

# **St. Patrick's College, Thurles**



## **Institutional Review SELF-STUDY**

**March 2009**

# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Data Sources</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Student Feedback .....	1
Staff Feedback .....	1
Management Feedback .....	2
Stakeholder Feedback .....	2
Quality Assurance – Specific Review Techniques .....	2
<b>Objective One – Public Confidence</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Analysis of Public Confidence</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Improvement Plan .....	4
<b>Objective Two – Strategic Planning &amp; Governance</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Strategic Planning</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Governance</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Improvement Plan .....	7
<b>Objective Three – Quality Assurance</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Element 1 Policy and Procedures for QA</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Improvement Plan .....	9
<b>Element 2 Approval, Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1 New Programme Approval Procedures.....	10
Improvement Plan .....	10
2.2 Programmatic Review .....	11
Improvement Plan .....	12
2.3 Programme Monitoring.....	12
Improvement Plan .....	12
<b>Element 3 - Assessment of Students</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1 Procedures for Examination Boards.....	13
Improvement Plan .....	14
3.2 Procedures for External Examiners.....	14
Improvement Plan .....	14

3.3 Procedures for Learner Appeals.....	14
Improvement Plan .....	15
3.4 Procedures for Information about Assessment.....	15
Improvement Plan .....	15
<b>Element 4 – Quality Assurance of Teaching Staff.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Staff Recruitment Procedures.....	16
Mechanisms in place to support CPD .....	16
Feedback on Teaching Performance .....	17
Improvement Plan .....	18
<b>Element 5 – Learning Resources &amp; Student Support.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Learning Resources.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Library Service.....	19
Information Technology Service.....	19
<b>Student Support Services.....</b>	<b>20</b>
Counselling Service.....	20
Chaplaincy.....	20
Student Mentoring.....	20
Educational Support .....	20
Financial Support .....	20
Career Guidance Support .....	21
Disability support .....	21
Open Door Policy.....	21
Improvement Plan .....	21
<b>Element 6 – Information Systems.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Information Systems at St. Patrick’s College.....	22
Development of an MIS .....	22
Improvement Plan .....	23
<b>Element Seven - Public Information.....</b>	<b>24</b>
College Website .....	24
Advertisement on Qualifax and CAO website.....	26
Advertisements in Newspapers .....	26
Provision of Pamphlets.....	26
College Magazine.....	26
Informal Mechanisms.....	26

Analysis of Feedback .....	26
Improvement Plan .....	27
<b>Objective Four – Qualifications Framework, Access, Transfer &amp; Progression..</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Access.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Credit and Lifelong Learning .....	29
<b>Transfer and Progression .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Improvement Plan .....	29
<b>Objective Six – Recommendations.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Plans for Improvement .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>New Developments .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Improvement Plan.....</b>	<b>31</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1- Qualifications of Academic Staff .....	16
Table 2 – Internal Staff Training & Workshops .....	17
Table 3- Evaluation of St. Patrick’s College Website.....	25

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Improvement Plan	31
Appendix 2: HETAC Feedback – Quality Assurance manual	35
Appendix 3: Letters of Support – Programmatic Review Dry Run (Expert Panel)	37
Appendix 4: Questionnaires	41
Appendix 5: Short Certificate Programmes	62
Appendix 6: Academic Job Application Form	64
Appendix 7: Staff Details	74
Appendix 8: Staff CPD / Publications / Conferences	78
Appendix 9: Staff CV's	85
Appendix 10: Library Services Evaluation Form	160
Appendix 11: Student Support Services Evaluation Form	163
Appendix 12: Transfer & Progression Routes	166

**(Appendix 4 – 12 provided as a soft copy)**

# Introduction

Providers of higher education have primary responsibility for quality assurance. This principle is laid down in Irish law and in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* in the European Higher Education Area. A core element of contemporary quality assurance practice is external review of the institution as a whole. Having agreed the Terms of Reference with HETAC, St. Patrick's College undertook a combined Programmatic and Institutional Review self-study from October 2008 to March 2009. As this was the first Programmatic and Institutional Review carried out at the College it was felt prudent to employ the services of two external consultants to facilitate the process. Institutional Review guidelines provided by HETAC were followed to ensure that a thorough and systematic review was undertaken.

This document presents the findings of the Institutional Review self-study. The Programmatic Review self-study documentation along with relevant Programme Documents are provided as supplementary documentation. The findings for each of the objectives of Institutional Review are presented (with the exception of objective five – Delegated Authority). A summary improvement plan is presented for each objective, whilst a detailed improvement plan is presented in Appendix 1.

## Data Sources

The Institutional Review process involved extensive consultation with students, staff, management and external stakeholders. A list of techniques used to formulate the self-study report is presented below (a copy of the questionnaires is provided in Appendix 4):

### Student Feedback

- i. **Student Modular/Course Evaluation Form:** students were invited to comment on the courses as a whole e.g. content; presentation; organisation; the quality of the learning experience; modes of assessment; resources for the courses; intellectual challenge; strengths of the courses and recommendations for improvement.
- ii. **Student Questionnaire:** each year group gave an overall anonymous assessment of the content and assessment methods of each module.
- iii. **Student Focus Groups:** student focus groups were an integral element of the Programmatic Review. They provided students with an opportunity to present their views of the programmes in a systematic and open setting.
- iv. **Graduate Destination Survey Form:** graduates were asked to provide details of current employment, the value of their qualification and whether they would return to the College for further studies.
- v. **Student Online Questionnaire:** all students were invited to fill in an anonymous online questionnaire which related specifically to Institutional Review issues. The questionnaire covered areas in relation to public confidence (objective one), assessment issues (objective three element 3) and student support services and resources (objective three element 5).

### Staff Feedback

- i. **Annual Academic Staff Questionnaire:** these questionnaires were distributed to all academic staff at the close of the 2007/08 academic year. Feedback was provided on areas such as: the management of the organisation; physical resources; administration support and on the strengths and weaknesses of the module taught.

- ii. **Staff Focus Groups:** these focus groups allowed for an in-depth and structured discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme under review in an open and constructive setting.
- iii. **Staff Workshops:** all staff were invited to attend staff workshops. The main focus of the workshops was on objectives one, two and three.

### Management Feedback

- i. **Operational Management Workshop:** all members of the Operational Management Team attended a series of workshops. These workshops covered elements of each objective.
- ii. **Stream Leader Questionnaire:** all Stream Leaders were given the opportunity to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. This questionnaire dealt specifically with element 2 and element 3 of objective three.

### Stakeholder Feedback

- i. **Graduate Employer Survey Form:** feedback was obtained from stakeholders in relation to: how well the graduates' qualification assisted them in employment; their professional strengths and professional areas for improvement.
- ii. **Stakeholder Survey Form:** stakeholders were asked to provide details on their view of the College; their opinion on the image of the College portrayed to the public and also their view on the level of information provided / available to the public.
- iii. **External Examiner Reports:** feedback from External Examiner Reports proved very useful and was taken into consideration where appropriate.

### Quality Assurance – Specific Review Techniques

A culmination of the data gathering processes which are outlined above informed each of the five objectives under review. Additional review techniques were used to review objective three – Quality Assurance:

- An **external desk-based review** of the Quality Assurance manual was carried out by HETAC and elicited very positive feedback (see Appendix 2). Minor amendments were made to the document. The revised document has been resubmitted to HETAC.
- An **internal desk-based review** determined the operation of quality assurance procedures to review if the procedures adhered to European Standards and Guidelines<sup>1</sup>.
- **Document analysis** verified if quality assurance procedures were carried out on the ground.
- **Extensive consultation** with staff, management, students and key stakeholders was used to measure the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. Given that the Programmatic and Institutional Review were carried out simultaneously, some of this consultation was carried out within the Programmatic Review methodology.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2007, Helsinki, 2nd edition.

## Objective One – Public Confidence

The aim of objective one is to “*enhance public confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the institution and the standards of the awards made*”. An analysis of public confidence incorporated feedback from internal and external stakeholders.

