immediately. The 2007 and 2008 External Examination processes also provide a good example of the feedback loop in action. Recommendations made by External Examiners and agreed by the Examinations Board were presented in the annual QA report to be implemented in the forthcoming academic year. 2008 then saw a structured approach of meeting with the External Examiners prior to their moderation of student work to update them of improvements made as a result of their recommendations in the previous year.

The review of objective evidence also highlighted areas which may be improved in the QA system. It was identified that there is a significant amount of electronic information available from the web platform employed by the College that is currently not analysed.

Full results and discussion of the findings of the review of objective evidence are presented in supplementary document *Report C: Review of Objective Evidence of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008*.

3.5 Key Issue: How are staff engaged in quality assurance - is it part of the way things are done?

An analysis of the evidence presented in *Report B: Document Analysis of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008* highlights that staff, both teaching and administration, are heavily involved in QA practices. Building on this involvement two staff review days took place, in which all elements and aspects of the QA system were discussed and the work of the audit team was reviewed in detail. All staff were prepared for these review days by being supplied with draft *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)*, which condensed all of the information produced by the internal audit team into a format which was comprehensive yet easily digestible. The updated *OTC QA Manual (2008)* was also supplied. This information was dispensed at a briefing session facilitated by the internal audit team to explain the Institutional Review and QA Effectiveness Review processes to staff and to outline the requirements of individual staff members in these processes.

The review days were structured around reflective questioning exercises to gauge staff understanding of various aspects of the QA system and to obtain agreement on recommendations. It also included a final exercise where staff brainstormed how the

⁸ A sample QA report has been supplied as part of the core documentation supporting this report.



recommendations being made might be implemented and what their own role would be in relation to the implementation. The outcome of the staff review days was a very positive confirmation that all staff are fully committed to and engaged in the QA system, in a manner appropriate to their own role. The review days also facilitated a sharing of information regarding QA activities across different roles occupied within the College. Following the review days draft *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)* was updated, finalised and circulated to all staff.

3.6 Key Issue: What is the balance between staff ownership and Institutional coherence?

The staff review days discussed above highlighted significant balance between staff ownership and Institutional coherence. This was evidenced in that all of the conclusions and recommendations made at the Institutional level and presented to staff were agreed (some were amended slightly but none were contested or omitted). Staff feedback following the review days was also very positive, with staff indicating that they felt very included in the Institutional Review self-evaluation process and had acquired an enhanced understanding of the process and how it applied to the College as a whole and also to individual staff members, due to the work of the internal audit team.

3.7 Key Issue: How is the effectiveness of QA reviewed? How is the performance of the QA system measured? What actions are taken as a result of these reviews?

The effectiveness of QA is reviewed indirectly at the end of each academic year with the publication of the annual QA report for each programme. The Course Director will review the information presented, which has been gathered through the various QA evaluation methods during the year and which has led to agreed recommendations for improvements to the programme. This review of information will identify whether the required information is being gathered or if there are any gaps in the information. The relevancy of all information is also reviewed. This leads to changes to the way in which the QA system operates on the ground and feeds into individual programmes.

Overall effectiveness of QA procedures are reviewed by Course Directors and management within the College regularly at team meetings which address the standards and practices determined by the QA system and also the consistency in application of those standards and practices across all programmes and ancillary services.

The current QA system calls for an internal self-evaluation and review of the system every two years. One such review was carried out in late 2006/early 2007. The overall aim of this process was to review the College QA model and its implementation, examine its strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for improvement. The review was conducted in four stages, first QA documentation and evidence of implementation was reviewed by the (at that time) QA Coordinator and the College Director. The second stage involved consultation with the staff team, Programme Boards and Academic Council regarding the findings of the initial review. The final two stages involved making recommendations and implementing resulting changes to the



QA system and documenting these in a report. Actions arising from this process included opening discussions for the development of a student representative system; revising the structure of the annual QA reports; development of web-based QA reports; a review of the evaluation materials used by the College; introduction of new standards and guidelines for the recording of tutorials; analysis of the supervisor survey conducted and a review of the supervisor's role.

3.8 Key Issue: Seven Elements of the European Guidelines. How has the Institution reviewed the effectiveness of the seven elements in the European Guidelines?

The effectiveness of Open Training College QA systems regarding each of the seven elements of QA from the European Guidelines were reviewed by implementing the techniques illustrated in Figure 3 of the *HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of the Effectiveness of QA Procedures* (p.9). The techniques of desk-based review, document analysis and review of objective evidence have already been discussed briefly and are presented in more detail in the supplementary documents already mentioned.

Following the desk-based review, and consideration of documentary analysis and objective evidence, the internal audit team convened to make informed judgements regarding the effectiveness of each element and section. Based on the evidence gathered the internal audit team rated the College as having procedures that are 'well established' for nine of twelve specific procedures covering all aspects of QA within the College. Three procedural areas were rated as requiring 'further development', and no areas were identified as needing a 'full review'. To further inform this work the wider staff team was consulted. This consultation took place over two days (see under 3.5 above). During the two days, staff reviewed the preliminary judgements made by the internal audit team and all staff were given the opportunity to voice their opinion and make further suggestions. The full details of the outcomes of this process are presented in *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)*. Briefly the main findings were as follows:

3.8.1 Element one: Policy and procedures for quality assurance

While practice in this area is considered well established, with all staff committed to upholding standards of all aspects of programmes and services, and a very strong culture of quality evident in day-to-day practice, some areas for improvement were identified. These included a re-draft of QA documentation to be more explicit about the place QA occupies in the operation of the College and to reflect the QA structures congruent with the *Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1* (2005).

