Dublin International Study Centre

Risk Assessment Policy

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Risk Assessment Policy

Section One: Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear and systematic approach to identifying, assessing, mitigating, and monitoring risks that may affect the safety, quality, and effective delivery of the International Foundation Year (IFY) programme at Dublin International Study Centre (DISC).

2. This policy is designed to:

    - Ensure a proactive risk management culture across the centre, enabling early identification of potential threats to learners, staff, operations, and programme delivery.

    - Promote a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students and staff by embedding risk awareness into everyday decision-making and operational planning.

    - Safeguard the integrity and quality of educational provision, including compliance with the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and the ELE Code of Practice.

    - Support institutional preparedness in managing both foreseeable and unforeseen risks—such as health and safety incidents, compliance issues, or reputational risks—through structured planning and response.

    - Demonstrate accountability and transparency to internal and external stakeholders by documenting and reviewing risk-related processes and responses as part of the quality assurance cycle.

3. This policy applies to all areas of the IFY programme and is a key element of DISC's broader Quality Assurance Framework, ensuring that risks are actively managed in a way that supports learner achievement, staff wellbeing, and institutional resilience.

Section Two: Scope

4. This policy applies to all operational, academic, and support activities associated with the delivery and management at DISC. It outlines the risk assessment procedures and responsibilities necessary to safeguard the wellbeing of learners, staff, visitors, and institutional operations.

5. Specifically, this policy applies to:

    1) All academic and administrative operations connected to the IFY programme, including teaching and learning activities, assessments, student support services, and institutional governance.

    2) All individuals present at DISC, including permanent and part-time staff, learners, contractors, service providers, volunteers, and visitors, during both scheduled and ad hoc activities.

3) All types of risk, including but not limited to:

- Physical risks related to health, safety, facilities, and the use of equipment.

- Digital risks, including cybersecurity, data protection, and misuse of online platforms.

- Academic risks, such as those affecting the quality, delivery, and integrity of teaching, assessment, and learner progression.

- Safeguarding risks, including concerns related to learner welfare, protection of minors or vulnerable adults, and prevention of harm or exploitation.

6. The scope of this policy extends to all on-campus and off-site activities officially organised, supported, or endorsed by DISC. This includes field trips, events, collaborative engagements with external partners, and the use of digital platforms for teaching and communication.

Section Three: Policy Statement

7. DISC is committed to developing and maintaining a culture of proactive risk management across all areas of its academic and operational activity. This commitment underpins DISC's strategic goal of providing a safe, high-quality, and resilient educational environment for learners, staff, and stakeholders.

8. Through the implementation of this policy, DISC aims to:

- Ensure the safety, well-being, and safeguarding of all learners, staff, contractors, and visitors by systematically identifying and mitigating potential risks in academic, administrative, and co-curricular settings.

- Protect the continuity and quality of programme delivery, ensuring that teaching, learning, assessment, and learner support remains consistent, adaptable, and responsive to emerging challenges.

- Demonstrate regulatory compliance with all relevant Irish laws, health and safety legislation, the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, and the ELE Code of Practice for English language education providers.

- Support informed decision-making, resource allocation, and institutional resilience, ensuring that risks are considered and addressed using strategic planning, operational management, and contingency frameworks;

- Reinforce accountability and transparency, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for risk identification, reporting, monitoring, and review at all levels of the organisation.

9. This policy affirms that risk management is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing, integrated process essential to maintaining high standards of education, learner care, and institutional integrity.

Section Four: Legislative and Regulatory Alignment

10. DISC's Risk Assessment Policy is underpinned by a commitment to compliance with all relevant Irish legislation and regulatory frameworks. This alignment ensures that risk management practices are legally sound, promote the welfare of staff and learners, and support institutional resilience and accountability.

11. This policy is aligned with the following Irish frameworks and regulations:

    - **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005** – providing the legal basis for risk identification, mitigation, and staff wellbeing.

    - **Education and Training Boards Act 2013** – ensuring governance and oversight of education and training services.

    - **Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017)** – safeguarding the welfare of learners and ensuring child protection protocols are integrated into risk planning.

    - **QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines** – embedding risk management within quality assurance processes.

    - **HEA Guidelines on Institutional Risk Management and Business Continuity** – promoting robust risk assessment and continuity planning across educational institutions.

Section Five: Definitions

12. For the purpose of this policy, the following key terms are defined to ensure clarity and consistency in the understanding and implementation of risk assessment practices at DISC:

Risk

13. A risk is any potential event, condition, or action—whether internal or external—that may prevent DISC from achieving its strategic, academic, operational, or compliance objectives. Risks may negatively affect learners, staff, institutional reputation, infrastructure, finances, or the quality of education and services. Risks may arise from academic delivery, safeguarding issues, legal non-compliance, ICT failures, health and safety concerns, or reputational threats.

