



**Annual Quality Report (SNMCI)**  
**PART A: INTERNAL QA SYSTEM**  
**Reporting Period 2019-2020**



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## Part A: Internal QA System

This is the Annual Quality Report (AQR) for Saint Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI) for the reporting period September 1<sup>st</sup> 2019-August 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.

**Submission date:** February 26<sup>th</sup> 2021

The AQR has been approved by the Academic Board of SNMCI and is submitted by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA).

### Introduction and Overview of Institution

#### **SNMCI:**

SNMCI is a private college of education, established in 1970, based in Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.

The College offers Montessori teacher education and special education through full-time and part-time accredited degree programmes and shorter programmes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and has lately extended its provision into the disciplines of psychology and community based education, e.g. Montessori Education for Dementia.

The College is one of the three 'pillars' of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland (SMSI), CLG, a not for profit charity governed by a Board of Trustees. The second and third pillars of the society are represented by the St Nicholas Montessori Schools (pre-schools and primary schools) and the St Nicholas Montessori Ireland's Teachers' Association.

In 2018, SNMCI was rebranded as part of the strategic plan **Society 2025**. Society 2025 outlined the College's intention to provide a **Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education** committed to the development of each of the areas below.

#### **Research:**

The College has formulated a research strategy and convened a Research Committee to support and enhance research activity within the institution.

#### **Model schools:**

SNMCI is unique in Ireland, as patron of model schools where the specific pedagogy of its teacher education programmes is implemented. Two Montessori schools deliver the primary curriculum to children up to the age of 12, in authentic Montessori prepared environments, and aligned to the philosophy and methods Montessori pedagogy.

#### **Access:**

The College is pursuing blended learning options to enhance access and delivery.

#### **Programme development:**

In this reporting period and in response to stated strategic objectives, the College successfully submitted two new programmes to QQI, extending the scope of its provision: *Montessori Education for Dementia* and *B.A. (Hons) in Psychology*. Programme development in other areas is ongoing.

**Teaching and learning:** Teaching and Learning at SNMCI is humanist and constructivist in nature. The College is engaged in a significant and on-going development of its faculty including the



appointment of doctoral research active lecturers, and a wide range of continuing professional development (CPD) activities for existing faculty. The COVID 19 pandemic (March 2020) provided an opportunity to fast track the development of online teaching, learning and assessment capability.

**Supporting Educators**

The St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers’ Association (SNMTA) is a national, POBAL funded, teacher professional development organisation that supports education professionals working with children of all ages.

**Informing policy**

The College has institutional membership of many national organisations, including Early Childhood Ireland, The Children’s Rights Alliance, PLÉ and Organisation Mondiale pour l’Education Prescolaire (OMEP), Ireland. The College is represented at the Early Years Forum, the Early Years Workforce Development Plan Stakeholders Group, the National Vocational Childcare Committee, the National Forum (NF) the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and its quality subgroup (HAQEF). Through these fora, the College seeks to contribute to the national conversation and policy development of the education sector.

**Reaching the wider community**

The College was a founding member of Montessori Europe and hosted the 2019 Montessori Europe Conference. SNMCI is a long-standing member of the Kastalia network of European institutions of teacher education. Learners from SNMCI go on Erasmus placements from January to April and have travelled to Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and Turkey, and to date we have welcomed learners on study visits from Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey. Every year, the College welcomes learners from the Bundesbildungsanstalt fur Kindergartenpädagogik, in Linz, Austria to study the Montessori Method of education. The recently validated Montessori *Education for Dementia*, will bring the benefits of Montessori education to an audience not primarily education and young person focussed. It will enable graduates to use Montessori philosophy to prepare life enhancing Montessori environments for those living with dementia.

**Accreditation at August 2020**

No.	Programme Title	Level/Type	Status
1.	BA in Montessori Education	7/Major	Level 7 for EY or entry to Level 8
2.	BA (Hons) in Montessori Education	8/Major	One Year Full and Part Time. Restricted recognition from TC for teachers of Special Education
3.	Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education	8/Major	Programme for graduates of any discipline who wish to follow a career in Montessori ECEC.
4.	B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education	8/Major	Validated 2019
5.	B. Ed. Montessori Education	7/Major	Validated 2019
6.	Montessori Education for Dementia	6/SPA	Validated June 2020

**Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)**

SNMCI is a founding member of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA). HECA offers the HECA PEL scheme which provides member organisations with two levels of protection for enrolled learners:



- Academic Bonding – SNMCI is bonded by the National College of Ireland (NCI) and the Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences (ICHAS) such that these Colleges have agreed to provide SNCMI programmes to SNCMI learners in the event that SNMCI is unable to do so itself.
- Financial Bonding – SNCMI pays an annual levy to the PEL scheme to support a sink fund that HECA PEL members can access to resource the delivery of programmes in the event that academic bonding is activated.

### **Development of AQR:**

**Reengagement:** The reporting period in question spans the process of SNMCI's reengagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - application Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 2019- site visit Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020- approval April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020. This AQR is therefore representative of the root and branch review of the College's QA policies and processes occurring during this reporting period, and was compiled in conjunction with all staff members concerned in the reengagement process. Reengagement included the approval and implementation of material changes to institutional QA, e.g –new policies and procedures and significant amendments to existing ones, and this AQR includes both **Part A** and **Part B** of the reporting process.

The office of the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (DQAA) maintains regular contact with all members of staff, monitoring quality issues that may arise on an ongoing basis. Periodic meetings are convened throughout the year and annual meetings are convened to review and monitor the implementation of policies and procedures. Actions arising from these meetings are communicated widely.

### **Cyclical Review**

SNMCI has a cyclical approach to quality assurance involving initiation, development, approval, implementation, monitoring and review.

The normal cycle of review may be influenced by external factors including:

- Changes in legislative frameworks;
- Changes in the National and International landscape;
- Change of requirements from the Awarding Body (QQI);
- Changes in requirements by other bodies e.g. Teaching Council (TC), Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), Department of Education and Skills(DES);

Internal factors also influence the cycle of review including:

- Identification of a need for an amendment, refinement, addition or removal of information by persons/departments/programme committees in the College;
- Additional considerations that may arise subsequent to the drafting of the original policy , e.g. the current COVID 19 pandemic;
- When processes change in respect to how programmes are delivered e.g. blended or online learning or changes in assessment submission (Moodle/learning platforms etc.).

### **A Comprehensive System**

The promotion of quality is embedded in the governance, organisational and academic activities of SNMCI.

- SNMCI is committed to the continuous development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality and quality enhancement in all College activities.



- SNMCI encourages staff and student insight and participation in the development, review, implementation and testing of policies and procedures.
- Staff and students are represented on the Academic Board of the College
- SNMCI sees it as the responsibility of all employees to become familiar with and have ownership of the College's QA policies and procedures. This process is promoted through induction and ongoing engagement facilitated by Programme Directors, the DQAA and the CEO as appropriate.
- Programme Committees meet at the beginning and end of the academic year to discuss significant programme issues.
- General staff meetings are held regularly to facilitate information sharing regarding the aspirations and concerns of management and staff
- Programme Directors are available to provide clarification to part-time staff members and to raise issues at meetings on their behalf.
- Stakeholder feedback is obtained regularly through face-to-face and online methods
- SNMCI endeavours, through the use of the website, Moodle and shared folders, to ensure that all information circulated is appropriate, relevant, reliable and accessible.

All new policies created and approved by the Academic Board adhere to [QA 2.1](#) *Scope of Quality Assurance* and [QA 2.2](#) *Formulation, Issuance and Enhancement of College Policies* or the 'Policy on Policies' which contains a Template for College Policies.

The Template encourages the initiator/owner of the policy to:

- Develop policies according to the process set out in [QA 2.2](#)
- Present policies in a standard format including illustrations
- Follow through on policy approval process
- Ensure that policies are accessible to all interested parties and are kept up to date.

It also requires:

- A context for each policy
- The policy statement
- The scope of the policy
- The staff involved
- The associated procedure outline, stating, at each point, a) Person/s Responsible and b) Records generated to ensure evidence of follow through and closure of the process.

## 1.0 Internal QA Framework

### 1.1 Governance and Management of Quality

The SNMCI approach to Quality Assurance emphasises a commitment to comprehensive, open and inclusive processes that are effective, fully aligned with the mission and strategic objectives of the College and compliant with both statutory based national objectives and European standards.

The complexity of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in higher education was summarised by the European University Association (EUA) as '...a culturally sensitive, relative and contested concept that is **shaped by the institutional and national context**, and given expression as an **internal dynamic process** with the objective of **constant improvement**' (EUA, 2004)

#### Institutional and national context:

SNMCI addresses Quality Assurance at two levels:



1) **College community:** on a day-to day basis, the College community needs evidence to assure itself that quality procedures are applied systematically across all aspects of College life and that the quality assurance policies and procedures are effective in enabling the College to achieve its goals

2) **External and public interest nationally and internationally:** the College is aware of the need to create and sustain public confidence in its quality procedures, and in its capacity to provide programmes that achieve national and international standards, appropriate to the relevant level in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

**Internal dynamic process and constant improvement:**

In practice, quality assurance and enhancement at SNMCI is supported through a combination of College -wide policies and procedures implemented on an on-going basis, and a system of review. To ensure that quality assurance is seen as a dynamic concept there is a continual enhancement of procedures, informed by review (internally and externally), feedback from all stakeholders, staff and learner participation, innovation and examples of best practices in other Colleges.

**National Statutory Guidelines observed:**

- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):** the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training.
- **Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012):** Section 28(1) of the Act requires all providers to “establish procedures in writing for quality assurance for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training and research and related services the provider provides”.
- **QQI Policy Framework for Cyclical Reviews of Higher Education Institutions (2016):** Observed to evaluate the **effectiveness** of the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for the purposes of establishing, ascertaining, maintaining and improving the quality of education, training, research and related services the institution provides. This is a measurement of the institution’s **accountability** for compliance with European standards for quality assurance with regard to the expectations set out in the QQI quality assurance guidelines, or their equivalent, and adherence to other relevant QQI policies and procedures as established in the lifecycle of engagement between the institution and QQI. It is also an exploration of the institution’s **enhancement** of quality in relation to impacts on teaching, learning and research, institutional achievements and innovations in quality assurance, alignment to the institution’s mission and strategy and the quality-related performance of the institution relative to quality indicators and benchmarks identified by the institution (2016, p2).
- **QQI Policy on Quality Assurance Guidelines (Dec. 2015, revised Apr. 2016):** The principles which should permeate an institution’s QA policies and Procedures include that they be, Provider-Owned, Contextual, Quality Culture, Learning Outcome, Implementation, Externality, Continuous Improvement, Transparency, Public Confidence.
- **QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (May, 2016);** SNMCI’s Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework follows the main areas to be addressed, in provider quality assurance procedures, as outlined in the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* which are as follows:
  - 1) Governance and Management of Quality
  - 2) Documented Approach to Quality Assurance





- 3) Programmes of Education and Training
  - 4) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
  - 5) Teaching and Learning
  - 6) Assessment of Learners
  - 7) Supports for Learners
  - 8) Information and Data Management
  - 9) Public Information and Communication
  - 10) Other Parties involved in Education and Training
  - 11) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review
- **QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (March 2018):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and in response to market intelligence, SNMCI was investigating how best to introduce blended learning opportunities to learners and had piloted blended learning in the College. The COVID 19 pandemic accelerated this move. (Next reporting period)
  - **QQI Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (2012):** As part of its Strategic Plan (2020-2025) SNMCI is investigating transnational possibilities and is aware of its responsibilities in respect of the above policy. (n/a in this reporting period)
  - **QQI Policy Restatement Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training (restated 2015):** SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression is committed to inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates. The College provides clear information to learners, identifying pathways **to**, **from** and **within** programmes, and about awards and qualifications that may be achieved.