The College provides information to the public through both direct and indirect contact. Programme details are posted to all the Guidance Career Guidance teachers And additionally the College website can be accessed for more information. Representatives attend the CAO conference, the higher options exhibition and local or regional careers exhibitions. School visits are organised and interested prospective students are offered individual tours of the College. Supervisors of Teaching Practice attend induction and feedback meetings where they are invited to provide information to schools and accept feedback for referral to the College. Qualifax is another resource used to publicise the College. Advertisements are placed in strategic publications and local radio has also been utilised.

### Analysis of Public Confidence

Public confidence is essential to the development and growth of the College. It is fundamental that all stakeholders as well as the general public have confidence in the quality of education and training provided by the College.

As part of the Graduate Employer Survey Form employers were asked to evaluate the employment opportunities and the professional strengths of graduates of the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies*. The feedback received about graduates was extremely positive. Employers believe that the qualification assisted graduates greatly in their employment opportunities. Employers stated that graduates demonstrated such attributes as: “*good rapport with students*”, and “*enthusiasm and energy in the classroom*”. The results have indicated that public confidence is high amongst these stakeholders.

Business teachers, Religious Studies teachers and Career Guidance teachers also completed a Stakeholder Survey Forms which examined stakeholders opinion of the College. In general the results were very positive; stakeholders indicated that “*staff and students are very professional*” and “*friendly*”. The College is referred to as an establishment which “*seeks educational excellence*” and which “*adapts well to change*”. It is also seen as being proactive and forward thinking. Stakeholders were also asked if their view of the College differed from the image portrayed to the general public via media, promotional material and the website. One stakeholder said that the “*P.R. is excellent*” however, two stakeholders indicated that not many people know about the courses on offer at the College, “*St. Patrick’s is invisible for the most part which is a pity*”. There was a suggestion that the College should make a promotional DVD available to all Career Guidance teachers.

Efforts have been made to increase the number of applications with a view to raising the CAO points on an incremental basis thus raising the College profile and public confidence. The 2009 figure shows an increase of 23% compared with 3.4% applying for Teacher Training nationally.

Public confidence is also measured by feedback from the twenty-eight Teaching Practice Supervisors who report on their experience with school authorities and co-operating

teachers. Comments were largely positive with schools expressing a willingness to accept students in the future as a result of the perceived high quality of their most recent student teachers. The supervisors also report on their own experience of induction and their school visits. The response is very positive in particular in relation to their view of the College structure, course content and teaching.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Continue to represent the College at CAO Conferences.
- Promote the College at teacher seminars where possible.
- Student teachers to provide information about the College at schools.
- Research the possibility of hosting a conference to increase the profile of the College.
- Increase the demand for the programme and consequently CAO points for the programmes.

## Objective Two – Strategic Planning & Governance

The aim of objective two is “*to contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance in the institution*”.

### Strategic Planning

St. Patrick’s College are currently in the process of developing a new five year Strategic Plan (2009-2014). The initiative was taken to develop a new more encompassing and more detailed plan as it was felt the institution and stakeholders would benefit from the clear focus and direction the plan would provide. The revised plan will be instrumental in:

- Providing a clear direction and vision for the College for the next five years
- Assisting the College in pacing its growth e.g. introduction of new programmes
- Enhancing the link between decision making and strategic planning
- Reacting to changes in the external environment

A strategic planning committee was established in December 2008. Staff meetings are held to inform of developments in the strategic planning process and invite and encourage feedback and suggestions. A collaborative approach has been adopted which it is hoped will instil a sense of ownership of the plan.

The committee has researched and reviewed strategic plans from other Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) and is utilising this research to aid the development of the most appropriate and effective type of Strategic Plan for the College. The plan will have clearly stated goals/strategies and will include detailed aims and objectives around these goals. Mechanisms for monitoring the progress around each goal will be identified as will the time frame in which each goal should be achieved. These mechanisms are crucial for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and performance of the aspired goals. Responsibility will be assigned for each goal and the associated monitoring. In this respect it is important that the assigned staff members remain abreast of changes in the environment that prohibit or inhibit development.

The following are the areas of strategic focus that will form the basis of the new Strategic Plan. Monitoring and evaluation of these goals will ensure quality:

**Area 1 - Contribution to Society Strategy:** Changing societal needs will be examined with a view to broadening access and contribution to a wider community.

**Area 2 - Human Resources Strategy:** Aims and objectives will be developed around the existing and future needs of staff both in terms of recruitment and continuous professional development.

**Area 3 - Infrastructural Resources Strategy:** The development of a broader prospectus and a larger student body will necessitate further infrastructural developments for which planning has commenced .

**Area 4 - Strategic Alliance Strategy:** The College currently collaborates with Tipperary Institute on its delivery of the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies*. Plans to identify partnership opportunities that would be beneficial to the College and stakeholders are being explored. Relationship building with local bodies and enterprises boards are being investigated. The College would also be open to explore potential for further collaboration with other HEIs.

**Area 5 – Programme Strategy:** Major emphasis will be placed on maintaining high standards of quality regarding the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* programme. The College aims to commence a *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Irish and Religious Studies* pending the approval of the Teaching Council. The pace of growth will be monitored so as quality is not compromised. The lifelong learner is also being considered in terms of the Strategic Plan. The College are in the process of developing an *Postgraduate/Masters in Special Educational Needs*. A number of night-classes are currently offered at the College. A goal of the plan is to identify areas of demand in this area, which have relevance to the College's ethos and to target this market appropriately. Details of short certificate programmes and numbers attending are outlined in Appendix 5.

**Area 6 - Advertising Strategy:** The College hopes to increase and improve its profile both locally and nationally. This will involve remodelling of the website; increased coverage in newspapers; continued representation at Educational conferences and schools and more targeted advertising.

**Area 7 - Teaching Practice & Supervision Strategy:** Quality of Teaching Practice and quality of supervision is at the core of this strategy.

**Area 8 - Funding Strategy:** Sources of external funding in addition to student-generated income will be examined.

A vision statement is currently being developed as part of the Strategic Plan. The existing mission statement is still seen as very fitting and suitable but it may be updated in light of the new Strategic Plan.

## **Governance**

Management endeavour to engage both full-time and part-time staff in the decision making processes in the College. Staff meetings are held on a monthly basis and regular Programme Board meetings ensure staff involvement. Minutes of staff and Programme Board meetings are recorded and made available to the relevant people. Consultation with staff through workshops have ascertained staff satisfaction with their involvement in the decision making process.

The Board of Trustees are involved in decision making on an ongoing basis. The President liaises with them and communicates decisions to management. Meetings with the Board of Trustees take place on a formal basis as required. They are involved in strategic planning at a high level and are privy to all major strategic decisions.

**Improvement Plan**

- Develop a vision for the College.
- Continue to embed quality in all activities.
- Outline the methods used in monitoring the progress of the Strategic Plan and in determining the effectiveness and usefulness of strategic planning in the Quality Assurance manual.
- Assign responsibility for monitoring the goals of the Strategic Plan to appropriate staff members.

## Objective Three – Quality Assurance

As a result of developments in the European Higher Education Area, objective three of Institutional Review will be based on Part One of the *European Standards and Guidelines* for quality assurance<sup>2</sup>. How the Institution reviews the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures for the “seven elements” of the European standards and guidelines will be explicitly addressed including:

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance;
2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards;
3. Assessment of students;
4. Quality assurance of teaching staff;
5. Learning resources and support;
6. Information systems;
7. Public information.

### ELEMENT 1 POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR QA

The provision of a Quality Assurance manual (developed in line with National Framework of Qualifications, European developments and HETAC policies) has enabled the College to structure all quality assurance procedures in a formal manner. St. Patrick’s College have outlined their commitment to quality and this commitment is evident in every element of their activities. All staff have responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of the highest standards of quality and quality assurance is ultimately governed by the College Patron, Board of Trustees, President and management team. The Academic Council assists in the planning, coordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College and additionally, sets, maintains and develops the academic standards of the courses. Feedback from HETAC on the Quality Assurance manual has been very affirmative (See Appendix 2).

