Quality Assurance SOP

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Head of Quality, Excellence and Development

Summary of Contents
The purpose of this document is to outline the range of activities that support the process of improving the quality of learning experience for students at SERC in all courses and across all campuses

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Contents

1.0 CHANGE HISTORY 1

2.0 SUMMARY 1

3.0 SCOPE 1

4.0 PROCEDURE 1

4.1 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT 1
4.2 SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING 3
4.3 QUALITY PROVISION FOR LEARNING 5
4.4 QUALITY OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS 8

5.0 RESPONSIBLE OWNER 10

6.0 COMMUNICATION PLAN 10

7.0 REVIEW 10

APPENDIX 1: DOCUMENT CHANGE HISTORY 11

1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Summary

The purpose of this document is to outline the range of activities that support the process of improving the quality of learning experience for students at SERC in all courses and across all campuses.

3.0 Scope

This SOP will apply to all staff who are involved in the processes listed below. These processes include all corporate and academic staff.

4.0 Procedure

4.1 Leadership and Management

4.1.1 Quality Assurance Cycle

The Quality Assurance Cycle is to outline the activities taken by the teams and units over the academic year to ensure quality assurance and improvement is managed in a coherent and consistent manner. The outcomes of the Quality Assurance Cycle inform the Human Resource Policy and annual staff development plan. The Quality Assurance Cycle shows the sequence of the main actions which include:

- Self-evaluation and review and quality improvement planning
- Integrated Monthly Performance Management System (IMPMS)
- Student Case Conferences and Enhanced Case Conferences
- Staff Communications
- Listening and influencing surveys
- Support for Teaching and Learning
- Course Assist Review (CAR)
- Pedagogy Support, ILT Pedagogy Mentoring, Project Based Learning Mentors
- Staff Appraisal and Continued Professional Development

The Quality Assurance Cycle is coordinated within the Quality Assurance Calendar. The Quality unit will draft a Quality Assurance Calendar in June each year for the following academic year. The QA Calendar will co-ordinate all the elements of the quality cycle to ensure that they are completed at the appropriate time with no clashes.

The quality assurance cycle is supported by the following activities:

- Appraisal
- Communication with staff and students
- Curriculum Development
- Examination and Progress Boards
- Recruitment and Induction

- Internal Verification and Moderation
- Peer Observation (team observation and ILT Pedagogy and Project Based Learning Mentors)
- Published Information for staff and students
- Staff Development
- Standardisation
- Staff induction
- Student induction

4.1.2 Self-Evaluation Reports, Improvement Plans, Monitoring Review

Each programme will produce a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at the end of the academic year. The quality of the SER is maintained by the Head of School (HOS), the Principal Lecturer (PL) and Deputy Head of School (DHOS) who will meet with the programme teams and scrutinise the robustness of the SER and QIP. Quality Excellence and Development (QED) will sample and monitor the process as part of IMPMS. The QIP will identify areas for improvement and use SMART actions to address these. Review of programme, school and unit QIP actions will occur monthly as part of the IMPMS agenda.

All programme and school performance indicators are sourced from the central college MIS system. It provides three-year trends, programme benchmarks and focus for target setting. Attendance, retention, achievement and success targets are set at programme level and monitored through the IMPMS process.

4.1.3 Integrated Monthly Performance Management System (IMPMS)

Budget holders meet monthly with the College Management Team to monitor and review quality and financial targets set through the review process. The targets are updated to reflect progress and updated to include new requirements. A monthly agenda of current quality issues forms the basis of a professional discussion and report on school and unit level activities.

4.1.4 Student Case Conferences

Student Case Conferences will be held every six weeks to review the performance of individual students. Appropriate members of the teaching and support teams should attend and complete the case conference app in line with standard operating procedure. The teaching and support teams are responsible for ensuring that all agreed actions are progressed.

