SERC

HIGHER EDUCATION HANDBOOK 2026-27

REAL LEARNING

BANGOR | DOWNPATRICK | LISBURN | NEWTOWNARDS

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SERC

WELCOME

Welcome

If you are a new student, I am delighted to welcome you to South Eastern Regional College (SERC). If you are returning, I am equally delighted to welcome you back. Along with all my colleagues on the staff of the College, I would like to wish you an enjoyable and successful year.

This Handbook is designed to provide you with key information on the College. It also answers some of the questions that you may have about services and support available to you and how to make the most of your time with us. Please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff if you have any other questions about SERC.

As you enrol on your college course, you are taking on an exciting and rewarding challenge. Our aim is to help you to settle in quickly to college life.

I wish you every success.

Tommy Martin, Principal and Chief Executive

Vision & Mission

Vision

We empower individuals, strengthen communities, and drive economic prosperity.

Mission

As an innovative and inclusive College, we provide transformative education and training that meets the evolving needs of our students, community and economy, fostering a culture of excellence, collaboration and sustainability.

Introduction

This online handbook is intended to be a reference point for all HE students. It is an overall summary of HE structure, regulations and support services at SERC. You will also receive detailed information directly related to your programme in your Programme Handbook. Used together they will provide the information needed as you study at SERC.

Throughout the handbook there are links to the standard operating procedures (SOPs) and policies used to manage the Student Experience. As well as using the links directly, these can be found in the Policies and Procedures section on the SERC Website.

“What our students say…”

“I left grammar school after my GCSEs and visited SERC; I was impressed by the Bangor Campus and especially the enthusiasm of the staff. When I visited, I expected to meet one tutor, but the whole teaching team came to meet me and show me the kitchens and explain the courses available. And the facilities are good – they have everything, all the equipment we could ever need.”

Open University Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) in Culinary Arts

“Outside my course, I received mentoring and entrepreneurship help from SERC and I got help to revamp and relaunch the business. It brought everything up a level, and I developed from a 16-year-old making cakes to a professional baker and businesswoman.”

Ulster University Foundation Degree in Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management

“I would recommend SERC as a place to study music; in the past five years I’ve developed as a person and as a musician. SERC as a whole is very supportive - the learning support, the canteen staff, the teachers are lovely. Even when you are doing independent projects, there is a helping hand if you need it. I would encourage anyone to come to SERC.”

Pearson BTEC HND in Music Performance

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KEY INFORMATION

Key Information

Campus Contact Information

Space Bangor Campus

Castle Park Road, Bangor,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland, BT20 4TD

Bangor Campus

Castle Park Road, Bangor,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland, BT20 4TD

Newtownards Campus

Victoria Avenue, Newtownards,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland, BT23 7EH

Downpatrick Campus

Market Street, Downpatrick,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland, BT30 6LZ

Lisburn Campus

Castle Street, Lisburn
Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, BT27 4SU

Newcastle Campus
Castlewellan Road, Newcastle,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland, BT33 0UR

General Enquiries: info@serc.ac.uk **Call us:** 0345 600 7555

HE Calendar 2026-27

Term One

Tuesday 1st September 2026 to Friday 18th December 2026 inclusive

Mid-Term: Monday 26th October 2026 to Friday 30th October 2026 inclusive

Christmas Break: Monday 21st December 2026 to Friday 1st January 2027 inclusive

Term Two

Monday 4th January 2027 to Friday 19th March 2027 inclusive

Virtual/Inter Semester Week: Mon 18th January 2027 to Friday 22nd January 2027 inclusive

Mid-Term: Monday 8th February 2027 to Friday 12th February 2027 inclusive

Public Holiday: Wednesday 17th March 2027

Easter Break: Monday 22nd March 2027 to Friday 2nd April 2027 inclusive

Term Three

Monday 5th April 2027 to Friday 4th June 2027 inclusive

Public Holiday: Monday 3rd May 2027

Public Holiday: Monday 31st May 2027

Please Note:

Certain HE courses may have a different start date, but students will be informed directly by the relevant School.

Terms and Conditions

The Terms and Conditions given to you when you applied and confirmed by your acceptance and enrolment on this course are available on the SERC Website and can be accessed by this link Terms and Conditions.

Health and Safety

No Smoking Policy and Substance Abuse

The College has a No Smoking Policy which includes e-cigarettes. Smoking is not permitted on any part of SERC campuses except in designated external smoking areas. You will be advised of these designated areas during the induction period of your programme. E-cigarettes may not be used within any of the SERC campuses. The College has a no tolerance policy for substance abuse and will act in accordance with the Substance Misuse SOP.

Fire/Emergency Evacuation Procedure

South Eastern Regional College has a Fire/Emergency Evacuation procedure for each campus. This will be fully explained at Induction and is accessible on the SERC Website under Public Information Policies and Procedures section within the General Health & Safety SOP. You must comply fully with this policy as failure to do so may potentially endanger life. Failure to comply with such procedures will be dealt with through the Student / Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)

Any student who has a disability that may affect how they can be evacuated from the College buildings must have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) completed. This plan will detail how such a student can be evacuated quickly and safely from the building should an emergency arise. A PEEP or Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan is the responsibility of the learner, and this will be created alongside their Programme Coordinator/ Director and with support (if required) from Learning Support and the Lead Designated Safeguarding Officer. Any learner who requires a PEEP must follow it in the event of a fire or other emergency evacuation.

Individual Risk Assessments

Should a student experience a health-related condition that brings particular risks to themselves or other students or staff then they should disclose details of this to a member of the Learning Support Staff, or to their lecturer, ideally at the time of application. In such circumstances a Risk Assessment will be completed, and a Management Plan prepared to address these risks. In every case the College will take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the student, their classmates and SERC staff.

Health and Safety Regulations

You are required to abide by the College's Health and Safety Regulations at all times. The regulations which govern you state that: 'All students shall be advised that they:

- Have a duty for the safety of themselves, their fellow students and others in relation to their actions;
- Are required, when safety is involved, to wear appropriate clothing, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) when required, and observe proper standards of behaviour;
- Are required to observe safety rules and procedures;
- Must not interfere with or misuse anything provided within the College for health and safety; and
- Are expected to report to staff any instruments, machinery or other college equipment or facilities which constitute a hazard.'

Further details regarding the specific Health and Safety requirements as they relate to your programme of study will be provided by your lecturers during the induction period of your programme. A complete copy of the SERC Health and Safety Policy and Procedures can be found on the SERC Website under Public Information Policies and Procedures section.

SERC

ENROLMENT

Enrolment

Enrolment Information and Support

When you enrol as a student at SERC you are agreeing to the rules and regulations as set out in the College's Terms and Conditions.

Tuition fees are payable for all HE courses and the price may vary depending on your course of study. Full details on the financial assistance available are detailed on the SERC Website **www.serc.ac.uk/fees-and-finance.** *International students contact international@serc.ac.uk for fee information**.**

Full-time Students

All full-time Higher Education students are required to submit evidence of how they intend to fund their course fees during the enrolment process. Your place on the course will not be secure until this evidence is submitted. If you are unsure if you are eligible for the Home Student fee rate, please contact Customer Services.

There are a number of options for paying your fees:

1. Student Finance NI funding of fees

You must upload your award letter to your student account confirming funding of your fees by Student Finance NI. If you have not yet applied, you can do so via www.studentfinanceni.co.uk If you have not been approved for funding at the point of enrolment you will need to complete a Direct Debit Mandate to secure your place on the course.

If the award letter is not received 1 week prior to the direct debit instalment date the College will proceed with the direct debit instalment payment. If the application for funding is unsuccessful or does not meet the full course fee the student is liable for the outstanding fees. In all instances, the College will refund to the student any overpayments that have been made to their account.

Tuition fee loan payments are issued to the College following an attendance confirmation each term. If your full tuition fee is not released to the College or your tuition fee loan does not cover the full cost of your tuition fees, the College will invoice you for the remaining fee amount.

2. Payment by Instalments

You can pay your fees by six equal instalments. These instalments are as follows:

- **2 November 2026**
- **1 December 2026**
- **1 February 2027**
- **1 March 2027**
- **5 April 2027**
- **4 May 2027**

To avail of this option, you must complete a Direct Debit Mandate download here and upload the completed mandate to your Student Account or submit to Customer Services at enrolment.

3. Payment in Full

You can avail of a 5% discount (of tuition fee element only) if paying your fees in full at the point of enrolment. Payment can be accepted by cash, cheque or card via Customer Services.

4. Employer / Sponsoring Organisation

If your employer or sponsoring organisation is paying the fees on your behalf, they will need to complete a Sponsor Liability Form. The form can be downloaded here. Once completed, you should upload the form to your Student Account or submit directly to Customer Services on campus.

Part-time Students

Fee payment is required for part-time higher education courses and fees are payable at the point of enrolment. Course fee amounts will be displayed on the course descriptor on the College website.
There are a number of options for paying your fees:

1. Payment by Instalment

When the total fee payable, after any concessionary fee has been deducted, is over £300 it is possible to pay by instalments. The instalment plan is made via direct debit. The direct debit arrangement is only available for enrolments on or before the second week of the class by completing a direct debit mandate.

The **deposit payable at the time of enrolment is 25%** of the total course fee. For September enrolments, six instalment payments will then be collected, by direct debit, as follows:

- **2 November 2026**
- **1 December 2026**
- **1 February 2027**
- **1 March 2027**
- **5 April 2027**
- **4 May 2027**

Concessionary fees are only applicable to the tuition fee element of the course fee. Concessionary fees do not apply to all courses. For details on eligibility for concessionary fees please view the Concessionary Fees section on the website.

2. Student Finance NI

After enrolment part-time students can apply for assistance from Student Finance NI in the form of a means tested tuition fee grant and or tuition fee loan and a means tested course grant, dependent upon household income and course intensity. Tuition fee grants and tuition fee loans are paid directly to the College.

The Student Finance award letter must be uploaded to the student's account as soon as it is received by the student. If the award letter is not received 1 week prior to the direct debit instalment date the College will proceed with the direct debit instalment payment. If the application for funding is unsuccessful or does not meet the full course fee the student is liable for the outstanding fees. In all instances, the College will refund to the student any overpayments that have been made to their account.

Tuition fee loan payments are issued to the College following an attendance confirmation each term. If your full tuition fee is not released to the College or your tuition fee loan does not cover the full cost of your tuition fees, the College will invoice you for the remaining fee amount.

3. Payment in Full

You can avail of a 5% discount (of tuition fee element only) if paying your fees in full at the point of enrolment. Payment can be accepted by cash, cheque or card via Customer Services.

4. Employer / Sponsoring Organisation

If your employer or sponsoring organisation is paying the fees on your behalf, they will need to complete a Sponsor Liability Form. The form can be downloaded here. Once completed, you should upload the form to your Student Account or submit directly to Customer Services on campus.

Full & Part-Time HE Withdrawal or Leave of Absence

Higher Education Students who withdraw from or go on a leave of absence will be charged a tuition fee as detailed below:

Withdrawal Dates	Fee Liability
From first day of term until 4 January 2026	25% of the full annual tuition fee
From 4 January 2027 until 4 April 2027	50% of the full annual tuition fee
From 5 April 2027	100% of the full annual tuition fee

Non-Payment of Fees

Fee payment is required for each year of your course. If paying by direct debit mandate or Student Finance award letter you will need to submit a new document for each year of your course. If you do not pay your tuition fees, or default on payment, the College will impose a number of sanctions, including immediate loss of access to the College ICT systems. You also will not be allowed to graduate until your fees are paid in full. Default in any payment will result in a £10 administration fee. Any student with outstanding student fees will be referred to a Debt Recovery Agency.

For more detail on payment of tuition fees please access the SERC Website **FAQs** section which includes details on fees.

Your information is protected and treated in confidence within the provisions of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the UK GDPR. For further detail on how we process your data please visit our website https://privacy.serc.ac.uk/privacynotice

Student Records

Student records are held in the College's central database. It is important that you tell Customer Services of any changes to your personal details in order that these can be kept up to date.

Privacy Notice

SERC looks after your private data carefully and in line with all data protection legislation. The Privacy notice below explains this in more detail.

https://privacy.serc.ac.uk/privacynotice

Criminal Convictions

SERC is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all students, trainees and staff as they attend the College, while at the same time ensuring that there is an equality of opportunity for all, including those with criminal convictions.

The College requests all applicants who hold or have held a conviction at the time of their application to declare these in line with the Criminal Conviction Disclosure Procedure (which is included within the Safeguarding, Care and Welfare SOP) so that, if necessary, an appropriate risk assessment and management plan can be prepared.

If a student receives a conviction whilst at SERC, they must disclose it through the Criminal Conviction Disclosure Procedure so that, if necessary, an appropriate risk assessment and management plan can be prepared. Any disclosure will be seen in the context of the occupational area you follow, the nature of the offence and the responsibility the College has to care for all students, staff and others who attend the College. However, should we become aware of an offence that has not been disclosed, the College will review the risk and decide if the student must withdraw from the course until the Criminal Conviction Disclosure Procedure can be applied.

Course Duration

The College has a duty of care to ensure that students can complete the second or third year of their programmes if they have completed the first year successfully. Students will be guaranteed delivery of their original Programme of Study (POS) duration as published on the College website or prospectus at the time they enrolled on the programme, providing attendance and academic performance is in line with the

original timescale. The Higher Education Course Closure SOP and Student Protection Plan provides further information.

Progression within the College

The College will encourage you to progress through the various levels in line with your skills and abilities. Figures 1 illustrates typical levels and routes through higher education. Progression from one Programme of Study to another is not guaranteed and is subject to gaining the necessary entry qualifications, course viability and the funding constraints that the College must operate within as outlined previously. You will be given the opportunity to develop skills, qualities and competencies which will aid you in your personal and professional development to achieve and contribute positively to the economy. We will encourage you to complete your full Programme of Study (which may include Essential Skills), which will equip you for progression to the next level or employment. Remember that some universities will require you to have GCSE Maths and/or English to progress to a new qualification with them. This requirement is down to the individual university, and we strongly advise that you check this requirement early with the university, and if necessary, enrol yourself in the appropriate class in college to achieve GCSE Maths and/or English if required.

You can ask your Programme Coordinator/ Director and the careers staff for advice. You will be responsible for the course fees for your GCSEs. Figure 1 below shows the routes and timescales on a typical programme, to and through higher education from level 3 to level 8, based on full-time attendance.

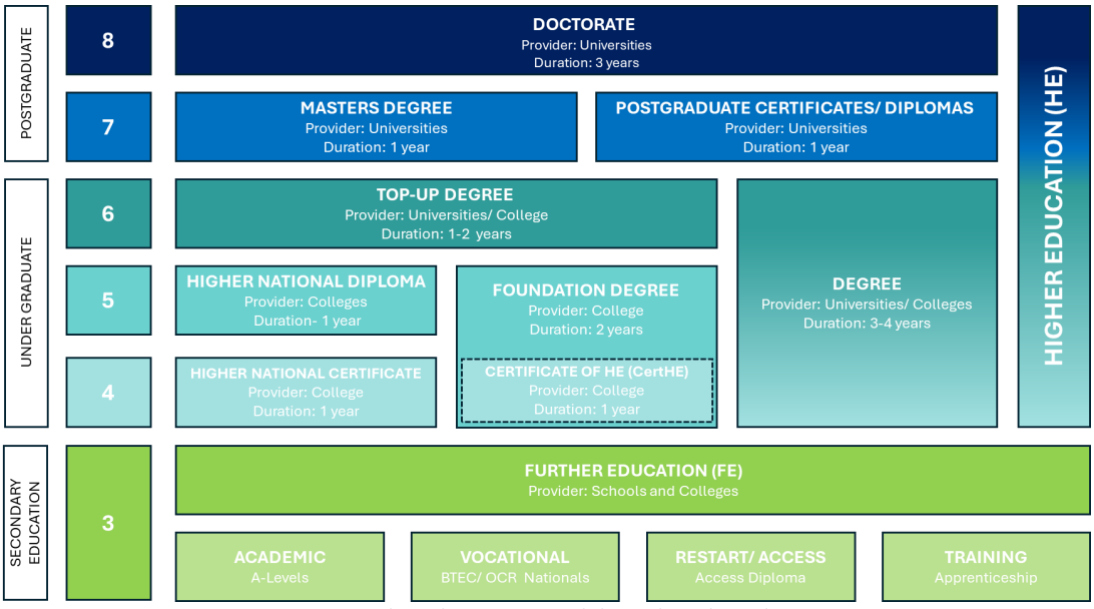


Figure 1- Levels and Routes to and through Higher Education

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?