Risk Assessment

14. Risk assessment is the structured process of identifying hazards, evaluating their likelihood of occurrence, and analysing the potential impact on the institution. It includes the classification of risks (e.g., low, medium, high), consideration of vulnerable populations (e.g., under-18s, international learners), and the development

of appropriate mitigation and contingency strategies.

Risk Register

15.   The risk register is a dynamic, continuously updated document used to record all identified risks. It includes detailed information on:

- The description and source of each risk.

- Risk categorisation (e.g., operational, academic, reputational).

- The likelihood and potential impact.

- Assigned risk owners.

- Planned or implemented mitigation actions.

- Review dates and progress tracking. The risk register supports oversight and decision-making by DISC leadership and feeds into institutional quality assurance and governance reporting cycles.

Section Six: Types of Risk

16.   Risks associated with DISC programmes and delivery may arise from a variety of contexts. This policy categorises risks into the following types, all of which must be considered as part of the risk assessment process:

Academic Risks

17.   These relate to the design, delivery, and assessment of the IFY programme. Academic risks include:

- Curriculum misalignment.

- Inconsistent assessment practices.

- Inadequate academic support.

- Staff underqualification, or barriers to learner progression.

18.   Academic risks may compromise the quality of teaching and learning, learner satisfaction, and academic outcomes.

Operational Risks

19.   These concern the day-to-day functioning of DISC and include issues related to staffing, scheduling, resource allocation, IT systems, infrastructure, and administrative processes. Disruptions in these areas can affect service delivery, learner support, and

institutional efficiency.

Health and Safety Risks

20. These involve any condition that could result in physical harm or injury to learners, staff, or visitors. This includes:

    - Risks arising from unsafe premises.

    - Poorly planned off-site events, accidents, or inadequate emergency response procedures.

21. DISC has a legal and ethical duty to minimise these risks in line with national legislation and institutional policy.

Safeguarding Risks

22. These refer to threats to the welfare of learners, particularly vulnerable individuals, including those under 18 or individuals with additional support needs. Safeguarding risks include failure to identify or respond to signs of abuse, bullying, harassment, or inappropriate staff-learner interactions.

23. Safeguarding risks require immediate and sensitive intervention and are addressed under DISC's Safeguarding Policy.

Reputational Risks

24. These relate to events or actions that could damage DISC's standing among learners, partners, regulators, or the wider public. Reputational risks may arise from academic failure, student dissatisfaction, public complaints, legal action, or media exposure. Maintaining institutional credibility is critical for trust, recruitment, and compliance.

Compliance Risks

25. These arise when DISC fails to meet legal, regulatory, or quality assurance obligations. This includes non-compliance with QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines, ELE Code of Practice, visa requirements, data protection laws (GDPR), or employment legislation. Compliance risks may result in sanctions, legal liability, or programme devalidation.

26. Each identified risk should be assessed according to its category, likelihood, and potential impact, and recorded in DISC's Risk Register with appropriate mitigation strategies.

Section Seven: Risk Assessment Procedure

27.   DISC maintains a structured and cyclical approach to risk assessment. This ensures that potential threats to the delivery, quality, and safety of its programmes are identified, evaluated, and managed effectively. The procedure consists of the following six key stages:

Risk Identification

28.   All academic, operational, safeguarding, and environmental risks are systematically identified by staff through planning meetings, audits, event proposals, quality reviews, and feedback mechanisms. Risks may arise from internal processes or external factors and must be recorded with sufficient detail to understand the source and nature of the threat.

Risk Assessment (Likelihood and Impact)

29.   Each identified risk is evaluated to determine:

- The likelihood of the risk occurring (e.g. rare, possible, likely).

- The potential impact on learners, staff, operations, or institutional reputation (e.g. minor, moderate, severe).

- Risks are categorised using a risk matrix to determine their priority level (low, medium, high) and urgency of response.

Mitigation Actions

30.   Appropriate mitigation strategies are developed to reduce the likelihood or impact of each risk. Actions may include policy changes, staff training, infrastructure improvements, or alternative delivery methods. Each mitigation measure is assigned to a responsible individual or team, with clear timelines and resource considerations.

Monitoring Controls

31.   Controls are implemented to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation actions and to detect any escalation or changes in risk status. This may include regular check-ins, audits, learner feedback, or performance indicators. Where risks persist or evolve, controls must be adapted accordingly.

Documentation in the Risk Register

32.   All risks, assessments, mitigation plans, and monitoring updates are logged in DISC's central Risk Register. This live document is reviewed regularly and used to support institutional planning, quality assurance processes, and external audits. The register includes risk owner details, review dates, and progress status.

Reporting to Quality Assurance Committee

33.   Risk assessment outcomes and emerging issues are reported to DISC's Quality Assurance Committee. Significant risks or trends may be escalated to the Academic Board or Operations Committee for strategic oversight and resource allocation.