Enhanced Case Conferences will be held to support programmes where they are deemed to be ‘at risk’. Programmes are ‘at risk’ when there are complaints raised by students, staff, External Verifiers, External Examiners or Quality Assurance; issues through student survey or issues of retention, achievement or success. The Enhanced Case Conference will aim to isolate issues and provide support to create and implement an improvement and development plan.

4.1.5 Staff Communications

The annual cycle of staff communications will be outlined in the College Quality Calendar. These will include three CMT briefings to staff and School meetings. CMT briefings are recorded and published on the college intranet for staff review at a later stage or for absent

and newly inducted staff. Schools will prepare a schedule of team meetings. Staff communications include:

- Team briefings
- Team meetings
- Whole college meetings
- Professional discussions with line managers
- Published Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Policies on intranet
- Staff surveys and resulting action plans
- Joint Consultation Forums with staff representatives
- Briefings to the Governing Body and sub-committees
- Staff student meetings
- E-briefings on intranet
- Blogs and webinars on intranet
- Team sites
- Have Your Say

4.1.6 Listening and influencing surveys

The College will issue a number of surveys to its staff, students and employers to provide essential feedback on the quality of the learner experience and services to industry. These surveys may be online or via focus groups.

- The student onboarding and induction survey will be carried out annually and include cross-sector benchmarking student satisfaction questions and issues of concern to the College. Any areas that require further investigation may be carried out using a further short-focused survey.
- The student survey will be carried out annually and include cross-sector benchmarking student satisfaction questions and issues of concern to the College. Any areas that require further investigation may be carried out using a further short-focused survey.
- Curriculum staff will meet with student representatives from full-time and substantial part-time programmes each year to discuss a range of issues. These staff student consultative committees will be structured and minuted.
- The National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destination Outcome Survey will be operated for Higher Education students.
- The College will gauge the views of its staff using online surveys.
- The College will gauge the views of its employers through a range of mechanisms including breakfast briefings and industry panels.

4.2 Support for Teaching and Learning

The College has as a central aim the constant improvement of teaching and learning and the overall learning experiences of all students. Observing lessons is a key part of the strategy to provide targeted support for course teams and staff. There are five opportunities for lesson observations:

- Pedagogy Mentoring (TEL, PBL and Learning and Teaching) (see 4.2.2.1)
- Early Professional Development (new start observations) (see 4.2.2.2)

- Continuing Professional Development (supportive observations) (see 4.2.2.3)
- The PGCE(FE) and CIT lesson observation (see 4.2.2.4)
- Staff Appraisal process (see 4.2.3)

4.2.1 Course Assist Review (CAR)

The Course Assist Review (CAR) supports course teams and individual staff where there are issues of concern that may affect the quality of the provision and the levels of course success. The CAR encourages teams through a culture of self-evaluation to reflect on the students' learning experience and plan for improvement through a well-resourced, inclusive process.

The Course Assist Review has two elements:

- An open and supportive evidence-based review to distil areas of strength and areas for improvement. The review is conducted by QED following which school management and the course teaching team are provided with oral feedback and written main findings.
- The development of a QIP which is an agreed, resourced improvement action plan, with milestones, monitored regularly at school level and reported at IMPMS. Progress against the QIP is also monitored by QED over a 12 to 18 month period and comprises of interim visits and a final follow-up visit to the programme to evaluate progress made against the QIP.

4.2.2 Learning Academy Support

The Learning Academy provides a range of formal and informal continuous professional development (CPD) activities to support individuals and schools / units. These activities may be organised at whole college, school / unit or individual level. These include the pedagogy mentoring programme, training, project-based learning support, leadership and management programme, Outside Insight (job shadowing programme), Industry placement scheme, "Getting to grips with" (HE in FE support for staff and students) and early career support. Additional asynchronous training is available through the Learning Engine and includes all mandatory training as well as self-selected CPD. Weekly webinars provide just in time support. These include Moodle Mondays, Teams Tuesdays, webinar Wednesdays and Link and Learning sessions. CPD activities are informed through a range of mechanisms including the self-evaluation process, appraisal, annual Training Needs Analysis and personal development planning. These are tracked using the skills and knowledge database. CPD is structured around 4 key themes.