The Quality Assurance manual has recently been published on the College website. Details pertaining to quality procedures are also available in the Staff Handbook. The mission statement is displayed in a number of places throughout the College.

The preparation of the Quality Assurance manual has also been instrumental in cultivating a quality culture. A quality culture is promoted through measuring and monitoring quality in the delivery of programmes. The need to formally state how culture is defined internally has also been recognised and will be carried out as part of the improvement process.

A definition of quality along with key indicators of quality would add to the value of the Quality manual. One way in which quality is currently defined is in terms of stakeholder perceptions e.g. how staff, students and external stakeholders view the College. St. Patrick’s College is committed to responding to stakeholder feedback and quality assurance procedures will be updated as the need for change and improvements to existing processes arise.

---

<sup>2</sup> “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2007, Helsinki, 2nd edition.

A 'Quality Policy' is available and is referred to in the Quality Assurance manual as "Commitment of St. Patrick's College to quality assurance". The policy states a commitment to providing the highest level of third level education; ensuring quality of programmes; policies; procedures; services and facilities.

Various mechanisms are used to ensure quality is paramount in all areas of the College. These mechanisms enable and ensure the involvement of learners and other stakeholders in the quality system. Partly as a result of the size and culture of the College, lecturers and management are extremely accessible to students. Students are encouraged to provide feedback on the quality of teaching and learning provided through surveys and through student representatives who attend Programme Board meetings. Similarly, these forums are also used to involve academic staff in the quality system.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Clearly state the Colleges 'Quality Policy' in the Quality Assurance manual.
- Outline and define the 'culture' of St. Patrick's College in the Quality Assurance manual.
- Define 'Quality' in the Quality Assurance manual and incorporate a list of the key indicators of quality.

## **ELEMENT 2 APPROVAL, MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES**

The European Standard relating to quality assurance of programme development, review and monitoring in Higher Education states that *“Institutions should have formal mechanisms in place for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards”*. The confidence of students and other stakeholders in Higher Education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

### **2.1 New Programme Approval Procedures**

To date new programmes have been developed after a need for a specific programme is identified. After consultation amongst the management team an expert is employed to research the area, in consultation with external stakeholders. Based on the research results, the resource implications, the financial outlay and the demand for the programme a decision is taken whether or not to have a programme document prepared for submission to HETAC. The current Strategic Plan takes cognisance of programme development. The College strives to *“advance the scope and quality of academic programmes and to increase the number of subject options available to students”* and also *“to develop a number of relevant postgraduate courses in key areas.”*

There are currently two programmes awaiting approval, namely the *Postgraduate Diploma/Masters in Special Educational Needs* and *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Irish and Religious Studies*. The former was proposed in early 2008. Currently it is being revised for re-submission to HETAC for accreditation. The latter is awaiting approval from the Teaching Council having been awarded Level 8 status by HETAC. It was first proposed in late 2007.

In keeping with the values and principles underpinning the National Framework of Qualifications, St. Patrick’s College wishes to promote lifelong learning especially through its aspirations to develop a Postgraduate Diploma/M.A. St. Patrick’s College reserves approximately 20% of new first year places for mature students.

### **Improvement Plan**

- The management team will continue to identify, research and develop new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes based on perceived needs.

## 2.2 Programmatic Review

The current quality assurance procedures in place for the Programmatic Review of existing programmes comply with European Standards as well as the guidelines which have been prescribed by HETAC. The current Programmatic and Institutional Reviews are being undertaken as one combined review. This process commenced in October 2008. The goals and objectives of Programmatic Review are clearly documented in the Colleges quality assurance procedures. It is the view of the Programmatic Review Team and management, that these goals and objectives were successfully met. This view was corroborated by an External Peer Review Panel (selected based on HETAC guidelines), who undertook a Programmatic Review dry-run session in February 2009 (see Appendix 3 for letters of support received from each member of this panel). All programmes that require Programmatic Review have been reviewed.

The *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* was validated by HETAC in June 2004 and the first cohort of students began in September 2004. A thorough Programmatic Review was carried out on this programme as part of the current Institutional Review. The self-study process involved systematic consultation with students, staff, key stakeholders and management. The Programmatic Review methodology outlined in the Quality Assurance manual was used to carry out the self-study. The self-study document, along with the revised programme document, is available as a supplementary document.

The *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Irish and Religious Studies* is not operational yet. It has been approved by HETAC and is currently under review by the Teaching Council. The Education and Religious Studies elements were designed as mirror images of the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* and as such the review of these elements has been captured and approved amendments will be implemented accordingly. As the Irish element has so recently been approved by HETAC and hasn't been operational it has not been subject to an extensive review process. A revised programme document is provided which contains the revised ACS, assessment schedule and module descriptors for the Irish stream of the programme.

In relation to the *B.A. Theology* degree, a strategic decision was taken in November 2008 by the management team of St. Patrick's College to discontinue the programme in light of diminished demand. It was agreed with HETAC that no further students would be registered on the existing programme. As such this programme has not been subject to the Programmatic Review process.

There is no formal procedure in place for retiring programmes. Notwithstanding this, management has made strategic decisions to retire programmes where there was no longer adequate demand for such programmes.

The effectiveness of the prescribed Programmatic Review procedure was evaluated by the Stream Leaders. Feedback on the methodology utilised to carry out the self-study was positive. Stream Leaders were happy with the approach undertaken and were satisfied with the management of the internal review process.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Programmatic Review should commence well in advance of a self-study completion deadline – this would alleviate some of the time strain on Stream Leaders and lecturers.

### **2.3 Programme Monitoring**

All programmes are monitored by a Programme Board which meets three times each academic year. Programme Board members include, ex officio, the President, Registrar and Academic Coordinator, in addition to programme lecturing staff and one student representative per year group. Minutes are recorded at each Programme Board meeting and are subsequently circulated to all Programme Board members. The main focus of Programme Board is to monitor the ongoing delivery of programmes, to address issues raised by student representatives and to seek to continually enhance the programme.

It is the view of Stream Leaders and management that Programme Board meetings are an effective means of communication between lecturing staff and students, given that it is the ultimate forum for discussing academic matters. It is the forum at which students may seek clarity around policies and regulations and give an insight into the challenges they face as students of the programme. In many instances ambiguities are addressed immediately, if there are other issues which need to be discussed at length, Programme Board members have an opportunity to explore possible solutions to the issues raised during the meeting and provide feedback to students at a later stage.

Programme Board members are informed on an ongoing basis of CAO applications statistics, examinations statistics and any other reports which are of relevance.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Actively encourage all lecturing staff to attend Programme Board meetings.
- Actively encourage student representatives to attend and contribute at Programme Board meetings.

## **ELEMENT 3 - ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS**

The European Standard states that “*Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently*”. The European guidelines refer to, inter alia: assessment w.r.t. learning outcomes; appropriateness; clear and published marking criteria; be undertaken by people that understand the role of assessment; where possible, not rely on the judgments of single examiners; consequences of examination regulations; regulations covering student absence, illness and mitigating circumstances; verification checks and informing students of assessment strategies.

### **3.1 Procedures for Examination Boards**

All Programme Board members are invited to attend preliminary and final Examination Board meetings. External Examiners attend the final Examination Board meeting. A representative from HETAC is also invited to attend.

After all examination scripts have been corrected and in advance of the Examination Board meeting at least three examination scripts from each module are sent to the External Examiner for review. These scripts are a representative sample of the scripts for that examination. The External Examiner’s comments are presented to the Stream Leaders and lecturing staff. The following documentation is available for External Examiners prior to the Examination Board meeting and it is also available for reference during the Examination Board meeting in addition to the examination broadsheets.