#### **European Standards and Guidelines:**

In the context of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG's), quality is considered 'mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose' (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, May 2015, 2015, p.5).

The Quality Assurance Framework at SNMCI is monitored and updated to ensure that it is, as QQI advises, 'appropriate to our context' and as the ESG's advise 'fit for purpose'. The revised 2015 ESGs regard the following as significant indicators of quality:

- The design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes of study;
- Supports and training for teaching staff;
- Regular student feedback and complaints procedures
- Well established mechanisms such as the external examiner system and the institutional strategic planning functions
- The learning environment.

The revised ESGs contain Ten Standards, with a standard defined as an "agreed and accepted practice for quality assurance in higher education in the European Higher Education Area and should, therefore, be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned in all types of higher education provision" (ESG, 2015, p.7).



The Standards are strongly reflected in the QQI Core Guidelines and woven through the SNMCI Quality Assurance Framework. **See table below**

**Table 1 Mapping of ESG (2015) to QQI QA Guidelines (QAG) with link to SNMCI QA**

AQR Part A Section	QQI/QAG Core Sub-section No.	QQI Core (Statutory) Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2016	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015	SNMCI Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
1.0 Internal QA Framework	2.1	<b>Governance and Management of Quality:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governance</li> <li>- Objectives, Mission, Strategy</li> <li>- QA provider owned</li> <li>- Integrity in Academic Standards</li> <li>- Consideration of Risk</li> <li>- Internal, External Evaluation</li> <li>- Management of and embedding of Quality</li> </ul> <b>Documented approach to Quality Assurance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Documented policies/procedures</li> <li>- Policies into Practice</li> </ul>	<b>From ESG 1.1 –ESG1.10 ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:</b> Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1- QA 1.2
	2.2			SNMCI QA Policies QA 2.1- QA 2.6
2.0 Programme Development and Delivery	2.3	<b>Programmes of Education and Training:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Programme Development</li> <li>- Learner Admission, Progression, Recognition</li> <li>- Programme Monitoring</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:</b> Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. <b>ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification Standard:</b> Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification. <b>ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:</b>	SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1- QA 3.8
4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes				SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.4- QA3.8
8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review				SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1- QA 11.4



			Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.	
<b>5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>Staff Recruitment, Management and Development:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systematic Approach to Recruitment</li> <li>- Staff Communication</li> <li>- Staff Development</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff Standard:</b> Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff.	<b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 4.1-QA 4.3</b>
<b>2.3 Teaching Learning and Assessment</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality T, L&amp;A</li> <li>- Ethos that promotes learning</li> <li>- Reference to National and International Best Practice</li> <li>- Quality Learning Environments</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.3 Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard:</b> Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	<b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 5.1-QA5.10</b>  <b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 6.1-QA 6.13</b>
	<b>2.6</b>	<b>Assessment of Learner Achievement –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessment Framework</li> <li>- Materials</li> <li>- Processes</li> <li>- Assignments</li> <li>- Records</li> </ul>		
<b>3.0 Learner Resources and Supports</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>Supports for Learners</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learner Perspective</li> <li>- Integrated Approach</li> <li>- Learner Representation</li> <li>- Guidance</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support Standard:</b> Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided	<b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 7.1-QA 7.13</b>
<b>6.0 Information and Data Management</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>Management Information and Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information Systems</li> <li>- Management of Information Systems</li> <li>- Planning</li> <li>- Completion</li> <li>- Records</li> <li>- Data Protection</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.7 Information Management Standard:</b> Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities	<b>SNMCI QA Policies QA8.1-QA8.3</b>
<b>7.0 Public Information</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>Public Information and Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public</li> </ul>	<b>ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance Standard:</b> Institutions should have a policy for	<b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 1.1-</b>



and Communication		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information Learner</li> <li>- Information Publication of Reports</li> </ul>	<p>quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.</p> <p><b>ESG 1.8 Public Information Standard:</b> Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.</p>	<p><b>QA 1.2</b></p> <p><b>SNMCI QA Policies QA9.1-QA9.2</b></p>
<p><b>2.0 Programme Development and Delivery</b></p> <p><b>8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review</b></p> <p><b>9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties</b></p>	2.10	<p><b>Other parties involved in Education and Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer Relationships</li> <li>- External Partnerships</li> <li>- Expert Panels</li> </ul> <p><b>Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Provider -owned Review</b></li> <li>- <b>Self-Monitoring</b></li> <li>- <b>SER</b></li> <li>- <b>Provider Owned QA</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:</b> Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</p> <p><b>ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes Standard:</b> Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.</p>	<p><b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1-QA11.4</b></p> <p><b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 3.1-QA 3.8</b></p>
<p><b>2.0 Programme Development and Delivery</b></p> <p><b>8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review</b></p>	2.11		<p><b>ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Standard:</b> Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</p> <p><b>ESG 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance</b> Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis</p>	<p><b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.2-QA11.3</b></p> <p><b>SNMCI QA Policies QA 11.1-QA11.4</b></p>



**Boards and Committees:**

The overarching governing body for the College is the Board of Directors of the Company, who also act as Trustees of the charity. The Board of Directors is responsible for the commercial and academic wellbeing of the College and seeks to provide a secure and stable context within which the College can pursue its vision and realise its strategic objectives.

The Board of Directors interface with commercial and academic operations via the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is responsible for human resources, commercial and business operations.

The Academic Board is chaired by the Director of Quality and Academic Affairs and fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. It is the primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters.

The table below briefly describes the different boards and committees that form the governance and operational structures of SNMCI. See [QA 2.3](#) for more detailed Terms of Reference.



BODY	FUNCTION	STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION
<b>Board of Directors/Trustees</b>	The function of the Board of Directors is to safeguard the strategic interests of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland and to ensure that all pillars of the Society, College, School and Teacher’s Association function effectively and legally, in accordance with the vision, mission and values of the Society	External, representation financial, academic, industry based.
<b>Finance Committee</b>	The function of the Finance Committee is oversight of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland’s current financial activity and consideration of long term financial plans and operations.	Institutional/management/ external auditors
<b>Academic Board</b>	The Academic Board fulfils the regulatory requirement to establish an appropriate academic governance model. It is the primary decision-making body in the College for all academic matters.	Academic, external ‘critical friend’, learner representation
<b>Admissions Committee</b>	The main function of the Admissions Committee is the monitoring of admissions data to ensure compliance with standards, process and procedures for access, transfer and progression of learners.	Academic
<b>RPL &amp; RPEL Committee</b>	The main function of the RPL Committee is overseeing the implementation of procedures for the accreditation of prior learning and acknowledgement of prior experiential learning.	Academic
<b>Programme Committees</b>	Each programme in the College has a Programme Committee to undertake, on behalf of the Academic Board, responsibility for programme management, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in accordance with regulations stipulated by QQI and as agreed by the College’s QA.	Academic internal/academic external/ learner representation (Industry at programmatic review)
<b>Teaching, Learning and Assessment</b>	The main function of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board is to	Academic, learner representation



<b>Board</b>	support and develop innovative learning and teaching practices linked to assessment of programme and module outcomes. The Board recommends, to the Academic Board, any strategies, policy, approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment it considers will be beneficial to all programmes in the College.	
<b>Quality Enhancement Committee</b>	The key objective of the SNMCI Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) is to guide the College in the development of policies and procedures to fulfil its responsibilities under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012, QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016), QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines developed for Independent/Private Providers coming to QQI on a Voluntary Basis (2016), the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and associated policies, guidelines and codes	All staff/student/academic, administrative, learner representation
<b>Research Committee</b>	The key objective of the SNMCI Research Committee (RC) is to guide the College in strategy, policy and approach to research activity in the College	Academic, learner representative
<b>Ethics Committee</b>	The key objective of the SNMCI Ethics Committee (EC) is to define the ethical standards required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI carried out by SNMCI researchers. The EC reviews and advises on all submissions for ethical approval made by researchers, be they staff or students.	Academic, external as required for staff research
<b>Pre Exam Board</b>	The Pre-Exam Board takes place once per year at the end of the first semester in order to ensure good management of Learner progression.	Academic internal /academic external