1. Early Professional Development
2. Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
3. Leadership and Management
4. Collaboration and Internationalisation

4.2.2.1. Pedagogy Mentoring

The Pedagogy Mentors support lecturers through a six-step process where the mentor teaches the mentee's class, team teaches and peer observes them, alongside bespoke training, tailored to the pedagogical and technological needs of the lecturer as well as the embedding of PBL and T skills within the curriculum.

The peer mentoring model promotes a collaborative, professional, enquiry-based approach, characterised by personalised, adaptive and reflective professional learning. Student feedback is captured at each stage and this feeds forward into agreed targets and training for the next stage of this interactive model.

Mentees are nominated by curriculum managers or staff may self-nominate. A mentee can choose to complete the mentoring on several occasions to incrementally improve their pedagogical skills. All new staff are supported through an initial supportive observation to identify specific training needs and prioritise support.

4.2.2.2. Early Professional Development

Early professional development includes the employee's structured and supportive introduction to the College as well as an effective skills development programme for those at the start of the professional career within SERC. It aims to support the employee's induction to the College and department / school to help them establish themselves quickly into their appointed role. New teachers have a supportive observation by an experienced mentor and identified training needs are resourced, supported and reviewed.

4.2.2.3. Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

SERC seeks to provide relevant and flexible development opportunities for all staff. The College supports a wide portfolio of CPD in a range of formats including:

- In-College training
- External accredited programmes
- Professional / technical training
- Mentoring – tailored programme supporting staff 1-1 through training and classroom sessions (including demo lessons, team teach and supportive observations)
- Digital skills training – to support staff as they use a wide range of digital tools. This includes the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - MOODLE, Microsoft Teams, e-portfolios, a range of TEL packages and responsible AI use.
- Job shadowing
- Webinars and online training – to facilitate the sharing of good practice college wide in relation to Project Based Learning, Transversal skills, Digital skills and pedagogical practice.

4.2.2.4. PGCE(FE) and CIT lesson observation

As part of the CIT and PGCE(FE), the Learning Academy provides developmental lesson observations which contribute to the completion of the award. Each participant is mentored in the first semester each year. Targeted support is given through mentoring and workshops, reflecting the training needs identified by the candidates and during the observations.

4.2.3 Staff appraisal

This is an important area for professional self-evaluation and review and contributes to the overall improvement cycle. A sector-wide appraisal system that incorporates lesson observation has recently been agreed as part of the new lecturers' contract, it is a key priority. The appraisal process will be on a continuous two-year cycle following agreed guidelines. (CEF Circular 2009/13). HR will be responsible for updating staff appraisal training as required.

4.3 Quality Provision for Learning

4.3.1 Course Team Meetings

The course team has a critical role in the successful management of the programme and the quality of the learning experience delivered to the students. The Curriculum Managers attend a number of course team meetings per year.

The course team is responsible for the complete programme of study including all vocational modules and essential skills provision. The team is composed of all module and essential skills tutors, training support and learning support officers (where appropriate). The course team must meet formally a minimum of every six weeks with greater frequency at the start and end of the year. The course team meeting is chaired by the course coordinator and has a number of standing agenda items such as:

- Student retention and progress
- Student attendance monitoring
- Good practice in teaching and learning
- Assessment scheduling, grading and marking (IQA, IV and IM)
- Monitoring of improvement plan
- Reviewing curriculum enrichment
- Completing all student administration
- Review student support
- Outcomes of award body reviews including SV, EE and EQA comments and recommendations

4.3.2 Standardisation

To ensure that all students receive the same high-quality learning experience the College has standardised a range of documentation, processes and activities. The range of documentation includes:

- Schemes of work and lesson plans
- Assessment planner/schedule
- Assignment cover sheet and student feedback sheet
- Curriculum enrichment tracking
- Student assignments
- IV documentation - cross marking sheets, assessment brief and IV and lead IV tracking sheets

There are a range of activities including assessment planning and scheduling, integration of assessments which occur at the start of the year/semester. Cross marking activities take place at team and cross campus level and occur twice per year. The internal verification process occurs in tandem with the cross-marking activities and is managed by the lead IV/IM or IQA.

