



**OPEN TRAINING
COLLEGE**

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The Open Training College

Programmatic Review

of the

BA and BA (Hons)

in

Applied Social Studies (Disability)

20th May 2009

Report of the External Panel

Executive Summary

Findings

The panel finds the Open Training College to have engaged in the process of Programmatic Review with energy, enthusiasm and honesty. The process was found to be rigorous and fit for purpose. Following the external panel visit the continued validation of the programmes in question is approved, as are all recommendations for improvement made by the College.

Summary Commendations

1. The Open Training College can be commended on their engagement with the Programmatic Review and on implementing a structured process that was clear and comprehensive.
2. The focus of the Programmatic Review can be commended. The College's use of objectives to structure their review and reflection added greatly to the process.
3. Staff engagement in the Programmatic Review was noteworthy, with all academic staff indicating a clear understanding of and involvement with the process. The panel had the opportunity to meet all academic staff during the visit.
4. The consultation process that the College engaged in to gather information about the programmes and inform the recommendations is to be commended. Their efforts here ensured a complete picture of the programmes was presented, from all relevant perspectives.

Summary Recommendations

The panel make the following recommendations:

1. The continued validation of the BA & BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Disability) programmes is recommended, without condition.
2. The ten recommendations made in the Self-Evaluation report are agreed and it is recommended that these be followed up and implemented. These ten recommendations are outlined in an appendix to this report (Appendix A).
3. The College should spend some time reflecting on the process taken to complete this programmatic review, and to identify lessons learned and examples of good practice to be taken forward for future reviews. One example of such is the experience gained in conducting stakeholder consultation and the good practice evidenced in the graduates survey and research conducted with service-users by an independently contracted researcher.
4. The College should re-consider the module titles (including those updated titles indicated in the course schedule) from the point of view of transferability of student's learning on these programmes to programmes of other institutions, and readability of OTC transcripts for other institutions.

5. The College should continue to monitor student's assessment results on an annual basis with a view to identifying areas requiring additional supports.
6. Efforts should be made to investigate the possibility of working with community groups to develop research projects.
7. The College should consider carefully the assessment of the Research module at level 7, to ensure that graduates at this level have a sufficient grounding in research skills as well as theoretical knowledge. This is of particular importance for students who may exit at Level 7.
8. In developing the assessment for the revised Research modules the College should endeavour to ensure that service-users are not over researched as a result of student assessments.
9. The College should consider introducing an assessment of students personal and professional skills development at each stage of the programme, with this assessment conducted in collaboration with the student's work-based supervisor.
10. The College should consider CPD for staff as part of the Strategic Planning process.

Background to the Open Training College

The Open Training College (the College) was established by St Michael's House (SMH) in 1992. St. Michael's House is a voluntary body and one of Ireland's largest providers of community based services providing support to approximately 1,500 service users (adults and children) with an intellectual disability and their families. It is governed by a Board of Directors, the majority of whom are parents of service users. The Head Office is based in Dublin and services are delivered through a regionalised structure of three regions, St. Michael's House South, St. Michael's House Northeast and St. Michael's House North. The Open Training College currently operates as a Division within St. Michael's House. It offers a range of accredited programmes to staff working in disability and related health services nationally. In addition to the five programmes currently validated by HETAC, it also offers programmes validated by NUI Galway and is also FETAC quality approved. Originally a designated college under the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) predecessor body to HETAC, the College agreed its quality assurance procedures with HETAC in 2004. The College operates as a not-for-profit organisation and receives no state funding from the Department of Education and Science. Its' income is generated entirely by fees or participation in projects.

All students at the College are employed in voluntary services (disability/health/ non-profit) nationally; the College recruits no school leavers, so in effect all its students are adult learners. There are currently approximately 800 students between the ages of 23 and 63 from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland registered on the College's programmes. The College's model of delivery is Supported Open Learning, a blended learning approach which is supported by open learning materials, skills workshops, telephone tutorials, work-based mentoring, local study groups, e-learning and other forms of feedback. The College operates a formal three-way partnership agreement between the student, the agency for which the students work and the College. It has 18 staff based at head office and 7 offsite tutors. Staff structures and salary scales are linked to those of the Health Services Executive and not to those operating within higher education nationally.

