

Carlow College, St. Patrick's

2021

Annual Quality Report
(Carlow College, St. Patrick's)
Reporting Period 2019-2020

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(Carlow College, St. Patrick's)
PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM
Reporting Period 2019-2020**

PREFACE

Note: QQI's provider portal, QHub, is currently under development and will be completed in November 2020. AQR 2021 will be submitted via QHub.

The **Annual Quality Report (AQR; formerly AIQR)** forms part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) quality assurance (QA) framework of engagement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The AQR provides documentary evidence of the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality system. It provides QQI with assurance that internal QA procedures have been established and are being implemented consistent with regulatory requirements.

The AQR, particularly part A, should assist with **document management** in the institutional review process and will facilitate institutions in providing review teams with procedural QA documentation in preparation for the external review process. It is an important part of the evidence base considered by external **review teams** as part of QQI's CINNTE cycle of institutional reviews, demonstrating that the institution's internal QA system is aligned with QQI's Core and relevant Sector- and Topic-specific Statutory QA Guidelines, and with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). It enables the review team to satisfy itself of compliance with these requirements for the purpose of the institutional review process.

Each AQR is **published in full on QQI's website**, providing transparency on the HEIs' assurance and enhancement of quality to external stakeholders. (As such, institutions should ensure that their submissions do not contain any data that they consider to be commercially sensitive.) Collectively, the AQRs comprise a single national repository of quality assurance practice in Irish higher education institutions.

Each year, QQI produces a synthesis report of the key themes highlighted across the AQRs, primarily arising from Part B of the reports.

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Guidelines on Completing the Report

The AQR is aligned with QQI's Core, Sector and Topic-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and with the ESG (2015). A mapping of the ESG to QQI Core QA Guidelines is included in Table 1 below; the structure of Part A of this report template aligns with the first column of the table. Additional guidance on completing this template and reference material is included in each section. Institutions should adhere to this guidance and have regard to QQI Core, Sector and Topic-specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. **The guide text within each section should be deleted before submission of the report.**

Submission Process and Timeline

The deadline for submission of the AQR each year is in February of the relevant year, with the call for submission sent to institutions in November of the preceding year. Once the call for submission has been made, QQI will provide access to QQI's provider portal, QHub, to the designated institution contact(s) to facilitate submission of the report. Through QHub, each institution will have access to an editable version of its AQR for the previous reporting period. This document can then be amended/updated to reflect any changes or developments that occurred during the current reporting period before submitting the final report to QQI.

Completing the AQR

- When completing the AQR template, all relevant colleagues in the institution should be consulted.
- Consider whether external audiences will be able to understand the terminology used (particularly local abbreviations and acronyms); it may be helpful to include a glossary.
- Aim to avoid duplication in the report – where information is relevant to more than one section, the first mention may be referenced in subsequent sections.
- Provide reflections on what worked well, but also what may have been tried but did not work.

Report Structure

Part A: Internal QA System

Part A of the AQR comprises a record of each institution's current QA policies and procedures and should provide links to those policies and procedures. Private HEIs may provide links to the policies and procedures approved by QQI during initial access to validation (IAV) or reengagement. It is the responsibility of each HEI to ensure before submission of the AQR that all links are correct and functional, and that the policies and procedures referred to are the most up-to-date versions available. Given that the AQR is submitted in respect of a discrete reporting period, it may be helpful for institutions to establish a SharePoint/OneDrive folder (or similar) for each reporting period that contains the current versions of their policies and procedures, and that hyperlinks to these versions of the documents be provided in the AQR

Part A is to be completed only if there have been **material** changes to QA policies and procedures during the reporting period. Such changes may include the approval and implementation of new policies or procedures, or significant amendments to existing ones.

Part B: Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE)

Part B of the AQR documents and captures QA activities, developments and enhancements undertaken by institutions **during the reporting period** and their **impact**. Insofar as is possible, institutions should demonstrate in Part B how plans set out in the previous AQR were progressed during the reporting period

– these may be plans linked to strategic objectives, to reengagement advices, or to institutional review recommendations.

Case Studies

In each reporting period, QQI may request updates on specific thematic areas or may invite the institution to submit case studies in response to specific topics. Further, institutions may include case studies to share good practice on topics of their choosing, demonstrating QA and QE in action. In formulating case studies, institutions are encouraged to reflect on and highlight areas that may be of interest to other institutions and would benefit from wider dissemination. Further guidance is provided in Part B.

Links to Reference Documents Cited in this Template¹

Legislation

- [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 \(as amended\)](#)
- [Technological Universities Act 2018](#)
- [Universities Act 1997](#)

QQI Documents

Statutory QA Guidelines (QAG)

- [Core QAG](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Independent/Private Providers](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Designated Awarding Bodies](#)
- [Sector-specific QAG for Institutes of Technology](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes](#)
- [Topic-specific QAG for Blended Learning](#)

Other QQI Policy Documents

- [QQI's Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes, and Joint Awards, 2012](#)
- [QQI's Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners, 2015](#)
- [QQI Policy Restatement on Access, Transfer and Progression, 2015](#)

Other National/International References

- [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(2015\)](#)
- [IHEQN Guidelines on Collaborative Provision](#)
- [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#)
- [Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes, 2019](#)
- [HEA National Framework for Doctoral Education](#)
- [The Salzburg Principles](#)
- [The Salzburg II Recommendations](#)
- [SOLAS Code of Practice for Employers and Apprentices](#)
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

¹ These links will be updated as further guidance documents are published.

PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

Table 1

Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG)				
AQR Part A Section	QQI QAG Core Sub-section No.	QAG Core Sub-section Title	ESG Standard No.	ESG Standard Title
1.0 – Internal QA Framework	2.1	Governance and Management of Quality	1.1	Policy for Quality Assurance
	2.2	Documented Approach to Quality Assurance		
2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery	2.3	Programmes of Education and Training	1.2	Design and Approval of Programmes
4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes			1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review			1.5	Teaching Staff
5.0 – Staff Recruitment, Development and Support	2.4	Staff Recruitment, Management and Development	1.3	Student-centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment
2.3 – Teaching, Learning and Assessment	2.5	Teaching and Learning	1.6	Learning Resources and Student Support
	2.6	Assessment of Learners		
3.0 – Learner Resources and Supports	2.7	Supports for learners	1.7	Information Management
6.0 – Information and Data Management	2.8	Information and Data Management	1.8	Public Information
7.0 – Public Information and Communication	2.9	Public Information and Communication	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
2.0 – Programme Delivery and Development	2.10	Other Parties Involved in Education and Training		
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review				
9.0 – Details of Arrangements with Third Parties	2.11	Self-evaluation, Monitoring and Review	1.9	On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
2.0 – Programme Development and Delivery			1.10	Cyclical External Quality Assurance
8.0 – Monitoring and Periodic Review				
4.0 – QA of Research Activities and Programmes	QAG for Providers of Research Degree Programmes			

Introduction and Overview of Institution

This is the AQR for **Carlow College, St. Patrick's** for the reporting period **1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020**.

It is to be submitted by **Friday, 26 February 2021**.

The AQR has been approved by the **Academic Council** and is submitted by **Dr Eric Derr, Quality Assurance Officer**.

Carlow College, St. Patrick's (hereafter Carlow College) opened in 1793 and is the second oldest third-level college in Ireland and the oldest third-level Catholic College. It is situated, since its foundation in 1782, on its parkland in the centre of Carlow town. Carlow College is a private college with charitable status governed by a Governing Body. Carlow College is a College of teaching and research in the Humanities with the following stated mission: 'In the shared enterprise of education, through teaching, learning, practice placement and research activity, Carlow College prizes excellence in all it does and endeavours to respond creatively to the changing needs of its learners, of potential employers and of society.' As such, the vision of the College is to 'educate, engage and inspire its learners through the provision of transformational learning and teaching experiences; it will enable a diverse learner and graduate population to achieve their academic and career potential and enable them to contribute to the ethical development of society at local, national and global levels.'

The core values of Carlow College are its guiding principles which are built on our rich heritage as a Catholic higher education institution. They inform our day-to-day pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. The integrated college learning experience includes formal classroom instruction, critical engagement with ideas, exploration of links between theory, professional practice and lived experience. This develops the learners' capacity for academic excellence, leadership, social justice, career development and scholarship.

Our core values are:

- **Truth and Integrity** – We aim to create a research-led teaching and learning environment that is interdisciplinary in nature, that inspires openness to new ideas and critical thinking and that is ethical in practice.
- **Respect and Justice** – We recognise the diversity of our college community and seek to promote actively a spirit of inclusiveness, mutual respect and equality of opportunity and access.
- **Collaboration and Social Awareness** – By creating opportunities to work together, both internally and externally, we believe that collaboration and partnership can best contribute to the ethical development of local, national and global communities and society.
- **Friendliness and Service** – We are committed to maintaining a hospitable, learner-centred environment that recognises each learner's individual learning journey, and that promotes, values and supports their personal, social and cultural development.
- **Creativity and Innovation** – We believe that learning is about being open to new ideas and possibilities both in what we learn and how we learn. We are committed to be an educational space which promotes creativity and innovation as a way of responding to the contemporary world.

Carlow College is committed to maintaining and developing an organisation that can deliver its mission according to the values of the College. We have developed a Quality Assurance Framework that is based on these values and enhances the College's ability to meet our strategic objectives. Carlow College is committed to developing and embedding a quality culture in all our endeavours: a culture that embodies planning, defining, encouraging, assessing and improving practice. We believe that the learners, staff and external stakeholders of our College are the pivotal actors in the process of embedding a quality culture. The College's Quality Assurance Committee is responsible for the maintenance and development of this Quality Assurance Framework. This Committee reports to the Academic Council, which in turn reports to the Governing Body. All activities related to quality assurance at Carlow College are found on our [website](#). The Quality Assurance Committee developed the AQR and it was approved by the Academic Council on 24 February 2021.

1.0 Internal QA Framework

1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

The following policies and procedures related to Governance and Management of Quality were revised and approved during this reporting period. For a master list of all policies and procedures at Carlow College, please see the [Master List of Policies and Procedures](#).

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Critical Incident Policy	3	8 April 2020	Management Board
Quality Assurance Policy and Quality Assurance Policy: Appendices	4	26 August 2020	Academic Council
		23 September 2020	Management Board

1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

There were no changes to policy and procedures related to Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision during the reporting period.

2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

2.1 Programme Development and Approval

See *Quality Assurance Policy*, Part A, Section 1.1.

2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification

The following policies and procedures related to Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification were revised and approved during this reporting period.

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Exit Awards Policy	1	20 May 2020	Academic Council
Fees and Refunds Policy	5	26 August 2020	Academic Council
Fitness to Practice Policy	1.1	19 February 2020	Academic Council
Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy	3.3	26 August 2020	Academic Council
	3.2	19 February 2020	
	3.1	28 August 2019	

2.3 Procedures for Making Awards

N / A

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The following policies and procedures related to Teaching, Learning and Assessment were revised and approved during this reporting period.

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Assessment Re-Check, Review and Appeals Policy	2.1	22 January 2020	Academic Council
	2	16 September 2019	
Plagiarism Policy	3	29 July 2020	Academic Council
Research Ethics Advisory Policy	3	16 September 2019	Academic Council
Teaching and Learning Policy	3	29 July 2020	Academic Council

3.0 Learner Resources and Support

The following policies and procedures related to Learner Resources and Support were revised and approved during this reporting period.

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy	3	13 November 2019	Academic Council
Learner Disability Policy	2	16 September 2019	Academic Council
Learner Grievance and Complaints Policy	3	13 November 2019	Academic Council

4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

There were no changes to policy and procedures related to QA of Research Activities and Programmes during the reporting period.

5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

The following policies and procedures related to Staff Recruitment, Development and Support were revised and approved during this reporting period.

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Annual Leave Policy	2	18 December 2019	Management Board
Dignity and Respect Policy	2	8 April 2020	Management Board
		6 May 2020	Academic Council
Grievance Policy (Staff)	3	29 April 2020	Management Board
Maternity and Adoptive Leave Policy	2	29 April 2020	Management Board
Parental Leave Policy	2	16 October 2019	Management Board
Sickness Absence Management Policy	2	12 February 2020	Management Board

6.0 Information and Data Management

The following policies and procedures related to Information and Data Management were revised and approved during this reporting period.

Name of Policy	Version	Date Approved	Approving Body
Data Protection Policy	3.1	8 April 2020	Management Board

7.0 Public Information and Communication

There were no changes to policy and procedures related to Public Information and Communication during the reporting period.

8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

There were no changes to policy and procedures related to Monitoring and Periodic Review during the reporting period.

9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	1
Awarding bodies	0
QA bodies	0

1. Type of arrangement (PRSB/awarding body/QA body)	PRSB
Name of body:	CORU
Programme titles and links to publications	BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care)
Date of accreditation or last review	2 October 2020
Date of next review	

9.2 Collaborative Provision

Type of arrangement	Total number
Joint research degrees	0
Joint/double/multiple awards	0

Collaborative programmes	1
Franchise programmes	0
Linked providers (DABs only)	0

1. Collaborative Provision (Type of collaborative provision)	Collaborative Programmes
Name of body (/bodies):	IT Carlow
Programme titles and links to publications	Higher Diploma in Journalism and New Media Content
Date of last review	N / A
Date of next review	N / A

9.3 Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements - Total number	N / A
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1. Articulation agreement:	N / A
Name of body (/bodies):	
Programme titles and links to publications	
Date of agreement/arrangement or last review	

Date of next review	
Detail of the agreement	

Carlow College, St. Patrick's

2021

Annual Quality Report (Carlow College, St. Patrick's)
PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT
Reporting Period 2019-2020

PART B: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM

1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

1.1 Strategic QA Updates

Strategic Objectives of Carlow College, St. Patrick's

The strategic objectives of Carlow College are two-fold: i) the macro level objective of full integration into the higher education system, and ii) the strategic development and scaling of current capacity with the objective of increasing learner numbers, developing new programmes and research promotion. In furthering the macro strategic objectives, the College has engaged in a series of discussions with the previous Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the current Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in addition to a process of close collaboration with the Institute of Technology Carlow since the signing of our Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) in February 2019. The College submitted a Strategic Road Map to the DES in November 2019 in the context of the strategic objectives on system positioning. A series of meetings were held with IT Carlow throughout the year. A joint meeting was held with both institutions and senior officials in the DES in April 2020 to discuss the process of deepening collaboration.