What is Expected of Me?

SERC Student Charter

The SERC Student Charter has been developed by students, staff and the Students' Union and sets out shared values and commitments between them. It is not a legal contract, but a statement of partnership designed to support a positive learning experience for all. The Charter can be found around our Campus' and in Appendix 5 – SERC Student Charter. This will be reviewed and updated with the students keeping it current.

Student Code of Conduct

This Code sets out the standard of conduct that SERC expects of all students so that everyone enjoys a safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environment. Good conduct means acting with honesty, being considerate and showing respect for yourself and others. It means treating everyone you meet with courtesy and avoiding any actions which may cause offence or harm to others.

Good conduct **In Class** means…

- Attending every class, being punctual, and notifying staff of any absence
- Submitting coursework on time and making sure the work is all your own - do not copy from others, text books or the internet
- Complying with Awarding Body and Examination regulations relating to submitting coursework, plagiarism and exam arrangements.
- Behaving appropriately in the classroom
- Adhering to guidance from tutors on mobile phones/devices, breaks and consumption of food/drink in the classroom
- Showing respect for other students e.g. allowing others to speak, not causing disruption and not swearing
- Complying with guidance on appropriate use of the College IT systems

Good conduct **In and Around SERC** means…

- Showing respect for property and facilities by disposing of litter properly and not damaging any tools, equipment or other resources
- Driving and parking appropriately on campus grounds and with consideration for others

- E-scooters (and their batteries) may not be brought into any of the campus buildings due to the Fire Regulations that the college must comply with.
- Not behaving in a way that damages the reputation of the College
- Not bringing offensive weapons or items which could harm others into the College
- Adhering to the College's No Smoking Policy which includes e-cigarettes
- Conforming with all Health and Safety rules and instructions such as fire evacuation, safe use of machinery and the wearing of Personal Protective Equipment or the correct uniform
- Not consuming, possessing or distributing alcohol or drugs while engaged in SERC related activity.

Good conduct **Towards Others** means…

- Recognising the diversity of the College community by treating everyone with respect and not discriminating against anyone who is different from you.
- Respecting the rights and freedoms of other students, staff, college contractors, local residents and business owners
- Actively discouraging bullying and harassment and reporting any incidents that you see. Speak out against racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice
- Not making inappropriate comments about the College, its staff or other students on social media or other platforms and not displaying clothing or tattoos with emblems that would cause offence to others.

Our commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive environment extends to ending Violence Against Women and Girls and everyone has a role to play in preventing such violence and in supporting those affected by it. We have a zero-tolerance approach to any behaviour, language or action that constitutes harassment, abuse or violence against women and girls, and we expect you to speak up and seek support from college staff if you witness or are made aware of any incidents.

During the induction phase of your course, you will be provided with further specific conduct requirements that relate to your particular programme of study. Breaches of the Code of Conduct will be addressed using the SERC Student/Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP and as summarised in the Student Discipline section.

Taken together, compliance with these requirements will enable all our students to learn in an environment which maximises effective learning while at the same time minimises stress on both students and staff.

Programme Regulations

The regulations for your programme can be found on your programme Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and College Website. Below are some issues which cover all higher education programmes. Programme regulations will also be discussed with students as part of the course induction process.

Attendance requirements

Regular attendance is expected at all lectures, seminars and other activities. An e-register will be taken by your Programme Coordinator/ Director at every class. It is essential that you attend activities such as tutorials and seminars at which you are being assessed.

The minimum expected requirement for attendance is 80% for all learning activities in each module of your course for part-time and full-time students. Failure to do so may mean that you will be asked to leave the course on the grounds of Academic Standing (see below). The College is keen to support you through your studies and if you face issues which may affect this it is important that you keep your Programme Coordinator/ Directors informed. Communication is important so do use your email account or Microsoft Teams to let your Programme Coordinator/Course Director or Pastoral tutor know of the issues you are facing or ask for a meeting or phone call to discuss further.

Unexpected Absence

If you are absent from your course or unable to study for more than two days you must advise the Programme Coordinator/Course Director and complete an Absence Form at Appendix 2. The College recognises that it may be difficult to obtain medical evidence for medical reasons of less than 5 days. In this case an explanation can be given on the Absence Form.

If you are unable to hand in an assessment or attend for examinations or practical assessments, you should, in addition, complete an extenuating circumstances form (EC1) in order that you may be considered for an extension. The EC1 form and process can be found on the SERC website under the Assessment Regulations and Key Forms section. Guidance for "Extenuating Circumstances" can be found in the chapter below.

Authorised Absence

If you expect to be absent this may be authorised in specific circumstances where it is supported by sufficient evidence. You should inform the Programme Co-ordinator/Course Director a minimum of one week (where possible) in advance of the event. Attendance will be reviewed periodically as per the College's Authorisation of Absences for Full-Time Students SOP. Disciplinary action may be taken where poor attendance is identified. Please refer to the SOP for details. The type of issues which may be approved as authorised absence include:

- Weather related factors that affect a large area of Northern Ireland
- Transport disruption caused by strikes; civil unrest, public events, service provider
- If the student is a main carer and care arrangements for a close family member have fallen through. However, this should not be a regular occurrence that would lead to attendance dropping below 80% attendance;
- Driving & Theory tests (but not lessons unless part of a college course);
- Attendance at a funeral, wedding or civil ceremony of close family members;
- Visit to university open days or career related interview;
- Extra-curricular activities such as sports participation at national or county level or voluntary work. The activity must represent a significant personal achievement/involvement. Representing SERC at a sports or skills competitions should be regarded as authorised absence;
- Work-placement which is an integral part of the course;
- Attendance at probation meeting and court cases;
- Family breakdown or other family related matters that cause the student to be living in temporary accommodation;
- Illness (see below);
- Attendance at interviews for employment;
- Attendance at interviews with the Department for the Economy/Social Security Agency/Jobs and Benefits Office/Careers Office;
- To take written examinations or external competitive assessments related to the professional and technical qualifications being pursued;
- Attendance arising from a Community Service Order as directed by a Court of Law;
- For domestic emergencies including immediate family bereavements;

- Attendance at annual training courses or camps. A participant who is a member of the Auxiliary or Reserve Forces and who is required to attend annual training courses or camps may be granted special leave for a maximum of 2 weeks per academic year;
- Attendance at hospital/doctor/dentist appointments; only in emergencies or where these cannot be arranged outside the hours of course participation;
- Attendance at regular hospital visits or health checks for participants with disabilities;
- Attendance at SERC Youth Health Clinic; and
- Attendance at events directly associated with the College, including Skills Competitions.

The Authorisation of Absence request form can be accessed on our "Assessment Regulations and Key Forms" section of the College website.

Your Programme Co-ordinator/Course Director will aim to return to you with a response within three working days. It is therefore important that you give as much notice as possible, but it is understood that in some cases this may not be possible, and each case will be considered in context.

Prolonged absence from your course, without good reason, is viewed as a serious breach of regulations.

Extenuating Circumstances

What are Extenuating Circumstances?

Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) are serious, unexpected events outside your control that affect your ability to complete assessments or perform at your best. They must be:

- Unforeseeable
- Beyond your control
- Have a clear impact on your assessment
- Supported by evidence (where required)

When can you apply?

You can apply if your circumstances affect:

- Assignment submission (late or non-submission)
- Exams or timed assessments
- Your overall academic performance

Examples of circumstances likely to be accepted:

- Serious short-term illness or injury
- Worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions
- Symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others
- Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend
- Unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependent
- Significant personal or family crises leading to acute stress
- Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident
- A crime which has had a substantial impact on the student
- Accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable
- An emergency or crisis that prevents the student from attending an exam or accessing an online assessment
- A technical problem that prevents the student from accessing online teaching or assessment
- Safeguarding concerns

Examples of circumstances likely to be not accepted:

- Holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected
- Minor illnesses such as common colds or hay fever, unless the symptoms are particularly severe
- Assessments that are scheduled close together
- Misreading the exam timetable
- Poor time management
- Minor transport disruption
- Computer or printer failure where the student should have backed up their work
- Normal exam stress
- Minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact

Please note both lists are not exhausted, and each case will be reviewed on an individual basis**.**

What do you need to do?

- Tell someone early (Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Student Support)
- Submit a formal EC request
- Provide evidence where possible
- Be honest – false claims may lead to disciplinary action

I*mportant deadlines*

- Apply before your assessment where possible
- Or within 5 working days after the deadline
- Late applications need a valid reason

What evidence is needed?

Examples include:

- Medical notes
- Appointment letters
- Counsellor/support letters

- Death notices
- Police reports
- Employer or official documentation

Short-term issues:

You may be able to self-certify once per semester (up to 5 days).

What could happen?

If approved, you may receive:

- Extra time (extension)
- Deferral to a later assessment
- First attempt at next opportunity
- Removal of late penalties
- Approved alternative form of assessment

You will **NOT** receive extra marks.

How will you hear?

- You'll normally get a decision within 5 working days of submission
- You'll be told the outcome and any next steps through written communication

What if you disagree?

You can appeal the decision based on procedural irregularity or new evidence.

Support is available

Contact your Course Co-ordinator/Director, Students' Union, or Learning Support Services.

If you're struggling, speak to someone early — support is available, and EC is just one option.

Your data

Your information is confidential and handled in line with data protection law.

Making a Request

The Higher Education Extenuating Circumstances SOP and EC1 Request form can be accessed on our Policies and Procedures and Assessment Regulations and Key Forms sections of the College website. An EC request should be completed by the student and supporting evidence should be attached. Both the EC1 and supporting evidence should be submitted to the Programme Coordinator.

Leave of Absence / Interruption of Studies

A Leave of Absence (LoA) or Interruption of Studies (IoS) is a temporary pause in your course.

- You stop attending classes and assessments for an agreed period.
- You are expected to return and complete your course later.

This is different from:

- Short-term absence → refer to Extenuating Circumstances.
- Withdrawal → leaving your course completely.

When can I apply?

You can apply if you are **temporarily unable to study**, for example:

- Physical or mental health difficulties
- Caring responsibilities
- Bereavement or family crisis
- Financial hardship
- Exceptional opportunities (e.g., sport, employment)
- Military service

Not normally approved for:

- Extending deadlines
- Holidays
- Improving grades without valid reasons

What evidence do I need?

Your evidence must be relevant, proportionate and to support a decision. Examples include:

- Medical note (no diagnosis required)
- Letter from professional/support service
- Financial or employment evidence
- Supporting statement for personal circumstances

How do I apply?

1. Speak to your Course Co-ordinator/Director or Student Support
2. Submit a formal request, with evidence, using the LoA form
3. Apply as early as possible

You will receive a **written outcome (normally within 10 working days)**

How long can I take off?

- Usually up to **one academic year**
- Shorter periods may be agreed

- Extensions only in exceptional cases

What happens during your leave?

While on LoA/IoS:

- No classes or assessments
- Limited access to college services
- Still subject to programme regulations

It may affect:

- Fees
- Student loans or funding
- Contact student finance for support and guidance

Returning to your course

Before you return:

- Confirm your return by the agreed deadline
- Meet any conditions

On return, the College will:

- Confirm where you restart
- Support your re-engagement
- Inform you of any course changes

If you don't confirm your return, you may be withdrawn.

If your request isn't approved

You will be supported to consider:

- Extenuating Circumstances
- Continuing with support
- Withdrawal options

What if you disagree?

You can appeal the decision based on procedural irregularity or new evidence.

Support is available

Contact your Course Co-ordinator/Director, Student Union, Learning Support Services or Student Finance.

If you're struggling, speak to someone early — support is available and LoA is just one option.

Your data

Your information is confidential and handled in line with data protection law.

Making a Request

The Higher Education leave of Absence/ Interruption of Studies SOP can be accessed on our Policies and Procedures and Assessment Regulations and Key Forms sections of the College website. An LoA/IoS request should be completed by the student and supporting evidence should be attached. Both the LoA/IoS and supporting evidence should be submitted to the Programme Coordinator.

Fee Suspension

The College will consider a Fee Suspension for students who have been granted a Leave of Absence by the Programme Team. If approved, this means that the student will not be charged fees during their Leave of Absence.

Good Academic Standing

The College is required to advise grant-awarding bodies that an individual student is 'in good academic standing'. This statement will not be made in respect of any student whose attendance is unsatisfactory or whose behaviour on the course is otherwise unsatisfactory. Any student absent without agreed leave of absence for four weeks will be assumed to have withdrawn from their course and their sponsor body will be notified accordingly. Leave of Absences are dealt with in the paragraph above.

Examination Regulations

Examination regulations (Appendix 3) cover all written Higher Education examinations conducted at SERC. Special regulations are in place for practical examinations, and your Programme Coordinator will advise you of these.

Examinations are normally of two- or three-hours' duration. Examination scripts are not returned to you, but you may discuss your performance with your tutor You should note that marks and grades are subject to a process of moderation, which ensures their validity and reliability, and that no result is finalised until confirmed by the Board of Examiners. (see Progression section)

Mobile Phones and Electronic Devices

SERC's Mobile Phone policy provides guidance for staff and students regarding the acceptable use of mobile phones while you attend the College. Learners are expected to follow the rules that each tutor will

set for their particular learning environment, and these expectations will be clarified with your class during the induction period. Please note that mobile phones and smart watches must not be brought into Examinations.

Student Discipline

SERC has a responsibility for creating a peaceful and positive learning environment so that all learners can focus on their learning without disruption. At the same time, SERC must ensure that staff have the opportunity to work with learners in safety, in compliance with legal requirements and without unnecessary distraction. To ensure that this is achieved student behaviour and performance is monitored and managed. From time-to-time appropriate disciplinary action may need to be taken when student behaviour fails to meet an acceptable standard.

The process for managing student performance, behaviour and discipline will take account of the needs of the student and will be applied in a manner that will support the development of appropriate, positive, respectful behaviours and successful learning.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct will be addressed using the SERC Student/Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP and as summarised in the table below.

Disciplinary Stage	Category	Actions and Record
Informal Warning	Performance and Classroom Behaviours	• Tutor discusses issues with students informally to encourage change of behaviour • Recorded on E-ILP/ e-PTP by tutor- held to end of programme of study
Stage 1- Warning	Reoccurring Performance and Classroom Behaviours or Minor Misconduct	• Warning issued by tutor and recorded on E-ILP/ e-PTP • Time bound action plan issued for corrective behaviour • Recorded on E-ILP/ e-PTP by tutor- held to end of programme of study
Stage 2- Warning	Reoccurring Performance and Classroom Behaviours or Misconduct	• Warning issued by School Management or Designated Manager • Time bound action plan issued for corrective behaviour • Recorded on E-ILP/ e-PTP by tutor- held to end of programme of study

Stage 3- Final Warning	Reoccurring Performance and Classroom Behaviours or Serious Misconduct	• Warning issued by Designated Manager • Time bound action plan issued for corrective behaviour • Recorded on E-ILP/ e-PTP by tutor- held to end of programme of study
Stage 4- Exclusion	Reoccurring Performance and Classroom Behaviours or Gross Misconduct	• Issued by Designated Manager with approval of Principal/ Director • Withdrawal from programme • Exclusion for a period of up to 5 years

It is important to note that a student against whom disciplinary action has been taken at Stage 2, 3 or 4 shall have the right of appeal. The right to appeal is only available in the situation where the student can demonstrate that:

• The SERC procedures were not correctly followed in determining the outcome;

• Additional relevant information or evidence has come to light that, had it been known at the time of the disciplinary sanction, would have led to a different outcome;

• There was demonstrable bias or prejudice in the decision reached;

• The sanction was excessive or inappropriate given the nature of the issue. The right to appeal in these circumstances is only available to a student for 5 working days after being issued with the Formal Warning.

Use of College IT Systems and Social Media

College IT Systems

You are bound by the terms and conditions of the College's Acceptable ICT Use Policy. The College uses web filtering software to block access to prohibited sites and material. In the event that you inadvertently access any offensive or sexually explicit material, for example from a link in an email, you should leave that site immediately and inform both your Programme Coordinator/ Director and the IT & Services Department giving details of the URL visited.

As stated in the College's Acceptable ICT Use Policy, SERC retains the right to monitor the transmission or storage of material through its computing services if it is suspected that acceptable use has been violated.