The Programmatic Review Process

The Open Training College undertook this Programmatic Review with reference to the HETAC Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance (2002) and in compliance with the College's agreed QA Policy and Procedures for the Periodic Evaluation and Review of Programmes (2004).

The process taken followed this structure:

1. Course review team

A Course Review team was established from within the academic staff of the programmes under review. The team was made up of:

- Course Director of the BA (Ord) in Applied Social Studies (Disability)
- Manager of Academic Affairs
- Senior course tutor and year coordinator
- Coordinator of the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Disability).

The Course Director of the BA (Ord) took the position of team leader in the process.

The Course Review team took the following responsibilities:

- To determine the objectives of the review
- To specify the actions necessary to fulfil these objectives;
- To arrange for appropriate stakeholder consultation to be conducted;
- To facilitate communication with staff and students of the programme about the Programmatic Review process and outcomes
- To produce the Self-Evaluation Report.
- To nominate members and convene the External Review Panel

2. Objectives of the Review

Using the structure of the Institutional Review process as a guide the College structured the review around set objectives, which reflected the guidelines for programmatic review in the College's QA policies and procedures.

The objectives for the Review were determined as follows:

- i. To detail how the College quality assures the standards of teaching and learning systems for the programme and how quality improvements have been identified and implemented over the past five years
- ii. To review the course content, the aims, objectives and continued relevance of the programme, taking into account the views of key stakeholders
- iii. To review the course delivery and support structure, including the Partnership Approach, the Supported Open Learning Model, and the supports provided to students with a disability/specific learning difficulty
- iv. To review the arrangements in place for the assessment of students' work
- v. To review the arrangements in place for Access, Transfer and Progression
- vi. To make recommendations for the continued growth and improvement of the programme

3. *Inputs from Quality Assurance*

The following inputs from the Quality Assurance Procedures of the College were consulted:

- Annual Quality Assurance Reports
- QA Evaluation Procedures
- Examination Boards meeting minutes and External Examiner's Reports
- Programme Board meeting minutes
- Academic Council meeting minutes

4. *Stakeholder Consultation*

The following inputs from stakeholder consultation processes were considered:

- Consultation with staff
- Consultation with graduates and agency representatives
- Consultation with service users

5. *The Self-Evaluation Report*

The College published a self-evaluation report, which outlined their findings under each of the objectives, taking into account the views of key stakeholders obtained in the consultation processes.

The College made a number of recommendations in this report, which are included as an appendix to this report (Appendix A).

This report was circulated to all members of the external panel for review three weeks prior to the panel visit.

6. *The External Panel visit*

The external panel consisted of the following members:

Dr. Deirdre Lillis (Panel Chair)	Head of Computing, DIT
Dr. Bronagh Byrne	Research and Policy Officer, Centre for Human Rights, Northern Ireland
Ms. Joan Dempsey	Educator, Brothers of Charity Services, Galway (also Open Training College graduate)
Ms. Lavinia MacLean	Social Care Lecturer, IT Blanchardstown
Mr. John McHugh	Head of Social Care, Carlow College

The visit of the external panel to the College took place on Wednesday 20th May 2009 in the OTC administrative offices at St. Michael's House, Goatstown, Dublin 14. Please refer to Appendix C for details of the agenda for this visit.

Findings in relation to the objectives of the Programmatic Review

Objective 1:

To detail how the College quality assures the standards of teaching and learning systems for the programme and how quality improvements have been identified and implemented over the past five years

The Institutional Review process conducted by the College prior to this programmatic review panel meeting indicated that the Quality Assurance processes of the College were comprehensive and fit-for-purpose.

The QA summary report produced by the course review team indicated that the QA system has been successful in identifying quality improvement recommendations from a variety of feedback sources and ensuring these recommendations were discussed, actioned and implemented into practice.

Panel Recommendation:

The College should spend some time reflecting on the process taken to complete this programmatic review, and to identify lessons learned and examples of good practice to be taken forward for future reviews. One example of such is the experience gained in conducting stakeholder consultation and the good practice evidenced in the graduates survey and research conducted with service-users by an independently contracted researcher.