1. Medical Certificates and Attendance records
2. Special Needs assistance provided during the examinations
3. Correspondence from students regarding extenuating circumstances
4. Invigilator’s reports if appropriate
5. Continuous Assessments

At the beginning of the Examination Board meeting staff are advised of the confidential nature of the proceedings. At the end of the meeting the final versions of the examination broadsheets, which are signed by all Examiners, are filed in the Registrar’s Office. All copies of the documentation circulated at the meeting are collected. Copies of the examination broadsheets are then shredded.

In the past where there was conflicting opinion at the Examination Board meeting the External Examiner’s advice was sought and their recommendation was adopted.

When External Examiner reports become available a copy is sent to all Stream Leaders. When a student appeals an examination result, their examination script is sent to the External Examiner for review. Any amendments to marks following this review or amendments made resulting from a recheck of the marks aggregated on a student’s examination script are communicated to the Stream Leader and also to the student in writing.

Feedback from Stream Leaders and lecturing staff suggests that clarity around Marks and Standards is required at Examination Board meetings.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Management will continue to encourage all staff to attend both the preliminary and final Examination Board meetings.
- To pilot the effectiveness of presenting examination results electronically at the Examination Board meeting.
- To provide clarity around Marks and Standards at the Examination Board meeting.

### **3.2 Procedures for External Examiners**

External Examiners for all programmes are appointed by the Academic Council. The role of the External Examiner is to provide an objective view of the adequacy of standards at all levels of examinations in the College. In accordance with HETAC Marks and Standards, all External Examiners are required to submit a report to the Registrar following the summer Examination Board meeting.

The procedures and criteria for selecting External Examiners are clearly documented in the Quality Assurance manual and to date have been very effective. External Examiners are appointed for a three year period. There is currently one External Examiner for each of the three streams of the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies*. External Examiners, on appointment, are provided with the following documentation by the Registrar's Office:

1. A copy of the Duties of the External Examiner
2. A copy of Approved Course Schedule
3. Module descriptors
4. External Examiners Report Form

Learner satisfaction with assessment procedures has also been evaluated as part of the Programmatic Review process. Students were asked to complete online questionnaires detailing satisfaction with information provided about assessment and also the appeals process. Information pertaining to these two issues is discussed in elements 3.3 and 3.4 below.

Overall, the External Examination process is seen as an effective, thorough and fair process. The External Examiner provides an insight into how the subject area is marked in other third level Institutions, thus providing a benchmark for St. Patrick's College.

### **Improvement Plan**

- To keep External Examiner policies up to date and in line with HETAC guidelines.

### **3.3 Procedures for Learner Appeals**

St. Patrick's College applies HETAC's prescribed guidelines pertaining to Appeals and Re-checks of examination results. Students who have failed modules are initially advised to make every effort to attend on the day of the 'post-mortem' of results to discuss their examination performance in detail with the lecturer concerned. This day is scheduled approximately one week after the examination results have been made available to students. Following this 'post-mortem' of results, students have an additional week to

appeal their result. The student concerned must outline his/her reason(s) in writing for requesting a re-check of results and/or an appeal. Guidelines specifying appeals procedures and the relevant grounds for appeal are clearly specified in the Quality Assurance manual and the Student Handbook. In addition students are advised of the appeals procedure when they receive their examination results.

When an examination result is appealed, the student's examination script is sent to the External Examiner along with the letter from the student specifying the grounds for appeal. In general, in the past, appeals have arisen where there were extenuating circumstances which were not made known to the Examination Board at the time of their deliberations. To date examination results have not been adjusted as a result of appeals by students. The results of all appeal applications are communicated in writing by the Registrar to the student concerned and the Stream Leader.

Learner satisfaction with the appeals process is currently captured on an informal basis. A formal evaluation of student satisfaction was carried out for the Institutional Review process by means of an online student questionnaire. 11.1% of students have appealed a subject (based on 45 students who answered this question). When asked if they were happy with the information provided about the appeals process, the majority of students felt that further information and clarification about the process could have been made available.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Students will be advised that the standard application form will be required for the purpose of appealing or re-checking an examination result. This is currently available on the website.
- Further guidelines will be provided to students in relation to the appeals process

### **3.4 Procedures for Information about Assessment**

At the beginning of each academic year students are advised to consult the Student Handbook with regard to the module descriptors and the assessment schedule for each module. In addition programme lecturers meet with relevant Stream Leaders to plan a schedule of continuous assessment. The Academic Coordinator agrees on a schedule of continuous assessment, with the Stream Leaders. This is provided to students each September. The continuous assessment policy is currently under revision in an effort to streamline the policy across all streams of the programme.

As part of the Institutional Review process student satisfaction with assessment was measured via an online survey. While some students feel that the information provided in relation to assessment is adequate, others feel that more clarity is necessary. In general students felt that details pertaining to aggregated continuous assessment should be made clearer at the beginning of each year.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Lecturers to clarify for students the breakdown of continuous assessment for each module, at the beginning of the academic year.
- A clear outline of how the modules are weighted will be provided in the Student Handbook.
- Continuous assessment policies are currently being revised.

## ELEMENT 4 – QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING STAFF

The European Standard for quality assurance of teaching staff states that “*Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews and commented upon in reports*”. The Institutional Review at the College incorporated an examination of:

- Staff recruitment procedures
- Mechanisms in place to support CPD
- Feedback on teaching performance

### Staff Recruitment Procedures

The Academic Council is responsible for the selection of an interview panel. The panel normally comprises of the President, the Registrar, the Academic Coordinator and at least one external member at senior management level in another third-level institution. To assure the highest calibre of teaching staff, the Quality Assurance manual states that posts will be advertised internationally via appropriate online recruitment websites. Even though no full-time academic posts have arisen since the formulation of this aspect of quality assurance, the College is committed to such a recruitment process in the future. To ensure adequate accessibility, particularly in instances of international applications, application forms will be posted on the College website, enabling both national and international applicants to fill in application forms online. A copy of the current academic job application form is available in Appendix 6.

In the case of academic posts, the preferred minimum academic requirement for candidates is a Masters Degree or a Postgraduate qualification or relevant professional experience. The breakdown of qualifications for teaching staff on the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* is presented in Table 1 (figures are inclusive of the Academic Coordinator and the Registrar). It is important to note that some staff members hold more than one qualification. A summary of staff qualifications is provided in Appendix 7. The staff recruitment procedures currently in place are considered to be extremely effective. The College will strive to maintain high standards of teaching in the future.

**Table 1- Qualifications of Academic Staff**

Qualification	Number of Staff
MA	15
MSc	4
PGD	4
MBS	1
PhD	3
H.Dip.	15

### Mechanisms in place to support CPD

The importance and value of supporting the Continued Professional Development (CPD) and training needs of staff is recognised to be hugely important. Staff members are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning; to undertake further studies; to attend

conferences and to publish papers in national and international peer-reviewed journals. Details of staff CPD e.g. research, publications and conference proceedings are provided in Appendix 8. Academic staff can request academic leave (for a duration of up to one academic year) in order to pursue more extensive research, including, for example, the completion of a Doctoral thesis or the production of a substantial piece of academic writing. The College also provides a number of bursaries for staff wishing to attend academic conferences in their chosen areas of expertise. To date a number of workshops have taken place internally to facilitate staff training (see Table 2 below). Staff members have also attended workshops and training external to the College, details of which can be seen in individual CV's (Appendix 9).

**Table 2 – Internal Staff Training & Workshops**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Provider</b>
2008	Designing Learning Outcomes	Cynthia Deane
2008	Implications of Semesterisation	Gary Prosser
2007	Mental Health Workshop for Staff & Students	Dr. Barry
2005	21st Century Learning Initiatives	John Abbott

Although the College supports CPD, consultation with both management and staff indicated that the mechanisms in place to implement CPD could be improved. CPD is mentioned briefly in the current Strategic Plan but management have indicated that it will be a more integral part of the new (2009-2014) Strategic Plan.