3.8.2 Element two: Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

Review of this area considered the procedures in place for the approval of new programmes, Programmatic Review and programme monitoring. Procedures in each of these areas are well established in the College. Experience from participation in the new programme approval



procedure twice in the last four years has led us to conclude that the current 15-stage process⁹ may be too detailed in some areas causing attention to be drawn away from other more important areas or tasks. This report will recommend that this 15-stage process be reviewed. In relation to ongoing monitoring of programmes, it is also proposed that Programme Boards be reviewed with regard to the objectives, roles and membership of the boards. Currently Programmatic Review is being carried out on our Social Care programmes under the original system. It is anticipated that the system of Programmatic Review will be evaluated and modified when the full process has been completed in 2009.

3.8.3 Element three: Assessment of students

The procedures considered here were those for Examination Boards, External Examiners, learner appeals and information provision. The procedures for the Examination Board were the only ones identified as requiring further development. The rationale for this judgement reflects the current review process HETAC are engaged in regarding the role and responsibilities of External Examiners. The College has a representative on the HETAC working group looking at this matter and awaits the outcomes of this working group, which it is anticipated will provide guidance in helping the College to specify the roles and responsibilities required of External Examiners. The other three procedures were considered well established and effective, based on the evidence identified and the discussions held among the staff team. In the interest of continuous quality improvement recommendations for enhancement of each of these procedures have been made and are detailed in *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)*.

3.8.4 Element four: Quality assurance of teaching staff

This element was considered a high priority for the College as it is recognised that a high standard of competence and professionalism among the teaching staff is an absolute necessity to maintain the quality of programme delivery and assessment and to ensure confidence in the College among participants of our programmes and those who enter into conversation with our students about the College. The procedures for the selection, appointment, appraisal and development of staff were deemed to be effective. This is evidenced by the quality of current staff and their commitment to ongoing professional development. By the end of 2009 78% of core teaching and management staff will have qualifications to or above Masters level in varying areas. The remaining 22% are largely administration staff, who also have qualifications appropriate to their role. Staff morale is excellent and grievances very rare. There are no instances in the history in the College of the implementation of formal grievance or disciplinary procedures by staff or management at any level.

In relation to this element one area was recommended for further development, subject to consultation with the St. Michael's House Human Resources Director and the Health Service Executive. As outlined earlier this is the area of removal of poorly performing staff and staff appraisal (see Section 3.1 for details).

⁹ This 15-stage process is detailed in Section 3 of *the OTC QA Manual (2008)*, supplied as part of the core documentation accompanying this report.



3.8.5 Element five: Learning resources and student support

The College procedures for the provision of learning resources and student support services can be considered well established by virtue of the founding principles of the College, which still apply as much today as they did in 1992, and the *Supported Open Learning Model*¹⁰ of delivery, upon which every programme is developed. However, it is recognised that the formal structures for providing support must be developed to reflect and support the growth in student numbers and the increased diversity in the student population, thus some recommendations are detailed in *Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQA)*.

3.8.6 Element six: Information systems

When considering this element it became very clear that Institutional self-knowledge holds a very important place in the current QA system and has become a very well developed and structured system over the past four years. However this element is recommended for further development due to the wider uses for that knowledge that have been identified through this QA Effectiveness Review process. For example as mentioned earlier more effective use of electronic information generated by the web platform would assist the College further with continuous improvement activities (see Section 3.4).

3.8.7 Element seven: Public information

The meaning of 'Public' in this element has been interpreted in a very specific way to relate to the context in which the Open Training College is placed i.e. a private Institution owned by St. Michael's House and operating commercially but without statutory funding. The current practice of making QA information available to all via the website, which has itself experienced significant development over the past four years has led to the judgement that this element is well established in the College. The dynamic nature of information provision is however recognised so we have made recommendations for enhancement of this element to ensure that new technologies and examples of best practice remain on the agenda to continually challenge and ultimately drive this area forward into the future.

In conclusion, this review of QA effectiveness in the Open Training College has identified the significant resources and effort afforded by all staff of the College to comply with QA policy and procedures and to maintain the high standards of the College's programmes and services. This effort is expended by virtue of the strong belief held by the College that QA systems offer support and guidance regarding day-to-day operations, a conscientious monitoring system for standards and opportunities to engage in focused quality improvement. The evidence and feedback gathered on each of the QA procedural areas has attested to the effectiveness of current practice in the majority of areas. However this process has also taught us lessons and provided guidance for the continued improvement of QA in the College.

¹⁰ Please refer back to section 1.9 of this report for information on the *Supported Open Learning Model*.



3.9 Summary of Findings: Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Arrangements

In addition to the specific findings relating to each of the seven elements of QA which have been outlined above the College has also concluded that:

- The culture of QA is very strong within the College, with QA embedded in all aspects of College programmes and services.
- In the last four years practices within the College have developed far beyond the parameters set by the QA policies and procedures agreed in 2004. Despite this, QA has remained at the centre of all new practices and informed the process for all new developments.
- All staff of the College, both teaching and administration, are deeply engaged with and committed to QA in a manner appropriate to their individual role.
- The Open Training College is almost fully compliant with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1 (2005)*, and those areas requiring development to become fully compliant have been identified.
- Evidence-based practice and the recording of documentation relevant to QA are notably strong aspects of the quality system within the College.
- Stakeholder consultation is the cornerstone of QA in the College and represents the foundation on which judgements can be made regarding the effectiveness of any QA policy and procedure. Formalising a mechanism for consultation with service-users on College activity would strengthen College activity in this area.





SECTION 4: REVIEW OF ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION

Terms of Reference: Objective 4:

“To confirm the extent that the Institution has implemented the national framework of qualifications and procedures for access, transfer and progression”.