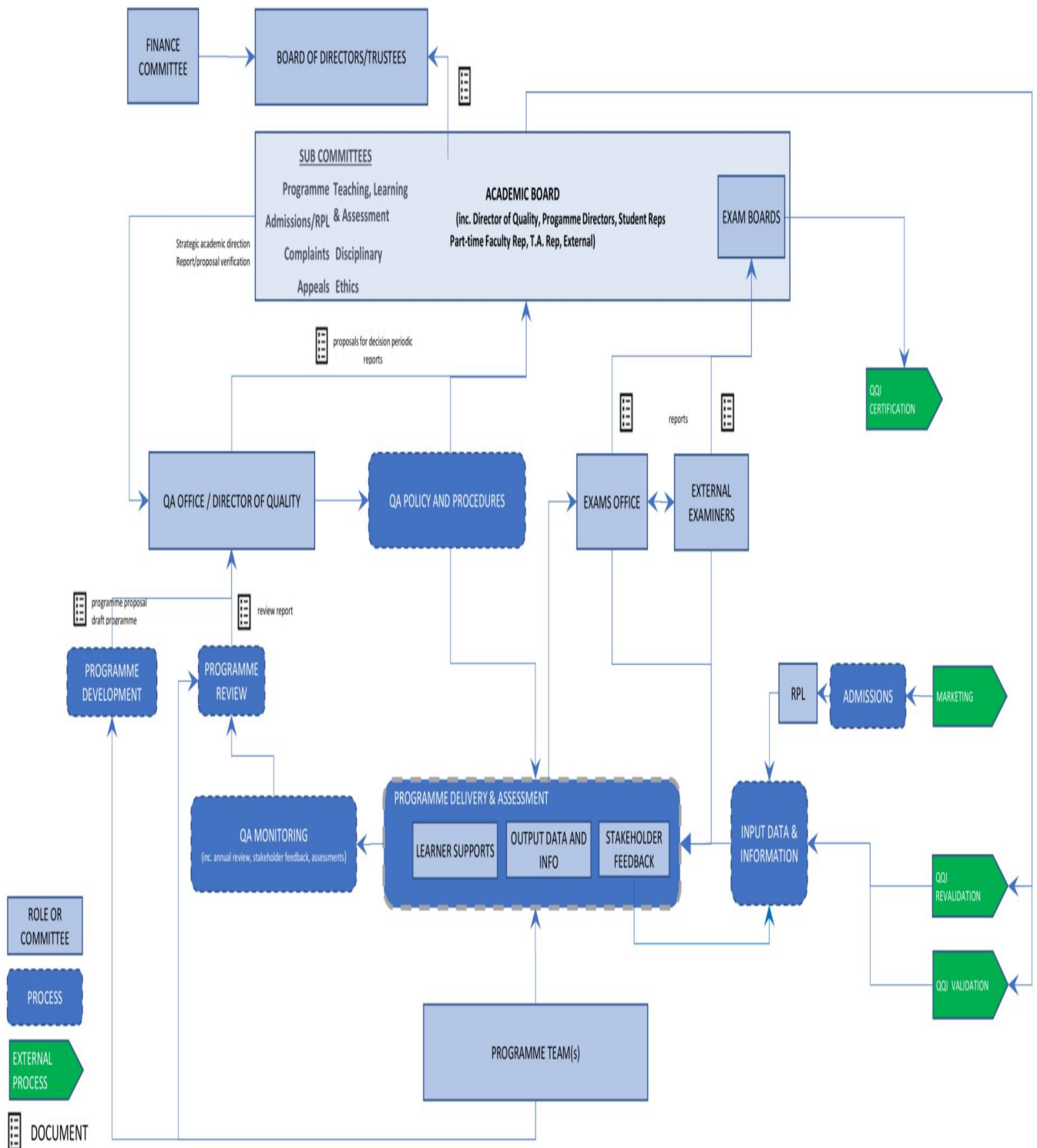
<b>Examination Board</b>	The Examination Board ratifies results of modules and stages in programmes, including degree classification at award stage.	Academic internal /academic external
<b>Disciplinary Committee</b>	The Disciplinary Committee reviews all information relating to breaches of good conduct, social and academic, and reaches decisions on the outcomes, with the imposition of appropriate penalties where applicable.	Academic internal and external as required
<b>Appeals Committee</b>	The Appeals Committee reviews all information relating to any learner appeal with regard to assessment outcomes or other academic decisions, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such appeal. It may also review appeals of examination and assessment grades where appropriate.	Academic internal and external as required
<b>Complaints Committee</b>	The Complaints Committee reviews all information relating to any complaint by a learner, and reaches a decision on the outcome of any such complaint.	Academic and institutional / internal and external as required

The interaction of the governance framework and allied committee structure, the quality assurance policies and procedures and the standard operating procedures for the development and delivery of programmes is described below.





Figure 2: Interaction of Governance, Quality Assurance and Operations





### 1.2 Linked Providers, Collaborative and Transnational Provision

<b>Collaborative provision of programmes</b> , i.e. <i>where two or more providers are involved by formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training</i>	n/a for this reporting period
<b>Transnational delivery of programmes</b> , i.e. <i>the provision or partial provision of a programme of education in one country by a provider which is based in another country</i>	n/a for this reporting period
<b>Linked providers and their quality assurance</b> , including procedures for approval, monitoring, review, withdrawal of approval and appeal. [Ref: QQI Statutory Sector-Specific Guidelines for Universities and DABs]	n/a

#### Overview of the system for quality assuring research activity

See Section 4, p. 26

## 2.0 Programme Development and Delivery

SNMCI has a systematic process for **proposing and developing** new programmes and for entering into the validation process with QQI. It has also clear guidelines for monitoring and delivery of existing programmes. [\(QA 3.1: Programme Proposal\)](#)

### 2.1 Programme Delivery and Approval

Programmes are proposed on the Programme Proposal Form [\(FQA 3.1 A\)](#).

This form has guidelines [\(FQA 3.1B\)](#) to assist the proposer and to allow for consideration of the following:

- The strategic fit with the College’s direction
- The relative market demand for recruitment purposes
- The programme learning outcomes and expected learner profile
- The academic coherence of the programme as a whole
- The internal capability to fully develop the programme
- The resource implications (human and otherwise) of delivering the programme
- The appropriate mode(s) of delivery
- Compliance with external requirements for validation / accreditation
- The financial viability of the programme

Recommendations and the outcome of a programme proposal is fed back by the Academic Board on Form [\(FQA 3.1C\)](#). Programmes that reach the stage of development, follow QQI guidelines [\(QA 3.2\)](#) for validation and the process is documented on a Programme Validation Control Sheet [\(FQA 3.2A\)](#) below .



QA 3.2A Programme Validation Control Sheet				
<Programme Title>				
Step	Description	Person/s Responsible	Date	Comment
1	Programme Proposal Form	Proposer		Initial programme idea
2	Academic Board Approval	Academic Board		Academic approval: In line with the mission, values and scope of provision of the College
3	Board of Trustee Approval	Board of Trustees		Commercial: A strategic fit with the College's mission statement. In line with market demand and financially viable
4	Convening the Programme Development Team	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Members to include, critical friend, external expertise, learners, expert staff
5	Programme Document Opened	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Beginning of documented process
6	Series of documented meetings	Lead by Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Learner profile/Graduate profile MIPLOS Access, Transfer and Progression Regulatory requirements Workload/Mode of delivery Learning environment
7	Review of programme QA implications	DQAA		All related QA
8	Desk Top Review of all documentation	DQAA		Review against criteria
9	Critical Review/Mock Panel			Critical Friend Mock panel of peer reviewers
10	Response of Critical Review Panel	Mock Panel		Edit
	Edit based on Critical Review	Proposed PD/Prog Dev Lead		Edit
	Application to QQI	DQAA		All documents to QQI via QHub for consideration at PAEC
	Initial Review QQI	QQI contact		Desk top review to ensure all components present
	Peer Panel Selection	DQAA/PD/ QQI		Convening of validation panel
	Peer Panel Site Visit	SNMCI/ QQI		Validation event
	Panel Report	Panel		Response of panel
	Response to Panel Report	DQAA		Answer to panel re initial report
	Panel response/agreement	Panel		Finalising
	Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)/Decision received	QQI		Official validation
	Academic Board Informed	DQAA		



### **Existing programmes, monitoring and review:**

For existing programmes SNMCI QA Procedures allow for

- Annual Programme Review ([QA 11.2](#))
- Significant Programme Modification ([QA 11.3](#))
- Minor Programme Modification
- Programmatic Review ([QA 11.4](#))

Programmes are reviewed on an ongoing basis by Programme Directors and Programme Committees (all staff involved in a programme). On-going reviews take the form of mid-year, end-of-year and beginning of year programme meetings (**QA 11.2**).

An Annual Programme Review (**QA 11.2**) is conducted at the end of each year to:

- To provide an opportunity for Programme Directors and College staff to identify, evaluate and address any issues surrounding the structure, content, delivery and resourcing of individual programmes
- To assess the continued relevance of the programme to the learning needs of learners / demands of the employment market
- To act as a source of information for the wider College on the operation of its academic provision
- To incorporate action planning in support of continuous improvement
- To discuss proposed programme modifications (NOTE: programme modifications agreed by the Academic Board are – if significant modifications - provisional until agreed by the relevant validating body. The Programme Director will document and justify any required changes. Changes will only be put into effect when the validating body has agreed to the proposed changes. The Programme document should be modified accordingly.)
- To provide a report on the ‘academic health’ of programmes to the Academic Board.
- To inform possible revalidation and/or programme development
- This process is documented each year in the Annual Programme Report ([FQA 11.2](#))

### **Programmatic Review**

Each programme of the College is also subject to programmatic review, normally every five years. The purpose of the Programmatic Review is for the Programme Committee (chaired by the Programme Director) to report on the overall health of the programme in terms of structure, content, currency and quality, as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery. The Programmatic Review builds on the ongoing and annual review and monitoring processes. Whilst the need for programme changes may be addressed from time to time over the five-year period, the Programmatic Review provides an opportunity to

- take an overall perspective on the development of the programme over the previous five years
- to consider whether it is continuing to meet current stakeholder needs and whether or not it will continue to address these needs into the future
- to decide whether to end or revalidate the programme



## 2.2 Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

SNMCI has a 'foundation' policy on Access, Transfer and Admissions ([QA 3.3](#)).

This policy applies to all SNMCI programmes. It outlines SNMCI's approach to Access, Transfer and Progression and our commitment to inclusivity and equality of opportunity for prospective learners, enrolled learners and graduates.

This overarching policy is the foundation for, and is evidenced in a range of related policies:

- [QA 9.1](#): Compiling and Approving Marketing Material and Public Information
- [QA 3.4](#): Admissions
- [QA 3.5](#): Admissions Committee TOR
- [QA 3.6](#): Recognition of Prior Learning
- [QA 3.8](#): Information for Enrolled Learners
- [QA 3.11](#): Learner Induction
- [QA 3.14](#): Learner Feedback
- [QA 7.5](#): Cause For Concern

These policies are informed by:

- Qualifications and Quality Assurance *Education and Training Act 2012*
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013) *Assessment and Standards, Revised*
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2015) Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education (Restatement)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2015) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Section 1.4.
- AHEAD and Higher Education Authority (2013) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*

Access policies, admission processes and criteria are established and implemented consistently and in a transparent manner in accordance with national policies and procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression. Entry requirements are set in order to identify prospective students who will be able to deal with programme demands and who have the interest and commitment to complete programmes. Criteria for entry are detailed in QQI validated programme documents.

Students typically apply for a place in SNMCI either through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system or directly through the College's Admissions Management Portal.

Applications for undergraduate programmes are typically made through the CAO whereas applications for part-time programmes or Higher Diplomas are made directly through the Admissions Portal.

### **Progression:**

Indicative marks are issued throughout the year and all marks are provisional until agreed at the Examinations Board ([QA 6.13](#)). The Examinations Board is the decision making body to determine learner progression. Students have access to a range of supports to support them with any issues that may impact on progression for that year (See <https://smsi.ie/qa/> [QA 7.1- 7.13](#)).



**Recognition of Prior Learning:**

The College has a robust Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) system, both for accredited learning and for experiential learning [\(QA 3.6\)](#).

**2.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

**A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning**

The SNMCI [Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy](#) reflects the Montessori concept of ‘wider horizons’; the physical, cognitive, social and moral progression of children moving through new ‘planes of development’. It also draws on Biggs (1999) who sees teaching and learning as an integrated and balanced system, in which all components - the curriculum we teach, teaching and learning environment, the assessment process and reporting of results, and the institutional climate - support each other.

SNMCI sees education as a transformative experience for students as they move through their programmes of study, depending less on tutor support and progressively developing independence of thought and the character and skills necessary for success in life. The priority areas of SNMCI’s Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy reflect Montessori’s ‘outward-looking’ philosophy and Biggs’ notion of an integrated system. We are confident that we are working from a strong pedagogical foundation, evidenced by the fact that our graduates are consistently in demand in many educational contexts.