There is mutual agreement amongst lecturing staff and management that additional training workshops throughout the academic year would be beneficial. It is proposed that two staff training days will take place during the academic year (one in each term). A questionnaire will be sent to all academic and administrative staff to assess training needs. In house expertise will be used where possible in order to limit the financial costs incurred. The following is a provisional list of areas which have been indicated by staff:

- IT workshop (new version of Microsoft office)
- Teaching Skills workshop
- Workshop on detection of and support for students with learning difficulties
- Induction/training for new lecturers

### **Feedback on Teaching Performance**

The annual Modular/Course Evaluation Form is a key component of staff appraisal (Appendix 4). The form invites students to comment on the course as a whole e.g. content; structure; presentation; organisation; the quality of the learning experience; modes of assessment; resources for the course; intellectual challenge; effort required by the student; strengths of the course and recommendations for improvement.

To date the process by which the modular evaluation forms are distributed and the information collated is as follow: lecturers distribute and collect the forms in class and the feedback is subsequently reviewed by the lecturer, with no formal summary report to be submitted to the relevant Head of Department/Stream Leader. As part of the Programmatic and Institutional Review process, and in light of recent revisions of the Quality Assurance manual, lecturers were asked to summarise student feedback in relation to the strengths and areas of improvement for all modules. The importance of collating student feedback on modules in a more structured and formalised manner e.g. as outlined recently in the Quality Assurance manual, has been extremely positive,

particularly, in enhancing the individual modules and the programme as a whole, and will be undertaken at the end of each academic year.

### **Improvement Plan**

- CPD will be an integral part of the new Strategic Plan.
- Additional staff workshops/training days will be provided in subsequent academic years.
- A formal process of collating feedback from the Student Modular/Course Evaluation forms will take place at the end of each academic year.

## **ELEMENT 5 – LEARNING RESOURCES & STUDENT SUPPORT**

The European Standard for Learning Resources and Student Support states that *“Institutions should ensure that the resources available for student support of learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered”*. The provision and effectiveness of learning resources and student support services will be incorporated into the new Strategic Plan under the ‘Infrastructural Strategy’ and ‘Human Resources Strategy’ respectively.

### **Learning Resources**

St. Patrick’s College is committed to the provision of necessary resources and infrastructure which are fundamental in creating and developing a high quality teaching and learning environment. The following section focuses on the library service and IT facilities.

#### **Library Service**

The two libraries in the College have a combined total of 27,000 books. The range of books available is continuously expanding and staff are encouraged to order updated texts as necessary. The library also stocks 434 journal titles and subscribes to an online database for Religion and Philosophy related journals (EBSCO).

As part of the Institutional Review process students were asked to comment on the quality of learning resources. Thirty-nine students responded to the question and twenty-eight of these expressed satisfaction with the library resources.

An annual library audit is carried out to ensure that all books and journals noted on module descriptors are available. A Library Services Evaluation Form (Appendix 10) will also be made available to users of the library throughout the year. The results of these questionnaires will be returned to the Registrar for incorporation into the Annual Review of Services report. Recommendations from this report will be implemented by the librarian before the beginning of the academic year.

#### **Information Technology Service**

The Information Technology service at the College is managed by Tipperary Institute. There is currently an IT technician on site for two hours daily. Problems with IT facilities are logged through an online help-desk which is supported by Tipperary Institute.

Staff who attended the workshops were asked for opinions on the IT support and services at the College. In general, staff elicited satisfaction with the IT services provided for students and lecturers. Concern was noted in relation to students having access to non-educational websites, this is particularly relevant to social networking websites such as Bebo. In the future these sites will not be accessible from 9am to 5pm. The feasibility of WiFi technology is currently being investigated.

Staff feedback on the effectiveness of physical resources was also obtained through the Annual Academic Staff Questionnaire, feedback was extremely positive. The physical resources were referred to as *“very good and improving”* and *“excellent in comparison to other colleges”*. Some suggestions were put forward by staff e.g. *“have a designated IT person on site”*.

Student feedback noted that some improvements have been made to IT services e.g. the computer facilities have improved; new technology in lecture rooms; new computer room and the installation of new printers. As part of the improvement plan, the College will research the feasibility of installing additional printing and photocopying facilities.

The results of the online student survey relating to satisfaction with learning resources and support services provided at the College were very positive. 61.5% of the 39 respondents were 'happy', and a further 10.3% indicated that they were 'very happy' with these services. An analysis of student support services will be carried out annually through the Student Support Services Evaluation Form (Appendix 11). As the current full-time programme is relatively new, resources have not been retired to date.

## **Student Support Services**

St. Patrick's College values their sense of identity as a pastoral College where the student is at the core of all activities. The small nature of the College ensures that members of staff know students individually. This inevitably results in a very personable environment. Personal support is provided in a number of ways, as discussed below:

### **Counselling Service**

A counselling service is offered by the Student Chaplain/Counsellor. This is a confidential service for students who may experience personal difficulties at a given time. A number of students highlighted their satisfaction with the counselling service provided and commended the good work being carried out. The counsellor has an open door policy and can be connected out of hours if necessary.

### **Chaplaincy**

The Chaplaincy team has regular contact with students and ensures that all pastoral issues are attended to. Chaplaincy offers students the opportunity to get involved in the life of the College by participation in liturgy groups, folk group, Gaisce, and sacred dance.

### **Student Mentoring**

First Year students are assigned a mentor who endeavours to ensure a smooth transition to third level education and provide support throughout the year. Students, as part of induction, are given information on the mentoring system. Feedback from staff indicated that the mentoring system is very worthwhile. The following suggestions have been offered and will be incorporated in the next academic year:

- Mentors will meet once per term going forward to discuss any issues that may have arisen.
- Explore the benefits and usefulness of peer-support.

### **Educational Support**

Where it was deemed appropriate, students have been provided with additional supports such as: lap-tops, dictaphones, exams scribes, readers at exams, and additional learning support such as one to one tutorials for specific students.

### **Financial Support**

The grant system is managed by the College secretary and students are notified immediately when the grants arrive. Support is provided to students in accessing extra funding through agencies such as the Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholarship Fund and

the society of St. Vincent de Paul. Written/oral references stating that the students are worthy of the funds is provided by the College.

### **Career Guidance Support**

The College offer formal career preparation seminars relating to the preparation of CV's, job application forms and interview preparation. Mock interviews are held for each student consisting of a panel of recently retired principals and College staff. Feedback is provided individually to students and a DVD of the interviews with written assessments and areas of improvement identified for each student. Students have access to the College careers service during the summer months if they wish to avail of additional practice. This is organised by prior appointment with the careers officer. A number of lectures in the Personal and Professional Development module in Year 4 are focused on career options. Information pertaining to progression routes will be kept on the shared drive and made available to students as will job application templates and interview preparation material. Garda vetting is organised through the College as is registration with the Teaching Council of Ireland. Guest speakers from various agencies are invited to the College to speak to the students e.g. Uteach Recruitment, Members of the Examinations commission of the DOES and Religious Education Support Service.

### **Disability support**

The management team recognises that a more formal approach needs to be adopted in relation to student services such as Disability and Access. As part of the strategic planning process specific personnel/resources will be put in place to address this. Academic staff are currently not provided with formal guidelines for grading assignments of students with a learning difficulty. It has also been recommended that formal procedures need to be put in place whereby the Registrar will send a confidential letter (signed by the student and the Registrar) to the relevant lecturers to inform them of the support required for the student. A formal access policy is also under development.

### **Open Door Policy**

All members of staff including the Stream Leaders and other members of the management team are very accessible to students.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Explore possibility of purchasing additional printing and photocopying facilities.
- Evaluate student satisfaction with support services on an annual basis.
- Library Services Evaluation Form to be made available to library users.
- Examine the value in blocking non-educational websites.
- Investigate the feasibility of installing WiFi.
- Mentoring meetings to occur once per term.
- Explore the benefits and usefulness of peer-support.
- Provide guidelines to lecturers for correction of assignments of students with learning disabilities.
- Implement formal procedures to notify lecturers if a student is in receipt of learning support in the College.