The National Qualifications Authority document *Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression of Learners (2003)* outlines the role of the Qualifications Authority, Awards Councils and the providers of further and higher education in providing a coherent national policy on access, transfer and progression. To progress these three aims the roles and responsibilities are outlined in four sections; Credit, Transfer and Progression, Entry Arrangements and Information Provision. This structure is used to present the findings of the OTC internal audit team in relation to these areas.

To review objective 4 the audit team followed a similar process to the one undertaken in assessing objective 3. The team completed a desk-based review comparing the *OTC QA Manual (2008)* to the four sections within the NQAI document. Then a process of document analysis was completed looking for internal documentation generated by the College to evidence practice within the four sections; and finally objective evidence was sought from statistics, benchmarking with other Institutions, research and international reports.

4.1 Non-standard student profile

As outlined in the introduction to this report, a distinctive feature of the Open Training College is its student profile; all students are in employment and therefore are adult learners. The majority of the College students are female. Demographic information monitored by the College suggests that the age profile of College students is maturing (from 2005 to 2009, an increasing number of students aged thirty plus registered with the College) and the number of non-Irish national students has been increasing (the number of non Irish students registered with the College has increased from zero in 2001 to 112 in 2009, with 80 of these students coming from outside the European Union). The model of delivery used by the College is the *Supported Open Learning Model*, which provides students with a range of supports as they progress through the learning process. This model has provided the opportunity of accredited training to those that may be disenfranchised by the traditional 'taught' model of delivery used by many educational Institutions in Ireland, and normally defined as the 'non-standard' student.



4.2 Credit

This section requires the College to outline what statement of arrangements has been made available for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and what purposes RPL can be used for.

RPL is differentiated in the guidelines between credit for prior learning that is academic (i.e. accredited) and prior learning that is experiential (i.e. not accredited). The College policy on RPL (both academic and experiential) is still evolving but a number of procedures are in place. The College has an established system through which students can apply to have previous accredited learning recognised through an Advanced Entry system, which includes a 'bridging' component. The statement of arrangements for RPL (academic) and the competencies needed to succeed on each programme are recorded in the relevant programme documents. In addition, advanced entry arrangements are available on the College website and in the relevant College literature. The process of programme approval ensures the College's approach in relation to RPL is consistent with National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI) requirements.

All of the College's programmes are credit based, in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System. Each programme is modularised, with modules weighted from 10-20 credits, with each stage equating to 60 credits in total (for example, an ordinary degree equates to 180 credits, with an Honours degree requiring 240 credits). The credits per module and the modules needed to complete each stage of any programme are stated within the relevant submission documents and on programme literature.

RPL of experiential learning is more challenging and further guidance and direction is awaited from the national and international research currently being undertaken in this area. The College has previously been involved in partnership with the Dublin Institute of Technology in the VaLEx project (2003-2005), which captured the prior experiential learning of a group of care assistants through portfolio, to be used as credits towards two modules at stage 1 of the level 7 *BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)*. In 2008, four of these students completed their degree having entered through the VaLEx project in 2004; one student is currently completing her studies. However, the experience of the College in the VaLEx project led to a decision to hold off on developing a full procedure in this area pending further guidance and direction from relevant national bodies and the outcomes of research. The self-evaluation process highlighted a gap in the College's policy and procedure in relation to RPL (experiential). College management is aware of this gap and, as stated above, awaits further direction before moving to a decision on the approach and system to be used. Given the size of the College, its funding base and the potentially significant resources required to operate an effective RPL procedure in relation to experiential learning, the College believes this approach is prudent. However, it will confirm its commitment to the development and operation of an effective RPL (experiential) policy and procedure over time.

The self-evaluation also highlighted some areas for further development in the area of RPL (academic). These include an overall clarification and development of the systems currently in use. Specifically, a centralised system for access, storage and analysis of applications and outcomes of RPL applications is required; a clarification of terminology in relation to RPL and the bridging process is required as these are often used interchangeably; finally a specific



section in the *OTC QA Manual* to cover RPL needs to be developed, documenting the policy, principles and procedures and including definitions and learning outcomes.

4.3 Transfer and Progression

This section requires the College to indicate the extent to which transfer and progression routes into and onwards from all programmes leading to awards on the framework are identified; including any particular attainments, in Open Training College awards, required for transfer or progression; and to what level the College makes adaptations to programmes to facilitate successful transitions, especially for those accessing programmes through non-standard routes.

In reviewing the College's position, transfer into and between Open Training College programmes was identified as generally stronger than transfer out to other programmes. The information relating to transfer and progression routes are clearly stated in the relevant submission documents and is outlined in Table 2 below:

NOAI Level	Access	Transfer	Progression
Certificate Minor Level 6 Level 7: Stage 1	Leaving Certificate or equivalent FETAC level 5 <i>and</i> Interview <i>and</i> Suitable employment		OTC Higher Certificate in Applied Management (Non- profit/ Human services) OTC Level 7: Stage 2 Cognate HETAC Level 6 Major award
Higher Certificate Major Level 6 Level 7: Stage 2		Bridging studies + FETAC level 6 <i>or</i> HND (UK) <i>or</i> Cognate HETAC Level 7: Stage 1	OTC BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability) OTC BA in Applied Management (Non- profit/ Human services) Cognate HETAC Level 7 award
Degree Level 7		Cognate HETAC Level 7: Stage 2 + Bridging studies <i>or</i> OTC Diploma in Supported Employment	OTC BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Disability) Cognate HETAC Level 8 award
Honours Degree Level 8	Cognate Level 7 + Bridging studies		Masters HETAC Level 9 award

Table 2: Access, Transfer and Progression Routes



Internally, students can progress from the *BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)* into the *Honours BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)*, and from the *Certificate in Applied Management* into the *Higher Certificate in Arts in Applied Management*. From this, students can progress onto the *BA in Applied Management*. Students who have completed the OTC modules from the Health Service Skills programme (FETAC: Level 5) can apply for recognition of these when accessing the *BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)*. Graduates of the *Diploma in Training and Education in Supported Employment* (OTC/NUI Galway) have access to the in *BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)* at Stage 3.