Objective 2:

To review the course content, the aims, objectives and continued relevance of the programme, taking into account the views of key stakeholders

It is clear from the feedback received from key stakeholders that the programmes continue to be relevant to the market served i.e. staff of disability service agencies nationally. The recommended programme amendments presented in the College's self-evaluation report are considered to be appropriate and are expected to add to its current relevance and standing in the sector.

The expansion of the Social Policy content of the course is welcomed and is outlined very clearly in years 1, 3 and 4. Although the academic staff could readily illustrate the Social Policy content in year 2 this could be made more explicit.

Objective 3:

To review the course delivery and support structure, including the Partnership Approach, the Supported Open Learning Model, and the supports provided to students with a disability/specific learning difficulty

The College presented significant and comprehensive information to the panel to illustrate the structures and model of delivery utilised in its programmes. The collaborative tripartite model employed by the College was discussed at length, particularly in relation to its ability to strengthen student's professional development as they progress through the programme, and to foster an integrated approach to learning i.e. translating theory into practice and implementing best practice successfully into the workplace.

Panel Recommendation:

The College should consider introducing an assessment of students personal and professional skills development at each stage of the programme, with this assessment conducted in collaboration with the student's work-based supervisor.

Objective 4:**To review the arrangements in place for the assessment of students' work**

Assessment practices within the Open Training College were discussed in a dedicated session with relevant academic staff. Specific attention was given to the College's rationale to re-introduce assessment by exam into all years of the programmes. The extent of Plagiarism as an issue within the College was discussed, along with the actions taken by the College to educate students about plagiarism and to deal with cases that arise efficiently and effectively. Assessment of amended modules proposed by the College arose for discussion, experiences of assessing a long list of learning outcomes by bundling similar outcomes was shared, as well as the practice of showcasing projects to encourage student ownership and responsibility towards their own work.

Panel Recommendations:

The College should continue to monitor student's assessment results on an annual basis with a view to identifying areas requiring additional supports.

The College should consider carefully the assessment of the new Research module at level 7, to ensure that graduates at this level have a sufficient grounding in research skills as well as theoretical knowledge.

The College should endeavour to ensure that service-users are not over researched as a result of student assessments.

Objective 5:**To review the arrangements in place for Access, Transfer and Progression**

Progression of OTC students onto further studies was the subject of the first discussion on this topic. The programme staff provided examples of graduates that have used their OTC qualification to access a variety of programmes in other institutions. The College indicated that it has allocated considerable resources to educating students about the framework of qualifications since its introduction, to empower them to make choices and to progress along the framework, and has recommended changes to be made to the module titles in an effort to enhance the transferability of OTC modules to other institutions.

The College's recommendation to introduce exit points within the existing Ordinary degree programme that would allow relevant individuals to obtain an accredited qualification, relevant to their achievement on the programme. The College are advised to manage the exiting and re-entry of students carefully to ensure that this structure is not exploited by individuals motivated to obtain three qualifications.

Panel recommendation:

The College should re-consider the module titles (including those updated titles indicated in the course schedule) from the point of view of transferability of student's learning on these programmes to programmes of other institutions, and readability of OTC transcripts for other institutions.

Objective 6:

To make recommendations for the continued growth and improvement of the programme

The structured process of review and reflection conducted by the College for the Programmatic Review has led to recommendations that rational and appropriate, and which the panel agree will add value to these programmes.

Panel Recommendations:

The 10 recommendations made in the Self-Evaluation report are agreed and it is recommended that these be followed up and implemented.

In addition to the approval of internal recommendations the panel would welcome the consideration of CPD for staff as part of the Strategic Planning process, as indicated by the College during the panel visit.

Finally it is advised that efforts should be made to investigate the possibility of working with community groups to develop research projects.

