

dublin
international
study
centre

Quality Assurance Manual

Study Group Ireland trading as

Dublin International Study Centre



quality assurance & enhancement office

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Quality Assurance Manual

Chapter 1 – Introduction & Context

1.1 Introduction

1. This chapter introduces the Dublin International Study Centre and describes its relationship with its parent company, Study Group Global (SGG).

1.1.2 Dublin International Study Centre

2. The Dublin International Study Centre (DISC) was established in September 2011 to provide international students, who may not qualify for direct entry to University College Dublin (UCD), with a pathway onto specified UCD undergraduate degree programmes via successful completion of the relevant international foundation programme. DISC's programmes are internally approved through a rigorous published process and are formally endorsed by UCD allowing DISC to market and promote the programmes using UCDs name and marketing collateral. Programmes delivered by DISC are:
 - [International Foundation Year in Business, Economics & Finance](#)
 - [International Foundation Year in Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities](#)
 - [International Foundation Year in Engineering & Sciences](#)
3. The International Foundation Year (IFY) prepares students for entry to the first year of a choice of pre-agreed undergraduate degree programmes at UCD, as published on the website (see links for each of the programmes above).
4. DISC also offers an English Language Preparation course that students may take prior to joining the International Foundation Year (IFY) if they do not meet the published English language entry requirement.
5. DISC exclusively owns, and is solely responsible for delivery of, its programmes. The contractual agreement that is in place with UCD sets out DISC's responsibilities regarding the provision of all key aspects of programme delivery, assessment and quality assurance. See [section 1.1.6](#) for further details about the arrangement between DISC and UCD. DISC is situated on the UCD campus in the Newstead Block A building, ensuring that students have access to a range of university services.
6. DISC is owned by the international education company Study Group. The organisation trades internationally as 'Study Group', but for clarity is referred to throughout this manual as 'Study Group Global' (SGG) in order to clearly distinguish it from DISC.

1.1.3 Study Group Global

7. SGG has extensive experience in the delivery of preparatory pathway programmes as it is a leading provider of international education, working with universities across the UK, Europe, North America and New Zealand to deliver a variety of programmes to nurture ambitious students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds. SGG's programmes provide study opportunities to prepare students for success at their chosen university and in the world of work.
8. With a global outlook and offices all over the world, SGG uses its expertise, knowledge and commitment to keep creating more opportunities in international education. The universities that SGG works with trust it to increase their global footprint, access student diversity and provide with assured routes for students to progress to higher education.
9. SGG has extensive experience in the delivery of preparatory pathway programmes, having operated the 'International Study Centre' (ISC) model in the UK and Europe since 2006. Under this model, SGG delivers tailored international pathway programmes in partnership with a number of universities, with delivery taking place on partner university campuses and being underpinned by a signed formal agreement.
10. Students who complete their studies and achieve the published progression requirements (both subject-specific and English language level) are then enabled to progress to their chosen degree programme at the university to which the ISC is connected.
11. In 2011, SGG signed a formal agreement with University College Dublin (UCD) whereby it would deliver pathway provision for the university at the Dublin International Study Centre (DISC) as part of its UK and Europe network.

1.1.4 Legal Structure

12. When DISC was established in 2011, it was instituted as a key part of SGG's network of ISCs in Europe with the legal entity overseeing the operation of each centre being Study Group Limited¹ (SGL), a company based in the UK. In 2021, in support of DISC's application for external validation and in order to align with the expectations of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), SGG established an Irish company, Study Group Ireland Limited² (SGI), which mirrors the governance arrangements of SGL with both the SGL and SGI boards reporting to the SGG Top Co. Board. As such the SGG Top Co. board has delegated legal, regulatory and operational responsibility for the education that is delivered in the Republic of Ireland to SGI, with the company seamlessly assuming responsibility for the operation of DISC in September 2022.
13. 'Dublin International Study Centre' and its shorthand name 'Dublin ISC' have been registered with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) as a trading name of SGI.

¹ UK company registration number 02325576

² Republic of Ireland company registration number 708206

14. While benefiting from being part of the SGG corporate structure, Study Group Ireland Limited, trading as Dublin International Study Centre, maintains its own board of directors, governance and decision-making processes, which are described in detail in [Chapter 3](#). Nevertheless, DISC continues to benefit from access to the structure and resources afforded by SGG. This manual clearly sets out where DISC utilises SGG resources – such as global policies and functions – and where it has designed bespoke local processes – such as local policies and procedures – in order to ensure compliance with regional expectations.

1.1.5 Aims and Objectives of DISC

15. The aim of DISC is to provide international students with an opportunity to progress to undergraduate degree programmes at UCD.
16. Central to this objective is equipping students with appropriate subject matter knowledge at an appropriate level for their chosen degree pathway, combined with the development of English language skills in an academic context, as well as other related skills essential for successful study at UCD. These skills are embedded in all modules through, for example, guidance with subject study plans, assessment preparation and academic integrity, as well as activities to develop student autonomy and collaboration skills.
17. DISC aims for excellence in teaching provision and student support and acknowledges the importance of student well-being in promoting academic success. DISC therefore delivers a programme of welfare tutorials covering topics such as acculturation, physical and mental health, and life management. DISC works in close collaboration with all relevant staff, including those of UCD, as well as students and the SGG network as appropriate to embed this work and effectively reach its desired objectives.

1.1.6 External Partnerships and Collaborations

18. Part of the success of the partnership between DISC and UCD has been the mutual benefits accrued by each partner with DISC gaining additional expert input into development and review activities, and UCD gaining high-quality, well-prepared international students for its undergraduate degree programmes.
19. As its primary critical stakeholder, DISC seeks input and feedback from UCD at all stages of policy development and review, both informally and formally via, for example, the Oversight Board (see [section 3.5.2](#) and the governance handbook). UCD has a vested interest in the quality and standards of provision at DISC to ensure students have the best foundation to be successful on their UCD programme.
20. DISC sets entry requirements and progression thresholds in collaboration with UCD and, where appropriate, aligns its processes with UCD to ensure that students are well prepared for onward study at the university.
21. UCD does not validate, own, co-deliver, or assess DISC programmes or modules; there is a formal agreement in place which identifies the areas of responsibility and arrangements between the two parties.

Chapter Two

Documented Approach to Quality Assurance

Chapter 2 - Documented Approach to Quality Assurance

2.1 Introduction

22. The main purpose of this manual is to centrally collate all quality assurance policies and procedures for all staff at DISC. It also demonstrates that there is a robust framework for the management of quality assurance that is subject to continuous and effective monitoring and is consistent with QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.
23. Each chapter details policies, processes and procedures, and identifies where responsibility and accountability sit for the implementation of them. The manual also sets out how the assessment of quality indicators feed into the quality assurance and enhancement system to facilitate continuous improvement. [Chapter 3](#) provides detail regarding the governance structure within which these quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms are overseen and evaluated.
24. DISC refers to its learners as students and therefore this terminology is used by DISC in all policies and processes drafted to date. As such, references throughout this manual and in supporting documentation will reflect this terminology, and where 'student' is referenced, this should be considered consistent with QQI's definition of 'learner'.

2.2 Responsibilities

25. DISC's governance and management structures have been created to ensure that quality assurance and academic decision making is appropriately free from commercial considerations or influence of the business owners (see [Chapter 3](#)).
26. A dedicated quality assurance role, Head of Quality, has responsibility for overseeing and providing support for all quality assurance processes.
27. DISC can leverage the expertise and advice of the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team as needed. The SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team work closely with and support all International Study Centres (including DISC) in areas of quality such as programme development, approval and re-approval.

2.3 Embedding a Quality Culture

28. All DISC policies and procedures in this Quality Assurance Manual have been created and developed with the engagement of students, staff and external stakeholders, which include representatives from the SGG network and UCD.
29. Students and staff are invited to contribute to the development and review of DISC policies to ensure input from the people directly impacted by them. Students, members of staff and, where appropriate, external stakeholders, are members of relevant committees and boards to ensure that the development and approval of quality assurance policies and procedures is consultative and transparent.
30. DISC maintains effective communication with all its stakeholders and provides updates and responses to recommendations and concerns which affords reassurance that engagement is followed up with action. This approach has a positive effect on the

quality of provision because it helps to demonstrate and embed the value of a quality culture and of reflective practice.