As outlined above, other Colleges/Institutions would define the Open Training College's student demographic as non-standard. The non-standard Open Training College student can transfer in from other courses, for example from Social Care programmes run by the Institutes of Technology nationally, or with international qualifications where the qualification is recognised as being at a defined level on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The College provides a number of supports for students entering the College from these non-standard, external routes. These supports include a foundation course on how to use the College's e-learning supports, a bridging process completed through a specific online area for bridging students; and if needed a one-to-one tutorial process. College statistics show that the College's model is effective for advanced entry students, and in providing a progression route to other courses. Information regarding progression after programme completion has been addressed in the 2008 Graduate Survey. Results showed that progression had occurred both professionally through promotion (53% of respondents had moved onto a more senior job) and educationally through further study (23% of respondents had undertaken further study since graduation).

To facilitate transfer and progression, the College's policies and procedures adhere to the ACCS system. Further in keeping with the College's ethos completion of award/stage represents eligibility to progress rather than a particular level of attainment.

The self-evaluation process established that the College has implemented the access, transfer and progression arrangements but some improvements could be introduced. These include, the provision of additional information to students regarding progression routes from the College, to ensure students' understanding of the framework of qualifications and to direct them to appropriate information resources, e.g. Qualifax; and to include additional information as a section of the Student Handbook.

4.4 Entry Arrangements

This section requires the College to state the extent to which the Institution has clear entry arrangements, how the College provides transparent decisions on the allocation of places, and to ensure all applicants are treated in a fair, equal and consistent manner. Other requirements are that appropriate arrangements are made for appeals; that the College provides statements of knowledge, skill and competence needed for successful participation in each programme and that eligibility criteria for entry to each programme are clearly defined.



The College provides substantial information relating to each programme detailing entry criteria and arrangements and the designated level of the award on the framework. This information is contained in the College's brochure and website. Information for advanced entry is also provided through these media. The College has significant documentation relating to the entry arrangements including the application form, the *Agency Support Agreement*, Applicants' Day information and documentation, the bridging process and allocation of places. Presently, any student who is unsuccessful at any stage of the process is sent a letter outlining general reasons for non-offer of place, areas that may require some more development before they apply again, and an option to phone the relevant Course Director to discuss the issue further.

The National Plan for Equality of Access to Higher Education (2008-2013) defines access as encompassing 'not only entry to Higher Education but also retention and successful completion' and outlines eight key challenges. These challenges include addressing the higher educational needs of those already in the workforce, achieving equity of access through the use of additional resources both for students and Institutions and the need to have special regard to the needs of recent immigrants. The Open Training College prides itself on tackling these challenges. The success of the College's approach can be seen in the College's high student retention rates (97% currently) and the diversity of the student population. These aims have been achieved with a student population that is atypical in relation to many other Irish Colleges. The Open Training College student is work-based, older, and due to adult commitments might find access to third level education difficult, within other educational models.

4.5 Information Provision

A key objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. This requires that all learners should have accurate and reliable information available, to enable them to plan their learning on the basis of a clear understanding of the awards available and the associated entry arrangements and transfer and progression routes (NFQ, 2003). Guidelines require that providers inform new learners of the name of the awarding body and the programme designation on the framework of qualifications and that they publish the following information:

- entry criteria for programmes and a statement of knowledge, skills and competences needed to successfully participate
- the arrangements used to assess an applicants criteria to enter a programme (with further selection arrangements being published, where necessary)
- a statement of arrangements for RPL for entry onto a programme
- the possibilities for transfer and/or progression associated with the programme
- details of learner supports available for specific learner groups
- to ensure that all publicity information for a programme includes entry arrangements and transfer/progression opportunities into and out of the programme

The College publishes information through a number of media, the key media being the College website, the College brochure (that contains details of the entry requirements, course and



available awards), the *OTC QA Manual* and the Student Handbook. The provision of the information through these media compares well with the NQAI guidelines. As part of its advertising strategy, the College keeps a database of nationwide Social Care agencies and not-for-profit agencies with which it liaises with regard to existing and new courses.

The College website is updated regularly. Phone enquirers are sent hard copies of the College brochure and referred to the website. Both the website and the brochure clearly state the names of the awarding bodies, the title of the awards, the award-type and the framework levels designation of the course. In addition, measurement against the guidelines shows that the significant documented information was available publicly to all interested parties, as required.

Student retention, assessment statistics and the results of the annual end-of-year survey indicate positive outcomes for students regarding access, transfer and progression, suggesting information provision in this area is effective and efficient.

4.6 Summary of Findings: Credit, Access, Transfer and Progression

- The self-evaluation process determined that generally the College is compliant with the requirements relating to credit, transfer and progression, entry arrangements and information provision
- Traditionally the College has and continues to work only with students that are considered 'non-standard'.
- Arrangements for RPL (academic) are in place and effective. Some improvements were suggested.
- The development of policy and procedures for RPL (experiential) await national research and guidelines.
- Transfer and Progression arrangements are in place and are effective. It is perhaps easier to transfer into the College than out of it due to the specialist nature of the programmes delivered by the College. Progression has been achieved by College graduates. Tracking of this information in the College has commenced.
- Entry arrangements into College courses are operational, specified and effective.
- Information provided by the College on each of the areas covered in this section is effective. However, some areas for improvement were identified.