With regard to institutional development, Carlow College developed a broad academic framework in 2020 which builds on our current Strategic Plan through the articulation of a range of high-level strategic objectives in seven identified categories:

- Teaching;
- Research;
- Technology Enhanced Learning;
- Collaboration and Partnerships;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;
- Public and Civic Engagement; and
- Labour Market and Employment Focus.

The alignment of this academic framework to the higher education policy landscape was an important consideration for contextualising the strategic position of the College in the higher education system. The academic framework aims to enhance our current expertise and responsiveness to higher education policy and quality frameworks, education practice, learner and labour market demand; in addition to making a contribution of value to the higher education infrastructure in the South East region. In this overall context, Technology Enhanced Learning is highlighted as a core objective in supporting the development and delivery of higher education programmes to a high standard.

The academic framework strategy identified a number of high-level objectives under each of the seven noted dimensions. A more in-depth implementation plan with detailed targeted actions, indicators and timeframes will be developed in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. Some of the significant outcomes for 2019 / 2020 include the development of a new postgraduate *History* programme, two proposals approved by Academic Council for undergraduate degrees in *English, Media and Creative Arts* and in *Philosophy, Politics and Sociology*. The Academic Council also approved the undertaking of a scoping exercise to

consider the development of a degree in Psychology as well as the exploration of ideas and strategy to enhance the discipline of Theology. In addition, there were substantial outputs regarding the development of the Research Hub (see Part B, Section 2(ix), including the collation of research activities, the development of a dedicated webpage and the ongoing communication on staff and learner research. The priority outcomes in relation to Technology Enhanced Learning were primarily targeted in response to the transfer to remote working, online teaching and learning activities. In terms of collaboration, there is a more detailed reference below.

Re-Engagement

In compliance with Section 29 or 30 of the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*, Carlow College formally applied to have its quality assurance procedures approved by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). As part of the application process, a comprehensive internal gap analysis study of the Carlow College Quality Assurance Framework was conducted, and the following revisions were made to the *Quality Assurance Policy*: development of an organisational reporting system and enhancement of the academic monitoring / evaluation reporting system; review and development of data and information policies; development of templates for inter-institutional agreements and the development of a template for implementing external panel recommendations. The College had its quality assurance procedures formally approved by the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) of QQI on 12 September 2019; PAEC made its decision based on the [report](#) submitted by the QQI Re-Engagement Panel that visited Carlow College on 17 June 2019.

In their Report, the Re-Engagement Panel commended Carlow College on:

- the comprehensive review and re-structuring that had taken place with an authentically collaborative approach across the College community;
- the calibre of directors the College has appointed;
- the support provided to staff to engage in research, external engagement activities and ongoing professional development;
- the broad range of assessment methodology employed across the College;
- the College's obvious dedication to learner support which was evident throughout the day's panel discussions and in particular in discussions with the Head of Student Services; and
- the College's approach to self-review and the extensive and authentic scope of collaboration it demonstrated in relation to the re-engagement process.

In addition to these commendations, the Panel made seven quality enhancement recommendations that the Quality Assurance Committee is monitoring for implementation (see [Monitoring and Implementation Plan](#)).

Specific Changes to QA Systems During Reporting Period

Carlow College has a robust quality assurance framework that is focused on quality enhancement and transparency throughout the organisation. The key objective of our *Policy on Policies* is to have a consistent policy development system and have policies that are:

- appropriately developed and regularly monitored / reviewed;
- accessible to staff and the public (as required) in usable formats;

- consistent with the Mission of Carlow College;
- compliant with applicable laws and national / international benchmarks of best practice; and
- promote a culture of quality across the College community.

During the reporting period, the Quality Assurance Officer completed a master version control document of every policy, this document can be found [here](#). Moreover, during the reporting period there were twenty-four policies that went through our internal policy development system and were approved.

In preparation for both the review and revalidation of our academic programmes in 2018 and Re-Engagement, significant resources were extended to develop, review and / or revise all College policies and their associated documents in the College. As illustrated in the table below, the number of new / revised policies increased significantly in the lead-up to Re-Engagement. As the Quality Assurance Framework at Carlow College matures, the number of new policies developed should decrease and the revisions to existing policies will be done in accordance with internal policy review periods. For many of the policies approved in the 2017 / 2018 Academic Year, they are completing their three-year cycle and will be reviewed in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

Academic Year	New Policies Developed	Policies Revised
2017 / 2018	9	20
2018 / 2019	23	10
2019 / 2020	1	23

In addition to the twenty-four policies approved during this reporting period, there were two policies that were made obsolete with the approval of the *Learner Disability Policy*, the *Learners with Disabilities and Specific Learning Needs Policy* (approved 11 January 2011) and the *Assistive Technology and Supports Policy* (approved 11 January 2011). The only new policy to be developed during the reporting period was the *Exit Awards Policy*. This policy was developed after it was determined by the Quality Assurance Officer that there was a lacuna in the processes associated with the decision-making and the documenting of learners requesting and being granted exit awards.

The impact of COVID-19 on changes related to policy development and review were limited as most of the policies scheduled for review were completed; the notable exception to this was the *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy*. This policy was updated three times during the reporting period and was scheduled for a complete review in April 2020. However, with the uncertainty around the sitting of state exams and the additional strain placed on resources, it was decided that the review of this policy should take place after the current Admissions cycle was completed and before the 2020 / 2021 Admissions cycle commenced.

Contextual Strategic Impacts

(i) IT Carlow (Landscape Funding)

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* established a vision for higher education institutions working collaboratively in an integrated, coherent, inter-related system of higher education, underpinned by quality and efficiency. IT Carlow and Carlow College signed an MoA on 11 February 2019 to

‘strengthen existing co-operation and collaboration’ and ‘enter into a partnership agreement on a process for collaborative engagement and shared activities of mutual interest, in line with their respective organisational strategic aims and objectives.’ The MoA specifically recognises the synergy and opportunities in the applied, academic and research fields of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the significant potential to bring added value and benefit for almost 2,000 learners and 100 staff in these areas in both institutions.

To further this Project, IT Carlow and Carlow College submitted an application to the Higher Education Authority Landscape Funding Programme to: establish a joint project office to support and drive a range of new collaborative initiatives across teaching and learning, further education and higher education progression, research, learner engagement, engagement with community and local authorities, staff development, EDI and internationalisation. The application was awarded €60,000 and a Project Programme Partnership Manager role was advertised and filled in July 2020.

(ii) HDip

Carlow College worked in partnership with the Institute of Technology Carlow to develop a joint Higher Diploma award in Journalism and New Media Content which was formally approved at an IT Carlow appointed validation panel in August 2020. An addendum to the MoA outlining the administration of this programme has been jointly drafted. Learners on this programme will have full library access at both institutions and a process has been agreed for this. GDPR arrangements are currently being finalised between both institutions for this programme.

In June 2020, a joint discussion was held with IT Carlow, QQI and Carlow College regarding the potential validation of Carlow College programmes. Specific reference was made to the Carlow College proposed MA and Postgraduate Diploma in Irish Regional History and it was agreed that there would be further exploration regarding the validation of this programme.

(iii) Institutional Alignment

A project examining Quality Assurance at each institution and suggestions for alignment began in August 2020. This project has scoped out the areas of alignment and is on hold until further strategic objectives are realised.

(iv) Human Capital Initiative

Carlow College worked in partnership with IT Carlow and the Waterford Institute of Technology to develop a postgraduate programme proposal in the area of Social Enterprise. This proposed project envisaged substantial collaboration with social enterprises in the region, however it was not successful in receiving funding.

(v) Athena SWAN

Carlow College commenced the application process for the Athena SWAN Bronze Award in the Autumn 2019. The Athena SWAN Charter, an initiative supported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), recognises work undertaken to address gender equality in the higher education sector. The Carlow College Athena SWAN Project is sponsored by the President and a Self-Assessment Team (SAT), Chaired by the College Vice President, has been established to progress the application. It is the responsibility of the SAT to gather and reflect on a range of quantitative and qualitative data to identify both challenges and opportunities with regard to gender equality, establish gender-based priority areas and develop a comprehensive action plan to underpin advancement against these agreed priorities. The SAT has already compiled a series of data and has undertaken a Staff Survey to gather views from staff

as to how they feel the College is progressing in the area of gender equality. The survey results are being collated and will, in addition to the data gathered, inform the College's Action Plan which is part of the overall application. Owing to the challenges of COVID-19, it was decided to place the submission on hold in April 2020. Carlow College anticipates it will submit its application for the Athena SWAN Bronze Award under the first round of applications in 2021.

(vi) Athena Swan Capacity Building Fund 2019

Carlow College, in collaboration with IT Carlow, successfully submitted a joint proposal under the Athena Swan Capacity Building Fund in November 2019. The project is focused on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Capacity Building in Advancing Intersectionality. This project is based on two objectives: undertaking a one-day symposium and developing a guide to identify best practice approaches to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the context of the intersection of gender and ethnicity in higher education. The project will be completed in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

1.2 Update on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

No.	Planned objectives (Previous AQR) Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable	Update on Status Provide brief update on status, whether completed or in progress. If an action was planned in the previous AQR, but not completed, provide reasons/short reflections for the delay/non-completion.
1	Implementation / Monitoring of Re-Engagement Recommendations	In progress, the Quality Assurance Committee is progressing the remaining elements of recommendations made by the Re-Engagement Panel. Owing to the nature of some of the recommendations, they were intended to be ongoing. For more information on the recommendations and the College's implementation of the recommendation, please see this link .
2	Revise <i>Quality Assurance Policy</i> to include the following updates: reference to the statutory requirement to submit the Annual Quality Report (Section 4.11 and Appendix 40); organogram (Appendix 4) and summary of management functions (Appendix 5).	Completed
3	Revise the <i>Quality Assurance Policy: Appendices</i> document to replace inserted policies with links to improve document control.	Completed
3	Review and revise processes for programme reviews and revalidations / new programme development (Appendices 9, 10 and 11)	Completed
4	Review and revise processes for module-level feedback	In progress, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee developed a proposal that was sent to the Academic Council for approval (11 March 2020); the proposal included moving from a paper-based form to an electronic-base form. The representatives for the Academic Staff queried the number of people who will have access to the data and the disaggregation of data. With the emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic, this was not progressed any further but is an identified objective that will be achieved in the next reporting period and implemented for the Spring 2021 Semester (see Part B, Section 2(iv) of this report).
5	Review / revise policies and procedures as indicated by policy review schedule	In progress, there were three policies that were not reviewed / revised by the end of the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year; two of the policies were subsequently re-approved in September 2020. The <i>Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy</i> was scheduled for review in April 2020, but it was decided

		that this review should take place before the admission cycle begins for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. The COVID-19 Pandemic, the uncertainty around state exams and the additional strain placed on resources all contributed to this decision to push back this review.
6	Policy development in blended learning	In progress, this was not progressed any further as it was determined that the policy should be developed in conjunction with a blended learning programme, should one be developed.

1.3 Governance and Management

1.3.1 QA Governance Meetings Schedule

Body	Meeting Dates
Governing Body	13 September 2019 29 November 2019 21 February 2020 15 May 2020
Academic Council	28 August 2019 16 September 2019 (Extraordinary Meeting) 2 October 2019 13 November 2019 11 December 2019 22 January 2020 19 February 2020 (Extraordinary Meeting) 11 March 2020 1 April 2020 20 May 2020 (Extraordinary Meeting) 29 July 2020 (Extraordinary Meeting)
Management Board	4 September 2019 25 September 2019 16 October 2019 22 October 2019 6 November 2019 18 December 2019 15 January 2020

	<p>12 February 2020</p> <p>8 April 2020</p> <p>29 April 2020</p> <p>20 May 2020</p> <p>10 June 2020</p> <p>13 July 2020</p>
Quality Assurance Committee	<p>9 October 2019</p> <p>18 December 2019</p> <p>10 March 2020</p> <p>16 June 2020</p>
Exam Board Meetings	<p>16 January 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Humanities / English and History (First Semester Modules) <p>17 January 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) / Social, Political and Community Studies (First Semester Modules) <p>3 June 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Humanities / English and History (Internal Exam Board Meeting) <p>4 June 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) / Social, Political and Community Studies (Internal Exam Board Meeting) <p>11 June 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Exam Board Meeting <p>30 June 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraordinary Exam Board Meeting, Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) <p>25 August 2020</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autumn Exam Board Meeting
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1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

College Vice President

Carlow College appointed its first female vice president in its 226-year history in August 2019. The primary responsibilities of this new appointment are strategic projects and collaboration with overall responsibility in furthering the strategic objectives of the College.

IT and Student Systems Manager

This role was created to blend all departments who regularly engage with inputting / analysing learner data in the Student Records Management System (SRMS); Carlow College brought in a new SRMS in the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year. This role will also streamline support services across the College. The departments impacted are IT, Administration, Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO), SRMS staff members and Reception.

Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO)

A Progression and Retention Working Group was established in the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year to examine learner progression and retention in the College. This Working Group drafted a Progression and Retention Report that was submitted to the Management Board for discussion / approval. A new role was approved by the Management Board to be piloted during the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year. Its primary function is to maximise the retention of learners at Stages 1 and 2 of all undergraduate programmes by proactively communicating with learners and monitoring ‘at risk’ learners by initiating follow-up contact and providing links to academic, pastoral, counselling and administrative resources and support within the College (see Part B, Sections 2(v) and 4 of this report).

Changes to Committee Membership

- IT & Student Systems Manager became an *ex officio* member of the Academic Council, the Quality Assurance Committee and was nominated by the President to serve on the Management Board.
- Learner Information and Retention Officer became an *ex officio* member of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee and the Learner Resources Committee.
- Data Protection Officer became an *ex officio* member of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee.
- Applied Social Studies (Profession Social Care) Programme Board made changes to its Terms of Reference as a result of their preparation for CORU Approval.

1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review

1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews

Unit of review for which report has been published during reporting period	Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted)	Links to relevant publications
N / A		

1.4.2 Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA

The following programme was reviewed by an external review team:

- BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme – CORU Review Panel (see Part B, Section 2(ii))

(i) Expert Review Team/Panel Size and Related Processes

	Total	Academic Schools/ Department	Professional Services/Support Unit	Approval/Review of Linked Provider	Programme Approval	Programme Review	Other
Number of review/ evaluation processes	1						1
<i>of those:</i>							
On-site processes	1						1
Desk reviews							
Virtual processes							
Average panel size for each process type*	4						4

* excluding secretary if not a full panel member

(ii) Composition of Expert Review Teams/Panels involved in IQA

Type of Expert/ Role on Panel	Total	Gender			Internal	National	International			Institution Type	
		Male	Female	Other, or unspecified			UK, incl. NI	Other European	Outside of Europe	Similar	Different
Chair	1		1			1					1
Secretary	2		2			2					2
Academic/Discipline Specific	1	1				1				1	
Student Representative											
QA											
Teaching & Learning											
External Industry /Third Mission	2		2			2					2

2.0 IQA System – Enhancement and Impacts

2(i) Governance and Management of Quality

Policy Development and Enhancement

For this reporting period, there were two policies that were reviewed, revised and approved that relate to governance and management of quality, the [Critical Incident Policy](#) (Version 3) and the [Quality Assurance Policy](#) (Version 4).

The *Critical Incident Policy* (Version 3) was a legacy policy that was approved in 2016 prior to the development and alignment of the Carlow College's Quality Assurance Framework with QQI's *Statutory Core Quality Assurance Guidelines* (2016). Work had begun on this policy in early January 2020 and, although it was not officially approved until 8 April 2020, the revisions were timely as they served as the template for how the College approached the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Critical Incident Team established two key groups in the College to progress the Carlow College response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, one group was led by the Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs to develop plans for Academic Programme Delivery (see Part B, Section 2(iv)) and the other group was led by the Director of Operations to develop the College's COVID-19 Response Plan. The [COVID-19 Response Plan](#) was officially approved by the Management Board on 13 July 2020.

The *Quality Assurance Policy* (Version 4) underwent several important amendments during the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year. The most significant change to the policy was in the presentation of policies in the appendices. At the time of Re-Engagement, the *Quality Assurance Policy* contained complete copies of all relevant policies and their associated documents. However, as policies were updated this meant that the *Quality Assurance Policy* also had to be updated; as such, this became cumbersome and increased the likelihood that duplicate version of policies may not be in alignment. To rectify this the Quality Assurance Officer removed the policies from the *Quality Assurance Policy* and inserted direct links to the online version of the policy. This revised practice ensures that the *Quality Assurance Policy* is always up-to-date and there is perfect alignment between linked policies. Other changes to the *Quality Assurance Policy* were small in scope. For example, references to the Annual Quality Report, CINNTE Review and LIRO function were inserted into the document. Additionally, a new appendix was added, Appendix 56, which graphically depicts the Quality Assurance Consultation, Feedback and Action Cycle within the College.

Green Paper – Review of the Remit for the Management Board and the Academic Council

All the programmes at Carlow College were up for review and revalidation in 2018. The QQI Review and Revalidation Panel that conducted a thorough review of our programmes commended the high standard of education at Carlow College. Similarly, the QQI Re-Engagement Panel (June 2019) commended Carlow College for the capacity and expertise in embedding an extensively revised systemic approach to governance and quality at all levels of the College.

Although much progress has been made in the areas of governance and quality assurance, as validated by the two above mentioned external review panels, internal discussion on further enhancement has continued since the revision of the Terms of Reference and Constitution for both the Academic Council and the Management Board (2017 / 2018 Academic Year). At the heart of this discussion was the delineation of the remit for both the Management Board and the Academic Council. Progress towards the production of a Green Paper has been slowed owing to other institutional priorities. However, a Working Group was established by the Management Board (28 November 2018) to review the organisational structures within Carlow College to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose; the Working Group established by the Management Board had a scheduled completion date of 2019 / 2020. The scope

of this Working Group was extended somewhat by the first recommendation made by the Re-Engagement Panel: '[g]iven the size of the College and its existing staffing, the panel recommends reviewing the quantity of dedicated committees and their memberships with a view to streamlining committee activities'. The Working Group accepted that a review should be conducted to streamline committee activities, but priority should be given to further delineating the remit of both the Academic Council and the Management Board.

The Green Paper was completed and submitted for comments / feedback to both the Management Board (8 April 2020) and the Academic Council (6 May 2020). The initial findings in the Green Paper indicate that the Academic Council is largely operating within its remit. However, some areas identified for further discussion centre on: the possibility of expanding the Academic Council to include representation from Academic Professional Support Staff; greater attention to gender representation and its relationship to the Strategic Development Committee. The Green Paper indicated that the terms of reference for the Management Board will require a more in-depth review. In particular, the terms of reference require revision to include specific mention of ownership and oversight over the implementation of the College's Strategic Plan; clarity of role in the allocation of resources (human, financial, capital and non-capital); clarity of role in the effective management of the College and review of membership to match strategic scope and management of the College / allocation of resources. The review found that the two sub-committees of the Management Board require further consideration.

The Working Group responsible for drafting the Green Paper reported that some of the changes will require greater engagement with key internal stakeholders and it was decided that the transition to the White Paper would be revisited in September 2020. The Management Board discussed the White Paper on 14 October 2020 and appointed two of its members to form a Working Group; the Academic Council appointed one of its members to the Working Group on 11 November 2020. Any proposed changes will be brought implemented for the 2021 / 2022 Academic Year.

2(ii) Programmes of Education and Training

Policy Development and Enhancement

For this reporting period, there was one new policy that was developed, the [Exit Awards Policy](#) (Version 1). The need for this policy emerged through the programme development process and a sub-group was established to progress this through the policy framework and it was approved in May 2020. There were three policies that were reviewed, revised and approved, the [Fitness to Practice Policy](#) (Version 1.1), the [Fees and Refunds Policy](#) (Version 5) and the [Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy](#) (Versions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). The *Fitness to Practice Policy* was reviewed by the CORU Working Group (see Part B, Section 2(ii)) and amended Appendix 1 of this policy to include a reference to learners not meeting the programme attendance requirements. The *Fees and Refunds Policy* underwent minor revisions related to the payment of fees in relation to semesterisation; the sections impacted were 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 5.3 of the policy.

The *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy* underwent three revisions during the reporting period; this policy was up for its three-year cyclical review in June 2020, but this was delayed until the end of the Admission Cycle for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. The first revision took place in August 2019 when the College introduced three new scholarships, an Entrance Scholarship, a Mature Student Entrance Scholarship and a Progression Scholarship:

Academic Achievement Entrance Scholarship: Incoming learners are awarded an Academic Achievement Entrance Scholarship by gaining the highest CAO points through their Leaving Certificate examination. This scholarship is awarded to the highest point earner on each undergraduate programme, with an award amount of €500 per learner.

Mature Student Entrance Scholarship: Incoming mature learners are awarded a Mature Student Entrance Scholarship by gaining the highest-grade point average (GPA) in semester one of their academic programme. This scholarship is awarded to one successful applicant on each undergraduate programme, with an award amount of €500 per learner.

Progression Scholarship: From September 2020, upon completion of stages 1-3, the learner who gains the highest-grade point average (GPA) in each undergraduate academic programme will be awarded a Progression Scholarship.

All scholarships awarded by the College are outlined in an appendix of the *Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition Policy*.

The second change to this policy was approved in February 2020. The policy was revised to include reference to CAO application fees; minor revision to application processes; scope of RPL was added; terminology updated regarding immigration documentation and an update to the list of approved English language tests. The third change to this policy was approved in August 2020 when a new appendix was added, 'Guidelines and Procedures for Return to Studies'.

Although high-level changes were outlined in Part B, Section 2(i) of this report, there were three [appendices](#) of the [Quality Assurance Policy](#) (Version 4) that were reviewed and revised that directly related to programmes of education and training, Appendices 9, 10 and 11. Appendices 9 and 10 were revised to reflect changes made by QQI to its validation templates. Appendix 11 was revised after consultation with staff members as to the composition and scope of Programme Design Teams.

Organisational and Academic Monitoring / Evaluation Reports

In 2016, QQI introduced a number of new policies and procedures related to the review and revalidation of programmes, namely: *Core Policies and Criteria for the Validation by QQI of Programmes of Education and Training* (2016); *Programme Review Manual 2016/2017* (December 2016) and the *Programme Validation Manual (2016) for Programmes of HET and Apprenticeships (FET and HET)* (Pilot Version, edition 2.15). Coinciding with the publication of these new policies and procedures, every programme at Carlow College underwent a review and revalidation, all of Carlow College's programmes were revalidated by QQI in Q2 2018.

However, during the Programme Review Phase of the Review and Revalidation Process, the Programme Design Teams encountered significant delays in sourcing, collating and analysing programme data, many of these datasets were new requirements introduced by the Pilot Version of the *Programme Review Manual*. To ensure that all of our academic programmes were gathering the necessary datasets required by the *Programme Review Manual*, Carlow College used the Re-Engagement Gap Analysis as an opportunity to streamline all organisational and academic monitoring / evaluation reports within the College (these revisions are reflected in the [Quality Assurance Policy](#) (Version 4), [Appendices 40, 40.1, 40.2 and 41](#)). The Office of the Registrar, in collaboration with other key internal stakeholders, revised the templates for the Programme Board Monitoring Report (PBMR), this revised template was fully utilised for the first time in the 2018 / 2019 Reports, which were approved by the Academic Council on 13 November 2019. It was noted in the Cross-Programme Monitoring Report (CPMR), approved by the Academic Council on 11 December 2019, that the availability of detailed and systematic data from the Admissions Office greatly facilitated the production of consistent reports across programmes. Moreover, the CPMR also noted that the new processes which require the Programme Directors to produce monthly reports for the Academic Council and assessment reports three times during the academic year also assisted in the production of comprehensive and consistent reports. Although the revised templates

significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the PBMRs, the Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs made a number of recommendations for the PBMRs for the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year:

- Programme Directors to liaise with other college functions regarding the configuration of data for their monitoring reports;
- Programme Directors to establish more uniform layouts for the display of data in graphs and tables;
- broader analysis of non-acceptances of CAO offers along with an examination of the courses accepted by learners who did not accept an offer from Carlow College;
- some consideration of part-time learners in the PBMRs; and
- the inclusion of feedback from Programme Administrators.

During this Reporting Period, the Academic Administration began producing an attendance report through the SRMS every four weeks which is circulated to the relevant Programme Director (see Part B, Section 4 of this report).

CORU

The Social Care Workers Registration Board (CORU) launched the *Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes* in 2017. The College submitted an application to CORU for approval of its Level 7 BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care). The programme approval process allows CORU, as the Regulation Board, to determine if it is satisfied that a programme is suitable for the education and training of candidates for registration in its register. The process involved the following:

1. A formal application to CORU (January 2019)
2. Submission of a Mapping Document (October 2019): this document was made up of two parts:
 - a. Criteria for Education and Training Programmes (which included 6 criteria and within that 54 individual parts to be addressed and evidenced);
 - b. Standards of Proficiencies (which included 5 domains and within that 67 standards to be addressed and evidenced).
 - c. Alongside the above two parts, a depository of the documentary evidence also had to be created and maintained to support the evidence listed in the mapping document, culminating in over 170 pieces of evidence being gathered.
3. Two-day Panel Site Visit (3rd and 4th March 2020)

Correspondence was received from CORU on 2 October 2020 which stated that: ‘under Section 48 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended), the Registration Board is satisfied that the BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) is suitable for the education and training of candidates for registration in its register. The programme is now subject to monitoring of its continued suitability by the Social Care Workers Registration Board.’

Virtual Graduation

The most significant event on the College calendar is the annual graduation ceremony, which takes place every November. Normally, the Carlow College Graduation Ceremony takes place at the Carlow Cathedral, which sits adjacent to the College. However, owing to COVID-19 restrictions, the 2019 / 2020 Graduation Ceremony took place virtually. Chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs,

the Graduation Committee began planning for the 2019 / 2020 Graduation Ceremony in late August. Initially it was anticipated that President Michael D. Higgins would deliver a virtual address, but when the country went into Level 5 Lockdown at the end of October, he was unable to deliver his conferring address virtually and it was instead read by the President of Carlow College, Fr Conn Ó Maoldhomhnaigh. There were 148 degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate level awarded and 21 Carlow College certificates awarded. A link to the Carlow College Graduation Ceremony can be viewed [here](#).

