QQI

Quality Assurance Manual

HCTS QAM Revised February 2022

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
AB	Academic Board
AC	Academic Committee
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DMS	Document Management System
DP	Data Protection
EA	External Authentication
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
FoI	Freedom of Information
GA	Gap Analysis
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HCTS	Healthcare Training Solutions
IV	Internal Verification
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMS	Learner Management System
MIS	Management Information System(s)
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
PEL	Protection for Enrolled Learners
QA	Quality Assurance
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QAM	Quality Assurance Manual
QQI	Quality & Qualifications Ireland
RA	Reasonable Accommodation
RAP	Results Approval Panel
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
ToR	Terms of Reference
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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Quality Manual – HCTS

Welcome

Dear Stakeholder,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you as an interested party in the operations and management of Health Care Training Solutions College of Further Education (HCTS). HCTS is one of Ireland's leading private training providers and we are accredited and regulated by, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). HCTS was originally established in 2011 as a FETAC Provider.

HCTS is dedicated to delivering the highest standard of training and education through providing quality, affordable and adaptable programmes to individuals and companies with careful consideration of each of our clients' requirements.

Core Values
Our core values underpin our company's culture - Quality, Experience, Sharing, Respect, and Evaluation.

- **Quality** - Healthcare Training Solutions always deliver the highest quality healthcare training courses, as validated by QQI and Learners and clients.
- **Experience** - All our courses are delivered by professionals who are fully qualified, not only as tutors but also have vast experience of working in their specialised area of expertise.
- **Sharing** - Guidance and advice are shared with Learners to help them establish which course is right for them. Course notes, supporting documentation, equipment and techniques are shared to empower each learner individually.
- **Respect** – Learners are always treated with respect. We follow an individual holistic approach to teaching and encourage diversity within the learning environment.
- **Evaluation** - We Listen. We seek sincere evaluation from Learners and clients to ensure we consistently deliver high quality, professional, adult learning-based courses. As part of our self-assessment, we value all evaluation which supports our ethos of continuous development.

We have a culture of continuous improvement & benchmark ourselves to ensure best practice.

This QQI Quality Assurance System uses a framework based on the 11 core areas of QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. HCTS is here to assist and guide all our stakeholders, so please free to contact us with any query that you may have.

Mary Mc Loughlin
Managing Director
Healthcare Training Solutions - College of Further Education (HCTS)

Organisational Background

HCTS is a QQI accredited training provider, originally established in 2011. HCTS has grown to become one of the leading Healthcare private training providers in the North East of Ireland, using a process of continuous improvement and innovation to develop Further Education (FE) courses for a wide range of Learners. Due to external factors in 2020 and following the QQI Implementing Contingency Arrangements For Alternative Assessment and Authentication Processes: Guidance for Further Education & Training Providers April 2020 and the more recent Measures to Mitigate Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Programmes Leading to QQI Awards, HCTS developed online and blended learning options for Learners, with focus maintained on delivering quality training and education. HCTS are aware that both Learners and tutors are participating in online & blended learning education in their homes in isolation from each other. HCTS has identified this as an opportunity to support Learners and tutors in achieving a positive learning experience, in a positive learning environment.

Mission Statement

HCTS is dedicated to delivering the highest standard of training and education through providing quality, affordable and adaptable programmes to individuals and companies with careful consideration of each of our clients' requirements.

Objectives

HCTS recognises the importance of online and blended learning in this current climate. We are committed of evaluating HCTS classroom and online and blended learning strategies. We strive towards continuously identifying areas that we can improve the service delivery in, while always being mindful of HCTS mission statement and objectives.

HCTS is committed to quality service delivery, expansion and growth. We achieve this through identifying the emerging needs of Learners, through constant communication with Learners and other key stakeholders, and by monitoring business processes with a view to continuous improvement and financial security.

Scope Of Practice

Healthcare Training Solutions QQI Validated Programmes

	Component Code	Component Name	QQI Date of Validation	QQI Validation Code
1	Anatomy & Physiology	5N0749	04/06/2014	PG19347
2	Care Skills	5N2770	04/06/2014	PG19347
3	Care Support	5N0758	04/06/2014	PG19347
4	Communications	5N0690	04/06/2014	PG19347
5	Care of the Older Person	5N2706	04/06/2014	PG19347
6	Infection Prevention & Control	5N3734	04/06/2014	PG19347
7	Work Experience	5N1356	04/06/2014	PG19347
8	Palliative Care Support	5N3769	04/06/2014	PG19347
9	Recovery in Mental Health	5N3773	04/06/2014	PG19347
10	Safety & Health at Work	5N1794	04/06/2014	PG19347
11	Intellectual Disability Studies	5N1652	06/02/2020	PG24163

HCTS suite of awards are validated, accredited and regulated by QQI. The HCTS 'Scope of Practice' is the development and delivery of virtual online and classroom-based quality healthcare training service, nationwide. HCTS ensure that all training is delivered in a positive, encouraging and inclusive environment embracing diversity.

HCTS works closely with residential care settings and home care companies in a consultancy and training capacity, professionally facilitating staff through specific training programmes, including but not exhausting of health and safety legislation and up to date HIQA standards.

All HCTS tutors are professionally experienced in their subject matter areas, which adds value to and enhances the Learners teaching and learning experience. HCTS tutors are also fully qualified and demonstrate expertise in training delivery, whether in-person or online. HCTS ensure that required additional supports and resources are available to all tutors to optimise consistency in quality award delivery throughout the company.

The Quality Assurance Manual

To ensure consistency among the HCTS Team, the HCTS quality manual has been developed in compliance with the below QQI guidelines and supported by evidence documents. Additional information is referenced and located in Appendices;

- ➢ Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines published by QQI (April 2016),
- ➢ Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines – Independent/Private; and
- ➢ Statutory QA Guidelines for Online and Blended Learning Programmes.

Based on these guidelines HCTS developed The Quality Assurance (QA) system which covers the 11 main quality assurance areas. HCTS ensures integration of the quality assurance system across all aspects of HCTS teaching, learning and assessment provision.

By means of introduction please see the quality system outline below which gives a brief overview of the quality system within HCTS.

HCTS Team Introduction

HCTS understands that to achieve and maintain consistency in the provision of high-quality service training & education, within a responsible and financially viable business, we must manage a professionally qualified innovative team, each of whom with clear roles and responsibilities. The HCTS organisational structure below outlines the responsibility each person has within the organisation;

HEALTHCARE TRAINING SOLUTIONS ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Director

Academic Manager
- Risk Management
- KPI's, Audits & Internal Infographics
- Monitoring of Stakeholder Feedback
- Monitoring of QA Policies & Procedures

Financial Controller
- Operational Budgets (Sales & Marketing)
- Programme Resource Management

Tutors

QQI Coordinator
- Course Administration
- Sales, Marketing
- Enrolment
- Learner Supports & Reasonable Accommodation
- Certification
- Committees Note-taker

Figure 1: Organisational Structure for Quality Service Delivery

HCTS Communication Strategy

HCTS is based on the strength of the team and the effectiveness of HCTS communication strategy. This is achieved through clear organisational structure, clear roles and responsibilities, clear day to day communication, regular meetings providing progress updates with opportunities to contribute progress and development. Clear goal setting and expectations are important to prevent demotivation and reduced compliance.

HCTS work hard to manage recruitment of all staff, including tutors, to ensure that individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude are selected. This supports HCTS in its ethos of striving towards continuous implementation of quality standards and upholding the service level agreements that are agreed upon with all of the stakeholders. To support and retain effective teamwork and professional communication, all new staff participate in an induction programme, and receive 'on-the- job' training to learn about HCTS's business processes, gain an understanding of stakeholders' quality requirements and learn how to apply HCTS's core values into practice.

The findings and outcomes from internal audits are used to further support teamwork and progress development and communication. All stakeholders, including staff, Learners and business-based clients are encouraged to give feedback and improvement suggestions, all of which are welcomed and captured in overall quality development.

QA1: GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT QUALITY

1.0 Policy Statement

Through the HCTS Governance structure, HCTS approve all quality assurance procedures. The over-arching purpose of our governance approach is to protect the integrity of academic processes and standards and to ensure that decisions about personnel and other resources are made to reflect the interests of further education and training and, to protect the learning experience for every learner.

HCTS has primary responsibility for the oversight of business strategy and operations, ensuring the sustainability of the organisation as a business.

HCTS management's core task is to facilitate the delivery of products and services to meet learner needs, whilst meeting all stakeholder and legal requirements

HCTS supports the development and delivery of quality products and services for HCTS's Learners, staff, potential Learners, external authenticators and members of review panels.

1:1 - Governance

In order to effectively ensure a consistent, quality safe and financially viable service, HCTS has developed a seamless governance structure (Figure 2), representative of relevant committees to reflect the integrity and accountability of the decision-making processes and best interests of the company who have independent roles and responsibilities to ensure provision of quality services. These committees must report to the management board. There are two principal committees; the Academic Governance Committee and the Financial Governance Committee.

Independent Oversight/Externality is defined as the approach of appointing an individual to assist in the objectivity of the governance of the organisation, without prejudice or direct affiliation to the organisation on an operational basis.

In compliance with the areas of legislation as listed below, and to ensure the demonstration of fairness, transparency and integrity within the planning, development, facilitation and management of teaching, learning and assessment, HCTS aim to be inclusive of independent oversight, within its governance structures at all times;

1.   Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012
2.   Further Education & Training Act 2013
3.   QQI Insights: Quality in Irish Further Education & Training – September 2019

The integration of independent oversight, also referred to as externality specifically influences the following areas;

• External Authentication Procedures (see External Authentication policy);
• Independent Externality as represented as Chair Person on the AQC;
• Independent External Expert(s) on Programme Reviews, Programme; Validation/Re-Validation, Self-Evaluation Reviews and/or sub-groups, as and when necessary.

 and is managed as follows:

1. Independent Oversight is offered only by professionals within the training and education sector;

2. Professionals elected to provide independent oversight are completely external to the day-to-day operational functioning of HCTS;

3. HCTS will only elect external professionals who are qualified to make impartial, objective and relevant comparisons;

4. The appointment of the external professionals will be based on their ability to demonstrate adherence to HCTS QA associated policies, procedures and processes, as approved. This includes but is not exhaustive of;

   • Ability to demonstrate independence – professional judgements, questioning and chairing of committees are managed by way of impartiality;
   • The Independent Person presents no conflict of interest;
   • Capacity to provide oversight – to ensure that policies, procedures and processes are fit for purpose;
   • Ensure Governance structures are consensus-oriented;
   • Ensure Governance structures and operational responsibilities are responsive, efficient, equitable and inclusive.

5. The specific Terms of Reference which are relevant to the specific area of work (and committee) to which independent oversight is required will be applied.

Independent oversight/externality for Governance purposes is managed as a cyclical process at 3 yearly with reviews, sooner if necessary.
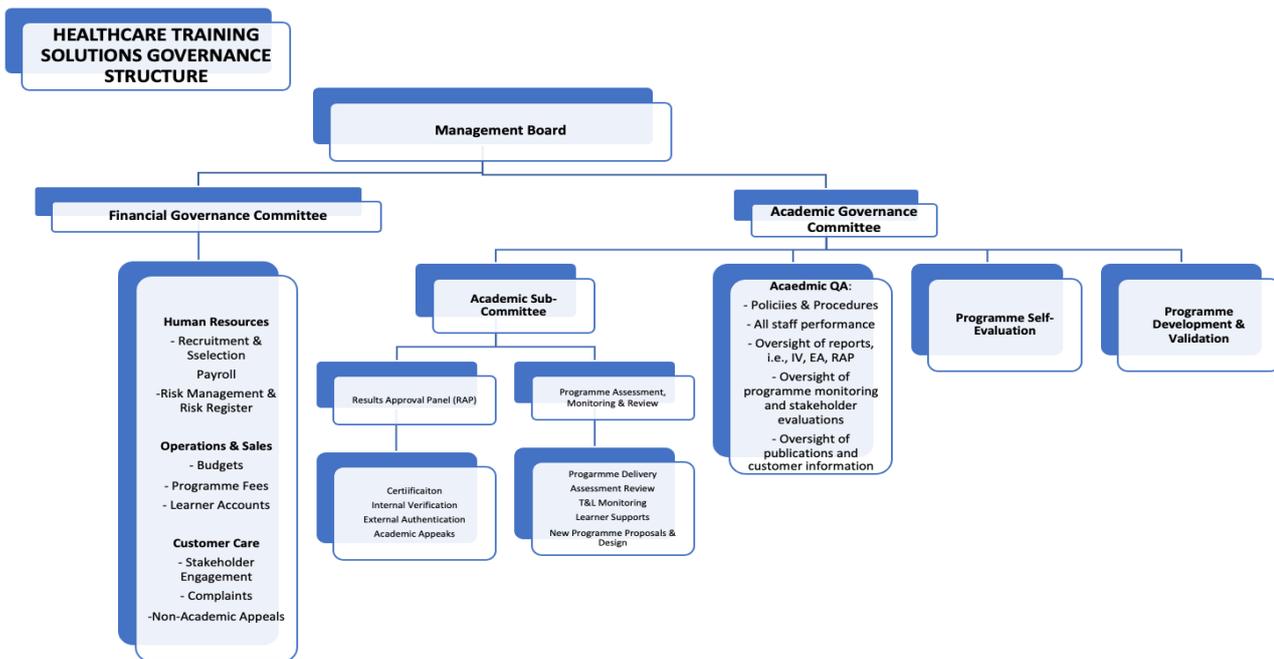
Figure 2: Quality Management Structure Outline *(Governance)*

HCTS has established a graphic summary of our operational and governance structures demonstrating how our processes interrelate (see Figure 2 above). Our Management Board (MB) meets quarterly, with a formal agenda covering progress against action plans, internal audit evaluation, financial reports, sales and marketing, people and operations, stakeholder Evaluation and opportunities for development and improvement. At a strategic level, HCTS Governance makes provision for an explicit oversight of core business processes including but not limited to operations, programme delivery and support, sales and marketing, finance and human resources.

HCTS have clear terms of reference/role descriptions for all committees represented and these are further detailed in the tables below. HCTS are committed to providing the resources required to ensure excellence of governance and the application of quality assurance.

Management Board

Purpose (including Risk Management):	The Management Board are responsible for working in collaboration with the Director, ensuring oversight and primary decision-making of the collective governance of HCTS. The purpose is to ensure a strong, stable and sustainable company where governance is at the core of all HCTS activities.
Membership:	Members include: The HCTS Director HCTS Company Secretary External Independent Advisor - Chair Members of HCTS staff who would not normally attend Management Board meetings may be asked to attend a meeting or part of it, from time to time, to provide detail on specific operational, policy or agenda items.
Terms of Reference:	1. Provide leadership and management at a corporate level for HCTS. 2. Set the vision and strategic direction for the organisation, considering, as far as possible, learner, staff, and all other relevant stakeholder views. The Management Board will work to turn the vision and strategy into a suite of tangible actions. 3. Evaluation of performance against stated objectives will be a key function for the Management Board to ensure that where necessary the appropriate action is taken to ensure that targets are achieved. 4. Ensure that the Board and the project functions efficiently and effectively in compliance with relevant regulation and legislation. 5. The Management Board will ensure, by delegating and assigning responsibility and accountability to the appropriate person(s). 6. Ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place to protect the quality of l outputs and ensure the independence and integrity of the teaching, learning and assessment of all awards is maintained at all times; 7. Ensure that the appropriate protocols and procedures are in place to protect the confidentiality of all data holdings; 8. Ensure that the integrity of information provided to and disseminated by HCTS is ensured and that risks are identified and managed at all levels of the organisation; 9. Ensure that systems of risk management are robust and defensible.
Meetings - timing, conduct, frequency	The Management Board meets once each calendar year, typically in February, or more frequently, if required.

	Meetings are normally scheduled to last for approximately two hours, but from time to time it may be necessary for meetings to be extended. Such extensions and frequency of meetings are agreed by the Management Board ahead of the meeting. It is a HCTS requirement that members commit to and attend Board meetings.
Requirements: **Information / reports / indicators need to be supplied for review**	The Director in consultation with the Chair is responsible for developing a draft agenda in advance of each Management Board meeting. This provides all members with sufficient time to consider the agenda issues and any other issues which may arise. The draft agenda is circulated to the members at least 7 days in advance of each meeting. Members may then request additional items to be added to the agenda. Supporting documents are circulated electronically in advance of the meetings to provide background to any topics included on the agenda. It is the responsibility of the committee members to access the documents and bring them to the meetings. When agreeing the agenda, the Director and the Chair confirm what members of staff are required to attend the Management Board meeting and for which agenda items.
Reporting Requirements: **Approval Sign Off.**	Upon completion of the Management Board meeting, draft minutes are circulated to members of the Board for review, within 7 working days. Members are asked to check for accuracy and return any amendments. Any issues arising from the minutes are discussed and recorded in the minutes of the next meeting. Where no issues arise, the draft minutes are approved by the Management Board. Drafts of new documents and revisions to old documents are presented to the Management Board.

Financial Governance Committee (Financial Committee)

Purpose (including Risk Management):	The Finance Committee provides financial analysis, advice, and oversight of the organisations financial position and budgetary arrangements. Their sole responsibility is to ensure HCTS is operating with the financial resources it needs to provide programmes and services to its stakeholders.
Membership:	Members include; The Financial Controller HCTS Accountant - External The Director
Terms of Reference:	1. A representation from the Finance Committee will be available to the Management Board as and when required. 2. A meeting quorum requires all of the members. 3. Decisions are made by consensus (i.e., members are satisfied with the decision even though it may not be their first choice). If consensus is not possible, the Chair makes the final decision. 4. The QQI Coordinator provides administrative support which includes: - Drafting agendas and supporting papers in consultation with the Chair; - Preparing meeting notes and information; - Writing up minutes/action plans and distributing them to members of the committee in a timely manner.
Meetings - timing, conduct, frequency	Members commit to: 1. Attending all scheduled meetings; 2 meetings are held annually, June and December. 2. Ensuring the appropriate sharing of information across all members. 3. Making timely decisions and acting upon them. 4. Understanding HCTS quality assurance system and making decisions within the ethos and aims of the organisation. 5. Ensuring they are fully informed of the financial standing of HCTS. 6. Keeping the Management Board informed by way of an annual report. Members expect: 1. To be provided with complete, accurate and meaningful information in a timely manner so as to inform any decision-making. 2. To be given reasonable time to make key decisions. 3. To be alerted to potential risks and issues, as they arise and if necessary, coordinate 'special' meetings. 4. Open, honest, ethical and professional discussions. 5. To be fully aware of any issues that may arise in

	regard to staffing of the project, recruitment and employment of staff.
Requirements: **Information / reports / indicators need to be supplied for review**	The HCTS Finance Committees require staff to provide highly contextual reports clearly communicating the organisation's financial and cash position, its adherence to the budget, its allocation of resources toward the accomplishment of its mission, and its support of any donor-imposed restrictions on contributions. The Finance Committee will endeavour to investigate all potential risks regarding investment to programmes, recruitment of new staff/tutors, development of contracts and be aware of all current legislation as it pertains to staff recruitment and employment. The Finance Committee are also responsible for ensuring financial accountability and transparency through the provision of oversight to, and the recommendation of key financial projections, financial performance indicators, monitoring and reviewing the annual budget, overseeing financial risk assessment, confirming the accuracy of the annual financial statements, the effectiveness of and compliance with internal financial systems and the effectiveness of the audit process.
Reporting Requirements: **Approval Sign Off.**	The Finance Committee reports to the Management Board.

Academic Governance Committee (Academic Committee)

Purpose (including Risk Management):	The main objective of the Academic Committee is to oversee the academic affairs of HCTS and make recommendations about academic programmes and strategic priorities.
Membership:	The Academic Committee members serve for 2 years and can be reappointed. The Committee will consist of a minimum of 4 members and a maximum number of 8. Members: 1. External Independent Advisor with relevant FET expertise, who acts as Chair 2. Academic Manager 3. Tutor Representative 4. Learner representative Members commit to: 1. Attending all scheduled meetings 2. Sharing relevant and current information

	3. Making timely decisions
	4. Understanding of the QA system and all associated policies and procedures as implemented by HCTS.
	Members expect:
	1. To be provided with complete, accurate and meaningful information in a timely manner so as to inform any decision-making.
	2. To be given reasonable time to make key decisions.
	3. To be alerted to potential risks and issues, as they arise and if necessary, coordinate 'special' meetings.
	4. Open, honest, ethical and professional discussions.
	5. To be fully aware of any issues that may arise in regard to staffing of the project, recruitment and employment of staff.
	The Management Board has the right to alter the composition and operation of the Academic Committee.
Terms of Reference:	Terms of Reference include;
	1. To maintain an overview of HCTS's academic strategies, policies and procedures pertaining to the following (these are not listed in any priority order):
	- Teaching and Learning;
	- Definition and maintenance of academic standards;
	- Examinations and assessment practice;
	- Innovations in educational practice;
	- Programme development and review;
	- Learner behaviour and discipline;
	- Protecting the Learner experience and interests;
	- Academic staff development;
	- Quality Assurance management and enhancement.
	2. Monitor the provision and academic integrity of programmes in line with the validated approval agreements,
	3. Consider reports of all programme evaluation and monitoring activity,
	4. Lead and give oversight to programmatic reviews and self-evaluations,
	5. Ensure secure feedback mechanisms for Learners, tutors and stakeholders are in place: to monitor that feedback and make recommendations as to how feedback should be responded to,
	6. Advise the Academic Manager as to the day-to-day implementation of the QA system,
	7. Review compliance to quality assurance policies and procedures,
	8. Examine the effectiveness of academic and general learner support services,
	9. Make recommendations on the use of existing

	resources and the need for new resources to support programme development, validation applications and/or delivery, 10. Sanction changes to delivery and minor changes to programmes within the parameters set by validation approval, 11. Oversee the design and development of suitable transfer and progression pathways for Learners and graduates, 12. To ensure oversight to the Academic Sub-Committee in the areas of RAP and Programme Assessment, Monitoring & Review, 13. Present the Annual Report and Plan.
Meetings - timing, conduct, frequency	A meeting quorum is a minimum of 4 members, one of whom must be the Internal Advisor. Decisions are made by consensus (i.e., members are satisfied with the decision even though it may not be their first choice). If a consensus is not possible, the Chair makes the final decision. The Academic Committee meets up four times each calendar year or more frequently, if required. Meetings are normally scheduled to last for approximately two hours, but from time to time it may be necessary for meetings to be extended.
Requirements: **Information / reports / indicators need to be supplied for review**	The Academic Manager in consultation with the Chair is responsible for developing a draft agenda in advance of each Academic Committee meeting ensuring that members have sufficient time and opportunity to discuss the agenda issues and any other issues which may arise. The draft agenda is circulated to the members at least 7 days in advance of each meeting. Members may then request additional items to be added to the agenda. Supporting documents are circulated electronically in advance of the meetings to provide background to any topics included on the agenda. It is the responsibility of the committee members to access the documents and bring them to the meetings. Meetings are recorded and noted by the Academic Manager. Draft minutes are circulated to all members within 7 days of the meeting being held whereby members in attendance are asked to check for accuracy. A final set of meeting minutes are forwarded to all members prior to the next meeting.

