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Proposal for Programme Continuity and Assessment Contingency Arrangements in Response to COVID-19 Outbreak.

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Introduction

The unprecedented situation of College closure for indeterminate length due to a public health pandemic raises a number of matters for consideration by the College in order to continue to fulfil contractual obligations to learners and ensure continuity of provision. The following paper summarises CCT's approach in respect of:

- Student absence
- Lecturer absence
- Programme delivery and supports
- Assessment

First and foremost is the health and wellbeing of all members of the CCT college community and for that reason the College agreed a policy position of adhering to government advice and recommendations from the outset. It is, however, recognised that regardless of the precautions taken, members of the college community are likely to come into contact with and contract corona virus, COVID-19. This will invariably result in periods of absence which the College needs to manage.

The contingency arrangements of the College have been informed by research and consultation. The following individuals and representative organisations were consulted:

- HECA
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in HE
- Joe Ryan, THEA
- Sinead O'Sullivan, University of Limerick
- David McCarthy, National College of Ireland
- Michael Hallissey, H2 Learning
- Brian Mulligan, IT Sligo

Student Absence

Student absence due to ill health will be managed in accordance with existing attendance and assessment regulations, including accommodating arrangements for assessment stemming from the approval of applications for PMCs to be taken into consideration. Where feasible, students will be granted extensions. Where longer term arrangements are required the College will look to maximise the opportunities provided through the repeat exam sitting and supplemental Board of Examiners. Subject to the parameters of assessment regulations, progression with credit deficit will continue to be considered on a case by case basis.

Staff Absence

Staff absence will be managed through the existing sick leave protocols and arrangements for a cover lecturer will be implemented. The use of subject expert guest speakers may also be implemented with the oversight of a member of College faculty or management. In the potential scenario of multiple lecturer absences at any one time, the College will make all reasonable attempts to continue the delivery of programmes through cover lecturers. In some instances this may require merging of classes for a short period. The College hopes to avoid this, recognising the impact schedule changes can have on students' other commitments. In the extreme scenario where significant lecturer absence prevents immediate continuation of module delivery, the College will defer the impacted modules and re-schedule them at the earliest possible opportunity.

Programme Delivery and Supports

Contingency preparations in the event of a closure were underway within the College for the last number of weeks. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the Monitoring and Review Team (MRT) had specifically undertaken a risk assessment to determine potential solutions in the advent of the COVID-19 outbreak impacting Ireland in the way it has affected other jurisdictions.

The risk assessment, based on consultation within the College and across the wider higher education sector, determined that the College was in a reasonable position to quickly transition the delivery of programmes from face to face delivery to technology enabled delivery. See appendix one for risk assessment summary and mitigation proposals.

To summarise, the College has assumed the position that all programmes will continue to be delivered through a flipped classroom approach for the duration of closure due to COVID-19. After this point, all programmes will revert to the validated programme delivery and assessment model. In order to implement the revised approach the College has made commenced implementation of contingency arrangements as follows:

- Training of all faculty and staff for continuity of provision through technology
- Development of guidance materials to support staff
- Investment in additional technical equipment such as microphones, cameras and software to ensure effective blended learning delivery
- Alternative staff communication channels and supports
- Revised working arrangements
- Technical support for all live lectures / webinars
- Dedicated technical and pedagogic supports for faculty
- Pastoral, academic and social supports through our VLE
- Alternative communication channels for students at institution, programme, module and service level
- Access to support information through the VLE and Subjectsplus
- Increased lecturer toolkit of resources available on Centre for Teaching and Learning Moodle page
- Securing additional capacity on Moodle
- Induction materials and support programme introducing students to CCT online
- Promotion of CCT's online academic databases and e-book collection through the CCT Hume Library.
- Provision of one to one and group online Library support and guidance, including the Library's student success programme of classes being made available online.
- The continuation of robust sectoral engagement via virtual meetings and conferences where available.

CCT has adopted the flipped classroom approach for use in delivering programmes through technology. This is in line with the institutional teaching and learning strategy and is underpinned by the College's learner centred approach. Training has been delivered to all faculty, and some support services, to development their understanding of the minimum requirements, standards and expectations in implementing the flipped classroom methodology and to develop knowledge and capability in the use of different technology to support this. The College position remains that existing platforms, tools and software that students and faculty are familiar with will continue to be tools of delivery for CCT programmes, thus ensuring all parties are comfortable and familiar but also

to ensure consistency in the learner experience. Should the period of closure extend beyond the initial crisis management phases, the College will look to further enhance the online learning environment through additional software, incorporating appropriate staff and student training to complement this.