2(iii) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

Policy Development and Enhancement

For this reporting period, there were six policies that were reviewed, revised and approved that relate to staff recruitment, management and development. In particular, the [Sickness Absence Management Policy](#) (Version 2) received minor revisions largely related to processes and alignment with GDPR legislation. The [Parental Leave Policy](#) (Version 2) was revised to include legislative changes resulting from the *Parental Leave and Benefits Bill* (2019).

The [Maternity and Adoptive Leave Policy](#) (Version 2) was reviewed and revised to reflect greater guidance to managers and staff in managing maternity leave for staff. The Policy includes guides and checklists for managers and staff which facilitates greater resource planning and communication around preparing for maternity leave and returning from maternity leave. These guides and checklists now form a basis for greater dialogue between managers, staff and teams.

The [Annual Leave Policy](#) (Version 2) was revised to include changes to processes around booking annual leave and when annual leave can be taken. Carlow College moved to semesterisation in the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year, which resulted in the start date of the Academic Year being brought forward to allow for exams to take place before Christmas Break. As such, the last week in August has become an important week on the academic calendar for meetings and staff re-orientation / training. The *Annual Leave Policy* was revised to indicate the significance of this week and indicate to academic staff that annual leave cannot be taken during the last week in August.

The [Grievance Policy \(Staff\)](#) (Version 3) was revised to include a statement that Line Managers must adhere to stated timeframes and procedures to include the principles and natural rules of justice / mediation. On the latter point, an appendix was added to the policy to define the role of mediator and outline the process for mediation within the policy framework.

The policy to receive the most significant change was the [Dignity and Respect Policy](#) (Version 2). At its approval, the first version of this policy had built into its implementation plan a comprehensive review mechanism. As such, the initial review was conducted by the Quality Assurance Officer and Data Protection Officer, in consultation with key internal stakeholders (i.e. HR and Contact Person's identified in the policy). Once this review concluded, HR was tasked with making comprehensive revisions in consultation with the Office of the Registrar. The changes to the policy included greater alignment with GDPR legislation and greater delineation of practices / procedures for both learners and staff members. Another key section of the policy that was more clearly defined was the role of Contact Persons. Prior to approving this policy, staff members were invited to a college-wide workshop delivered by an external consultant on 'Dignity and Respect at Work'. The aim of this workshop was to build greater awareness of the differences between 'dignity' and 'grievances' and discuss the proposed changes made to the College's *Dignity and Respect Policy*.

Review of Workload Allocation Policy

Carlow College established its *Principles for Academic Workload* (Version 1, 2011). Informed by the college-wide *Listening Exercise* (2015) and the *Participatory Staff Workshop* (June 2016), and in

keeping with best practice in Ireland, the College approved its *Academic Workload Allocation Policy* (Version 2, 2017). This Policy sought to reflect and strengthen a College environment underpinned by the principles of equity, transparency and flexibility. It was intended that the operation of the policy would allow academic workloads to be managed in a way that was most effective in achieving Carlow College and staff objectives. In the Spring 2019 the *Academic Workload Allocation Policy* was reviewed in the context of the QQI Re-Engagement process. This revised version of the *Academic Workload Allocation Policy* (Version 3, 2019) was approved by the Academic Council subject to the following conditions of Monitoring and Review: ‘This Policy will be implemented for the 2019-20 Academic Year beginning in May 2019. In Autumn 2019, the Office of the Registrar, the HR Officer and Director of Operations will initiate a review which will include an examination of academic workload allocation by an independent, external reviewer.’

The College sourced an independent, external reviewer of the Policy to conduct a comprehensive review of the current policy, including: a data review of policies employed under consideration elsewhere and provide some insight into models of cost allocation at HEIs in Ireland. The reviewer was also invited to provide commentary on the fit between the College’s current *Academic Workload Allocation Policy* and the strategic direction of the College. The final element of the request was for the development of findings and recommendations including proposals regarding the communication of the review and its results to the staff of the College and for the implementation of any changes identified. A report was prepared and submitted to the President and the independent, external reviewer presented their findings to the Governing Body (February 2020); a presentation was also given to the academic staff of the College.

Following the presentations, the College Vice President and Quality Assurance Officer addressed the recommendations made by external reviewer and developed the College’s Response and Implementation Plan regarding External Review of the Academic Workload Allocation Policy 2020. The Response and Implementation Plan was circulated to the members of the Academic Council and was approved by the Academic Council on 29 July 2020. It was further approved that the Office of the Registrar would be responsible for the implementation of the plan; this is an identified objective for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

Remote Working Policy

When the Irish Government announced the closure of third-level institutions on Thursday (12 March 2020), Carlow College moved its activities online. In the short-term, the College’s *Remote Working Policy* (Version 1) was used to guide processes in this area, however, a noticeable shortcoming of the policy was that it was primarily developed to facilitate remote working due to health reasons. With the publication of the Government’s ‘Living with COVID Plan’, and the recognition that remote working will be a feature for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year, the College established a Working Group to draft [Remote Working Temporary Guidelines](#); a supplemental [COVID-19 Health and Safety Guide](#) was also developed. The key sections of the guidelines included: guiding principles and guidelines; procedures for applying for remote working; responsibilities for Line Managers; guidelines for employees; data protection and information management protocols and video conferencing guidelines. The temporary guidelines were approved by the Management Board on 28 August 2020 for the Autumn 2020 Academic Term; this timeframe was extended by the Management Board on 21 January 2021 to the end of the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. It is accepted by the College that remote and flexible working will feature prominently in the post-COVID era; as such, an objective for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year is to develop a permanent flexible and remote working policy that is fit-for-purpose.

Communication with Staff

The College Human Resources Office also developed a companywide Employee Handbook to facilitate and combine greater communication around the areas of policies and the College standardised procedures for all new and existing staff. The development of this handbook provides information which enables line managers to have a centralised document which focuses on culture and behaviour, allowing them to have greater management responsibility in the execution of policies, procedures and practices within the College. The handbook now serves as an informational tool for line managers and staff whereby they can directly refer to their employment rights, enabling a more streamlined approach to HR and people management issues and information. The handbook is communicated to all new employees and line managers at the induction stage of the employee lifecycle.

The College also developed a more interactive HR section on the College [website](#) which can be used by a staff member and site visitors; this site includes information pertaining to all our benefits, policies and procedures and general information to employment at Carlow College.

Union Recognition

Several staff members of Carlow College have been members of SIPTU for many years. At its meeting on 8 November 2017, the SIPTU representative in the College officially sent correspondence to the Management Board requesting College recognition of the union. After some discussion, the decision was deferred, and the College extended an invitation to a representative of SIPTU to give a presentation to the Management Board; this presentation took place on 28 May 2018 and he was accompanied by an Employee Relations Manager at another HEI in Ireland. After an interlude resulting in very little progress, the President and the SIPTU representative in the College agreed that the SIPTU representative in the College would meet with individual members of the Management Board to discuss the proposal to have the College recognise the union. Ahead of the Management Board meeting on 12 February 2020, the SIPTU representative in the College submitted a paper on what union recognition might look like in the College; an action from this meeting was to engage HR and have that office make a presentation at the next Management Board Meeting. Owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the presentation by HR regarding union recognition did not take place until 29 April 2020. An action from that meeting was that the Governing Body would be informed that the Management Board will be deciding on the question of union recognition at its next scheduled meeting. On 20 May 2020, by a consensus vote, the Management Board approved to officially recognise the union in the College. At its next meeting, 10 June 2020, the Management Board discussed the next steps in the recognition process and agreed that this should include an implementation plan over a phased basis and that it was necessary to identify College policies / handbooks which may need to be revised. An objective for the next reporting period is the drafting of a formalised document that progresses union engagement in the College.

2(iv) Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Policy Development and Enhancement

For this reporting period, there were four policies that were reviewed, revised and approved that relate to teaching, learning and assessment. The [Teaching and Learning Policy](#) (Version 3) was up for its three-year cyclical review and underwent only minor revisions. Section 3.4, related to maintaining and developing the learning environment, was revised to include how the teaching and learning environments are annually reviewed. Further revisions included the addition of referenced policies and links to the associated documents to assist with document control. Another policy that was up for its three-year cyclical review was the [Plagiarism Policy](#) (Version 3). This policy was revised to include references to the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019*. Explicit mention of Section 43A, which empowers QQI to prosecute those who facilitate academic cheating, was inserted into the policy.

The [Assessment Re-Check, Review and Appeals Policy](#) (Version 2) was reviewed in line with its three-year cyclical review. There were only minor changes made to this policy aside from the inclusion of a new application form. Although approved in August 2019, the policy was revised again in January 2020. As outlined in Part B, Section 2(ii) of this report, Carlow College applied to CORU for its BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme to be named as an approved programme for the education and training for the registration of Social Care professionals. When the College's CORU Working Group was progressing its work it identified a need to develop programme-specific procedures related to practice placement and portfolio modules; these procedures became Appendix 1.1 of the *Assessment Re-Check, Review and Appeals Policy* (Version 2.1).

Documenting Extensions and Absences

An issue that emerged during the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year was that the procedures for granting extensions were not consistent across stages / programmes. After extensive discussion with the relevant stakeholders, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee approved (12 June 2019) revised procedures for granting assignment extensions and procedures regarding absences from class. These recommendations were officially approved by the Academic Council on 28 August 2019 for the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year; subject to a discussion on storage and retention of forms / information supplied by learners. After further discussion, it was agreed that Academic Advisors would enter details of extensions granted on the SRMS so that lecturers can access this information. Moreover, it was agreed that the Academic Advisors and Academic Administration would enter details of approved absences on the SRMS so that this information can be accessed by lecturers, Programme Directors and the Learner Information and Retention Officer. Section 3.1.5 of the *Regulations in Relation to Assessments and Standards*, 'Procedures for Granting Assignment Extensions and Procedures for Absence from Class', were updated (both approved by the Academic Council on 22 January 2020). These changes were published prior to Semester 2 commencing in January 2020. The new processes have reduced the number of paper forms required and emails needed to inform different functions. They have also assisted the work of the LIRO and promoted more lecturer engagement with the SRMS.

Internal Moderation

One of the Re-Engagement Panel's recommendations to Carlow College was to develop and implement a formalised internal moderation process to further ensure fairness and standardisation of assessment across and within programmes. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee discussed this recommendation at length during the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year and agreed that adopting a procedure of second-reading, all or a sample, of assessments worth more than 15% of total module mark would place too much strain on resources and would be unfeasible given the timescale for correction and input of marks ahead of exam board meetings / delivery of material to external examiners. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee agreed to continue discussing the second marking of assessment and will draft a comprehensive proposal for approval in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

However, some progress was made regarding the internal moderation of dissertations during this reporting period. The Academic Council approved on 2 October 2019 the following change to the dissertation section of the *Regulations in Relation to Assessments and Standards*: 'all dissertations will have a second reader and, in the event of a significant difference in marks allocated, the dissertation was submitted to the External Examiner.' The Academic Council further approved that the dissertation marking rubric will retain the category of 1.1 (80+%). This criterion is reserved for exceptional dissertations which are publishable in their present form. Moreover, all marks in this criterion must be agreed by the first and second readers and the view of the External Examiner is to be sought.

Prior to the second marking of dissertations being approved, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee spent considerable time discussing whether it was appropriate to have the second reader see

the marks / comments from the first reader. The decision was taken that the second readers would have sight of the supervisors' commentary and grades rather than having to 'blind read' dissertations. This decision was taken because of current staff workloads and because all dissertations are graded by lecturing staff; Carlow College does not currently employ teaching assistants. As such, the second marker of dissertations were asked to correct the dissertation following the assessment sheet rubric and then submit their comments through Turnitin and inform the dissertation supervisor (first marker). Where there was disagreement between the first marker and second marker, the dissertation co-ordinator was contacted, and the dissertation was sent to the external examiner. Overall, the system worked well and there were no complaints or suggestions for change by either staff or learners. The use of second readers was welcomed by external examiners.

Repeat Arrangements, Late Submissions and Extenuating Circumstances

Another recommendation made by the Re-Engagement Panel was that the processes in relation to repeat arrangements, late submission and extenuating circumstances be documented clearly within the College's assessment policies and related documentation for learners to ensure transparency and consistency in these processes. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee reviewed the processes in relation to repeat arrangements, late submission and extenuating circumstances. A new section titled, '2.3.5 Information for Learners on Repeating Assessments' was added to the *Regulations in Relation to Assessments and Standards*. A document in FAQ format was prepared for learners and was circulated with the publication of Semester 1 results in January and final results in June. The Academic Council further approved on 11 March 2020 revisions to the 'Late Submission Penalties' and the 'Procedures for Extenuating Circumstances', both of which will be implemented in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

Research Ethics Policy

The *Research Ethics Advisory Policy* (Version 2) underwent significant changes in 2017 that were implemented during the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year. During the implementation of this policy, new procedural barriers emerged that caused significant angst amongst final year dissertation learners on the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme. The Programme Director noted in the Programme Board Monitoring Report that:

There was no mention of research and dissertation at this point in the year [when the learner evaluations for Semester 2 were conducted], although issues were emerging in relation to research ethical approval through class representation and at Programme Board level. Significant discussion took place at programme board level in the second semester and this resulted in (a) accommodations being made to allow learners to complete their research and dissertation and (b) an overall review of the roles, function and processes of the Research Ethics Advisory Committee.