**Learning Environments**

Philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, educationalists, sociologists, and others have all contributed to understanding how people learn, but in general there is consensus that *‘there is no agreed theory of learning, only a range of theories to choose from’* (Carlile & Jordan 2005 cited in Whitaker 2017). It is important that learning communities reflect on their own beliefs and theories about teaching and learning to avoid teaching in ‘the way, it has always been done’. Teaching and Learning at SNMCI is Humanist and Constructivist in nature. Humanism focuses on ‘emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills’ and constructivism is a learner centred theory that believes that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning, and build on prior experience and knowledge (Ashworth et al., 2004, p.5)

	<b>Humanist</b>	<b>Constructivist</b>
<b>Main Theorists</b>	Abraham Maslow Carl Rogers	John Dewey Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky Barbara Rogoff
<b>View of the T&amp;L process</b>	A personal act to fulfil potential	Construction of meaning from experience
<b>Locus of learning</b>	Affective and cognitive domains	Individual internal construction of reality
<b>Purpose of education</b>	To become self-actualised, autonomous	Construct knowledge



Table assembled with reference to Whitaker, 2017, p. 75.

SNMCI acknowledges the advantages of exposing learners to a wide range of teaching and learning methods across their programme of study. It further acknowledges the importance of staff development to provide opportunities to explore alternative approaches to teaching and raise the quality of traditional approaches. In choosing teaching methods and strategies SNMCI has considered the following...

- Learners experience the same teaching in different ways.
- Cultural background and beliefs can impact on student behaviour, interpretation and understanding.
- Knowing this, lecturers/tutors must modify their approaches.
- An understanding of where learners are starting from is vital, to properly scaffold learning to the next level, and to avoid gaps in learning.
- Feedback and discussion are important so that learners and lecturers can both be satisfied that accommodations of new understanding are 'correct'.
- Learners and lecturers are both responsible for making learning 'happen'.
- All learners bring their own valuable knowledge and experiences to learning.
- Learners need to be encouraged to engage and internalise new knowledge and to draw on prior knowledge.
- Learner involvement and choice increases motivation.
- Small peer group work and discussion can be a powerful learning tool.

### **Teaching Methods and Strategies**

Due to the COVID 19 Pandemic lecturers at St. Nicholas have been working within a blended paradigm since March 2020 and are acclimating to blended pedagogy as a cohort, with training and support from a newly appointed Instructional Designer. In particular the College is focusing on the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000) as a guide to enhance social presence and instructor presence in the online environment, while extending the social cohesion of the face to face learning environment.

At modular level the College is employing a modified version of the ABC Learning Design model as an efficient method for collaborating with staff to produce a visual storyboard of their curricular design, to ensure the learning activities and assessments match the module learning outcomes.

Teaching and Learning Strategies also integrate principles of the COACT framework to ensure a balance of instructor-led activities and student interactions to achieve higher-level learning (Johnston and Breakwell, 2011; Bailey et al, 2014). The model breaks the learning experience down into a five-stage process that reflect a progression from lower-order towards higher-order learning, towards 'seeking meaning' through interpretation, critical analysis and application of knowledge. In planning lessons, lecturers are required to explicitly work through each step in the framework to ensure that each level is addressed but are free to choose whatever learning objects or teaching methods they feel are most suitable to achieve the learning outcomes, which ensures the lessons are varied and draw on a large variety of resources.



## 2.4 Assessment

SNMCI’s assessment strategy has been developed with an eclectic approach to ensure a wide range of academic knowledge, skills and competences are assessed and to accommodate different learning styles. Continuous assessment (e.g. essay, presentation) is applied to assess learning against expected outcomes and is a method of assessing learning as it is occurring. The focus is on constructive learning, where feedback is motivational and directed at improvement. [\(Summary Assessment Guidelines for lecturers\)](#)

Other types of assessment (e.g. terminal examination, dissertations or projects) tend to occur at the end of a semester or stage. All assessment techniques have advantages and disadvantages. Programme developers and lecturers in SNMCI are expected to consider their modules carefully and choose from the range of assessments techniques available, to find those capable of allowing learners to demonstrate how well they are learning in any given module.

The Teaching, Learning & Assessment Board meets both at the end and at the beginning of each academic year to discuss issues related to assessment, for the outgoing year, and to propose and review assessment for the upcoming year

Assessments at SNMCI: -



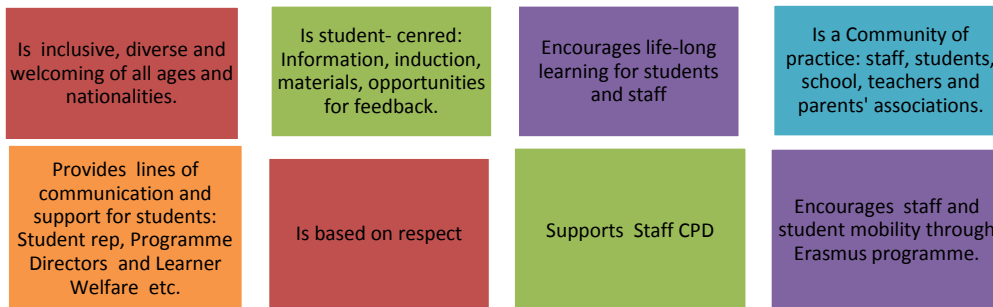
## 3.0 Learner Resources and Support

SNMCI understands that the space, physical, social, cultural and intellectual, that surrounds students is important and has a great impact on learning, and that, not only formal, but also informal and non-formal education takes place in the environment. The ethos of the College supports a positive institutional climate. **Physically:** our learning spaces are adaptable to the needs of the learners. **Intellectually:** Montessori philosophy supports active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings. **Socially and culturally:** the very presence of individuals and groups from different backgrounds results in diversity, but SNMCI is aware that it is the experiences of individuals and groups, and the quality and extent of the interaction between those various groups and individuals, that speaks to the institutional ‘climate’ of any organisation. See below





**The Institutional climate at SNMCI:**



Improving students’ experience is central to SNMCI’s ethos and we endeavour to ensure that all students have an opportunity to fully engage in their education experience, through a range of student support and guidance systems. SNMCI offers flexibility of delivery to accommodate not only school leavers but also learners who are working, those who wish to upskill and those who wish to return to education following a long period of time working in the sector.

**3.1 Learner Resources and Support**

SNMCI students have access to a range of resources in a range of domains; human, physical, teaching and learning and quality assurance. They are supported in the following ways:-

- **Programme Director:** Each programme has a Programme Director who has responsibility for the good running of the programme.
- **Programme Manager:** Each programme has a Programme Manager who has responsibility for certain administrative aspects of the programme and who liaises with and supports students re assessment submission.
- **Instructional Designer:** The IE is available to staff and students.
- **IT Support:** IT support is available to staff and students.
- **Library Support:** Well stocked ‘physical’ library plus access to online resources through Ebscohost
- **International Officer:** Provides support for a small cohort of international students each year
- **Student Engagement and representation:** The College has a Student Engagement Officer (SEO) who serves as a channel of communication between staff and students. The SEO plays a key role in enriching the campus experience across the non-academic spheres of student life and is called upon to provide rapid and insightful access to student opinion and challenges across all aspects of their College experience. Through the SEO students are encouraged to nominate representatives for committees and boards across the College. [\(QA 7.1\)](#)
- **Learner Support Office:** The College has a Learner Support Officer (LSO) and a Learner Wellbeing Service appropriate to its capacity. As we are a relatively small college the Learner Support Officer introduces herself to each new cohort of learners at the beginning of each year. The learner support office is clearly identified. Learners are given contact information and can contact the LSO in person or via the Programme Director. The College subscribes to a Health and Well-being Assistance Programme and information and contact details are available in the student handbook or from the Programme Directors or LSO.



- [QA 7.6](#): Cause for Concern outlines the Policy and Procedures in place should there be concerns about any aspect of a learner’s wellbeing that may impact on academic performance.
- **Complaints**: SNMCI has a fair and accessible Learner Complaints policy and procedure in recognition of a person’s right to express a complaint, in the event they feel they have been unfairly treated or disadvantaged, as a result of the service provided by SNMCI, or the actions and behaviours of a member of College staff or the student body. ([QA 7.7: Learner Complaints](#))
- **Appeals**: Learners have a range of routes through which to challenge any decision – making Board or Committee of the College, including assessment. ([QA 7.11](#))
- ([QA 7.13](#))

## 4.0 QA of Research Activities and Programmes

### 4.1 Overview of the system for quality assuring research activity

As part of its strategic plan [Society 2025](#) the College formulated a research strategy and convened a research committee to support and enhance the existing research activity within the institution; to further support student research and to drive staff research. Research is governed and quality assured in the following ways.

Document	Description
<a href="#">SNMCI Research Strategy 2019/2020</a>	SNMCI Strategic Research Objectives with key actions. Monitored by the Research Committee
<a href="#">QA 5.6 Research Policy</a>	Commitment to shared principles of best practice in research for staff and students
<a href="#">QA 5.7 Code of Good Practice for Student research</a>	Guidelines for any and all research activities undertaken by students.
<a href="#">QA 5.8 TOR for Submission of Proposals</a>	Terms of Reference for the submission of research proposals
<a href="#">QA 5.9 TOR and OP of Ethics Committee</a>	Defines the ethical standards for required for the professional conduct of all research within SNMCI
<a href="#">QA 5.10 Guidelines on Supervision in Research</a>	Guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in supervision in research
<a href="#">QA 5.11 TOR and OP of Research Committee</a>	Governance, resourcing, monitoring and review of research activities across the institution.
<a href="#">Research Handbook for students</a>	Guidelines for staff and students engaged in research and supervision of research



## 5.0 Staff Recruitment, Development and Support

### **Staff Recruitment and Development (see link below)**

SNMCI recognises that people are its most important asset and values the contribution of all staff members. The College seeks to attract and retain professional academic staff with the expertise necessary to advance the teaching, learning and research agenda of the College. The crucial role of administrative staff is also recognised. All recruitment activity is fair, effective, transparent and equal. In filling any vacancy, management and staff are required to follow a systematic process designed to ensure the most cost-effective deployment of current and potential employees.

**QA 4.1: Staff Recruitment and Appointment** clearly outlines the policy and procedures for staff recruitment with clear guidelines and instructions facilitating the College in appointing suitably qualified staff members to deliver its vision and mission. These guidelines include:

- Needs Analysis
- Decision to Recruit
- Job Specification
- Shortlisting
- Interview and Selection
- References and Conditional Offer
- Contract

SNMCI promotes best practice in recruitment by:

- Ensuring that recruitment processes conform with relevant legislation
- Providing a transparent, systematic, framework for recruitment which enables fair selection decisions
- Ensuring that Programme Directors and any staff with recruitment responsibility are aware of SNMCI's recruitment policies and procedures and the importance of adhering to best practice.

A key determinant of quality in any organisation is the capacity of those who are responsible for its day-to-day running; academic and administrative. Having appointed staff, SNMCI has a strong commitment to their on-going professional development.

