Dublin International Study Centre

Substitute Teaching and Cover Policy

Contents

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Section One: Policy Statement

1. DISC is committed to maintaining continuity of teaching and learning for all enrolled learners. Although DISC does not hire external substitute teachers, it has a clear internal structure to ensure that all learner contact hours are preserved in the event of staff leave or absence. This Substitute Teaching and Cover Policy outlines the procedures for managing planned and unplanned staff absences in accordance with QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines and the ELE Code of Practice.

Section Two: Purpose

2. This policy ensures that the provision of substitute teaching within the International Foundation Year (IFY) programme at DISC is consistent, fair, and aligned with national quality standards. The policy serves the following purposes:

   - **Ensure Continuity and Quality of Learning:**

     To maintain uninterrupted delivery of the approved curriculum during periods of staff absence, safeguarding learners' academic progress and learning outcomes in line with QQI standards on programme consistency and integrity.

   - **Establish Transparent and Equitable Procedures:**

     To outline clear and fair procedures for arranging substitute cover, ensuring all staff and stakeholders are aware of their responsibilities and that replacements are assigned in a timely and equitable manner.

   - **Support Learner Engagement and Programme Integrity:**

     To fulfil the requirements of the QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines (2016)

   - **Uphold Academic Oversight and Governance:**

     To ensure that internal procedures for cover are quality-assured and monitored by academic leadership, preserving the integrity, continuity, and intended learning outcomes of validated programmes.

   - **Minimise Disruption and Maintain Professional Standards:**

     To ensure that teaching delivery remains professional and learner-centred, even during periods of staff illness, personal leave, or emergency absence.

Section Three: Scope

3. This policy applies to all stakeholders involved in the delivery of the IFY programme at DISC, and specifically to:

- **All Teaching Staff**:

    This includes full-time, part-time, and sessional teachers delivering components of the QQI Level 5 IFY programme. All teaching staff are expected to comply with substitute cover procedures and ensure proper handover of materials where required.

- **Academic Management and Scheduling Teams**:

    Programme coordinators, academic managers, and timetabling officers responsible for arranging, authorising, and monitoring substitute cover. This includes ensuring continuity of delivery and adherence to QQI standards in teaching quality and learner experience.

- **Enrolled Learners:**

    All learners registered on the IFY programme are entitled to uninterrupted, high-quality instruction. This policy ensures their access to consistent teaching and learning experiences, even during periods of staff absence.

- **All Learning and Assessment Activities:**

    This includes scheduled classes, workshops, tutorials, group work, supervised assessments, and any other formal academic engagement covered under the programme validation requirements.

Section Four: Alignment with National and Institutional Guidelines

4. This policy is grounded in national quality standards and internal frameworks that support the delivery of high-quality education and learner support at DISC. It ensures compliance with regulatory expectations while promoting consistency in governance, programme delivery, and staff management.

5. The policy is informed by the following key documents:

    1) **QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)**, particularly in relation to:

        - Governance and management of quality.

        - Programme delivery and the learner experience.

        - Staff recruitment, development, and management.

    2) **QQI Programme Validation Manual – Further Education and Training**, which outlines expectations for programme structure, resources, and learning outcomes.

    3) **ELE Code of Practice (QQI, 2022)**, including provisions for:

        - Consistent learner contact time across all modules.

        - Strategic planning of staff resources to support academic delivery.

        - Maintenance of academic quality and student welfare through ongoing

review and support mechanisms.

Section Five: Cover and Absence Management Framework

6. DISC maintains a clear policy of not engaging external substitute teachers for short- or long-term staff absences or leave. Instead of hiring temporary teaching staff unfamiliar with DISC's programmes or internal procedures, the centre employs a structured internal cover system that prioritises academic integrity and consistency in delivery.

7. When a short-term absence occurs, DISC draws on its existing academic and administrative capacity to manage cover in a way that safeguards the learner's experience. Available members of the academic team who do not have scheduled teaching duties may be reassigned to deliver or support sessions. In cases where academic staff are unavailable, Academic Managers themselves may take responsibility for delivering content, supervising learning activities, or facilitating continuity of assessment preparation. This approach ensures that all substitute teaching is conducted by individuals who are already familiar with DISC's quality standards, programme delivery plans, and learner needs.

8. By restricting substitution to internal staff, DISC ensures that substitute teachers are qualified, adequately briefed, and fully aligned with the pedagogical and regulatory expectations of the QQI-validated IFY programme.

9. DISC implements the following processes to ensure adequate and effective staff cover.

Planned Absences and Annual Leave

10. To ensure continuity of teaching and minimal disruption to the learner experience, DISC has established clear procedures for managing planned staff absences, including annual leave. These procedures support effective planning and ensure that qualified cover is arranged in a timely and transparent manner.

11. Key procedures include:

- Staff must submit annual leave requests a minimum of two weeks in advance.

- Early notice enables the Academic Management Team to arrange appropriate teaching cover from the internal staff pool.

- All cover arrangements are confirmed in writing and must be approved by the Programme Manager.