Section Eight: Responsibilities

34.   Effective risk management at DISC requires the engagement and accountability of all stakeholders and staff. The following roles and responsibilities apply to those involved in identifying, mitigating, and responding to risk within the IFY programme:

Role	Responsibility
Centre Management Team (CMT)	Maintains overall ownership of the Risk Register and provides strategic oversight of all institutional risk management processes. Ensures risks are escalated appropriately and embedded in strategic planning and quality enhancement cycles. Coordinates cross-departmental collaboration in managing high-level or systemic risks.
Head of Quality	Ensures compliance with QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines, the ELE Code of Practice, and all relevant regulatory and accreditation standards. Monitors consistency in risk documentation and reporting and advises on institutional quality implications. Supports the integration of risk assessment outcomes into self-evaluation and continuous improvement processes.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Oversees the identification, assessment, and management of all risks related to child protection, learner welfare, and safeguarding. Coordinates safeguarding training and ensures that policies and practices are responsive to emerging safeguarding risks or disclosures. Liaises with external agencies where required.
Academic and Welfare Staff	Identifies risks that may arise during teaching, learning, assessment, or learner support activities. Reports incidents or emerging concerns in line with institutional protocols. Contributes to the risk assessment of educational events,

	student behaviour, and engagement.
Student Experience Team	Identifies and mitigates risks linked to operational logistics, student events, travel, facilities, and learner accommodation. Ensures that operational risks (e.g., trip planning, group supervision, accessibility) are proactively managed. Works closely with other departments to coordinate risk mitigation measures.
Learners	Are expected to engage in safe and responsible behaviour, comply with DISC's Code of Conduct, and follow health, safety, and safeguarding guidelines. Learners should promptly report any hazards, unsafe conditions, or well-being concerns to a staff member. They are encouraged to participate in the risk management process by providing feedback, disclosing support needs, and adhering to event protocols, especially during off-site activities.

35. All staff and learners share a collective responsibility to maintain a safe and supportive environment. Risk awareness is embedded in DISC's institutional culture to uphold high standards of learner welfare, academic integrity, and regulatory compliance.

Section Nine: Risk Categories and Indicators

36. Examples of risk categories and indicators relevant to DISC are outlined below. This list is not exhaustive and may be expanded as needed.

Category	Examples
Academic	Low learner progression; Academic Misconduct cases.
Operational	Staff shortages; IT system issues.
Health and Safety	Non-compliance; Slips/accidents.
Safeguarding	Bullying; Unreported disclosures; Absenteeism.
Reputational	Complaints.
Compliance	Data breach; Missed QQI QA review cycle.

Section Ten: Training and Awareness

37. Effective risk management depends on maintaining consistent awareness and preparedness across the entire learning community. At DISC, all staff and learners are provided with targeted training and guidance to ensure that risks are identified, understood, and appropriately addressed.

Staff Induction and Ongoing Training

38. All new staff members receive comprehensive risk awareness and health and safety training as part of their formal induction. This includes:

- Familiarisation with DISC's Risk Assessment Policy, Safeguarding Policy, and Emergency Response Plan.

- Procedures for identifying, reporting, and escalating risks.

- Roles and responsibilities in maintaining a safe environment for learners and colleagues.
  In addition, annual refresher training is provided to all staff to reinforce core principles, respond to new or emerging risks, and ensure continued compliance with institutional and regulatory standards.

- Staff receive specialised training in areas such as child protection, first aid, incident management, and off-site risk planning.

Learner Induction and Engagement

39. All learners receive risk awareness training during induction, covering:

- DISC's emergency procedures (e.g., evacuation, contacting staff).

- How to report safety or well-being concerns.

- Expectations for responsible behaviour during on-campus and off-site activities.

- Digital safety protocols, including appropriate online conduct and safeguarding in virtual learning environments.

40. Learners are encouraged to take an active role in maintaining a safe community by understanding their responsibilities and communicating concerns without fear of reprisal.

Communication and Visibility

41. Key safety information—including contact details for safeguarding officers, reporting channels, and emergency procedures—is made clearly visible across campus and accessible via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

42. Through regular training, clear communication, and a culture of accountability, DISC ensures that all members of its community are equipped to manage risk effectively and contribute to a safe, inclusive learning environment.

Section Eleven: Monitoring and Review

43. To ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of risk management practices, DISC maintains a regular schedule of monitoring, review, and policy updates. This process supports a proactive approach to risk identification, mitigation, and institutional accountability.

44. Key review practices include:

    - Risk assessments are updated each term and following any significant incidents or near-misses.

    - The Risk Register is reviewed on a quarterly basis to track developments, ensure mitigation actions are effective, and support leadership oversight.

    - This policy is reviewed annually or sooner, where necessary, to reflect changes in regulatory requirements, operational priorities, or institutional risk exposure.

Document Control

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