During the Summer 2019, the newly appointed Chair of the Research Ethics Advisory Committee (REAC) reviewed the *Research Ethics Advisory Policy* and proposed the following changes to REAC, the appendices were revised, namely: the process for applying to the Research Ethics Advisory Committee was redesigned and clarified (Appendix 1); Ethics Checklist revised (Appendix 2) and Data Management Guidelines added (Appendix 3). Version 3 of this [Policy](#) was approved by the Academic Council 16 September 2019.

To ensure clarity around the new procedures, REAC held workshops for both staff and learners during Semester 1. For this Academic Year, REAC processed 47 applications for ethical approval and encountered very little procedural issues that were problematic with Version 2 of this Policy.

Moreover, as part of its quality assurance process and to check compliance with its recommendations, REAC has a system of checking learner dissertations after submission. The Committee checks all dissertations that were submitted to the Committee for ethical approval to ensure the learner complied with the Committee's recommendations; and a spot checking process for those dissertations that did not go to the Committee but were given ethical approval through the signature of two lecturers in the area. It was envisaged that this checking would be done with the physical copies of the dissertations once they were submitted to the Academic Administration. However, that was not possible this year, since all dissertations were submitted in electronic form only, due to the college building closing and work moving online during COVID-19. It was agreed that the electronic versions of the dissertation would be checked. REAC has representatives from each degree programme who have access to the Dissertation Moodle page of their respective degrees. These members checked the relevant dissertations on Moodle to see that they had complied with the recommendations the committee made to their proposals. The results showed that all of the learners on the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme (which accounted for 96% of the dissertations receiving REAC Approval) had completed the relevant policy forms correctly and incorporated the relevant ethics and GDPR guidelines into their documents.

Technology Enhanced Learning

During this reporting period, which was the second cycle for both semesterisation and the SRMS, the College is quickly identifying areas where future quality enhancement is required whilst also demonstrating significant scalability to meet new challenges. A significant development this reporting cycle was the appointment of the IT and Student Systems Manager which was a new role created to blend all departments who regularly engage with inputting / analysing learner data in the SRMS. The area of Technology Enhanced Learning is an education space that Carlow College is currently developing, and the IT and Student Systems Manager has drafted a preliminary report titled *Key Elements of a Strategy for Technology Enhanced Learning*. This report outlines the fundamental components of a Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy under the following areas: Technological Infrastructure; Student Feedback and Engagement; National Policy and Funding; Internal Staff Training and Awareness; and Delivering Technology Enhanced Learning. As stated in this preliminary report, Carlow College has the tools and opportunity to deliver and build in further technology usage into our existing and new programme design. Moreover, digital skills and literacy are critical for Carlow College's capacity to respond to learner and employer requirements in relation to the provision of accessible and flexible education. The Strategic Development Committee is currently progressing this strategy.

COVID-19 and Teaching, Learning and Assessment

During the physical closure of the College in the second half of the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year, all matters relating to teaching, learning and assessment were closely guided and monitored by the Office of the Registrar. Membership of the weekly meetings of the Office of the Registrar was extended and included the Quality Assurance Officer, IT and Student Systems Manager, Director of Operations and Head of Student Services. Additionally, all organisational meetings within the College were moved online. The normal cycle of review of policies and procedures continued, and Internal / External Exam Boards were held via ZOOM. Carlow College also developed a dedicated webpage that acted as the main institutional information hub for all related COVID-19 updates (see Part B, Section 2(vii) of this report).

The Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs met regularly with the Programme Directors and all contingency plans were passed by the relevant Programme Boards and approved by Academic Council. Following sign-off by our External Examiners, QQI was notified on 6 April 2020 of our contingency plans and changes made to assessment.

The DES (now the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science) requested an update from the College on its measures to ensure continuity of learning and assessments for learners, its communication methods with learners and general measures to ensure learner welfare. This was completed by the Office of the Registrar and returned on 24 April 2020. In June 2020, the Office of the Registrar coordinated learner and staff evaluations of the experience of online teaching, learning and assessment. This information was included in the College's response to QQI's request for reflections on COVID-19 modifications learning from March to June 2020, submitted on 26 June 2020. This information was also used to inform and develop an updated Contingency Plan for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year, which was submitted to QQI on 7 August 2020. Overall, in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, organisational processes worked well, and this was reflected in feedback from learners and staff. The College responded swiftly and communicated extensively. Significantly, the College learned that it had the flexibility and creativity to deal with substantial change while maintaining high standards of quality assurance.

Delivery of Teaching

The physical closure of the College on 12 March 2020 occurred at the end of Week 7 (Semester 2), there were five weeks of teaching remaining on each undergraduate programme. The Office of the Registrar had already been preparing contingency plans which allowed for an immediate announcement to learners that their remaining classes would be delivered online. Classes were delivered by a variety of methods including synchronous classes on MS Teams and recorded classes uploaded to the VLE. Learners were contacted by the IT Office with instructions on how to access these platforms. Timetables for lectures and tutorials were maintained with interactive features such as Moodle forums and chatrooms used to promote learner engagement. Participant activity on the Moodle VLE was used as a proxy for attendance rolls. Lecturers informed the LIRO if they had concerns about Stage 1 and 2 learners, Academic Advisors with regards to Stage 3 and 4 learners and the International Officer with regard to international learners. Learners were also contacted with offers of support and guidance; all learner support services operated online.

Lecturers were able to avail of a range of instructional material via the Teaching and Learning page on the Moodle VLE. This was used to access tutorials on aspects of online teaching. The page contained links to resources produced and shared by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. Staff forums were used to share information and provide support and advice.

Learners were advised to cease all work placements / work experience at the end of Week 7 (Semester 2). Learners enrolled on the English and History, Arts and Humanities and Social, Political and Community Studies programmes were coming close to the end of their placements and it was possible to substitute desk-based activities to allow them to complete their modules and achieve their learning outcomes.

Stage 3 learners on enrolled on the Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) programme had a significant number of placement hours to complete to satisfy CORU requirements for professional registration. Detailed contingency plans were developed to enable these learners to complete their placements and demonstrate attainment of learning outcomes and professional competencies. The Practice Placement Advisory Committee developed these plans in conjunction with the External Examiner and the Office of the Registrar. They were passed by the Programme Board and approved by the Academic Council on 6 May 2020. Following this, the plan was communicated to QQI on 14 May 2020. An Extraordinary Exam Board Meeting was held 30 June 2020 to certify the results of these learners.

Assessment

Given that Semester 2 was over halfway completed, a significant number of our continuous assessment elements had already been completed or were completed as scheduled. However, in a small number of cases an alternative mode of assessment had to be put in place given the move to online delivery. As part of our quality assurance process, the Office of the Registrar and Programme Directors developed a template to: document these changes, ensure that the MIMLOs being targeted by the original assessment would be met by the revised assessment and demonstrate the approval process. These changes were formally approved by Academic Council on 1 April 2020. All assignments were submitted through Turnitin software on the VLE with cover sheets requiring learners to certify that the work was their own and all marks / feedback were delivered through Turnitin Feedback Studio. Detailed information on modifications to assessment was communicated to learners via Moodle, the website and social media.

Slightly under half of our modules were scheduled to be assessed by a 2-hour, invigilated, written exam. These exams were replaced by 'open book' time limited online exams administered through the VLE. Learners were given 24 Hours to complete the exams to facilitate international learners who were in different time zones as well as learners with caring responsibilities and intermittent access to devices. Answer booklets with mandatory academic integrity tick boxes were developed for upload through Turnitin. This plan was formally approved by Academic Council on 1 April 2020 and was also approved by our External Examiners. Detailed FAQs on take-home exams were developed by the Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs in conjunction with the Programme Directors and the Academic Resource Office (see Part B, Section 2(vi) of this report). These were communicated to learners and the Exams Officer / LIRO ran live Q&A sessions with learners via the Pubble App. Learners were also invited to book 15-minute calls with the Academic Resource Office to discuss assessment issues. All learners received an email on the topic of academic integrity with links to the QQI page containing information on new legislations in this area. An additional guideline was prepared by the Office of the Registrar regarding the correction of take-home exams and sent to all assessors. Lecturers were offered one-to-one support in using Turnitin Feedback Studio for correction of essays, dissertations and take-home exams.

All learners in Level 8 award years complete a dissertation for 15-20 ECTS. Supervisors worked closely with these learners, particularly those learners that had their research disrupted. For instance, alternative arrangements were found for learners who were unable to complete fieldwork / archival research. The submission deadline for dissertations was extended and learners were able to request further extensions if necessary. In some cases, learners could defer the submission of their dissertation to the August Exam Board.

The College had seven postgraduate learners in the final year of the MA (Leadership in Therapeutic Child and Social Care) Programme. They were due to submit their dissertations on 29 April 2020 and most were able to meet this deadline; although extensions to the August Exam Board were offered (if required). The research plan of some learners was affected as they were unable to interview as many people as they had proposed, but all had collected a sufficient amount of data to complete the write up of their dissertations.

Planning for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year

A Working Group of the Office of the Registrar comprising the Assistant Registrar for Academic Affairs (Chair), Administrator for Office of the Registrar, IT and Student Systems Manager, Head of Student Services and Director of Operations was set up in May 2020 to begin planning for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. In anticipation of the necessity for further online delivery, the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee developed guidelines for online teaching using the MS Teams platform in conjunction with the Moodle VLE. Plans for staff training were put in place along with various timetable

scenarios depending on public health guidelines. The contingency plans were communicated to QQI on 7 August 2020.

2(v) Supports and Resources for Learners

Policy Development and Enhancement

For this reporting period, there were four policies that were reviewed, revised and approved that relate to supports and resources for learners. The *Library Admissions and User Services Policy* (Version 2) was up for its three-year cyclical review and was re-approved without any amendments. The [Learner Grievances and Complaints Policy](#) (Version 3) and the [Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy](#) (Version 3) were revised to include clearer reference to the Learner Information and Retention Officer function. Additionally, Appendix 1.4 was added to the *Learner Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy*. This appendix provided templates for recording and issuing warnings, both informal and formal. During the review of the *Learners with Disabilities and Specific Learning Needs Policy* (2011) and the *Assistive Technology and Supports Policy* (2011), the Head of Student Services, in consultation with key internal stakeholders, determined that the policy framework in this area could be further streamlined by amalgamating these two policies into the [Learner Disability Policy](#) (Version 2).

Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO)

A strength of our Quality Assurance Framework is in the area of learner supports. This was an area commended by the QQI Re-Engagement Panel and Carlow College continues to explore ways it can more fully maintain a learner-centred environment that recognises each learner's individual learning journey and that promotes, values and supports their personal, social and cultural development. During the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year, a Progression and Retention Working Group was established to:

- investigate, record and analyse the details of historical and current progression and retention rates at the College;
- identify factors that impact progression and retention rates in Carlow College;
- compare progression and retention rates with those that pertain nationally and elsewhere;
- consult the national and international literature on the factors which impact progression and retention rates;
- investigate the type and range of initiatives or interventions, their operationalisation and impact, which have been undertaken in other institutions nationally and elsewhere; and
- propose recommendations regarding the future management of progression and retention rates at Carlow College

One of the key outcomes of this Working Group was the appointment of the LIRO for the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year. This new role commenced in September 2019 and had a dual purpose: to provide information and resolve issues for learners and to put in place interventions and provide support to 'at risk' learners. 'At risk' learners were identified using data analytics from the SRMS / VLE / Library Systems through the analysis of data patterns. During Semester 1, LIRO communicated with sixty learners and developed a Discussion Report detailing both short-term and long-term recommendations in the area of retention and attrition; these are currently being considered by the Academic Council. One of the key statistics from the Discussion Report is that 40% of Stage 1 learners achieved leaving cert points of less than 250 and the national average attrition rate for these learners is 43%; the current attrition rate for these learners at Carlow College is 8%. Although this attrition rate is exceptional, as the College doubles down on its efforts to provide greater access to third-level education, the system and

supports available to this cohort of learners is of paramount importance. For more on the role of the LIRO, see Part B, Section 4 of this report.

Peer Mentoring Pilot Programme

A recommendation by the Programme Review and Revalidation Panel (2018) encouraged Carlow College to develop a Peer Assisted Learning Model across all programmes. The Learner Resource Committee led on this initiative and determined that the Levels 7 and 8 Arts and Humanities Programmes were best placed to pilot this initiative. The Peer Mentoring Programme was managed by the College Chaplain who coordinated the training of mentors and:

- acted as a contact-point;
- provided continuity and stability for mentors;
- managed the day-to-day queries that arose; and
- ensured that the mentors were recognised and rewarded.

The Chaplain reported through the Head of Student Services to the Office of the Registrar. Moreover, there was a defined clear start and end point (Semester 1 2019 / 2020) and initially there were a total of fifty-four learners across both programmes. Recruitment of Peer Mentors took place during April (2019) and were drawn from the Arts and Humanities Programmes Stages 2 and above. A training workshop for mentors took place on 23 May 2019 after having first received Garda Vetting.

The initial contact with the “Mentors” and “Mentees” took place during Orientation & Registration Week. Here the mentors introduced themselves, briefly discussed their own course of studies and some of their concerns and difficulties they experienced as “Freshers” in a third-level college. During the second week of the term, a meeting was held for the learners and their mentors. Here the learners were divided into their individual groups, this gave the learners the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other. This meeting was well attended, and it gave the Chaplain the opportunity to explain in detail the purpose of the programme. The mentors explained to the learners how and where they can be contacted. An email was sent from the Chaplain to those learners who were unable to attend this meeting.