	The Academic Manager will present a report for every meeting.
Reporting Requirements: Approval Sign Off.	The Academic Committee takes directions from, and reports to, the Management Committee and operates with the understanding that ultimate responsibility for ensuring effective and efficient quality assurance and associated provision of HCTS lies with the Management Board.

Additional Sub-Committees

The Academic Sub-Committee
The Academic Sub-Committee has responsibility for coordinating and giving oversight of the following:

1.   Internal Verification procedures
2.   External Authentication procedures
3.   Managing Learner Academic Appeals
4.   Approving Results via Results Approval Panel (RAP)
5.   Programme Assessment Monitoring & Review including, programme delivery and learner supports.

Terms of Reference
The Academic Sub-Committee is made up of a minimum of 3 members, to ensure the decision-making is undertaken in an informed and valid manner.

The Chairperson of the Academic Sub-Committee is the QQI Coordinator. Other members will include a Tutors representative (different to that Tutor attending the Academic Governance Committee) representative of the teaching, learning and assessment processes of programmes, and an External Advisor, when necessary, with an oversight role of considering approaches to and analysis of programme and assessment monitoring and review, particularly in the context of programme delivery and learner supports.

An External Advisor may be asked to attend the Academic Sub-Committee in such instances as outlined below
1. Step into a RAP where the EA has submitted a vague report with no actual quality content and recommendations which were not discussed either during or after the visit had taken place. Their role of the External Advisor is to advise what steps to take so as to ensure the integrity of the QQI awards and the integrity of the EA process
2. To give independent oversight to a review on programme assessments, to ensure that they have been updated within the QQI approval procedures and meet the NFQ Grid of Level Indicator sub-strands and is quality assured.

The Academic Manager is responsible for liaising with the Academic Committee (AC) when additional members are required to participate in the sub-committee. The AC must approve any additional members, including the ad-hoc positioning of additional Independent Advisors, which may be required in the context of subject matter expertise or for impartiality when responding to academic appeals.

The Academic Sub-Committee will assure impartial decision-making to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Minutes of the Academic Sub-Committee meetings are documented allowing for all discussions including but not limited to:
• Issues arising;
• Decisions made by consensus;
• Delegation of action and action planning;

All documentation including but not limited to meeting minutes (pertaining to specific areas of interest or 'focus' agendas such as Programme Assessment Monitoring or RAP), and associated documentation such as the QBS Authentication Reports by Learner Group, Internal Verification and External Authentication Reports are all retained should they be required for further internal review or QQI monitoring.

*Role of the Results Approval Panel (RAP)
As the final stage of the quality assurance process in certification of awards to Learners, the RAP takes place upon the completion of all due diligence procedures, i.e., Internal Verification (IV) and External Authentication (EA). It must be executed prior to learner's results being finalised through the QBS portal.

The RAP must consider all certification events at the time of the certification event (not retrospectively) and should review all results from all Learners presenting, leading to QQI awards. All learner results are provisional until approved by the RAP. The RAP process must be completed before results are finalized and submitted for certification to QQI. This must be confirmed on the QBS and signed off by the QQI Coordinator.

The Results Approval Panel are responsible for ensuring:
1. All assessments submitted to it have been comprehensively reviewed and QQI QA procedures have been complied with;
2. A thorough internal verification has taken place and can verify accurate calculation and transfer of marks;
3. An IV report documenting all findings has been generated;
4. EA has been completed, (as and when required), with academic integrity checked and a comprehensive report received and approved;
5. That the total number of Learners and assessments to be certified aligns to those reported on IV and EA documentation;
6. All results are quality assured and signed off by RAP prior to submission to the QQI QBS portal;
7. The outcome of the assessment, verification and authentication processes is determined to be appropriate and has been undertaken in a timely manner;
8. All assessment procedures have been accurately observed and there is evidence of standardisation within the project, especially in situations where components may have been facilitated by multiple tutors.
9. There is appropriate and current evidence of record keeping and procedural application of assessment and administrative procedures;

10.   There is evidence that any suspected irregularities where highlighted and reported to the QQI Coordinator and explained to EA at time of visit;

11.   Issues arising from both the IV and EA are noted and recommendations, if necessary, are made for further review at the Academic Committee;

12.   Assessments where Learners may have presented as unsuccessful are reviewed to ensure that the result is correct and no mitigating circumstances were brought to the attention of the RAP before sign off.

Where instances of malpractice of assessment irregularities, or errors in the assessment tools have been reported, they must be brought to the attention of the QQI Coordinator as part of the Quality Assuring Assessment policy and, as set out in the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) in compliance with the qualifications and quality assurance (education and training) Act 2012 (revised updated to 18 November 2014).

Discussions, considerations and actions of the RAP are recorded in the RAP meeting minutes. The QQI Coordinator and Academic Manager then coordinate the finalising of the results on the QQI QBS and the communication of results to Learners.

*Role of the Programme Assessment Monitoring and Review (PAMR)
The purpose of the PAMR is to monitor, review and reflect on the day to day running of all programmes being delivered and to assure that they are done so in line with current legislation. This is fundamental so as to facilitate continuous improvement in response to feedback, to prepare for the revalidation of programmes and to develop new programmes for validation.

PAMR is fundamental to HCTS Quality Assurance process as it allows HCTS to:
•   Ensure content is current and in line with regulations and legislation including revisions to QQI standards, learning outcomes or guidelines issued;
•   Respond to requests/feedback from Learners, tutors and other stakeholders;
•   Implement corrective actions and evidence continuous improvement;
•   Ensure that programmes remain fit for purpose;

The PAMR will take responsibility for:
•   Maintaining a high level of standards associated with the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment delivery on behalf of HCTS;
•   Ensuring the quality and protection of the learner experience;
•   Reviewing all documentation and associated outcomes, including programme evaluations from Learners and tutors, updates and information received from awarding bodies, workplace monitoring reports (where relevant), IV and EA reports and determining required actions;
•   Provisionally sign off on programme changes, detailing recommendations and rationale to the Academic Committee for final approval;
•   Assist the Academic Manager and QQI Coordinator with the monitoring of learner and tutor attendance, learner progress, learner and tutor retention rates and learner certification statistics;

Sub-committees may be required from time to time on an ad hoc basis. Such sub-committees may include but are not limited to:

• Disciplinary Committee (Academic)
• Disciplinary Appeals Sub-Committee (Academic)

*Disciplinary Committee (Academic)
A disciplinary committee is established under the AC to investigate academic disciplinary hearings. These may include but are not limited to:

• Non attendance
• Malpractice of assessment
• Plagiarism of assessment

The disciplinary committee must have a quorum of three members;

1. QQI Coordinator
2. Tutor
3. Representative of AC

The sub-committee will have the responsibility to adjudicate on hearing presenting, allowing equal representations, deciding on the outcome and communicating the outcome to all parties. If the outcome is accepted, parties must agree to meet the terms laid out by the sub-committee in order to ensure the matter is resolved. Examples include but are not limited to:

• Change in an assessment grade (typically reduced marks).
• Withdrawal of the learner evidence from the certification process, pending a referral (learner can resubmit within an agreed timeframe. This may be subject to additional costs).
• Removal from the programme

The outcome will depend on the severity of the circumstances that have presented. The individual has the opportunity to appeal the findings and in doing so, must inform HCTS within ten days of the receipt of the findings.

*Disciplinary Appeals Sub-Committee (Academic)
The Disciplinary Appeals Sub-Committee will receive notice of appeal and will respond that the appeal has been lodged and will be investigated with the findings being communicated within ten days of the receipt of the appeal letter.

The sub-committee must have a quorum of 3 represented by the Academic Manager, an Independent Advisor and a tutor, none of whom have been involved in the investigation thus far.

The sub-committee will review the findings of the disciplinary committee, including all evidence originally presented. Decision-making must reflect one of the following:

• In agreement with the findings of the Disciplinary Committee;
• Overturn the findings of the Disciplinary Committee;
• Propose an alternative resolution.

The findings are documented, signed off and communicated in writing to the individual concerned within 10 days of the receipt of the appeal.

This is the final internal disciplinary mechanism available to HCTS. If the person is unhappy with the results of the appeal, they are advised to contact QQI.

1:2 – Management of Governance

HCTS is committed to undertaking key performance indicator (KPIs) reviews as per the annual task schedule.

To ensure efficiency and best practice with the management of governance, HCTS works towards the following objectives:
- Regular internal committees for governance in situ
- Clear structures for where the responsibility for where the quality assurance system sits

The Management Board recognises that it is accountable for the effectiveness of the organisation's QA system. Therefore, the Board undertakes regular risk assessments, adhering to the HCTS Risk Management Policy, maintains and keeps an up-to-date Risk Register, the primary objective of which is to ensure the safe and secure development, delivery, and governance of all aspects of further education and training, including environmental risk management. These processes and procedures assist the organisation at an operational level with ensuring compliance with all legal responsibilities (such as the QQI GDPR Guidelines 2018) and adherence to standards in further education and training.

Risk Management

The HCTS Risk Management system is developed to ensure HCTS has effective methods of identifying potential problems before they occur.

An integral part of HCTS academic and business operations is to complete risks assessments on all identified hazards and include these assessments in our safety statement, updating the risk register accordingly.

All risk assessments have an identification number which is referenced to in the risk register. The HCTS risk assessment and safety statement is audited annually in June. Associated KPI's are part of our Quality Management System which is discussed at Management Board meetings, Financial and Academic Committee meetings.

HCTS ensure that up-to-date training is carried, as and when required on any revisions made to policies and procedures as a result of the risk management plan. The HCTS procedures ensure that all quality operational, training and education systems are maintained.

INCIDENT REGISTER

Date	Incident Number	Incident Description	Date Opened	Date Closed	Closed By

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Incident / Accident / Near-Miss.   (Please circle)

Hazards	Is the hazard present? Y/N	What is the risk?	Risk rating 1 to 5 Refer to Matrix below	Control measures	Is this control in place? Y/N	If no, what actions are required to implement the control?	Person responsible	Date action completed

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSES

1st Goal Summary of Root Cause of the Problem or event	2nd Goal Suggestions on how to fix, compensate or learn from any underlying issues within the root cause	3rd Goal How do we learn from this analysis to systematically prevent further issues or to repeat successes

1:3 – Embedding a Quality Culture

All decisions made by HCTS, both at strategic and operational level are made in the knowledge of protecting the learner experience. HCTS are committed to ensuring that Learners needs are met in a financially viable manner thus ensuring business financial security.

Our Academic Manager ensures that decisions on education and training matters are made independently of commercial considerations.

The Academic Governance Committee systematically reviews all assessment outcomes and trends. These are addressed as part of the Academic Manager's workplace and a plan of action is devised and agreed. These are then discussed at Tutor appraisals and at staff meetings as and when appropriate.

HCTS 'Virtual on Line' is delivered through an on-line tutor led platform to maintain delivery of our training services during COVID 19. HCTS are in the process of evolving a more sustainable approach to blended learning through the development of an e-Commerce website which will incorporate an e-Learning Learning Management System (LMS) with learner login. It is anticipated that the HCTS e-Learning LMS and teaching, learning and assessment platform will make provision for the following areas (but not limited to):
- Moodle
- On line Discussion Forum
- On line Library

HCTS are working to ensure that the expertise and necessary resources are available to deliver and support blended learning programmes in a quality assured manner. This will include a schedule of continuous professional development (CPD).

Academic Governance Committee
- Oversight of Quality within HCTS
- Quality Policy Development
- Reports to Management Board

Academic Manager
- Quality in Teaching & Learning activities

Quality Assurance Delivered
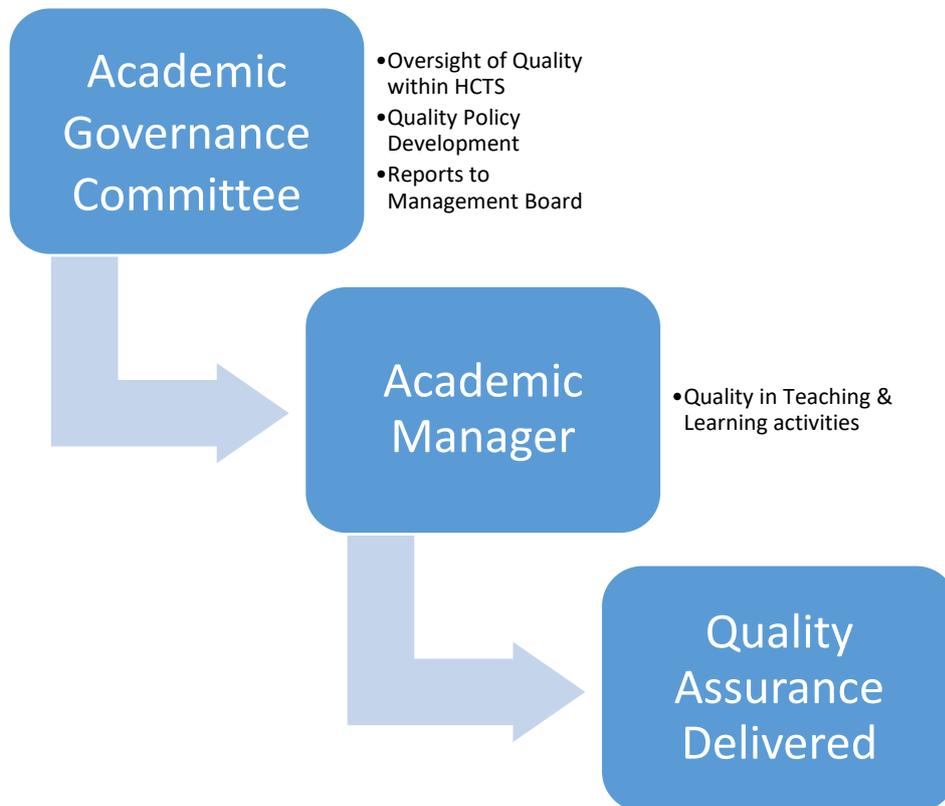
Figure 3: Operational responsibilities for Quality Assurance within HCTS

HCTS have clear systems for reporting of findings of monitoring and reviews to governance and action and review to be taken when required.

As part of staff induction all staff are made aware of the HCTS quality assurance system and of their role and responsibilities within it. Any change to the quality assurance system is made at a staff meeting which is documented.

Learners are made aware of the HCTS's quality assurance system and of their responsibilities and entitlements within it.

HCTS's have continued to use the classroom experience to support the Virtual On line learning delivery methods.

Collectively, HCTS work to an overall principle of embedding a quality culture by way of:

- Having clear and well-defined organisational values;
- Making provision for regular and current continuous professional development training in the areas of quality assurance and associated standards;
- Ensuring policies and procedures are reviewed, revised, updated and approved in a cyclical manner or, as and when required;
- Ensuring all updates re the above are shared in a timely and professional manner with all staff, tutors and Learners, including necessary revisions to documents such as Learner and Staff/Tutors handbooks;
- Ensuring the appropriate allocation of resources;
- Ensuring effective staff, Tutor and Learner engagement at both an operational and a strategic level;
- Communicating clearly and regularly with Regulators.

While HCTS have developed a system in compliance with QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and the Sector Specific Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers, it recognises that the effectiveness of the QA system is dependent on ongoing and systematic audits, evaluation and follow-up and reviews, all of which must be documented as HCTS strives to be an evidence-based organisation.

QA 2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

2.0 Policy Statement

HCTS policy on documented Approach to Quality Assurance is to develop and review a comprehensive Quality Assurance (QA) system that is fully documented, sets out the organisation's commitment to quality delivery and continuous improvement, and is capable of monitoring QA standards to ensure that these are being achieved.

QA policies, procedures and systems have been designed as a comprehensive system, enabling an effective professional system at an operational level.

2:1 – Documented policies and procedures

A cornerstone of our Quality Assurance is the control of documents. Document control is an essential preventive measure ensuring that only approved, current documentation is used throughout HCTS.

Review of policies and procedures is conducted annually or more regularly is indicated as some policies may be non-compliant with new laws and regulations. This assists HCTS in ensuring policies and supporting procedures are current, meaningful and workable at an operational level.

Regular reviews of the QA standards and all associated processes allows HCTS to keep up-to-date with regulations, technology, and industry based best practices. This is particularly important in ensuring the training, reskilling and/or upskilling of Learners as 'Safe Novices' in an industry that is created to support some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

HCTS strives to ensure that all documentation is seamless, coherent and user-friendly. Many policies and procedures reflective of the QA standards are informed by feedback regularly captured through both learner and tutor programme monitoring and feedback and, by way of conducting cyclical self-evaluation audits on specific programme themes.

2:2 - A comprehensive system

HCTS is committed to its Quality Assurance system and works to guarantee a streamlined approach to the use of the processes; to ensure that every time a process is actioned and performed, the same information, methods, skills and controls are applied in a consistent manner.

HCTS aim to ensure that the following 7 principles of a comprehensive quality management are embedded within its QA, both strategically and operationally;
1. Leadership
2. Relationship management
3. People engagement
4. Customer Focus (Learners and work-based providers)
5. Evidence-based decision making
6. Continuous Improvement
7. Approaches based on process

The HCTS system is designed as a formalised process to document those processes, all associated policies and procedures as well as the accompanying responsibilities for achieving quality standards. HCTS is committed to QA, with overall responsibility assigned to the Academic Governance Committee. Communication, continuous professional training and support, scheduled audits to capture constructive feedback through monitoring and evaluation, all assist in maintaining the highest level of quality systems and assurance

QA 3: PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION & TRAINING

3.0 Policy Statement

HCTS is committed to the integrity of the QQI Award and its policy on Programme Development and Approval, including delivery and review, is to ensure that the development and review processes applied to each further education and training programme makes provision for the capturing of all feedback from both the Learners and the employers who offer workplace experience. Programme development, approval, delivery and review is coordinated and managed to ensure compliance with the regulations of the awarding body (QQI) as well as industry relevant standards and legislation.

Through the diligence of the HCTS governance arrangements, HCTS ensures that policy and procedures specific to programme development, approval, delivery and review, incorporates feedback from and to Learners and tutors and all other relevant stakeholders. HCTS works to achieve this through the following processes:

• Capturing and collating feedback from Learners at the end of each individual programme teaching and learning session;

• Capturing and collating feedback from tutors as programmes are delivered and completed;

• Capturing and collating feedback from work-placement employers with a specific emphasis on learner monitoring and effective practice in supporting work-placement Supervisors;

• Making available the appropriate supports to Learners including ensuring Learners understand relevant policy and procedural content, documented and communicated within the Learner Handbook and they, the learner, are adequately assisted in their journey to certification through regular contact with HCTS staff face to face, by phone, email, website and/or social media;

• Monitors, reviews and evaluates all stakeholder feedback on a continuous basis and in line with HCTS audit scheduling enabling key performance indicators (KPIs) to be regularly considered against outcomes observed;

• Maintaining currency with FET associated trends and adaptations to or new standards/codes of practice and ensure they are integrated into new or existing programmes as and where relevant and necessary;

• Compliance with a wide range of legislation and regulations which are appropriate to both education and training practices, as well as the industries within which the training and awards offered by HCTS reflect.

To ensure a consistently high standard of teaching, learning and assessment delivery by qualified staff, HCTS are committed to allocating the appropriate tutor to the relevant programme of training and/or, component award.

HCTS is committed to undertaking regular programme reviews and continuously seek to measure accountability to compliance with policies and procedures.

3:1 – Programme development and approval

HCTS is committed to the development of programmes that respond to the needs of its Learners, workplace provisions and potential employers. The HCTS's Policy 'Programme Development and Validation' details the stages HCTS work through when undertaking programme development, particularly for QQI approval.

Curriculum content is also developed to reflect the ever changing needs within the health and social care sector, taking into consideration issues such as changes to standards and regulations that may be imposed by HIQA and the more current updates to infection control, as directed by the HSE and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. All programmes are mapped to the award standards and indicators as directed in the Awards Type Descriptors and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Grid of Level Indicators, as well as the QQI documented learning outcomes. HCTS recognises that the learning outcomes are 'indicative' and is cognisant of updating the minimum intended module learning outcomes to reflect current work/industry based practice, regulations and legislation as well as effective practice as it relates to the subject matter.