Assessment

In completing the risk assessment final written exams were, in the main part, scheduled for 12 weeks into the future and therefore didn't require urgent or immediate consideration, with the exception of two papers for QQI validated diplomas and one paper for a Microsoft accredited diploma programme. A more detailed review highlighted a number of in-class tests, practical lab based assessments, presentations and similar face to face supervised assessments. It was agreed that while the primary focus would be on considering alternative options for written examinations, contingency arrangements would factor in all face to face assessments.

Consultation with the wider sector and student representatives along with research across higher education inform the proposals put forward herein. Early stage information from across the sector highlighted a varied approach that included bringing examinations forward (RCSI), deferring examinations (TU Dublin), moving examinations online (DBS) and implementing alternative assessments (DCU, TUD, NCI, UL) with many providers opting for a combination of online assessment and other forms of alternative assessment. CCT was keen to consider and investigate all possible options in the context of ensuring good practice with regards academic standards and integrity.

A newly published article by Brown and Sambell, "[Contingency Planning: Rapid Alternatives to Face to Face Assessment](#)" identifies 5 alternative approaches for providers to consider:

1. Defer or re-schedule deadlines

In considering this option CCT has identified the following factors as significant to decision-making:

- Full compliance with existing approved programme schedules and validated arrangements for programmes
- Disruption to student lives resulting from deviating away from the published schedules
- Potential economic impact for students having to remain in Dublin accommodation for a longer period than anticipated
- Potential economic impact of extending studies in a scenario where part time employment is likely to be terminated
- Difficulty in predicting when a more suitable time might be
- Ongoing consequences for repeat arrangements and the subsequent academic year
- Delaying graduating students from competing in an increasingly challenging economy
- Potentially condensing revision and assessment duration to accommodate subsequent schedule
- Time delay between completion of learning and completion of assessment and possible impact of this
- Potential to increase participation by delaying until virus outbreak abates
- Implications for visa holding students on possible extensions to approved period to reside in Ireland.

2. Assess only what has been taught prior to campus based restrictions.

As college closure has arisen early in the semester and teaching is continuing in spite of restrictions, this isn't considered a feasible alternative. The College position remains that attainment of learning outcomes must be assessed.

3. Consider how much assessment is still outstanding and decide whether you can waive further assessment

As indicated under point 2, the timing of the restrictions and the commitment to assess attainment of learning outcomes renders this option unsuitable. Furthermore, the College feels the authority to determine such a decision falls outside the assessment regulations of the College as approved by QQI through re-engagement.

4. Change the mode of submission

This alternative allows for the continuation of specific assessments, such as presentations, posters, debates, but also practical skills assessments and some in class tests through technology rather than in the original face to face format. In considering this option the college identified the following factors as significant in decision-making:

- Technical capability of students
- Technical capacity of CCT platforms
- Availability of suitable software
- Assurance of academic standards
- Means of assuring authenticity / authorship of student work

In considering this option the College was mindful of the potential to move all exams online using online proctoring. Brown and Sambell, 2020, advise that these may provide a long term solution but shouldn't be considered a quick fix. Consultation with NCI highlighted the issue of different software packages being required for subjects such as computing, with a skills element, compared with the more theoretical disciplines, suggesting a range of different solutions would warrant investigation prior to committing. [Research](#) by CIT colleagues O'Reilly and Creigh, 2015, further suggests challenges with remote proctoring services particularly around validating the identity of candidates.

5. Offer alternative assessment formats.

CCT recognises the value of written examinations, and other face to face assessments, but nonetheless does not hold the view that they are the only realistic means of determining authorship of student work. Indeed, the college is experienced in implementing protocols to promote academic integrity and deter (identify and penalise) academic misconduct in a range of assessment methods. Notwithstanding this, a number of factors were identified as requiring consideration in decision-making:

- Potential impact of workload burden on students
- Timing and volume of assessment
- Variety of assessment types
- Potential for integrated assessment
- No award stage programme will be completed without some face to face assessment – either last semester or in the subsequent semester.
- Approaches to assure academic integrity

- Maintaining academic standards
- Suitability of assessment tool to learning outcomes being assessed
- Student perception
- Student support needs / reasonable accommodations
- Approval processes

On investigation of this option, student opinion was sought. In general, there is an openness to alternative assessment methods being applied. It is the uncertainty that is the greatest cause of anxiety. Additional matters raised reinforced those already identified in respect of scheduling and volume of assessment and a further potential concern relates to ensuring technical or typing ability doesn't indirectly advantage or disadvantage a learner when setting time limits and online assessment tasks.

Feedback to learners is a fundamental element of the assessment process and will be of paramount importance in any instance of alternative assessment or submission methods being employed. The existing policy on feedback will continue to apply. It is however recognised that the use of technology will allow for real time feedback and the provision of feedback via audio or video file. Such approaches are encouraged.

It is recognised that the unforeseeable impact of COVID-19 on faculty wellness and attendance may impact on the ability to facilitate the provision of timely feedback. The college will continue to monitor the situation and will seek to address any such scenario on a case by case basis. Continued communication with any impacted students will be central to managing student satisfaction.