2.4 Quality Assurance Policies and Processes

31. All of DISC’s quality assurance policies and procedures are documented and referenced in this manual. Policies and operating procedures are available to students and staff on DISC’s internal virtual learning environment (VLE) and in hard copy upon request. This Quality Assurance Manual will also be published on the DISC website, following approval by QQI.
32. The table below indicates how the chapters of this QA Manual align to the relevant standards as outlined in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

ESG Standard	Chapter
<p>ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.</p>	<p>Two - Documented approach to Quality Assurance</p> <p>Three - Management & Governance</p>
<p>ESG 1.2 Design & Approval of Programmes</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.</p>	<p>Four - Programme Development, Approval & Validation</p>
<p>ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff.</p>	<p>Five - Staff Recruitment, Management & Development</p>
<p>ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition & Certification</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”.</p>	<p>Six - Access, Transfer & Progression</p>
<p>ESG 1.3 Student-Centred Learning, Teaching & Assessment</p> <p><i>Standard:</i></p>	<p>Seven - Learning & Teaching</p>

<p>Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.</p>	<p>Eight - Assessment of Students</p>
<p>ESG 1.6 Learning Resources & Student Support</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.</p>	<p>Nine - Support for Students & Student Engagement</p>
<p>ESG 1.7 Information Management</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.</p>	<p>Ten - Information & Data Management</p>
<p>ESG 1.8 Public Information</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up to date and readily accessible.</p>	<p>Eleven - Published Information</p>
<p>ESG 1.9 On-going Monitoring & Periodic Review of Programmes</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</p> <p>ESG 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance</p> <p><i>Standard:</i> Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.</p>	<p>Twelve – Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review</p>

2.4.1 Principles of Policy Design and Development

33. DISC develops its policies and procedures to be clear, comprehensive, and consistent, translating them into relevant quality assurance and enhancement processes supported by operating procedures, guidelines and training.
34. DISC policies are reviewed periodically, led by the Head of Quality, to ensure that they are up to date and continue to adhere to any regulatory or legislative requirements. The date and frequency of reviews is specified on each policy document, and responsibility for initiating the review sits with the relevant board/committee, as delegated by Academic Board (see [section 3.3.2](#) and the governance handbook).

35. As DISC's key stakeholder, it is important that student facing DISC policies and processes align with those of UCD (as far as possible) to ensure a smooth transition for students from their DISC pathway programme to their undergraduate degree programme at UCD. DISC therefore seeks input from UCD in the development and review of student facing policies as needed.
36. Key policy documents provided to students are reviewed to ensure consistency with IELTS level 5.0. This ensures that the readability of documents is pitched to the appropriate entry level of English language required for DISC students so that the content can be understood.

2.4.2 SGG Policies

37. As part of a global network, DISC can benefit from utilising policies developed by SGG. Global policies are adopted where it has been determined that they are compliant with the obligations of DISC. Where DISC must adhere to additional regional requirements, such as from QQI or the Department of Justice, local policies are developed.
38. Academic Board will review and approve any global level policies for use by DISC to ensure compliance with QQI expectations. In addition to the periodic review of policies by the policy owner, Academic Board will review the continued suitability of the policy for use by DISC on an annual basis. These reviews will be led by the Head of Quality.
39. Where global policies have been adopted for use, DISC can raise queries and input into the formal development and review of these policies through representation or membership of relevant SGG boards/committees. DISC may also discuss concerns more informally with the relevant SGG department or function, or the University Partnership Director (see [section 3.4.2](#)).
40. Where it would not be appropriate to adopt a global policy due to, for example safeguarding legislation requirements, or adherence to QQI requirements, a local DISC policy will be drafted.

2.4.3 Version Control

41. All SGG and DISC policies will be subject to proper version control and will clearly indicate the policy owner, to whom the policy applies, date of approval, and date of next review. This will ensure that the most up-to-date policy is clear and followed. The SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team keep a central log of the next review date of all policies across the network (both global and local), and will alert the Head of Quality when a review is due for any policies applicable to DISC.

2.5 Quality Indicators

42. The key indicator of the quality of learning opportunities at DISC is the progression of students to their degree of choice at UCD and, ultimately, a successful outcome in terms of that degree. Quality of DISC provision – including that of the student experience – is assessed throughout the student journey, from first contact, during the admissions process, to progression to and successful engagement with study at UCD.
43. QA processes at DISC assess specific quality indicators (such as student recruitment, student retention and progression) and identify actions to ensure that academic standards are secure and quality is maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

44. Student feedback is also a key indicator of the quality of provision at DISC. Feedback is received through the two committees, Staff-Student Liaison Committee and the Student Council (outlined in the DISC governance handbook) as well as the module and programme feedback processes.
45. Please see [section 4.4](#) and [Chapter 12](#) for further information about quality indicators used as part of the programme review and self-evaluation processes.



Chapter Three
Management & Governance



Chapter 3 – Management & Governance

3.1 Introduction

46. DISC's governance and management structure has been designed to hold true to the ethos, principles and requirements of good governance in higher education. Therefore, the arrangements (described below) have been designed to ensure that:
 - There is appropriate, effective oversight of education and training delivered at DISC;
 - There is proper separation between commercial and academic decision making;
 - The standards of education and training delivered at DISC meet the levels described in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ); and
 - QQI can receive appropriate assurance that quality standards are being maintained and that the reputation of the NFQ is protected.
47. In addition to this, the model of governance has been designed to enable DISC to fulfil its strategic objectives, to ensure it continues to be professionally managed and that it remains transparently accountable to its stakeholders.

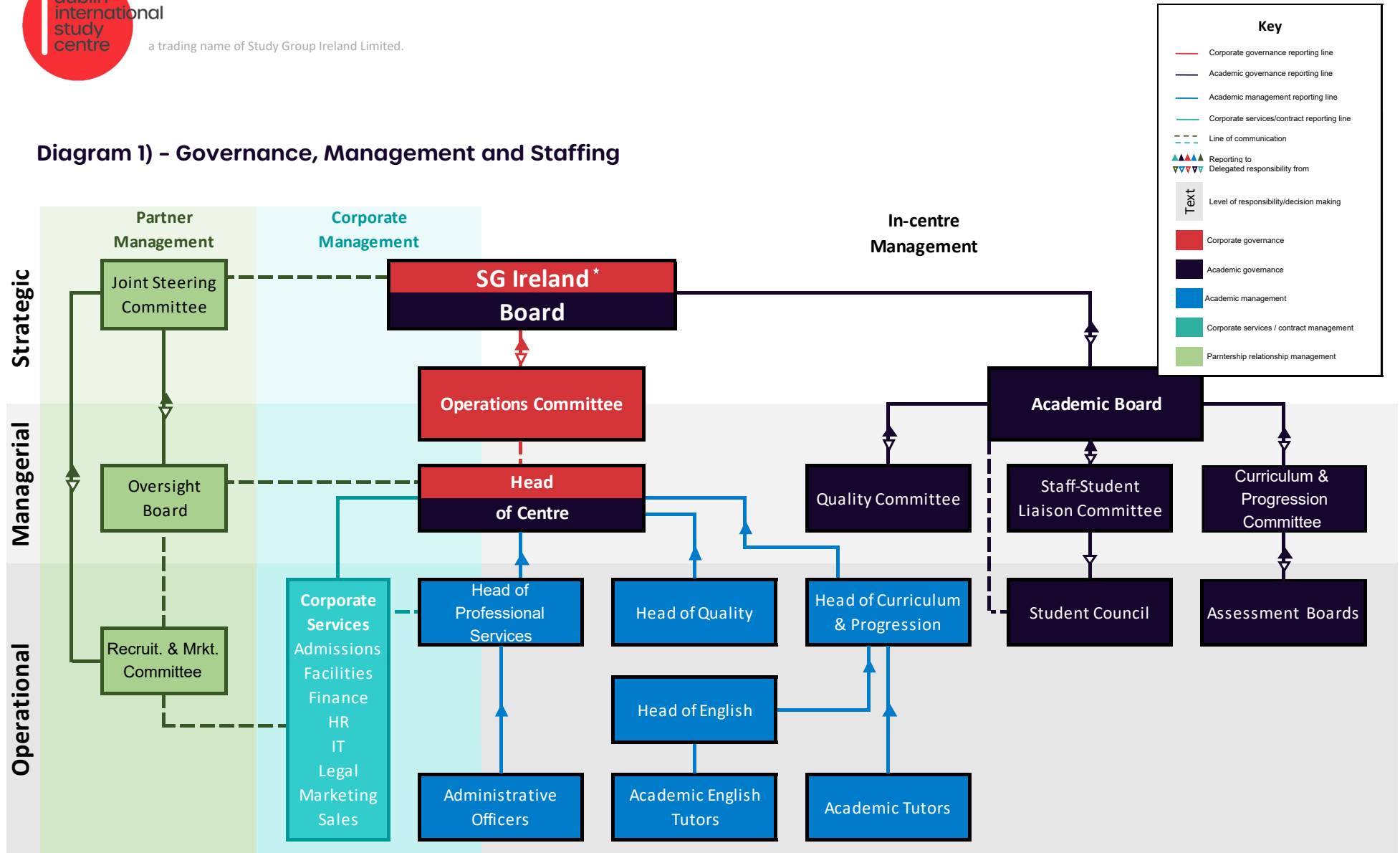
3.2 Governance Structure

48. DISC's governance structure is comprised of several authoritative bodies and the constitution under which Study Group Ireland Limited, trading as Dublin International Study Centre, is incorporated provides for each of these bodies to fulfil a distinct role in the governance framework. A diagram of DISC's governance is included below ([Diagram 1](#)).