4.3.3 Team sites

Team sites will be organised at programme level and will include:

- Assignment Schedules
- Assignment Briefs
- Schemes of Work
- Course Enrichment

- SV/EE/EQA reports
- Results
- Minutes of meetings
- Awarding Organisation information
- Individual campus co-ordination

4.3.4 Developing independent learning using technology

4.3.4.1. MOODLE

MOODLE is the College virtual learning environment (VLE) and is used to enhance, integrate and encourage student independent learning. MOODLE is central to the student learning experience both in provision of materials and in lesson delivery. The MOODLE experience is available external and internal to the College. It is expected that all course teams will fully exploit MOODLE functionality for the benefit of their students and the development of independent learning opportunities.

The College has agreed a standardised MOODLE course site structure to ensure a high-quality experience for students and all course teams follow this format:

- Template for format by programme
- Student handbooks
- Access to e-books
- Access to individual timetable
- Attendance record
- Social media for peer to peer learning

4.3.4.2. MS Teams

MS TEAMS is the college collaboration platform and is used to support the learner by providing blended learning opportunities. It is expected that course teams will exploit the features of MS Teams for the benefit of the learners by development of both synchronous and asynchronous activities.

4.3.5 Competitions and Awards

The College is fully committed in promoting a competition and awards culture. Academic staff are aware of the significant benefits competitions and awards offer to all those who enter and support them by complementing all teaching and learning by:

- Raising standards
- Promoting excellence in skills
- Injecting ambition and aspiration
- Building confidence and self esteem
- Putting excitement into learning and achievement

Participating in competitions and awards is very important as it encourages excellence and provides students with valuable learning experiences and opportunities to showcase their skills. The college competition and awards fund is available to all HOS to apply for financial

support to support their participation in competitions. Applications received are processed and authorised by the Competitions Manager.

The College competitions manager is responsible for promoting and encouraging curriculum school involvement in suitable competition opportunities and monitors and reviews progress. Course teams actively encourage students to participate in competitions and awards.

4.4 Quality of Achievements and Standards

4.4.1 Setting and monitoring of targets

The College publishes and monitors targets at College, School and programme level. The College provides reliable benchmarking data for the range of different provision it delivers each year. The data includes the key performance indicators of retention, achievement and success. The range of provision covered by the data includes:

- Higher Education FT and PT
- Further Education FT and PT
- ApprenticeshipNI
- University Access
- GCEs
- GCSEs
- Essential Skills
- School Partnerships

The purpose of the published benchmarks is to provide a datum from which comparisons are made. These benchmarks must be used in all course and school level SERs. In addition, external benchmarking data including the annual DfE Further Education Activity Survey will be used to analyse performance within the sector.

4.4.2 Further Education Leavers Survey (FELS) Report

All lecturers who teach a vocational course or module are required to return the outcome of that course or module for every student on their programme. The FELS report will be used to trend the performance of courses that last up to one year only. The outcome may be full achievement, partial achievement, no achievement.

The FELS will also track the student destination after they have completed their programme of study. Students may progress to further education or training, employment, unemployment etc.

4.4.3 Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR), e-Individual Learning Plan (e- ILP) and e-Personal Training Plan (e-PTP)

The HEAR provides FT Higher Education students with a record of their achievements including academic, vocational and extra-curricular developments. The student should complete the HEAR during a termly one to one meeting with the pastoral tutor. A student may request a validated copy of the HEAR on completion of their programme of study.