SECTION 5: GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Terms of Reference: Objective 2:

“To contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance in the Institution”.

5.1 Organisational Governance

As outlined earlier, The Open Training College is unusual in that it is a provider of accredited programmes of education but is part of St. Michael's House and therefore situated under the Department of Health & Children and not the Department of Education. Figure 1 in Section 1 (repeated below) outlines the organisational structure of St. Michael's House and indicates the College and the governance relationship between the two.

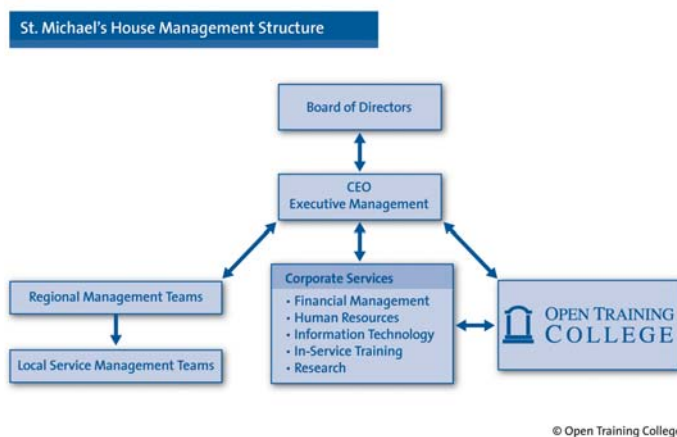


Figure 1: Structure of St. Michael's House

St. Michael's House is governed by a Board of Directors. The full Board meets monthly with sub-committees (e.g. finance committee) meeting more frequently. In February 2008 the College Director made a full presentation to the board on (at that time) current and future proposed activity including the requirement of Institutional Review in relation to HETAC programmes.

College accounts are audited with those of St. Michael's House and College activity is reported in the organisation's Annual Report.



5.2 Operational Management

Day-to-day management of the College is delegated by the Board of Directors to the College Director via the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of St. Michael's House. The College Director and the Deputy CEO meet regularly (normally once per month). Meetings cover all aspects of College resourcing, staffing, activity and future work.

A range of services and supports are provided to the College through the corporate services section - Human Resources, Financial Management, IT, Health and Safety. As St. Michael's House operates under the auspices of the Health Service Executive all policy and procedures relating to these aspects of the College are congruent with HSE requirements. Within the College, management consists of one College Director, one Assistant College Director, three Course Directors, one Corporate Services Manager, and one Manager of Academic Affairs. Management is also supported by staff that are paid a 'post of responsibility' allowance for specific duties. Since September 2008 management of the QA policies and procedures within the College falls within the remit of the Manager of Academic Affairs.

The work undertaken for IR did not highlight any significant deficits in the governance and/or management system. In actuality, the current system supports the work of the College and facilitates a good level of autonomy while still ensuring effective governance and management. All legal, ethical and financial obligations are met in a manner that allows the College to conduct its day-to-day business and respond effectively to its stakeholders as required. Feedback on the College from stakeholders is consistently good. Staff are highly motivated and committed, morale is good and grievance and complaints virtually non-existent. The College has shown consistent growth and development since its foundation and has developed an excellent reputation in its area.

5.3 Academic Governance - Academic Council

Because of its relatively small size and its position within a service agency, the College appointed an Academic Council in 2000 comprising of people external to the College. Council members were academics from other third level Institutions and/or people with a disability with appropriate qualifications and experience. This Council met regularly between 2000 and 2005. In 2006, difficulties were experienced in convening the Council, which resulted in the College postponing a number of meetings. Also, during 2007 and 2008 a number of members resigned (for personal and work related reasons) including the Chairperson. At a Council meeting in October 2008 it was proposed that the College review the role, function and operation of the Council prior to appointing new Council members. It was felt that the Institutional Review process may assist in this process and may highlight other areas that would benefit from an external viewpoint on a regular basis. One proposal was that the Council could operate more as an 'advisory board' and could be convened as and when needed. At this time the College is considering how best to address the matter of Academic Council and is open to input on this matter from the IR panel. Implementing a new or modified Council is a priority for Spring 2009.



5.4 Strategic Planning - Past

The College developed a Strategic Plan in 2003 for the period 2003 – 2008. A full Staff Review of this Plan was undertaken in 2004 and a number of modifications and revisions incorporated into the original plan. Following the 2004 review the Strategic Plan comprised of 49 targeted outcomes across eight areas: College Mission, Structure and Funding; Course Delivery and Development; Student Supports and Involvement; Staff Development; College Profile and Reputation; Networking; Organisational Performance; Other.

Learning in the time since the development of the 2003-2008 plan indicates that Strategic Planning presents a challenge for the Open Training College given its status as an independent, self-funding not-for-profit entity. Very often the College responds to opportunities as they present in the external environment, even though such opportunities may lie outside those identified in the Strategic Plan. For example, in 2005 the College competed by tender for a large national training initiative called SKILL, which was a government backed project targeted at up-skilling circa 28,500 health services staff by 2010. The College was one of only three national providers appointed to this project and resulted in substantial income for the College and the achieving of FETAC accreditation. Neither delivering training in this area nor at FETAC level had been identified as targets in the 2003 Strategic Plan.

Notwithstanding the challenges the College has identified in relation to Strategic Planning it engaged an external consultant in 2006 to work with it in commencing a review of the 2003-2008 plan and commence the initial work toward a new plan to run from 2009. A desk review in 2006 conducted by the College Director as part of work undertaken with the external consultant indicated that of the 49 targets set in the 2003-2008 plan 24 (49%) had been achieved, 13 (27%) were in progress and 12 (24%) had not been achieved. Some of the original targets had become irrelevant due to changes in the College's internal or external environment. As detailed in the example on SKILL above, new work and projects had been achieved even though these were not part of the original Strategic Plan.