## **ELEMENT 6 – INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

The European Standard relating to quality assurance of Information Systems in Higher Education establishments states that *“Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities”*.

Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. It is important that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Quality related information systems required by institutions depend on local circumstances. However, the information system is ideally expected to cover the following:

1. Student progression and success rates
2. Employability of graduates
3. Students satisfaction with their programmes
4. Effectiveness of teachers
5. Profile of the student population
6. Learning resources available and their costs
7. The Institutions own key performance indicators

Ideally, HEIs should have integrated information systems that help them to collect data, link different databases and disseminate information to the members of the institution<sup>3</sup>. Whilst this is more pertinent to larger HEIs it is nonetheless important to keep in mind when developing an Information System.

### **Information Systems at St. Patrick’s College**

The availability of data which is comprehensive, robust, timely and widely accessible is essential for management. A bank of statistical data has been developed and analysed as part of the Programmatic and Institutional Review process (e.g. student retention, analysis of results, demographic profile, CAO analysis). This data will be used as a tool to assist with strategic planning. At present no formal statistical analysis takes place in the context of the information discussed above.

There is currently no integrated Management Information System or database in place at the College. The lack of a Management Information System, has been identified as an area for development. At present, data is stored in hard copy in the Registrar’s office.

### **Development of an MIS**

A highly advanced information system such as Banner or ITS, which requires substantial investment, in terms of finance and staff training is not feasible due the small cohort of students at St. Patrick’s College. It is proposed, however, that a customised database system will be developed to include records of student biographical data, registration data and examination data. As the College expands and more functionality is required, the data contained in this system may be easily migrated to other more sophisticated systems if necessary. It is envisaged that the proposed database system will require minimal maintenance and will run on a high specification PC without the expense of server hardware.

---

<sup>3</sup> EUA Publication (2006), Quality Culture in European Universities: A Bottom-Up Approach

**System Requirements:** A detailed specification pertaining to the requirements of an MIS is being developed. The following are examples of reports which would be required from the system:

- **Registration Forms**
- **Class lists** – programme title; stage; academic year; date produced; student name; the option of including or excluding student number and registration status.
- **Mark Sheets** - for the capture of continuous assessment and final examination marks.
- **Judgement Sheets** - to include student name; number; address; programme; stage; modules; marks; overall grade; credits; date of print and examination session i.e. summer/autumn.
- **Transcripts of Examination Results**
- **List of students assigned to each mentor/tutor** - per academic year, programme title and stage.

### **Improvement Plan**

- To install a customised database system to capture student data and generate appropriate reports.
- To have formal statistical analyses of data on an annual basis.

## ELEMENT SEVEN - PUBLIC INFORMATION

The European Standard and Guidelines state that *“Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering”*. In order to achieve this it is essential that the College has clear guidelines around the goals and objectives of information provision and that the activities surrounding information provision are embedded in quality assurance procedures.

Information provision is central to communications between the management, students, staff and the public. Commitment to communications is set out in the Quality Assurance manual. *“St. Patrick’s College believes that the key to efficient management lies in clear and comprehensive communication between all College bodies, students and members of the public”*. Although the College aspires to this goal it recognises that further development in this area is required. The Institutional Review has been very useful in reaffirming some areas of information provision but more importantly in highlighting gaps in the provision of information. An in-depth analysis of element seven - Public Information was conducted through consultation with staff, management, students and other stakeholders. Management and staff attended workshops and Stream Leaders completed online questionnaires. Students were also consulted via online questionnaires. External stakeholders including Principals of secondary schools, Career Guidance teachers, Business teachers and Religious studies teachers were consulted through anonymous questionnaires.

The following is a list of communication tools used by the College to inform stakeholders about activities in the College in addition to providing information on programmes being offered. The College utilises the following modes of communication:

- College website
- College prospectus
- Advertisement on Qualifax and CAO website
- Advertisements in newspapers
- Provision of pamphlets provided
- College Magazine
- Informal Mechanisms

### College Website

Web presence is recognised as a powerful communication tool. A major update of the website is required and this is due to take place shortly. As part of the Institutional Review an evaluation of the website was carried out, this highlighted the main strengths and weaknesses of the website. The evaluation was based on five criteria<sup>4</sup> namely: First Impressions; Navigation; Content; Effectiveness and Making Contact. A summary of these strengths and weaknesses are provided in Table 3.

---

<sup>4</sup> [www.mcil.co.uk/review/7-10-criteria.htm](http://www.mcil.co.uk/review/7-10-criteria.htm)

**Table 3- Evaluation of St. Patrick's College Website**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Strengths of Current Website</b>	<b>Weaknesses of Current Website</b>
First Impressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ URL is short and simple</li> <li>▪ Content is readable and easy to understand</li> <li>▪ Quick download time</li> <li>▪ The unique selling point of the College is noted</li> <li>▪ Direct links visible on the homepage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No 'mission', vision' or 'values' stated</li> <li>▪ The new campus is only shown in the video</li> </ul>
Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The navigation system is easy to use - all links in working order</li> <li>▪ The site map is very useful</li> <li>▪ A 'return to homepage' link on each page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No internal search facility</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear headings to illustrate and outline the content of the site</li> <li>▪ No pages of scrolling text</li> <li>▪ A FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions) link is provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not all information is up to date</li> <li>▪ Details on the profile of the student population; number of graduates in employment and employment destinations should be provided</li> <li>▪ The date when the site was created and last updated are not evident</li> <li>▪ Need for additional graphics</li> <li>▪ Further information should be provided on learning outcomes as well as on teaching, learning and assessment procedures</li> </ul>
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intuitive URL. The URL is very close to the Colleges name</li> <li>▪ Partner and Affiliate sites – a link is provided to Tipperary Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Search engine ranking is poor, St. Patrick's college was not found when 'secondary school teacher training Ireland' was typed into Google search engine</li> <li>▪ The website address should be printed on all literature e.g. golden pages</li> </ul>
Making Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Details of administrative and management staff are provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Part-time staff and Stream Leader details are not provided</li> </ul>

The development of a new website will result in a more efficient and user friendly website. The website will incorporate the following:

- Information on the existing programme
- Information on upcoming programmes
- Statistics including e.g. profile of student population; number of graduates in employment; employment destinations
- Images of the new campus as well as the traditional campus
- A 'news' section for current students and potential students
- Student testimonials, including present students and graduates
- Student achievements will be outlined on the website
- Virtual tour of the College
- Ability to order information on current programmes

### **Advertisement on Qualifax and CAO website**

The *B.A. (Honours) in Education* is advertised on the Qualifax and CAO websites. This is seen as a very effective way of informing the public about the programme on offer.

### **Advertisements in Newspapers**

The College advertise occasionally in local and national newspapers. The effectiveness of information provision in the newspapers is difficult to capture. The College is currently investigating opportunities for a local advertising campaign which will not only publicise the programmes on offer but will also take the opportunity to present the new and updated facilities available at the campus.

### **Provision of Pamphlets**

Details about the College are provided in pamphlet format for the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies*. As well as providing programme details the pamphlet includes details on: the College; Thurles town; entry requirements and accreditation. Pamphlets are distributed at CAO conferences and also posted to schools.

The provision of pamphlets to schools is seen as necessary but its effectiveness is disputable. Many Principals and Career Guidance teachers are under-resourced and therefore do not always have the time to go through the literature received or to discuss all options with students. In the future it may be more effective for student teachers to give a brief talk about the College to the appropriate students while in schools on Teaching Practice placement.

### **College Magazine**

The College magazine *Luceat*, is published once a year. The magazine combines newsworthy items, scholarly articles and student reports both of an academic and non-academic nature. Currently the magazine is only available in hard copy format but will also be made available on the new website once it is developed.

### **Informal Mechanisms**

Although it is not a formal mechanism of information provision, word of mouth plays a major role in the promotion of the College. This occurs through Teaching Practice in schools and also through students promoting the College to their friends and family.