3.2.1 Study Group Ireland Limited Board

49. The Study Group Ireland Limited Board (the Board) is the governing body of DISC, with responsibility for overall strategy development as well as financial, regulatory and legal matters. The development of academic strategy and oversight of the effective operation of academic governance is delegated by the Board to the Academic Board. Therefore, Academic Board is responsible for teaching, learning, examinations, and quality assurance. A diagram of DISC's academic governance structure is included below ([Diagram 2](#)). Responsibility for the oversight of managerial decisions about the effective operation of DISC while identifying and addressing strategic risks is delegated, by the Board, to the Operations Committee.
50. The Board also delegates responsibility for the day-to-day running of DISC to the Head of Centre. The Head of Centre is responsible for the line management of colleagues, and the provision of corporate services including admissions, facilities, finance, HR, IT, legal, marketing and sales.
51. The Board remains accountable to the SGG Top Co. Board for fulfilling any obligations it may have in line with SGG's strategy. The Board will report to the SGG Top Co. Board via submission of minutes and Chair's report from each meeting, and via additional formal reports on any aspects of its business when requested.
52. The following governance bodies report directly to the Board:
 - Academic Board; and
 - Operations Committee.

Diagram 1) - Governance, Management and Staffing



* Study Group Ireland Limited, trading as Dublin International Study Centre

3.2.2 Academic Board

53. Academic Board has delegated authority from the Board to act as the principal academic authority of DISC. Academic Board is responsible for the governance of all academic activities including academic policies, the management of academic risk, the delivery of programmes, oversight of students' academic performance and ownership of quality assurance processes. It also advises the Board on academic matters including (but not limited to) teaching, learning, and scholarship.
54. The following governance bodies report directly to Academic Board;
 - Quality Committee;
 - Staff Student Liaison Committee; and
 - Curriculum and Progression Committee.
55. In addition to the above, Academic Board has delegated key responsibilities to the Centre Management Team (CMT). The CMT is responsible for ensuring that all academic policies and procedures, owned by Academic Board, are implemented as designed and written. The CMT serves as the primary source of advice to Academic Board on matters relating to the delivery of teaching and learning at DISC, the performance of students and the impact of scholarly and research activity undertaken by DISC staff.
56. Additionally, in consultation with other relevant colleagues, the CMT develops, for approval by Academic Board, DISC's academic planning, teaching resource allocation, performance evaluation, and quality assurance cycle.

3.2.3 Operations Committee

57. The Operations Committee (OPC) has delegated authority from the Board for oversight of DISC's corporate operations. The Committee is DISC's primary operational decision-making body with responsibility for ensuring the effective provision of services which support teaching and learning activities at DISC. It oversees operations and directs the implementation of DISC's operational plans and policies while identifying any operational threats or risk to the successful implementation of SGI's strategy.
58. Operations Committee has delegated key responsibilities to the CMT. The CMT is responsible for ensuring that all operational policies and procedures, owned by the Operations Committee, are implemented as designed and written. The CMT serves as the primary source of advice to the Committee on matters relating to the smooth running of DISC, the performance of corporate services sourced from Study Group Global (financial, HR, legal, IT and facilities (campus) services), the performance of DISC staff, and the impact of external pressures on DISC.
59. Additionally, in consultation with other relevant colleagues, the CMT develops, for approval by the Operations Committee, DISC's annual management plans, accounts and operational risk mitigation strategies.

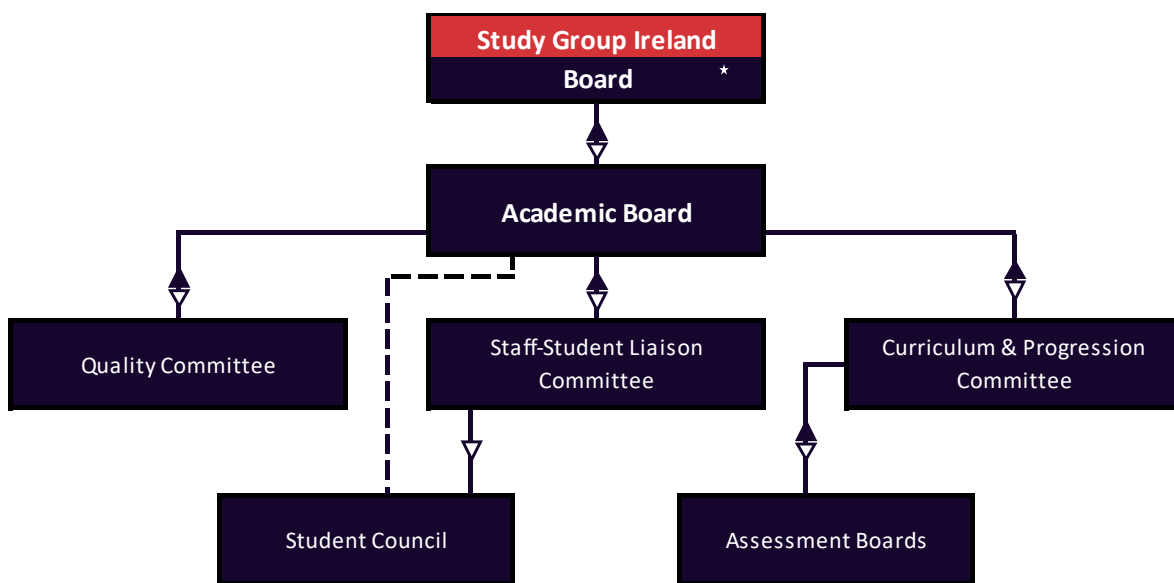
3.3 Academic Governance

60. As highlighted by the responsibilities of Academic Board and Operations Committee, DISC's governance has a clear separation of powers and obligations for the different parts of the governance structure. Academic Board is DISC's principal academic

authority and as such it has primacy and oversight of all boards and committees which are in place to assure the quality of educational provision. It also has a responsibility to ensure that relevant standards are being met by students through the study of their programmes. In this section we highlight the academic governance of DISC and what each of the committees do with the delegated responsibilities that they have been given, either by the governing body or by Academic Board.

61. Further information about the roles and responsibilities of the different committees can be found in the terms of reference section of the governance handbook. The terms of reference set out the purpose, remit and authority of each of the committees along with who should sit on those committees. These are complemented by the Standing Orders (also in the governance handbook) which outline how meetings of the committees should take place and how decisions can be made. There are specific standing orders for the Board, Operations Committee and Academic Board but other committees have a template set of standing orders that they can use to manage the business that they consider which are also in the appendices of the governance handbook.

Diagram 2) - Academic Governance



Study Group Ireland Limited, trading as Dublin International Study Centre

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3.3.1 Quality Committee

62. The Quality Committee has responsibility delegated to it by Academic Board for the oversight of the implementation of all quality assurance policies and procedures at DISC. It ensures that quality assurance activities are completed, after the completion of one academic cycle and prior to the start of a future academic cycle, to ensure that the results of those activities can be reported to Academic Board and acted upon in good time. Quality Committee also ensures that relevant policies and processes are kept up to date through the maintenance of a regular process of scrutiny and revision of those policies. The Quality Committee will also make recommendations to Academic Board about the effectiveness of any quality assurance policy or process and recommend any changes to improve the effectiveness or efficiency of those policies or processes.

3.3.2 Staff-Student Liaison Committee

63. The Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) acts as a formal channel whereby the views of students can be expressed and sought. SSLC is made up of elected students (reps) from each tutorial group at DISC, a member of the CMT, and a member of the Professional Services Team. Student representatives hold a vital role in promoting the student voice and are given training and guidance on what is expected of them as representatives. The role is voluntary, and the benefits can include improving and enhancing a skillset that includes diplomacy, responsibility, leading group discussion, self-development, and co-ordinating with other students and staff of all levels. In performing its role, the SSLC collates feedback from student representatives on programme delivery, access to resources, and any feedback related to the student experience. It also receives feedback from Student Council, enabling any student (regardless of if they are an elected rep or not) to provide feedback on their experiences.

3.3.3 Curriculum and Progression Committee

64. The Curriculum and Progression Committee (CPC) has two responsibilities. The first is to monitor the delivery of all programmes at DISC and ensure that the outcomes of the assessment boards are in line with expectations. The second is to provide a forum for all those involved in the delivery of programmes to be involved in identifying future developments in the ways their programmes are delivered and managed and to share and enhance practice. The CPC is chaired by the Head of Curriculum & Progression and includes key staff who are involved in the delivery of the programme(s) with input from collaborative partners or external stakeholders as appropriate.

3.3.4 Student Council

65. The Student Council is an advisory forum of students that provides an opportunity for DISC students to raise, and discuss, their experiences of their education and identify actions that could improve their, and others', experience. The purpose of the Student Council is to provide a forum for all DISC students to raise, in a safe environment, any experiences they have had and how they have impacted the quality of their time in Dublin. While the primary focus is on matters relating to students' experience of their programmes (including academic standards, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, and the quality of information) any item relating to the wider student experience may be discussed. Student Council reports to the SSLC regularly but also has a link to Academic Board to raise issues directly with the primary academic body of the organisation, when the council feels that this is appropriate.