5.5 Strategic Planning - Present

The executive management of the College and the consultant met for a series of meetings over Autumn 2007 and early 2008. A key outcome of this work was the agreement of a revised management structure for the College. This included the designation of an Assistant College Director, a re-grading of the Course Director role, the agreement of a 'post of responsibility' allowance for specific roles and the creation three new roles – Corporate Services Manager, Manger of Academic Affairs and Administrative Assistant (p/t). A further outcome was a Staff Review Day in April 2008. This day completed initial groundwork toward the Institutional Review and Strategic Planning processes. In June 2008 the College commenced the IR process by agreement with HETAC. To give focus to the IR process and due to workload of staff (which is high) a decision was taken to postpone further work on Strategic Planning until the IR process is completed in 2009.



The IR process has contributed to Strategic Planning by highlighting areas requiring review/improvement as part of a Strategic Planning process:

- Strategic Planning within the College has been limited largely due to workload, operational demand on resources and the need of the College to avail of opportunities as they emerge in the external environment
- The identification of a Strategic Planning process that takes account of the unique features of the College (particularly its funding situation) would be of great assistance to the College
- Continuous Professional Development for staff needs to be addressed in a more formalised way
- Development of key performance indicators for the College to replace the current critical success factors

5.6 Strategic Planning - Future

On conclusion of the IR process, items relating to Strategic Planning (above) will be addressed during the Strategic Planning process. It is the intention of College management to re-engage with the Strategic Planning process itself in late 2009 with the aim of developing a new Strategic Plan.

5.7 Summary of Findings: Governance and Strategic Planning

- Current governance and management arrangements between St. Michael's House and the College work well.
- Difficulties have been identified in the operation of an 'external' Academic Council. Review of operation of Academic Council to be completed and new arrangements implemented during Spring 2009.
- A significant number of targets set in the *Strategic Plan 2003 –2008* were achieved.
- A new Strategic Plan to be developed in late 2009.
- A Strategic Planning process that takes account of the particular needs and context of the College would be very helpful.
- Specific items were identified by the self-evaluation process to be referred to Strategic Planning.



SECTION 6: PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Terms of Reference: Objective 1:

“To enhance public confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the Institution and the standards of the awards made”.

6.1 Enhancing Public Confidence

To enhance public confidence while delivering the highest possible quality of education provision within higher education, the College has adopted the guidelines and procedures set out in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: Part 1* (2005) in respect of all areas of the College’s activity. As has been outlined in earlier sections of this report, all of the awards offered in the College comply with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and thereby are in compliance with the Bologna Accord. Furthermore the standard of awards is monitored relative to achievement of learning outcomes appropriate to the level of the award as defined by the NFQ. All awards offered are fully compliant with the European Credit Transfer System.

In completing the comprehensive review and analysis undertaken by the College for the self-evaluation component of the Institutional Review the audit team were cognisant of identifying practice and information that the College can demonstrate supports and enhances public confidence. While confidence of the general public is important for the College, its funding sources and stakeholders (students, agencies, St. Michael’s House, people with disabilities) are seen as of prime consideration in considering the matter of confidence. The self-evaluation process highlighted that the College builds public and stakeholder confidence in a number of formal ways:

- achievement and retention of our status as a recognised provider working with three accrediting bodies (see Section 1.4)
- recognition of the quality of education and training provided through endorsement by employers and government agencies
- publication on our website of annual documents, including formal QA reports, a prospectus of our programmes, programme specific brochures and supporting documentation
- organising an annual open event during the Aontas Adult Education Festival to which the public are invited
- College newsletter available on our website, with contributions from staff and students
- partnering training initiatives at local, national and international level
- staff participation in academic conferences and public events
- collaborative partnerships with other third level Colleges (e.g. delivering the disability component of social care programmes)



- partnership approach with non-profit/human service sector in the development of new programmes (e.g. collaboration with the WHEEL in the development of management programmes in 2008)
- recruitment of highly qualified academic staff who all have worked in delivering services to people in the non-profit/human service sector
- evaluation of all elements of the *Supported Open Learning Model* by students annually
- regular updating of the content of the programmes in line with emerging new thinking and best practice
- the full and demonstrable commitment to lifelong learning and use of the *Supported Open Learning Model* providing effective and energetic leadership in this area

6.2 Structures and Practices Supporting Public Confidence

The formal ways in which the College ensures public confidence are supported by the approaches, systems, structures and activities of the College across a range of areas:

6.2.1 Resources

As detailed previously the College operates under the governance of St Michael's House. Although not directly in receipt of higher education funding, relying on income generated from course fees and other appropriate income generating activities, the College has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct its affairs effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement, its methodological approach and its responsibilities under law. College accounts are audited annually with those of St. Michael's House.

6.2.2 Investment in quality staff

The HR Director of St. Michael's House and the College Director take joint responsibility for effective workforce planning, recruitment and management of staff. A College QA objective is that the College 'recruit and retain the best quality staff with the skills necessary to achieve the College's academic aims and objectives'. The Human Resources department is responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant legislation and organisational policies for recruitment. The College Directors and managers have responsibility for drawing up job descriptions and specifications for academic posts, which largely focus on experience in the sector and educational skills and achievements. The interview process also probes expertise in curriculum design and use of relevant e-learning technologies. Resources are made available annually for the up-skilling and academic development of staff. As outlined in previous sections this area has been identified for further work under the Strategic Planning process scheduled for late 2009.