During the first week of October an email was sent to all learners on the programme by the mentors seeking feedback and inviting them to share their college experience to date. There was no response to this request and the following week the mentors met with the Chaplain to discuss the non-response to this request. It was the consensus of those present that there was no evidence to suggest that the learners were not settling-in – and it was noted that learners were availing of existing Student Services within the College. In an attempt to give some clarity, it was agreed that a survey would be carried out among the learners. The survey had a return rate of 64% from the learners enrolled on both programme; of those learners that responded, 72% of the learners indicated that they did not avail of the Programme.

The Chaplain submitted to the Learner Resources Committee a Review Report of the Peer Mentoring Programme. The Learner Resources Committee discussed the Review Report and the value of the programme to learners in a small college vis-à-vis the time and resources required to implement it. The Learner Resources Committee agreed that more time and resources should be given to the learner-led and very popular Social Network Initiative rather than continuing with the Peer Mentoring Programme. As such, the Learner Resources Committee recommended to the Academic Council that the Social Networking Initiative, organised and led by learners, should replace the Peer Mentoring Programme, this proposal was approved by the Academic Council on 11 March 2020.

Learner Information

One of the QQI Re-Engagement Panel's recommendations was 'to build on a strong culture of face-to-face training and sign-posting to student services via e-mail by creating more formal materials and including signposting on the student gateway.' Carlow College engaged in several new initiatives to respond to this recommendation during the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year. A communication plan was developed in September 2019 that ensures access to information in a variety of formats for learners. Fortnightly briefs through MailChimp were sent to all learners highlighting key academic information, resources, points of contact and other relevant information to create an effective link between learners and the College's administrative, academic and pastoral supports. Following the closure of the college campus in March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 'Settle, Stay, Succeed' MailChimp emails continued to be sent to learners but were refocused on reminding learners how to access programme materials, supports and services online and the key contact people within the College.

Example: MailChimp



[Email Martina to book](#)




CARLOW COLLEGE ST. PATRICK'S
PUBLIC LECTURE

pre-study
Should I eat meat?
Address to lecturers, food and environmental programmes (without cheating: serving the food at home)

Public Lecture **Should I eat meat?** by Dr Sarah Otten on Monday 2nd March at 1.45pm in Cobden Hall

[Book your place](#)




Nicola Moses, the LIRO (Learner Information and Retention Officer), has moved office to the ground floor beside the IT office off the O' Meara Gallery or phone 059 915 3233

[Email Nicola](#)



Weekly Careers Drop-in Sessions – no booking required! Tuesdays 10 – 12.30pm, Wednesdays 2 – 4.30pm and Thursdays 11 – 2pm. Career appointments may be arranged by email.

[Email Eleanor](#)



Workshop: Supercharge your assignments! How to locate and use journal articles (ESBSCO and JSTOR). Friday 27 February (repeat) 1pm IT Resource Room.

[Email Caroline](#)



Another key action was the addition of a Quality Assurance Section to all learner handbooks to better signpost the Student Gateway. The Student Gateway enables learners to have access to all information relating to their academic record (i.e. exam results, finance details and elective choices) and it acts as an online repository of all learner policies and procedures. Moreover, the Quality Assurance Officer meets annually with members of the Students' Union to explain the basic principles of quality assurance and stress the importance of the learners' voice in the Quality Assurance Framework at Carlow College.

Supporting Learners through COVID-19

Due to the closure of the physical college campus in March 2020, all learner support services moved to a remote, online provision. The College's Counselling, Chaplaincy, Health, Careers, Disability and Academic Support services continued to provide advice, guidance and support within normal working hours and were contactable by mobile phone, email, 'What's App' messaging, or through MS Teams. To support the health and wellbeing of learners, additional supportive resources were posted on Moodle in addition to links to external sources of support for self-care. All services and supports offered a 'drop-in' contact service via email, phone or text. One-to-one and small group appointments were facilitated through video conferencing. Support services were proactive in maintaining personal contact with a significant number of our students and signposting to other supports as appropriate. Learners with disabilities, learning differences or long-term health conditions, vulnerable learners and those at risk from the impact of isolation were identified and contacted in person by the College's counselling, pastoral and academic support staff to ensure continuity of engagement and to assist with access to

college resources. The Students' Union continued to support learners through email and official social media channels.

Additionally, although the College is not in receipt of the ESF Student Assistance Fund, a modest Chaplaincy Assist Fund is available to learners in financial difficulties. Due to the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Chaplaincy Assist Fund was increased, and any learner financially impacted by the health crisis was encouraged to contact the Chaplain and make an application for assistance.

2(vi) Information and Data Management

Revised Registration Processes

During the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year, Carlow College had a dedicated Working Group that implemented the new SRMS. As part of the implementation of this system, and the ongoing monitoring of our Admission processes, Carlow College introduced a two-phase registration process that has improved the integrity of our data around registered learners. Learners (new and returning) must register online which will note the learner as pre-registered in the SRMS. The registration status of the learner is not changed to 'fully registered' until they attend registration in the College. This information has greatly helped in forecasting and creating follow-up reports tracking learners through the registration process. It further has eliminated any calculation errors where learners are considered registered prior to turning up to the College.

This reporting period has saw us review, audit and update some of the processes around learner registration. Key stakeholders of the registration processes have recognised the challenges of ensuring learners status are accurate, otherwise the integrity of broadsheets and fee records are not accurate. There is also acknowledgement of the impact of semesterisation and the various different cohorts of learners (i.e. Part Time / Deferred) within the system and how records need to be updated at various times of the year to accurately reflect learners not returning to Semester 2 or who are rolled over into the next session of their studies. There are three defined objectives for the next reporting period to review: changing further processes to electronic over paper forms; review of reporting / evaluation of reports / actioning reports and review of academic processes which are managed through the SRMS.

Investment in Technology

During this reporting period, the College have made further investment in data analytic software and tools. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was rolled out across the College to support our Psychology offering while also being used within business operations to analyse data emerging from large academic reports through the Office of the Registrar. It is intended to further utilise SPSS across wider areas of the College. There was also further investment into Moodle to improve both cloud functionality and to provide further resources for course pages. Furthermore, the latest version of Moodle, which we have invested in, contains a considerable amount of data analytic tools (see Section 4 of this report for further details). These data analytic tools have enabled the College to gain important insight into learner engagement with course material and assignment submission.

The College continues to invest in hardware for both learners and staff to improve the standard specification of user devices on the network. COVID-19 has also given rise to our investment in hardware for staff within the College. All staff offices have been fitted with webcams and microphones to enable each staff member to deliver online lectures from their office in addition to enabling all staff to conduct online meetings. Additionally, there was significant investment in audio visual equipment and laptops to support online learning and remote working. This has enabled continuity of business through mobility and accessibility to college systems.

IT Training Programme for Staff

Large focus has been placed on CPD and staff training and development throughout this reporting period. Some of the main drivers for this has been through dependency on user data for analytics while also supporting staff during online learning and remote working. IT Services are continuously collaborating with all areas of the College to generate awareness and provide training on the critical systems of the College. This training has involved providing transparency to staff of how their role contributes to the greater data analytics strategy of the College and how they use the College systems (i.e. the more data entered by staff, the higher quality information can be retrieved). Furthermore, we have developed several guidelines and handbooks to support staff and learners during this period of online learning through technology. This has resulted in a number of useful knowledge bases made available to staff and learners through programme pages on Moodle.

The College is now operating through a virtual environment using MS Teams and OneDrive. We have had online and on-site training sessions to teach staff the fundamental elements for the successful use of these products to not only delivery of teaching but also to embed consistency in how these applications are used (i.e. Training for MS Teams, Moodle Training and Office 365 / One Drive Training). IT Services undertook a number of learner and staff feedback initiatives to identify areas where people were struggling with technology and actioned the feedback by providing more online support tools and virtual training sessions.

COVID-19 and Data Management

During this reporting period, data management was of fundamental importance in Carlow College's ability to respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Remote working and online learning have posed challenges for the sharing of information, in addition to increased requirement for transparency and clarity through data within the College. Data Analytics has proven to be a valuable tool which we have worked to develop and grow to provide clear insight into learner engagement and retention while learning remotely. To address the difficulty of being unable to identify risks to learner engagement through face-to-face learning, analysing our data from our Student Record Management System (SRMS) and Moodle Analytics has allowed us to be proactive in recognising learners who are struggling, this was achieved by in-depth analysis of learner data. In particular, this provided the opportunity for the College to intervene with learners to provide the support and guidance necessary to assist them in their online learning, based on weekly reports generated through college data systems.

Furthermore, Carlow College have looked at processes around data sharing within various departments while working remotely to ensure the security and the integrity of the data we process on a daily basis. Further emphasis has been put on use of cloud storage and extended utilisation of Moodle and the SRMS to ensure all staff are working from the most up-to-date and relevant information while also ensuring all sensitive data is secured and protected.

2(vii) Public Information and Communication

COVID-19 and Communication

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, effective communication with both internal and external stakeholders proved invaluable. In addition to the other COVID-19 communication channels identified in other sections of this report (i.e. Part B, Sections 2(iv) and 2(vi)), a significant development that achieved this aim was the development of a [COVID-19 Information Portal](#) on the Carlow College website that provided the latest updates from the Irish Government and the College. This was particularly important for our partner institutions in the United States as there were twenty-two study abroad learners that were

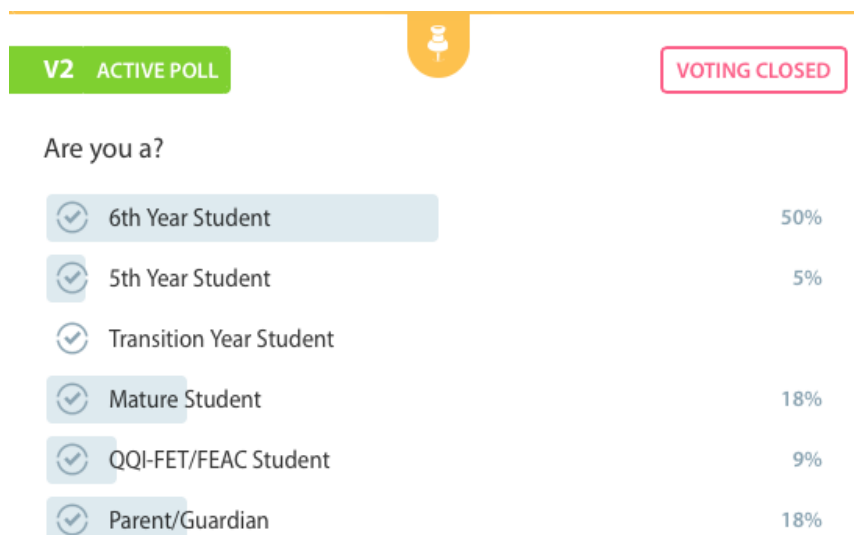
forced to return home mid-semester and finish their studies online. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) was also placed on the website aimed at providing further information to prospective learners and revised applications processes.

One of the linked pages to this Portal was a dedicated information page for our learners. The page was designed in a FAQs format that provided information related to how classes were going to be delivered to how learners could use the library facilities. Learners were sent an email with all relevant information and directed to the College's website for the most up-to-date information. There was a [FAQs document](#) developed and approved by the Academic Council that outlined the teaching and learning arrangements for the semester and information on assessments and examinations. A subsequent [FAQs document](#) was developed that related exclusively to examinations.

An online survey of learners was conducted in June 2020, 192 learners participated in the survey. The purpose of this survey was to reflect on the COVID-19 modifications made to teaching, learning and assessment and to inform contingency planning for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. The key finding from the survey results were that 60% of learners surveyed rated the quality of digital teaching delivered during the COVID-19 outbreak as good or excellent. In particular, many learners felt they were provided with good support from their lecturers and other support functions within the College while learning remotely. Moreover, a number of learners were happy with how the College informed and kept learners up to date on how they were operating through COVID-19. Of the 40% of the learners surveyed that rated the quality of digital teaching delivered during the COVID-19 outbreak as average or poor, the key reason provided was that learners has issues accessing personal devices and reliable WiFi which in turn caused stress as they felt behind in their course material with limited access to online resources. A significant number of learners expressed concerns around consistency in the technology used to deliver lectures and course material (i.e. software and format of course delivery differed across various modules). The contingency planning for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year, and how these findings were used in that planning, will feature prominently in the next AQR.

Virtual Open Day

Owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Carlow College ran its first ever Virtual Open Day on 29 April 2020 to give prospective learners the chance to chat to College representatives about their course choices, learn about campus facilities and learner supports through a virtual Q&A. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for Carlow College lecturers, learner support staff and the College's Admissions Team to answer questions about our academic programmes. During the event, the following attendees could be broken down by the following statistics:



In many ways this event was a ‘test-run’ for the College’s main Open Day that took place in December 2020; this will feature in the 2020 / 2021 AQR.

2(viii) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Review and Revalidation Panel Recommendations (2018)

Every programme in the College underwent the revised QQI Review and Revalidation Process in the Spring 2018. The Panel made eleven recommendations across the entire institution, eight programme-specific recommendations for the undergraduate programmes and one programme-specific recommendation for the postgraduate programme. These recommendations are a standing item on the weekly agenda for the Office of the Registrar which is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the recommendations; the [Recommendations and Implementation Plan](#) is also a standing agenda item at Management Board. Following an internal audit in the Autumn 2019, it was recommended by the College’s internal auditor to add dates to the Plan to better capture progress; these were accepted and added to the Plan.

2(ix) Quality Assurance of Research Activities and Programmes

Research Hub

Carlow College formally launched the [Research Hub](#) in the Spring 2020 Term to bring shape and coherence to research activity within the College by acting as a support for current research and related activities and by driving and enabling research agendas. Carlow College has been a leading centre in the South East for research inquiry for over 200 years. Current research activities are grounded in the College’s ethos, vision, and mission to foster openness to new ideas, to build civic engagement and social awareness, and to promote creativity and innovation. Our researchers shape and contribute to evolving contemporary discourses in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences across a variety of interdisciplinary contexts and partnerships.

