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CCT College Dublin's Quality Assurance Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Case Study: CCT's QA Response
to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

CCT's QA Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

What was the nature of the project / initiative and when did it take place?

The project was largely unforeseen and unprecedented, arising from the COVID-19 global pandemic and specifically the decision of the government of Ireland, upon public health advice, to close all higher education providers on March 12th, 2020. At the time of closure, the potential duration was unknown, and providers were encouraged to operate remotely.

Who was involved in the project / initiative?

Planning for potential closure was undertaken by the Monitoring and Review Team (MRT), an interim working group, established by the College Board, comprising of the Executive Leadership Team and members of the Management Team. Academic Council representation was ensured in the membership but all decisions that required approval in respect of academic matters still required Academic Council approval. The role of the MRT was to identify risk and mitigating actions required to ensure continuity of programmes, supports and services in the event of closure due to a government decision or a COVID outbreak on campus. Membership ensured representation from managers with responsibility for security, health and safety, finance, student services and administration, human resources, technology and IT Services, teaching, learning and assessment and quality assurance and academic standards and a student advocate.

The Academic Council was responsible for the review and approval of contingency arrangements in respect of teaching, learning and assessment.

Describe the aim(s) of the project?

The primary aim was to be suitably prepared to respond to a potential emergency closure through timely, seamless and effective transitioning from physical campus operating to virtual campus operating, or a hybrid of the two, and successfully supporting all staff and students with this transition without detriment to standards, programmes and support services, or the wellbeing of the CCT community.

The MRT would agree the necessary contingency arrangements required to ensure continuity. These would then be documented for formal approval.

What were the learning outcomes / intentions or objectives of the project / initiative?

The guiding principle was to prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of the CCT community in the event of a Covid -19 related closure or restricted operations.

That principle underpinned the intended outcomes which were to:

- Ensure continuity of programme provision in a manner that promotes interaction and engagement of staff and students and reflects the student-centred approach advocated by the CCT Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy
- Implement mechanisms to facilitate continued access to resources, supports and services in the event of a whole college closure or the requirement for specific individuals or groups to isolate away from campus.
- Utilise existing and potential technology solutions to support the transition and the ongoing provision of programmes and the management and support of learners

- Maintain academic standards and academic integrity through alternative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment based on international research and good practice, and as approved by Academic Council

Describe the project / initiative

As outlined, this initiative was the identification of the resources and developments required to facilitate successfully pivoting to act as an online provider of programmes. It involved completion of a full risk assessment and identification of mitigation activities and initiatives. Investigation of good practice in online teaching, learning and assessment, regulatory frameworks and practices, technology supports, and human resources required for successful implementation and maintaining of academic standards was central to the project.

What data was collected during this project / initiative?

The initial contingency arrangements were informed by international research and good practice, as documented within the Contingency Arrangements document.
On conclusion of the academic year, a Self-evaluation of Contingency Arrangements was conducted. This factored in feedback from staff and students and also considered data pertaining to student retention and attainment.

What insights were gleaned from the project / initiative data?

- ✔ The implementation of the MRT was a highly effective means of expediating decision-making, with appropriate delegated authority in a potential crisis management situation. This approach enabled risk assessment and risk management planning in a time efficient manner, negating the need for referral and decision-making to pass between the different governing bodies, with the exception of academic arrangements requiring approval of Academic Council.
- ✔ Membership of such a body requires representation from across all academic and operational areas to ensure consideration of all influencing factors and impact of decisions. This must include the student advocate or student representation also.
- ✔ Sector level consultation and research nationally and internationally needs to inform crisis response proposals and needs to have commenced as far in advance as possible, being proactive rather than reactive.
- ✔ Ongoing investment in digital infrastructure and resources provides a sound framework in which to manage students, communication, programme and service delivery and assessment remotely.
- ✔ Increased investment and availability of in-house CPD for staff and teaching faculty, particularly in respect to the use of technology and tech enabled teaching, learning and assessment is a valuable investment for crisis and non-crisis management.
- ✔ Effective communication is the cornerstone of successful crisis response.
- ✔ Maintaining continuity is encouraged where possible and sensible but alternatives should always be investigated.
- ✔ Academic standards and integrity can be effectively maintained with the right approach to support, information, regulations and methodologies.

✔ The transition for staff and students can be managed in a low risk way with the right planning and mitigation arrangements.

How has practice changed as a result of the project / initiative?

Of note, the College Board and ELT recognised the benefit of a dedicated committee responsible for risk management and mitigation planning. Plans are underway to formally embed such a committee into the governance structure, where risk management and mitigation was previously the remit of ELT and Academic Council, this new committee will bring these two aspects together to strengthen cohesion and responsiveness in decision-making.

Practice on the ground in respect of the management of programmes and support of student and staff has changed significantly as a result of an extended programme of staff development, integration of technologies, expansion of virtual supports and services. Collectively these developments have created a virtual campus that facilitates rich virtual social interaction and provides an engaging online teaching, learning and assessment environment which promotes academic integrity and maintain academic standards.

✔ Teaching faculty have altered their teaching methodologies, applying a flipped classroom approach, combining synchronous and asynchronous learning activities and integrating third party apps and opportunities for individual and group interaction into their online classes. The knowledge and competence acquired will continue to be applied when returning to campus-based provision.

✔ Campus teaching spaces have been set up to facilitate lectures being recorded as standard, including when returning to campus-based provision

✔ Virtual supports such as the online learning toolkit and the online teaching toolkit have assisted the development of staff and students which will inform their practice moving forward

✔ The CCT Learning Space has become an established source of support for students and staff

✔ Student Success classes are now available online

✔ The Careers Service is now available online and has a dedicated virtual resources page increasing accessibility for students.

✔ Student Services utilise a range of technologies to provide pastoral and social supports to learners, with a number of these continuing with the return to campus-based provision