HCTS comply with the 'Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and training' as observed by QQI. By following the HCTS policy, programme development is mapped to QQI criteria and the specific major, special purpose and component award specific validation requirements, learning outcomes and if relevant, assessment procedures. HCTS appreciate the revised creativity providers has with assessment methodology and so, should HCTS believes it to be beneficial to the assessment experience, changes to assessment techniques may be embedded into the QQI CAS programme descriptors per component, where necessary.

HCTS AC prepares each programme application using the CAS Compound Programme Descriptor Template and supporting guidelines and works to align all curriculum content and required information to those guidelines.

The design for each programme is coordinated by the AC, with the Academic Manager appointed as the primary role to lead. Oversight is provided by the Management Board, in consultation with tutors, so as to ensure to develop content that meets the perceived training needs.

The Academic Manager oversees the following elements of programme development:
- Giving appreciation to the relevant entry, transfer and progression criteria.
- Giving consideration to the curriculum content and any special validation requirements (SVRs).
- Extricating and where relevant, integrating learning outcomes, either within a component or across multiple components.
- Considering and giving credence to appropriate delivery methodologies, particularly during the current pandemic and ensuring an appropriate balance between the virtual classroom/in-person and self-directed learner learning.

- Considering the application of appropriate assessment techniques, instruments and weighting.
- Developing marking schemes/rubrics/matrices - as appropriate.
- Assessing the requirement of programme resources so as to ensure adequate resources are available to deliver programmes to the highest possible standard.
- Administration support requirements.
- Detailing the relevant work experience requirements and ensuring Work Experience Guidance to both Learners and Workplace Supervisors is up to date and reflective of both curriculum content, assessment details and changes within social policy, standards and/or regulations.
- Observing that up-to-date PEL arrangements are in place.

Formal approval from the Management Board is provided to the AC prior to final submission to QQI.

Protection for Enrolled Learners

As required by QQI, HCTS complies with and offers protection for all enrolled Learners (PEL). PEL will only be activated should a programme have to close or cancel unexpectedly, or closure of the business. Upon programme commencement, HCTS is committed to its delivery, aiming to ensure its completion in full so as to protect the learner. Although marketed as major awards, programmes are delivered on a component-by-component basis and last a maximum of 4 weeks. HCTS do not commence programmes unless there are sufficient numbers (minimum of 8 Learners). No fees are paid in advance of the programme commencement. Learners are encouraged to pay fees on the first day of the programme with a booking hawk link using stripe.

Should a learner need to postpone their participation in a programme, HCTS has procedures in place to facilitate them through a programme deferral or the issue of a refund if necessary.

PROGRAMME NEED	PROGRAMME DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT	VALIDATION AND APPROVAL
Evaluation of Learner Feedback Evaluation of Stakeholder feedback QQI guidelines and component specification Target Leaner group	**Academic Manager oversees Programme Development on behalf of AC** • Programme Design • Learning Outcomes • Delivery methodologies • Entry criteria • Assessment methodologies	**Formal Approval from Management Board**
Business Analysis Budget for: validation development Programme delivery Administration support Tutor support Marketing strategy	**Programme Resources** • Administration Support • Tuition requirements • Face to Face Delivery • Blended Learning delivery (Covid 19 Contingency) • Work Experience requirements • PEL	**FC approval of financial investments required** **AC give approval re academic elements of programme for validation application**
Meetings Academic Manager along with AC prepares final documentation for Management Board approval	**QQI Validation Application Draft**	**QQI Validation process** • Validation submission to QQI • QI panel meeting and follow up • QQI approval/refusal/ mandatory changes and resubmission **Successful Approval** Programme launch and marketing

Figure 4: New Programme Design & Development

3:2 – Learner admission, progression and recognition

Learner Admission & Entry Requirements

QQI approved programmes include details on the HCTS programme learner entry requirements and progression opportunities. Once validated by QQI, this information is published on the HCTS website and any corresponding marking and promotional materials.

Typical Learner Admission & Entry Requirements include:

Age:
- Participants must have reached the statutory school leaving age.

Gender:
- Participants may be male or female. HCTS invites an equal number of male and female participants to apply for all courses since all employers including the caring industry cater for equal numbers of male and female clients.

Education/Training Level/Standard:
- A standard equivalent to Leaving Certificate or Junior Certificate with relevant work experience is desirable. We can provide potential applicants with information on Local providers of literacy and numeracy skills if required prior to taking Level 5 courses. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is practiced.

Personal Skills:
- Participants need good communication skills, outgoing personality, be confident with a mild intonation and clear diction, a friendly manner and must be enthusiastic.

Previous Experience:
- A proven interest or previous experience in the area of proposed study is advantageous.

Typically, QQI programme admission criteria is based on:
- The NFQ award level;
- QQI component award specification;
- The approved programme delivery method;
- The required learner entry competencies such as language proficiency (please observe below) and agreed previous qualifications and/or experience or equivalent.

HCTS is committed to ensuring that all applicants and registered Learners to HCTS programmes have an understanding of programme requirements, appreciation their own levels of learning and, the capacity to work towards the achievement of the programme learning outcomes.

English Language Requirements

HCTS intends to address the need for educational equity, access and rigor for all Learners.

As some Learners are expected to participate in work placement experience, and as all HCTS teaching, learning and assessment materials are developed and facilitated in the English language and, as HCTS adopts academic content standards within its programmes with the goal of ensuring that Learners are adequately prepared for employment and/or upskilling within the health and social care sector, HCTS wishes to emphasise that all potential Learners, at the point of application, are required to demonstrate proficiency in both written and spoken English language to a general standard academic. As is required by HCTS, and in the specific entry requirements of the course they are applying for, the minimum acceptable level of English language proficiency for admission to HCTS programmes is Junior Certificate English Language or an International English Language Testing (IELTS) average score of 6.0 with a minimum score of 5.5 in each component; listening, reading, writing and speaking; as per the IELTS Scale, or equivalent. HCTS also stresses that IELTS (or equivalent) scores must be current, having been successfully completed within three months prior to application. This is to allow for challenges that may present due to second language attrition or issues applicants whose first language is English have with literacy and/or verbal communication.

Evidence of English language proficiency will be required and HCTS reserves the right to seek further evidence of English language proficiency prior to confirming an applicants' place on a programme. This may include, but is not limited to, a short verbal presentation, short essay or the completion of a more detailed application process to the programme of choice.

Learner Registration

Registration enquiries are managed initially by phone, email or via the HCTS website. The QQI Co-ordinator responds to enquiries in the first instance and will provide the potential learner with a current programme schedule, detailing the structure of the specific programme of interest. Information can also be posted. Learners can also be enrolled by employers or CE Supervisors.

The QQI Coordinator is responsible for all registrations of each learner. A detailed registration process includes the completion of an enrolment form and a short, informal interview. This process provides HCTS with the opportunity to determine basic yet important information in terms of contact details, recent work/education history, and which specific programme is of interest and why. Learners are encouraged at this stage to disclose any learner assistance requirements, including reasonable accommodation (RA). This enables HCTS to ensure that correct RA supports can be considered and implemented in a timely manner.

Learner Recognition:

The statutory requirements regarding Ireland's facilitation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) is clearly set out in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training)

Act 2012. The Act documents responsibility of regarding the development and implementation of a consistent policy led approach to RPL.

QQI defines RPL as;

'…a process which is used to evaluate skills and knowledge gained through life outside of formal education and training, for the purpose of recognising life achievements against a given set of standards or learning outcomes.'

Through its Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy and associated procedures, we aim to ensure that our QA systems emulates the principles of recognizing Learners prior learning and in doing so, safeguards learner achievement in a manner that is reliable, valid, fair and consistently aligned to the standard of the award in question.

As with all other QQI providers, HCTS defines RPL as;

'… the assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning; either formal, informal or non-formal; the outcome of which is then used to determine credit outcomes of the individual's application for credit against the award'.

HCTS supports the process of RPL assessment as it recognises the benefits of RPL in supporting potential applicants to acquire their formal qualifications and thereby, contribute to enhancing employability and lifelong learning opportunities.

Taking into consideration the importance of prior learning, HCTS will not register Learners to go through a programme of learning when they already have the knowledge, understanding and competence to meet the assessment criteria. Alternatively, HCTS will give recognition to the prior learning via RPL and, enable the individual as an applicant to demonstrate their existing capabilities and know-how of the approved component programme assessment criteria through knowledge, understanding or skills they already have. HCTS respects that this is a nationally acknowledged assessment process which must be developed, approved and implemented within regulated standards.

HCTS manages RPL as an overall process which embraces two sub-strands as outlined below;
(1) Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) – this is the process whereby an applicant seeks formal recognition of prior learning they have achieved through experience, such as career, professional or voluntary work, and/or self-directed non-accredited study.

(2) Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) – this is the process whereby an applicant seeks formal recognition of prior learning from qualifications they already hold but may not be recognised within the rules of 'combination' of the proposed qualification.

The HCTS RPL policy and procedure document details the operational processes of administering RPL.

Transfer and Progression

Learners who successfully complete a QQI component award or Major Award will have further learning opportunities within a learner progression pathway with HCTS to complete further component awards or complete major award 5M4339.

The HCTS Fees Policy is outlined below;

- Instalment Payment Option:
  HCTS offers all Learners interest-free, weekly easy payment options, which is a binding contract. The total amount owed is due on award completion (the final date of directed learning/in-person teaching/virtual learning class).

- Grants / Funding
  Any learner receiving funding for a programme is responsible for ensuring that their programme is completed within the specified timeframe as set out by the funding agency, otherwise, the learner may incur the full cost of the programme.
  HCTS do accept Social Welfare Funding, which the learner must arrange when meeting with their local Social Welfare office. This includes the receipt of an approved TESG Form. This process can fund the learner up to €500 towards a QQI programme with HCTS.

- Learner ID cards
  HCTS may issue learner ID cards, upon request. The cost is €10 per card. Official photo identification must be presented to HCTS to enable this process.

- Refund Policy
  The HCST Cancellation Policy requires that in the event of a learner needing to cancel their booking, a request must be received in writing by HCTS, no later than 7 days prior to the commencement date of the particular programme signed up to. HCTS cannot guarantee that a receipt of any written request less than 7 days prior to course commencement will be accommodated.
  Where a learner books within 7 days of the start date of the programme, the learner may cancel their booking within 24 hours of the programme start date.
  Where a learner cannot undertake training on the dates booked, HCTS will offer alternative dates and make every effort to accommodate the learner within a reasonable time frame of 3 months. In the event of an unforeseen personal crisis HCTS will address this on an individual basis.

- On Line Courses (Non-Accredited QQI Programmes)
  Request for refunds for online courses must be made in writing within 5 days of booking. Once an online course has been accessed HCTS will not grant a refund.

- Handling Charge
  All refunds may be subject to a processing charge from the online booking site.

- Discount/Special Offers

HCTS do not offer or approve refunds in respect of a learner registering and paying for a discounted programme or, where programmes have been promoted as a special offer.

ACCESS	TRANSFER & PROGRESSION	RECOGNITION OF PRIOR EARNING (RPL)
Check HCTS entry requirements for QQI	Advise learner that information is available re: progression – HCTS website, monthly newsletter, Learner Handbook	RPL is done on an individual basis.
Learners' competencies and suitability e.g., English competencies	Enrol Learner to further HCTS component awards	RPL request form completed with copies of existing certificates
Access prior learning and/or experiences	Progression to studying Level 7/8 HE courses through HCTS (although these are outside the scope of HCTS QA manual)	RPL decision made by Academic Manager and QQI consulted if assistance with same required
If suitable complete enrolment procedure		

Figure 5: Overview of Programme Admission, Progression & RPL

3:3 – Programme monitoring and review

HCTS is committed to development, delivery and effective management of high-quality education. HCTS has in place a comprehensive audit system which aims to ensure an effective, sound and evidence-based approach to the continual improvement of HCTS programmes, accredited and non-accredited.

HCTS reviews each policy and accompanied procedural approaches on a XXX schedule, with the ultimate aim of mapping strategy to both operational and professional practice. This includes supporting all staff to be diligently aware of regulations and required standards and procedures.

The HCTS AC keep abreast of legislation and supporting regulations/standards in relation programme content e.g., Nursing Homes Standards, HSA guidelines, HIQA, H.S.E, WHO, so as to evaluate programme needs in relation to curriculum development.

Ongoing review of Learner/Tutor feedback is carried on completion of each course to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement. HCTS capture both tutors and Learners programme evaluation feedback by utilising the survey monkey platform. Programme evaluation forms are emailed to each learner and a comprehensive analysis completed. The HCTS Learner Programme Evaluations are designed to evaluate the entirety of the learning experience.

The audit process is applied here to so as to collate findings and circulate reports to the AC and Management Board.
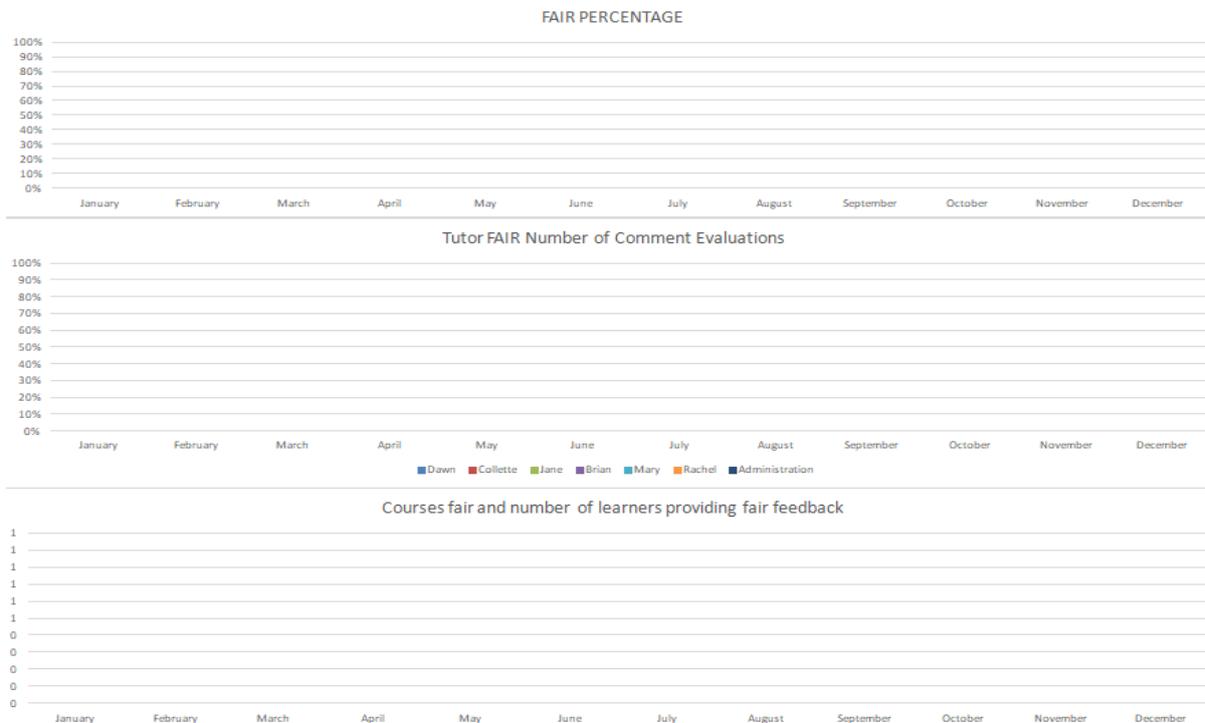

Figure 6: Learner Feedback Analysis KPI Report

HCTS reviews and assures the effective teaching, learning and assessments of the QQI validated programmes and their learning outcomes by way of conducting external benchmarking through its FET network and its external authentication processes, of HCTS assessment and grading compared to similar colleges of further education.

- HCTS is committed to the ongoing review of its programmes in order to enhance the effectiveness of its delivery methodologies, the continued relevance of content, and the availability of appropriate facilities and resources.
- Learner enrolments, retention, completion and progression is monitored by Tutor course evaluation form and completed analysis for management/academic committee meetings.
- HCTS regularly monitors and reports on the resources required for programmes including human, financial, physical and ICT.
- Curriculum Review is discussed at each monthly tutor meetings and formal review is conducted on an ongoing basis to ensure we are complying with updates and regulation changes. All reviews and updates are conducted by the Academic Manager
- HCTS recognises the importance of improving staff teaching and assessment skills as fundamental to the monitoring and review of programmes and is committed to:
  - Listening and responding to tutors,
  - Providing opportunities for tutors to share strategies with one another,
  - Continuous Professional Development (as outlined in QA 4)
  - The coordination and execution of cross-moderation activities in the assessing of assessment process (outlined in QA 6)

The Academic Manager is responsible for Curriculum Review;

- Ongoing review of the quality of the academic material.
- Develop relevant and up-to-date academic materials to enhance the Learners' acquisition of knowledge, manipulation of information, and reasoning capacity.
- To audit and update training and information documents as when necessary and relevant.
- To report to AC for approval.
- To update all staff/tutors.

HCTS have a strict policy on ensuring all information about programmes is subject to internal approval prior to publication.
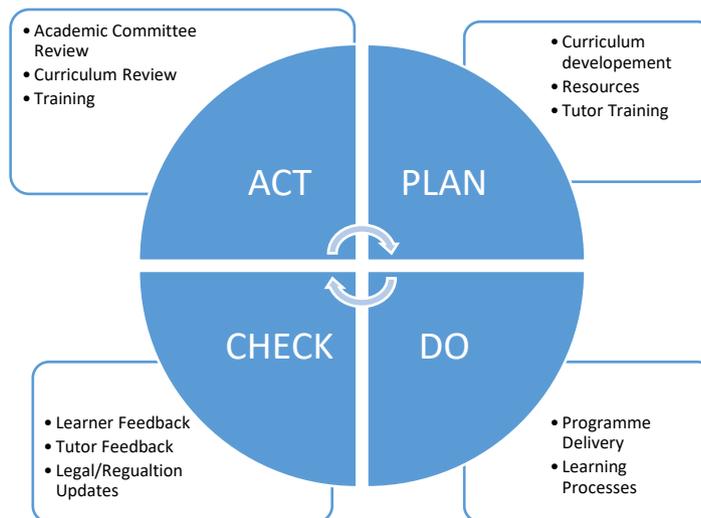
Figure 7: PDCA approach to Programme Reviews

Programmatic Review

HCTS will undertake a formal programmatic self-evaluation review of the 5M4339 QQI major award on a two-yearly cycle. The aim of the programmatic review is to ensure a comprehensive gap analysis of elements requiring attention, revisions and refreshing.

QA 4: STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

4.0 Policy Statement

HCTS Ltd is an equal opportunity employer and aims not to discriminate on any grounds.

HCTS has two separate recruitment procedures detailed in the following section, and reserve the right to use whichever one they deem to be appropriate to fill any vacancies that arise.

4:1 - Staff Recruitment

4.1.1

It is normal procedure that in a situation where a vacancy arises, HCTS may offer the position to suitable qualified person(s) with whom the company has encountered or has knowledge of from the course of our business. It has been the experience of HCTS that this is one of the most successful ways to source experienced and reliable staff. If in an offer of employment is made in such a way HCTS will require evidence of suitable qualifications and experience before contracts are completed, along with a thorough reference check from former employers.

In addition, HCTS comply with The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 and reserve the right to require all employees to receive a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau before commencement of employment.

4.1.2

If suitable candidate(s) for a position cannot be sourced through the procedure outlined above, or at a time/within a time-frame that HCTS deems necessary, any open vacancies shall be advertised publicly. Interested persons shall be invited to apply by forwarding a current curriculum vitae and cover letter. Candidates deemed to have met the requirements of the role advertised will be short listed based on their qualifications and experience and contacted for interview.

The interviews will follow a structured approach and will be competency based to ensure that every interviewee is treated fairly and can demonstrate why they are best suited to the role (please refer to interview procedure/ template for more information). Candidates will be scored and ranked during the interview process to identify the most suitable person to fill the role. The candidate that scores the highest during the interview process shall be offered the position. If an offer of employment is made HCTS will require evidence of suitable qualifications and experience before contracts are completed, along with a thorough reference check from former employers.

As outlined in 4.1.1, HCTS comply with The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 and reserve the right to require all employees to

receive a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau before commencement of employment.

HCTS ensure that the programme needs are incorporated into the recruitment processes. This includes;
1. Developing tailored job descriptions and person specifications.
2. Detailing any online skills that may be essential to the role.
3. Detailing the pedagogical requirements of the course to be facilitated.

The process of advertising the vacancy is as follows;
All vacancies will be advertised through one of/ all of the following medias, depending on the role and the specific requirements of the position:
- Local newspapers
- National newspapers
- Job websites
- LinkedIn

Each position advertised will include the following;
1. Details of HCTS as a Ltd company
2. HCTS Equal Opportunity statement
3. Title of the position being advertised
4. Description of position – primary role and key responsibilities
5. Location of position (including requirements of flexibility, should travel be required)
6. Qualifications and experience required for the position
7. The shape of the contract: Full time/ part time/ temporary
8. Instructions on how to apply, including sending copies of qualifications
9. Closing date
10. Provisional interview date

Selection Criteria
Selection is based on the alignment of the quality of the information submitted by applicants against the requirements outlined in the advertisement.

The interview process will be coordinated upon the completion of the shortlisting. Applicants shortlisted will be telephoned/emailed and invited to attend for an interview on a specified date and at a specified time.