6.2.3 Quality assurance

The College was the second of the private Colleges in Ireland to have its QA policies and procedures agreed by HETAC in 2004. The College has a system of continuous QA of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives. The College publishes an annual QA report for programmes on offer. These reports are developed from a range of evaluation procedures and sources, including student retention and



assessment outcomes for the programme, External Examiner reports and student and tutor feedback, gathered at various times during the year. These reports inform recommendations for change and development, which are discussed and ratified by the Programme Boards and Academic Council. In the interest of openness and building public confidence, we believe in sharing the results of all our internal quality procedures. QA reports are available on our website for academic years 2004 –2008.

6.2.4 Partnership approach

The College is highly regarded in the national non-profit/human service sector, which includes services for people with a disability. This ‘best practice reputation’ was primarily developed through a partnership approach to the development and delivery of programmes. The growth of the College is testament to the high regard in which it is held by the disability sector (one programme with 25 students in 1992 to eight programmes and approximately 800 students in 2008). This partnership approach builds relationships and ensures the support of the employer in the transfer of learning to the workplace, course relevance and responsiveness to changes on the ground.

As part of a recent internal Programmatic Review process the College surveyed opinions from two stakeholders of the partnership - agencies whose staff studied at the Open Training College and graduates. Key findings indicate continued confidence in the College:

- There is overwhelming satisfaction with Open Training College programmes and courses, both by agencies and graduates
- Both agencies and graduates agreed that they had seen a measurable improvement in positive work practice across the board. They also felt the student support structures in place worked well
- All agencies agreed they would continue to support staff studying at the Open Training College

6.2.5 Designing practical relevant programmes and learning supports

The College recognises the need to design practical and relevant programmes, which enhance confidence in the quality of programmes and equip graduates to work in the dynamic non-profit/human service and disability environments. This is facilitated by the continued development of its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) known as MyOTC, and a range of College programmes, together with the development of national and international partnerships. The establishment of the *Honours BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)* is an example of development of a programme (funded by the HSE) in direct response to a policy-lead, sector need for the education of Social Care Leaders. Through this programme the College continues to build public and sectoral confidence, ensuring graduates have the skills necessary to enter and progress in this new area of professionalisation into the 21st century.

6.2.6 Excellent student retention rates

The continued success of College courses is an acknowledgement of the confidence in the College to deliver relevant quality programmes and to the effectiveness of the *Supported Open Learning Model* which facilitates an adult learner-friendly modular approach, very low withdrawal rates (3% between 2004 and 2008), cost effectiveness for employers, minimal



disruption in service to clients and generally supports mature staff availing of lifelong learning opportunities. The College currently has approximately 800 students and is pursuing additional developments, guaranteeing its success into the future.

6.2.7 Employment potential for graduates

The partnership model employed by the College clearly addresses the employment potential for graduates as all our course participants are already employed in the non-profit/human service sector and research has indicated to us that a very high percentage, (86%) of graduates continue to work in the sector on completion of their studies (Melinn, 2001¹¹). Graduates of the College are highly regarded by employers and often promoted. In a recent survey 53% of graduates polled had been promoted on completing their programme with the College. The greatest benefit, as perceived by the employer, is the ability to integrate learning into their everyday working lives (Melinn, 2001).

6.2.8 Collaboration, research and consultancy activities

The national and international standing of the College is reflected in the number and diversity of projects, activities and research projects the College is invited to participate in. A sample is described below. A full list and details are found on the College website.

www.opentrainingcollege.com

Cross-border Supported Employment Training Partnership 2006 -2008

An EU project funded under the *Programme for Peace and Reconciliation*, aimed at providing comprehensive, accredited training programmes for staff working as job coaches / employment facilitators in cross-border agencies and locations.

The SKILL Project 2006-2009

The SKILL Project (Securing Knowledge Intra Lifelong Learning) is a major health services/union initiative established to oversee the education, training and development of circa. 28,500 support staff and their supervisors in the Irish Health and Personal Social Services. The College was one of only three national providers appointed to the project.

Management Development for the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

The College successfully delivered a three-day programme between 2006 and 2007 to 150 senior and first line managers on contract to the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies.

Romanian Project 2005-2006

In 2005 the College was contracted by Health Action Overseas (HAO) to develop and deliver a staff training programme in Constanta, Romania. This programme supported the establishment of a new service based on the social model of service delivery and moved children (largely orphaned) from an Institution to a community based setting.

6.2.9 Congruence with relevant Government policy

In recent years the College's development as a provider has been consistent with emerging trends in government policy, as outlined in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000),

¹¹ Melinn, A. (2001) *Impact of training: A review of impact of training over three years on graduates of the Open Training College*. Autumn 2001. Dublin: Frontline.



recognising that learning takes place in a range of settings wider than schools and colleges, encouraging greater links with industry. Above all, it means ensuring that quality educational services are accessible and responsive to the needs of young and adult alike, and that education policy and practice is designed to meet the diverse range of needs this entails.

Furthermore the College has been proactive in areas such as Social Care responding quickly and appropriately to legislation such as the *Health and Social Care Professionals Act (2005)* with the development of programmes congruent with the legislation.

6.2.10 Public Information

The College informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural/educational context of the College. This includes full and clear disclosures of relevant documentation such as quality policies, procedures, criteria and reports. The College also discloses to the public the decisions about the College resulting from any external review of its own performance. Information about the College can be found on our website.

6.3 Summary of Findings: Public Confidence

- A large number of areas of good practice in the College were identified which enhance public confidence on an ongoing basis.
- While the confidence of the general public in the College is important the College is particularly aware of retaining the confidence of its key stakeholders.
- The Institutional Review process itself will continue to support public confidence in the College.
- The self-evaluation process highlighted a range of recommendations across all areas of College activity. The implementation of these recommendations and their monitoring over time will further contribute to public confidence.
- The College will continue to make open, transparent and accurate information on the College and its work available on its website.





SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

Terms of Reference: Objective 6:

“To provide recommendations for the enhancement of the education and training provided by the Institution”.

7.1 Proposed Recommendations

Quality Assurance (Objective 3)

- Recommendation 1: Continue to develop the culture of Continuous Quality Improvement within the College.
- Recommendation 2: Redraft and publish the OTC QA Policies and Procedures Manual on the College website.
- Recommendation 3: Review and evaluate the current process for the approval of new programmes particularly as it relates to minor, special purpose or supplemental awards.
- Recommendation 4: Evaluate the process for conducting a Programmatic Review in the College, based on experience of current Programmatic Review process and implement the revised process.
- Recommendation 5: Review and evaluate the role, function, membership and operation of Programme Boards in the College.
- Recommendation 6: Further develop the policy and procedures for external examination in the College in line with the new HETAC guidelines in this area.
- Recommendation 7: Further improve the functioning of Examination Boards in the College.
- Recommendation 8: Continue to liaise with the St. Michael’s House HR Director in relation to the possible rollout of a team-based performance appraisal system for the College in line with the remainder of the organisation.
- Recommendation 9: Develop a policy and procedures related to supporting students with additional support needs.
- Recommendation 10: Explore the possibility for benchmarking with a similar Institution.
- Recommendation 11: Review the data gathering and feedback systems within the College to maximise use and efficacy of the current data being collected toward continually improving the Quality Improvement cycle.



Recommendation 12: Develop a more formalised and proactive policy for consultation with service-users on the work and activity of the College.

Access, Transfer and Progression (Objective 4)

Recommendation 13: Make explicit the policy and procedure for the recognition of prior learning (both academic and experiential) within the College following the outcomes of research in this area.

Recommendation 14: Further develop a centralised system for access, storage and analysis of RPL applications and their outcomes.

Governance and Strategic Planning (Objective 2)

Recommendation 15: Identify and utilise a process for strategic planning that takes account of the unique features of the College and the need to respond quickly to opportunities presented by the external environment.

Recommendation 16: Complete the development of a new Strategic Plan prior to the end of 2009.

Recommendation 17: Address the Continuing Professional Development of College staff in a more formalised manner.

Recommendation 18: Develop key performance indicators for the College to replace the critical success factors outlined in the Strategic Plan 2003-2008.

Recommendation 19: Review the role, function and operation of the Academic Council. Implement new modified Council/Board.

Public Confidence (Objective 1)

Recommendation 20: Continue to invest in and forge closer and more formal ties with all College stakeholders.

Recommendation 21: Continue to publish relevant reports and documents on our website, particularly those relating to Quality Assurance.

Recommendation 22: Implement the findings of this self-evaluation and Institutional Review Process to support public and stakeholder confidence in the College.



7.2 Improvement Plan

The College has commenced the development of its Improvement Plan for the recommendations outlined above. The format being used is that suggested in the *HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for Institutional Review*, detailing the date of commencement of initiatives, the improvement to be implemented, the actions to be undertaken, the person(s) responsible and the monitoring and success criteria. The Improvement Plan is a work in progress. A draft of the Improvement plan will be available to the panel during the Institutional Review panel visit.





APPENDIX A:

List of supplemental documentation:

Section 2: The Institutional Review: Self-Evaluation Process

1. Terms of Reference for Institutional Review of the Open Training College in the Spring Semester of 2009
2. Minutes of Internal Audit Team meetings
3. Gantt chart for the Open Training College Institutional Review process (2008-2009)

Section 3: Review of Quality Assurance arrangements

4. Qualifications (Education & Training) Act (1999)
5. HETAC (2002) Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training
6. OTC Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures Manual (2008)
7. HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for Institutional Review
8. HETAC Supplementary Guidelines for the Review of the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures (Objective 3 of Institutional Review)
9. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005)
10. OTC Institutional Review Report A: Comparative Evaluation of OTC QA with European Standards
11. OTC Institutional Review Report B: Document Analysis of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008
12. OTC Institutional Review Report C: Review of Objective Evidence of the Implementation of OTC QA Policies and Procedures 2004-2008
13. OTC Institutional Review Draft Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)
14. OTC Institutional Review Final Report D: Internal Self-Assessment against Standards and Guidelines on QA (ENQA, HETAC and NQAI)
15. Records of staff briefing session and review days: November 2008
16. OTC QA Self-Evaluation Review Report 2006/07

Section 4: Review Access, Transfer and Progression

17. NQAI (2003) Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners.
18. Submission documents to HETAC for the accreditation of new programmes.
19. The Open Training College and Dublin Institute of Technology Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning Pilot Project: Final Report (VaLEx Report)
20. OTC Graduate and Agencies Survey Report (2008)
21. HEA: National Plan for Equality of Access to Higher Education (2008-2013)
22. OTC Student Handbook for HETAC accredited courses 2008/09



Section 5: Governance and Strategic Planning

23. St. Michael's House Annual Reports (2000-2007)
24. Minutes of OTC Academic Council meetings (2004-2008).
25. OTC Strategic Plan 2003-2008
26. Records of staff review day: April 2008

Section 6: Public Confidence

27. St. Michael's House HR Policies and Procedures Manual (2008)
28. Quality Assurance annual programme reports 2004-2008
29. Melinn, A. (2001) Impact of training: A review of the impact of training over three years on graduates of the Open Training College. Autumn 2001. Dublin: Frontline
30. Department of Education and Science (2000) Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education.
31. Health and Social Care Professionals Act (2005)

Section 7: Recommendations

Draft Quality Improvement Plan