Professional development initiatives grow and develop in response to programme needs identified through review and monitoring processes such as Programme Reviews ([QA 11.2](#); [QA 11.3](#)) and also through less formal discussion and consultation which takes place on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Professional development initiatives also grow as a result of supportive and useful feedback.

SNMCI's Policy on **Promoting Professional Development** ([QA 4.3](#)) includes provision for the support of staff training and development activities, study and examination leave and attendance and participation at conferences.

SNMCI's policy and practices for Professional Development are developed with reference to:

- a) QQI Core: Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)
- b) ESG: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area(ESG, 2015)



- c) National Forum: National Professional Development Framework for all Staff who Teach in Higher Education (2018)

### **Erasmus+**

Under Erasmus + opportunities are available to all staff, both academic and administrative. Travel abroad to participating colleges may consist of teaching, job shadowing, observation or programmes of CPD.

### **Conferences and opportunities to represent the College**

Staff members are supported to attend and to participate in (through research /presentation) conferences, nationally and internationally. Staff are also given opportunities to represent the College on committees and working groups including e.g. Early Childhood Ireland, The Children's Rights Alliance, PLÉ, OMEP, the Early Years Forum, the Early Years Workforce Development Plan Stakeholders Group, the National Vocational Childcare Committee, the National Forum (NF) the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and its quality subgroup (HAQEF).

### **Staff Communication**

It is vital that important information flows correctly throughout the College and SNMCI supports the practice of everyone being involved and responsible for good communication. This promotes an atmosphere where everyone feels included, informed and consulted. SNMCI has various internal pathways of communication to keep all employees informed on all relevant issues.

- Staff meetings allow for discussion on a variety of topics
- Minutes of all meetings are circulated and posted in a communal folder
- SNMCI publishes relevant documents and policies internally (staff drive) and on the SNMCI website, as appropriate.
- The College welcomes suggestions and ideas from its employees through one-to-one meetings between managers and staff, staff meetings, staff development days, email communications, committee meetings, shared folders, staff representation and an open-door policy where all employees can share their thoughts, ideas and concerns.
- Staff communication involves asking for the views of staff members as well as keeping staff members informed of issues relating to their roles, responsibilities and programme areas.
- The cycle of review of policies and procedures allows for the opinions, views and judgements of staff to add value and relevance to policy development.

A range of policies and systems are in place to recruit staff, to support them to carry out their work effectively, and to encourage ongoing personal and professional development ([QA 4.1](#); [QA 4.2](#); [QA 4.3](#)).

## **6.0 Information and Data Management**

### **Information Systems**

All staff and learners are obliged to read [QA 8.2: Privacy Policy](#) which clarifies why SNMCI collects information, outlines how data is used and supplies reasons why any data gathered may be shared. Details of the purpose of collecting data, the type collected and the legal basis for doing so may be found in this document.



### **Management System:**

The College uses management systems adequate to its capacity. 'Scholar' is used to register learners, document grades, produce transcripts and manage information such as student contact details, student status and exam results. Scholar is a secure repository for current learner records and also for past learner records. The Scholar system can produce data, as needed for quality purposes e.g. to inform programme reviews and development, to supply information to QQI, the Teaching Council or to other agencies e.g. SUSI. The College's information systems record and store data to be used as an information source in relation to programme completion rates, awards and overall grades for final year students, and this is available for all external agencies as appropriate.

A separate data management system (**ZOHO**) handles information such as enquiries, applications, offers, acceptances and recruitment.

### **Learner Information Systems**

SNMCI uses the VLE Moodle; a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments. Moodle is used for programme content, information for learners and is also used to generate attendance records. Learners are also obliged to read [QA 8.1: Principles, Terms and Conditions of Use of the College's Information and Communications Technology](#) and sign the corresponding form [FQA 8.1](#): Each learner signs this document on a yearly basis.

### **Records Maintenance and Retention**

Collection and utilisation of information by SNMCI is done in compliance with the College's policy on storing, retaining and disposing of data ([QA 8.3](#)) This policy has an attached schedule detailing how long data is retained and how it is disposed of.

SNMCI only collects and processes data for purposes which are:-

- Relevant to the provision of SNMCI programmes and/or for the protection of learners of all ages
- Necessary for the fulfilment of accreditation and legal obligations
- Lawful and fair
- Clearly explained to the data provider before the data is collected
- We seek to ensure that data is accurate, relevant and in proportion to the data usage purpose.

#### **Data Storage**

- Data is stored securely, either in digital or concrete formats.
- Data is stored so that it is easily accessed by those with appropriate authority and in a format which is suitable for processing.

#### **Retention of Data**

- Data is retained no longer than is necessary to fulfil the purpose for which the data was originally collected or for the period that it is required to be retained by law or accreditation agency, whichever is the longer.

#### **Disclosure of Data**

- Data will only be disclosed to the persons or organisations as identified.



### **Disposal of Data**

- Data will be deleted as soon as the retention period has expired.

### **Assessment Data:-**

- Programme Managers and the Head of Examinations and Registrations have overall responsibility for ensuring that all data related to assessment is complete, accurate and secure.

A Document Retention Schedule for documents in SNMCI is available at [FQA 8.3 A:](#)

## **7.0 Public Information and Communication**

### **Public Information**

SNMCI recognises the importance of providing accurate and timely data about its academic provision to all stakeholders.

The College makes publicly available the following minimum information:

- The legal name of the College and the company and its charitable status
- Profiles of the Board of Trustees, CEO and staff (academic and administrative)
- Details of the College's legal and accreditation status with all professional, regulatory and statutory bodies
- Details of the College's Protection of Enrolled Learners arrangements (PEL)
- The SNMCI Quality Assurance Manual
- Outcomes of external quality assurance and accreditation engagements
- Information about the College's research activity where applicable
- Information about the use of personal data and a person's right to privacy
- College contact details

The College publishes information to prospective students and the general public about the College, its programmes and other related events and activities, and there are procedures for compiling and approving academic material before publication. [QA 9.1:](#) Compiling, & Approving Marketing Material and Public Information

### **Learner Information**

In the first instance information for prospective students is available in print and online. The Admissions Office takes all enquiries by phone, e-mail or drop-in. It is College policy to reply to all enquiries promptly and factually.

The College also hosts Open Days (in person and virtual) where academic staff members are available to answer questions about programmes in the College.

Prospective learners are provided with information related to both the College and Academic Programmes. All information for prospective and enrolled learners is:

- Written in plain English
- Consistent with the SNMCI brand and values
- In line with the requirements of any accrediting and/or professional bodies where applicable
- Transparent
- Accurate, complete and up to date
- Respectful and inclusive

### **Publication of Quality Assurance Reports**

SNMCI's Reengagement report is available on the QQI website [here](#).

## 8.0 Monitoring and Periodic Review

### **Institutional:-**

Cyclical Institutional Reviews evaluate the effectiveness of the College's QA procedures for the purposes of establishing, maintaining and improving the services provided. They encourage a quality culture, emphasising ownership of quality assurance across the College. The appointment of a Director of Quality and Academic Affairs (2018) to lead reengagement addressed the need for systematic oversight in the College, and ensured that QA is compliant with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines (2016) and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015)

The College's '*quality assurance mechanisms and procedures*' have been carried out with QQI Core Statutory Guidelines for QA in mind. Those guidelines address:-

### **Governance:-**

The College has reviewed and updated its vision, mission, organisational structure etc. as part of its Strategic Plan, Society 2025.

### **Administration:-**

The College monitors, reviews and updates processes with regard to human resources, record management and data protection, management/student information system, accessibility, general learner supports and services,

### **Information and Communication:-**

The College monitors, reviews and updates processes with regard to GDPR, communication with public, marketing and information for enrolled learners.

### **Academic Management:-**

The College's strategic plan is driving programme development. All policies and processes are developed and updated with regard to , information for students (and prospective students), managing assessment and standards, managing validation processes, external examining, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards, assessment of students, evaluation by students, benchmarking (national and international comparisons, information systems and public information.

Programmes at SNMCI are monitored, reviewed and revised on a regular basis to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of learners and the workforce. Regular review encourages compliance with all relevant legislation, policy, and standards, ensures transparency and supports public confidence in the College as a quality provider of programmes of education and training. They also link with the College's Strategic Plan. [QA 11.1: Cyclical Review and Self-evaluation](#)

### **Programme Review:-**

The process of annual programme review allows for monitoring of all aspects of all programmes and is a general measurement of the 'health' of the programmes. Learner feedback is addressed as soon and as comprehensively as possible, e.g with regard to resources, adjustments to assessment and scheduling. Stakeholder feedback is addressed, e.g., for improved communication with placement. External Examiner feedback is addressed for enhancement of all academic aspects of the programme. Feedback leads to review, to adjustments, to amendments and initiatives for improvement.

**QA 11.2:** Annual Programme Review policy and procedure

**QA 11.3:** Programme modification

**QA 11.4:** Programmatic Review:-

Each programme of the College is subject to programmatic review (every 5years), to review the continuing validity of the programme in terms of structure, content, currency and quality as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery.

Our programmes are informed by regulatory and professional policies e.g those relating to Early Years, The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), The Department of Education and Skills (DES), The Child and Family Agency (TUSLA), etc., and those related to Initial Teacher Education e.g The Teaching Council of Ireland (TC), to ensure compliance and to assure the place of our graduates in the workforce.

Specific guidelines are in place relating to the selection and appointment of external examiners and all independent board/committee members.

**QA 10.1: Appointment of Independent Board/Committee Members**

## 9.0 Details of Arrangements with Third Parties

### 9.1 Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies

Type of Arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	1
Awarding Bodies	1
QA Bodies	1

<b>1. Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):</b>	<b>Awarding Body</b>
<b>Name of Body:</b>	<b>Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)</b>
<b>Programme Titles and Links to Publications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BA in Montessori Education (extended)</li> <li>- BA (Hons) in Montessori Education (extended)</li> <li>- Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education (extended)</li> <li>- B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education (accredited /Sep 2019)</li> <li>- B. Ed. Montessori Education (accredited /Sep 2019)</li> <li>- Montessori Education for Dementia (accredited/June 2020)</li> </ul>
<b>Date of Accreditation or Last Review</b>	Various /ongoing
<b>Next Review Year</b>	Ongoing



<b>2. Type of Arrangement</b>	<b>PSRB</b>
<b>Name of Body:</b>	<b>Teaching Council</b>
<b>Programme Titles and Links to Publications</b>	BA (Hons) Montessori Education Restricted recognition through Route 4 for Special Education Teachers
<b>Date of Accreditation or Last Review</b>	Extended Oct 2019
<b>Next Review Year</b>	2021

<b>3. Type of Arrangement</b>	<b>QA Body</b>
<b>Name of Body:</b>	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
<b>Programme Titles and Links to Publications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BA in Montessori Education</li> <li>- BA (Hons) in Montessori Education</li> <li>- Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education</li> <li>- B. Ed. (Hons) Montessori Education</li> <li>- B. Ed. Montessori Education</li> <li>- Montessori Education for Dementia</li> </ul>
<b>Date of Accreditation or Last Review</b>	<b><u>Reengagement 2019 here.</u></b>
<b>Next Review Year</b>	Ongoing

### 9.2 Collaborative Provision

n/a in this reporting period

### 9.3 Articulation Agreements

n/a in this reporting period

**Annual Quality Report (SNMCI)**  
**PART B: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**  
**ENHANCEMENT & IMPACT**  
**Reporting Period 2019-2020**

**Part B: Internal QA System**

## 1.0 Quality Implementation and Developments

### 1.1 Developments

The reporting period in question spans the process of SNMCI's reengagement with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - application Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 2019- site visit Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020- approval April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020. This AQR is therefore representative of the root and branch review of the institution's QA policies and processes, occurring during this reporting period.