Social Media

The following guidance is to help you understand the implications of using both college and/or personal social media. Social media is defined as any type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public or internal forum. This constantly changing area includes (but is not limited to):

- Online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook & LinkedIn.
- Blogs, videos and image-sharing websites such as YouTube, Instagram, & TikTok.
- Messaging technologies such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, iMessage & Snapchat.
- Dating apps
- Personal web space

Although SERC permits personal use of social media, you are reminded that access to these facilities is a privilege, and that social media use should not interfere with your responsibilities and commitments during class time. Access to social media is currently permitted by default, however, the principle of privilege and responsibility applies to all students, and access may be removed if you fail to meet your responsibilities & commitments.

It is your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the rules and guidelines set out by individual social media sites. However, in addition to these rules, SERC require that you:

- Should not use social media websites to criticise the College, or any staff members, students or third parties.
- Should not use social media websites to abuse, harass staff members, students or any other third parties.
- Must remember not to post any comment, or image that would bring the College into disrepute, or give cause for a third party to consider taking legal action.
- Must not place information pertaining to, or upload image(s) of college staff or other students to any web site without the prior consent being obtained from the staff and student member(s) in question.

You are reminded that the line between Academic, Professional and Personal use of social media is not always clear and personal use can have an impact in the College and on the studies of others. It is therefore important that you bear the following advice in mind when using social media.

When using personal social media, remember that although you are not acting on behalf of SERC, you can impact on the College's reputation if you are identified as being a SERC student. Your online profile may reference SERC's name as your place of study, so make sure that any of your comments/posts are inoffensive and thought-through.

Some online communities can be volatile, tempting users to behave in ways they otherwise would not. Do not forget that anything posted online can be seen by anybody, and that it might not be possible to remove it. Deletion in the online world is neither instant nor permanent and may have an effect later in life.

Online social media material can be retrieved by legal bodies in some cases years after posting. Bodies providing internet access have legal requirements to store material for lengthy periods of time. Think before you post! Remember that prospective employers or universities may trawl social media sites as part of their selection process and the social media posts you make could undermine your future prospects.

Should you encounter or witness any inappropriate behaviour such as bullying or illegal activity on social media, you can talk to your Programme Coordinator/ Director, seek guidance from the PSNI, or access free, impartial online safety advice on communication and social networking on the Get Safe Online website.

ABOUT MY COURSE

About My Course

Awarding Organisations/ Bodies

SERC works with a range of different Awarding Organisations/ Bodies at Higher Education level. The table below summarises the Awarding Organisations/ Bodies and the level and qualification type delivered.

Awarding Organisation/ Body	Qualification Type
Pearson	Level 4- Higher National Certificate (HNC) Level 5- Higher National Diploma (HND)
Ulster University (UU)	Level 4- Certificate Level 5- Foundation Degree
The Open University (OU)	Level 5- Foundation Degree (FD) Level 6- Top-Up Honours Degree
Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)	Level 6- Honours Degree
Accounting Technicians Ireland (ATI)	Level 4- Certificate Level 5- Diploma
City and Guilds (C&G)	Level 4- Award/ Certificate Level 5- Award Level 6- Award Level 7- Award
Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI)	Level 4- Award/ Certificate Level 5- Diploma
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)	Level 5- Diploma Level 7- Advanced Diploma
Chartered Management Institute (CMI)	Level 5- Award/ Certificate/ Diploma Level 7- Certificate
Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)	Level 4- Diploma Level 5- Diploma Level 6- Certificate
Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCNNI)	Level 4- Award Level 5- Certificate
Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE)	Level 5- Diploma
Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT)	Level 4 Award/ Certificate/ Diploma Level 5 Certificate/ Diploma

Your qualification will be delivered according to the relevant academic regulations for each Awarding Body.

A copy of the regulations will be available on your programme VLE and for University validated and Pearson Programmes can be found in the Assessment Regulations section of our website.

Qualifications and Credit Framework

Higher Education at SERC aims to provide students with the required achieved outcomes detailed in Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

This framework is an integral part of quality assurance in HE. HE institutions such as SERC use this in planning, delivering and monitoring their study programmes and the awards that come from them, and external quality assurance procedures focus directly on how effectively institutions manage their use of the framework. The numbering of the FHEQ levels correspond with levels 4 to 8 in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for the vocational qualifications system and can assist with transfer and progression between different levels and types of study. The FHEQ also aligns with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area to assist students' and graduates' international mobility.

The FHEQ is based on the concept that qualifications are awarded for the demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes and attainment, rather than the length or content of study. It provides the basis for a shared understanding, for higher education and its key stakeholders, of the link between standards and qualification levels. It aims to support a consistency of approach and transparency about expectations for students and employers by providing a series of general qualification descriptors which summarise the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of different qualifications are likely to have.

The HE programmes delivered by SERC reflect the generic outcomes within the FHEQ of the QAA. The bulk of the HE provision at SERC is at credit level 4 and 5 (i.e. Higher National Certificate (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND), and Foundation Degree (FD). The College also offers full honours degree programmes at level 6 in some specialist areas. CMI Level 7 qualifications are also offered through our Business Support unit.

Credit levels are indicators of relative demand, complexity and depth of learning and student independence.

A summary of the skills expected to be demonstrated by students studying at Levels 4-6 is detailed below:

Credit Level 4

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study

Credit Level 5

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge

Credit Level 6

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
    - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

A Programme of Study is comprised of modules which are delivered at a specified credit level detailed below:

Award	FHEQ Credit Level	Minimum overall credits to be achieved	Typical range of levels of credits
Certificate of Higher Education (HNC)	4	120	3, 4
Diploma of Higher Education (HND)	5	240	3, 4, 5
Foundation Degree	5	240	3, 4, 5
Honours Degree	6	360	3, 4, 5, 6

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 articulates the principles of UK higher education for securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality.

It has been built on a shared understanding across the UK, the Quality Code enables providers to see what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other, irrespective of the regulatory framework in which they operate. It informs the public, protects students' interests and champions the UK's world-leading reputation for high-quality education provision.

Individual higher education providers use the Quality Code to ensure students have a high-quality educational experience. It is published online at www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

SERC policies, procedures and processes are all informed by the expectations within the Quality Code. The Quality Code is used to help maintain the academic standards of programmes and awards, assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities, and to provide information about their higher education provision.

Student representatives and Students' Unions can use the Quality Code in their discussions with the College, as it sets out the minimum expectations for the quality of the learning opportunities the College aims to make available to its students. Students will be encouraged to be involved in these discussions through the College Student Engagement processes.

HE Full-Time (FT) Study and Ethos

Full-time study means dedicating the majority of your time and effort to your education- consider it like a full-time job. Full-time courses generally involve attending classes multiple times a week and in some cases every day. There is a significant length of time required to attend classes/ lectures and complete independent study. It allows you to achieve your qualification in a shorter timeframe than part-time study due to this commitment.

Design of programmes ensures that the student learning experience provides current knowledge and skills expected by industry and meets the individual needs of the student. SERC is developing specific characteristics for it's HE provision delivered through further education (FE) and they include:

- Producing a work-ready workforce skilled in advanced technical, subject specific skills and knowledge that relates to their chosen area of study e.g. engineering, construction, web-authoring, software engineering;
- Personal development of transversal skills;
- Personal Development skills including the capability for independent learning and reflection, problem solving, e-learning and life-long learning;
- Employability skills such as being able to work as part of a team to find solutions to complex problems with people from different backgrounds;
- Widening student participation in HE and supporting those students' development within HE;
- A flexible practical curriculum responsive to economic need delivered with academic rigour.

These characteristics are integrated within a college FT HE ethos and they include:

- Bridging courses and support for Essential Skills (ES) to enable participation and progression;
- Small group and team learning;
- Project-based learning;
- Full pastoral care services which contribute to developing the whole person;
- Retention initiatives to support students to succeed;
- Opportunities to engage in work-placement;
- Vocational specific project activities including overseas study and work placements;
- Curriculum delivery by staff with current industrial/sectoral knowledge.

HE Part-Time (PT) Study and Ethos

Part-time study allows you to study at a slower pace than full time. This allows you to better balance other commitments such as work and family life. There is still time required to attend classes/ lectures and complete independent study, but it involved fewer hours of study per week compared to full time, leading to a longer overall study period for the same qualification.

The PT HE programmes will incorporate the relevant vocational qualification and where appropriate the associated Essential Skill of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT qualifications. Students enrolling on a PT HE programme will be required to address all elements of the programme. The College will provide guidance for all PT HE students through its internal services and through this Handbook. The College PT HE programmes will allow;

- A focus on teaching and learning so that students develop higher level skills of application, analysis, evaluation and the ability for lifelong learning, including capabilities in the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in addition to the specific learning outcomes associated with their chosen vocational programme.
- Suitable progression pathways for students from FE programmes within SERC and other educational institutions;
- Opportunities for progression to honours degree programmes at enhanced entry and /or to appropriate employment in the local economy;
- Employees engaged in the local economy the opportunity to develop their higher-level technical, supervisory and self - development skills in a fashion that is compatible with their current and future skill needs and their working and family commitments.
- Personal development of Transversal Skills

Higher Level Apprenticeships

Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) allow you to study an approved higher-level qualification (level 4 and above) while working in employment in a wide range of subject areas. The length of a Higher-Level Apprenticeship will vary depending on the programme you chose but will be a minimum of two years.

As an HLA you will work full-time within the industry and study with the support of your employer, part-time within the College. There is still time required to attend classes/ lectures and complete independent study, but it involved fewer hours of study per week compared to full time, leading to a longer overall study period for the same qualification, allowing you to balance work requirements.

To be a Higher-Level Apprentice you must be a new employee or an existing employee in a new job role. Entry requirements will depend on the apprenticeship pathway.

To take part in the Higher-Level Apprenticeship programme you need, as a minimum, to:

- be employed or be about to take up permanent paid employment as an apprentice, or be an existing employee moving to a new job role, with a Northern Ireland based company
- work a minimum of 21 hours per week (which includes time for 'off-the-job' training)
- have achieved all necessary entry qualifications determined by the relevant sector
- pass any entry tests specified by the relevant sector
- be the minimum school leaving age in Northern Ireland

You may need to meet other eligibility considerations, for example you may not be eligible if you're a non-EU national, a public sector worker or based on the qualifications you have previously been awarded.

By taking part in a Higher-Level Apprenticeship, you can gain the skills that employers need and that are relevant to the local economy, therefore improving your prospects of good earnings and sustained employment.

Other benefits include:

- earning while you learn
- achieving professional-level qualifications without paying higher education tuition fees
- increased opportunities for career progression
- a clear pathway to achieving ambitions in the workplace

Higher Level Apprenticeships allow employers to train staff to the level needed so they have strong technical and good employability skills.

An apprenticeship can:

- fill higher level skills gap
- attract higher calibre staff
- increase productivity
- develop existing staff

Who's Who?

Explanation of Roles

The management of each course is the responsibility of the Programme Coordinator/ Director (also known as Course Team Leader, Course Tutor or Course Director) who is supported by the course tutors (the Course Team).

While the Programme Coordinator/ Director and Course Team are responsible for the day-to-day operation of your course, it is the Principal Lecturer and Head of School who are responsible for the overall management of all courses within their School.

Most of your day-to-day dealings will be with the Course Tutors and if you have any queries the best starting point is usually with the tutor for the module in question or your Programme Coordinator/ Director. You will also be allocated a personal tutor each year, see Tutorial Programme section below. Your personal tutor is someone who can get to know you and support you throughout the course providing support where needed.

It is very important that you stay connected with your programme course team especially if you are facing problems or issues. They will advise you how to access additional help or discuss the issues with you. If the tutors do not know about how you feel they cannot help you – so keep them informed.

College E-mail and Microsoft Teams

The main form of communication with students is via the College e-mail system. You will be given a SERC email account, which you should check regularly as many staff use this to relay information directly to you.

You will also have access to Microsoft Teams which you can use to communicate with both staff and students within the College.

Both Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Teams are free to download from Google Play and the Apple Store.

When you need to contact a member of staff you should, in the first instance use the staff e-mail system. As with all communications, please be courteous and polite in sending messages. For further information see the Use of College IT systems and Social Media sections.

Course Structure and Content

Student Induction

Induction is a vital part of student education to ensure you are aware of the services you are entitled to and in turn make students aware of their responsibilities. All students will undergo a range of induction activities including online modules as well as face to face activities with Programme Coordinators and teaching team. New areas for induction will be identified and include, student finance, ILT facilities, pastoral care, health and safety etc. Your Programme Coordinator/ Director will inform you about induction dates. It is important that you attend these events.

Tutorial Programme

All FT students will be allocated a Programme Coordinator/ Director who will carry out regular reviews of progress and target setting as well as having a pastoral care role. All FT students will have a weekly timetabled tutorial which will include career education, cultural diversity, development and monitoring of the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

Student Placements and Work Experience

Work placement is a valuable opportunity to gain real workplace experience and develop the skills employers are looking for. Placements may form a mandatory assessed part of your course or be undertaken as an optional opportunity to enhance your employability and career prospects. They provide a chance to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom within a real working environment.

All full-time and part-time students are encouraged to participate in a work placement, even if it is not a requirement if their course. SERC will support you throughout the process and help you identify suitable placement opportunities. You will work closely with your tutor and Work Placement Officer, who will provide advice and guidance from application through to placement completion.

To help you find a placement, SERC provides access to the Work Placement App. This online system enables you to search for employers, browse placement opportunities and register placements that you have sourced independently. Students, placement providers and SERC staff are given secure access to information relevant to their role. SERC and placement providers are committed to handling personal data responsibly and in accordance with Data Protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

Placements can take place with either large organisations or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), both in Northern Ireland and overseas. The length and attendance requirements of placements vary depending on your course. Some placements may last for a full academic year, while others may run for several weeks. Attendance can range from one day per week to full-time (up to five days per week).

If your placement is not a compulsory part of your course, it must be completed in your own time. The placement must be relevant to your course of study and approved by your course tutor.

SERC will put in place the necessary placement documentation to guarantee we have done all that is reasonably possible to ensure students have a safe and rewarding placement. This includes a risk assessment which is completed for each student.

If your placement involves working with children, and/or adults at risk of harm or adults who may require protection, you may need to obtain a valid AccessNI check before starting. Further information about this process can be found in the SERC Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Procedure, available on the SERC website on the SERC website Policies and Procedures section.

AccessNI is the criminal record checking service for Northern Ireland. Depending on the placement role, students may need an Enhanced or Enhanced with Barred Lists check. These checks include the same information as a standard criminal record check, along with relevant information held by local police and, where applicable, checks carried out by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

SERC will manage the AccessNI application process for both full-time and part-time students in Further Education and Higher Education programmes. Students are responsible for paying the cost of their AccessNI check unless advised otherwise.

Details of the Work Placement Team are provided below should you require any support or guidance regarding the AccessNI process.

Carolyn King
Work Placement & Competitions Manager
cking@serc.ac.uk

Erin Harkness
Work Placement & Competitions Officer
eharkness@serc.ac.uk

Teigan Mitchell
Work Placement & Competitions Officer
tmitchell@serc.ac.uk

Alan Horne
Work Placement & Competitions Officer
ahorne@serc.ac.uk

Leah Hamilton
Work Placement & Competitions Officer
lhamilton@serc.ac.uk

International Student Support

The International Office is available to advise you on a wide range of issues before and after arrival to the College. We recognise that it can be very difficult adapting to a new culture and in many cases a very different way of learning. Throughout the year we will be offering a number of support sessions for international students, to enable you to understand what is required to achieve success.

As well as helping you understand the requirements of Higher Education, these sessions will allow you to discuss your concerns with a view to addressing misunderstandings.

SERC offers many support services for all students, and the International Office will be happy to advise you on where you can get this support. You can contact the International Office using international@serc.ac.uk.

The SERC Learning Experience

Schemes of Work

Schemes of Work (SOW) or Week by Week Schedules for each unit of study will be available on your programme of study site within Moodle by the third teaching week. The SOW will assist students to have knowledge of the running order of lessons and prepare in advance for these through reading or set tasks.

Project-Based Learning

FT programmes will be encouraged to source real projects to enable students to have real life learning experiences with either external partners or even within the College. These projects will be activity based with defined and agreed outcomes, specific milestones and resources and must also meet the requirements of Awarding Organisation assessment criteria.

Delivery Methods

A range of delivery methods will be used within your Programme of Study.

These may include:

Lectures- The purpose of a lecture is to convey basic knowledge and concepts. You will learn both from the lecture content and from different approaches to the material presented.

Tutorials- There are two types of tutorials – academic and pastoral. The academic tutorial may be individual, or in small groups, but the key element is the interaction between tutor and you around problems that you have raised. They are important in helping you to learn to identify and articulate problems in your work, and to seek help and constructive criticism.