The SERC 4 U portal is key to tracking student information and progression and provides students with personalised targets. All full-time students are provided with access to an individualised SERC 4 U portal. Course teams ensure that the students have completed the

identified induction elements to supplement the induction onto the programme of study. The induction modules must be completed within the first four weeks of programme commencing.

The student can monitor their attendance and progression through SERC 4 U and this is encouraged by the course team. The careers element of the e-ILP should be completed by the student with the course tutor at tutorial. Course team members update the Portal with assessment schedules and through updates on learner assessment progression in advance of student case conferences. Any disciplinary issues are recorded on the Portal after discussion by the course team.

All AppNI learners have a TAMS PTP generated by their Training Support Officer (TSO) within 12 weeks of commencement on programme. On completion of comprehensive initial assessment and individualised target setting, TAMS PTPs are populated with personal details, programme details, qualification targets, skill levels and careers objectives and are personalised to the individual apprentice. Progress towards targets are updated regularly and provide all stakeholders, including trainees and apprentices, with a live record of their achievements to date and progression in their transferable and occupational skills. The College also maintains an e-PTP system to provide a variety of reports on retention, achievement and progression and provides status reports on the level of completion of all sections of PTPs.

Progress reviews towards the targeted qualifications listed in the PTP are completed for each apprentice every 10 weeks by their TSO in consultation with the apprentice, their employer and vocational tutor.

4.4.4 Higher Education Examination and Progress Boards

Higher Education Examination and Progress Boards are an important element of quality assurance. They have the following functions:

- To determine the module/unit results obtained by candidates
- Where such results lead directly to an award to forward to external bodies lists of successful candidates classified in accordance with relevant course regulations
- To determine the academic progress of students on the basis of their performance in examinations and other forms of assessment.
- To ensure that the examination and assessment of candidates are conducted in accordance with regulations and procedures as required by the Awarding Organisation.

The process for higher education boards can be found in the Higher Education Programmes SOP.

4.4.5 Traineeship Examination Boards

Traineeship Exam boards will be held at the end of each Academic year to review all components of the Traineeship programme for each vocational area and to recommend individual Traineeship classification. The following agenda will be followed:

1. Review Pre-Exam Board records, including any matters arising, and confirm that the appropriate quality assurance processes have been completed.

2. Review Vocational qualification, ES/GCSE qualifications, T Skills qualification/T Skills development and placement completion confirmation for each Trainee.
3. Recommend individual Traineeship classification.
4. Confirm arrangements for communication of results to Trainees.
5. Agree date for supplementary exam board if required.

Traineeship progress boards will be held in February for 1-year programmes and in June (end of year 1) for 2-year programmes. The boards will review progress across all components of the programme and will recommend support interventions.

5.0 Responsible Owner

It is the responsibility of the Head of Quality, Excellence and Development to ensure that this SOP is implemented, adhered to and reviewed.

6.0 Communication Plan

This SOP will be uploaded to the College intranet and referred to in staff induction and training.

7.0 Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.1	January 2022	Update to Support for Teaching and Learning. Inclusion of MS TEAMS to Developing independent learning using technology
1.2	September 2023	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
1.3	August 2024	Responsible Owner updated to “Head of Quality, Excellence and Development”
1.4	September 2024	Update on Traineeship Exam Boards and Progress Boards.
1.5	June 2025	Update on Course Assist Review (4.2.1)
1.6	June 2026	Section 4.1.6 Listening and influencing surveys updated to include the introduction of the onboarding and induction survey for 2026/27. Minor updates included within 4.2.2 Learning academy support and in particular 4.2.2.3 CPD and 4.2.2.4 PGCE(FE) and CIT lesson observation. Section 4.4.3 updated to HEAR, TAMs system and SERC 4 U.