#### 1.1.1 Strategic Objectives

Objectives	Achieved during this reporting period	QA Implications
Programme Validation	Achieved. A level 8 programme with an embedded level 7 A Special purpose award/ level 6	Review as per programme validation process. Professional EY standards
Develop Montessori programmes into broader areas of the community, e.g. Montessori practice for those living with Dementia	Achieved. Validated Special Purpose Award with links to community practice.	New policy with regard to placement for this programme. Increase in consideration of Quality Body e.g. CORU. Application for Blended Learning Status. (result reported in next reporting period)
Plan for future Programme Development through research and staff development. Broaden suite of programmes in line with faculty strengths	Programme in psychology, in line with faculty expertise, developed and validated just outside of reporting period. Ongoing programme development delayed due to COVID 19 and new primary framework. (Primary Ed)	Application for revision to scope of provision. Associated programme QA. Increase in arrangements with PRSB's. (result reported in next reporting period) Review of Admissions and access policy
Increase flexibility of delivery /Blended Learning Application	Accelerated move to blended learning. Application to QQI during this period	Total review of QA to factor implications of B. L. (result reported in next reporting period)
Foster a climate of research	Research Strategy Research Committee instituted.	Research Strategy document Research Committee TOR
Investigate access for workers in the sector who wish to return to education	New programme development and programme revalidation. RPL initial review	Reviewed for current provision. Major review of RPL scheduled as initiative for extended provision.
Increased student input	Representation on all boards and committees. Expansion of role of SEO. Student Council	TOR's of all boards and committees reviewed and updated. TOR Student Council (next reporting period)
Enhanced technical support	Upgraded Moodle platform and Student access system.	<a href="#"><u>New policy on privacy.</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Use of College network</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Retention of data policy</u></a>

#### 1.2 Updates on Planned QA Objectives identified in Previous AQR

n/a for this reporting period

### 1.3 Governance and Management

#### 1.3.1 QA Governance Meeting Schedule

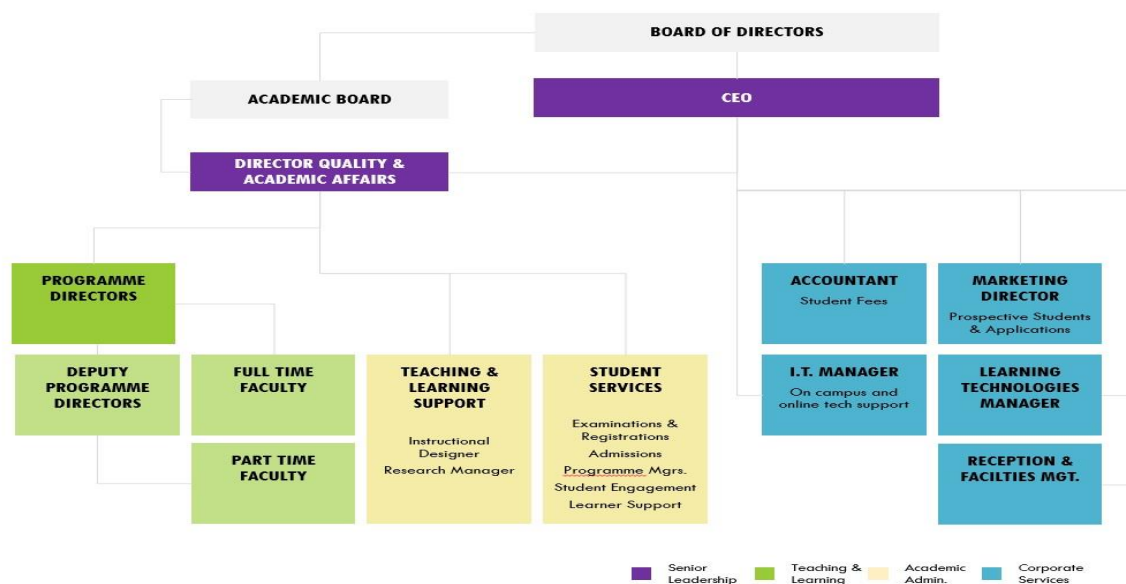
ANNUAL CALENDAR OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES														
Board Committee	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Notes
Board of Trustees		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				
Finance Committee		x		x				x		x				
Academic Board	x			x			x			x				Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.
Admissions Committee		x					x				x			Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.
RPL Committee		(x)				(x)						(x)	(x)	As required but generally at these times
Programme Committee	x					(x)				x				(x) mid-year review
Ethics Committee					x			x						Generally at time of student submission. As required for staff
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board		x				x		x				x		Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.
Quality Enhancement Committee			x			x				x				Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.
Research Committee				x					x					Generally at these times but may be convened as needed.
Pre-Exam Board						x								
Exam Board		x									x			
Disciplinary Committee														As required. Generally in line with assessment periods
Appeals Committee		(x)					(x)				(x)			As required. Generally in line with exam periods
Complaints Committee														As required

### 1.3.2 QA Leadership and Management Structural Developments

Throughout the year of preparation for reengagement (2018-2019) and the span of this reporting period (2019-2020) the following structural, management and leadership initiative were embedded to correspond with growth across all areas of the College.

<b>Structural</b>	<b>Changes</b>	<b>In place</b>
Academic Board	Changed from Academic Committee	The Academic Board. New TOR and a more defined schedule of meetings. Agenda to address pivotal academic issues for the College. Commitment to external oversight.
Admissions Committee	Instituted	Liases with RPL Committee to provide combined data on access and transfer.
Teaching Learning and Assessment Board	Instituted	To separate functions once held by individual programme committees, and to define aspects of T, L&A relevant to the College as a whole.
Quality Enhancement Committee	Upgraded	Groups convened for the yearlong reengagement process gave rise to a permanent Quality Enhancement Committee, convened to guide the College in the development of policies and procedures to fulfil its statutory and regulatory responsibilities.
Research Committee	Instituted	To meet the strategic objective to enhance research activity in the College. Oversight of staff research with mitigation of risk.
<b>Roles</b>	<b>Changes</b>	<b>In place</b>
Chief Executive	Changed from College Director	The role of Chief Executive underlines the separation of 'church and state' i.e. the need for separation of institutional/commercial and academic concerns. Responsibilities include Governance; Statutory compliance; Strategic planning; Financial stewardship; Senior appointments;
Director of Quality and Academic Affairs.	Instituted	To support the connection between quality assurance and the academic integrity of validated programmes. Responsibilities include Quality Assurance Enhancement: Implementation & Review of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; Programme development/validation/ monitoring and review; Academic leadership; Academic calendars; External representation;
Student Engagement Officer	Enhanced role	A new appointment to expand this role.
Instructional Designer	New appointment	To facilitate and support online and blended learning. Work with the IT Manager to ensure optimal online learning experiences for learners. Responsibility for the user experience within Moodle and other learning platforms

**Governance and Quality in Academics Management Roles and Responsibilities:**



**1.4 Internal Monitoring and Review**

**1.4.1 Overview of Periodic Reviews**

At reengagement the panel noted ‘that SNMCI presented an authentic QA system framed as a work in progress.....a positive disposition towards continual development which will enable the provider to further develop and enhance its comprehensive system’ (reengagement report [here.](#))

For this reporting period and as part of our commitment to quality enhancement and institutional growth, several areas were identified for focused review, as outlined below. The emergence of COVID 19 required staff to redirect their focus to upskilling for online delivery with associated contingency plans and a College wide focus on student and staff support.

The table below indicates where College initiatives and reviews were completed and in some cases delayed.

Unit of review during reporting period	Date of completion/reason for conducting review (if not planned) or non-completion (if planned but not conducted)	Links as relevant
Programme review and validation	Sep 2019. First cohort of newly validated B.Ed Montessori (levels 7/8). In place Sep 2019	<a href="http://www.smsi.ie">http://www.smsi.ie</a>
	Review of proposal and subsequent validation of <i>Montessori Education for Dementia</i> . Completed June 2020	<a href="http://www.smsi.ie">http://www.smsi.ie</a>

	Review of Higher Diploma in Arts in Early Years Montessori Education. Delayed due to COVID 19	Ongoing
	Proposal for B.Ed Primary Education approved by Academic Board. Development begun. Delayed due to COVID 19.	Ongoing
	Review of BA (Hons) Montessori Education. Completed and extension approved. Sep 2019	<a href="http://www.smsi.ie">http://www.smsi.ie</a>
<b>Updates of Health and Safety</b>	In conjunction with new policies and procedures for COVID 19, the College's Health and Safety Statement was reviewed and updated. This included a staff survey re working conditions and needs for remote working. In place Sep 2020	<a href="#">H&amp;S Policy</a>
<b>Admissions and RPL.</b>	Review delayed due to COVID 19. Moved to next reporting period	Ongoing
<b>Student Engagement</b>	New policies as part of reengagement. Planned review in conjunction with learners moved (at learner request) to May 2021 due to ongoing issues related to COVID 19.	Ongoing
<b>GDPR policies and processes</b>	Initial reviews for reengagement, approved. Reviewed for application for blended learning. Staff training (GDPR Officer). Major review scheduled for 2021. In progress	Next reporting period.
<b>SNMCI Contingency Plan 1</b>	Agreed by the AB on March 13 <sup>th</sup> 2020 and implemented to August 2020 (sent to QQI )	<a href="#">CP 1 March 2020</a>
<b>SNMCI Contingency Plan 2</b>	Agreed by the AB on Aug 5 <sup>th</sup> 2020 (sent to QQI)	<a href="#">CP 2 August 2020</a>
<b>Blended Learning Strategy and application.</b>	Completed and sent to QQI	Next reporting period.

## 2.0 IQA System –Enhancements and Impacts

Given that the reporting period was defined by the reengagement process, all improvements, enhancements and impacts to QA can best be outlined by the summary below, which addresses where the College feels it has made enhancements and how the reengagement process as a whole, has allowed us to **a)** identify any shortcomings and **b)** to either address them or put in motion initiatives to do so.

Each of the eleven areas of the QQI Core QA document will be addressed with a brief synopsis of initiatives and short qualitative comment.