3.3.5 Assessment Boards

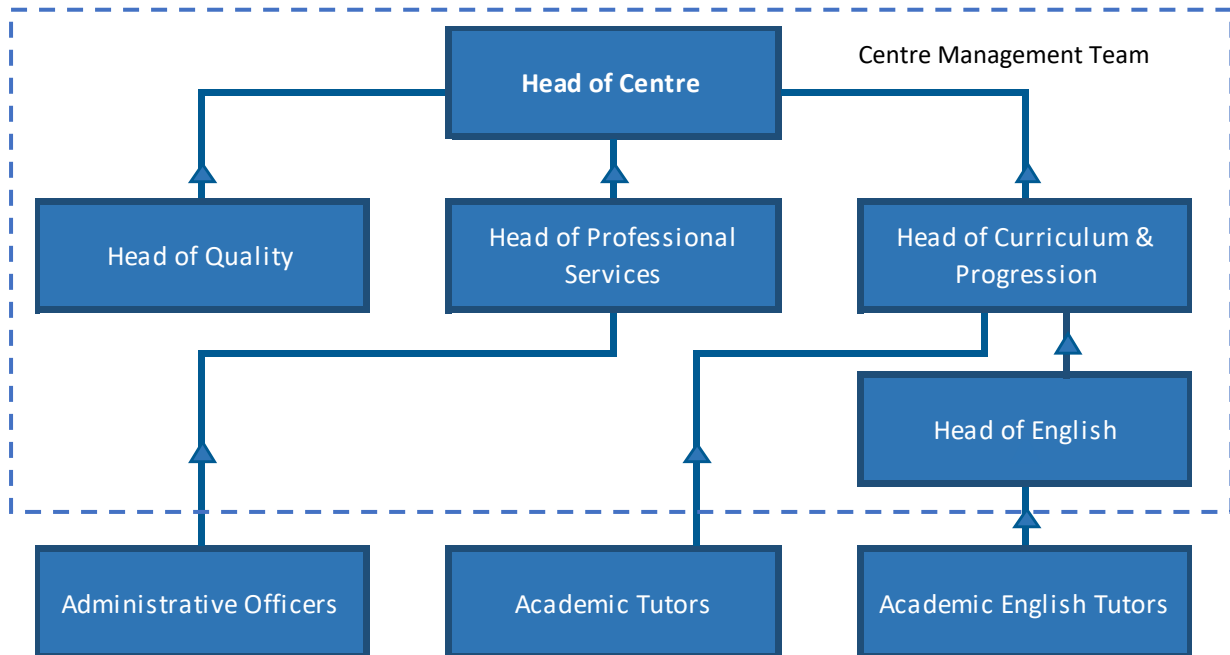
66. The assessment boards, the Programme Assessment Board (PAB) and Module Assessment Board (MAB), are responsible for determining the progress or otherwise of students at intermediate stages of DISC programmes and the final decisions or recommendations, as appropriate, at the final stage. The MAB reports directly to the PAB and then the PAB reports the final results to the Curriculum and Progression Committee.

3.4 DISC Management and Staffing

67. DISC's management structure ([Diagram 3](#)) has been designed to ensure that the centre is managed and operated effectively and has clear lines of responsibility and

accountability. It has been designed to aid effective management of DISC and ensure objective oversight of its financial and operational sustainability. It has also been designed to help ensure that there is a correlation between DISC's financial policy, its vision and mission, its strategic goals and the quality and standards of its academic provision.

Diagram 3) Staffing Structure



68. DISC's Centre Management Team (CMT) comprises the Head of Centre, Head of Curriculum & Progression, Head of English, Head of Professional Services and Head of Quality. The team meets regularly (normally every two weeks), and other DISC staff attend when required. The Head of Centre reports to the Board and Operations Committee.

3.4.1 Centre Management Team

69. The CMT is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of DISC and the delivery of its academic offering. This includes:
- Managing the aims and objectives of DISC as set by its senior governance (operational and academic) committees and boards;
 - Advising the Head of Centre on matters for decision;
 - Reviewing and monitoring the progress of the Centre Action Plan (CAP) and effectiveness of other DISC strategy documents;
 - Managing DISC resources and its facilities to ensure quality academic provision and an overall excellent student experience;
 - Regular review of DISC's practices, policies and procedures to ensure they remain appropriate and effectively implemented in DISC; and
 - Managing staff, teaching and support/professional services, with a particular focus on strong recruitment, staff development (CPD) and performance.

70. This section details the key roles and responsibilities of DISC management. Full job descriptions are included in the governance handbook appendices.

Head of Centre

71. The Head of Centre is appointed by the Board and is responsible for running DISC, reporting to the Board as well as Operations Committee. A detailed job description can be found in the governance handbook appendices, but the key responsibilities of the Head of Centre include:

- Develop and maintain an effective working partnership with key UCD functions;
- Achieving the agreed progression rate of students moving from DISC to UCD;
- Overseeing the quality assurance processes in DISC;
- Overseeing the administration of DISC;
- Overseeing provision of student welfare support; and
- Overseeing staff recruitment, staff support and staff development.

Head of Curriculum & Progression

72. The Head of Curriculum & Progression reports to the Head of Centre and Academic Board. A detailed job description can be found in the governance handbook appendices, but the key responsibilities of the Head of Curriculum & Progression include:

- Responsibility for academic standards, the provision of learning and teaching, and the accuracy and completeness of all programme related information, ensuring that these are managed appropriately and in accordance with policies and procedures;
- Ensuring the consistent implementation of DISC's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; and
- Planning and monitoring progression tracking activities and student outcomes planning within DISC.

Head of English

73. The Head of English reports to the Head of Curriculum & Progression. A detailed job description can be found in the governance handbook appendices, but key responsibilities of the Head of English include:

- The maintenance and management of academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement of English and academic skills modules within DISC.

Head of Professional Services

74. The Head of Professional Services reports to the Head of Centre and Operations Committee. A detailed job description can be found in the governance handbook appendices, but key responsibilities of the Head of Professional Services include:

- Ensuring compliance with policies and procedures;
- Contributing to the implementation of quality assurance processes;
- Overseeing the provision of student experience and welfare services; and
- Responsibility for the delivery of an effective administrative service.

Head of Quality

75. The Head of Quality reports to the Head of Centre and Academic Board. A detailed job description can be found in the governance handbook appendices, but the key responsibilities of the Head of Quality include:
- Leading on, and monitor, the updating of key policies and processes relating to the assurance of quality and standards;
 - Ensuring adherence to all QA policies and procedures through embedding a quality culture throughout DISC;
 - Lead on, and having responsibility for, all internal quality assurance and enhancement activity; and
 - Ensuring that all governance bodies have the correct information to be able to conduct their business appropriately.

3.4.2 Management Engagement with Study Group Global

University Partnership Director

76. To ensure that DISC gains the benefits of being part of the wider Study Group organisation there is a close relationship between DISC and the rest of the International Study Centres (ISCs) that deliver education in the UK and the rest of the world. These relationships are managed by two University Partnership Directors, who each have a direct relationship with half of the ISCs within the Study Group Global network.
77. To ensure that this relationship continues to work effectively a University Partnership Director has been tasked, by the Board, to take day-to-day line management responsibility for the Head of Centre at DISC. This allows the Head of Centre to engage effectively with the Study Group Global network, access opportunities for CPD, share best practice and to benchmark performance of DISC with other ISCs around the world. To ensure that there is effective engagement within DISC governance, the University Partnership Director is also the Chair of the Operations Committee. This arrangement also provides the Head of Centre with support from a senior member of the global organisation to help with operational matters as they arise.

Study Group Global Corporate Services

78. DISC leverages the specialist knowledge and expertise of SGG in areas such as recruitment, HR and finance, and therefore meets regularly with the relevant members of staff. The budget for physical and human resources for DISC is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Head of Centre, who will meet with HR and Finance representatives from SGG.
79. In addition, bi-monthly long-term planning calls take place between the Head of Centre and SGG staff members as required. This includes the University Partnership Director, the HR business partner, the Commercial Finance partner, and a member of the Talent Acquisition team.

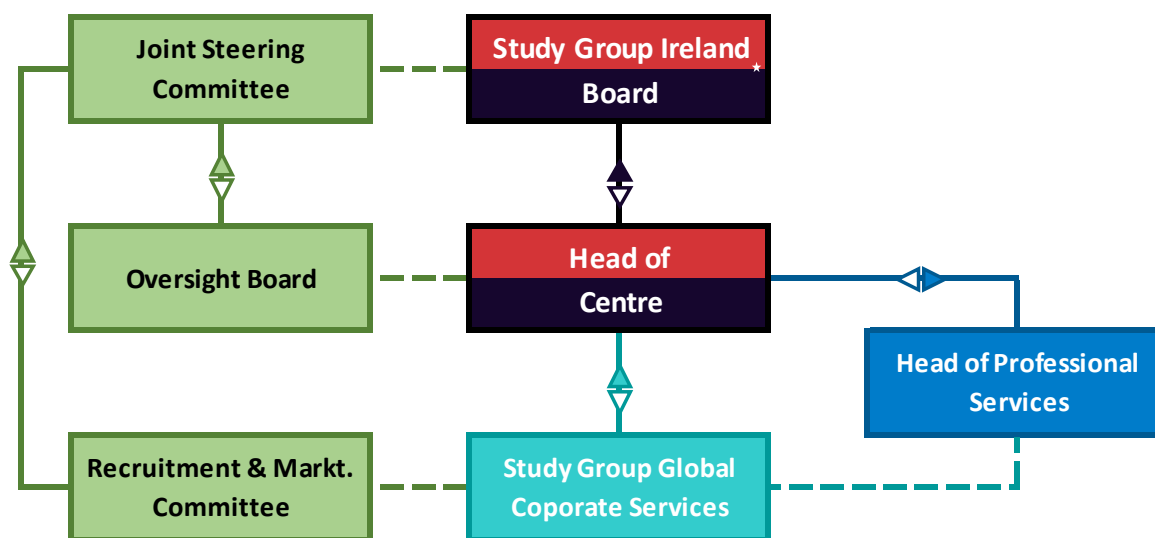
3.5 Partner Management

80. All Study Group Global International Study Centres work closely with a partner Higher Education Institution. DISC is embedded in the campus of University College Dublin (UCD) and students from DISC usually progress to relevant programmes of study at UCD. To ensure that the programmes delivered by DISC are appropriate and that the

recruitment efforts of the centre are in line with the needs of UCD, a series of governance committees are in place to manage and oversee the relationship between the partner organisations.