Hybrid Learning- All Programmes of Study are developing a hybrid learning approach. This means that the range of modules within a Programme of Study will use an appropriate variety of learning methods including theory, practical workshop/laboratories, as well as a range of online learning and assessment materials. These methods should help address the range of learning styles that students may have within a class cohort and also help students develop independent learning skills.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

The accreditation of prior learning is the process by which students may be awarded credits for learning that they have gained in the past and which is relevant to the course for which they have applied. Accreditation of prior learning usually takes the form of one of the following:

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) – which is learning for which a certificated has been awarded by an appropriate Awarding Organisation or academic institution; and

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) – this is when you are given credit for past learning which comes from experience rather than a specific course of certificated study.

In either case, it is the responsibility of the student to provide evidence that their prior learning matches the learning outcomes of the sections of the course for which they are claiming prior credit. If you would like to discuss APL further contact your Programme Coordinator/ Director. Full details are found in the Higher Education Accreditation of Prior Learning SOP.

Independent Learning and Personal Development

Students through their HE programme will develop independent learning techniques to enhance their personal development. Therefore, independent learning will be encouraged for all students, appropriate to their skills and experience, through the use of ILT technology, project-based activity, presentation, placement experience and team work activities as well as the range of enrichment activities organised within their Programme of Study.

Higher Education Achievement Records (HEAR)

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) provides a single comprehensive record of a learner's achievement. The HEAR provides a detailed picture of student achievement throughout your time at the College including academic work, extra-curricular activities, prizes and employability awards voluntary work and offices held in Students' Union clubs and societies that have been verified by the institution.

Student Portal

The student portal is used to track your progress. It also tracks your completion of a range of induction modules and other key records. Programme coordinators will support you to complete all induction materials with the first 3 weeks of your programme.

Campus and Intercampus Competitions

Competitions are a great way to develop your skills, gain experience, and challenge yourself. Throughout the year, the College runs a range of campus and intercampus competitions across different subject areas, giving students opportunities to improve their technical abilities and build important transferable skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and confidence.

There are two main types of competitions available to Higher Education students:

- **Project Competitions** – where you complete and present a project based on a specific challenge or theme.
- **Skills Competitions** – where you demonstrate your practical skills in a timed and competitive environment.

You can find out more about available competitions on the Competitions Team site on the student intranet or by speaking to your tutor.

External Competitions and Awards

SERC is committed to providing students with opportunities to take part in competitions as part of their learning experience. Many students have progressed from internal College competitions to represent SERC and Northern Ireland HE at regional, national, and international competitions, including WorldSkills events.

Course teams, with support from the Competitions Manager, will identify suitable competitions and explain how students are selected to take part. These competitions may also be used to identify students who could go on to compete at regional, national, or international level.

Local Site Visits and Study Trips

Visits to local companies and businesses are an important part of the curriculum by giving the FT student an appreciation of a real working environment. Where possible, teams will organise appropriate site visits to enrich your programme. Students may be asked to make a contribution to the cost of these visits.

Guest Speakers

The College aims to enrich the student learning experience through engaging guest speakers from industries relevant to the curriculum area. Where possible, teams will organise appropriate guest speakers to enrich your programme.

International Cultural Visits and Study Trips

The College aims to provide students with the opportunity to participate in local and international study trips to broaden their experience vocationally and culturally. The international team will work with programme teams to identify links with partners across Europe and internationally and explore the opportunity to access funding to support the financial cost.

Entrepreneurship and Enterprise

The College aims to support and develop students' entrepreneurial mindset, skills, confidence, and innovative thinking. Through ideation, project-based learning, competitions, and a year-round programme of activities, students are encouraged to explore and test their ideas. Innovation Advisors work in partnership with course teams to deliver workshops, tutorials, and 1:1 mentoring, supporting students at every stage of their enterprise journey.

"Getting to Grips" with Higher Education

Supporting students in their transition to Higher Education (HE) is a key focus of the College. The **"Getting to Grips"** series has been designed specifically to support students as they progress to Higher Education study. The series focuses on developing core academic skills essential for success in HE, including:

- Academic reading
- Research skills
- Academic writing
- Referencing conventions (e.g. Harvard)

These areas reflect the foundational skills required to build confidence and capability in higher-level study. The "Getting to Grips" series forms part of a wider, integrated student support framework rather than operating as a standalone provision. It is complemented by:

- Study skills development embedded within tutorials
- Library and research support services
- The Student Support Hub, offering guidance on wellbeing, finance, careers, and learning support

Together, these supports ensure that students are equipped both academically and personally to succeed in their HE journeys.

Supporting video tutorials can be found at: Learning Academy - Videos - HE GTG - HE in FE - All Documents

Student Engagement

Higher Education teams in the College strive to provide a quality learning experience that meets your expectations. Your feedback on that experience is important to the College, and you will be invited to provide your views in a number of ways. Further information can be found in the Student Engagement section of the Higher Education Programmes SOP in the Policies and Procedures section on the SERC Website.

Class Representatives

A class representative is voted for annually. They will represent the class at college and programme meetings to discuss areas for improvement and development of the programme.

Staff-Student Consultative Meetings

Twice a year the Course Team will meet with students to ask them about issues and queries that they may have about the programme. This is an opportunity to discuss ideas and hear external feedback such as the External Examiner's comments on the programme. Minutes will be taken, and Programme Coordinators/ Directors will provide feedback on issues raised.

Focus Groups

Occasionally you may be invited by the College to join a focus group. These look in depth at specific issues of interest or concern. Generally, feedback will be given via the College intranet or your Programme Coordinators/ Directors.

Student Surveys

Student feedback is extremely important to SERC and the Programme Team. The results feed into programme self-evaluations and enable critique of all aspects of the module and will inform future delivery. Students are also asked to complete online first impressions and general surveys about the facilities and experience on the programme. All surveys are anonymous and are for your benefit and future applicants who are considering joining the programme.

SERC

ASSESSMENT

Assessment

Programme Assessment

Assessment Schedules

The assessment schedule is aimed at streamlining assessments across all the modules within a Programme of Study and to ensure that there is a variety of assessment methods used. All students will receive an assessment schedule for each year of the Programme of Study. The assessment schedule should be available on Moodle within the first 3 weeks of a module starting. It will provide an outline of what is expected and allow self-responsibility for learning and progression.

Assessment Methods

Tutors will devise a range of assessment methods such as written, practical, peer, e-assessment and examinations. Students must submit written assignments electronically through the College approved plagiarism checker software. When received on time these will be marked and returned electronically within 3 weeks of submission. Tutors will store all assignment feedback and returns for quality purposes. All students will be expected to keep electronic or hard copies of their submitted work. There will be further details about the forms of assessment for each unit on your Programme of Study Moodle site.

Submission of Assessments

The submission of assignments will follow the regulations required by the relevant Awarding Organisation, accessed on the SERC Website under Assessment Regulations and Key Forms section. Most assignments will be submitted and receipted electronically. It is your responsibility to keep a backup copy of your work. If a physical hand-in location is required your tutor will advise you.

Feedback on Progress

The College views feedback as an important learning tool for students. Students will receive written feedback three weeks after submission (if they have met submission deadlines) to the module tutor (this will include one week for cross marking purposes). Feedback should be constructive which will identify areas of good practice evident in the submitted work and indicate how a student could improve their work or future work. The grade will reflect the adjectives used in the feedback. The process of feedback may vary depending upon the Awarding Organisation.

Academic Practices

The College requires certain basic standards to be met by Higher Education students; these are outlined in Appendix 1.

Academic Malpractice

There are several offences that constitute as academic malpractice.

Plagiarism and Malpractice

Plagiarism is *"The failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person's work as if it were the candidate's own"* (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2004). A strict interpretation of the term 'work' in this definition would include original ideas as well as published words or artefacts or work previously submitted by other candidates/learners. Plagiarism is on the increase, and students should be aware that tutors have a responsibility to identify and report any suspected instances of plagiarism. Several forms of plagiarism exist, ranging from purchasing whole assignments via the Internet, through partial plagiarism to unconscious plagiarism.

The following are dishonest and therefore unacceptable and not allowed by the College:

- Taking someone else's work (including another students), images or ideas and passing it off as your own (this is called Plagiarism).

- The misuse or covert use of Artificial Intelligence tools to complete or partial complete assessments and passing it off as your own work.
- Using the computer, the internet, or information stored on a hard copy or USB which belongs to someone else and passing it off as your own.
- Cheating, that is acting unfairly or dishonestly to gain an advantage.
- Contract Cheating which involves a student engaging with and paying a third part to complete an assessment on their behalf
- Secretly, agreeing with another to deceive, this is known as collusion i.e. unauthorised co-operation between a student and another person in the preparation and production of work which is presented as the student's own.
- Students should not lend or borrow notes and disks as it can lead to plagiarism, cheating and collusion.
- Personation- assuming the identify of a student with the intent to deceive during a piece of assessment by complete the work on behalf of the student

Artificial Intelligence and Malpractice

Artificial Intelligence (AI) use refers to the use of AI tools to obtain information and content which might be used in work produced for assessments which lead towards qualifications. While the range of AI tools, and their capabilities, is likely to expand greatly in the near future, misuse of AI tools in relation to qualification assessments at any time constitutes malpractice. Teachers and students should also be aware that AI tools are still being developed and there are often limitations to their use, such as producing inaccurate or inappropriate content.

AI chatbots are AI tools which generate text in response to user prompts and questions. Users can ask follow-up questions or ask the chatbot to revise the responses already provided. AI chatbots respond to prompts based upon patterns in the data sets (large language model) upon which they have been trained. They generate responses which are statistically likely to be relevant and appropriate. AI chatbots can complete tasks such as the following:

• Answering questions
• Analysing, improving, and summarising text
• Authoring essays, articles, fiction, and non-fiction

• Writing computer code
• Translating text from one language to another
• Generating new ideas, prompts, or suggestions for a given topic or theme
• Generating text with specific attributes, such as tone, sentiment, or formality

AI chatbots currently available include:

• ChatGPT (https://chat.openai.com)
• Jenni AI (https://jenni.ai)
• Jasper AI (https://www.jasper.ai/)
• Writesonic (https://writesonic.com/chat/)
• Bloomai (https://huggingface.co/bigscience/bloom)
• Google Bard
• Microsoft Copilot

There are also AI tools which can be used to generate images, such as:

• Midjourney (https://midjourney.com/showcase/top/)
• Stable Diffusion (https://stablediffusionweb.com/)
• Dalle-E 2 (OpenAI) (https://openai.com/dall-e-2/)

The following are dishonest and therefore unacceptable and not allowed by the College:

• Copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content so that the work is no longer the student's own
• Copying or paraphrasing whole responses of AI-generated content
• Using AI to complete parts of the assessment so that the work does not reflect the student's own work, analysis, evaluation or calculations
• Failing to acknowledge use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information
• Incomplete or poor acknowledgement of AI tools
• Submitting work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies.

Cheating during exams

Cheating is defined as the use of inadmissible materials or any other material during an exam, other than those approved by the invigilator. Cheating during exams will also include the act of copying and the act of

collusion where students signal answers to other students during an exam or share exam content with students after an exam with the intent for them to gain an unfair advantage.

Falsification or fabrication

Falsification or fabrication involves the unauthorised creation of false information/data, or the alteration of information/data within a piece of assessment while presenting this information as genuine.

Academic Misconduct

What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct includes acts of dishonesty, deception and fraud through the attempts to gain an unfair academic advantage. The different forms of academic misconduct are identified below:

- Plagiarism of any nature
- Misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Cheating (including copying, personation and falsification)
- Collusion

If you are discovered or suspected of any of the above, the College will investigate using the HE Academic Misconduct procedure which specifies process and possible penalties. Academic misconduct and malpractice is viewed very seriously by the College and can be viewed as gross misconduct.

Academic misconduct vs. gross academic misconduct

The table below summarises the differences between academic misconduct and gross academic misconduct. Please not these lists are not exhaustive.

Academic Misconduct	Gross Academic Misconduct
• Work with limited plagiarism and/ or covert AI generated content may be considered academic misconduct. • The copying from books and/or internet sources without acknowledgement, which has a significant contribution to the overall work. • The limited plagiarism from professional work (not course books). • The paraphrasing of another's work by simply changing a few words or altering the order of	• Cases of cheating, collusion, and work with substantial plagiarised and/ or covert AI generated content may be considered as gross academic misconduct. • Repeated cases of academic misconduct will generally be escalated to gross academic misconduct. • The extensive copying of textbooks and/or internet sources in one piece of work or limited copying in two or more pieces of work

presentation, without clear identification and acknowledgement. • The limited copying of other candidates' work (hard copy or electronic), or excessive help within one piece of work. • The limited downloading of information from the internet or the use of model answers downloaded from the internet. • The representation of the students own previous work without being properly referenced. This is known as auto-plagiarism. • The limited copying or paraphrasing of AI-generated content. • The incomplete or poor acknowledgement of AI tools.	which makes a significant contribution to the work/s. • The extensive plagiarism of professional works. • The buying, selling or stealing of work. • The repeated evidence of extensive use of information from the internet without acknowledgement or using model internet answers. • The use of past candidates' work from previous years. • The repeated cases of Academic Misconduct. • The deliberate and detailed presentation of another's concept as one's own. • The copying or paraphrasing sections or whole responses of AI-generated content so that the work is no longer the students own. • The use of AI to complete parts of the assessment so that the work does not reflect the student's own work, analysis, evaluation or calculations. • The failure to acknowledge use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information. • The submission of work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies. • Cases of cheating (Including copying, personation and falsification). • Cases of collusion.

Avoiding plagiarism and the misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence

To avoid Plagiarism and the misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence tools, students should carefully note the following guidance on referencing in Appendix 1. HE students will be expected to submit written assessments through the College approved plagiarism checker software Turnitin.

The College uses Turnitin software to assist with the detection of plagiarism and misuse/ covert use of Artificial Intelligence. You can use this software by submitting before the deadline to help determine if you have properly referenced your work. Turnitin is only one part of the process and professional judgement will be used by staff as part of the process.

Consequences and penalties

Incidences of academic misconduct will be dealt with following the HE procedures for the relevant Awarding Organisation as previously identified and any resulting disciplinary action will follow the Student and Trainee Disciplinary and Behaviour Policy and SOP. Penalties can be found in the Academic Misconduct in HE procedure within Section 9.6 of the Higher Education Programmes SOP on the SERC Website.

The below penalty tables summarise the penalties for each of the main Awarding Organisation/ Bodies within the College. Other Awarding Organisation/ Bodies can be found in Section 9.6 of the Higher Education Programmes SOP.

Penalties for Ulster University Level 4 Certificate and Foundation Degree Programmes

1st Offence- Academic Misconduct	**2nd Offence- Academic Misconduct**	**3rd Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 1st Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct**	**4th Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 2nd Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct**	**Plagiarism Detected after Graduation**
Reduction in marks based on exclusion of plagiarised work or work produced through the misuse/ covert use of AI. Formative interview with module co-ordinator and/or Programme Coordinator. Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. Interview with Head of School and/or Course/Subject Director and/or lecturer. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 1 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. and maximum mark of 40% for coursework element[1]. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 2 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for module. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 3 (final warning issued) or stage 4 (exclusion). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	The award may be revoked.

[1] 'Assignment containing plagiarism and/or misuse/ covert use of AI' means the assignment which contains the plagiarised material, and not all the assessments for the module. 'Maximum mark for coursework element' refers to the total aggregate percentage mark for all the pieces of coursework in the module.

Penalties for Pearson Higher National programmes

1st Offence- Academic Misconduct	2nd Offence- Academic Misconduct	3rd Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 1st Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct	4th Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 2nd Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct	Plagiarism Detected after Graduation
Should be picked up at formative assessment stage and should be addressed by educating on referencing and seriousness of plagiarism and/ or misuse/ covert of AI. Formative interview with Unit Co-ordinator and/or Programme Coordinator. Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Work should be marked without plagiarised aspect or work produced through the misuse/ covert use of AI, contributing to the mark. Work can be resubmitted if a 'pass' grade not achieved. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 1 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Failure of the assessment. Resubmission of full assessment with grade capped at a "pass". Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 2 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Failure of module. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 3 (final warning issued) or stage 4 (exclusion). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	The award may be revoked.

[1] 'Assignment containing plagiarism and/or misuse/ covert use of AI' means the assignment which contains the plagiarised material, and not all the assessments for the module. 'Maximum mark for coursework element' refers to the total aggregate percentage mark for all the pieces of coursework in the module.