Appendix 1: Internal Recommendations

	Recommendation	Rationale
1	Introduction of Social Policy through the four years.	To respond to the various policy changes that have occurred in the period since the last review and to respond to a gap analysis that showed that the Open Training College needed to provide more Social Policy, in line with other providers of Social Care under HETAC. The new modules aim to provide students with the requisite knowledge and context around Social Policy in relation to people who use health and social care services with a particular focus on people with a disability.
2	Replace Personal Initiative Skills in Second Year with a new module called Empowerment and Advocacy	Stakeholder feedback indicated that the original Personal Initiative Skills module failed to provide the student with key skills in this area. The new module aims to provide students with knowledge around the various policy updates in this area and to focus on the skill requirements in empowering service users within human services.
3	To change the title of Creating Living Environments in Year Three to Supporting Independent Living, and move this module to Year Two, replacing States of Being	This module was felt to be of value to Social Care Workers due to its focus on creating person centred services for service users and outlining the capacities needed to do this effectively. The placing of this module in Year Two continues the practitionership theme that runs through the first three years.
4	States of Being, which dealt with two issues - Challenging Behavior and Mental Health issues, to be divided by topic and those topics to be delivered as electives in Year Three. The two new modules will include recent changes in practice and legislation in relation to the two issues.	By dividing this module into two new modules, it allows for expansion of the module content in each area and use of the modules in the elective cycle of Year Three. This enhances the variety of specialism choices for students.
5	The two research modules in Year Three and Year Four to be changed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be introduced in Year Three and then looked at on an applied basis in Year Four. (The complete plan is contained in the gap analysis/plan report in appendix 2)	This recommendation is driven by feedback from external examiners, staff and students. A gap analysis was also conducted to compare the research content of OTC courses with that of other providers of Social Care under HETAC. As a result, the Open Training College's approach to research has been changed. The approach now introduces both qualitative and quantitative methods in Year Three and provides the students with the knowledge and skills to become more research minded. In Year Four the students are asked to apply their skills.
6	To deal with practice and ethics issues in Year One, through a module on Professional Practice and Ethics. Remove Professional Development from Year Three.	With the Social Care profession still in its relative infancy, and service users demanding a staff population that is kind, caring and ethical, the College has decided to provide an insight into the key ideas around professionalism (including a look at the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005) and ethics including values, personal/professional identity, autonomy, consent issues, human rights and duty of care.

7	The managing change element of Professional Development will move to year four and be added to the Leadership module.	With the introduction of professional development issues in Year One, the decision has been made to make the leadership module in Year Four a more applied module by including the managing change content from the original Professional Development module. This allows for the students to produce a change project in year four that will highlight the skills and knowledge learned through the year.
8	Students will be required to complete two electives in Year Three.	Expanding the number of elective options to be taken will allow students to combine their elective choices to specialise further at the end of their third year. The electives provided are seen as complementing each other in providing supports for individuals commonly marginalised in services.
9	To ladder the course with exit points at the end of each year.	This development will create clearer transfer opportunities for students and provide a support for students to exit with a qualification on the national framework, if personal or academic reasons mean they cannot progress.
10	To update module titles.	The module titles used by the College need to be more descriptive and identify core Social Care topics and key Social Care Workers' roles. This process will allow for easier access for any Open Training College students transferring to other courses.

Appendix B: Revised Course Schedules

NAME OF INSTITUTION : The Open Training College TITLE AWARD : BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability) AREA OF SPECIALISATION : Social Care MODES OF STUDY : Distance Learning/ACCS STAGE : Stage 1 SEMESTER (if applicable)										
Subject Number	Title of Examination Subject	Subject Status	ACCS CREDITS		Contact Hours (per module)	ALLOCATION OF MARKS				
			NFQ Level	Number		Continuous Assessment	Project	Practical	Final	Max. Marks
1	EXPLORING DISABILITY: A Sociological And Historical Perspective.	MANDATORY	6 (minor)	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
2	SOCIAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION I	MANDATORY	6 (minor)	10	269.5	0	0	0	100	100
3	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS	MANDATORY	6 (minor)	15	404	100	0	0	0	100
4	EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PEOPLE SKILLS	MANDATORY	6 (minor)	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
5	FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL: Person Centred Planning	MANDATORY	6 (minor)	15	404	0	100	0	0	100

NAME OF INSTITUTION : The Open Training College
 TITLE AWARD : BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)
 AREA OF SPECIALISATION : Social Care
 MODES OF STUDY : Distance Learning/ACCS
 STAGE : Stage 2
 SEMESTER (if applicable)