81. In this section we highlight the details of the committees that manage and oversee the partnership, how they work together and how these bodies interact with the governance bodies, and management structures, of DISC.

Diagram 4) Partner governance structure



Study Group Ireland Limited, trading as Dublin International Study Centre

*

3.5.1 Joint Steering Committee

82. The Joint Steering Committee oversees the essential activities for ensuring that DISC maintains a strong and effective working relationship with UCD and fulfils the objectives of both parties in the formal agreement. The overall determination of the strategic relationship between DISC and UCD is the responsibility of the Joint Steering Committee. It reviews the strategic direction of the partnership and its implementation and considers changes or additions to existing operations. The contractual agreement establishes the key areas of strategic partnership upon which the steering committee develops its direction.

3.5.2 Oversight Board

83. The Oversight Board is the key forum for both partner organisations to monitor the academic standard that DISC students reach once they have successfully completed their programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities offered. Most joint academic matters will be dealt with through the Oversight Board but if the issues require more senior or strategic input, it will be reported to the Joint Steering Committee. In addition, matters may be reported from the Oversight Board to the relevant UCD committee(s).

3.5.3 Recruitment and Marketing Committee

84. The Recruitment and Marketing Committee is the key forum for both partner organisations to design and develop the messages that will be used to attract students to the programmes offered by DISC. It will monitor the output from the Study Group Global corporate services (primarily in the areas of marketing and recruitment) and ensure that there is oversight of the working relationship that is key to meeting any aims agreed at the Joint Steering Committee. Most recruitment and marketing issues will be dealt with by the Committee however it can report issues to the Joint Steering Committee if more senior input is required.

3.5.4 Study Group Corporate Services

85. Given the size of the centre, DISC utilises the corporate services of SGG to ensure that it remains efficient and cost effective while delivering a high-quality educational experience to its students. To help maintain an effective partnership with UCD, DISC uses the services of the marketing and recruitment teams within SGG to meet the requirements of the partnership (as outlined by the Joint Steering Committee). The operational work that needs to be undertaken is managed by the Head of Centre with some aspects delegated to the Head of Professional Services with the Recruitment and Marketing Committee providing governance oversight.

3.6 Risk Management

86. DISC recognises that there are potential risk factors across all areas of the organisation; whilst risk cannot always be eliminated, it can be managed in a way to mitigate the impact. Consideration of areas of potential risk are included in discussions at key meetings across DISC, particularly during the Centre Management Team (CMT) meetings. Identified areas of concern are fed through to the relevant governance board/committee, as outlined below.
87. There are three key boards/committees to which evaluated areas of risk are submitted for consideration:
- The Board considers overall strategic risk.
 - Operations Committee considers operational and financial risk.
 - Academic Board considers academic, quality, compliance, and reputational risk, and submits regular reports to Operations Committee.
88. Following consideration by the relevant board/committee, any new or updated areas of risk are added to DISC's Risk Register, which is reviewed and amended by Academic Board or Operations Committee and reported to the Board for final approval. Identification and mitigation of areas of risk will also be factored into the Centre Action Plan (see [section 12.4](#)), as needed.

3.6.1 Risk Register

89. DISC's Risk Register is approved and owned by the Board, with the operational management delegated to Academic Board or Operations Committee (depending on the nature of risk). A review of the Risk Register is a standing agenda item for all meetings of Academic Board and Operations Committee, and it is formally reviewed by the Board ahead of the start of each academic year. The Risk Register will be referred to in order to put measures in place as required should any of the identified risks occur. See **Appendix 3.1** for a sample DISC Risk Register.

90. DISC's Risk Register contains a high-level assessment of identified areas of potential risk across DISC, split into academic and corporate areas of risk. Each identified risk includes:
- Evaluation of the likelihood of occurrence and impact should it occur;
 - Identification the person responsible for that area of risk; and
 - Consideration of potential mitigation actions.

Chapter Four

Programme Development, Approval & Validation

Chapter 4 - Programme Development, Approval & Validation

4.1 Introduction

91. DISC is committed to developing and delivering high quality programmes. The programme approval and re-approval processes ensure that:
- programmes are aligned with DISC strategic plans/recruitment needs;
 - there is a market for proposed programmes and agreement to progress to UCD undergraduate degree programmes;
 - academic standards are set appropriately and align to [QQI Foundation Year standards](#) (2015);
 - there is constructive alignment between assessments, module learning outcomes and programme learning outcomes;
 - student learning and achievement are assessed appropriately and in accordance with [QQI Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022](#);
 - the quality of learning opportunities available to students is the best it can be;
 - programmes are viable and sustainable; and
 - programme development takes account of [QQI Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training \(2017\)](#).

4.2 Responsibilities

92. Any staff member may propose a new programme for development, but it is the responsibility of the Head of Centre to formally present programmes for development to Academic Board.
93. Academic Board is responsible for initial academic approval of programmes for development and is responsible for approving programmes to be submitted to QQI for validation and re-validation.
94. The Operations Committee is responsible for approving resources for programme development and for confirming financial viability of programmes.
95. The Head of Quality is responsible for leading the programme development process, once approval for development has been granted by Academic Board. The Head of Quality is also responsible for leading programme review and self-evaluation as part of the re-approval and re-validation processes.

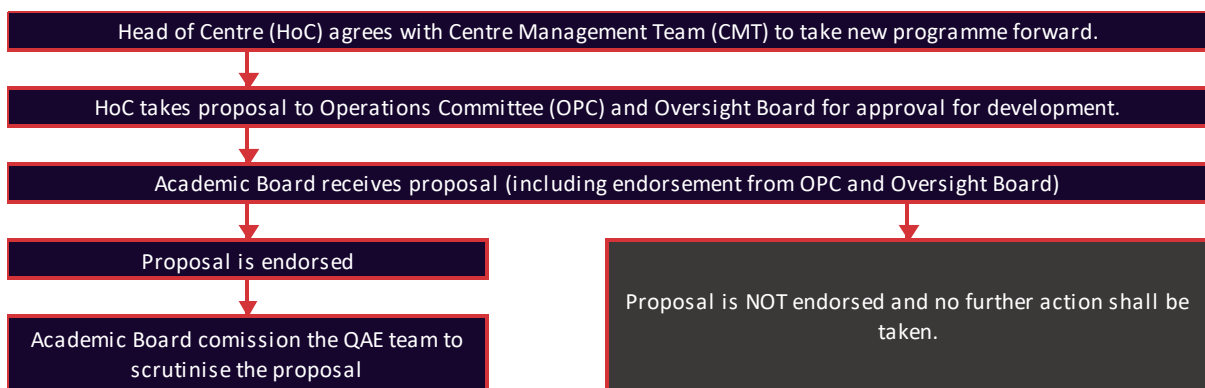
4.3 Programme Approval & Validation Process

96. There are six stages from initial proposal to Programme Validation, as outlined in the table below.

Stage	Responsible	Overview
Stage 1: Programme proposal	Head of Centre	A staff member proposes a new programme to the Head of Centre who brings the proposal to the Centre Management Team for initial discussion. The Head of Centre then takes the proposal to the Oversight Board and the

		Operations Committee to seek recommendations from those bodies.
Stage 2: Initial approval to proceed to academic approval	Academic Board	The Head of Centre submits the initial proposal to Academic Board. This must include endorsement for development by UCD and input from the Operations Committee (sought during stage 1). Academic Board considers the proposal and may approve or refuse.
Stage 3: Programme development according to QQI policies and criteria for the validation of programmes.	Head of Quality	Programme development includes internal and external stakeholder engagement (SGG sales and marketing insights, student consultation, staff feedback, UCD input). The Operations Committee approves resourcing of the programme.
Stage 4: Approval event, including external panel member(s).	Approval panel, organised by Academic Board	An approval event (involving the appointment of a panel of experts to review and make recommendations on the proposed programme) is held at DISC prior to submission of the new programme to Academic Board for final approval for submission to QQI. The programme is assessed against QQI criteria for the validation of programmes. Outcomes and summary report are submitted to Academic Board.
Stage 5: Approval to submit to QQI for validation.	Academic Board	Academic Board reviews the report from the Approval Panel and recommendation from the Operations Committee, and gives approval for submission to QQI for validation.
Stage 6: QQI validation	QQI	Required documentation is submitted to QQI for validation.