### **Analysis of Feedback**

Students and stakeholders were asked to complete surveys in relation to the information provision of St. Patrick's College. A total of 49 students responded to the survey. As part of the questionnaire students were asked if they felt that the information provided to the public about the College is adequate, 34.7% felt that the information provided is adequate. Students were asked to provide suggestions as to how the information provided to the public about the College could be improved. The following are some comments and suggestions: "*Many students and teachers alike (including the Guidance Counsellor) are not aware of or familiar with the course and the College*" and "*Update the website, make it more appealing*".

A Stakeholder Survey was sent to a random sample of Principals, Career Guidance teachers, Business and Religious Studies teachers. A total of 33 surveys were sent and the response rate was 33%. There was mixed reviews from stakeholders on whether St. Patrick's College provides adequate information. Four stakeholders felt that the College does provide adequate information, five felt that it does not and two did not respond to

the question. The following are replies from stakeholders who felt that information provided was not adequate: *“Not many know about the courses on offer there...the College need to raise their profile”* and *“Apart from having student teachers in my classroom I would know nothing about St. Patrick’s College”*.

The results reaffirm the opinion of management and staff that the College does need to raise the level of awareness and the level of information provision. It is vital that a high level of quality information provision is ensured. In the future, this will be achievable by assigning individuals to monitor, evaluate and update all areas of information provision.

### **Improvement Plan**

- Develop a new and improved website.
- Make relevant statistics available via new MIS system e.g. profile of student population; number of graduates in employment; employment destinations and student testimonials.
- Engage in effective advertising of the programmes.
- Assign responsibility of monitoring and evaluating information to the most appropriate individual.
- Present College pamphlet and College Magazine online.

## Objective Four – Qualifications Framework, Access, Transfer & Progression

The aim of objective four is to examine the extent to which the College has applied the National Framework of Qualifications. The National Framework of Qualifications states that *“a learner should be able to enter and successfully participate in a programme, or series of programmes leading to an award, or series of awards, in pursuit of their learning objectives”*. Formal structures are required in each educational establishment to facilitate and enable the learner to enter onto a programme and to transfer and progress where applicable.

### Access

The *“National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education”*<sup>5</sup> states that all institutions should have an access plan and processes for evaluation. The access plan should be inclusive of mature students, students with a disability, those from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds including members of the travelling community and refugees.

Although there is no formalised access policy in place, commitment to lifelong learning is outlined in the Quality Assurance manual. St. Patrick’s *“endeavour to offer comprehensive continuing education programmes aimed at developing and fostering lifelong learning and specialist training ... and will continue to respond to short and long term requests from the local and regional community”*.

All admissions are currently processed through the CAO. The College determines specific entry requirements for the programmes and the CAO is responsible for implementing these on behalf of the College. The admission procedures and practices are documented in the College brochure, Qualifax website and on the College website.

Mature applicants apply through the CAO and are selected on the basis of an interview. Although the College welcomes an intake of up to 20% of mature students on the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* programme the current mature student intake is at approximately 12%. This year, mature student applications to the CAO for this programme have increased by over 20%.

The College is committed to facilitating access for students with special learning needs or disabilities. There have been notable advances in the provision of adequate physical access to buildings. With the assistance of HEA funding additional tutorials have been provided for students with learning difficulties. Furthermore, scribes, readers and other appropriate facilities are provided during examinations.

The College intends to comply with the National Access Plan, by providing adequate opportunities for all learners to progress to third level education and by developing an access policy.

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie)

## **Credit and Lifelong Learning**

The College uses the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) based on the convention that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year (1 credit is the equivalent of 20-25 learning hours). Learning hours include both contact hours and independent learning. The main benefit of this system is that it enables credit accumulation and credit transfer thus creating a more flexible learning pathway for students.

## **Transfer and Progression**

The National Framework of Qualifications states that all learners should be able to make transitions “*between levels; between award types at the same level and between named awards*”<sup>6</sup>.

The *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* is quite unique in terms of the subject mix and as such transfer requests both in and out of the course have not been very prevalent. Transfer requests are evaluated on a stand-alone basis and where appropriate exemptions are granted. To date two students have transferred from Tipperary Institute, to the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies*. The students in question had completed Business modules at Tipperary Institute and were therefore exempted from a number of modules on the Business Stream. Students of the *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies* who wish to pursue a Degree in Business at Tipperary Institute will be eligible to apply for exemptions on a subject by subject basis from the *Bachelor of Business Studies* programme (Level 7 and 8) and *B.A. Accounting and Finance* programme (Level 8). To date no student has requested a transfer from St. Patrick’s College to any other Institute.

As this is a HETAC Level 8 approved programme, graduates are eligible to apply for Level 9 programmes both nationally and internationally. Under the National Framework of Qualifications each educational establishment is also required to provide adequate information to students detailing progression routes. Appendix 12 presents a list of some of the postgraduate courses to which graduates can apply. All career options are covered during lectures in year 4. Templates of cover letters and CVs are available on the student shared drive in addition to career preparation information. This information is updated regularly.

To date, St. Patrick’s College has not made the Diploma Supplement available to students but it is recognised as an area which needs immediate attention.

## **Improvement Plan**

- An Access Policy to be prepared.
- Diploma Supplement to be made available to graduates.

---

<sup>6</sup> www.hetac.ie

## Objective Six – Recommendations

The aim of objective six is “to provide recommendations for the enhancement of the education and training provided by the institution”. The self-study provided an opportunity for the College to reflect on all activities and to identify areas of weakness and areas for improvement. The following is a list of improvements that have been formulated from the key findings of this self-study.

### Plans for Improvement

- Enhance the profile of the College.
- Improve public confidence.
- Develop a vision for the College.
- Develop and publish a new Strategic Plan.
- Include definitions of quality and culture in the Quality Assurance manual.
- Increase representation at Programme Boards and Examination Boards.
- Increase effectiveness of Programme Board meetings – programme monitoring.
- Improve Examination Board procedures.
- Staff development to be part of new Strategic Plan.
- Expand learning resources.
- Improve student support services.
- To install a customised database system for the capture of student data and the provision of appropriate reports.
- Revamp the current website.

### New Developments

The main developments due to take place at St. Patrick’s College include the formulation of the new Strategic Plan; the development and integration of new programmes and the updating of relevant quality assurance procedures. The new Strategic Plan (2009-2014) will be completed and adopted shortly. A key element of this plan is to ensure quality is embedded in all teaching and learning activities.

Programme development is a crucial part of the College activities. A new full-time day programme, *B.A. (Honours) in Education, Irish and Religious Studies*, has been approved by HETAC and the College is awaiting feedback from the Teaching Council in relation to same. A *Postgraduate/Masters in Special Educational Needs* is also currently being developed.

A number of quality assurance procedures have been identified as areas where developments are needed. The recommendations from the self-study report will be implemented at the College and progress of same will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

# Appendix 1

# Improvement Plan

Date started	Improvement	Priority	Description of Actions to be taken	Responsible	Monitoring / Progress	Success Criteria	Status
Ongoing	Enhance the profile of the College	High	Continue to represent the College at CAO Conferences and teacher seminars; Student teacher to provide information at schools; Research the possibility of hosting a conference	Schools Liaison Officer	This will be monitored annually through student and stakeholder feedback in addition to monitoring the demand for the programme	Demand for programmes will increase	In progress
Ongoing	Improve Public Confidence	High	Increase the demand for the programme – resulting in higher CAO points	Schools Liaison Officer / Academic Coordinator	This will be monitored annually through student and stakeholder feedback in addition to monitoring the demand for the programme	CAO entry points will increase; student and stakeholder feedback will continue to be very positive	In progress
April 2009	Develop a vision for the College	Medium	Develop a vision statement for the College	Academic Coordinator	To be completed by end April	A vision statement will be written and adapted	Not started
February 2009	Develop and publish a new Strategic Plan	Medium	Define objectives and targets for each goal; determine timeline for completion; Assign responsibility for monitoring the goals to appropriate staff members	Academic Coordinator	Each individual will have responsibility to monitor their assigned goal; Academic Coordinator will have overall responsibility for the Plan	When the goals in the Strategic Plan have been realised	In progress
May 2009	Include definitions of Quality and Culture in the Quality Assurance manual	Medium	Clearly state the Colleges 'Quality Policy' and incorporate a list of the key indicators of quality; Outline and define the 'culture' of St. Patrick's College	Academic Coordinator	To be completed by end May	When QA manual is updated	Not started
Ongoing	Increase representation at Programme Boards and Examination Boards	Medium	Encourage all staff to attend Programme Board meetings; Attendance at preliminary and final Examination Boards will be compulsory; Ensure student representation	Stream Leaders; President	Review attendance lists for Programme Boards and Examination Boards at end of year	Teaching and management staff attend programme and Examination Boards; Student representation at	Work in Progress