Having reviewed the available options, it is proposed that options 4 and 5, alternative mode of submission and alternative mode of assessment are implemented as contingency arrangements for the affected assessments.

Recommendations

Academic Council are asked to consider the following recommendations and confirm their decision in respect of same.

1. To ensure the continuation of programmes and the ongoing management and support of learners, the facilitation of this through the proposed technology enabled approach shall proceed subject to the following:
 - Being limited to the period of restrictions imposed due to COVID-19
 - The ongoing monitoring and commitment to essential enhancement insofar as is reasonable and practicable in the timeframe under consideration.

2. To overcome the challenge presented by college closure, and the indeterminate duration of this, all face to face assessments will be replaced with either an alternative mode of submission or alternative mode of assessment, determined by the module learning outcomes to be assessed and the suitability of the proposed approach. In all cases the following will apply:
 - All assessments will seek to assess the attainment of learning outcomes and will further incorporate the opportunity for students to evidence attainment beyond the learning outcomes.
 - Proposals will be considered in the context of all modules and assessments in the period under consideration and due regard will be given to suitable variety in assessment and the appropriate planning of assessment load and timings;
 - Semester assessment schedules and proposals will evidence incorporation of good practice guidelines and be subject to internal approval by the Dean of School;
 - All assessment changes will be subject to External Examiner approval
 - Where possible, students will be given sufficient advanced notification of changes and afforded the opportunity to undertake practice assessments in the same mode;
 - Monitoring of student performance, progression and award will be considered in the context of these unprecedented circumstances.

Reading List

The following resources informed the proposal development and will be made available to faculty to ensure implementation of good practice guidelines.

Cork IT Teaching and Learning Unit – Alternatives to Traditional Exams

<https://tlu.cit.ie/contentfiles//TACIT%20Guides/5%20-%20Alternatives%20to%20Traditional%20Exams.pdf>

DCU / NIDL Exemplars and Case Studies of Technology Enhanced Assessment

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-53jSmf_uf46ojZKL4vJRuLtEHNZ9hdQs7IR_LH5ypM/edit#heading=h.p3c6sf37ulz3

London School of Economics (LSE) Toolkit advice on Take- Home Assessment

<https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Eden-Centre/Assessment-Toolkit/Assessment-conditions/Take-home-assessment>

Manchester Metropolitan University advice-leaflet

http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/design/tasks/takehome_exam.php

National Forum for Ireland: 10 points to consider in choosing alternative assessment methods in the online environment

<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/10-Points-to-Consider-in-Choosing-Alternative-Assessment-Methods.pdf>

UCD Teaching and Learning Unit – Guidance for Considering Alternative Assessment Methods

http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/alternative_assessment_methods.pdf

Appendix 1: COVID-19 Risk Assessment February 2020

	Risk	Impact	Likelihood High, Med, Low	Mitigation
Human Resources	Limited staff capacity to use technology for teaching	Inability to deliver modules, poor learner experience, faculty dissatisfaction	Low – IT Med – Bus	Provision of initial induction training and ongoing supports. Development of easy access guidance materials for a non-technical audience. Extend the teacher toolkit of resources available through the Centre for T & L Moodle page
	Technical support available onsite only at present	Worst case – technical failure resulting in class being cancelled where staff or students are accessing remotely and having technical challenges personal to their device or set up	High	Allocation of dedicated tech buddy for every live class. Identification of technical support contacts for staff and students
	Potential isolation / fragmenting of teams	Negative impact on learner experience, disjointed programme, poor learner experience, staff dissatisfaction	High	Remote working is new to many as is online delivery. Establish sub team and whole team communication networks. Weekly updates from ELT. Faculty meetings weekly for informal discussion and ideas sharing.
	Lack of to access technology remotely.	Inability to provide service or deliver programmes	Low	Continue use of existing CCT software packages in the first instance. Undertake staff technology audit to establish current position and identify additional requirements. Make provision for provision of wifi – purchase of mobile data etc. Continue to facilitate delivery from CCT while government guidelines allow. Plan for advance upload of future lessons in preparation for lockdown scenario.
	No agreed approach re delivery methodology	Inconsistent learner experience.	High	Agree minimum expectations regarding platforms, tools and methodology and communicate this through induction training and guidance documents.