Penalties for Queens University Belfast Foundation Degree Programmes

1st Offence- Academic Misconduct	2nd Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 1st Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct	3rd Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 2nd Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct	Plagiarism Detected after Graduation
Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. Interview with Head of School and/or Course/Subject Director and/or lecturer. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 1 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. and maximum mark of 40% for coursework element[1]. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 2 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for module. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 3 (final warning issued) or stage 4 (exclusion). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	The award may be revoked.

[1] 'Assignment containing plagiarism and/or misuse/ covert use of AI' means the assignment which contains the plagiarised material, and not all the assessments for the module. 'Maximum mark for coursework element' refers to the total aggregate percentage mark for all the pieces of coursework in the module.

Penalties for The Open University, CertHE, Foundation Degree or Degree Programmes

1st Offence- Academic Misconduct	**2nd Offence- Academic Misconduct**	**3rd Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 1st Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct**	**4th Offence- Academic Misconduct/ 2nd Offence- Gross Academic Misconduct**	**Plagiarism Detected after Graduation**
Reduction in marks based on exclusion of plagiarised work or work produced through the misuse/ covert use of AI. Formative interview with module co-ordinator and/or Programme Coordinator. Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. Interview with Head of School and/or Course/Subject Director and/or lecturer. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 1 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for assignment containing plagiarism or through the misuse/ covert use of AI. and maximum mark of 40% for coursework element[1]. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 2 (formal warning issued). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	Mark of zero for module. Case referred to Head of Higher Education (HE). Interview with Head of HE and course team representative. Application of student disciplinary procedure – stage 3 (final warning issued) or stage 4 (exclusion). Details recorded on the Academic Misconduct register and Exam Board.	The award may be revoked.

[1] 'Assignment containing plagiarism and/or misuse/ covert use of AI' means the assignment which contains the plagiarised material, and not all the assessments for the module. 'Maximum mark for coursework element' refers to the total aggregate percentage mark for all the pieces of coursework in the module.

Academic Appeals & Complaints

SERC wants your experience to be positive but sometimes there may be issues that concern you. You should feel free to discuss areas of concern, whatever they may be, with your tutors. It is always better to do this as soon as possible so that these can be resolved. There may be times, however, when a formal approach is needed, and procedures exist to help you do this.

Academic Appeals and Complaints are different and operate under two separate procedures.

An Academic Appeal is a formal request within specific grounds to review decisions made by the Higher Education Assessment and Examination Board on progression, assessment and awards.

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction made by either a single student or a group of students about the provision of their programme of study or related academic service or facility or any other service provided by the College.

The Academic Appeals Procedure cannot be used to bring complaints.

Academic Appeals

Your rights to appeal are detailed in the Academic Appeals section on the SERC Website and Appendix 4 of this Handbook. Please note there are two separate processes depending on your programme of study: 1. SERC Appeals Process and 2. LJMU Academic Appeals Process which follows the University's own process. Remember once you have exhausted the SERC's internal procedures you can appeal to your Awarding Organisation.

You can also refer to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). For further information on this procedure and the areas covered please see www.nipso.org.uk.

Complaints and Compliments

SERC is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain. The College will ensure that any issues or problems raised are resolved as quickly and as close to the source as possible, to the satisfaction of all concerned. We would encourage customers to seek to

resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff in the first instance, however where this is not possible or a resolution cannot be found, customers may submit* a formal complaint in writing by either:

- Completing a complaints form, available at campus reception points;
- Emailing complaints@serc.ac.uk;

**If you require assistance in submitting a complaint, please make this known to reception staff, and assistance will be provided.*

The College also welcomes compliments from customers. If we have excelled at something, we would love to hear from you. You can pass on your compliment by contacting the staff member concerned, emailing compliments@serc.ac.uk, or completing a compliments form, available at campus reception points.

All complaints and compliments received are recorded on an electronic register. If the comment is positive, we will ensure that the member of staff involved is informed. If the comment is not positive, you will receive an acknowledgement email within five working days*, and a senior member of staff will then investigate the matter and advise you of the outcome in writing within a further 20 working days.

** Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other college closures are classed as 'non-working' days.*

Completed complaints or compliments forms can be returned to any campus reception point marked for the attention of the Senior Customer Services Officer.

The College's full Complaints and Compliments Policy is located on our website www.serc.ac.uk

Once you have exhausted the College's Complaints Process you can still approach the Awarding Organisation if you remain dissatisfied. You can also refer to NIPSO. For further information please visit www.nipso.org.uk.

Complaint, Academic Appeal or Another Process?

Below is guidance as to which process covers which issue. Remember this is not an exhaustive list and Customer Services staff, your tutor or the Students' Union will help direct you. Please do act as soon as an issue arises as we always seek to sort out a concern as quickly as is feasible.

Issue	Relevant Process
Admissions	Complaint process
Services e.g., Library, Canteen, IT, Student Finance, Pastoral Care	Complaint process
Disciplinary issues including exclusion	Student and Trainee Behaviour and Disciplinary process
Plagiarism and malpractice	Academic Appeals
Course delivery e.g., resources, timetabling, teaching	Complaint process
College administration	Complaint process
Health and Safety	Complaint process
Outcomes of assessment, progression, or awards	Academic Appeals
Perceived bias or equality issue	Complaint process

SERC

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESSES

Academic Requirements and Processes

Internal Moderation, Cross-marking, and Role of the External Examiner

Course teams will complete cross-marking and moderation of assignment grades/marks. Assignment grades/marks are not finalised until ratified by the College Examination Board and issued by the Examinations office. Any grades/marks given prior to this are only as an interim indication of performance and to assist with your development.

An External Examiner (EE) is appointed to monitor all assessed work and the grades awarded by the Course Team. The EE is appointed by the Awarding Organisation and reports annually to the College. The EE acts as both a 'critical friend' to the Course Team, giving them the benefit of his/her experience him and advising them on how to develop and manage the programme in accordance with developing national practice, and as an advisor on the interpretation and application of national academic quality standards. Students often meet the EE, and his comments are reported at Staff-Student Consultative meetings.

Higher Education Progress and Examination Board

All HE programmes are monitored by an Education Progress and Examination Boards. A Progress Board for each course is convened in January and an Examination Board in June (with a supplementary examination board in August if necessary).

It is the Examination Board that ratifies decisions concerning module grades, progression from one year to the next and the awarding of final qualifications. If you have not achieved the required grade in a module it is the Examination Board that decides what further action should be taken, having considered the recommendations of the Course Team.

Your grades/marks only become final following the College Examination Board any grades given to you up to that point must be viewed as interim.

Specific rules governing progression can be found in the individual Awarding Organisation regulations accessed under the Assessment Regulations and Key Forms section on the SERC Website.

Publication of Results

You will be advised of your results, as agreed at the Examinations Board (College or University) within seven working days of the Board's meeting. Results remain provisional until ratified by the Awarding Organisation/ Body following their Academic Regulations.

Recommendation for Award

A Higher-Level qualification is awarded to candidates who successfully complete all modules of study.

Re-sit Examinations and Resubmission of Coursework

Re-sit examinations and resubmission of coursework will normally be held early to mid-August. You will be informed in writing of dates for re-sit examinations that you are required to take. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are available for the re-sits.

Re-sit Fees and Re-sit of Unit

Re-sit fees will apply only if you have failed by the August supplementary examination board. A fee of £55 to cover administration and marking will be applied for each element of course work to be submitted following the August examination board. These fees will apply where there is resubmission without attendance. The programme Coordinator/ Director will agree a resubmission date with the student. All work must be completed and outstanding fees paid by Halloween. If a unit is agreed be carried over at the August Examination Board, then a fee will incur based on the current fees policy.

Withdrawal from the Course

If you wish to withdraw from your course you should arrange an appointment with your Programme Coordinator to discuss your concerns and reasons for wishing to withdraw. If, after this discussion, you still wish to withdraw you should notify your Programme Coordinator in writing.

You can contact the Careers Advice section to discuss options available to you. If you decide to withdraw, please note that you will still be liable to pay tuition fees. Higher Education Students who withdraw from, or go on a leave of absence, will be charged a tuition fee as detailed below:

Withdrawal Dates	Fee Liability
From first day of term until 3 January 2027	25% of the full annual tuition fee
From 4 January 2027 until 4 April 2027	50% of the full annual tuition fee
From 5 April 2027	100% of the full annual tuition fee

If you are receiving a tuition fee loan from Student Finance NI, they will cover payment up to and including the term in which you withdraw. You will be liable for paying the College any fees which are not supported by Student Finance NI / Student Loans Company. It is important that you notify both the College and Student Finance NI promptly if you withdraw as any overpayment of maintenance grant/loan funding will have to be repaid to the Student Loans Company immediately.

Future Entitlement

If you decide to withdraw, you may have no immediate intention of returning to higher education. However, it is still important to understand how withdrawal from a course can affect your loan or grant entitlement from Student Finance NI / Student Loans Company if you decide later to return to either full or part-time higher education.

Collection of Certificates

It is your responsibility to:

- Contact the College if you have not received notification of your results within 3 months of finishing your course. The College will investigate the reasons for the delay.
- Collect all certificates due to you within one year of finishing your course. Certificates not collected within 1 year will be kept in line with the Awarding Organisation/ Body requirements.
- Ensure all changes in contact details e.g., address/mobile number are communicated to the College so we can send communications regarding results and certificates.

SERC

SAFEGUARDING, CARE AND WELFARE

Safeguarding, Care and Welfare

Our Learner Welfare is centred on promoting your personal development and wellbeing as you complete your qualifications. We work to foster positive attitudes within the College by promoting tolerance, resilience, fairness and equal opportunities for all so that every student can achieve to their full potential.

Our staff provide support to students through a tutorial programme, and we also run activities and events at each Campus which aim to enhance student wellbeing and resilience. However, from time to time we all meet challenges within our lives, for example health and mental health concerns, caring responsibilities, family problems, financial worries or housing issues, and SERC has arrangements in place to help ensure that our students can get the help that they need when they need it.

Any member of staff who is concerned about the wellbeing of a student will raise their concern through the College's cause for concern App. The Learner Welfare team will review the situation and arrange for the right support to be put in place.

SERC works closely with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, Lena by Inspire, Action Mental Health, Ascert and others in providing information and care for our students.

SERC seeks to provide a positive, safe and supportive learning environment for all students. However, for the College to be able to specifically support students it is essential that the student discloses their concerns by talking to a member of staff who will signpost them to the Learner Welfare team. All students are assured that any issues raised will be dealt with confidentially and in a non-judgemental manner.

Health, Welfare and Counselling

Lena by Inspire Counselling

As a SERC student you will have access to Lena by Inspire who are an independent source of support and counselling. They can be contacted for free, confidential and immediate support on **0800 098 8816**. This number is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and we recommend all students to save it onto their mobile phone.

Once you have made the call to Lena by Inspire, their trained staff can assign a specific counsellor to work with you on an independent and confidential basis. This counselling can take place by phone, in person or using video call technology, and the College can set up a private area for you to take such a call.

It is also important to note that students can call Lena by Inspire Students at any time for support and assistance, and this does not necessarily need to progress to formal counselling. Sometimes all we need is someone independent to talk to who will listen and guide us.

You can also sign up to the Inspire HUB which has lots of practical resources to help you. To sign up, visit the HUB here Inspire HUB and your unique PIN is SERCHUB.

Health Issues

During their time at College, young people often have health-related worries and to help students to deal with these issues we have established links with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.
Expert help and advice can be provided in relation to:

- The use of alcohol and drugs
- Ongoing health worries or concerns
- Testing for sexually transmitted diseases (not involving any intimate examination)
- Pregnancy testing
- The availability of Emergency Hormonal Contraception (morning after pill)
- Advice on contraception and the provision of condoms
- Support for those who want to stop smoking
- Signposting to appropriate organisations to help those with emotional issues such as anxiety or depression.

In addition, all students will have the opportunity to complete a short online training package that focuses on **Healthy Relationships in a Digital World**. Through the programme you will learn to question behaviours online and know what actions to take to protect yourself and others. Some of the key topics covered in the programme include sexting, grooming, exploitation, bullying and scams.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Where can I get Help?

Student Support

SERC is committed to ensuring that all students and trainees are protected from harm and abuse while they attend / avail of the College services. To enable the College to achieve this a range of support services are in place at each campus. If at any time any student or trainee (whether in college or while attending a work placement) experiences any issues, they should immediately raise that issue with a member of staff. All such issues will be dealt with using the College procedures, and if necessary the College will work with appropriate external agencies (e.g. PSNI, Social Services etc).

Who's Who on Campus?

Questions concerning your work should be addressed to the relevant unit tutor on your course. More general matters on course administration should be taken up with your Programme Coordinator/ Director.

If you have personal difficulties during your course, speak to your tutor, or any member of staff, in the first instance who will advise and signpost you, depending on the nature of your concern. Please remember that no issue is too small to raise with a member of staff.

The Campus Management Team details are as follows:

Bangor Campus

Kieran McKenna
kmckenna@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn Campus

Roger Duncan
rduncan@serc.ac.uk

Newtownards Campus

Barbara McNeill
bmcneill@serc.ac.uk

Downpatrick Campus

Paul Walsh
pwalsh@serc.ac.uk

Designated Safeguarding Officer

Lists of the College's designated Safeguarding Officers are displayed throughout the College buildings. These staff have been trained to deal with safeguarding issues and can be approached by any student or trainee at any time.

Customer Services

The Customer Services Team are based at the main reception points within the four main campuses. They can help you with a range of things including payment of course fees and trips and updating personal details on your student record. Customer Services is also where you collect examination certificates upon course completion. The team can be contacted in person, by phone (0345 600 7555) or by one of the following email addresses:

Admissions, Application and Enrolment Queries: admissions@serc.ac.uk

General Enquiries: info@serc.ac.uk

EMA Queries: ema@serc.ac.uk

Learning Support

The Learning Support team works with students who face additional challenges due to physical disabilities, long-term medical conditions or learning difficulties. A member of the team will work with you to identify the best way to help as you learn at SERC. This could, for example, include access to a laptop with specialist

software; an orthopaedic chair or adjustable desk; one to one support with a Learning Support Assistant; or access to a British Sign Language Interpreter. We can also advise your teaching team on how best to support your individual needs.

We will also work with the Examinations team to make sure any suitable adjustments are put in place for you at exam time. You will need to provide appropriate evidence for this, and we can help you collect any medical evidence necessary for the Awarding Body to approve these arrangements.

All students requiring Learning Support are responsible for disclosing their need and for providing the evidence of this to Learning Support staff as soon as possible, ideally at the beginning of their course. If you do not provide the appropriate evidence by any stipulated cut off point, it may result in the College not being able to provide the appropriate adjustments.

Disabled Students' Allowance

For Higher Education students, any extra costs of studying, arising from a disability, such as travel costs, additional non-medical support and equipment are funded by Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) provided by the Education Authority. More details can be found here Student Finance Northern Ireland

DSA is not based on financial circumstances and there is no age limit. Part-time HE students are also eligible for DSA. To have support funded through DSA a HE student must first apply to the Education Authority (EA). The Learning Support Unit will assist HE applicants and students to apply to the EA for the DSA. HE students are therefore strongly advised to make contact with staff from the Learning Support unit as soon as possible so that this process is instigated in good time to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place as soon as possible.

Learning Support can be contacted by email (learning-support@serc.ac.uk), from your student portal, or in person at each Campus.

The Learning Support (LS) team details are as follows:

Downpatrick - Paul Walsh
Head of Learner Welfare
pwalsh@serc.ac.uk

Bangor - Grace Curran
Learning Support Manager
gcurran@serc.ac.uk

Bangor - Jean Liddell
Learning Support Manager
jliddell@serc.ac.uk

Bangor – Siobhan Ferguson
Learning Support Manager
sferguson@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn - Gerard Madden
Learning Support Manager
gmadden@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn - Christine Crangle
Learning Support Manager
ccrangle@serc.ac.uk

Downpatrick - Sinead Boyd
Learning Support Manager
sineadboyd@serc.ac.uk

Newtownards – Madison McCreery
Learning Support Manager
mmccreery@serc.ac.uk

Student Finance

The College Student Finance Team can advise you on the sources of financial assistance available to assist students with the costs associated with studying. Assistance is available towards the costs of home to college travel, books, tuition fees, living/maintenance costs and childcare. Check out the Higher Education Funding Quick Guide for more detailed information.