Each applicant invited for interview will be required to do facilitate a brief presentation during the interview which will be followed by questions, based on information documented within the applicant's CV and cover letter. The final phase of the interview will involve the asking of behavioural questions and evidence of qualifications; accredited and non-accredited, as listed in the candidates CV.
The successful candidate will be offered the position prior to letters of regret being forwarded to those applicants who were unsuccessful. This is to manage the possibility of the 'most' successful applicant not accepting the position.

Interviews

- A list of interview questions is prepared in advance.
- These questions will be based on the job description, person specification, authentication of the qualifications and responses to the behavioural questions.
- A marking system and score sheet is employed for reasons of consistency, fairness and transparency in the selection process.
- The interview structure be executed in the same standardised manner to each application;
    - The interview will open with welcome and introductions
- The candidate will then be invited to facilitate their presentation
- Candidates will be asked a range of questions which will enable verification of experience as detailed in their CV
- Evidence of the learner's qualifications will be checked with photocopies taken
- Candidates is offered the opportunity to ask questions

The position is offered to the candidate with the highest mark, subject to references being satisfactory. A Contract of Employment is signed by all employees.

PLANNING	SELECTION	NEW STAFF PROCEDURES
Job Description and Person Specification approved	Process applications for shortlisting	Induction
Pedagogical requirements (one NFQ level above course level to be taught)	Arrange and confirm interviews	Evaluation – to assess needs of new staff member and cpd development
Advertisement of Position	Selection of successful candidate(s)	Academic Manager to agree KPIs & performance management objectives
	Issue of Successful/Regret Letter	Academic Manager to ensure new staff member has completed and understood the Tutor Induction Handbook
	Contract of Employment issued to selected candidate	

Figure 8: Recruitment Process

4:2 – Staff Communication

HCTS facilitates a monthly staff meeting with tutors and administration. Monthly meeting arrangements including dates and times are communicated using WhatsApp. Confirmation or apologies are communicated through returned WhatsApp message. A meeting agenda is emailed to all prior to meeting date with minutes from the previous meeting briefly discussed for accuracy and matters arising. Duration of meetings is approximately one to one and a half hours.

Please tick the Meeting type						
Consultancy	☐	Management	☐	Academic	☐	
RAP	☐	Financial	☐	Other (Please Name)		

Date:
Attendance:
Apologies:

Read out Minutes of last meeting, follow up actions and outcomes Please Tick ☐
Agenda for Today's Meeting
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8. Reviews, Incidents, Complaints, CPD, Audit Reports Trend Analysis

Reviews	Date	Completed frequency	Last Reviewed date	Next planned review date
Incidents/Accident/Near Misses/Complaints		Ongoing		
Revised Risk Assessments		Ongoing		
1Policy/Procedure Review Considerations QA 1- 11 QQI/Legislation/Government Updates		Ongoing		
Continuous Professional development Name:		Ongoing		
Internal Verification Report		2 monthly PRN		

Cross Moderation Report		2 Monthly PRN		
External Authentication Report		2 monthly PRN		
External Evaluator Report		Annually - January		
Benchmarking Report		Annually - July		
Academic Audit Report and trend analysis		See annual schedule		
Business Operations Audit Report and trend analysis		See annual schedule		
Management Committee		See annual schedule		
Staffing				

Meeting Minutes	Time Allocated	Person Responsible	Due Completion Date

Curriculum Development							
Award Title	What change has been identified and Why	Assessment Tool to be changed	Date changed	Reference Number/Document Number updated – new number & date	Archived Number	Curriculum Development Updated	Completed by
		1. 2. 3.					
		1. 2. 3.					
		1. 2. 3.					

HCTS encourage ongoing communication with all staff

- Monthly meetings
- Business WhatsApp group for all staff (used only during working hours)
- Emails (all staff members are issued with an organisational email address)
- Monthly newsletter distributed to all staff

Each Tutor is required to complete a Course Evaluation form upon completing of each of their facilitated programmes. This is coordinated via Survey Monkey and an analysis of all information shared is undertaken and presented at both the monthly staff meeting and at relevant governance meetings.
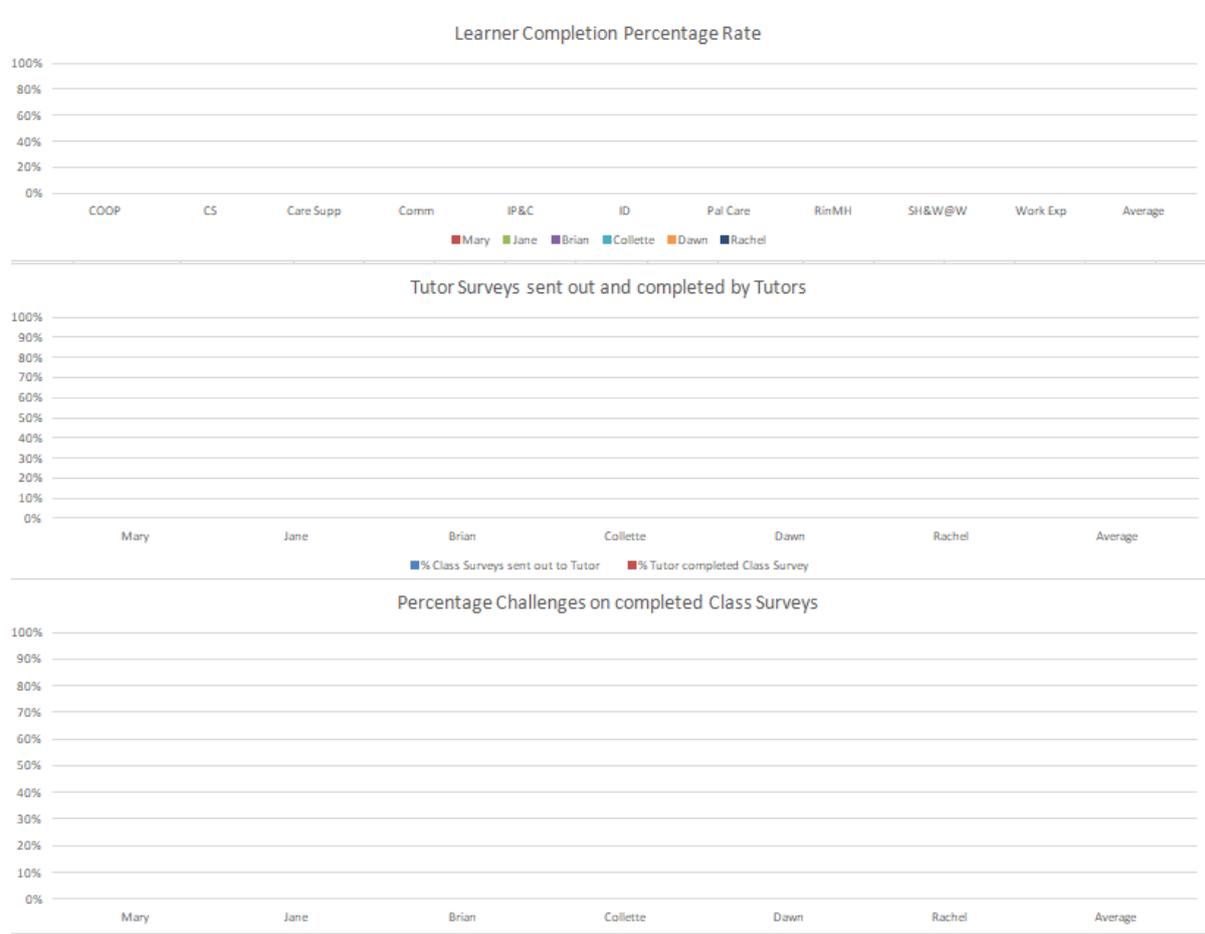
Figure 9: Tutor Feedback Analysis KPI

All staff are encouraged to provide ongoing constructive and structured feedback and suggestions. This may be in the context of programmes and/or organisational wide issues.

Tutor monitoring is officially conducted annually or more regular if indicated. The aim is to monitor the quality of it teaching and learning across its training and education programmes.

HCTS have an excellent relationship with contract staff and value them as essential people to the overall success of the organisation. HCTS manages it's working partnerships with all staff members, employed and contracted via;

- Ensuring staff availability prior to scheduling any course. Emails are sent with confirmation of availability returned and documented
- Tutors must inform the Academic Manager verbally and in writing (preferably via email) if they are unavailable
- A Tutor 'Monthly Timetable' is accessible to all staff in the organisations Professional Dropbox account

- Each tutor is 'colour coded' in the timetable
- Only the Academic Manager or the Director has the authority to alter any schedule in timetable
- There is adequate resource of contract staff and strict lesson plans to ensure classes are seamlessly completed without any reduction in quality training delivery
- Contract Tutor are Involved in tutors/lecturers in programme team meetings and in programme development and review processes
- All information in relation to their programme areas are communicated
- Tutor Training Monitoring identifies if staff development is required

Virtual Online Training:
- Strategies and processes for the appointment, induction and training of staff to deliver Virtual Online training
- Professional development and appraisal arrangements for teaching and support.

INDUCTION	STAFF REVIEWS	MANAGEMENT
New staff engage with staff induction procedures	Tutor Monitoring and Development completed	Feedback on Staff Development
Academic Manager conducts a training needs analysis	Tutor Handbook	Approve Training Budget
Any areas of staff development or areas of expertise identified	Staff Meetings	Academic Committee monitor approved training

Figure 10: Staff Communications Process

4:3 - Staff Development

The HCTS Academic Manager coordinates the induction programme for all new staff, including tutors. The induction programme focuses on the following key areas;

- Further information about the position to which the tutor/staff member has been recruited to
- Introduction to key personnel within HCTS
- Contract of employment, including terms and conditions
- Procedures for expense claims
- Tutor/Staff Handbook (must be completed within 3 months of commencement)
- Details of Disciplinary procedures
- Code of Conduct
- Safety & Health requirements, including the HCTS Safety Statements
- Equality Policy
- Copy of all HCTS policies and procedures

All members of staff are entitled to training and development opportunities. This can be achieved through;
- Coaching
- Work shadowing
- Monitoring
- Courses (internal and external to HCTS)
- Attending management meeting and conferences, as authorised by the Director

HCTS identifies any training and development needs via the following methods;
- Annual Performance Reviews (staff are required to complete their performance review documentation 2 weeks before the scheduled appointment)
- Interim review to take place in June to ensure staff is on target to achieve objectives and training
- Learner Evaluation Forms, Programme Monitoring Forms and Stakeholder Evaluations

HCTS encourage all staff to engage with a Community of Practice in their field of subject matter expertise. This may happen internally via HCTS or, through an external Community of Practice (CoP) with partner organisations.

PLANNING	STAFF DEVELOPMENT	MANAGEMENT
Induction of new staff	help design and co-ordinate training programmes and development days	Review Training Budget
Tutor Monitoring Review	Staff Development plan - factor in national or local policy initiatives	Evaluation – to measure impact of staff development
Identifying staff development needs	Tutor Monitoring Development Form	
Analysing staff development needs	Design and co-ordinate training programmes and development days	

Figure 11: Staff Training & Development Process

QA 5: TEACHING & LEARNING

5.0 Policy Statement

HCTS's position on teaching and learning is to assess Learners fairly and consistently and in a standardised and transparent manner, reflective of both programme requirements and national standards. HCTS empower an open learning community that values critical reflection and fosters personal and professional development for all Learners, tutors and staff.

HCTS recognises the prior learning and experience of Learners, and values diversity, including learning styles. HCTS incorporates online technology as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic and in line with QQI contingency arrangements to enhance Learners' experience.

HCTS engages with the wider national and international community of practice to enhance teaching and research

HCTS is committed to communicating with Learners, ensuring their awareness of the learning process and programme requirements, thus assisting the learner to engage to the best of their ability.

HCTS have developed and practice a teaching and learning ethos that is reflected in all staff and tutor's professional performance and experiences, academic qualifications, specific areas of subject matter knowledge and the understanding of the importance of creating a community of Learners that reflects mutual respect.

HCTS is committed to ensuring that all of its' programmes of education and training and related services are delivered in a manner that recognises diversity promptly addresses discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity for all.

HCTS works to ensure that an effective teaching and learning strategy is professionally implemented through all programmes so as to maximise learning and ensure an engaging, productive and safe learning experience for all Learners.

HCTS develops and embeds within its teaching, learning and assessment strategy, the following 3 key principles for effective learning:

1.   HCTS strives to understand each individual learner's context; both past, present and future;
2.   HCTS works to establish and respond to each individual learner's existing level of knowledge, know-how and competency;
3.   HCTS aims to provide adequate and appropriate academic supports and accommodations for each individual learner, as necessary, relevant and required.

The teaching and learning policy is developed on the elements of teaching experience, qualifications, subject matter knowledge and understanding the mutually-respectful 'teacher-learner' relationship.

Prior to Covid-19, HCTS only facilitated in-person learning, providing safe and inclusive learning environments. Continuous monitoring of teaching and learning has demonstrated that the migration of teaching and learning provision into the online-virtual learning space has not affected the quality of the teaching and learning experience. In fact, HCTS Learners have 'connected' with relative ease. Through its audit system, HCTS continues to continuously monitor and review practice and performance of both Learners and tutors, reflecting the organisation's commitment to those standards relating to internal reviews, self-monitoring and self-evaluation, the minutiae of which is outlined in QA 3 and QA 11.

Programme Delivery

HCTS coordinate the teaching and learning process of each programme using a standardised approach. This means that each programme is set up for teaching and learning in a consistent way. Each individual tutor is fully resourced with all training materials, resources and equipment necessary. Lesson plans, curriculum content, formative and summative assessment materials and relevant checklists will be distributed to the Tutors (via their Tutor Records and Professional Dropbox – see below) prior to the commencement of each programme.

The HCTS strategy to teaching, learning and assessment is operationally underpinned by the Tutor Record system:

The QQI Coordinator organises Tutor Record for each individual course, following the checklist/process as detailed below:*
- Tutors are issued with a colour code that is used to identify them on the associated programme time-table and programme specific folder.

- Each Tutor Record is available to Tutors in the HCTS Professional Dropbox and is identified by:
  - Programme Start Date
  - Award Name
  - Tutors First Name e.g., July 1st Care Skills (Tutors First Name).
- Each folder is organised in year and then by individual months.
- Each Tutor Record has the following individual pages:
  1. Award Title page to identify
     a. Programme ID
     b. Tutors Full Name
     c. Programme Start Date
     d. Programme Completion Date
     e. Learner Submission Date
     f. Tutor Submission Date to Office
  2. Summary Results Sheet
  3. Alphabetic Order Form of Learner Name and details for entry to QQI QBS
  4. Learner Feedback – Tutors enter copy of all feedback sent to Learners
  5. Tutor Session Check list – to show compliance or non-compliance with systems 'in pace'
  6. Sign In Sheet – Each learner's details are entered pre-programme and attendance is completed per session by the tutor. Comments entered if Learners are absent or joining late or leaving early.
  7. Lessons Plans – signed off per session by each tutor.
  8. Accident/Incident Sheet – signed off per session, even if no incident is reported.
  9. Risk Assessment Sheet - if required by tutor.
  10. Examination procedures – as and when required.
  11. Internal Verification Record for learner group completed and Audit Report updated.
  12. Cross Moderation Record for learner group completed and Audit Report updated.

Pages 1,2,3,4 for all Class tutor Folders are printed off and made available for the specific and relevant external authentication event.

- Each completed programme is organised by submitting all Learners in each 'Course ID' to the office using the tutor colour coded folders supplied.
- This assists the EA in identifying each tutor's folders.
- Each learner will have a section identified by a number which is on the Summary Results sheet; beside the Learners' name and at the beginning of each of the tutor colour coded folder.
- Learner portfolios must have included within them:
  - Completed and signed cover page
  - Completed and signed Marking Sheets, including evidence of marking allocation via marking schemes/rubrics or other
  - Signed assessment briefs for per component, with completed assessments
  - Briefs must be completed with
    - Issue date
    - Submission date
    - Signed Statement of Authorship

The HCTS Theoretical Approach to Teaching and Learning
Education and training is changing all the time. The experience of an adult learner is more transformative now than ever before. Recent years has exposed profound challenges in education and as a result has offered opportunities to reflect and review. Keeping an often, diverse group of learners 'on-board' requires motivation and to understand learner's motivation, it is imperative to understand what is they want to learn, why they want to learn and what is it about learning than can help them to achieve what *they* want to achieve.

HCTS is committed to supporting the individual learner and respects that adults each learn in different ways from one another. HCTS adopts a combined theoretical approach to its teaching and learning strategy; learning flows partly from psychological theories of learning, I.e., those that influence and change a learners' understanding, partly from pragmatic observation, i.e., working collaboratively with specific focus on interpersonal skills, turn-taking, responding to non-verbal skills, cooperation and negotiation and partly from experiential learning, i.e., through direct and active participation, work-based/on the job learning and reflection. HCTS embraces Bloom's Taxonomy and the acquisition of three domains and the hierarchical/progressive levels of learning;
1. Knowledge - Cognitive
2. Skills - Psychomotor
3. Attitudes - Affective

HCTS is currently embracing the emerging Universal Design for Learning and plans to integrate the principles and values into all programmes currently facilitated and under development, including non-accredited courses.

Tutors are each inducted into their position by way of attending informal briefings on theoretical approaches to adult learning and development with the aim being that educators have the capacity to offer an inclusive learning environment, celebrate diversity within the classroom and promote a 'growth mindset'.

Modes of Delivery
HCTS traditionally has offered direct learning experiences facilitating teaching and learning from a physical classroom environment. However, the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020 resulted in a swift transition to the virtual learning environment where all classrooms were coordinated via Zoom. This has resulted in HCTS working towards a blended learning strategy and future application for approval as it has been acknowledged that the inclusion of a blended learning methodology to incorporate diverse modes of synchronous and asynchronous learning can be of added learning value to all.

Currently, HCTS continues to focus on and utilise teaching and learning methodologies that complement the 'traditional' classroom, albeit a VLE classroom, which are inclusive of but not limited to power-point presentations of information, group discussions, Q&A sessions and self-directed learning activities that allow for measured and appropriate formative and

summative learning. Feedback to learners is continuously given with HCTS embracing both *feed-back and feed-forward* strategies, allowing for a dynamic interaction between tutors and learners and encouraging learners to learn to self-regulate in the context of learning and assessment engagement via the feedback provided.

Academic Integrity

HCTS is committed to ensuring that the fundamental principles of Academic Integrity are apparent through the provision of all its' education and training programmes. Underpinned by the commitment to the demonstrable principles of honesty and morality within its' academic practices, HCTS works to a solid set of policies, procedures and practices so as to safeguard the learner's learning experience and the tutor's professional integrity.

The HCTS commitment to the process of academic integrity is captured within its' wide-ranging suite of policies and supporting procedures and is embedded into its promotion of the learning experience, permitting both Learners and tutors the freedom to develop new ideas, constructively question others ideas, build new knowledge and acknowledge the work of others.

Through the provision of quality education and training, HCTS prides itself on supporting all Learners to develop as 'active agents' of their own learning and as such, is committed to addressing all the essential needs of its' Learners. HCTS believes in the following principles when it comes to embedding the promotion of learning into the effective learning experience;

> **Involve encounters with challenging ideas or people.**
> In a Learners' educational life, there are external forces challenging the learner, presents ideas, beliefs, perspectives or educational environments different from those the learner holds or may be able to accept. The external force may also be people, in the classroom or in the workplace, who differ from the learner in significant ways. Such challenges, if managed correctly within the learning environment and experience can open the door to broader or deeper knowledge, to the reformation of ideas or beliefs, to the adoption of more differentiated and complex understanding.
>
> **Require learner's active engagement with the challenge.**
> The learner must engage with the challenge of 'learning', investing energy in resolving the tension between new and old learning, that the challenge has introduced. For 'real' and meaningful learning to occur, Learners must engage with the challenge. The higher the level of engagement, the greater the learning benefit.
>
> **The supportive environment.**
> Supportive environments provide encouragement and appropriate guidance to help Learners persist and succeed. Ensuring the implementation and management of appropriate support mechanisms can help to mediate the learner's response to a challenge. "Support" does not mean coddling Learners or dumbing down what is to be learned. HCTS are committed to support as a provision of whatever the learner needs to engage the challenge and benefit educationally so as to resolve the tension

the challenge created. Together, a challenge and support make an educationally effective experience possible.

Encourage active, real-world learning.
HCTS appreciates that the most common teaching approaches continue to involve 'instructor led lecturing' with group discussions as an 'add-on'. HCTS aim towards an active learning experience in each of its programmes, encouraging Learners to work on real-world (or simulated) situations which are reflective of the industry requirements and, with a goal of performing as a *'Safe Novice'*. In many of these health and social care related scenarios, there is no correct answer nor no solution exists. HCTS are committed to the 'experiential approach' as a much more effective learning experience, capturing skills such as problem identification, critical thinking, evaluating evidence and alternative ideas, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Involve other people.
Often learning and development can be a solitary activity with the challenge occurring when the learner engages with others, such as peers or tutors. Some challenges can be more cumulative than catalytic, for example when Learners adopt or reject peer group or other values, attitudes and behaviours. A learning group can provide support for resolving challenge-generated conflict which is important in the context of that 'industry-ready' role.

Invite or promote reflection.
HCTS believe that providing "opportunities to reflect" is a vital, research-based characteristic of effective teaching and learning. Reflective practice is also one of the specifications for industries where employees are working with vulnerable individuals, and as it inheres problem-based learning, living-learning communities and diverse experiences the development of the skill of reflection must have a positive effect on learning and development.