The primary objectives of this approach are outlined in our [framework document](#) and are summarised here as follows:

- to support and promote staff research;
- to foster a research agenda that aligns with College Strategy, Mission and Ethos;
- to connect the College’s research expertise with local and national organisations, communities and institutions; and
- to play a supporting role in College programme development by identifying, utilising and enhancing existing and potential areas of College research and expertise.

Research at Carlow College is organised by the College’s Research Hub into six distinct areas of focus and expertise:

- Politics, Society and Sustainability
- History, Literature and Culture of Ireland
- Ideas and Beliefs
- People, Places and Cultures
- Mind, Memory and Behaviour
- Theory, Education and Practice

For this reporting period, the academic staff at Carlow College actively engaged with research projects, both nationally and internationally: two staff members were editors of books; three staff members had articles in edited books; five staff members had articles published in peer-reviewed journals and one staff member had an article published in a non-peer-reviewed journal. Staff members also published opinion pieces in national newspapers and wrote blog posts for the Carlow College Staff Blog during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

2(x) Third-mission activities, societal and community engagement

Here Together: Reflections on the South-East Project

In 2018 every programme at Carlow College were revalidated by an external QQI Review and Revalidation Panel. One of the recommendations of that Panel was that Carlow College ‘should develop a stronger profile and status for community-related group creative projects, interlinking their practice and research dimensions.’ An important collaborative project that has furthered this objective is the [*Here Together: Reflections on the South-East Project*](#). This Project is a collaborative venture that gathers together a series of writings and events that reflect on what it means to live in the South East of Ireland today, to be published on-line and in a paperback anthology. The Project has various strands, drawing on Philosophy, Theology, Creative Writing, Social Partnership, Filmmaking, Photography, and Music, and sees colleagues and learners in Carlow College collaborate with colleagues and learners in IT Carlow, Waterford IT, VISUAL, and other local and regional bodies.

Two collaborative projects took place during the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year:

- *Debate in the Agora* – The first collaborative project took place in December (2018) at IT Carlow when Dr Sarah Otten (Philosophy Lecturer, Carlow College) and the Third Year Philosophy learners at Carlow College and the Public Relations and Media Relations learners at IT Carlow debated matters of public importance in the ‘Debate in the Agora’; the event was filmed live by learners of the BSc in TV and Media Production at IT Carlow.
- *The Carlow Song Cycle* – The second collaborative project took place in January (2019) at VISUAL involving two members of the Carlow College staff: Dr Morgan Cawley-Buckley on classical guitar and a song cycle based on poems by Dr Derek Coyle. This new commission, ‘The Carlow Song Cycle’ was performed in the second half of a diverse musical programme, including a medieval song, a 2012 work from composer Gráinne Mulvey, and a set of contemporary classical guitar works performed by Cawley-Buckley solo and in duet with Eoin Flood. The ‘Carlow Song Cycle’ was commissioned by Cawley-Buckley and sponsored by the Arts Council of Ireland. The music for the commission was created by one of Ireland’s leading contemporary composers Gráinne Mulvey, an award-winning artist of international renown. The concert also featured Elizabeth Hilliard, a leading Irish, Dublin born soprano. Prior to the concert, a pre-concert workshop took place that focused on the inter-disciplinary and collaborative nature of the creative process. The concert was filmed and recorded by learners of the BSc in Film and Media at IT Carlow.

The third collaborative project, which took place during the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year, was titled *A Theology of Space: The Architecture of Belief and Rhythms of Ritual*. This included a three-part series of events:

- Part 1 – This element of the project explored the construction and realisation of religious space in contemporary culture. Taking ancient and contemporary religious sites in County Carlow as its subject matter, the project looked at questions that arise around spaces and places that are marked out and celebrated as sacred. Participants in the project analyse and critique a number of such sacred sites that have been set a-part in order to ritualise significant moments of life. This

project began in the second semester (January – April 2019) and was a collaborative project with IT Carlow TV & Media Production learners. The first stage of the project involved a tour to religious places around County Carlow that included: Holy Wells, Monastic Ruins, Graveyards, Churches, and other contemporary sites of worship. Cork based poet James Harpur and local Carlow artist Bridget Flannery joined the group for the tour of local sites that brought together word, vision, and place.

- Part 2 – This element of the project included a Podcast on the visit (detailed above) by the learners of TV and Media Productions at IT Carlow.
- Part 3 – This element of the project included an Art Exhibition that was officially launched on 10 February 2020 and available to the general public at Carlow College for the entire Spring 2020 Term. The exhibition comprised the artwork of three local artists (Anne Martin Walsh, Bridget Flannery and Bob Frazier) and explored the themes of place, ritual, spirituality and cultural identity in the South-East of Ireland today. The art pieces included paintings, stone and glass carvings, mixed media paintings, and photography. Due to COVID-19 restrictions resulting in remote learning and teaching, the exhibition will remain in place until the coming academic year (2021 / 2022).

College Colloquia

The College’s regular public lectures / staff colloquia were specifically aimed in 2019-2020 at Secondary School and Further Education learners in Carlow Town, county and environs. Thanks to the work of the School Liaison Team, the seven lectures held before the COVID-19 Pandemic struck were very successful in bringing large numbers of potential learners into the College from eleven schools and further education institutes. The College’s biggest hall, with a capacity of 120, was packed for these lectures. An overflow hall catering for 60 was made available on occasion. Potential mature and part-time learners were also in attendance at these publicly advertised lectures which were well covered in the local media. These colloquia are serving their purpose in raising awareness of the College among secondary school, further education and mature learners. This successful initiative will become a permanent feature of the College’s annual series of public lectures.

The following schools and colleges in attendance were: St. Leo’s, Gaelcholaiste, CBS, Presentation College, Tyndall College, Knockbeg, Tullow Community School, Presentation de la Salle, Bagenalstown, CIFE, Carlow ETB, Institute of Technology Carlow.

Below is a schedule of the College Colloquia:

Date	Title of the Public Lecture	Presenter(s)
7/10/20	<i>Coping and Resilience in Your Life: The Latest Insights from Psychology</i>	Dr Susan Ní Chuileann and Dr Candice Condon
23/10/20	<i>Ireland and Europe, 1918-1920: World War I, Versailles Peace Treaty, and Partition</i>	Dr Elaine Callinan and Dr Ida Milne
25/11/20	<i>Finding Your Voice: A Guide to Writing A Short Story</i>	Dr Derek Coyle and Colm Keegan, Writer in Residence
2/12/19	<i>Unwrapping Oppressive Attitudes to Children (in time for Christmas)</i>	Dr John McHugh and Damien McLellan

20/1/20	<i>Time for Action: Climate Change & Our Future</i>	Helen Maher and Stephanie Hanlon
27/1/20	<i>Nazi Concentration Camps to Mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day</i>	Dr Thomas Mc Grath (delivered twice due to demand)
2/3/20	<i>Should I Eat Meat?: Learning to Explore, Form and Express Moral Judgements (Without Shouting, Slamming the Door or Throwing Things!)</i>	Dr Sarah Otten

Collaboration and Social Awareness

One of the core values of Carlow College is to create opportunities to work together, both internally and externally, to contribute to the ethical development of local, national and global communities and society. Furthermore, Carlow College is committed to providing an inclusive working and learning environment, valuing diversity and fostering a culture where the rights and dignity of all its staff and learners are respected. Below are events that Carlow College led, or participated in, that promoted one of its key strategic objectives:

- *International Rohingya Remembrance Day (25 August 2019)*
 - The College hosted events for International Rohingya Remembrance Day which involved celebrations of the Rohingya culture and also included the research launch of ‘Welcome to Carlow: Ten years of Rohingya Refugee Settlement in Carlow’; this is a collaboration with Carlow County Development Partnership. The Remembrance Ceremony included speeches by civil society organisations and people from the Rohingya community, local, national and international. After a moment of silence, the Rohingya Flag was raised in honour of the lives that were lost in the Genocide of 2017. The event was a collaborative event organised by Carlow College, Rohingya Action Ireland, Carlow County Development Partnership, the TUI, Carlow Regional Youth Services, IT Carlow and Visual Carlow.
- *Failte Isteach (September 2019)*
 - *Failte Isteach* is a community project involving volunteers who provide free conversational English classes for migrants. *Failte Isteach* works at breaking down the barriers that migrants and communities face by extending the hand of friendship through conversational English classes. In collaboration with the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Carlow, the College began training a group of learners who had put their name forward to serve as a volunteer. However, the project came to a stop because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Once the restrictions are lifted it is hoped that the project will continue.
- *Twilight Group – International Conference on the Stigmatisation of Migrants (25 October 2019)*
 - Among the speakers at this conference were the ambassadors from Morocco, Lithuania, Poland and Moldova. Stephanie McDermott, a lecturer on the BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community Studies Programme, was invited as one of the keynote speakers addressing the delegates on Citizenship Rights and Activism and the role of Third-Level Institutions in welcoming migrants.

- *Voices from Direct Provision and the State that We Are in Conference* (8 November 2019)
 - This one-day conference was held at Carlow College to provide an opportunity to learn about the State's asylum system from people who are or have been through the asylum process.
- *Community Work Ireland Seminar 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities'* (18 November 2019)
 - Among the attendees of this seminar were community organisations, Carlow Public Participation Network, Carlow County Development Partnership, SICAP Carlow, Rohingya Action Ireland and Carlow College learners from the BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community Studies Programme. A key focus of the workshop was on exploring ways to make communities more sustainable and empowered.
- *Mass Rohingya Solidarity Rally* (6 December 2019)
 - Stephanie McDermott, a lecturer on the BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community Studies Programme, travelled with other delegates from Rohingya Action Ireland to join the 'Mass Rohingya Solidarity Rally' at the International Court of Justice in The Hague to support the case lodged by The Gambia to call Myanmar to account for the crime of Genocide against the Rohingya people. Stephanie spoke outside the court and at a debriefing afterwards on the importance of working together to see that justice is done for the Rohingya.
- *World Hijab Day* (3 February 2020)
 - Carlow College learners on the BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community Studies Programme organised a workshop for World Hijab Day in 2020. The day asked people to cover their heads with a scarf in an act of solidarity with Muslim women worldwide. Women, who have resettled in Carlow from Syria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan, Egypt and Rohingya also took part. Stories were exchanged and learners from Carlow College had the opportunity to learn how to wear the scarf.
- *Interreligious Study Day* (28 February 2020)
 - The Theology staff and learners enrolled on the Arts and Humanities / Social, Political and Community Studies degree programmes, along with theology learners from The Loyola Institute (TCD) and The Priory Institute (Tallaght), took part in an inter-religious study day which involved visits to the Irish Jewish Museum, the Clonskeagh Mosque, the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Ballsbridge, and the Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre in Kilmainham. Another inter-religious study day is planned for February 2022 which will include a visit to the Chester Beatty Library (Dublin).
- *International Women's Day* (8 March 2020)
 - The 2020 celebrations for International Women's Day comprised a week-long schedule of events. Celebrations commenced with the launch of a book *From Global to Local - Women's Narratives* which was a Carlow College collaboration with The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, St Catherine's Services, Carlow County Development Partnership, Carlow Further Education and Training College and Rohingya Action Ireland.

- Learner's on the BA (Hons) in Social, Political and Community hosted a number of events throughout the week to raise awareness on gender equality as part of their community-based practice for the Community Arts module.
- *County Carlow Migrant Integration and Intercultural Strategy, 2020 – 2024*
 - College Vice President, Helen Maher, is an active member of the Steering Committee that developed the [County Carlow Migrant Integration and Intercultural Strategy, 2020 – 2024](#). The Strategy was officially launched in January 2020 and the Steering Committee will continue to oversee implementation of the strategy.

Writer-in-Residence

During this reporting period, Carlow College's Creative Writing Partnership ('Write Here Write Now') with the Arts Office of Carlow County Council and Carlow County Library continued with the presence of two Writers-in-Residence on campus: poet, short-story writer and spoken word artist Colm Keegan, and poet and dramaturge Jessica Traynor. The Writer-in-Residence delivered 'The Writing Room' every week in the College as well as creating a unique capstone performative event from work generated by the participants.

For the 2019 / 2020 reporting period, there were two Carlow College learners, who were regular attendees of the Writing Room, that had their poems published. Additionally, the lecturer who teaches the Advanced Poetry Module at the College has incorporated the poetry by Colm Keegan into the module. Another important aspect of the programme is the high-level of engagement by part-time learners. Many part-time learners take the Creative Writing Module and are regulars of 'The Writing Room'. As a result, many of the part-time learners gain confidence in their writing and have submitted pieces for the Annual Literary Awards at the College.

Annual Literary Awards

Building on the awards of previous years, the Carlow College Annual Literary Awards took place on 9 March 2020. The purpose of the Annual Literary Awards is to provide the opportunity for the College's literary community to gather in a spirit of camaraderie and friendly competition to celebrate the best poetry and prose of the past year. For this reporting period, the distinguished poet asked to present the literary awards was the former Ireland Professor of Poetry, Paula Meehan. Upon her appointment as the Ireland Professor of Poetry, Meehan was praised as a poet of solidarity, whose work upheld the dignity of the human spirit and skilfully blended a shared and personal history. She served as Ireland Professor of Poetry from 2013 to 2016.