You can contact the Student Finance team for advice and guidance by telephone, email or by arranging an appointment:

Bangor Campus

Megan Cunningham
Student Finance Advisor
03456007555 Ext 8641
studentfinance@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn Campus

Adriaan Hooisma
Student Finance Advisor
03456007555 Ext 8640
studentfinance@serc.ac.uk

Newtownards/ Downpatrick Campus

Stephanie Lyness
Student Finance Advisor
03456007555 Ext 8641
studentfinance@serc.ac.uk

You should apply for financial assistance as early as possible in the Academic Year to avoid getting into financial difficulties. If you are experiencing difficulty with paying your fees or would like further

information on financial options available to you contact our Student Finance Team by emailing: studentfinance@serc.ac.uk.

Higher Education Financial Assistance Available

Sources of Finance you may be eligible to apply for include:

Student Finance NI **-** assistance for students on full-time HE courses.

Student Finance NI **-** assistance for students on part-time HE courses.

Care to Learn **-** Childcare support for students who are age 16 to 19 on the day their course commences and are a parent.

SERC Student Support Fund **-** Financial assistance for students experiencing exceptional financial hardship after having explored all other funding options.

HE Access Bursary **-** Bursary payment for eligible full-time HE students.

Further information is available at www.serc.ac.uk/fees-and-finance

SERC Careers Service

SERC Careers Service

SERC Careers Service provides careers information, advice and guidance for current and prospective students, as well as members of the local community. Our professionally qualified Careers staff offer support that is impartial, confidential, and designed to help you make informed decisions about your next steps, whether you are progressing into employment, further study or training.

We can support students with making career choices, accessing labour market information and opportunities, preparing for interviews, CV development, UCAS, and applications for further study. Lecturing Staff will work closely with the Careers Service in providing relevant vocational and occupational information to students in their specific areas.

To support your progression, the Careers Team will send you weekly Careers Bulletins to your SERC student email, featuring jobs, volunteering, events and useful resources. Students can also join the Online Careers Hub to access information on careers, jobs and volunteering opportunities, interviews and CVs, further study and training, upcoming events and external support organisations. You can join the Online Careers Hub here.

Throughout the year, SERC Careers host events designed to support your transition into employment or further study, including jobs and careers fairs, HE Fairs, skills workshops (e.g.: CVs and interview preparation) and employer talks. These are advertised in the Careers Bulletins as well as the Online Careers Hub.

Students can contact us to book a careers appointment, or with quick queries by emailing careers@serc.ac.uk or by contacting staff directly.

Bangor Campus Room A27b
Shirley Moore, Careers Manager
03456007555 Ext 2713 / 07790 347492
smoore@serc.ac.uk

Bangor Campus Room A27b
Louise Mulligan, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 2779 / 07557 259926
lmulligan@serc.ac.uk

Bangor Campus Room A27b
Julie Wilson, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 2779 / 07790 341875
juliewilson@serc.ac.uk

Newtownards Campus, Careers Hub
Anne Reid, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 3851 / 07971 303601
areid@serc.ac.uk

Downpatrick Campus Room B2-8
(Ballynahinch & Newcastle)
Julie George, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 6225 / 07769 359094
jgeorge@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn Campus Room 1B-7
Carolyn Mulholland, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 1600 / 07825 060293
cmulholland@serc.ac.uk

Downpatrick Campus Room B2-8
(Ballynahinch & Newcastle)
Elish Crilly, Careers Officer
03456007555 Ext 6225 / 07825 021830
Ecrilly@serc.ac.uk

http://www.facebook.com/SERCCareers

http://www.serc.ac.uk/support/careers-service

Students' Union

'Hi everyone, and a warm welcome to South Eastern Regional College! I'm Merlin Gilliland, your Student Governor, and I'm here to represent your voice at the highest level of decision-making in the college. My role is to make sure students are heard and supported, and that your experience here is the best it can be. I am also the prime representee of the Students' Union, which is your hub for student life—organising events, campaigns, and opportunities to get involved and make a difference. Whether you're just starting or returning, I'm excited to see what we'll achieve together this year.'

Merlin Gilliland

Student Governor, SERC, 2026-27

As an enrolled student at the College, you are automatically a member of SERC Students' Union (SERCSU). SERCSU exists to promote the interests and the voice of students and champions the education and personal development of its members through the election of student officers and representatives.

Elected officers provide a channel of communication and means of engagement between students and the College staff, management, and governing body.

SERCSU aims to represent and support the general welfare and inclusivity of the diverse student body through various campaigns, health and wellbeing activities, volunteering opportunities, clubs, societies, and social events. SERCSU endeavours to inspire a sense of belonging and enrich your educational journey.

Getting involved with SERCSU offers a unique opportunity for students to influence and make a difference to the student experience at SERC. You can do this by becoming an elected member of the Student Leadership Team, becoming a Class Representative or by joining our volunteering committee. These opportunities enable students to make a positive contribution to the wider student community while developing personally and professionally. The training, networking and skills gained in officer roles allow students to gain an advantage in today's challenging job market and competitive entry to third level education. To find out more on becoming an SU officer or volunteer, please get in touch with us by emailing studentsunion@serc.ac.uk

You can expect a wide range of on campus and online events such as Freshers' and Refreshers' Fairs where you can pick up freebies and talk to local organisations about their services and products, fundraising, welfare information days, social events, competitions and much more. The Students' Union hosts an online hub through Microsoft Teams. This hub provides blogs, information on clubs, societies, and opportunities as well as a dedicated health and wellbeing channel. You can join the online hub using the link below. You can also keep up to date on events on your campus by following us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Join the SU Online Hub HERE

As we are affiliated with NUS-USI (National Union of Students-Union of Students Ireland), we offer a student discount app where you will have access to over 200 discounts with well-known brands such as Misguided, ASOS, boohoo, Domino's, Co-op Food, and Superdrug. For full details on discounts and to purchase a TOTUM Card {powered by NUS extra} visit: www.totum.com

If you're interested in finding out more or would like to get involved in the Students' Union you can contact us at studentgovernor@serc.ac.uk or studentsunion@serc.ac.uk. or contact one of the team directly. The contact details for the team are found below:

Bangor Campus, Room D23
Newtownards Campus, Room A16A
Ross Currie, Student Engagement Manager
rcurrie@serc.ac.uk

Lisburn Campus, Room 1D-12
Downpatrick Campus, Room B5-12
Danielle Carey, Student Engagement Officer
dcarey@serc.ac.uk

Student Carers

STUDENT CARERS
studentcarers@serc.ac.uk

If you provide or intend to provide substantial care for a family member or friend on a regular basis who is disabled, physically or mentally ill, has a long-term illness or a substance misuse problem, you are legally defined as a Carer. SERC recognizes the additional burden Student Carers may need to cope with and are committed to being as accessible and inclusive as possible. If you are a Student Carer, you can make us aware when completing your online application forms, alternatively you can contact us at studentcarers@serc.ac.uk during your studies. We will then contact you confidentially and discuss how we will support you to successfully complete your course. Submission of assessment work, study patterns, signposting to financial assistance and networking are just some of the ways in which we can help you. If you require any further information, please get in touch at studentcarers@serc.ac.uk. Further information may also be found at the link SERC Student Carers.

Learning Resources

Moodle

The College uses a combination of Microsoft Teams and Moodle as a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Your tutor will guide you to the appropriate VLE for the programme. Here you will find course information, storage and organisation of learning and assessment materials and the ability to submit completed assessments. All FT and significant PT programmes will have either a Moodle or Microsoft Teams site, or a combination of both.

College Internet and Intranet Sites

The College's Internet site is www.serc.ac.uk. This contains up to date information on the College and its courses. You can access the student intranet from the site, under the 'My SERC' tab. Announcements to students will be posted on the Intranet site. Students can access the intranet both in college and externally. You should visit it regularly.

The Library

The College Libraries provide support for student learning in Ards, Bangor, Downpatrick and Lisburn. These Centres offer a welcoming environment for both individual private study and group work and are designed to enhance the student learning experience.

Library staff will provide you with advice on the most appropriate resources for your course and how to find them, how to complete a bibliography, and how to reference your assignments. We can provide you with one-to-one help and guidance in the Libraries (just call in and see us), or in a group setting in your classroom (please ask your tutor to book a session with the Library staff).

- Experienced and knowledgeable Library staff to help you research your assignments
- 27,000+ printed books
- 1100+ eBooks
- Specialist subject databases
- Library inductions
- E resource and e book demonstrations
- Access to computer facilities with specialist course specific software
- Designated silent study rooms
- Group study rooms
- Soft seating and individual study areas
- Printing, scanning and photocopying facilities
- Binding and laminating service

Remember if you need help with academic skills including referencing and bibliographies, the Library staff are happy if you drop by for help and assistance.

The Online Library

E-Resources and Online Access:

Our online resources include e-books, e-resources and research support which are available both on and off campus. If you need help using any of our online resources, then please ask the Library staff for assistance.

Online Library Catalogue:

You can search the catalogue, renew and reserve books online using our Online Library Catalogue App.

Inter-Campus Loans:

You can request books to be transferred from one campus to the other via our inter-library loan service. During term time books are normally transferred within a couple of days. Please ask the Library staff for details. You can also email us at library@serc.ac.uk or ask a question using **Ask a Librarian.**

Please note that all SERC Libraries are closed during holiday periods.

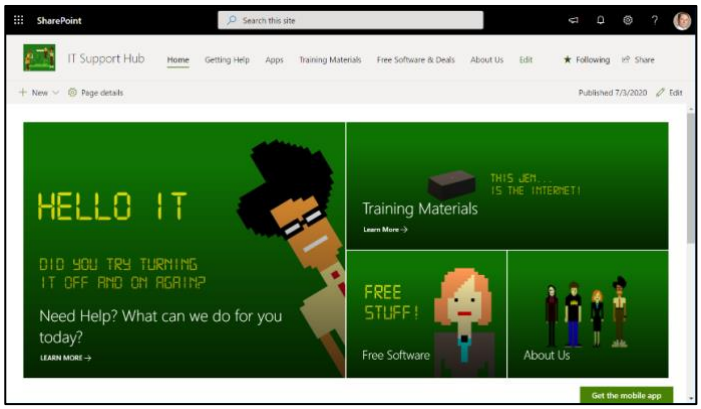
HE Study Rooms

Dedicated Higher Education study rooms are available in Bangor (B31), Space (S3-13), (Lisburn (2B-18 – back of Library), Ards (C01a) and Downpatrick (C3-8) for students studying Higher Level Courses within the College. These rooms come equipped with PCs, charging docks for personally owned devices, basic food storage/ preparation facilities and social and meeting spaces and are available for HE students only.

IT Help

General Guidance

IT can be complex and confusing, so we do our best to try to simplify things for you. We've created a special website to help you which can be accessed from the IT Support Hub icon on the desktop of all college PCs, and also from this link: http://www.serc.ac.uk/helpme



You will always find the most up to date information and help here. The site can be used to report faults, get help and training, access remote apps that let you work from home and access information about discounted and free software that you get as a student.

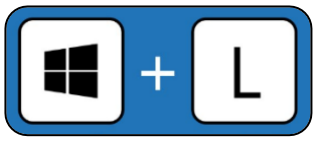
If you're really stuck, you can email servicedesk@serc.ac.uk, log a fault at https://servicedesk.serc.ac.uk or call 028 9127 6767, leaving your name, student ID, a return phone number and description of the problem you are experiencing, and we will call you back between 09:00 and 17:00.

User Accounts

As a student at SERC, you will be issued with a username and password that will give you access to E-Mail, Online Storage, access to the College Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) and a range of other services & benefits. The account is yours, and you should not share the account or your password with anyone.

Your username is also your email address and is normally written as 8 numbers and then finished with an '@serc.ac.uk' suffix. For example, the account for Sam Smith might look like 50099999@serc.ac.uk

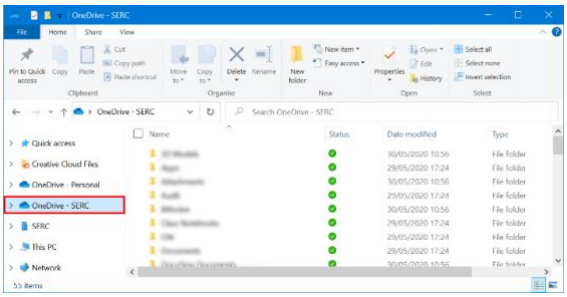
You should make every effort to protect your account, including locking your PC/Mac whilst unattended. This can be done using ‘Ctrl + Alt + Del’ and selecting "Lock this computer" or the Windows Key & the letter ‘L’ on your keyboard. On a Mac, you can lock the computer from the Apple menu.



Storage of Files & Documents

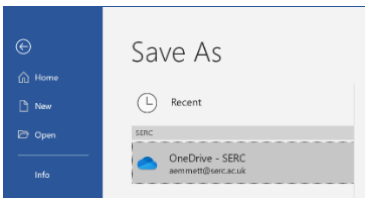
As a student, you have been allocated 1TB of storage in the College’s Office 365 Service, known as OneDrive. The key advantage for you is that OneDrive enables you to access your files/documents from any internet connected device, including tablets, PC, Macs or even on your mobile phone.

Before we go any further, you should know that the use of portable media, i.e. USB Keys, is strongly discouraged. You should consider using OneDrive for all file storage. OneDrive brings strong protection for your data in terms of backup, versioning and Malware/ransomware protection.



When you are on a college device, you can see OneDrive to the side of the Windows Explorer or macOS Finder. You should save your files here.

If you are in a Microsoft Office product such as Word or Excel, you can also save directly to OneDrive.



If you are at home, you can access your college OneDrive by clicking on the ‘OneDrive’ link in the ‘Apps’ section of the Student Intranet or by typing www.onedrive.com into your web browser. If you are prompted to login, use your college email address and password and then select the ‘Work or School Account’ option. Apps are also available for Mobile Phones & Tablet devices for all major platforms. Simply search for ‘OneDrive’ in your device’s App Store.

Finally, as a student, you are entitled to download and install Microsoft Office on to up to 5 of your personal PCs, MACs, Laptops, Tablet & Phone Devices. To download the software, navigate to https://m365.cloud.microsoft/apps/ and sign in with your college username & password. We ask that you

also encourage your fellow students to avail of this free service too. There are other services and benefits that are available to you. This will be communicated at the start of the academic year.

Password Protection Standards

Passwords are an important aspect of computer security. They form the front-line protection for users' accounts. A poorly chosen password may result in the compromise of the College's entire network. As such, you are responsible for taking the appropriate steps to select and secure your password.

You are strongly advised not to use the same password for SERC accounts as you may use for other non-SERC accounts such as personal e-mail accounts, banking accounts, PIN numbers, or any other account. The College requires that passwords are 15 characters long. This change is enforced automatically by the system. You should **not** share your password with anyone, including classmates, administrative assistants or line managers. If someone demands a password, refer them to this document or have them call someone in the IT & Services department.

You should never disclose your password in response to an email or phone call purporting to be from the IT department. The IT & Services department **should not and will not** ask an end user to divulge their password.

For the avoidance of doubt, it is not permissible to:

- Reveal the password over the telephone to anyone.
- Reveal a password in a single e-mail message.
- Reveal a password to a manager or lecturer.
- Reveal a password to co-workers for their use while you are on holiday.
- Talk about a password in front of others.
- Hint at the format of a password.
- Reveal a password on questionnaires or security forums.
- Share a password with family members.
- Write passwords down and store them anywhere in your office.
- Store passwords in a file or on ANY device without encryption
- Use the "Remember Password" feature of applications on devices, unless the device is personally owned, password protected and uses encrypted storage.

The single exception to the above guidance applies if you have a specific physical and/or learning need. In this scenario, a support worker may, with your consent, be allowed to hold knowledge of your password for the purposes of assisting you with your study.

If you suspect your password has been compromised, report the incident to the IT and Services Department and change your password immediately.

General Password Guidelines

The College requires the use of complex and strong passwords. The following characteristics are required:

- Passwords need to be at least 15 characters long and no longer than 127 characters.
- Passwords should not contain either your username or your forename & surname.
- The space character can be used in a password, but this is not a requirement.
- Passwords must contain characters from three of the following categories.
- Uppercase letters (A through Z).
- Lowercase letters (a through z).
- Numbers (0 through 9).
- Non-alphanumeric characters (special characters): (~!@#$%^&*_-+=`|\(){}[]:;"'<>,.?/)

  Note: Currency symbols such as the Euro or British Pound are not counted as special characters for this policy setting.