Subject Number	Title of Examination Subject	Subject Status	ACCS CREDITS		Contact Hours (per module)	ALLOCATION OF MARKS				
			NFQ Level	Number		Continuous Assessment	Project	Practical	Final	Max. Marks
6	TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT	MANDATORY	6	10	269.5	0	0	0	100	100
7	EMPOWERMENT AND ADVOCACY	MANDATORY	6	15	404	100	0	0	0	100
8	COMMUNITY NETWORKING	MANDATORY	6	15	404	0	100	0	0	100
9	LEARNING THEORIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES	MANDATORY	6	10	269.5	0	100	0	0	100
10	SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT LIVING	MANDATORY	6	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100

NAME OF INSTITUTION : The Open Training College										
TITLE AWARD : BA in Applied Social Studies (Disability)										
AREA OF SPECIALISATION : Social Care										
MODES OF STUDY : Distance Learning/ACCS										
STAGE : Award										
Subject Number	Title of Examination Subject	Subject Status	ACCS CREDITS		Contact Hours (per module)	ALLOCATION OF MARKS				
			NFQ Level	Number		Continuous Assessment	Project	Practical	Final	Max. Marks
11	RESEARCH METHODS	MANDATORY	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
12	EXPLORATION OF SELF, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY	MANDATORY	7	10	269.5	0	0	0	100	100
13	SOCIAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION II	MANDATORY	7	10	269.5	0	0	0	100	100
14	LIFE STAGES, DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION	MANDATORY	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
15	SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITHIN THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM	ELECTIVE (students choose two of four)	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
16	SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN MAINSTREAM WORK	ELECTIVE (students choose two of four)	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
17	SUPPORTING PEOPLE LABELLED AS CHALLENGING	ELECTIVE (students choose two of four)	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100
18	SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS	ELECTIVE (students choose two of four)	7	10	269.5	100	0	0	0	100

NAME OF INSTITUTION : The Open Training College TITLE AWARD : BA Honours in Applied Social Studies (Disability) AREA OF SPECIALISATION : Social Care MODES OF STUDY : Distance Learning/ACCS STAGE : Award										
Subject Number	Title of Examination Subject	Subject Status	ACCS CREDITS		Contact Hours (per module)	ALLOCATION OF MARKS				
			NFQ Level	Number		Continuous Assessment	Project	Practical	Final	Max. Marks
19	APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS	MANDATORY	8	15	404	100	0	0	0	100
20	ESSENTIAL SOCIAL CARE MANAGEMENT SKILLS	MANDATORY	8	10	269.5	100	0	0		100
21	LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE IN HUMAN SERVICES	MANDATORY	8	15	404	100	0	0	0	100
22	SOCIAL EQUALITY AND INCLUSION	MANDATORY	8	10	269.5	50	0	0	50	100
23	COMPARATIVE SOCIAL POLICY	MANDATORY	8	10	269.5	0	0	0	100	100

Appendix C: External Panel Visit Agenda

Meeting Title:

The Open Training College

Programmatic Review of the BA and BA Hons In Applied Social Studies (Disability)

External Panel Visit

Date of meeting: Wednesday 20th May 2009

Time	Session	Attending
9.00-9.15	Coffee on arrival	
9.15-10.15	Private panel meeting	
10.15-11.00	College overview, Programmatic Review process & Quality Assurance	Karen Finnerty (College Director) Raymond Watson (Course Director BA Ord) Mick Keating (Course Coordinator BA Hons) Margarita Hendrick (Manager Academic Affairs)
11.00-11.20	Coffee Break	
11.20-1.00	Content (Objective 2), Course delivery and Support	All academic staff of programmes
1.00-2.00	Private lunch	
2.00-3.00	Assessment (Objective 4), ATP (Objective 5)	Raymond Watson (Course Director BA Ord) Mick Keating (Course Coordinator BA Hons) Tracy Warner (BA Ord Year 3 Coordinator) Claire Hopkins (BA Ord Year 2 Coordinator) Alacoque McAuley Savage (BA Ord Year 1 Coordinator) Bridget Megarry (BA Ord Tutor) Ray Lynch (Course Director- Management programmes)
3.00-4.00	Panel private deliberations	
4.00-4.30	Feedback session	Karen Finnerty (College Director) Raymond Watson (Course Director BA Ord) Mick Keating (Course Coordinator BA Hons) Margarita Hendrick (Manager Academic Affairs)