### **1) Legal and Compliance:**

#### **Governance and Management of Quality:**

The Terms of Reference for Boards and Committees have been more clearly set out and formalised. The creation of a Risk Register has renewed the focus of the College within the broader St Nicholas Society. It will ensure that any potential threats to the College are identified and interventions put in place. Risk management has also increased communication across the College allowing policies to be mapped in terms of risk mitigation, and has also allowed management to divert resources where they are most needed.

**Comment:** The College is aware of the absolute necessity of separation of academic and commercial interests and this is now evident through a corporate structure that allows for sharing of information, but separation of decision making.

The College has paid particular attention to the maintenance of the desired level of independent oversight. SNMCI has external examiners, critical friends for programme development, an ‘independent’ member of the Academic Board, an independent Chair for research ethics etc. and has identified a need to formulate a list of management and academic peers to be invited for other external oversight needs. Oversight of academic quality is now supported by frequent meetings with KPI checklists to make sure that on-going monitoring is achieved.

### **2) Documented Approach to Quality Assurance: -**

The Reengagement process has ensured a completely provider owned QA system, fit for purpose and relevant to the scale and functioning of the College.

**Comment:** The creation of the dual role of Director of Quality and Academic Affairs, as part of an organisational restructure has highlighted, for staff and learners, the symbiotic interdependence of a valid QA system and the academic integrity of programmes. Combining the role has had the benefit of linking quality assurance across corporate and academic domains. Increasingly the QA system is seen as embedded in all activities, with involvement by all staff, academic and administrative, and also by learners.

### **3) Programmes of Education and Training:**

Following recent successful programme validations SNMCI is confident that it has a systematic process for proposing and developing new programmes, for entering into the validation process with QQI and also for the programmatic review process. New policy for Access, Transfer and Progression has linked well to a range of policies in this area. The



College has a robust RPL system for both accredited and experiential learning, adequate to its current delivery. A review of RPL is scheduled for the next reporting period.

**Comment:** The application for Blended Learning Status was made just outside of this reporting period. That process will feature in the 20-21 report. That said it is important to state that due to COVID 19, SNMCI has made huge strides in terms of blended learning capability. The imposed move to blended learning instigated a complete review of QA in relation to **Programmes of Education and Training**, with 'interim' policies being provided in the first instance, which were then further developed and embedded to meet a) the continuance of COVID restrictions into the next academic year and b) the requirements for an application for Blended Learning status (next reporting period). A further review of policy, with regard to access, and in particular, Recognition of Prior Learning, is scheduled (Feb 2021) in line with programme development. This will be reviewed in the next reporting period.

#### **4) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development:**

SNMCI has initiated a clear process for staff recruitment based on a needs analysis. The College recruitment process endeavours to secure the right person for each role and for the College as a whole; one who also feels that the College and role are right for them.

Increasingly, in line with a strategic objective to increase the research profile of the College, staff are at doctoral, or doctoral candidate level. The College also has a policy on Promoting Professional Development, with reference to the National Forum's Professional Development Framework.

**Comment:** In tandem with a focused recruitment policy, existing professional development within the College encourages staff to value all instances of Professional Development from collaborative/informal----to unstructured/informal---- to structured/non-accredited----to structured accredited, and it is hoped that by using the suggested PD Form, adapted from the National Forum's Professional Development Framework, new information and requests from staff will come to light to allow us to develop this area further.

SNMCI has a dedicated cohort of full-time staff and a list of part-time and sessional staff members who have been with the College for quite some time and/or have been recommended by past lecturers. However, two main issues have come to the fore 1) succession planning particularly related to Montessori experts and 2) staff training for blended learning delivery.

The College is developing a two pronged plan for Montessori succession. Graduates, who have taught in the sector and who have gone on to further learning e.g. masters' degrees, have been invited to take a training course being designed by SNMCI. In- house staff who would like to upskill existing qualifications are also being encouraged to do so with the support of management. Professional development for blended learning is being addressed with the appointment of an Instructional Designer and opportunities for staff to engage in accredited programmes of Teaching and Learning.

#### **5) Teaching and Learning:**

In line with the College's vision and mission, the [SNMCI Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy](#) reflects our Montessori philosophy of 'wider horizons' and also draws on Biggs (1999) who sees teaching and learning as an integrated and balanced system, in which all

components support each other. The quality of the teaching and learning experience is monitored through feedback and through results data and graduate achievement.

**Comment:** Policy on placement has been extended to document how placements are allocated and also to consider differences between programmes e.g. implications for placement on the newly validated *Montessori Education for Dementia* which has factored in CORU guidelines on best practice.

Policies related to student and staff research (commended at a recent validation) have also been reviewed. The College has a nascent [Research Strategy](#) and has instituted a Research Committee to support research activity across the College; staff and student.

The application for Blended Learning Status was made just outside of this reporting period. That process will feature in the 20-21 report. That said it is important to state that due to COVID 19, SNMCI has made huge strides in terms of blended learning capability. The imposed move to blended learning instigated a complete review of QA in relation to **Teaching and Learning**, including an update to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy to meet the requirements for an application for Blended Learning status (next reporting period). Teaching and Learning strategies and assessment processes are under constant review during this transition to online delivery.

#### **6) Assessment of Learners:**

Assessment is at the heart of the student experience and as a College we are constantly aware of any potential vulnerability in this area. Assessment is constantly monitored both from an academic and an administrative standpoint. Part of the remit of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Board is to approve all assessment strategies and assignment briefs before they are issued to students. Staff members have been supported to achieve Teaching and Learning Awards, are current in terms of the Green Paper on Assessment and are engaged in CPD related to assessment for online learning. There are checks and balances in place re collection, correction, inputting of marks etc. The College also monitors placement assessment to ensure consistency of approach and ownership of the assessment process.

**Comment:** Assessment on any proposed blended programme will require the College to consider assessment methods appropriate to this type of delivery and to plan for the implementation of formal and informal assessment for blended learning. Assessment in the Blended format will be reviewed in the next reporting period.

#### **7) Support for Learners:**

The scale of the College allows for swift access to information and people. All learners meet the Learning Support Officer which reduces the likelihood of any student feeling isolated. The recent appointment of a dedicated Student Engagement Officer (SEO) (previously PT) has provided an additional outlet for the student voice and a defined access route to programme management and College management.

**Comment:** As a small College we may sometimes consider ourselves limited in the amount of learner support we have to offer. However, within our capacity, and in line with Montessori philosophy, the College offers an ever growing range of supports to learners. The expansion of the SEO role and the LSO role, with attendant new policies, has greatly enhanced this area of College life. A further review of student engagement policies is

planned in conjunction with the newly formed Student Council, to ensure that the policies reflect the student voice (May 2021)

A further issue relates to international learners. The College's focus has been on supporting Erasmus students. With a potential increase in international learners we need to address concerns that are particular to their circumstances. We have begun with Learner Support meetings to assess any cultural, academic and social issues and the planned new student access service will include an SNMCI App to allow for clearer and more student friendly communication.

#### **8) Information and Data Management:**

During this reporting period the College reviewed and updated its privacy and data management policies and procedures. **See Section 6.0 p.28**

**Comment:** The move to blended learning has highlighted the need for continued vigilance in this area. Information and Data Management is identified as one of the major reviews for the next reporting period.

#### **9) Public Information and Communication:**

As part of the reengagement process SNMCI reviewed and updated policy and procedures with regard to public information and communication.

#### **Comment:**

The establishment of a Marketing Department has contributed to more defined channels of communication. The reviewed policy details how information is updated by programme committees and disseminated by the Marketing Dept. to ensure current and correct information for learners and other stakeholders.

#### **10) Other Parties Involved in Education and Training:**

SNMCI does not have any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries? The College does not, at the moment, have any transnational provision.

The College's awarding body and quality body is QQI. One programme of the College is also recognised by a PSRB, namely the Teaching Council of Ireland.

#### **Comment:**

Our QA policies include criteria and procedures for the recruitment and engagement of External Examiners and Independent Board/Committee Members. Policy also covers allocation of placement, and we have Memoranda of Understanding with Placement settings. All awards are validated by QQI. Future consideration will include a further quality body (CORU) and a further PSRB (the Psychological Society of Ireland) (next reporting period)

#### **11) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review:**

SNMCI has clear policies and processes in place for self-evaluation, monitoring and review. Reengagement which included a comprehensive review of QA and the appointment of key staff has allowed the College to acknowledge positives and to address gaps.

#### **Comment:**

**Institutional:** The past year has seen the consolidation of major reviews and initiative begun in 2018-2019, in terms of structure, organisation, processes and culture of the College. As part of a new Strategic Plan the College has reviewed and updated its vision, mission and organisational structure. It has also reviewed human resources, record management, data protection, information management systems and learner supports.

**Academic:** In terms of academics, internal review and monitoring is on-going through a system of reviews and feedback mechanisms. All academic processes in the College have been subject to review due to the move to online learning, in the first instance as part of an emergency contingency plan, followed by a further review for application for Blended Learning Status (next reporting period).

### 2.1 Initiatives within the Institution related to Academic Integrity

Staff members from SNMCI were in attendance at the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) inaugural meeting of the Academic Integrity project on November 14th 2019. This meeting was a national response to the introduction of the amended legislation as set out in the QQI amended Act.

#### **SNMCI Considers that Academic Integrity:**

- Is something to be achieved through good practice rather than ‘misconduct’ to be avoided;
- Goes beyond understanding and avoiding plagiarism, although this is a key part of it.
- Involves the learner demonstrating knowledge and understanding through a process of evaluation and research, expressing understanding and original ideas independently, honestly and in an appropriate academic style, using good referencing and acknowledging all sources;

Staff members have continued to monitor the work of NAIN e.g by attendance at National Academic Integrity Week 2020 and additional webinars related to fostering Academic Integrity. The College is also a member of the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and its quality enhancement subgroup HAQEF. Professional engagement with these groups and other fora for sharing best practice, allows SNMCI to monitor its strategy and policy related to academic integrity.

#### **SNMCI considers Academic Integrity as important:-**

- To uphold the academic reputation of the College and to ensure that stakeholders see SNMCI as a reputable college that maintains the standards of its awards;
- To ensure that learners receive due credit for the work they submit;
- To protect the interests of all learners so that there can be no academic advantage or disadvantage;
- To meet SNMCI’s reporting and compliance obligations as a Higher Education Provider delivering QQI validated awards;

## B.A. (Hons) Montessori Education (Level 8)

- To assure employers that our graduates, who have been awarded degrees, have met the standards and professional requirements for the program of study e.g. Teaching Council, CORU, PSI, DCYA;
- To assure employers that our graduates, who have been awarded degrees, have met the professional expectations of honesty, ethical standards, respect and responsibility;
- Because it is an extension of personal integrity.

Based on the work of NAIN, and in recognition of the challenges of balancing support for students and upholding the academic integrity of programmes, SNMCI's policy was recently reviewed, adapted and renamed, from Academic Misconduct to [QA 7.8: Academic Integrity](#). Although the notion of support for first time instances of plagiarism, and of being focused on the action, rather than labelling the student, was inherent in the existing policy, these are now more explicit and more in line with the mission and values of the College. This policy also focuses on a renewed importance of academic integrity in the 'blended space'.