HCTS further demonstrates its' commitment to the protection and quality of the learner's learning experience by employing only suitable, expert and professionally qualified staff and tutors. Furthermore, the processes involved in the continuous improvement and the collation and monitoring of evaluative feedback from both Learners and tutors, as well as the HCTS complaints procedure, outlined below, makes provision for HCTS to respond efficiently to the dynamic and fast-paced needs to the learning communities, FET and health and social care sectors.

Complaint Procedure
HCTS encourage all stakeholders who may be unhappy with any aspect of the HCTS service to inform us. HCTS are committed to resolving problems in a timely manner. The process encourages:

- A satisfactory outcome for all. If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved through informal discussions, HCTS make provision for a formal complaint in writing.
- The Academic Manager coordinates the process initially and will invite the stakeholder to complete a complaints form.

- Upon completion, the complaint form must be sent by post to Manager, Healthcare Training Solutions, Bective Square, Kells, County Meath. A82 F9X3. IF the form is not completed correctly, the Academic Manager will make contact with the stakeholder and ask for a revised form to be correctly completed. If a further form is inaccurate, HCTS reserve the right to terminate the process.
- The stakeholder will be informed that an investigation into the nature of the complaint will be carried out, and that the complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation within 20 days.
- The complaint will be registered on the incident/accident/near miss form, risk assessment and a root cause analysis carried out. The findings will be discussed with the appropriate governance committee/Management Board, with recommendations for corrective action taken so as to prevent a recurrence of a similar complaint/grievance (see risk Policy).
- The complainant will be contacted on completion of the investigation and informed of the outcome and any corrective action that has been approved to be taken.
- If the complaint is in reference to a QQI programme delivered by HCTS, HCTS will encourage the complainant to contact www.QQI.ie.

5:3 – National and international effective practice

HCTS encourage and assist all staff and tutors to actively participate in relevant national and international networks so as to enhance their professional knowledge and practice. At a local level, HCTS works cooperatively and collaboratively with many providers offering the same/similar health and social care related education and training. This supports both HCTS and those involved in the network to consider and determine current, emerging and effective practices in learning, teaching and assessment.

HCTS has associations with a wide range of external organisations including:
1. PHECC: The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council.
2. American Heart Association/ Irish Heart Foundation.
3. Irish Institute of Training and Development.

Bench Marking
HCTS defines benchmarking as a fundamental element of their quality assurance process, particularly in the context of measuring learner experiences and outcomes against 'institution' standards and appropriate learning goals. HCTS are committed to benchmarking as it is a process which allows tutors to identify both providers' strengths and weaknesses and informs further effective and appropriate development. The process of benchmarking provides HCTS with an in-depth opportunity to observe and evaluate the alignment of its documentation, processes and professional practice in teaching, learning and assessment to QA core areas.

HCTS uses best practice information and methodology to improve its' performance and enhance its overall integrity as a quality driven provider. The scope of such benchmarking activity, includes but is not limited to:
- Programmes, components and awards,
- Statistics/data regarding Learners achieving certification including grade averages,
- Comparisons of the skills and outcomes achieved from different learning environments and learner experiences,
- Appraisal of HCTS sales and marketing strategies,
- An agreed benchmarking activity from any quality assurance perspective agreed in terms of reference (see benchmarking terms of reference)

The process of 'peer-to-peer' activity suitable for benchmarking purposes include;
1.	Understanding the minimum threshold for 'good practice' in further education and training,
2.	The identification of particular areas of ''good practice within teaching, learning and assessment,
3.	What is deemed to be effective practice in professional collaboration and emerging 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) and, how CoPs work in practice,

HCTS consider the following activities as crucial to benchmarking.

- Understanding the data from in grade distribution via the QQI Info-graphics; nationally and by sector and how this translates into 'trend-analysis'.
- Formal, cyclical and documented self-evaluation assessments.
- The practice of 'Peer-to-Peer' collaborations with the purpose of comparing and contrasting the sharing of knowledge, issues arising and 'what works' in their learning environments.

All benchmarking activities and associated findings are documented, reported to and approved by the AC.

5:4 – Learning environments

HCTS is committed to ensuring that all training venues meet the appropriate safety and health standards as set out by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, and are accessible for all Learners in the provision of an environment that is conducive to the learning experience. HCTS believe that the learning environment is a resource that should not be ignored as it influences the academic learning and facilitates both social and emotional growth.

HCTS apply the following policy areas and/or practices to ensure the effective management of the learning environment:
• Financial management of the learning environment; physical premises *vs* virtual learning
• An appropriate learning environment checklist; physical premises a virtual learning environment (VLE)
• Appropriate and fit for purpose complaints procedure
• Tutor Records

Health and Safety Checklists for all training venues are maintained to show all rented training venues are compliant with safety requirements.

All tutors are required to communicate 'housekeeping' instructions to all Learners' pre programme commencement. The HCTS Code of Conduct is explained and made available to Learners in the Learner Handbooks. Each tutor is required to complete a tutor check-list per session and as documented in the Tutor Record Folder to show compliance/non-compliance with the quality systems that relate to the capturing, collation and oversight of all teaching, learning and assessment activity and, to ensure a safe, protective and conducive learning experience.

The HCTS Health and Safety Policy and supporting procedures is updated as required. HCTS also maintain a comprehensive risk register which makes provision for the collation of Incident Reports. All elements of managing the learning environment, specifically relating to health, safety and risk are coordinated by a Root-Cause Analysis Report.

HCTS recognises its obligations and duties as an employer to direct, manage and to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of all staff, Learners, tutors, and members of the public who may visit its premises as required under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Furthermore, HCTS combats discrimination on nine grounds and in accordance with The Equality Act 2004. The nine grounds are:

    i. Gender
    ii. Marital Status
    iii. Family Status
    iv. Sexual Orientation
    v. Religion
    vi. Age
    vii. Disability
    viii. Race

The HCTS Safety Management Strategy

HCTS works to ensure that all practices within teaching, learning and assessment facilitate equality and the diversity of each individual Learners' requirements.

The Management Board is responsible for the overall management of health and safety of all stakeholders including the development and maintenance of associated policy areas and assisting procedures to support this.

Duties include but are not limited to:

- Taking a proactive response to the management of HCTS premises so as to ensure safety, the coordination and oversight of risk assessment, and the resolution of issues presenting.
- Ensuring risk assessments are visible and up to date in all premises and learning environments.
- Support the Financial Committee to ensure the provision of sufficient funds to maintain safe facilities as much as is reasonably practicable.
- Ensure the transparency of communication to all HCTS stakeholders to manage and enforce the HCTS safety statement. This includes but is not limited to evacuation procedures relevant to different premises and learning environments.
- Implement and give oversight to the processes of recruitment, selection and appointment of appropriate and responsible staff and contractors.
- Ensure the availability of adequate training for relevant stakeholders.
- Encourage, empower, and always enable effective and safe work practices.
- Ensure the maintenance of fire certification, appropriate and working equipment and fire exits.
- Be responsible for the maintenance of appropriately effective housekeeping standards so as to ensure that conditions relevant to sanitization and hygiene are to the standard required and incorporate processed to manage waste and control pests.
- Report, document and accurately complete accident or incident investigations promptly and in compliance with HCTS and legal requirements.

Safety Representative

Appointment of a Safety Representative is described as a duty of the employer under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. Duties of the Safety representative are as follows:

- Communicate with management on any aspects of safety, health, and welfare at the place of work.
- Investigate accidents and dangerous occurrences.
- Receive and seek advice and information from inspectors on matters of safety, health, and welfare at work
- Carry out inspections of the premises to determine any potential hazards on the premises.

- Investigate potential hazards and complaints made by any stakeholder at the place of work.
- HCTS has a nominated Safety Representative.

Dignity & Respect at Work

HCTS has in place a strict policy prohibiting all forms of harassment via the Dignity at Work Policy. This policy applies to stakeholders and prohibits harassment by any employee or contractor of the Company, including directors, tutors, staff, Learners, and guests,

Harassment includes but is not limited to:
- Verbal conduct such as derogatory comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances.
- Visual conduct such as derogatory posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures.
- Physical conduct such as assault, making threats and/or demands, unnecessary or unwanted touching, blocking normal movement or interfering with work.
- Retaliation for having reported or threatened to report harassment.
- Communication via social media, email or in writing that could be deemed offensive or unwanted.

HCTS operate a grievance procedure which may be instigated at any time if an individual feels they have been the victim of a breach of the Dignity at Work policy. A complaint in writing will be provided outlining the matter as soon as it arises and given to the aforementioned staff. It should include:
- What happened?
- When?
- Who was involved?
- Who witnessed the incident?
- How it made the complainant feel.

HCTS are committed to the undertaking of a thorough and impartial investigation of the allegations. Upon completion of the investigation a determination is made regarding the alleged harassment with the result and approved corrective actions communicated to complainant as soon as it is possible to do so.

HCTS have in place a First Aid Box with each Tutor issued with a complete resource upon commencing in-person teaching and learning. A Certified First Aider is available upon request. The HCTS Fire and Emergency Plan is documented and communicated via Learner and Tutor/Staff Handbooks. Evacuation drills are regularly practiced. Emergency Exits are checked to ensure a safe and obstruction free pathway.

Finally, HCTS operates a no smoking/ no vaping policy in both its' offices and in any external locations used for the purpose of teaching, learning and assessment. Smoking and vaping are only permitted outside of the venues and in designated areas only. Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action or request to vacate the premises.

Smokers/vapers are required to:
- Smoke/vape only in the designated areas

- Not to block entry or exit to buildings
- Ensure that all naked flames, matches/lighters are extinguished in full
- Receptacles providers for smokers are used to prevent littering of area

The Learning Environment

HCTS delivers in –person training in a variety of settings including:
- Nursing homes,
- Day care centres,
- Outreach/Community Centres
- Schools
- Sports & Leisure Facilities
- Hotels

Regardless of the setting, the QQI Coordinator will ensure the implementation of all required processes and the accurate completion of relevant checklists.

Work Placement Guidance & The Learning Environment

The HCTS QQI programme focuses on the healthcare industry and thus, many Learners' engaging with the HCTS programme are already in a position of employment with a suitable organisation. Occasionally learners do enrol who require support in sourcing a host organisation with whom to undertake work experience. The work placement opportunities include the following **types** of facilities:
- Nursing Homes
- Residential Care, including Intellectual Disabilities
- General Hospitals
- Hospice Care
- GP Clinics and Medical Offices
- Day Care
- Community Care

Selection of suitable host organisations for work placement

HCTS do not prescribe a model for work-based learning but do aim to provide a set of principles, based on effective practice, which would be of benefit to learners. This set of principles enables HCTS to select appropriate host placements. Principles are as follows:
1. The geographical selection of a host organisation must take into consideration learner needs; travelling capacity (including method of travel) and learner learning needs and supports (are there reasonable accommodations to be made such as assistive technology, additional rest breaks, a mentor or work buddy?).
2. Can the host organisation agree to the schedule of hours/availability the learner has? For example, some learners may be undertaking the programme in addition to other work commitments or, have a range of personal/family commitments which must also be attended to. In the case of learners with learning needs and/or disability, ensuring where appropriate, that 'reasonable adjustments' can be made. Guidance on identified challenges and or aspects will be supported by HCTS.

3. The host organisation has appropriate health and safety arrangements in place and that any learners attending work-based practice are informed/inducted accordingly to understand the host organisations' responsibilities and their own in relation to legislation, regulations and standards of quality care.

4. The host organisation can agree to a 'designated person' who is suitably qualified to supervise the learner while on placement. This involves agreeing to the role and areas of responsibility as outlined in the Work Experience Information for Host Organisations and, ensuring that intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the placement being undertaken.

5. The host organisation can agree to ensuring that information and communication pertaining to the learner's placement is clear, unambiguous and consistent with that outlined in Work Experience Information for Host Organisations.

6. The host organisation can agree to ensuring that the roles, duties and any tasks undertaken by the learner are appropriately pitched to the level of learning required for the QQI 5M4339 award, are not demeaning to either the learner or the patient/client/service user or of a nature that requires the learner to 'know' more than is expected for a HCA at level 5, and, are adequately supervised by either the designated person or through the provision of another responsible staff member who is suitably experienced.

7. The host organisation can agree to the provision of feedback, ensuring written feedback and details such as dates and times pertaining to verbal feedback, are kept for monitoring learner progress on all aspects of placement participation and learning.

8. The host organisation designated person or a-another experienced member of staff, is available to liaise with the assigned HCTS nominated contact for monitoring visits, as and when required/scheduled.

9. The host organisation has procedures in place for responding to any difficulties or complaints the learner may experience when in attendance.

Collaborative work with Providers of work placement

Prior to attendance in work placement, Learners are informed of the host organisations' policies, procedures and practices, and expected to follow these in relation to work-based learning and professional practice, as being undertaken on site. This is inclusive of the undertaking of any skills demonstration activities as detailed within an assessment brief.

HCTS supports all Learners in their application for work placement and are assisted in the following areas:
1. National Vetting Application Process
2. A Work Experience Letter (to validate the request for work placement) and Work Experience Arrangements Form
3. HCTS College Cover of Insurance Letter
4. A document outlining the Work Placement Supervisors' role and areas of responsibility throughout the duration of the learner's work placement; Work Experience Information for Host Organisations
5. Frequent work experience site visits, by prior arrangement and in adherence to Covid-19 guidelines. A Work Experience Tutor Site Visit Form is completed and signed off by all stakeholders.

6. A Work Experience Attendance Log which must be kept up to date and approved by the host organisation, learner and Tutor.

HCTS works collaboratively with all host organisations, including those with whom the learner has sought work placement independently. HCTS operate a staged process in placing and monitoring the learner's work placement. This is outlined as follows:

1. HCTS encourages Learners to contact the work placement provider to discuss work placement opportunities for the 5M4339 Major Award.
2. HCTS programme tutor meets with the host organisations nominated Work Placement Supervisor and details the following:
   a. Requirements of the 5M4339 programme in the context of work experience.
   b. Requirements of the host organisation with regards to the management of hours, days etc as laid out by the duration of 180 hours.
   c. Learning criteria to be undertaken and assessed, including formatively and summatively, during the work placement duration of 180 hours.
   d. The process of summative assessment where skills demonstration activities may need to be assessed during work placement and with a client or client
   e. The role of the Work Placement Supervisor-Assessor regarding the integrity of the QQI Award, including the completion and return of individual learner assessment associated documentation for marking, grading and feedback purposes.
   f. A demonstration of completing the relevant and necessary paperwork for quality assuring purposes, specifically the Learner's Individual Progress Report.
   g. Details of the HCTS contact person and a schedule of HCTS and host organisation meetings during individual/groups of Learners work placement duration.
   h. Details regarding the host organisations first point of contact (Tutor).

Learner Permissions – Photography and Recording of Video Evidence for Assessment Purposes

HCTS do not permit the photographing or video recording of any client, residential or community based, for the purposes of either formative or summative assessment.

HCTS Assessor Responsibilities

No matter what submission method is used the HCTS Assessor must ensure that when submitting assessed evidence that the following checklist is observed:

- Corresponding Assessment Briefs, Learner Feedback and completed marking schemes and marking criteria sheets are included in each learner's portfolio,
- Video/Audio Recordings/USB are securely made available to for IV and EA processes,
- Each file must include the learner's name, date and the assessment title
- Recordings are securely held and all naming conventions are accurate and respectful of GDPR compliance.

On completion of the learner's work experience, the host organisation's work placement Supervisor will be required to complete a Learner's Individual Progress Report which

assesses the learner's performance and competence in the assigned tasks. This should be reflective of the learner's actual performance on the work placement and free from bias.

Any issues arising during work placement must be notified by the Tutor to the QQI Coordinator.

QA6: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

6.0 Policy Statement

HCTS adopts a standarised approach to the coordination and management of assessment processes. This provides HCTS with the capacity to ensure all Learners, regardless of the location or mode of programme delivery, are being assessed fairly, consistently, and transparently, as directed by QQI document Assuring Assessment, Guidelines for Providers 2013 edition.

All assessment materials, resources and supports are devised in consultation with the tutors, including assessment schedules coherently informing Learners of the dates and times of event-controlled assessments such as skills demonstrations and examinations. Submission details, along with the details of planned assessments (as mentioned above) are communicated to Learners during the induction process which takes place upon commencement of each programme.

6.1 Assessing of Learning Achievement

Assessment Process

HCTS are committed to ensuring all Learners understand the assessment process relevant to the award/component they are engaging with. HCTS believe that through open and clear communication, Learners are empowered to ensure that they, as active adult Learners, have; accurate and up to date information pertaining to their responsibilities,

- understand the variations of assessment methods and instruments,
- have the capacity to access and understand the assessment schedule,
- the knowledge to request formative feedback on progress and achievement to date, summative feedback on final submissions of assessment evidence,
- have the know-how regarding the mechanism to enquiring about academic appeals and any other relevant assessment information.

Learner Assessment

HCTS provide Learners with an assessment pack and access to the learner handbook upon programme commencement. Collectively, this information details assessment requirements including content on academic integrity; malpractice/plagiarism of assessment and the academic appeals process.

HCTS take pride in developing rigorous and appropriately pitched assessment briefs which allow for expansion and exploration of the component specific learning outcomes, relevant and current reflection of industry standards and up to date safety practices so as to ensure the skill development of the safe novice learner. All assessment briefs are accompanied by either an explicitly devised marking scheme, rubric or matrix document, supplementary guidelines, were required, and sample solutions. This also applies to examination papers and skills demonstration, practical learning assessment.

Formative assessments are evaluations of each Learners learning progress during the learning experience. HCTS uses quizzes (using survey monkey during the Covid-19 pandemic as virtual learning environments are operational) and focused group work activities (this is being managed via the Zoom breakout rooms for Covid-19 pandemic learning experiences).

Summative assessments refer to the learning acquired via the formal assessment process, leading to QQI certification. HCTS conducts this by way of the following assessment methodologies:
- Assignments
- Projects
- Portfolios/Collection of Work
- Exams
- Learner Records
- Skills Demonstrations

Learners are advised prior to programme commencement to inform HCTS of additional learning requirements they may have to assist them in their teaching learning experience and support them with the completion of the assessment procedures. If such information is not disclosed at the point of registration or prior to commencement, the learner may inform the Tutor as soon as it is possible to do so. Learners are asked to consult the Reasonable Accommodation policy and supporting procedures as outlined in the Learner Handbook.

During the duration of the programme delivery, the tutor is required to ensure that assessment is given credence during teaching and learning sessions. This provides Learners with an opportunity to research, explore and consolidate learning appropriately. Learners are encouraged to submit drafts of each assessment evidence to the tutors on an ongoing basis, enabling the provision of formative feedback for both learning and comprehension purposes as well as to encourage constructive progressive edits to drafts.

HCTS ensure tutors are appropriately trained and capable to monitor and review Learners' progress at regular intervals, throughout the programme.

Tutors are also briefed in how to mentor Learners on the academic presentation of each completed assessment and component portfolio.

Tutors are required to seek a declaration from each Learners submitting summative assessment, confirming that each assessment is their own effort by checking that Learners have signed the 'Authorship' statement on each assessment brief.

All learner evidence submitted as final (summative) for certification, is subject to an assessment malpractice query and will be checked through the ScanMyEssay plagiarism tool.

The AC is responsible for the oversight and approval of all assessment documentation.

Tutor Assessment and Marking of Portfolios

HCTS is committed to the practice of accurate and transparent marking both from tutors and where necessary, between tutors and, that the process of marking is within and aligned to national standards.

The marking of each learner group is completed by the tutor who facilitated the teaching, learning and assessment of the award. The tutor, who at this stage is recognised as the Assessor, adopts the documentation included in the assessment pack and ensures all elements of the assessing process are duly complied with;

- The marking scheme/rubric/matrix is adopted and completed per assessment, per learner.
- The transfer of marks from the above-mentioned document is accurately carried forward to the assessment Marking Criteria document, per assessment, per component.

- The Assessor ensures there is evidence of corrective feedback to justify mark allocations and deductions.
- The Assessor ensures there is evidence of summative feedback to validate the provisional finishing grade.

Tutors are encouraged to collaborate to discuss experiences, findings and outcomes in assessing of assessment practice.

Skills Assessment during Work Placement

The assessing of skills demonstrations/practical learning and development are assessed in the workplace. This is beneficial as it assists HCTS in their determination of confidence and competence in each Learners' skillsets. Through the implementation of the HCTS Workplace Guidance, individual workplace assessors are fully informed of the role and responsibilities that must be managed in the assessing of the application of knowledge and know-how to 'safe novice' competency. HCTS will then and only then, confirm each Learners' compliance with the HCTS and approved QQI standards of assessment of competency in the workplace.

Due to the nature of the health and social care industry, HCTS do not deem it appropriate from a privacy, dignity, or consent point of view to record the skills demonstrations, many of which are undertaken with clients (client consent is given via the health and social care workplace provision) and so, HCTS are committed to random monitoring visits. These visits are attended to by the programme tutor and are completed to ensure consistency and quality of assessment.

In addition to the above workplace supervisors are required to complete a skill's/competency-based report with annotated feedback. Learners are also required to develop a reflective practice record, documenting their work-based learning and in the context of each assessment activity undertaken.

Reasonable Accommodation

HCTS is committed to supporting as far as is reasonably practicable, Learners who have special requirements which will enable them to engage with their learning experience and assessment processes, making provision for impartial, reasonable and fair actions so as not to compromise the award standard.