Users are asked to consider a 'passphrase' instead of a password. Passphrases can be a sentence, song title or other phrase that is easy to remember. Some example passphrases would be:

- The 0nly Way 1s Up!
- H0ld the d00r!!
- My fav0rite c0l0ur is Red.

Passwords should never be written down or stored online as clear text. Users should also avoid common usage words such as:

  - Your forename, surname, name of family, pets, friends, co-workers, course title etc.
  - Computer terms and names, commands, sites, companies, hardware, software.
  - SERC, South Eastern Regional College.

- Birthdays and other personal information such as addresses and phone numbers.
- Word or number patterns like 1234567, abcdefghi, qwertyuiop etc.
- Any of the above spelt backwards.
- Any of the above preceded or followed by a digit (e.g. password1).

Additional Security Measures

The safety and security of your information is our highest priority. To ensure that we can protect you, there are two additional security measures that we have in place that will directly affect you.

The first restriction involves a special security feature, known as Two Factor Authentication (2FA) or Multi Factor Authentication (MFA). This is a requirement for all users on the College network. You will be required to setup 2FA during the setup of your new SERC account or alternatively, you can visit our guide at www.serc.ac.uk/2fa to learn more.

When working on a college computer, you will only need to use your username and password when logging on. However, if you are on a personal device, such as a laptop, tablet or phone, you will be required to use 2FA to login.

In addition, access to college computing facilities is geographically restricted to the UK & Ireland. So, if you were going to Spain, you would not be able to access your account. If you are on a college trip or on holiday and wish to have access to your account when away, you should contact the College IT team via the College ServiceDesk (servicedesk.serc.ac.uk) and submit an 'International Travel Request' fault.

Online Study

As part of your course, the College intends to deliver a small portion of your course 'Online'. There are several benefits for you with this approach:

- You'll gain an understanding of the technology & tools needed to effectively communicate when working at a distance.
- Home working has become an option in many jobs. Understanding how to work effectively from home will help you in your future career.
- If you must isolate due to sickness, you can still participate in your classes.
- If there is another lockdown, you'll know what you need to do.

What does 'Online Study' mean?

'Online Study' means that you can participate in your lesson from the comfort of your home. It can be in your Study (if you're lucky), the kitchen table, dining room table or even in your bedroom. You just need some peace to concentrate and to ensure you don't annoy others.

Do I need an internet connection?

Yes. To work online, you will need at minimum a broadband internet connection e.g. BT, Talk Talk, Sky, Virgin Media etc. You can also use the data connection from your phone, however, due to the high cost of mobile data, you should not use this for activities such as video conferencing unless you understand the consequences.

What equipment do I need?

You will need the following:

- At a minimum, to participate in video conferences, you need a smartphone or tablet with a camera capable of running Microsoft Teams. We suggest that, if you have a phone, you use the case or stand that will support a phone on a desk so that you can focus on your work and not worry about holding the phone.
- You can also video conference if you have a PC, Mac, Laptop or Chromebook, but you will need to ensure that you have a webcam and speakers or headphones.
- To participate in interactive lessons, a device larger than a smartphone is strongly recommended. Ideally, you'll need a tablet device or PC, Mac, Laptop or Chromebook.
- If you are studying in a specialist area such as engineering and need to use specialist software, you will need a device with a trackpad or mouse. This might be a PC, Mac, Laptop or Chromebook as some specialist applications don't work well with touch screens.

Note: You can even use 2 devices at the same time as most mobile phones are an excellent, high-quality webcam substitute. Install Microsoft Teams on both devices and experiment.

Optimising Your Environment

Try to do the following:

- Sit in a chair that allows you to be comfortable for the duration of you lesson

- Select a suitable workspace, that is:
    - free from distraction
    - quiet
    - doesn't inconvenience others
    - allows you space to make notes etc.

Switch on your Camera if possible

Turning on your camera during a class allows you to maximise the communication channel, adding more sentiment and expressions that spice up the discussion and enables you to listen more effectively. In fact, studies show that people are better able to comprehend and recall complex information when they can observe the speaker's nonverbal gestures.

However, when a camera is switched on, it may allow part of your home to be visible to others. For this reason, please make sure that the camera does not pick up private information e.g., lists or photographs on a wall, or private personal effects. The College recommends that you use a standard background, available on Teams or that you use the "blur" function. These suggestions are to help you to protect yourself.

Microphones

You are expected to keep your microphone on mute when not required to speak and to use the chat function to ask the lecturer a question, or to use the "put your hand up" function to get the tutors attention. Remember that when online, there may be many others asking questions, so patience may be required until the lecturer gets a suitable moment to address your question.

Other Points

Please make sure that you have notepad, pen or any other course material available to you:

- Remember that your online lesson is designed to help you to learn. Having other people in the room or chatting on social media will distract you. If it is only possible for you to participate from a room that others may have to use it is requested that you use headphones to minimise any disruption.
- You should not record any online classes etc without first obtaining the permission of all of those who will be participating, including the tutor.

- When attending an online class, the Colleges rules regarding respect for others including staff still apply. Failure to do comply with these requirements may result in:
    - your permissions to participate in online classes being withdrawn.
    - more formal disciplinary procedures being applied online with the Student / Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management Procedures.

If at any time you feel concerned that something you said or did online could be misconstrued, or if someone else is behaving inappropriately towards you, please raise it immediately with your tutor.

The College's online equipment and technologies are there to help you to learn and it should only be used for this purpose. As with all technology it is your responsibility to use it and to behave in a manner that is appropriate.

What about software?

Studying at SERC comes with some great advantages. Firstly, as a registered student, you are entitled to download, install and use Microsoft 365 applications for free, including Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Teams and many other useful apps. See www.serc.ac.uk/freesoftware for more info.

The College also offers a 'Remote App' service, so if you're using specialist software such as AutoCAD, Sage Accounts, Visual Studio or any other specialist apps, you can use them on your home PC, Mac, Laptop or Chromebook. You don't need to install the software itself, just a small client app that connects back to the College. This service is available 24 hours a day just for you! Get more info at www.serc.ac.uk/remoteapps

There are lots of other benefits too, e.g. discounts on equipment such as laptops, and services including Spotify, Amazon Prime etc. Visit www.serc.ac.uk/helpme for the most up to date offers and help.

APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Guidance on Academic Practices

Guidance on Academic Practices

Academic Practices

As a higher education student at SERC, you will learn to prepare assessments to meet academic practices expected for your level of study. Guidance can be found in the Study Resources section on the student intranet.

These practices include:

- Take comprehensive notes through lectures, classes and when researching topics.
- Consistent use of the Harvard Reference System to give credit to the work of others by quoting and referencing correctly.
- Including a bibliography when submitting every assignment.
- Following the College presentation requirements when writing assignments. These are using Arial typeface, 12-point, line and a half spacing, double for paragraphs, justified at left with a table of contents, bibliography and Harvard referencing.
- Developing and using an academic style.

Note Taking

Note taking is a fundamental academic skill. It is not just about writing something down from your reading so that you can use it later. It is too easy to simply copy something directly from your reading and forget that you took it down word for work. This can easily lead to plagiarism but of more importance is that you really learn by putting things down in your own words. This will show that you understand what you have read and its value and importance to the area you are studying.

How to take notes – a few tips. We will all find our own style but here is some guidance to start:

- Use key words, phrases and abbreviations
- Look for relevant points – do not be tempted to write out large chunks
- Use your own words to summarise main points and be critical of what is being said. Ask questions of the material

- Question what you have read – is it a valuable source?
- Careful document where the information is from and write down a full reference of citation using Harvard reference. This will save time later when you need the details for your assessment.

There are times when you want to note down a particularly good quotation – make sure that you identify in your notes that this is a verbatim quotation. Try using a different colour, type face or simply quotation marks to do this.

Developing and Using an Academic Style

- Higher level study seeks to develop your analytical, critical and problem-solving skills. To demonstrate these, you will need to learn to write academically. This includes:
- Writing in the third person
- Do not use 'I' except in reflective work for example logbooks
- No text speak or use of colloquial terms

A reference in the text, or as a footnote, should show at least the name of the author, the year of publication and the page number: for example: (Morrison, 2000, pg.29)

Candidates must also include a bibliography at the end of their work, which lists details of publications that have been used to research their project. For example: Morrison, A. (2000) Mary, Queen of Scots. , London: Weston Press.

For material taken from web pages, the reference must show the precise web page, not the search engine used to locate it. This can be copied from the address line. For example: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts

For individual works found through the Internet, the reference should show the details as in (b), above, plus the URL and the date assessed. For example: Airey, C (2004). The State of Play Today (Online) 6th Edition. Available: http:/classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html (20th September 2001)

Further guidance on referencing will be provided by your Programme Coordinator or can be obtained from the online learning resources and the student intranet.

Harvard Referencing System

The use of the Harvard Referencing system will be explained during tutorials.

- When using a direct quote from a book, page numbers are put in at the end of the in-text reference and the bibliography. E.g. Successful coaches “undertake numerous roles within the umbrella of sports coaching” (Martens, 2004, p. 5).
- Martens, R. (2004) Successful Coaching. 3rd edn. Windsor: Human Kinetics. Pp 5.
- Arrange references alphabetically in your bibliography
- Split your reference list at back of assignment
- References – direct quotes
- Bibliography – information you have used to supplement your knowledge on the topic area but not quoted directly.
- No date – the abbreviation ‘n.d.’ is used
- Example: Smith (n.d.) has written...
- No author – use ‘Anon’
- Example: Marketing strategy (Anon., 1999) ...
- OR When the name of the author cannot be identified then quote the title of the article were you found the information: e.g. In a recent report (Living condition in Britain, 2005 p.78) it was stated that…..
- Edited books – put ‘ed.’ after Editor’s name • Example: Robins, K. ed. (2007)...

Acknowledging the use of Artificial Intelligence Generative Tools

Where generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been used for an assessment, they must be acknowledged appropriately to ensure that any output is not misconstrued as the student’s own work. Where AI is used, students must acknowledge its use and show clearly how they have used it. This is particularly important given that AI-generated content is not subject to the same academic scrutiny as other published sources. Before beginning any piece of assessed work, students should check that the use of AI tools is authorised, as this practice may differ across modules and courses of study.

The following should be included to acknowledge the authorised use of AI:

- Cite in the text. Use the company as the author, not the tool's name e.g., OpenAI rather than ChatGPT and refer to appendix of exports (OpenAI, 2023, see Appendix 1)
- Include reference in bibliography, Title. Year. Place of publication: Publisher. Software: Platform. (List relevant Appendix)
- Where AI tools have been used as a source of information, the student must submit the following in an Appendix with their assignment including the following:
    - the name of the AI source used and the date the content was generated e.g. ChatGPT 3.5 (https://openai.com/ blog/chatgpt/), 25/01/2023
    - provide a copy of the question(s)/ prompts and computer-generated content for reference and authentication purposes, in a non-editable format (such as a screenshot) and provide a brief explanation of how it has been used
    - Each new prompt/question and response will need a separate appendix.

The Harvard Referencing rules and examples are summarised in the following tables:

What you are referencing	**What appears in the text**	**What appears in the bibliography**	**Example bibliography**
Book – one author	(Surname, Year, Pg. number)	Surname, Initials., Year. Title of book. Edition. Place: Publisher	Redman, P., 2006. Good essay writing: a social sciences guide. 3rd ed. London: Open University in assoc. with Sage.
Books with multiple authors	(Surname, Surname & Surname, Year, Pg. number) Or (First author's Surname et. al, Year, Pg. number)	Surname, Initial., Surname, Initial. And Surname, Initial. (Year) Title of Book, edition, where it was published: Publisher's name	Gray, D., Griffin, C. and Nasta, T. (2005) Training to Teach in Further and Adult Education, 2nd Ed., Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
E-Book	(Surname, Year)	Surname, Initial, Year, title of book. [type of medium] Place of publication: Publisher Available at: include web site address/ and additional details of access. [Accessed date]	Fishman, R., 2005. The rise and fall of suburbia. [e-book]. Chester: Castle Press. Available at: libweb.anglia.ac.uk / E-books [accessed 5 June 2005]
Journal	(Surname, Year, Pg. number) Or as book with multiple author	Surname, Initial. (Year) Article Title, Journal Name, Issue number (volume number) page numbers.	Greenbank., P. (2007) Utilising collaborative forms of education action research: some reflections, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 31 (2) 97-108.

What you are referencing	What appears in the text	What appears in the bibliography	Example bibliography
Website (where the author is known)	(Surname(s) as above, Year)	Surname, Initial. (Year) Article Title cited at FULL URL, last accessed DATE	Salmon, J. (2002) E-Activities; The Key to Achieve Online Learning cited at http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde8/reviews/etivities.ht m, last accessed 10/11/07.
Website (where the author is not known)	(Website, accessed DATE) e.g. (www.news.bbc.co.uk, accessed 05/10/07)	Organisation, Article Title cited at: FULL URL Date of article, last accessed DATE	BBC News, Skills training 'needs shake-up' cited at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6209212.stm 5/12/06, last accessed 05/10/07.
Journal (from an online source)	(Surname(s) as above, Year) Or as book with multiple author	Surname, Initials. (Year) Article title. Full Title of Journal, [type of medium] Volume number (Issue/Part number), Page numbers if available. Available at: URL Accessed DATE.	Greenbank., P. (2007) Utilising collaborative forms of education action research: some reflections, Journal of Further and Higher Education, [online] 31 (2) 97-108. Available at: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db Last Accessed 10/10/07
AI Generated Text	(OpenAI, 2023, see Appendix 1)	Title. Year. Place of publication: Publisher. Software: Platform.	ChatGPT. 2023. San Francisco: OpenAI. ChatGPT: Microsoft Windows - (List relevant Appendix- See Appendix ????)
AI Generated Images	Number and title/caption: Figure 1: The image was generated by DALL-E with the prompt 'ballet dancer.' In Text Citation: Figure 1 shows the use of generative AI using the prompt 'ballet dancer' (DALL-E 2023- see appendix 2).	Title. Year. Place of publication: Publisher. Software: Platform.	Reference List: DALL-E. 2023. San Francisco: OpenAI. DALL-E: Microsoft Windows. (List relevant Appendix- See Appendix ????)

More detailed information can be found at:

- Cite Them Right - Home

Appendix 2- Authorisation of Absence Form

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the UK GDPR and used for the purpose of recording and managing absence. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant college staff for the purpose of recording and managing absence.

Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy

AUTHORISATION OF ABSENCE FORM

Student ID:	
Student Name:	
Course:	
First Date of Absence:	
Last Date of Absence:	
Number of Days:	
Nature of Absence:	
Was supporting evidence submitted:	Yes / No
Student's Signature:	
Date:	
Absence Authorised:	Yes / No
If absence was not authorised please state reason:	
Programme Coordinator/ Director Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 3- Examination Regulations

- All candidates must be able to produce photographic ID.
- Candidates must observe all instructions given by an invigilator.
- Candidates may be admitted to the examination room not more than 10 minutes before the start of the examination.
- No candidate may enter the examination room later than 30 minutes after the start of the examination except under exceptional circumstances.
- No candidate may leave the examination room until one hour after the examination has commenced, or within the last 15 minutes, except with the permission of an invigilator.
- Candidates who wish to leave before the end of an examination must attract the attention of an invigilator and, when given permission to do so, should leave in such a way as to cause the minimum of disturbance to other candidates.
- Candidates may leave an examination temporarily only with the permission of an invigilator, and when accompanied by an invigilator or other authorised person.
- A candidate who leaves the examination room without the permission of an invigilator will be deemed to have withdrawn from the examination and will not be permitted to re-enter the examination room.
- Except for medical reasons or other sufficient cause, candidates who fail to present themselves for an examination shall be deemed to have failed that examination.
- Candidates shall not take into the examination room any books, papers or other information relevant to the examination except where the instructions of the module tutor are otherwise. Such instructions will be shown on the examination cover sheet and will clearly specify the nature of the material which can be used.
- Candidates shall not bring food or drink into the examination room without prior permission from an invigilator.
- During an examination candidates should not communicate with one another or leave their places.
- All work, including rough work, must be done in the answer books provided.
- Candidates should ensure that all their examination scripts are legible. A module tutor may decide not to mark an examination script judged by them to be illegible.

- A candidate who is considered by an invigilator to be disruptive during an examination may be required to withdraw from that examination.
- If an invigilator considers that annotation of prescribed texts used in an examination could give a candidate an unfair advantage, the texts may be retained at the end of the examination.
- It is the responsibility of each candidate to ensure that his or her script is received by an invigilator.
- Any student who has exceptional examination requirements must have made these known and produce the required evidence at least **8 weeks** prior to the examination.
- Mobile phones and smart watches must not be brought into the examination room.