Associated documents include:-

- [GQA 7.8 A](#): Guidelines on Academic Integrity for learners;
- [GQA 7.8 B](#): Academic Integrity Faculty Checklist [here](#)
- [1QA 6.8](#): Open Book Examination Information
- [Special considerations](#) during online assessment General information re open-book exams
- [Academic Integrity pledge](#)

## 3.0 QA Improvement and Enhancement Plans for Upcoming Reporting Period

### 3.1 QA and QE supporting the Achievement of Strategic Objectives

No.	Relevant objectives	Planned actions and indicators	QA/QE Implications
1.	Application for Blended Learning Status	<p>This application was successful, just outside of this reporting period. Remaining actions (for the next reporting period) include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adaptation of current programmes for blended delivery</li> <li>- Further staff training</li> <li>- Expansion of the instructional design facility with additional resources for staff and students</li> <li>- Programme development with inbuilt option for</li> </ul>	<p>College's approved QA to be continued to be mapped against <b>Topic Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning: three areas outlined therein:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Organisational Context</b></li> <li>- <b>Programme Context including development and assessment</b></li> <li>- <b>Learner experience context</b></li> </ul> <p>New and reviewed policy e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New policy: Blended</li> </ul>

		blended delivery mode where applicable.	<p>and Online Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New Policy: Blended Programme Development</li> <li>- Reviewed Policy: Academic Integrity</li> <li>- Reviewed Policies related to GDPR, Use of College Network, Privacy Policy, Storage and Disposal of Data</li> </ul>
2.	Application for Transnational Delivery Approval	<p>The College has recently been approached by Higher Ground Education (HGE) <a href="https://www.tohigherground.com/">https://www.tohigherground.com/</a> with a proposal to deliver the B.Ed (Hons) Montessori Education to its Montessori educators in the USA. Higher Ground Education would like to offer its staff the opportunity to achieve a Bachelor of Education degree in Montessori Education, an award which is not available in the USA. The College is currently reviewing QQI guidelines re Transnational Provision with a view to applying for this facility, in line with our vision and strategic objective of bringing Montessori Education to a wider community.</p>	<p>Compliance with QQI 'Policy for collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and Joint Awards' revised by QQI in 2017.</p>
3.	Programme Development	<p>B.Ed Primary: This strategic action has been in progress for almost 2 years. The process was delayed due to COVID 19 and in anticipation of the new Draft Primary Framework. Ongoing actions for the next reporting period) include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To achieve the strategic objective of a QQI validated programme of primary education.</li> <li>- Application to the Teaching Council of Ireland</li> </ul> <p>Micro-credentials: The College proposes to increase</p>	<p>Review of policies and processes related to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access, transfer</li> <li>- RPL</li> <li>- Admissions and registration</li> </ul> <p>Potential reconfiguring of arrangement with PRSB (TC)</p> <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Additional staff</li> <li>- Additional Learner Support</li> <li>- New premises (scheduled)</li> </ul>

		<p>its suite of programmes with the addition of a range of micro-credentials. The College has already engaged with Phase One of this initiative (just outside this reporting period)</p> <p>Ongoing actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To deliver the first validated micro-credential</li> <li>- To propose a range of micro credentials to the Academic Board for approval, development and submission to Phase 2.</li> </ul>	<p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Additional staff</li> <li>- Additional Learner Support</li> <li>- New premises (scheduled)</li> </ul>
4.	Extension of scope of delivery into other disciplines. BA (Hons) Psychology	<p>This objective has been realised, just outside of this reporting period. Remaining actions include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accreditation by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)</li> </ul>	Additional arrangement with PSRB (PSI)
5.	Resources New Premises	The College has secured new larger premises. The proposed move, delayed due to COVID 19, will now take place in 2021.	Health and Safety: additions for new premises Student Engagement in social spaces

### 3.2 Reviews planned for Upcoming Reporting Periods (Next and Beyond)

	<b>Unit to be reviewed</b>	<b>Date of planned review</b>	<b>Date of last review</b>
1.	Recognition of Prior Learning	February 2021	Reengagement 2019-2020. Policy update in August 2020 for Blended Learning
2.	GDPR Policies and procedures	April 2021	Reengagement 2019-2020. Some minor adjustments for enforced online learning- major review is planned to support staff and students in the blended learning space.
3.	Admissions and Registrations	May 2021	Planning is underway to move the registration process to an online format to complete the Admissions cycle.
4.	Student Engagement Policies, Procedures, Structures	Begun but delayed to May 2021	Reengagement 2019-2020. Policy was revised for reengagement. With the move to BL it was proposed to have another complete review led by students and supported through a newly established Student Council. Students themselves have proposed delaying this due to ongoing pressure of online T&L.

## 4.0 Additional Themes and Case Studies

### Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Response to Emergency Situations/Covid-19 Pandemic

The additional 'theme' in this reporting period (Sep 1<sup>st</sup> 2019-Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 2020) is, as is probably the case for all colleges, big and small, the institutional response to the COVID 19 crisis.

#### SNMCI:

It would be simple to assume that the COVID 19 pandemic merely hastened the move to online and blended delivery which, in the climate of the sector, was 'in the pipeline' for the College anyway.

Whereas it is true that SNMCI was piloting blended learning, with a view to easing into that space, the expectation was, that the transition would be more organic in nature, with more planning, expertise, funding, support, trial and error, refinement, etc.

In reality COVID 19 precipitated....

a) 'this-generation' of programmes and skill-sets, being catapulted into a 'next-generation' environment and

b) the need to immediately address the logistical, resource and operational implications of online learning, while at the same time dealing with an unprecedented amount of additional social, health and wellbeing issues for all members of the learning community; staff and learners

Our 'learning ecosystem' shifted its boundaries, from a focus on what happens 'on-campus', both in and out of class, to additional 'off-campus in-class', and 'off campus out-of-class' considerations.

As a consequence our IQA also shifted its boundaries

The solid quality assurance infrastructure in the college, recently validated by the reengagement process, was a good foundation for change management, and allowed the College to understand, plan, implement and communicate all necessary changes.

The matters below are indicative of emerging issues, from March 2020, as the College adapted to the ongoing health and social situation. In some instances 'interim' policies and procedures were developed, some of which have become embedded as the College continues online. Further adaptations will be addressed in the next reporting period, as the enduring impact of COVID 19 becomes evident at an institutional level.

The following is a summary in terms of the impact on IQA, under three headings; **organisational and staff context, programme context and learner context:-**



**Organisational Context including Staff Issues.**

Rather than creating new groups (not possible or recommended in a small college) changes to the TOR's of already existing boards, committees, groups e.g. allowed for swift response on three fronts

- Contingency
- Operational
- Future-planning

**Impact on IQA.**

Health and Safety: (Operational and Future planning)

- Review of College's Health and Safety Policy and Procedures
- Additional Policy and procedures for COVID 19
- Staff survey to assess impact of COVID 19
- Staff virtual 'social' areas
- Staff accommodations for 'working from home'

Organisation: (Operational and Future Planning)

- Adjustments to the TOR of Boards and Committees; procedural impact
- Intellectual Property: A basic policy is in development to meet the current scope of the College, to provide guidance on how to make decisions concerning IP.
- Interim review of College Privacy policies and procedures and GDPR nominated for a more in-depth review in the next reporting period.
- Review of staff roles and responsibilities (adaptations to job specifications , for online delivery)
- Additional staff identified

Recruitment: (Operational and Future Planning)

- Policy revised to be explicit re identification of 'need', clarity of job specification, including expectations, activities, skills required and reporting structure.
- Policy also specifies a commitment to development opportunities for current staff and the active recruitment of staff with skills specific to *'the context of all the education and training activities and related services provided by the provider'* (QQI Sector Specific Guidelines) **Note:** whereas ongoing support is being offered to current staff who have 'moved' to blended learning the policy now includes reference to a bespoke 'technical skills' induction course for all new staff members.

Online Support: (Operational)

- A staff support portal is where lecturing staff can access short tutorials on a range of online skills.
- A college wide 'Operational Guide for Blended Learning', in development, covering requirements for e.g. Delivery Modes-Setup-Equipment-Software

**Programme Context including Assessment:**

Contingency Plans for adjustments to delivery and assessment of programmes in the College were devised to uphold the integrity of programmes, to safeguard the currency of the awards in the workplace, and as much as possible to ensure, 'no disadvantage' to any student.

Admissions:

- RPL: procedural impact
- Review of processes for online registration

Programme information:

- Reviews and updates in the areas of Admissions, RPL, Marketing and Public

Information to ensure that SNMCI meets its responsibility with regard to ensuring that learners make informed decisions about entry and delivery during COVID 19.

Programme Committees: The remit of the Programme Committee is to assure quality in the design, development, **delivery and evaluation** of programmes. Additional considerations now include an increased focus on:-

- Induction activities for staff and learners re BL;
- Accessibility; that synchronous sessions are supported adequately to enable all learners to take part;
- Technical support for staff and learners during synchronous classes to ensure technical issues can be resolved;
- The role of the Instructional Designer/Technologist in terms of upholding the academic and pedagogical integrity of the programme in unison with technology;
- Content and material selected and produced to ensure that all learning outcomes are met and with due regard to copyright and privacy policies;
- Learning resources (including appropriately qualified staff) identified;
- Learning materials reviewed, and approved for academic content before becoming accessible to learners;
- Procedural impact: move to online interviews in password protected 'rooms' with associated protocol.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy:

- Ongoing review of the T,L,&A document
- Online assessment reviewed and approved to ensure the integrity of all programmes and includes:
  - Approaches to assessment reviewed to appraise the challenges and also the opportunities of online assessment.
  - Online aspects of assessment e.g. appropriate assessment to meet module learning outcomes.
  - Use of technology to support formative assessment i.e. asses 'for' and 'as' learning;
  - Academic integrity of programmes overall, and academic integrity issues at individual assignment level.
  - Processes and procedures for Open Book Exams.

Placement:

- Interim Contingency Plans to account for how placement will proceed in the second semester of this academic year. Associated documents: Contingency Plan 2 & Alternative Placement Plan submitted to TC.

Supervision:

- Additional guidelines on supervision of research and placement supervision (roles and responsibilities) in the online space.

**Learner Experience:** SNMCI was aware that returning learners and new learners were engaged in an entirely different experience to the one anticipated.

Health and Safety:

- Review of College's Health and Safety Policy and Procedures
- Additional Policy and procedures for COVID 19

Information:

- A 'Blended Learning Induction Programme' (BLIP) produced to introduce all learners to online and blended learning.
- 'Using Learning Technologies' induction programme
- Guidelines for interacting online

Support:

- Increased role of SEO.
- Increased communication channels for students
- Proposed review of Student Engagement Policies by students
- Student Council: New policy and procedures in development with students
- Increased role of Learner Support Officer in conjunction with Programme Directors; exceptional circumstances, referrals for wellbeing support, procedures for academic support, procedures for study plans, support for progression, support for deferrals
- Provision of online spaces for social needs