The purpose of Reasonable Accommodation is to ensure the Learners rights are protected by Equality Legislation.

Examples of reasonable accommodations may include but are not limited to:
- Modification of assessment briefs e.g., large print version
- Provision of scribe or reader for examinations
- Additional time for completion of exams
- Provision of dictionaries
- Recording of assessments
- The use of room designed to allow Learners to sit in selected areas, e.g., nearer to the tutor for those with hearing or sight impairment.

The QQI Coordinator will check in with the learner to assure that their needs are being accommodated. This information will be treated as confidential and will not be disclosed.

Please note that compassionate consideration is different to reasonable accommodation and is managed by way of the content contained within the relevant policy area.

Malpractice of Assessment

Any breach of the stated guidelines in the form of deliberate acts by staff, tutors or Learners will be dealt with accordingly and in line with HCTS's disciplinary policy. This includes any and all deliberate acts, errors and/or omissions which could impact the validity of the assessment process. The HCTS Malpractice of Assessment Policy provides further details.

Tutor Responsibility and Code of Conduct

HCTS provides all appointed Tutors with a Contract of Appointment/Employment, per programme, and ensures appropriate inductions are undertaken, which includes issues pertaining to the HCTS Tutor Code of Conduct. The documentation and induction procedure ensures that Tutor behaviour and practice is reflective of the HCTS integrity and the QQI brand of, is aligned to the FET profession of education and training and, makes significant provision for;

- Tutor responsibility for the coordination and safety of LR assessments
- Tutor integrity when assessing learner assessment evidence for certification
- Tutor conduct on the process of marking and grading for certification purposes
- Tutor competency in the coordination, execution, and supervision of skills demonstrations/examinations

Learner Responsibility and Code of Conduct

HCTS expects all Learners to work collectively; through informal peer mentoring, and to be accountable to HCTS core values and ethos. The HCTS Learner Code of Conduct details the standard of conduct expected to manage a supportive and non-threatening learning environment. The Learner Code of Conduct aims to support Learners in managing behaviour.

All information relevant to both tutor and learner conduct is communicated via induction, continuous professional training, briefing sessions as well as documented within the HCTS Tutor and Learner Handbooks.

The HCTS Cross-Moderation Process

HCTS Tutors are required to participate, as an Assessor in at least one, possibly two cross-moderation activities per year. The purpose of cross-moderation is to ensure the application of rigor and consistency quality assuring learner assessments for certification. This is beneficial in building and maintaining learner confidence in the assessment process.

The HCTS process to cross-moderation is as follows:
- Each component award is cross-moderated at least annually.
- A number of corrected learner groups will be brought to the cross-moderation session. During each of these sessions the Assessors present will be given a set of learner group assessment evidence to mark.
- All learner evidence will be 'clean' with no evidence of the original assessor's marking or corrective practice.
- Upon completion, the Assessor will complete the cross-moderation sheet, found in the Tutor Record Folder. Results are transferred to the cross-moderation audit sheet where percentages of marks/grades changes are calculated and gaps in each Assessor's marking observed and noted.
- If there is a difference in marking which would be to the detriment of a learner, then a third marking process will occur.
- The previous Assessors may be contacted to provide clarification.
- A report will be collated and held within the HCTS quality system and annotation presented in the Internal Verification Report for the purpose of the External Authenticator.
- Upon a tutor who has delivered no less than three learner group/programmes that have been cross-moderated successfully, meaning with no major errors in the cross-moderation procedure have been identified, then the next learner group/programme presenting for certification may be internally verified at 20% +1 or, three learner portfolios per learner group/programme; whichever is most.
- Tutors who have not delivered to a learner group or assessed learner evidence for a period of four months or more, must have all assessed learner evidence cross-moderated.
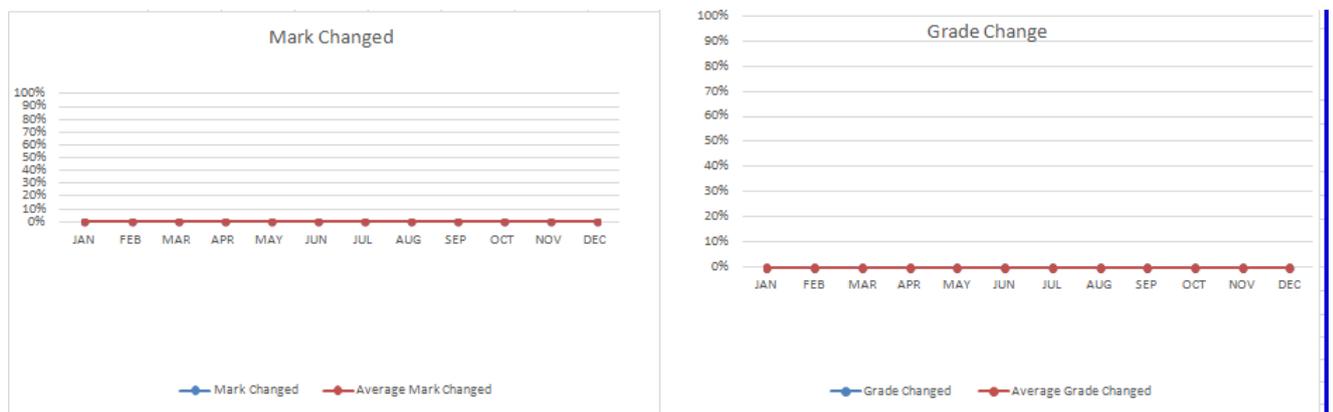

Figure 12: Cross Moderation KPI Report

Internal Verification

Internal Verification (IV) is an internal HCTS process, directed by QQI and quality assuring of assessment to check and verify the presence of;
- assessment evidence,
- accuracy of provisional results,
- calculations of marking documents and marking sheets,

And to ensure that learner submitted assessment evidence has been completed and presented appropriately and complies with preparation arrangements for the external authentication (EA) event.

Any issues arising from the IV procedure are documented as corrective actions, with all efforts made to resolve such issues prior to the EA event.

In the interest of quality assuring assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic and the VLE methodology for teaching, learning and assessment, a 100% IV is conducted to verify;

- All Assessment tools are present and correct
- Marking Sheets are calculated correctly
- All marks are transferred correctly to Summary sheet

The HCTS Internal Verification documentation located in the Tutor Record Folder must be completed.

Upon completion of the IV, results are transferred to the IV audit sheet where percentages of marks/grades changes are calculated and any corrections to the QQI QBS system are made prior to the EA event.
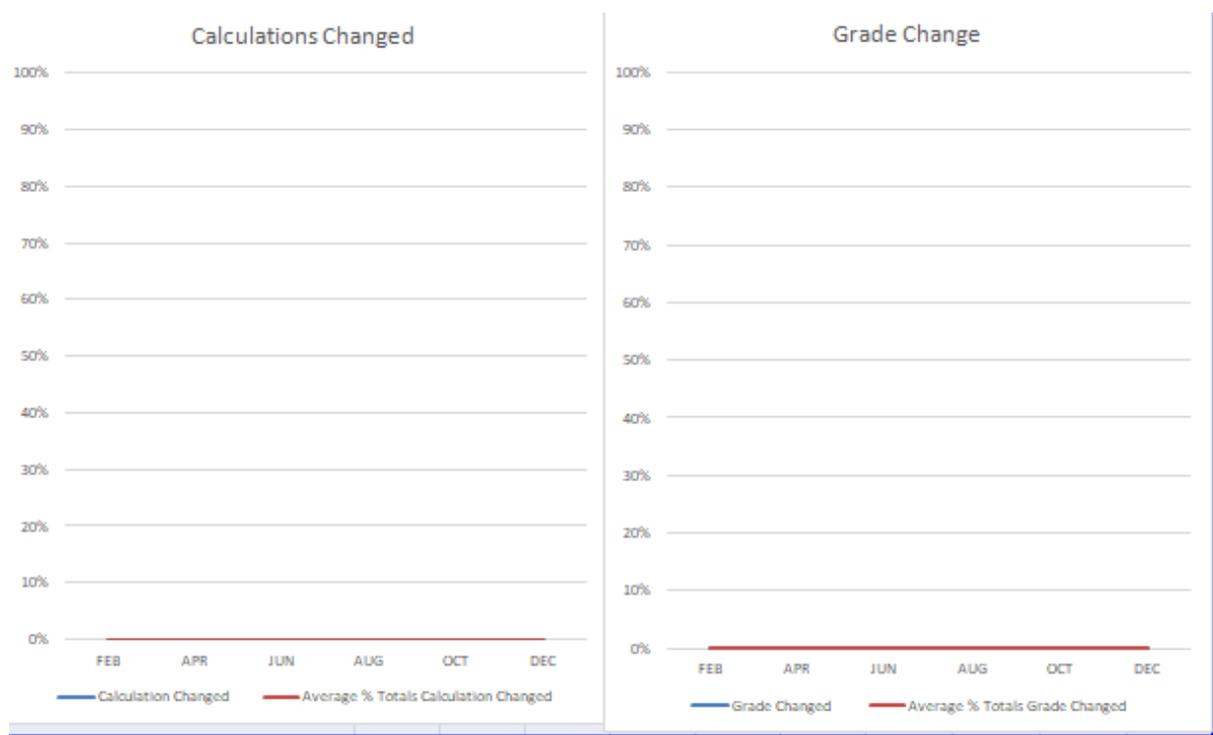

Figure 13: Internal Verification KPI Report

External Authentication (EA) is the final review of review of HCTS learner submitted assessment evidence. The externality oversight is contracted and applied to ensure learner evidence demonstrates consistency with QQI 'assessing of assessment' standards, the

approved validation programme(s), QQI specified minimum intended module/programme learning outcomes (MIMLOs/MIPLOs) and, effective practice in assessing assessment.

The EA process provides an independent and authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of Learners.

HCTS identifies a registered QQI External Authenticator agreeing a date and time with appropriate notice. HCTS apply the process as outlined below;

- External Authenticator (EA) is booked and confirmation agreed via email.
- The HCTS sampling method is emailed prior to the EA visit along with specific details on the QQI components and learner volume presenting for certification.
- A copy of the Internal Verification (IV) Report is provided to the EA on the day of the EA event.
- The previous External Authentication Report is provided to the EA on day of EA event.
- The EA and the Academic Manager agree to an opening and closing meeting on the day of the EA event.
- Upon completion of the visit, the EA is required to forward a completed report via email to HCTS within 3 working days.
- The EA report is included in the results approval meeting (RAP) and where necessary and relevant, EA feedback is communicated to staff and tutors.

Areas for improvement are discussed with the RAP and communicated to the AC for corrective action.

PLANNING	PRODEDURE	REVIEW
EA Plan – dates booking EA Sample Method	Sampling Strategy	EA report is communicated to all staff
Criteria for appointment of EA	IV Report made available to EA	Pre Results Approval meeting
Selection criteria for EA: independence from centre, subject matter expert.		
HCTS meets with EA pre start of procedure for Induction purposes	A reviews the component specifications/programme descriptor, the assessment briefs and the assessment evidence, making a judgment as to whether the evidence presented is marked in accordance with National Standards	Any areas of improvement identified assessed and auctioned by Academic Committee
Sampling Method emailed to EA pre-visit	IV report completed A completed report is emailed to HCTS. This report is included in the results approval meeting and communicated to all staff	

Figure 14: External Authentication (EA Process)

Certification Process

It is the aim of HCTS to continuously secure the standards for those qualifications accredited through the approved system. The Certification of Learners Policy and Procedure gives detail to the process involved.

On completion of the internal verification, external authentication and RAP meeting, results for all Learners across all components and awards are confirmed and the provisional results reports 'by learner' are documented on the QQI QBS system.

Results Approval Process

HCTS operate a Results Approval Panel (RAP) who meet upon completion of the EA event to observe the findings of the internal verification and external authentication reports and consider the final adjudicated marks to be submitted for certification to QQI.

The EA will be asked to be available by phone so as to clarify where necessary.

The RAP panel sign off on results prior to the final submission to QQI. A RAP meeting report will be compiled and retained by the QQI Coordinator.

Certificates are received in due course from QQI upon payment of invoice and are distributed to Learners.

Communication of Results to Learners
All information pertaining to the assessment process, including submission, marking processes and the awarding and communication of provisional results is outlined in the learner handbook. Information is also provided to all Learners upon induction.

If a learner requires their provisional results prior to processes having been completed they are asked to contact the Academic Manager. The request will be considered and the learner will be contacted accordingly.

Upon completion of the above, Learners are informed of their 'provisional' results by email and are advised on how to appeal provisional results if they feel required to do so. However, upon the appeal period passing (14 days from the sharing of provisional results), if Learners have appealed their grades, the portfolio is retained but for those Learners who have not appealed, the portfolios are shredded.

Academic Appeals
The HCTS policy statement and procedures applies to all QQI approved courses up to and including QQI Level 6.

The HCTS Academic Appeals Policy integrates procedures, representing an appeals framework that provides Learners with opportunities to have a review of an assessment decision made by HCTS, where there are grounds to do so.

The purpose of this procedural policy is to detail the situations in which a learner may wish to appeal against a decision provided during the assessment process. The HCTS procedure allows the learner to seek an appeal at an informal level.

On completion of an award Learners are given a three week submission date. On correction of a portfolio Learners are emailed a provisional result. If the learner wishes to appeal at this stage an internal appeal is conducted. An Internal appeal involves a recheck for confirmation by a second internal examiner, and is designed to ensure that all elements submitted for assessment/examination were considered and assessed, and that no errors occurred in the recording, collating, or combining of marks. The recheck also confirms that the summary mark presented was correct. If an error is indicated and there is a mark/grade change the learner will be informed. If required further tutor training will be scheduled.

NOTIFICATION OF PROVISIONAL RESULT

Learner Name:

Please see below your provisional results in relation to successful completion of your QQI programmes undertaken with Healthcare Training Solutions College of Further Education:

Minor Award		Grade	.

Results are provisional results only and may be subject to change pending the outcome of the External Authentication Process – if there is a grade change after this process has taken place you will receive notification.

Well done on successful completion of your award.

If you wish to appeal above grade or for any queries regarding certification please contact info@hcts.ie

Kind Regards

_____
Tutor

Figure 15: Notification of Provisional Result

Should the outcome of this is not be to their satisfaction Learners can use the formal procedure.

This Academic Appeal Procedure should be followed before escalation to the external Awarding Body, i.e., QQI appeals processes. Learners are signposted to the QQI appeal processes at the start of their programme of study. The principle objective is that all HCTS academic appeals will be treated fairly and objectively.

The definition of an Academic Appeal is a procedure through which Learners may seek a review of a decision relating to their academic progress or award result.

Without prejudice to the outcome of an appeal, a learner may continue to attend classes and make use of HCTS facilities and learning resources whilst their appeal is being heard. Learners who have completed their programme, and who have grounds to appeal an award decision, will be unable to receive their award until the matter has been fully resolved. Learners and staff should note that the timescales set out in the procedures must be adhered to.

Grounds for Appeal

Appeals against an assessment decision will normally only be considered on one or more of the following grounds:

1. That a learner's performance in the assessment was adversely affected by illness or other factors. The learner must have been unable to, or have a valid reason not to, divulge the information to their tutor prior to assessment. In this case, the appeal must be accompanied by documentary evidence to the QQI Coordinator.

2. Evidence of academic assessment administrative error or that an assessment was not conducted in accordance with HCTS's specific assessment policies/procedures.

3. That evidence is produced that some other material irregularity has occurred.

Exceptions

1. Learners undertaking non-regulated qualifications, have no further right of appeal against internal assessment decisions. The final decision rests with the academic provider.

2. External awarding bodies will not accept internal assessment appeals.

3. Appeals will not normally be permitted from third parties on behalf of a learner.

4. Exceptional Circumstances Considerations; Please refer to relevant policy for further details.

Notification

1. All staff members will be notified of changes to the Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures through the normal channels.

2. Teaching staff and staff advising Learners should have a detailed knowledge of the Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures.

3. Any changes to awarding body regulations (QQI) will be reflected in the annual review process of this policy and associated procedures.

4. Learners will be made aware of the policy within four weeks of commencing their course.

5. This policy will be available to all Learners via the Learners portal on the HCTS booking site.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Academic Governance Committee (AGC) are responsible for approving the policy and ensuring that it is followed. The AGC are also responsible for ensuring the strategic effectiveness of the policy.

2. The Management Board are responsible for operational compliance with the policy set by the AGC and making recommendations to the Management Board about updates to the policy. The Management Board are also responsible for ensuring the operational effectiveness of the policy and making provision for training for relevant staff.

3. The Academic Sub-Committee is responsible for overseeing annual updates to the Policy and Procedures.

4. The Management Board are responsible for ensuring all staff participate in training and follow the policy in their day-to-day role.

5. All relevant staff are responsible for familiarising themselves with the policy and procedures.

PROCEDURE
- The Academic Appeals Form is must be requested from the office via the QQI Coordinator.
- The learner will be informed by email, of their final result and their right to initiate an appeal if dissatisfied. A maximum of 14 days is allowed for Learners to lodge an academic appeal.
- A learner must lodge their academic appeal in writing directly to HCTS.
- A fee of €50.00 will apply per academic appeal and will be returned to the learner if the outcome of the academic appeal is successful.
- All assessment evidence as required by the component specification/validated programme module must be available for the academic appeal. Any evidence not available will be assumed not to have been completed or submitted.
- Only evidence that has previously been presented by the learner and has been retained in HCTS following the initial assessment can be considered as part of an academic appeal. No new evidence can be submitted.
- HCTS will ensure that the Academic Appeal Assessor is not the original assessor.
- HCTS will process the academic appeal within a reasonable timeframe of 10 working days.
- HCTS will inform the learner of the outcome of the academic appeal in written response within 10 working days of lodging an academic appeal, provided all information as listed above has been made available to the process.

Following the completion of the appeals process, QQI will be;
- Informed by HCTS of any successful academic appeals (changes in the assessment grades awarded).
- QQI will make any required amendments to grades on the QQI Business System (QBS) & will re-issue a certificate for the learner.

Non-Accredited Programmes
Attendance Certificates are issued on the date of the programme delivery and/or upon all fees having been received. For CE participants or employers who have booked the Learners on to the courses and are paying for the training, certificates are issued to the managers unless otherwise agreed. If a non-accredited certificate replacement is requested, HCTS can reprint with ease. However, with regards to QQI certification, should a learner require a replacement certificate upon misplacing or damaging the original, they will be referred directly to the QQI website. HCTS can print off a screen shot of the transcript of results from the QBS for the learner.

QA 7: SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

7.0 Policy Statement

HCTS endeavours to provide a range of suitable supports for Learners on all of its training and education programmes. These supports are monitored and updated on a continuing basis with a view to identifying opportunities for improvement.

The scope of policies, procedures and processes HCTS have implemented ensures that a range of meaningful learner supports are available at all times. The policy and procedural areas are reviewed as part of our ongoing monitoring approach. The HCTS monitoring processes allow both Learners and tutor's opinions and experiences on the quality of learner support resources to be captured. Learner representation is observed via our governance structure with learner representation invited to participate in both committees.

HCTS are committed to all Learners being appropriately supported from enrolment through to completion of studies and will ensure a corrective action plan is in place to respond to any errors, omissions or deliberate acts by Learners or staff which could affect the learner experience.

Applications from prospective Learners with disabilities are welcome and HCTS endeavours to assist all Learners in realising their potential by offering a range of supports, including reasonable accommodations and compassionate consideration to extenuating circumstances. HCTS aims to ensure that all programmes of education and training and related services are delivered in a manner that recognises diversity, promptly addresses discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity for all.

HCTS maintains a working environment for all, including staff, tutors and Learners, in which dignity and respect is enabled and upheld, building on its culture of compliance and adherence to duties under section 8 (2) (b) of the 2005 Act as regards 'managing and conducting work activities in such a way as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, any improper conduct or behaviour likely to put the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees or Learners at risk'. HCTS recognise that such legislation also applies to all stakeholders in relation to their duties under section 13 (1) (e) of the 2005 Act to 'not engage in improper conduct or behaviour that is likely to endanger his or her own safety, health and welfare at work or that of any other person'.

HCTS embed the review of the quality of its supports to Learners via the programme monitoring process as outlined in QA 3.

7:1 - Supports for Learners

Learners are informed as to what supports are available to Learners and how they can be accessed. These include a comprehensive list such as (but not limited to):

- One-to-one mentoring support from course tutors
- Ongoing feedback on performance or draft assignments
- Work placement support
- IT support
- Admin support
- Library supports
- Job Seeking support
- Employment References
- Garda Vetting
- Financial support – TESG and payment plans
- Peer-to-peer support
- Identify Learners with learning difficulties/disabilities

Learners' needs are assessed during enrolment to identify if there are any learning support requirements. Each learner's individual needs and any relevant supports are considered in the context of the programme the learner is attending. Examples of the learner supports HCTS offers include (but are not limited to);

- programme location: physical accessibility, specific hearing or sight supports or, technological supports,
- programme timetabling and overlaps with work related shifts,
- access to appropriate (including the location) work experience,
- learner health and wellbeing, including mental/emotional health and supports required to assist learner,
- Health and Safety checklist completed for all training venues,
- actioning of any other areas of reasonable accommodation as deemed to be appropriate, i.e., assessment assistance including examination scribes/readers,
- Sign language interpreters, chosen by the centre, are available to the Learners upon request. HCTS or Learners employer/supervisor communicate with Sign Language Interpreting Service, Deaf Village Ireland, Ratoath Road, Cabra, Dublin 7.