Unplanned Absences

12. Unplanned absences due to illness or emergency are managed swiftly to minimise disruption to teaching and learning. This process ensures that learners continue to

receive appropriate academic support, even in the absence of scheduled teaching staff.

13.   In such cases:

- Staff must inform the Programme Manager as early as possible on the day of the absence.

- Teaching cover is assigned from a pre-identified pool of staff who have confirmed availability or a reduced teaching timetable.

- If live class delivery is not feasible, asynchronous learning materials or guided study activities may be provided under the supervision of an academic staff member.

Cover Planning and Documentation

14.   Effective cover planning is essential to ensure transparency, continuity of learning, and accurate record-keeping. The Programme Manager is responsible for maintaining a centralised Cover Log that tracks all substitute teaching arrangements and supports quality assurance processes.

15.   The Cover Log includes the following details:

- The name of the absent staff member.

- The date and duration of the absence.

- The staff member assigned to provide cover.

- The nature of the learning activity delivered (e.g. live lecture, tutorial, guided study).

Staff Allocation for Cover

16.   Staff members may be assigned to cover duties during scheduled free hours on working days, provided this does not conflict with their primary responsibilities or exceed agreed workload limits.

17.   Academic Managers will refer to staff timetables to identify suitable cover options, prioritising fair distribution of cover duties across the teaching team.

18.   Wherever possible, advance notice and written confirmation of cover responsibilities will be provided.

Section Six: Academic Integrity and Learner Policy

19.   DISC is committed to upholding the academic integrity of its programmes and ensuring uninterrupted, high-quality learning experiences for all learners, including during periods of staff absence. In line with QQI *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*

(2016) and the *Assessment and Standards* (2013), DISC guarantees that:

- **All Cover Staff Are Suitably Qualified**

  Substitute teachers must hold qualifications and experience that meet the standards required for delivering QQI-validated programmes. This includes subject expertise and pedagogical competence, in line with the specific requirements outlined in the programme validation document and DISC's Recruitment and Staff Development policies.

- **Delivery Remains Aligned to Learning Outcomes**

  All covered sessions must follow the intended learning outcomes, content sequence, and assessment preparation timelines as set out in the Programme Descriptor. Substitute teachers are briefed in advance to ensure fidelity to the curriculum, supporting consistency and academic progression.

- **Learner Support and Feedback Are Maintained**

  Substitute teachers must ensure that learners receive the same level of academic guidance, clarification, and formative feedback as they would from the original instructor. This includes responding to learner queries, marking work (if applicable), and documenting learner engagement where required.

- **Communication and Contingency Planning**

  Any unexpected or extended disruption to module delivery is addressed promptly by the Academic Management Team. Learners are notified in a timely and transparent manner, and contingency measures (e.g. rescheduling, additional support sessions) are implemented to safeguard progression and assessment fairness.

Section Seven: Communication with Learners

20. Effective and timely communication with learners is essential to maintaining transparency, trust, and learner engagement during periods of staff absence or substitution.

21. To that end:

   1) **Advance Notification**

      Learners will be informed of any temporary changes to teaching staff, schedules, or delivery formats as soon as practicable following confirmation of cover arrangements. While some absences may occur unexpectedly, every effort will be made to communicate changes before the next affected session.

   2) **Channels of Communication**

      Notifications will be issued through official DISC communication platforms, including:

      - The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (e.g. Studysmart) – where

announcements will be posted directly on relevant module pages.

- Learner Email – all registered learners will receive direct email notifications outlining the nature and duration of the staff substitution.

3) Content of Communication

Notifications to learners will typically include:

- The name and role of the substitute teacher (if applicable).

- The duration of the substitution.

- Any changes to class format, schedule, or assessment timelines.

- Reassurance of curriculum continuity and learner support.

4) Learner Queries and Support

Learners will be provided with a point of contact (e.g. module coordinator or academic support email) in case they have questions or concerns regarding the temporary teaching arrangements.

5) Monitoring and Feedback

The Academic Management Team will monitor the effectiveness of communication and may seek learner feedback on the substitute teaching experience as part of routine programme review and quality assurance measures.

Section Eight: Monitoring and Review

22.	To ensure the continued effectiveness and compliance of substitute teaching arrangements, DISC conducts regular reviews of its internal cover processes. Oversight is led by the Deputy Director of Curriculum and Progression, in collaboration with the Programme Manager, and is informed by both internal feedback and external regulatory developments.

23.	Key elements of the review process include:

- Termly evaluation of cover arrangements based on staff and learner feedback to improve responsiveness and instructional quality.

- Ongoing monitoring of QQI and ELE Code requirements related to staffing and learner contact hours.

- Immediate policy updates initiated in response to any changes in regulatory standards or best practice guidance.

Section Nine: Related Policies and Documents

24.   This policy should be read in conjunction with other DISC policies and procedures that support staff planning, academic continuity, and quality assurance. The following documents provide further detail and operational guidance relevant to substitute teaching arrangements:

- Staff Recruitment and Induction Policy

- Academic Management Policy

- Staff Handbook

- Programme Delivery and Timetabling Procedure

- Learner Handbook

- Emergency and Contingency Teaching Plan

- Leave of Absence Application Form

- Cover Log Template

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