Date started	Improvement	Priority	Description of Actions to be taken	Responsible	Monitoring / Progress	Success Criteria	Status
						Programme Boards is maintained	
September 2009	Increase effectiveness of Programme Board meetings – programme monitoring	Medium	Programmatic Review to be a standing item on Programme Board agendas; Make relevant statistics available to staff on a yearly basis e.g. profile of student population; number of graduates in employment; employment destinations and analysis of exam results	Registrar	See description	Programme monitoring will have greater emphasis	Not Started
January 2009	Improve Examination Board Procedures	Medium	Results will be available on an over head projector on a pilot basis for the subsequent year; Clarification will be provided around HETAC Marks and Standards at the Examination Board meeting	Registrar	Review Examination Board procedures after June Examination Board	Streamlined operation at Examination boards	Work in Progress
September 2009	Staff development to be part of new Strategic Plan	Medium	Fact finding to take place re. CPD needs; Provide staff training days	Management Team	Training needs analysed	Positive Staff Feedback	Not started
June 2009	Expand learning resources	High	Explore possibility of purchasing additional printing and photocopying facilities; Research feasibility of taking on a full-time IT specialist; Investigate the feasibility of installing WiFi	Management Team	Student Feedback will be the most effective way of monitoring progress	Positive student feedback	Not started
September 2009	Improve support services	High	Provide grinds for students; Explore the benefits and usefulness of peer-support	Chaplain/Student Counsellor	Student Feedback will be the most effective way of monitoring progress	Positive student feedback	Not started
2009 / 2010	Plan, develop and implement a customised Information System	High	Commission the development of a customised information system which will provide a central repository and	President; Registrar	Carry out testing and evaluation of the new system	Key Information pertaining to students and courses will be	Work In Progress

Date started	Improvement	Priority	Description of Actions to be taken	Responsible	Monitoring / Progress	Success Criteria	Status
			generate useful reports for relevant staff members			readily available	
July 2009	Remodel website	High	Quotations being sought and a new design for the website is being developed	IT specialist	Monitor and update the website on a regular basis	Staff and student feedback	Work In Progress
March 2009	Facilitate access, transfer and progression	High	Access Policy and RPL Policy to be developed; Diploma Supplement to be made available	Registrar	Policies will developed and adapted Availability of Diploma Supplement	Policies to be made available in QA manual and website	Work In Progress

# **Appendix 2**

## **HETAC Feedback – QA Manual**



Higher Education and  
Training Awards Council

26-27 Denzille Lane,  
Dublin 2, Ireland

Tel: +353 1 631 4577  
Fax: +353 1 631 4577  
www.hetac.ie

Fr. Tom Fogarty  
Director  
St. Patrick's College  
Thurles  
Co. Tipperary

26-27 Denzille Lane,  
Dublin 2, Ireland  
T +353 1 631 4567  
F +353 1 631 4577  
Email: info@hetac.ie  
www.hetac.ie

26-27 Denzille Lane,  
Dublin 2, Ireland  
Tel: +353 1 631 4577  
Fax: +353 1 631 4577  
Email: info@hetac.ie  
www.hetac.ie

16 December 2008

Dear Fr. Fogarty,

The International Quality Assurance Review Panel met on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December to review your Quality Assurance policy and procedures as part of your submission to obtain accreditation with HETAC for third level programmes.

The response of the panel is as follows :

The panel commended St Patrick's College on a good document and one which was easy to follow. The panel will recommend to the Council of HETAC that the submission from the St. Patrick's College, Thurles (hereafter "SPCT") be accepted, subject to the following minor clarifications/improvement suggestions:

- LH
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of an independent monitoring system, for example second marking, which would ensure by reviewing a sample of each classification of scripts that the marking system is fair and consistent.
  - The submission detailed where quality assurance responsibilities lie, but the addition of an organisational chart might be beneficial.

I hope that these recommendations are helpful to you and we look forward to receiving a revised document to reflect the comments above.

If we can be of any assistance to you please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Rosalyn Barrett

# Appendix 3

## Letters of Support (Programmatic Review dry-run)

**Wexford Campus (IT Carlow)**

Summerhill Road, Wexford, Ireland

Telephone: (053) 9122992/9155030 Fax: (053) 9122812 Email: wexford@itcarlow.ie

International Codes: Telephone: (353-53) 9122992/9155030 Fax: (353-53) 9122812

**WEXFORD**  
CAMPUS



**INSTITUTE of  
TECHNOLOGY  
CARLOW**

Shane,

The management and staff of the College are to be complimented on the quality of the documentation provided to the review group, including a comprehensive self study. There is ample evidence of a strong commitment to operations of the departments and it is highly commendable.

The proposed programme scheduling is presented very well with clear rationale for changes. I fully support the proposed changes. I was very pleased to see some of the proposed changes to the Religious Studies modules as I believe these changes will enhance an already excellent programme. It is clear that not only do you all do things extremely well, you also keep an eye on the educational requirements and compliance, and go way beyond that as well.

Well done to all on the quality of the work and best of luck with the Programmatic Review.

*Joe Collins*

Joe Collins  
Campus Coordinator



Shane Dempsey,  
Academic Coordinator,  
St Patricks College,  
Thurles,  
Co. Tipperary.

02/03/2009

Dear Shane,

I have had the pleasure of working with you and your programme development team in reviewing the proposed amendments to the B A (Honours) in Education, in Business and Religious Studies degree. The rationale for all modifications provided is very clear and logical and should, in my opinion, lead to enhancing the attributes and skills attained by the graduates of this programme.

The business stream in particular provides a good balance between the accounting and the management stream. I am confident that the graduates will be well equipped to make a real contribution in terms of business and enterprise programmes at second level.

I wish you every success in your programmatic review.

Yours sincerely

Breda Kenny BBS MBS MIMii Grad  
Lecturer in Marketing and Entrepreneurship

Norough Road,  
Thurles,  
Co. Tipperary,  
Ireland.  
Cathel Court,  
Cleeveville,  
Co. Tipperary,  
Ireland.  
Tel: +353 504 28000  
Fax: +353 504 28007  
Email: info@tipperary.ie  
Web: www.tipperary.ie

INSTITIÚD TIONÓILÁRÓ DÁIRIANN

Tipperary Rural and Business Development Institute Limited - Fócas Forbartha Tuaithe agus Críoch Tionóil Árainn  
Registered in Ireland No 202724 - Established by the Government of Ireland

Printed on recycled paper.



Dublin City University  
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath

School of Education Studies  
Dublin 9, Ireland

18/02/09

Dear Shane,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the invitation to take part in the programmatic review dry run process. In particular I would like to commend you and your colleagues for the quality of the documentation provided. Both the clarity of the material and its comprehensive nature made the process of reviewing the programme an interesting and pleasant one. In addition, I found the quality of the engagement by the programme team during the review meeting to be of the highest standard. They are clearly a committed group of professionals who are willing to work hard to ensure that the programme reaches, and where possible exceeds, its state goals.

Many thanks once again for including me in the review and I wish you and the rest of the team every best wish for the rest of the process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe O'Hara', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joe O'Hara PhD  
Director, Initial Teacher Education