Offences in Connection with Examinations

It is an offence for a candidate wilfully to infringe, or attempt to infringe, the above regulations. In cases where malpractice is considered to have been committed by a candidate during an examination the procedure below will be followed.

An invigilator shall draw a line across the cover of the answer book, and on this line state the time at which the suspected malpractice was discovered and the nature of the suspected malpractice. The candidate will be issued with a fresh answer book and permitted to continue the examination, concluding at the normal time.

Immediately after the examination an invigilator will report the suspected malpractice to the Programme Coordinator who will decide on further action to be taken. Normally, when a student has been found guilty of malpractice he or she will be deemed to have failed that examination.

It is an offence in an examination (or any other assessment procedures) for a student to engage in any conduct for the purpose of gaining for himself or herself, or any other candidate, an unfair advantage with a view to obtaining a better result than he or she would otherwise achieve.

Examples of such conduct are:

- copying from the examination script (or any other assessment work) of another candidate;
- personating others;
- fabrication of results;

- plagiarism.

Reports of any such conduct will be made to the Programme Coordinator, who will decide on the nature of disciplinary action to be taken.

Regulations Governing Practical Examinations in Art & Design

All examination work, with the exception of research activities, must be carried out in the College and must be shown to be the original work of the student.

- All work must be carried out solely by the student, except for certain technical help approved by an invigilator.
- Examination work must be kept in the studios/workshops for the duration of the examination.
- Final evaluations and written critiques must be word processed.
- Examination work must be submitted by the set deadline.

Appendix 4- HE Academic Appeals Process

Introduction

This procedure has been informed by the UK Quality Code 2024 Principle 12- Operating concerns, complaints and appeals process, Awarding Organisation/ Body regulations and the office of the NI Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). It aims to improve the student experience by making appropriate and consistent judgements. The student will be guaranteed confidentiality and will not be disadvantaged for using the process. The College acknowledges that the process aids in developing the student experience.

What this procedure covers

This Appeals Procedure does not cover Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) programmes as this is not delegated to the College. Students working towards an award made by LJMU should use the University's own appeal process which is available at: Student Appeals | Liverpool John Moores University (ljmu.ac.uk).

All other Awarding Organisations fall under these regulations which cover all Higher Education students or those on a leave of absence.

An Academic Appeal is a request within the grounds itemised below to review decisions made by the Higher Education Assessment and Examination Board on progression, assessment and awards. An Academic Appeal can only be made after an Examination Board has sat and you have been advised of your marks/grades.

An Academic Appeal differs from a complaint and therefore appeals and complaints are considered under different processes. A complaint is defined as a formal expression of dissatisfaction made by either a student or group of students about the provision of their programme of study, related academic service or facility, or any other service provision provided by the College. Details of the Complaints and Compliments Policy can be found at the link Complaints and Compliments Policy at www.serc.ac.uk. Should an issue fall under more than one process the College will work flexibly to maintain the rights of the student.

The Academic Appeals Procedure embodies the principles of natural justice, fairness, equity, confidentiality, objectivity and equality of opportunity. Students will be informed about the process in the student handbook, in the Higher Education Programmes SOP and policy page on the intranet and as part of induction and tutorial processes.

Grounds for Academic Appeal

The purpose of this procedure is to establish the facts and come to a reasonable and just resolution, which is timely, relevant, and proportionate.

The grounds on which an Academic Appeal will be considered are:

1. That the Higher Education Examination and Progress Board was unaware of **new information about an extenuating circumstance** which might have affected their decision concerning an individual student.

   Evidence: Written medical evidence or evidence of compassionate circumstances, which were relevant to your performance, must be provided as part of the appeal.

   Note: Evidence of ill health must be authenticated by a medical certificate from a doctor or appropriate documentation from a registered counsellor - self-certification is not acceptable.

2. That there was a **procedural or other irregularity**. That the procedures were not used properly and fairly in arriving at judgements.

   Evidence: An example of a procedural irregularity could be a change to submission dates not notified to students in advance or the internal verification processes were not implemented. A full explanation and documentation to support the appeal must be included.

An Academic Appeal will only be considered where there is deemed to be evidence to support one of the above grounds for appeal.

Disagreement with the academic judgement of assessors or a Board of Examiners cannot constitute grounds for an appeal.

The Appeals Panel will not consider an appeal if it is deemed to be vexatious or frivolous, if the forms have not been completed, or if supporting evidence has not been supplied.

Procedure for Academic Appeals

Stage 1 – Informal

Academic Appeals should be addressed to the Senior Customer Services Officer (SCSO) of the College using the Academic Appeals Forms 1 or 2 below within 10 working days* (or 7 working days for Ulster University Programmes) of the student being notified in writing of the decision they wish to appeal. Appeals received outside of this timeframe cannot be considered. Submissions can be emailed to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk or handed in to any main campus reception area.

* Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other college closures are classed as 'non-working' days.

It is the responsibility of the appellant to state clearly the grounds for their appeal and to produce evidence in support of either extenuating circumstances or procedural irregularities.

The appeal will be rejected if:

1. There are no grounds for an appeal
2. The student has failed to substantially complete the form
3. The appeal is received outside the submission timeframe

The SCSO will forward the appeal to the Head of School who will determine if the appeal is valid i.e. meets one of the conditions of Grounds for Appeal.

The Head of School, Principal Lecturer, or nominated Deputy Head of School will meet (in person, by phone or email) with the student to try to resolve or provide support. This meeting should occur within five working days following receipt of the appeal. A student can bring someone to support them but there is no right to have legal representation.

As a consequence of this meeting one of the following outcomes should be agreed;

1. The student is content not to continue with their appeal
2. The student should proceed to the formal appeal stage

Students will in all cases be informed of the outcome of the informal stage in writing by the Head of School, Principal Lecturer, or nominated Deputy Head of School. Any student wishing to proceed to Stage 2 should inform the Senior Customer Services Officer in writing or by email to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk within 5 days of receiving the outcome letter of Stage 1.

Stage 2 – Formal

Where a student wishes to continue with their appeal the SCSO will notify the Head of Higher Education (QED) who will convene an Appeal Panel to hear the formal stage of the appeal. The Panel will be convened within 10 working days of receipt of a request by the student to continue the process. The College will try to convene a panel as swiftly as possible to expedite necessary actions, to ensure that the student is not disadvantaged.

To ensure independence and fairness, the Chair of the Appeals Panel and members must not have been party to any preceding decision that may have initiated the appeal. The Panel should be made up of at least two members of staff who have not been involved previously, one of whom must be a Deputy Principal, Head of the Quality Excellence and Development Unit, Head of Higher Education, or Head of School. (see Terms of Reference below).

Students have a right to be accompanied. Any person accompanying a student is present to support a student and as such should not contribute to the meeting unless at the behest of the student and only when invited to do so by the Chair.

There is no right for a student to have legal representation at an Academic Appeals Panel. Each party will be given an equal opportunity to present their case.

If the student does not attend the Academic Appeals Panel, the Panel may continue to consider the appeal in the student's absence. The Panel may, if it wishes, adjourn the meeting if reasonable grounds for non-attendance have been provided (e.g. sickness absence).

The outcome of the appeal may be:

1. To uphold the appeal based on the evidence presented
2. To partially uphold the appeal based on the evidence presented
3. To dismiss the appeal

The Chair of the Appeals Panel will notify the student of the outcome in writing within 5 days of hearing the appeal. Copies of the outcome will be returned to the Senior Customer Services Officer via email to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk

If the appeal is upheld or partially upheld the issue is referred back to the Board of Examinations to amend the record of the student accordingly in line with Awarding Organisation/ Body regulations.

Academic Appeals forms and guidance can be found in the Key Forms and Academic Appeals Process section of the SERC website.

Appeals to Awarding Organisation or the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

If all internal procedures have been exhausted and the student remains dissatisfied they have the right to refer the appeal to the Awarding Organisation and then to NIPSO. Further information about these processes can be found at www.nipso.org.uk

Please follow the link below for further information on how we treat your private data.

https://www.serc.ac.uk/PrivacyNotice/HigherEducation

The Appeals Process step by step guide and relevant appeal forms are accessed below.

Terms of Reference Academic Appeals Panel

Membership	• Deputy Principal Curriculum • Deputy Principal Student Support Services • Head of Quality, Excellence and Development • Head of Higher Education • Heads of School • Principal Lecturers • Deputy Heads of School • Student Representative
Chair	A Deputy Principal, Head of QED or Head of School/ HE may Chair
Conflict of Interest	No member may sit on the Appeals Panel if they have been associated with the original decision.
Quorum	A minimum of two members.
Frequency	As required.
Purpose	To implement the Academic Appeals Policy and to ensure fairness and reliability of all judgements of formal decisions relating to the outcomes of college assessments and to, where appropriate, make recommendations of remedial action. The Academic Appeals Panel will be responsible to the College Management Team and report to the Higher Education Review Board.
Terms of Reference	1 To implement the College Academic Appeals procedure to provide an opportunity for any individual student to appeal against an academic decision within the stated grounds. 2 To make decisions using the Academic Appeals process. 3 To provide information on trends and outcomes to the College Management Team and the Higher Education Review Board as appropriate.

Appeals Process Summary

Step 1. Student receives result.

Step 2. Student has 10 working days in which to submit an appeal (or 7 working days for Ulster University Programmes).

Step 3. If the student submits an appeal and the Head of School confirms the grounds for appeal are valid, the Head of School, Principal Lecturer, or nominated Deputy Head of School will meet (in person, by phone or email) with the student to try to resolve or provide support. This Stage 1 meeting should occur within five working days following receipt of the appeal.

Step 4. Student is issued an outcome letter and has five working days to respond to the outcome letter.

Step 5. The student has the right to appeal the outcome letter and proceed to the formal Stage 2 of the appeals process.

Step 6. An Appeal Panel will be convened to discuss the appeal within 10 working days of the appeal being received.

Step 7. The student is informed of the Panel decision by letter within five working days.

Outcome of Appeal:

Option 1. If the appeal is upheld, the decision is referred back to the Head of Higher Education and the Board of Examinations to amend the student record accordingly.

Option 2. If the appeal is not upheld and the original decision is confirmed by the Panel, and the student accepts the decision, the appeal is now closed.

Option 3. If the appeal is not upheld and the student contests the decision, the student has the right to refer the appeal to the Awarding Organisation and then to NIPSO.

ACADEMIC APPEAL FORM 1: APPEAL ON THE BASIS OF NEW INFORMATION

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the UK GDPR and used for the purpose of recording and managing academic appeals. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant college staff for the purpose of recording and managing academic appeals.

Further information on data protection and your rights is available on our website https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy

NOTES
A student may appeal against a decision on his or her academic progress on the basis of evidence of extenuating circumstances **not known** to the Board when the decision was made. **N.B. The academic judgement of examiners is not open to appeal.** The regulations require that relevant written medical evidence, or evidence of compassionate circumstances must be presented. Evidence of ill-health must be authenticated by the student's medical adviser. Self-certification is **not** acceptable. The completed form will be considered by an Appeals Panel acting on behalf of the examinations board which made the original decision. The student will be interviewed if he/she wishes and may be accompanied. Legal representation is not permissible. An explanation on student appeals is available in the HE Student Handbook, Programme Moodle Site, and Higher Education Programmes SOP on the SERC Website.
PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS OF THIS FORM
SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT (please complete legibly suitable for copying)
1. Name (in full):
2. Student ID No:
3. Address (for all correspondence): **Email:**
4. Contact Telephone No:
5. Programme Title and Code:

6. Academic Year of Study:
7. Campus:
8. Presentation of new evidence of illness or other extenuating circumstances Failure to complete this section may result in your appeal being rejected. **A.** Specify factors relevant to your academic performance which were not known when the original decision was taken (attach copies of medical certificates or other supporting material); this **must** be new information (see Section 9 below);
B. Explain why the information now being supplied was not made available sooner;

N.B. The original decision of the Board will be confirmed without the opportunity for interview if:

a. it is determined that you have not submitted any new information, or you have not provided a satisfactory explanation for your failure to supply the information by the date(s) prescribed in the regulations in the HE Appeals section of the Higher Education Programmes SOP;

or

b. there is no contemporaneous, independent, medical or other evidence to support the appeal.

9. Previous presentation of evidence of illness or other extenuating circumstances

If you have already submitted to the College, at any time during the current academic session, evidence of illness or other extenuating circumstances relevant to your academic performance, please indicate below:

i. the approximate date on which you forwarded these to the College:

ii. the person or office to which they were addressed:

iii. the nature of the illness or other extenuating circumstances and the period over which they could have affected your academic performance:

N.B. The above information is for advice of Appeals Panel only and is not for the purpose of reconsideration.

10. Decision on your academic progress against which you wish to appeal

11. Interview

You may not be called to interview if the evidence you have submitted is deemed to be sufficient for upholding your appeal.

i.	Do you wish to be interviewed by the Appeals Panel?	Yes/No
ii.	Do you wish to be accompanied at interview?	Yes/No

iii. If Yes, give the name and position of this person.

N.B. The person accompanying you **cannot** be a legal representative. It is your responsibility to arrange for this person to attend.
Signature: **Date:**
On completion of this section the student should return the form as follows: **TO:** Senior Customer Services Officer at any main campus reception point or via email to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk **BY:** Within 10 working days of receiving result (7 working days for Ulster University programmes)

ACADEMIC APPEAL FORM 2: APPEAL ON THE BASIS OF PROCEDURAL OR OTHER IRREGULARITIES

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the Data Protection Act (2018) and the UK GDPR and used for the purpose of recording and managing academic appeals. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant college staff for the purpose of recording and managing academic appeals.

Further information on data protection and your rights is available on our website https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy

NOTES
A student may appeal against a decision on his or her academic progress on the basis of procedural or other irregularities in the conduct of the examinations, or in other forms of assessment, or in the decision-making process. **N.B. The academic judgement of examiners is not open to appeal.** An explanation on student appeals is available in the HE Student Handbook, Programme Moodle Site, and Higher Education Programmes SOP on the SERC Website.
PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS OF THIS FORM
SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT (please complete legibly suitable for copying)
1. Name (in full):
2. Student ID No:
3. Address (for all correspondence): **Email:**
4. Contact Telephone No:
5. Programme Title and Code:
6. Academic Year of Study:
7. Campus:
8. Statement by Student Please provide details of the procedural or other irregularities relating to coursework or examinations, or in the decision-making process associated with your academic progress.

9. Decision on your academic progress against which you wish to appeal
10. Interview If it is established that there is a case for an appeal:
i. Do you wish to be interviewed by the Appeals Panel? Yes/No
ii. Do you wish to be accompanied at interview? Yes/No
iii. If Yes, give the name and position of this person.
N.B. The person accompanying you **cannot** be a legal representative. It is your responsibility to arrange for this person to attend.
Signature: **Date:**
On completion of this form the student should return form as follows: **TO:** Senior Customer Services Officer at any main campus reception point or via email to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk **BY:** Within 10 working days of receiving results (7 working days for Ulster University programmes)

Appendix 5- SERC Student Charter

SERC STUDENT CHARTER

This Charter sets out the shared values and commitments between students, SERC, and the Students' Union. It is not a legal contract but a statement of partnership, designed to support a positive learning experience for all.

Our Shared Values

- Respect – Treat everyone with dignity and fairness.
- Integrity – Act honestly and responsibly in all academic and personal conduct.
- Inclusivity – Celebrate diversity and ensure equal opportunities.
- Engagement – Work together to enhance learning and student life.
- Sustainability – Commit to practices that protect our environment and future.

SERC Commits To

- Deliver high-quality teaching and learning experiences.
- Provide clear, accessible information on courses, assessments, and policies.
- Offer academic, wellbeing, and careers support.
- Ensure safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments.
- Listen to student feedback and act on it.

Students Commit To

- Engage actively with learning and assessment.
- Attend classes and participate in activities.
- Respect staff, fellow students, and the wider community.
- Uphold academic integrity and follow college policies.
- Share feedback constructively to help improve services.

SERC

Students' Union Commits To

- Represent student views at all levels of decision-making.
- Provide opportunities for involvement in clubs, societies, and campaigns.
- Support student wellbeing and promote equality.
- Communicate clearly about events, services, and representation.

Working Together

- We will maintain open and respectful communication.
- We will review this Charter annually with student input.
- We will signpost to detailed policies on complaints, appeals, and support.