HCTS will conduct tutor monthly meetings to identify if any errors, omissions or deliberate acts by Learners or staff which could affect the validity of the learner experience. If any are identified the following procedures are completed as outlined below;

- Incident Report completed
- Risk Register Updated
- Identify if Policies need updating
- If required a Root Cause Analysis conducted

The HCTS Policy on Academic Integrity is communicated to Learners and Tutors in Handbooks and clearly details the HCTS position on Academic Integrity and associated corrective action processes.

All learner work submitted is subject to an assessment checking using the ScanMyEssay for plagiarism scrutiny.

Tutor support

- Tutors inform Learners of their contact details on Day 1 of course – email and contact number.
- Tutors offer Learner's support during class time on a one-to-one basis or group discussion, whichever is deemed to be most appropriate.
- Learners are encouraged to contact Tutors out of class time for feedback or clarification, as appropriate and as agreed. Learners are informed that Tutors must not be contacted during weekends, bank holidays or annual leave.

Remote Assessment

- Assessments facilitated via the Covid-19 arrangement in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) will be similar to those used for classroom delivery with quality standards being maintained. Where assessments are modified, QA approval will be sought form the AC.
- HCTS will ensure that the outcomes of assessment for a VLE programme meet the specified academic level of the award as defined by the NFQ.
- In programmes featuring online assessment, the Learners will receive orientation sessions in advance to ensure that Learners feel supported in engaging in this type of programme delivery and assessment.
- Learners will be made aware of HCTS Procedure for Preventing and Responding to Cases of Suspected Plagiarism, which is detailed in the Learner Handbook.
- Security issues relating to the authentication of a Learners work will be considered and integrated when designing assessment processes.

Aptitude Test Preparation Course for Mature Nursing Entry is advertised to all Learners on website under further opportunities link. HCTS advertise this course and refer any interested Learners to an external company.

To achieve a place in any branch of Nursing or in Midwifery by the mature student route, a mature student must sit an assessment. Only those applicants who achieve above a certain score in this assessment will be considered for an offer as a mature code applicant. While preparation from books will help to a certain extent, a preparation course where Learners are provided with relevant sample questions and guided to complete them with speed and accuracy can be much more effective. Due to COVID restrictions this course is only available online.

The HCTS Learner Handbook communicates information on the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), including how to access additional support services directly.

HCTS identifies situations where bullying commonly occurs and sets out procedures for resolving bullying complaints. HCTS will conduct a full investigation as detailed in the Complaints Policy and Procedure should reports of bullying/harassment be received.

HCTS accept the following behaviours as examples of bullying and/or harassment;
- Exclusion with negative consequences
- Verbal abuse/insults
- Physical abuse
- Being treated less favourably than colleagues
- Intrusion – pestering, spying or stalking
- Menacing behaviour
- Intimidation
- Aggression
- Undermining behaviour
- Excessive monitoring of work
- Humiliation
- Withholding work-related information
- Repeatedly manipulating a person's job content and targets
- Blame for things beyond the person's control

*This list is not exhaustive

Prevention of Bullying is managed in HCTS by:
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that demonstrates courtesy and respect.
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that promotes awareness of the policy and complaints procedures.
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that demonstrates vigilant to possible signs of bullying either in 'in-person' or the VLE;
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that responds sensitively and in compliance with the values, ethos, and policy of HCTS;
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that ensures that an individual who has lodged a complaint is not victimised for doing so;
- Empowering and encouraging a learning community that makes room for appropriate monitoring of a situation.

Review of learner supports is conducted through review of
- Evaluation Forms
- Incident reports

DELIVERY	REVIEW
Learners inform HCTS at enrolment of any special Learning requirements Responsibility of Course Administration	Learner Programme Evaluation on supports provided Responsibility of Course Administration
Range of Learner Support available: • Counseling Supports • Employment Supports • Financial Services • Disability Services	Review of Reasonable Accommodation Forms Responsibility of Academic Manager
Responsibility of course administration and course tutor HCTS support Learners with IT requirements Responsibility of course administration and course tutor Reasonable accommodation supports are put in place for those with a disability, without compromising the award standard	Academic Committee meetings Responsibility of Academic Manager

Figure 16: Review of Learner Supports

QA 8: INFORMATION & DATA MANAGEMENT

8.0 Policy Statement

The HCTS Management Board, supported by the Academic Board, retains oversight of data protection. The HCTS Director is the Data Protection Officer at an operational level. All issues regarding data protection should be referred to the Director.

HCTS is committed to a policy of protecting the privacy, rights and freedoms of individuals with respect to the processing of their personal data.

The HCTS policy Managing Data Protection applies to Learners and staff and makes provision for guidelines on how personal data is to be stored, handled and protected as well as how staff are trained and enabled to maintain currency on legislative updates, specifically managing personal data (privacy) and how to report possible breaches.

All staff, tutors and Learners are made aware of how their data is used upon appointment/enrolment and who that data is shared with. Both staff, tutors and Learners are asked to give their consent.

All HCTS information is gathered in HCTS Learner Management System (LMS) and customer relationship system thus planning on analysing past trends and plan for future academic and business development, bearing in mind data protection at all times to ensure due diligence.

HCTS recognises that GDPR places restrictions on what providers are permitted to do with personal data, how long data can be retained for and the protection of privacy, such as passing personal information on to third parties, transferring information outside the EU or using it for direct marketing.

Privacy Policy:

In compliance with data protection guidelines, HCTS demonstrates commitment to the protecting the privacy interests of all staff, tutors and Learners and any other stakeholders from whom we may collect personal data from, including visitors to the HCTS website. HCTS are committed to ensuring that all visitors can access the website content without having to provide personal information.

To ensure compliance with statutory GDPR guidelines and to continuously demonstrate effective and best practice, HCTS will never disclose personal information that identifies website users. HCTS confirms that it does not track website visitors browsing outside of its' own website.

HCTS are responsible as the controller of all stakeholder, including website visitors, personal information and that a nominated Data Protection Officer is appointed within the staff team.

8:1 – Information Systems

The HCTS policy **Managing Data Protection** applies to Learners and staff and makes provision for guidelines within our information systems on how personal data is to be stored, handled and protected as well as how staff are trained and enabled to maintain currency on legislative updates, specifically managing personal data (privacy) and how to report possible breaches.

A digital information is retained in order to support the delivery of current or any future training or education services. All data is stored in a secure encrypted data system which is code protected.

HCTS accept that under the new legislation consent must be obtained for the collection and use of any personal data. Personal data includes the following:
- First name(s)
- Family name
- Address, incl. Eircode
- PPSN
- Gender
- DOB
- Payment card info - for instalments
- Garda vetting (if relevant)
- Programme name/code
- QQI award code
- Award result
- Award grade for award
- Appeal status/result - if relevant
- Records of learner access to LMS/VLE

Forms of Data which are stored

- Electronic data (e.g. emails, word processed documents, spreadsheets, databases and web content)
- Hard copy documents (including learner assignments, course notes & materials, assessment materials, award certificates, Garda vetting applications, hand-written notes)
- Video and photos (digital images)
- Audio files

The Data Protection regulations and legislation require HCTS to process data fairly, ensuring the security of all data by way of the information systems employed;

- Explaining to each individual why personal data is being gathered,
- Outlining the purpose for which their personal data will be used,

- Gathering only the minimum amount of personal data necessary,
- Informing persons should HCTS have to share data with anyone else and for what purpose,
- Detailing to persons as to how long their personal data will be kept and how it will be disposed of,
- Reassuring persons and ensuring that all personal data will be protected from loss or theft,
- Ensuring that all data is accurate and kept up to date.

8:2 – Learner Information Systems

Remote Access

As a direct consequence of Covid-19, there is an increasing requirement for remote working across the sector. Consequently, this brings challenges in relation to data security within the LMS which HCTS aim to address. With regard to personal and sensitive data, the following guidelines are adhered to:-

1. In the first instance, all personal and sensitive data held electronically is stored centrally (e.g. on a secure server with documented security in place). Data that is readily available via remote access should is not copied to PCs or to portable storage devices, such as laptops, memory sticks, etc. that may be stolen or lost;
2. When accessing this data remotely, it is done via a secure encrypted link (e.g. IPSEC or SSL VPN tunnel) with relevant access controls in place;
3. Additional stringent security and access controls are in place, e.g. the mandatory use of strong passwords and security token authentication (i.e. two-factor authentication);
4. Data being accessed in this way is prevented from being copied from the central location to the remote machine;
5. HCTS personnel utilise technologies that will provide for the automatic deletion of temporary files which may be stored on remote machines by its operating system;
6. HCTS personnel ensure that only known machines (whether desktop PC, laptop, mobile phone, PDA, etc.) configured appropriately (e.g. with up-to-date anti-virus and anti-spyware software, full encryption, etc.), are allowed to remotely access centrally held personal or sensitive data. The strongest encryption methods available are used to encrypt data on these machines. In addition, 'strong' passwords/passphrases (see 'General Procedures') are used to protect access to these machines and to encrypt/decrypt the data held on them;
7. HCTS personnel are aware that it is imperative that any wireless technologies/networks used when accessing the HCTS systems should be encrypted to the strongest standard available.

To facilitate the VLE environment HCTS use cloud-based platforms which collect and process data and make it available to relevant staff and committees. These include;

- Dropbox Professional
- Zoom Professional
- Booking Hawk

Cover page for all portfolios are completed by each Learners to confirm the following information:

- Name
- Address
- PPSN
- Medical Card Number (if applicable)
- Date of Birth

- Email
- Gender
- Tick Box for Assignment submission

HCTS manages access to its LMS via Dropbox Professional and booking hawk through a log on with password.

8:3 – Management Information System

HCTS uses Microsoft Office 365 - email, word processing and spreadsheets to support both day-to-day office work and mobile working and in accordance with the HCTS management information systems.

Email and Digital Software

Email and other digital, personal productivity software such as word processing applications, spreadsheets, etc. are valuable business tools. HCTS use extreme care in using this software where personal and sensitive data is concerned. In particular;

1.   Standard unencrypted email is never be used to transmit any data of a personal or sensitive nature. Personnel that wish to use email to transfer such data ensure that personal or sensitive information is encrypted either through file encryption or through the use of a secure email facility which will encrypt the data (including any attachments) being sent. Personnel also ensure that email is sent only to the intended recipient.

2.   HCTS apply solutions that scan outgoing emails and attachments for keywords that would indicate the presence of personal data and, if appropriate, prevent its transmission.

3.   Where personal or sensitive data is held on applications and databases, relevant security and access controls are in place with additional controls considered too, would prevent data from being copied to personal productivity software (such as word processing applications, spreadsheets, etc.) where no security or access controls are in place and/or can be bypassed. This is of specific importance to the security and privacy of data collection, collation and retention via the process of digital applications to potential programmes.

Examples of record retention to which practice is aligned includes:
•   Programme schedules – 2 years
•   Academic Appeals – 5 years
•   Learner results – these are deleted once loaded onto the QQI QBS
•   Other (non-financial) records - 6 years
•   Financial records – 7 years

Laptops and Other Mobile Storage Devices (incl. Mobile Phones, PDAs, USB memory sticks, External Hard Drives, etc.)

The use of laptops, USB memory sticks and other portable or removable storage has increased substantially in the last number of years. Likewise, the use of personal communications and storage devices such as mobile phones, PDAs, etc. has also increased. These devices are useful tools to meet the business needs of staff. They are, however, highly susceptible to loss or theft. To protect the content held on these devices, HCTS implements the following procedures:

1.   All portable devices are password-protected to prevent unauthorised use of the device and unauthorised access to information held on the device. In the case of mobile phones, both a PIN and login password are used. Manufacturer or operator-provided PIN codes are changed from the default setting by the user on receipt of the device;

2.   Passwords used on these devices are of a sufficient strength to deter password cracking or guessing attacks. A password includes numbers, symbols, upper and lowercase letters. Password length is approximately 12 to 14 characters but at the very minimum 8 characters. Passwords based on repetition, dictionary words, letter or number sequences, usernames, or biographical information like names or dates are avoided. HCTS personnel must ensure that passwords are regularly changed;

3.   Personal, private, sensitive or confidential data are not be stored on portable devices. In cases where this is unavoidable, all devices containing this type of data must be encrypted. With regard to laptops, full disk encryption is employed regardless of the type of data stored;

4.   Data held on portable devices is backed up regularly to the HCTS servers;

5.   When portable computing devices are being used in public places, care is taken to avoid unwitting disclosure of information, e.g. through overlooking or overhearing by unauthorised persons;

6.   Portable devices do not contain unauthorised, unlicensed or personally licensed software. All software is authorised and procured through HCTS;

7.   Anti-virus/Anti-spyware/Personal Firewall software is installed and kept up to date on portable devices. These devices are subjected to regular virus checks using this software;

8.   When providing portable devices for use by HCTS personnel, each device is authorised for use by a specific named individual. The responsibility for the physical safeguarding of the device will then rest with that personnel;

9.   Laptops are physically secured if left in the office overnight. When out of the office, the device is kept secure at all times;

10.   Portable devices are never to be left in an unattended vehicle;

11.   Portable storage media is only used for data transfer where there is a business requirement to do so, and only on approved workstations and must be encrypted;

12.   In order to minimise incidents of unauthorised access and/or incidents of lost/stolen data, HCTS personnel restrict the use of personal storage media and devices (e.g. floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, USB memory sticks, etc.);

13.   Only storage media provided by HCTS is permitted for use.

14.   Personnel owned devices such as portable media players (e.g. iPods, etc.), digital cameras, USB sticks, etc. are technologically restricted from connecting to HCTS devices/computers;

15.   HCTS aim to implement technologies that allows for the remote deletion of personal data from portable devices (such as mobile phones and PDAs) should such devices be lost or stolen. A procedure for early notification of such loss is in place. This allows for the disconnection of the missing device from HCTS associated email, calendar and file systems;

16.   HCTS implements procedures to ensure that personal data held on mobile storage devices is fully deleted when the data is no longer required (e.g. through fully formatting the devices' hard drive);

Data Transfers

Data Transfers are a regular business requirement. With regard to personal and sensitive data, such transfers should take place only where absolutely necessary, using the most secure channel available. To support this, HCTS personnel are obliged to adhere to the following:-

1.	Data transfers should, where possible, only take place via secure on-line channels where the data is encrypted rather than copying to media for transportation. Where this is not possible or appropriate at present, the safety of the data should be ensured before, during and after transit;

2.	Manual data transfers using removable physical media (e.g. memory sticks, CDs, etc.) should end where possible;

3.	In the meantime, where data is copied to removable media for transportation such data must be encrypted using the strongest possible encryption method available. Strong passwords/passphrases (see 'General Procedures') must be used to encrypt/decrypt the data;

4.	Any such encrypted media should wherever possible be accompanied by a member of the personnel, be delivered directly to, and be signed for by, the intended recipient. If this is not possible, the use of registered post or another certifiable delivery method may be used if an agreement similar to that outlined in 7. below has been put in place;

5.	'Strong' passwords (see 'General Procedures') must be used to protect any encrypted data. Such passwords must not be sent with the data it is intended to protect. Care should be taken to ensure that the password is sent securely to the intended recipient and that it is not disclosed to any other person;

6.	Standard email should never be used to transmit any data of a personal or sensitive nature. Personnel that wish to use email to transfer such data must ensure that personal or sensitive information is encrypted either through file encryption or through the use of a secure email facility which will encrypt the data (including any attachments) being sent. Personnel should ensure that such mail is sent only to the intended recipient. In order to ensure interoperability and to avoid significant key management costs, particular attention should be paid to any central solutions put in place for this purpose;

7.	When a data transfer with a third party is required, a written agreement should be put in place between both parties in advance of any data transfer. Such an agreement should define:-

•	The information that is required by the third party (the purposes for which the information can be used should also be defined if the recipient party is carrying out processing on behalf of the organisation);

•	Named contacts in each organisation responsible for the data;

•	The frequency of the proposed transfers;

•	An explanation of the requirement for the information/data transfer;

•	The transfer method that will be used (e.g. Secure FTP, Secure email, etc.);

•	The encryption method that will be used;

•	The acknowledgement procedures on receipt of the data;

•	The length of time the information will be retained by the third party;

•	Confirmation from the third party that the information will be handled to the same level of controls that the Department apply to that category of information;

•	Confirmation as to the point at which the third party will take over responsibility for protecting the data (e.g. on confirmed receipt of the data);

•	The method of secure disposal of the transfer media and the timeline for disposal;

HCTS work with an external IT technician to ensure appropriate and up-to-date management of all its technical systems;

- Management of antivirus software and firewall
- Back-up and disaster recover
- Software renewals and software

HCTS's access to QQI's QBS system is through a password-protected link via www.qqi.ie.

8:4 – Information for Further Planning

HCTS approach to analyse management information system to support future organisation growth is outlined in figure below. HCTS is committed to applying continuous improvement to its information and data systems to;
allow for future planning
secure management support and development of its programmes

HCTS incorporate the monitoring and review of its information and data management systems into the self-evaluation and review process and view it as a fundamental tool in the contribution to the ongoing QIP.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS	MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS PROCESS	MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS REVIEW
Policies GDPR Social Media Website Privacy Policy	Security Systems managed by External support	Minutes of Management Board and Academic Committee meetings
Evaluation of Learner /Stakeholder requirements through evaluation	Secure storage of Learners assessments	Analysis of completion rates by Programme Review panels & Self-Evaluations
IT and Website external support management support	Tutor Course Folder updated with receipt of Learner portfolios. Learners emailed if portfolio not received post submission date	Review of Destruction procedures
Destruction Procedures		Minutes of Management Board and Academic Committee meetings
Data Input and storage to relevant systems		

Figure 17: Management of Information Systems & Future Planning Process

8:5 – Completion Rates

On completion of a programme, Learners are recorded on the HCTS MIS and auditing system and once the completed and final portfolio of assessment is received, this is again recorded.

Learners who are finishing a major award are required to complete an end of programme evaluation.

Learners who have gained employment are provided with letters of reference to support their employment.

HCTS tracks and collects all learner programme associated information including those waiting certification, continuing with other programmes and/or those who have left the programme or have successfully entered employment. HCTS can then generate detailed reports by programme to showcase the rates of completion;

- How many Learners commenced a programme
- How many Learners completed a programme
- How many Learners left a programme
- Reasons for leaving (where information is available)

An analysis of the above data is collated and presented to both the AC and the Management Board.
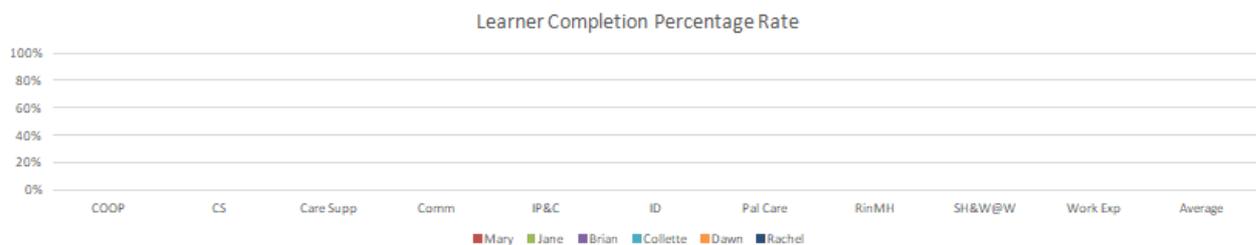

Figure 18: Learner Completion Percentage Rate KPI

Learner Records

HCTS collate and retain the following is a list of learner records:

• Attendance register
• Learner Enrolment forms
• Completed assessments
• Assessment marking sheets
• Assessment cover sheets
• Certification records (on QQI QBS)

Through its LMS and audit systems, HCTS have the ability to record and retrieve the participation of Learners in all its teaching and learning/programme activities. All records are maintained securely and safely until such times as they are no longer required at which point, they will be destroyed. HCTS are committed to maintaining records of Learners from their initial enquiry to completion and receipt of certification. These records will be maintained and stored in line with our **GDPR and Privacy Policy**.

HCTS complies to legislation and guidelines with regards to effective record maintenance, retention and disposal in that:
• HCTS commits to adhering to the associated legal guidelines in terms of retention periods;
• HCTS optimises the use of space by ensuring it manages an organised record storage management system;
• Minimises the cost of record retention by adhering to accurate retention schedules;
• HCTS applies a range of shredding, both digital wiping and manual shredding to destroy outdated paper and digital records/documents securely and permanently in such a way that prevents an end-user or any other persons from easily recovering data.

Paper Records

The Data Protection Acts apply equally to personal data held on ICT systems and on paper files. HCTS comply with the following guidelines and are committed to following them with regard to personal and sensitive data held on paper files and adheres to the Data Protection Act 2018 a and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Act 2018 and the fundamental principle that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes for which it was obtained;

1. Paper records and files containing personal data should be handled in such a way as to restrict access only to those persons with business reasons to access them;
2. This should entail the operation of a policy whereby paper files containing such data are locked away when not required;
3. Consideration should also be given to logging access to paper files containing such data and information items;
4. Personal and sensitive information held on paper must be kept hidden from callers to offices;

5.   Secure disposal of confidential waste should be in place and properly used. If third parties are employed to carry out such disposal, they must contractually agree to the Department's data protection procedures and ensure that the confidentiality of all personal data is protected. Such contracts should contain clauses similar to those outlined in the section on 'Data Transfers' below;

6.   When paper files are transferred within HCTS, this usually entails hand delivery. In these instances, senders must consider registered mail or guaranteed parcel post service where appropriate. Procedures must be in place for ensuring that the data is delivered only to the person to whom it is addressed, or another individual authorised to act on their behalf, and not any other staff member. Consideration should also be given to the security of manual files when in transit internally;

7.   Facsimile technology (fax machines) should not be used for transmitting documents containing personal data.

Appropriate Access and Audit Trail Monitoring

HCTS is committed to complying with its obligation to keep information 'safe and secure' and have appropriate measures in place to prevent "unauthorised access to, or alteration, disclosure or destruction of, the data and against their accidental loss or destruction" in compliance with sections 2(1)(d) and 2C of the Data Protection Acts 2018. The following guidelines should be followed:-

1.   Personnel are instructed and trained to ensure that their ICT systems are protected by use of appropriate firewall technologies and that this technology is kept up-to-date and is sufficient to meet emerging threats.