Diagram 5) Approval Process (Stages 1,2 & 3)



4.3.1 Stage 1: Programme Proposal

97. The Head of Centre will bring any new programme proposals to the Centre Management Team for initial discussion. If there is agreement to proceed, the Head of Centre will take the proposal to the Joint Steering Committee with UCD.
98. The proposal must be considered by UCD colleagues and is proposed to the Joint Steering Committee initially for approval at a strategic partnership level. If there is agreement to proceed, the Head of Centre will take the proposal to the Oversight Board to ensure strategic alignment and to confirm UCD progression degrees. If the schedule of the Oversight Board meetings would result in a significant delay, the proposal will be discussed with the Chair of the Oversight Board. Responsibility for confirming UCD progression degrees will be delegated to UCD representatives relevant to the DISC programme being proposed, who will then report to the Oversight Board.
99. The Head of Centre will then take the proposal to the Operations Committee, which will review the proposal from a resource perspective, including human resources, financial, and physical resources, and will make a recommendation to Academic Board.

4.3.2 Stage 2: Initial Approval to Proceed to Academic Approval

100. Following endorsement from the Oversight Board and a recommendation from the Operations Committee, programme proposals will be submitted to Academic Board by the Head of Centre.
101. Academic Board must receive confirmation from the Operations Committee that staff and specialist facilities are available, or there is the ability to secure these, and that the programme is financially viable. Academic Board will then assess the proposal using the following criteria:
 - Academic coherence of the proposed programme;
 - Clear evidence of market potential;
 - Confirmation of progression opportunities to UCD, as confirmed by Oversight Board;
 - Consistency with institutional academic regulations and relevant academic policies;
 - The impact of the proposed new development on existing provision including subjects/programmes which may be withdrawn as a result of the new development.

4.3.3 Stage 3: Programme Development

102. The Head of Quality will establish a programme team to fully develop the programme and develop an action plan to ensure ownership and timeliness of actions. The programme team usually comprises DISC academic staff with relevant experience and subject knowledge. If required, the Head of Quality may seek expertise from the SGG network, for example in a specific subject area if there is not availability within DISC.
103. DISC is supported by the SGG network, specifically the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, which shares good practice from around the network and across the education sector and can provide guidance to DISC throughout the development process.
104. Stakeholder engagement is a key part of the development process and is overseen by the Head of Quality.

Student consultation

105. As an integral part of all programme development/review, an early process of student consultation is carried out by DISC in order to garner the student perspective. Students are consulted specifically on the development of any new programmes/pathways and/or as part of a review of existing curriculum. DISC aims to consult both current students and alumni wherever possible and records are made of the consultation process and its outputs for use in programme development and for submission to the approval panel.

UCD input

106. The Head of Curriculum & Progression will liaise with colleagues at UCD to ensure curriculum and learning outcomes will fully prepare students for progression to the relevant programme.

Staff feedback and consultation

107. Consultations are held with DISC staff regarding proposed new programmes and curricula, usually via a specific meeting, to include staff who are not members of the programme development team.

Sales and marketing insight

108. SGG colleagues in sales and marketing functions are able to provide valuable market insights which may inform programme development, for example changes in the recruitment market that may affect prospective student decision-making, and/or the needs of students in specific markets.

External examiner feedback

109. Feedback from external examiners on current programmes is reviewed by the Curriculum and Progression Committee, which informs programme development in terms of areas of effective practice and any areas for further development. External examiners may be asked for feedback on new programme development proposals where relevant (e.g. if the proposal is for a subject area where the external examiner has expertise).

Documentation preparation

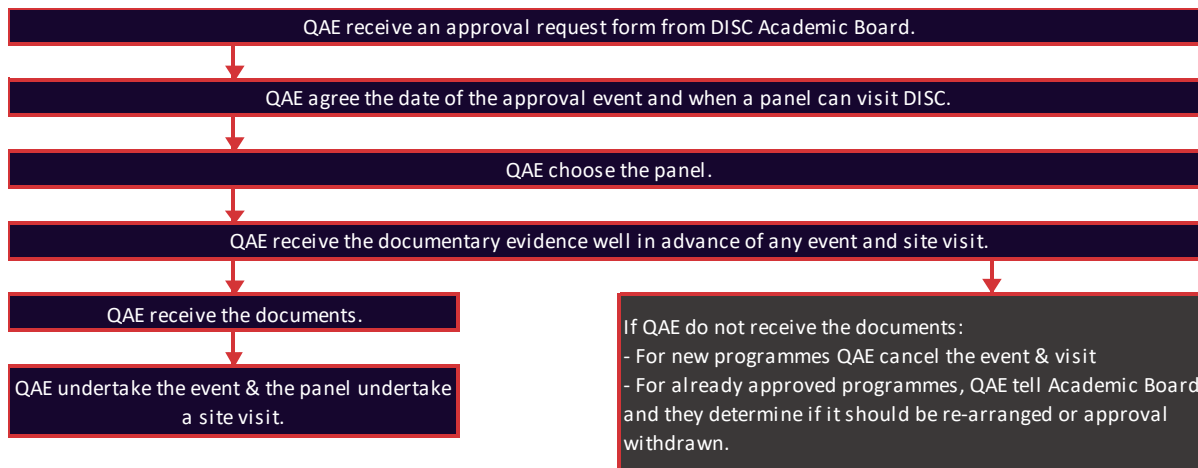
110. It is the programme team's responsibility to ensure that the relevant documentation is ready for the internal DISC approval event. Documentation includes:

Document	Detail required
Programme Proposal	Including a rationale for the programme, its educational aims, entry requirements, marketing information and learning outcomes
Evidence of Student Consultation Specifically in Relation to the Proposed Programme/s	To include the process followed, feedback obtained and explanation of the impact on the development of the provision
Programme Specification for each programme under consideration	Including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to the development and assessment of key skills within modules; • Constructive alignment mapping of module learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes; • Mapping of learning outcomes to relevant QQI standard and award type descriptors; • Benchmarking to relevant NFQ level; • ECTS credit allocation; • Details of proposed entry requirements; • Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies for the programme; • Assessment maps; • Progression requirements
Module Specification for each module under consideration	<p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative content and learning outcomes; • Notional learning time (split into contact hours and independent study) • Assessment modes, weightings, and schedule (to include formative and summative assessments); • Assessment mapping to module learning outcomes; • Assessment Criteria; • Key texts and reading lists; • Any pre/co-requisites or excluded combinations
Centre Handbook	Current year acceptable, or directions to locate the content on the VLE
Student Handbook	To include academic regulations and details of student support (current year acceptable) or directions to locate the content on the VLE
Resource information, including staffing details and physical resources	Confirmation from the Operations Committee that qualified staff and physical resources are in place to deliver the programme, or indicating the process to ensure they will be in place for a new programme
Written Confirmation of UCD Endorsement	Normally Oversight Board minutes or email confirmation from relevant UCD representatives

111. The Programme Specification and Module Specifications will be completed using the QQI Programme Descriptor Template. All documentation must be submitted by the Head of Quality to the Secretary of the Approval Event at least 3 weeks in advance of the approval event.

Diagram 6) Approval Process (Stage 4)



4.3.4 Stage 4: Approval Event

112. Academic Board delegates responsibility for appointing the programme approval panel to the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) team (see [section 2.2](#) for details of this team's remit). The panel will consist of a Study Group Senior/Quality Officer (Secretary), external subject specialists, and senior academic members from the SGG network. The QAE team will seek to appoint a Student Representative to the panel wherever possible. The panel will be chaired by an appropriate senior academic member of staff from the SGG network. See **Appendix 4.1** for information regarding the selection, appointment, duties and responsibilities of external panel members.
113. Documentation will be shared with the panel 3 weeks prior to the event to enable a thorough desk-based review ahead of the event. The event will be held at DISC and will include time for panel discussions as well as discussions with the programme team.
114. The panel will meet with current DISC students as part of the event and will also meet with students who have progressed to UCD where possible. An indicative schedule:

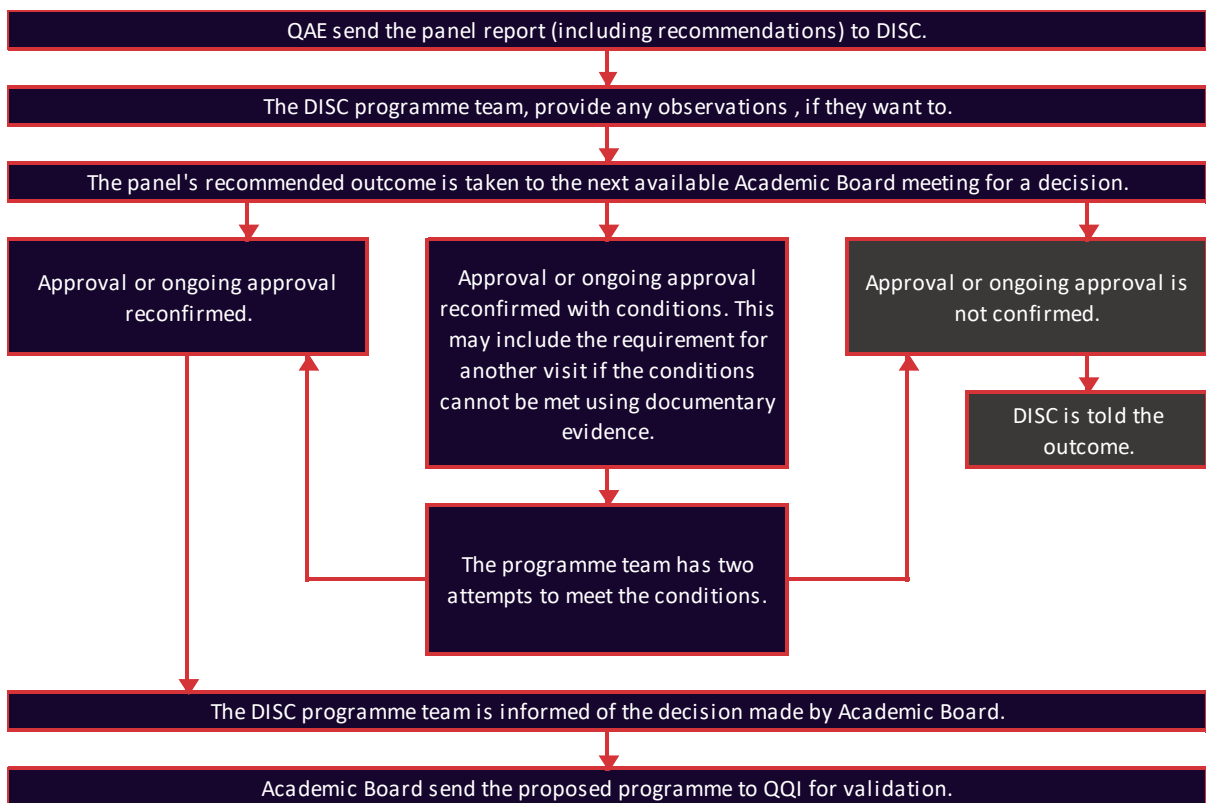
Indicative timing	Meeting or tour
9:00-9:15	Tour of DISC premises
9:15-9:30	Overview presentation by the Programme Team
9:30-10:15	Private panel meeting to agree lines of inquiry
10:15-11:15	Discussion with the Programme Team (followed by short break)
11.30-13:00	Further discussion with the Programme Team
13:00-13:45	Lunch
13.45-14.15	Discussion with students
14.15-15:00	Further discussion with the Programme Team
15:00-15:15	Break (+ time for Secretary to collate outcomes)
15:15-16:00	Private panel meeting to draw conclusions
16:00-16:30	Verbal feedback to the Programme Team

115. The approval panel may recommend one of the following outcomes to Academic Board:

- Not approved
- Approved subject to meeting one or more conditions
- Unconditional (full) approval

116. A report will be produced and approved by all panel members. The report and recommended outcome will be submitted to Academic Board.

Diagram 7) Approval Process (Stages 5 & 6)



4.3.5 Stage 5: Approval to Submit to QQI for Validation

117. Academic Board will review the programme approval documentation, including confirmation from the Operations Committee, and will scrutinise the report from the Approval Panel. Academic Board will then make a decision regarding the outcome.

118. If the programme is approved subject to conditions, Academic Board will require the Approval Panel to review the Programme Team’s responses to the conditions and make another recommendation regarding the outcome. Once satisfied, Academic Board will approve documentation to be submitted to QQI for validation.

4.3.6 Stage 6: QQI Validation

119. Required documentation is submitted to QQI according to the [QQI Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training \(2017\)](#).

4.4 Programme Review

120. DISC's programmes are continuously reviewed through quality assurance processes and the governance structure.
121. Modules are reviewed at the end of each term in Module Assessment Boards (see [section 8.8.1](#)). The data and feedback from Module Assessment Boards is regularly reviewed by the Programme Assessment Boards and the Curriculum and Progression Committee (refer to the governance handbook).
122. Key data sets which are used to inform ongoing management and development of curriculum include:
 - Student outcomes data (at both module and programme level, and progressed student outcomes at UCD where available);
 - Student feedback (from module questionnaires, surveys, the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and progressed DISC students studying at UCD);
 - Staff feedback (from Module Assessment Boards and departmental meetings);
 - Outcomes from the Observation of Learning and Teaching policy and peer reviews; and
 - External examiner reports.
123. Review and analysis of this key data by the Curriculum and Progression Committee on a regular basis enables DISC to ensure that entry requirements are set at the correct level and that curricula remain effective and support student progression, as well as enabling the achievement of programme learning outcomes. Actions arising from Curriculum Progression Committee meetings are noted on the action tracker and are reviewed at each meeting. Minutes and actions are submitted to Academic Board. Where actions are identified which relate to the academic standards and quality of delivery across DISC, actions are proposed to Academic Board to be added to the Centre Action Plan (CAP) (see [section 12.4](#)). Academic Board is responsible for the Centre Action Plan and reviewing the actions described against the outcomes achieved. Academic Board maintains oversight of data trends and the impact of actions taken. The Curriculum and Progression Committee may propose curriculum developments and enhancements, see [section 4.5](#).

4.5 Programme Modifications

124. Any changes to programmes must be approved by Academic Board. Academic Board will require documentary evidence that the proposed change enables the programme to continue to meet the QQI validation criteria. Any proposed amendments to entry requirements, modules or programmes identified by the Curriculum and Progression Committee should be proposed using the Change Notification process.
125. Prior to a decision being made by Academic Board, a change notification form should be completed and submitted to SGG's Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) team, who undertake the change notification process, under delegated authority from Academic Board. The QAE team will review the changes proposed and advise whether they can be made via the Change Notification process and submitted to Academic Board for approval, or whether the changes are significant and will alter how the programme meets the QQI validation criteria, and therefore require further engagement with QQI. This process enables DISC to leverage expertise within the SGG network, while maintaining responsibility and oversight by Academic Board.

4.5.1 The Change Notification Process

126. Programme changes will usually be proposed by the Chair of the Curriculum and Progression Committee, or a member of the Centre Management Team. There must be a clear rationale for the proposed change, consideration of the impact of the change, and, where required, appropriate consultation about the change must be undertaken with relevant stakeholders including UCD. The change notification form should be completed and submitted to SGG's Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) team.
127. The QAE team will consider each change proposal on a case-by-case basis and evaluate them against the QQI validation criteria and the DISC quality assurance manual. The QAE team will complete an initial assessment of the proposed change to decide if the change notification process is the most appropriate method. The QAE team may decide the change triggers a re-approval, in which case QQI will be consulted regarding the potential need for a re-validation or alternative direction from QQI. Minor changes may be considered through the annual monitoring process.

Process used	Reason
Annual monitoring process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change has no impact on the way the programme meets the conditions of QQI validation. <p><i>Example: a minor change to increase an entry requirement, or a change to an assessment mode identified via the quality assurance cycle.</i></p>
Change notification process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change potentially alters the way that the programme meets the conditions of QQI validation. Documentation is available to assess the impact of the change(s) on the programme's ability to continue to meet the conditions of QQI validation. When the change(s) are mapped to the validation criteria there is no clear requirement for an approval event. <p><i>Example: a change to decrease an entry requirement and implement support for students.</i></p>
Approval process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change alters the way that the programme meets the conditions of QQI validation. Documentation is not currently available to assess the impact of the change(s) on the programme's ability to continue to meet the conditions of QQI validation. When the change(s) are mapped to the validation criteria and conditions of QQI validation there is a clear requirement for an approval event. <p><i>Example: a change to Programme Learning Outcomes.</i></p>

Annual Monitoring Process

128. If the annual monitoring process is determined as the most appropriate route, the Head of Quality will ensure that the change is monitored and evaluated as part of the annual monitoring process and included specifically within the Annual Monitoring Report.

Change Notification Process

129. If the QAE team confirms the Change Notification process as the most appropriate route, they will appoint a panel from the SGG network (usually consisting of two members, one with appropriate subject specific knowledge) to consider the change proposal. Each panel member will be subject to a conflict-of-interest check to ensure they can provide an objective recommendation based on their assessment. The DISC team will provide documentary evidence as required by the panel, usually:
- A change notification form (see **Appendix 4.2**);
 - A completed quality assurance criteria mapping template (see **Appendix 4.3**); and
 - Any relevant documentation to evidence how the programme will continue to meet the QQI validation criteria.
130. The panel will make a recommendation to Academic Board as to whether or not the programme continues to meet the QQI validation criteria. Academic Board will scrutinise the recommendation outlined in the report from the QAE team, and decide whether to approve or reject the recommendation. If the recommendation from the panel is that the changes impact on how the programme meets the QQI validation criteria, Academic Board will consider how to take the proposal forward with QQI.

Approval Process

131. If the Approval Process is determined as the most appropriate route, QQI will be contacted so that the appropriate procedure can be agreed.

4.6 Programme Re-Approval & Re-Validation

132. The purpose of programme re-approval and re-validation is to ensure that programmes:
- Provide the best possible learning experience and outcomes for students;
 - Remain current and respond to any changes in student needs or UCD requirements;
 - Identify strengths and weaknesses in the current programme; and
 - Continue to meet QQI validation criteria.
133. Programmes are reviewed and submitted for re-validation by QQI every 5 years, or earlier if there are major changes proposed to a programme which require a re-validation (such as changes to programme learning outcomes). This involves a comprehensive programme review and self-evaluation led by the Head of Quality, and a re-approval event.
134. The Head of Centre is responsible for planning for re-validation in good time, at least one year prior to the end of the current validation period. The plan will incorporate the need to complete the process ahead of the intake of the next cohort of students. The Head of Centre will consult with QQI to agree terms of reference for the programme review and revalidation, and the independent panel.