St Columbanus Medal

In 2018, Carlow College instituted the annual practice of awarding the medal which honours St Columbanus' legacy and contribution to the ecclesiastical and cultural life of sixth and seventh century Ireland and Europe. The St Columbanus Medal is awarded to any person or group that makes an outstanding contribution to the betterment of society. The recipients of the St Columbanus Medal to date have been acknowledged for their contribution to peace, migrants and refugees. In 2018, Dr Martin Mansergh was recognised for his outstanding contribution to peace on the island of Ireland. The awarding of the St Columbanus Medal to his Holiness Pope Francis in 2019 for leadership and compassion in recognition of the plight of migrants and refugees, is also reflective of the values that underpin the purpose of the award. In each context, the dedication and commitment demonstrated was exceptional and is very much aligned to Carlow College's mission, vision and practice of promoting equity and inclusion.

In 2020, President Michael D. Higgins was awarded the St Columbanus Medal for his many decades providing an intellectually critical and ethical analysis of the conditions which enable a more inclusive,

humane and just society from local to global level. President Higgins has acted with compassion, empathy and solidarity towards those who have been excluded in many different societies, from Ireland to Latin / Central America, the Middle East and beyond. His determined focus has in many instances ensured that those whose voices are disregarded both nationally and internationally are amplified through his unrelenting insistence that we pay attention. Social activists, human rights advocates and political representatives have been inspired by the compassion, empathy and solidarity which he has exhibited towards those who have been excluded. Carlow College appreciates that his determined focus has ensured that those whose voices are disregarded are heard, and the College noted his tireless commitment in responding to global challenges as exemplified in his awareness raising of the implications of climate change.

President Higgins was to receive the St Columbanus Medal at the 2019 / 2020 Graduation Ceremony, but owing to COVID-19 restrictions, he was awarded the medal virtually as part of the graduation ceremony.

2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

During the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year, Carlow College continued to use a variety of methods to promote and embed academic integrity. Stage 1 learners are introduced to the values of academic integrity in their mandatory Academic and Digital Skills module and all learners are reminded of these values through programme handbooks and resources on the VLE. Workshops and one-to-one sessions are provided by the Academic Resource Office and the Essay Doctor Service.

The College moved to online submission of practically all continuous assessment assignments at the beginning of the academic year which meant that this practice was already embedded before COVID-19. All assignments are submitted through Turnitin and corrected through the Turnitin Feedback Studio. Cover sheets for online submissions contain an academic integrity statement and require learners to certify that their work does not contain any unacknowledged material from other sources. Training in Turnitin Feedback Studio was provided for assessors and links to videos demonstrating how learners can access and use the feedback were placed on the VLE. Initial feedback indicates that learners appreciate being able to access marks and feedback virtually. The facility to submit assignments to a test Turnitin link in order to view the similarity report and take remedial action before final submission is being promoted as a useful learning tool.

In the run-up to take-home exams all assessors were asked to review their exam questions to ensure that they were specific to course content and ideally asking learners to draw on examples used in class and in class discussion. Answer booklets with mandatory academic integrity tick boxes were developed for upload through Turnitin. All learners received an email on the topic of academic integrity with links to the QQI page containing information on new legislations in this area. An additional guideline was prepared by the Office of the Registrar regarding the correction of take-home exams and sent to all assessors. Lecturers were offered one-to-one support in using Turnitin Feedback Studio for correction of take-home exams (see Part B, Section 2(vii) of this report).

The [*Plagiarism Policy*](#) (Version 3) was revised to include references to the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training (Amendment) Act 2019*. Explicit mention of Section 43A, which empowers QQI to prosecute those who facilitate academic cheating, was inserted into the policy.

Feedback from learners and assessors indicates a significant level of confidence in the integrity of online assessments and take-home exams.

Data Protection

The Data Protection function provides advice to the College with regard to its responsibilities under Data Protection laws. Recent activities have included: reviewing agreements and contracts; contributing to the Athena SWAN process; and input to policies and guidelines such as online teaching, research ethics and remote working. Training was provided to new staff, informing them of Data Protection principles, and the College's safeguards and procedures. An objective for the next reporting period is that ongoing work regarding records retention schedules are finalised, with a proposal that records destruction is authorised and documented.

3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

No.	<p style="text-align: center;">Relevant Objectives</p> <p><i>Note: Include reference to the relevant section of the preceding AQR, where applicable</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Planned Actions and Indicators</p> <p><i>Note: Include details of unit responsible, and how planned action will address the relevant strategic priority and/or reengagement advice/CINNTE recommendation.</i></p> <p><i>If the institution is preparing for cyclical review, include how the planned actions will address the relevant review objective(s).</i></p>
1.	Academic Workload Allocation Policy	Office of the Registrar – This objective relates to Recommendation 18 from the Programme Review and Revalidation Panel (2018). The Career Progression Working Group determined early on in its work that the Academic Workload Allocation Policy was the first identifiable objective to furthering this recommendation. The Office of the Registrar is responsible for completing the implementation plan and making proposal to this policy.
2.	White Paper – Review of the Remit for the Management Board and the Academic Council	President’s Office – This review was recommended by the Governing Body and relates directly to Objective 5: Governance and Organisation Structure of the Strategic Plan, 2017 – 2022. It further relates to Recommendation 1 made by the Re-Engagement Panel: ‘Given the size of the College and its existing staffing, the panel recommends reviewing the quantity of dedicated committees and their memberships with a view to streamlining committee activities.’ A Green Paper was completed in May 2020 and a Working Group was established to complete the White Paper at the end of the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year; changes will be implemented in the 2021 / 2022 Academic Year.
3.	Academic Framework Strategy	Strategic Development Committee – The Academic Framework Strategy identifies the core elements of Carlow College, St. Patrick’s current expertise in teaching, research, public and civic engagement. As a key objective, a more

		in-depth implementation plan with detailed targeted actions, indicators and timeframes will be developed in the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.
4.	Review and revise processes for module-level feedback	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee – This objective relates directly to Recommendation 3 by the Re-Engagement Panel. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee will revise the proposal made in March 2020 and pilot the revised electronic questionnaire for the Spring 2021 Semester.
5.	Formalisation of Union Recognition	HR and Union Stewards – This objective relates to Objective 5: Governance and Organisation Structure of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017 – 2022</i> . For the next reporting period, a formalised document will be drafted that progresses union engagement in the College.
6.	Review of Processes related to the SRMS	Information & Student Systems Manager – This objective relates to Objective 3: Information and Data Management Systems of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017 – 2022</i> . There are three defined objectives for the next reporting period to review: changing further processes to electronic over paper forms; review of reporting / evaluation of reports / actioning reports and review of academic processes which are managed through the SRMS.
7.	COVID-19 Contingency Planning	Office of the Registrar (Academic) and Director of Operations (Facilities / Government Guidelines) – This objective relates to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and the necessity of the College to adhere to Education Sector and Government legislation and guidelines.
8.	Athena SWAN	President's Office – This objective responds to Objective 2: College as Community of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017 – 2022</i> and the Academic Framework objective of equality, diversity and inclusion. The Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team, which was established to oversee this Project, will complete its work in the Spring (2021) and submit its application for the Athena SWAN Bronze Award under the first round of applications in 2021.
9.	New Programme Development	Strategic Development Committee and Programme Design Teams – This objective responds to Objective 1: Teaching and Learning and Objective 6: Collaborations and Partnerships of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017 – 2022</i> . It further responds to the Academic Framework objectives of teaching and research. The

		Postgraduate Diploma and MA in Irish Regional History is at an advanced stage to be validated by IT Carlow. Three undergraduate programmes will also be submitted to QQI for validation: BA (Hons) in Psychology; BA (Hons) in English, Media and Creative Arts and BA (Hons) in Philosophy, Politics and Sociology.
10.	Mid-Cycle Review	Quality Assurance Committee – This objective responds to the introduction of a Mid-Cycle Review for all academic programmes; this was introduced with the revised Quality Assurance Framework and was noted by the Re-Engagement Panel as a novel quality enhancement practice.
11.	Societal and Community Engagement	College Staff – This objective responds to Objectives 1, 2, 6 and 7 of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017–2022</i> and the Academic Framework objective of public and civic engagement. Moreover, this all-encompassing objective embraces the College’s Visions statement which states that ‘Carlow College will educate, engage and inspire its students through the provision of transformational learning and teaching experiences’.
12.	Review flexible and remote working policies and procedures.	HR – This objective responds to Objective 5: Governance and Organisational Structure of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017–2022</i> . It is accepted by the College that remote and flexible working will feature prominently in the post-COVID era; as such, an objective for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year is to develop a permanent flexible and remote working policy that is fit-for-purpose.
13.	Review / revise policies and procedures as indicated by policy review schedule	Quality Assurance Officer – This objective responds to Objective 5: Governance and Organisational Structure of the <i>Strategic Plan, 2017–2022</i> . All legacy policies, aside from one, have been aligned to the <i>Policy on Policies</i> and are now operating under a cyclical review cycle. The Quality Assurance Office reports on all policy development in the College.

3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods

Carlow College, St. Patrick's does not have any formal programme reviews and revalidations scheduled for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year. As part of its Quality Assurance Framework, every programme validated in 2018 is scheduled to submit an Internal Mid-Cycle Programme Review Report at the end of the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year.

3.2.1 Reviews planned for Next Reporting Period

Unit to be reviewed	Date of planned review	Date of last review
N / A		

3.2.2 Reviews planned beyond Next Reporting Period

The schedule of reviews beyond the next reporting period can be found [here](#).

4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

Information Transformation – The Road to Data Analytics at Carlow College, St. Patrick’s

During this reporting period, Carlow College, St. Patrick’s placed an institutional priority on data analytics, which became even more relevant in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the necessity to implement remote learning. In particular, the College needed a strategy to monitor how learners were engaging with studies while learning off campus. Carlow College, St. Patrick’s, began the Learner Information and Retention Officer (LIRO) Pilot Project at the start of the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year to trial how the organisation could improve on monitoring learner attrition and applying a proactive approach to flagging ‘at risk’ learners. The LIRO role was the first point of contact for addressing learner issues / grievances, it was the view of the College that this required a pastoral approach. However, another important element of this role was based around data analytics. It is acknowledged that there is significant potential for the College to utilise the increasing volume of data within its systems and the LIRO role plays a significant role in this.

Collaborative work was undertaken within various departments to look at how the College could use the patterns in its data to identify whether a learner was logging onto Moodle to access course material to monitor learner attendance at online classes and assignment submission. The SRMS was a fundamental system to this exercise and the LIRO role was a key team member to correlate the information between the SRMS and Moodle to compile weekly reports, outlining learners who were showing potential signs of disengagement. These signs were monitored through data on attendance, Moodle engagement, assignment submission or any other correspondence from relevant college personal which affected learner engagement. All information was correlated into a weekly report to show an overview of learner engagement and elaborated on through separate reports to the relevant Programme Directors. Each section of the report was then actioned by the relevant team member to ensure all data was up to date (i.e. a learner who was listed as deferred was removed from a class list / assessment list).

Working within a wider team, the College reviewed processes around communication and management of learner records to ensure there was transparency and clarity of learner circumstances for all relevant college staff. Very quickly it was evident who needed support and how the College could implement preventative measures to support learner attrition. The LIRO further identified learners who should be contacted by phone or email to check in on how they were getting on. This was a subtle call in the context of wellbeing and the learner was reassured that this was not to reprimand them for poor attendance or lack of engagement. This also allowed the LIRO to remind the learner of the support services available to them and, depending on the nature of the call, they were also able to refer the learner to the different support services within the College. If the issue was related to fees or issues around carrying credits, the relevant college personal was notified to assist the learner with these specific queries. This proactive approach to supporting learners resulted in a demonstrative improvement in the overall retention rates from the 2018 / 2019 Academic Year to the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year and has resulted in several learners continuing with their studies through the support of the College. The College’s overall retention rate improved by 11%, from 82% (2018 / 2019) to 93% (2019 / 2020).

In recognition of the significant work undertaken by Carlow College, St. Patrick’s for learner engagement, Ellucian, who are the providers of our SRMS (Quercus), became aware of our use of record management for data analytics and were interested in promoting the College’s innovative use of learner data. Ellucian asked the College to take part in a campaign to help generate the message of awareness of data through SRMS to their other customers within higher education, particularly in the UK. As part of a project undertaken by Ellucian to identify return on investment for Quercus, representatives from

Carlow College, St. Patrick's spoke at a number of Ellucian customer sessions, informing Quercus users of the potential for learner engagement reporting and how this has resulted in improvement in learner attrition statistics in addition to showing transparency and clarity on learner and staff progress through online learning. The response from the other higher education institutions was positive and the institutions demonstrated an interest in the key indicators of the data analytics framework used by Carlow College, St. Patrick's and how the College had developed a transparent process for the proactive provision of learner support.

Based on how successful the LIRO Project has been, in addition to the increased focus on learner engagement through online learning, the LIRO role is now considered a permanent role within the College. Once the Project was completed, the decision was made to embed this role to the wider strategy plan of the College with a focus on further utilisation of learner data to inform decision-making and strategic planning. The LIRO role compiles an end of semester and end of year report which is circulated to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee and the Management Board with a review of learner engagement findings, initiatives, and statistics. The report also includes several recommendations to address factors which contribute to learners withdrawing from their college course. At the end of the 2019 / 2020 Academic Year, such recommendations included summer workshops, college preparation sessions, course information sessions in addition to a wide range of online support tools. The presence of the LIRO role, and use of data analytics, has now enabled Carlow College, St. Patrick's to use a proactive approach instead of a reactive approach to learner engagement which has positively impacted our attrition rates, which has been especially beneficial during the COVID-19 Pandemic.