	Risk	Impact	Likelihood High, Med, Low	Mitigation
Human Resources (cont.)	Mass staff absence due to illness	Inability to provide services, supports or classes	High	Continue with established contingency team-working arrangements for support services to ensure continuity as far as possible. Determine availability of all part time faculty for teaching cover as may be required. Defer classes for minimum possible period in worst case scenario. Standard absence procedures apply while recognising potential for mass absence.
Student Matters	Student capacity to engage with technology for teaching and learning	Inability to adequately engage with the college, fellow students and programme materials	Low	Overall low risk due to existing use of Moodle and google tools as part of core delivery. Reliance likely to be on mobile devices. All materials and software needs to allow for access via mobile devices. Student audit of capacity to be completed followed by induction training online.
	Student motivation	Potential fall in retention due to change in delivery mode and associated sense of isolation or lack of connection with the college community.	Med	Establish multiple communication channels to replicate those available onsite – library, careers, student services, main office, faculty coordinators and lecturers. Implement regular college led communications relating to teaching and learning, social matters, health and wellbeing during shutdown, etc.
	Timetable implications	Potential for fall in participation and subsequent student attrition due to students prioritising other commitments	Med	Continue with published delivery schedule for all lessons. Ensure content continues to be available and accessible. Provide sufficient lead time for all pre-loaded content to be reviewed.

Risk	Impact	Likelihood High, Med, Low	Mitigation
Remote access to technology	Students unable to access due to lack of device or internet	Med	IT students enrolled on a BYOD basis. Existing business and professional students currently access online tools and materials. WIFI access may become an issue. Need to monitor this. Reliance on a mobile phone may hinder ability to complete CAs. Use of video and audio submissions may be required. Standard PMC process to be applied.
Learners negatively impacted (health or economic) by COVID-19	Loss of employment Need for isolation Hospitalisation Outbreak in CCT Community	High	Continue with cleaning and hygiene practices to try prevent an outbreak within the college. Daily advice to students on government guidelines. Establish employment and health monitoring (self-disclosure basis) and identify suitable supports through Monitoring and Review Team where possible.
<p>Student supports are predominantly face to face.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic • Pastoral • Careers • Student mentoring <p>Currently technical support is limited to within CC.</p>	Negative impact on academic performance and development, student health and wellbeing, student satisfaction and student retention	High	<p>Establish online mechanisms for access to student services, QA and exams and careers.</p> <p>Existing arrangements for accessing lecturers and faculty coordinators to continue.</p> <p>Investigate potential for student mentoring to take place online.</p> <p>Extend technical support to learners</p> <p>Encourage access to online library through existing arrangements</p> <p>Implement library classes online for assessment support.</p>

	Risk	Impact	Likelihood High, Med, Low	Mitigation
Teaching Learning and Assessment	Quality of learner experience	Potential decline in student satisfaction	Med	Implement agreed mitigation activities (this plan). Introduce additional student feedback mechanisms for ongoing monitoring of satisfaction.
	Lack of consistency in delivery methodology and potential for ineffective blended learning practice	Inconsistent learner experience and decline in student satisfaction. Sense of failure, lack of confidence, disengagement within faculty.	High	Minimum standards and expectations to be articulated. Flipped classroom approach to be implemented and induction training and guidance provided to support faculty implement this. Teaching and learning supports through more experienced faculty and the Centre for T & L to be highlighted.
	Quality of materials	Inconsistent learner experience and decline in student satisfaction	High	Implementation of minimum requirements and monitoring through student feedback and per review.
	Assessment – integrity and standards	Inability to facilitate onsite exams, in class tests or other supervised assessments. Potential for plagiarism or collusion Potential for changes to negatively impact standards Potential on student outcomes, progression and award.	High	Alternative assessment strategies to be developed and submitted to Academic Council. Research sectoral practice for approaches to reduce, deter and or identify academic malpractice in non-supervised assessments. Academic Council to specify minimum requirements for alternative assessments and approval mechanisms, including mandatory External Examiner approval. Submit contingency arrangements to QQI. Monitor and report on student retention, progression and attainment.
	Copyright and IP	Potential for breach of copyright and our IP of third parties or CCT.	Med	Factor into induction training and guidance. Identify points of contact for queries or support.

	Risk	Impact	Likelihood High, Med, Low	Mitigation
Additional technical / resource matters	Variety in delivery platforms used by faculty within and outside CCT	Inconsistent experience for learners and potential to miss a class if logging in to wrong place. Additional challenges for technical support team Potential licencing issues	Low	Communicate requirement to only utilise existing CCT platforms. Implement a simple approach initially with a view to increasing tools used as confidence and capability increases and immediacy of crisis abates allowing for training to be provided. Experienced faculty can use additional tools but only where they integrate with CCT platforms.
	Minimum equipment requirements for staff	Staff and faculty may not have device, camera and mic for remote access	Low	As CCT already facilitates remote working it is unlikely this will be a significant issue. Undertake audit to establish requirements. Arrange for loan or purchase of equipment as required. Purchase additional cameras and condenser microphones for CCT for enhanced quality.
	Technology Failure	Loss of service	Low	Back-up server already in operation. Moodle is managed and supported externally by ennovation.
	Moodle capacity insufficient	Inability to accommodate upload requirements	Med	Request additional capacity from ennovation.