2.   In order to capture instances of inappropriate access (whether internal or external), addition, deletion and editing of data, audit trails should be used where technically possible.

3.   In situations where systems containing personal data do not currently record 'view' or 'read' access, it should be investigated, as a matter of urgency whether such functionality can be enabled. In carrying out such an investigation, personnel should take into account whether there would be any effect on system performance that may hinder the ability to conduct its business. If the functionality cannot be enabled and the risk of inappropriate access is sufficiently high, such systems should be scheduled for removal from use and replaced by systems with appropriate auditing functionality;

4.   Access to files containing personal data should be monitored by HCTS on an ongoing basis. Personnel should be made aware that this is being done. IT systems may need to be put in place to support this supervision.

5. Learners Portfolios are shredded by way of an external contract held with a specialist shredding company. Learners informed of this in Learner Handbook.

Minimum retention period:

HCTS work to the management, retention and destroying of data as per the minimum retention periods. HCTS give consideration to the retention periods for records, including protection/preservation requirements. HCTS determines retention periods as per the relevant statutory requirements, regulations and policy. For example, in the case of accountancy documentation and accompanying financial records, retention periods are fixed. There are many categories where there are not legal/regulatory retention guidelines,

in which case HCTS have determined internal durations of record retention as per effective practice and necessary requirements as a service provider. As mentioned, HCTS have in place appropriate and secure systems to ensure the safe disposal of both digital and paper held documents, data and records. The HCTS Auditing System provides strict timeframes for such disposal.

DATA RETENTION SCHEDULE: ACADEMIC RECORDS

Learner Records	Retention Period	Final disposal/Destination
Enrolment Details	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Records including: Extension requests, RPL , Records relating to access Reasonable Accommodation, references	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Learner fees/ financial: Recorders learner fees, payment records,	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Academic progress records	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Complaints records. Written allegations/ complaints: records received/created as a result of investigating allegations / complaints	Retain for 7 years.	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Garda Vetting records	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Submitted Assessments	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
External examiners' reports	Retain for a period of current year plus 7 years, or completion of next revalidation, whichever is the longer	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
External Examiners correspondence, meetings records etc.	Retain for a period of current year plus 7 years, or completion of next revalidation, whichever is the longer	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records

DATA RETENTION SCHEDULE: ORGANISATIONAL RECORDS

HR Records	Retention Period	Final disposition
Vacancy notification, Advert copies, Job description, Selection criteria.	Indefinitely	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Candidates not qualified or short listed for interview: Cover letters, application forms/CVs etc. Applications and CVs of candidates shortlisted for interview but who do not attend: Cover letters, application forms/CVs etc. Candidates short listed and who attend interview but who are not successful or who are successful but do not accept offer: Cover letters, application forms/CVs etc	Retained until appointment has been approved	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Interview Board marking sheet, interview Board notes, recommendation by Interview Board	Retained for 1 year after interview date	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Personnel Files. These contain (at a minimum) • Personal contact details last pension payment •Application form/CV/cover letter • Contract of employment (offer of appointment, date appointed) • Evidence of education qualifications • References • Garda vetting • Service records Termination notices • Training and development records • Safety training records	Retain on personnel file for duration of employment and for 7 years after	Confidential shredding /secure deletion of electronic files
Discipline records relating to disciplinary actions taken against employees e.g. warnings, suspensions recorded, or copy warnings	Retain on personnel file for duration of employment and for 7 years	Confidential shredding /secure deletion of electronic files

placed on an employee's personnel record etc.		
Written allegations/ complaints: records received/created as a result of investigating allegations / complaints	Retained for 7 years	Confidential shredding /secure deletion of electronic files

DATA RETENTION SCHEDULE: HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and Safety	Retention Period	Final disposition
Safety policies	Retain for 7 years after superseded then destroy Shredding	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Risk assessments records	Retained for duration of studies up to issuing of final certification	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Incident reports e.g. Accident reports and dangerous occurrence report forms	Retained for 7 years	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records

DATA RETENTION SCHEDULE: GENERAL ACADEMIC RECORDS

General Academic Records	Retention Period	Final disposition
Policies and procedures	Retain current until 7 years after superseded	Confidential shredding / secure deletion of electronic records
Records of Board & Academic Council and their Committees (Minutes, etc.)	Retain indefinitely	Appropriate Filing
Quality reports, quality assurance peer reviews	Retain indefinitely	Appropriate Filing
Correspondence with accreditation bodies etc.	Retain indefinitely	Appropriate Filing
Marketing	Retain 2 copies for College record and destroy remainder, once superseded	Non-secure Shredding / Recycling Archive (non-secure)
Legal records	Retain for 7 years	Appropriate filing / secure archiving

8:7 – Data protection and freedom of information

HCTS appreciates that the current objectives of the GDPR 2016 legislation:

• Reinforces the right of a person to ask for a copy of all personal data held relating to them personally,

• Gives a person the right to object to direct marketing practices,

• Permits a person to ask for inaccuracies in their personal data to be corrected,

• Gives provision to a person for the right to data portability,

• Gives a person the right to seek compensation through the courts where privacy rights have been infringed,

• In specific cases, GDPR may allow for personal data to be erased.

HCTS are required to collect and use personal data. The type of information collected and the methods used to collect this information will be influenced by various factors, such as whether the learner is under 18 years or an adult learner, the type of course they are enrolled on, whether they are required to undertake work placement experience etc.

The personal data HCTS collect can include information about learner identity and contact details; images/photo (including CCTV); family details; admission/enrolment details; previous schools; academic progress; PPS number; special educational needs; nationality; language; medical data; information about behaviour and attendance; information about health, safety and welfare; financial information (re fees, grants, scholarships etc.); and other personal data.

Personal data is used for purposes including: application for enrolment; monitoring of academic progress; processing for accredited certification; caring for health and well-being; caring for staff and other Learners; processing grant/funding applications; coordinating, evaluating, funding and organising educational programmes; compliance with legal obligations as an education body; compliance with monitoring and reporting obligations to Government bodies; the processing of appeals, resolving disputes, and defending litigation etc.

HCTS will share personal data with third parties, including other Government bodies. This may include but is not limited to, the State Examinations Commission, the Department of Education and Skills, NCSE, SOLAS, SUSI, HEA, QQI, TUSLA, An Garda Síochána, HSE, the Department of Social Protection, work placement provisions and the Revenue Commissioners.

Learners and staff have the following statutory rights that can be exercised at any time:
1. Right of access.
2. Right to rectification.
3. Right to be forgotten.
4. Right to restrict processing.
5. Right to data portability.
6. Right to object and automated decision making/profiling.

Personal data needs only to be retained for a short period, (e.g. HCTS will destroy at the end of an academic year because it is no longer needed).

QA 9: PUBLIC INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

9.0 Policy Statement

It is the policy of HCTS to have effective two-way communication with Learners, staff and stakeholders who have a current or potential interest in the programmes we offer.

HCTS will provide accurate information about the company and the programmes it offers.

HCTS will seek constructive feedback to enable an ongoing evaluation to make all programmes current and relevant to the Learners and stakeholders.

9:2 Public Information

Communication to current and potential stakeholders with up to date lists of courses available on website www.healthcaretrainingsolutions.ie.

A monthly newsletter is circulated to current and past Learners with opt-out option.

Public information is clear, accurate, and up to date and approved prior to publication on hard copies or on;
- Website
- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Instagram

Validated Programmes are published on the HCTS website once authorised by the Academic Committee.

HCTS commits to publishing quality assurance self-evaluation reports and its Quality Assurance Manual upon approval by the Academic Committee.

Communication Type	Risk Rating	Approval by
• Website information • Flyers • Programme brochures • Programme handbooks	High	**Academic Manager, reporting to Academic Committee**
• QA Manual • Annual monitoring reports	High	**Academic Manager, reporting to Academic Committee**
• PR releases and other public information	High	**Managing Director (requires referral to Academic Committee for all academic matters)**
• Social media postings	Medium	**Academic Manager**
• Web chat responses	Low	**Sales Manager**

Figure 19: Approval of Public Information & Communications

Course information is updated monthly on the HCTS website and on all social media platforms. A monthly newsletter is emailed to all who have agreed to receive it, using mail-chimp with an opt out option. The HCTS Learner Handbook is available on website footer www.healthcaretrainingsolutions.ie.

HCTS coordinates all ongoing communication with Learners from Management, Tutors and administration using the most effective means via in-person meetings (where possible), Zoom meetings and regular telephone communication.

Ongoing feedback is conducted both formally and informally. Learners are encouraged to contact tutors out of class time and also request in class feedback if required.

HCTS publishes information on upcoming awards using the following platforms;

- Website
- Facebook
- Instagram

9:3 – Publication of quality assurance evaluation reports

HCTS commits to publishing quality assurance self-evaluation reports and its Quality Assurance Manual upon approval by the Academic Committee.

QA 10: OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION & TRAINING

10.0 Policy Statement

It is the policy of HCTS that it is part of a wider educational endeavour in Ireland and internationally. In particular, HCTS is an integral part of the educational system in Ireland and aims to adhere with the Quality and Qualifications of Ireland (QQI) quality assurance standards. Accordingly, where HCTS works with other parties involved in education and training it does so within the context of national and international frameworks and processes of quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications. HCTS understands the importance of establishing and maintaining good two-way communications with all involved parties.

HCTS ensures to provide programmes of education and training which are designed in-line and consistent with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). HCTS understands the importance of encouraging positive relationships with other similar organisations as a means of support, benchmarking & identifying trends and current issues which need to be addressed appropriately. HCTS's Learners benefit from this proactive approach.

In all cases where HCTS enters into engagements with external partners or second providers, quality assurance procedures are in place to ensure Learners receive the appropriate learning opportunities and that Learners are safe and protected. HCTS manage any issues of conflict of interest by ensuring HCTS employees or contractors do not cause possible conflict of interest by its actions. The Academic Manager reports any concerns to the Academic Committee and Management Board.

When engaging external expertise HCTS ensures that all external experts are qualified and competent in their subject areas and are briefed on HCTS culture, policies and processes.

10:1 – Peer relationships with the broader education and training community

The Academic Committee and Management Board ensures standards are maintained by reviewing the strategic fit, academic power, quality assurance, financial status, legal entity and risk associated with this accredited bodies such as;

- Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC)
- Food Safety Professional Association (FSPA)
- An Bord Altranais (ABA)

HCTS encourages attendances at conference and webinars to network with other education and training professionals.

HCTS engages with other education and training organisations in Ireland to identify new trends and offer transfer and progression options during programme development.

HCTS works in partnerships with other providers to consider and determine areas of benchmarking.

10:2 – External partnerships and second providers

HCTS does not engage with second providers for any of its QQI programmes.

As a provider of the QQI Level 5 Major Award in Healthcare Support (5M4339), many of our Learners are required to complete their work experience module which includes a duration of time participating in work placement. A number of Learners may be in a position of being employed in a relevant workplace during their period of study. Those working environments that are involved in the provision of work experience are briefed on HCTS's requirements of the work placement and are provided with detailed documentation outlining the responsibilities of the learner, including HCTS as the provider of training and education and the provision itself.

The HCTS guidance to work placement provisions is outlined in QA 5: 5.4.

10:3 – Expert Panellists, Examiners, and Authenticators

HCTS currently appoints External Authenticators (EA) with expertise in the areas of health and social care and only from the QQI listing. HCTS aim to develop their own internal panel of EAs. As documented in QA 1, HCTS contract or appoint to positions of externality, including EA's, who meet the following criteria:

1. Independent Oversight (including the role of EA) is offered only by professionals within the training and education sector;
2. Professionals elected to provide independent oversight are completely external to the day-to-day operational functioning of HCTS;
3. HCTS will only elect external professionals who are qualified to make impartial, objective and relevant comparisons;
4. The appointment of the external professionals will be based on their ability to demonstrate adherence to HCTS QA associated policies, procedures and processes, as approved.
5. The External Authentication (EA) process is an external review of HCTS assessment to ensure its consistency with QQI standards, the award component specification and best practice
6. The EA process provides an independent and authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of Learners, in line with the National Framework of Qualifications.

QA 11: SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

11.0 Policy Statement

HCTS recognises the complexities of Quality Assurance and is cognisant that change can only come about through internal acceptance and implementation in 'lived processes' by staff and management. HCTS therefore recognise that it is necessary that stakeholders have access to appropriate resources to assist them through regular planning, quality-based monitoring, scheduled internal reviews and theme led cyclical self-evaluation in order to embed and continue to enable and evolve quality standards.

The Academic Committee takes responsibility for the planning and implementation of the self-evaluation of programmes as this enables them to establish a strategic approach to the frequency of programmes and services. HCTS uses the learning experience gathered through monitoring, self-evaluation and review to prepare Learners for real-life workplace and enable them to tackle future challenges. This allows HCTS to assist all Learners in becoming or refining themselves as a 'Safe Novice' within the health and social care industry.

HCTS ensures that current and past learner's feedback is considered in the self-evaluation of programmes to improve HCTS Quality Systems. The Academic Committee takes primary responsibility for Quality improvements.

11:1 – Provider-owned internal review, self-evaluation and monitoring

During a rolling 5 year period, all programmes delivered by HCTS will undergo self-evaluation in order to formally monitor and review their progress against the approved validation objectives. On completion of each self-evaluation, the Academic Committee will report to the Management Board who are responsible for formally signing off on updates and findings. If required, the Academic Manager will update Programme Review and Development. Any changes are communicated to all staff and training provided were required. Staff meetings are scheduled annually to discuss management and coordination of self-evaluation.

Internal Audits

Internal audits are carried out on a scheduled and priority basis to identify areas which are effective and areas where improvements are identified. An action plan to address these areas are then implemented and reviewed. Areas the audits addresses include (but are not limited too);

- To monitor and review current processes, together with their alignment with QA policies,
- Give oversight to staff performance and effective practice aligned to annotations throughout policy and associated procedural documents,

- Identify operational constraints,
- Assess how effective the overall process is in meeting both Learners and other stakeholders' expectations and HCTS's commitment to quality provision.

11:2 – External Evaluation

HCTS understands that the Integration of the external evaluation with the provider's internal quality assurance processes is important and an essential part of the HCTS quality assurance system.

HCTS is committed to confirming that the QQI approved HCTS award learning outcomes, complies to QQI national standards. HCTS implements the required external examining process which provides an objective independent opinion of procedures for the assessment of HCTS Learners.

Procedures

The responsibilities of the External Evaluator in programme self-evaluation include but are limited to;

1. Review the appropriateness of the minimum intended programme learning outcomes i.e., the programme's basic educational goal), and other programme objectives.
2. Probe the actual attainment of Learners (actual programme learning outcomes) using information agreed with and supplied by the provider.
3. Compare and contrast both the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and the actual attainment of Learners with the relevant awards standards, with the National Framework of Qualifications, and with corresponding data from other programmes in the same discipline in other higher education institutions in Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining Ireland and beyond.
4. Determine whether or not the applied procedures for assessment are valid, reliable, fair and consistent.
5. Review the appropriateness of the programme assessment strategy and the assessment procedures and, flowing from this, consider subsidiary module assessment strategies.
6. Report findings and recommendations to the provider.

Extent of the External Evaluator's authority

The External Evaluator's span of control is to objectively assess the processes to ensure the learning outcomes and assessment processes in Healthcare Support awards are consistent with the validation criteria. The External Evaluator will report to the Academic Manager.

Contract Agreement

Formal agreement between HCTS and the External Evaluator includes the outlining of HCTS's expectations; a clear and unambiguous review of the self-evaluation of the identified programme learning outcomes and assessment competencies. This agreement includes

dealing with any breaches, including the possibility that an External Evaluator may not be able to complete his or her full term of appointment.

Support for External Evaluators

The Academic Manager embraces an open communication system and assures the External Evaluator that any support required while carrying out the independent oversight is available in a time-efficient, non-judgemental and positive manner.

Reporting processes and time-frames

HCTS aim to coordinate annual external evaluations.

The draft report, as devised by the External Evaluator will be considered by the Academic Manager and brought to the oversight of the Academic Committee and Management Board. All identified opportunities for improvement and development will be discussed and where appropriate approved. An action plan will be developed and approved with resources and internal staff members positioned to undertake associated tasks.

HCTS are aware that at times disputes may arise between internal staff and external appointees (EA's and External Evaluators). Any dispute brought to the attention of management will be addressed objectively to ensure quality standards are upheld.

All reports arising out of self-evaluation/monitoring/review activities, including EA reports, are securely retained by the provider (in accordance with its records retention policy) and contribute to both quality assurance/enhancement and institutional research activities.

The following list provides examples of subject areas that may be included in reports:
1. The evidence considered — including meetings and interviews with Learners and academic staff and others.
2. The appropriateness of the provider's minimum intended programme learning outcomes in light of the External Evaluators' experience, and having regard to the relevant awards standards and the National Framework of Qualifications.
3. The External Evaluators' perception of the actual attainment of Learners.
4. The External Evaluators' opinion of the quality of the programme (its teaching and learning environment and its processes, as distinct from the intended programme learning outcomes addressed under [b]), citing strengths and areas for improvement.
5. The quality of the assessment instruments (strategy, examination papers,
6. guidelines etc.) and grading schemes etc.
7. The fairness, consistency and fitness for purpose (valid, reliable, authentic, robust) of assessment procedures and their alignment with HCTS policies and procedures as summarised in QA 6.
8. The reliability of the provider's benchmarking of its assessment procedures.
9. Appropriate national and international comparisons.

10. Any substantial concerns (even if they have already been communicated verbally) so that these may be addressed and followed up by the provider's quality assurance procedures.
11. Evidence concerning the extent to which teaching, learning and assessment arrangements have changed in response to the feedback provided by previous external examiners' reports.
12. Progress on recommendations in recent External Authenticators and other relevant reports on the programme.

The process and criteria for the removal or replacement of an External Evaluator

HCTS reserves the right to review or terminate the contract of an EA or External Evaluator if the responsibilities of the associated role are not complied with and projected objectives not achieved.

Scope and Fulfilling the Role of the External Evaluator

The Academic Manager and the External Evaluator will agree the following:

1. The information required to enable the External Evaluator to carry out their functions effectively.
2. A schedule of outputs and meetings, including meetings with Learners where appropriate.
3. To acquire familiarity with HCTS approved programmes via the QQI panel validation reports or most recent programme (programmatic) review report.
4. External Evaluator should also be informed about how the programme has been modified to address any recommendations and conditions in previous reports, including EA reports.
5. External Evaluators should make appropriate national and international comparisons. Such comparisons need to be based on valid, reliable and accurately referenced evidence.
6. HCTS will prepare necessary benchmarking data for the External Evaluator to consider.
7. HCTS will complete the organisations Induction Programme with the External Evaluator to ensure they are familiar with the HCTS quality assurance system.

11:3 – Self-evaluation, improvement and enhancement

HCTS undertake all learner programme evaluations using Survey Monkey with an analysis report prepared for Academic Committee meetings.

Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey are facilitated on a 6 monthly schedule with analysis reports prepared for Academic Committee meetings.

HCTS is committed to providing a quality learning service to Learners by moving from face-to-face teaching and learning to on-line virtual learning (as approved by QQI under the Contingency Arrangements Guidance for FET Providers 2020.

HCTS understand the importance of maintaining quality education and planned, developed, implemented and audited systems to ensure that the high standard of learning outcomes achieved in the classroom are maintained in the virtual learning environment (VLE). HCTS are committed to cyclical reviews of all policies-procedural areas and support all staff in their understanding and practical implementation of the associated regulations and required standards and procedures.

Continuous Improvements

HCTS has a strong ethos of continuous improvements. HCTS believe that all feedback is good. Perceived negative feedback while not desired is an opportunity for improvements. All feedback is analysed using Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). These KPI's are reviewed at management meetings and an action plan developed to meet the needs of the identified issue(s) while complying with all regulations and legislation.
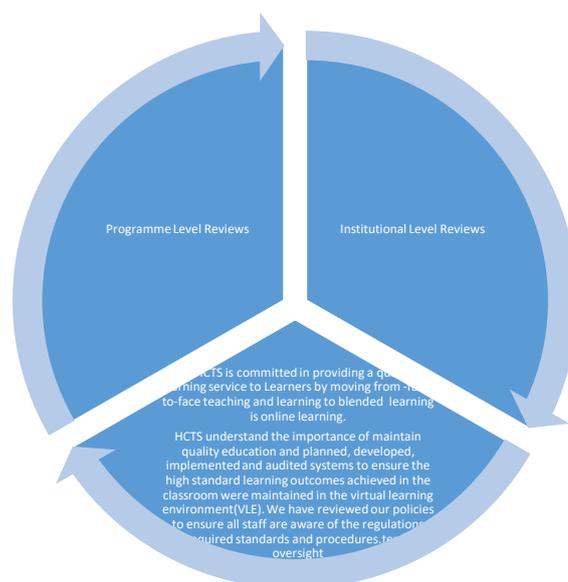

Figure 20: Benefits of Self-evaluation Process