Stage	Responsible	Overview
Stage 1: Programme review and self-evaluation	Head of Quality	A comprehensive programme review is undertaken, evaluating quantitative and qualitative programme data and feedback from stakeholders. The programme is evaluated against the QQI validation criteria.
Stage 2: Revised programme proposal development	Head of Quality	Programme review informs revised programme development by programme team led by the Head of Quality.
Stage 3: Re-Approval event, including external panel member(s).	Re-Approval panel, organised by Academic Board	A re-approval event is held at DISC prior to submission to Academic Board for final approval for submission to QQI. The programme is evaluated against QQI criteria for the validation of programmes. Outcomes and summary report are submitted to Academic Board.
Stage 4: Approval to submit to QQI for validation.	Academic Board	Academic Board review the report from the Re-Approval Panel and give approval for submission to QQI for re-validation.
Stage 5: Independent evaluation	Independent panel approved by QQI	The independent evaluation report is submitted to QQI.
Stage 6: QQI re-validation	QQI	Required documentation is submitted to QQI for re-validation.

4.6.1 Stage 1 Programme Review and Self-evaluation

135. The programme review and self-evaluation process is led by the Head of Quality. Data collated and reviewed as part of ongoing programme review (see [section 4.4](#)) will be analysed over the period of validation, typically 5 years. Data on progressed student outcomes at UCD will also be analysed, where it is available. Key stakeholder feedback will be collated and reviewed. The programme will also be assessed against DISC's strategy and plans for the following 5 years.
136. The Head of Quality is responsible for ensuring the completion of a Provider Programme Review Report (using the QQI template), which is submitted to Academic Board for review. Academic Board will also request confirmation from the Operations Committee that the programme remains financially viable and can be fully resourced. Academic Board reserves the right to agree on non-continuation of a programme, or approve development of a new programme for validation by QQI in lieu of re-approval and seeking re-validation of the existing programme.
137. The process of programme review and self-evaluation enables formal consideration of the following:
- what conclusions can be drawn from analysis of student recruitment data over the previous 5 years (including nationality, previous educational qualifications, age, gender, progression degree aim) and student outcomes (including module and

- programme grades, completion, progression, registration at UCD, and, where available, student outcomes at UCD);
- effectiveness of learning, teaching and assessment strategies, including student achievement of learning outcomes;
 - effectiveness of the provision of learning resources, including Study Smart (VLE) sites, and physical resources, including teaching space and facilities;
 - what conclusions can be drawn from analysis of student attendance data and feedback from students/staff/external examiners regarding student workload;
 - what conclusions can be drawn from analysis of feedback regarding student timetables and teaching group sizes;
 - what improvements can be made to quality assurance processes; and
 - a recommendation regarding continuation of the programme, and any changes required.

Student feedback

138. In addition to student feedback collated via ongoing quality assurance mechanisms, focus groups will be held with students (both current and progressed students). The Head of Quality is responsible for organising student focus groups and reviewing the outcomes. In particular, feedback from progressed students is valuable in understanding effective elements of programmes in terms of preparation for UCD degrees, and any areas for improvement to be incorporated in the programme.

Feedback from relevant UCD academic staff members

139. Feedback from UCD academic staff members informs programme development and helps ensure that students are being fully prepared for relevant undergraduate degree programme. The Head of Curriculum & Progression is responsible for liaising with relevant UCD academic staff members and collating feedback on the previous 5 years and any future plans which may need to be considered as part of programme development.

Staff feedback

140. DISC staff feedback on current programmes is gathered via Module Assessment Boards and Programme Assessment Boards and considered by the Curriculum and Progression Committee. Staff will be asked for feedback as part of the programme review process and consulted regarding re-approval proposals via staff meetings.

External examiner feedback

141. Feedback from external examiners on current programmes is gathered via Programme Assessment Boards and reviewed by the Curriculum and Progression Committee; this feedback informs programme development in terms of areas of effective practice and any areas for further development. External examiners are consulted as part of the re-approval/programme review process. The Head of Quality is responsible for collating feedback from external examiners.

4.6.2 Stage 2 Revised Programme Proposal Development

142. The Head of Quality will establish a programme development team to revise and update the programme based on outcomes of the programme review and self-evaluation. The programme team will usually comprise DISC academic staff with relevant experience and subject knowledge. If required, the Head of Quality may seek expertise from the SGG network, for example in a specific subject area if there is not availability within DISC.

Documentation preparation

143. It is the programme team's responsibility to ensure that the relevant documentation is ready for the re-approval event. Documentation includes:

Document	Detail required
Programme Review Report (QQI template)	Including a reflective assessment, evaluation of the programme against the QQI validation criteria, achievement & progression statistics, and details of significant changes
Programme Specification for each programme under consideration	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to the development and assessment of key skills within modules; • Constructive alignment mapping of module learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes; • Mapping of learning outcomes to relevant QQI standard and award type descriptors; • Benchmarking to relevant NFQ level; • ECTS credit allocation; • Details of proposed entry requirements; • Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies for the programme; • Assessment maps; • Progression requirements
Module Specification for each module under consideration	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative content and learning outcomes; • Notional learning time (split into contact hours and independent study) • Assessment modes, weightings, and schedule (to include formative and summative assessments); • Assessment mapping to module learning outcomes; • Assessment Criteria; • Key texts and reading lists; • Any pre/co-requisites or excluded combinations
Centre Handbook	Current year acceptable, or directions to locate the content on the VLE

Student Handbook	To include academic regulations and details of student support (current year acceptable) or directions to locate the content on the VLE
Resource information, including staffing details and physical resources	Confirmation from the Operations Committee that qualified staff and physical resources are in place to deliver the programme, or indicating the process to ensure they will be in place for a new programme
Written Confirmation of UCD Endorsement	Normally Oversight Board minutes or email confirmation from relevant UCD representatives
Latest Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)	
Relevant External Examiner Reports	

144. All documentation must be submitted by the Head of Quality to the Secretary of the Approval Event at least 3 weeks in advance of the approval event.

4.6.3 Stage 3 Re-Approval Event

145. A programme re-approval event will be organised and run in the same way as a programme approval event – see [section 4.3.4](#).

4.6.4 Stage 4 Approval to Submit to Independent Panel

146. Academic Board will review the programme re-approval documentation and will scrutinise the report from the Re-Approval Panel. Academic Board will then make a decision regarding the outcome, including receiving reconfirmation of the financial viability of the programme from Operations Committee.

147. If the programme is approved subject to conditions, Academic Board will require the Re-Approval Panel to review the Programme Team's responses to the conditions and make another recommendation regarding the outcome. Once satisfied, Academic Board will approve documentation to be submitted to the independent panel.

4.6.5 Stage 5 Independent Evaluation

148. An independent panel approved by QQI will evaluate the re-validation documentation and complete an independent programme review report and an independent evaluation report.

149. Academic Board will review the independent programme review report and may require the programme team to make amendments to the re-validation documentation.

150. The Head of Quality is responsible for completing a formal response to the independent panel reports, indicating any amendments made to programme documentation.

4.6.6 Stage 6 QQI Re-validation

151. Re-validation documentation will be submitted to QQI according to requirements.

4.7 Programme Delivery

152. Academic Board is responsible for ensuring that programmes are delivered according to the programme schedule approved by QQI. DISC's governance structure ensures high quality programme delivery across the programmes (see [section 3.2](#) for more details of the governance structure).
153. Academic Board oversees the maintenance of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for students. The Curriculum Progression Committee, the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and Quality Committee all report to Academic Board and ensure that student outcomes data, student feedback and the outcomes of the QA processes are formally considered, and appropriate actions taken. Module Assessment Boards and Programme Assessment Boards (see [section 8.8.1](#) and [section 8.8.2](#)) report to the Curriculum and Progression Committee to ensure that the committee is provided with the necessary data and feedback on the running of the modules and the programmes, to make informed recommendations to Academic Board.
154. High quality programme delivery is also supported by staff appraisals, the Observation of Learning and Teaching Policy, and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities; see [Chapter 5](#) for more details.

Chapter Five

Staff Recruitment, Management & Development

Chapter 5 - Staff Recruitment, Management & Development

5.1 Introduction

155. All staff at DISC are recognised as essential to delivering programmes to the highest level possible. DISC recognises the importance of recruiting capable, effective, high-calibre employees with the appropriate skills, abilities and personal qualities, and expects that those responsible for selection and employment, induction, training and personal development ensure that the highest standards are maintained.
156. DISC provides development opportunities to its staff and reviews performance of both academic and professional services staff to ensure that they are contributing to its mission, aims and objectives.
157. Whilst DISC aligns with the SGG network HR policies and procedures, it is the responsibility of DISC to ensure that staff have a supportive environment and to ensure effective supervision and performance monitoring, including planning staff development events and activities as necessary to ensure an excellent student experience.
158. The relevant policies are transparent and ensure that there is no discrimination in employment practices relating to the protected characteristics recognised in law: gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, race, and membership of the Traveller community.
159. This chapter details the processes followed to ensure that the best qualified staff are recruited and supported by DISC.

5.2 Responsibilities

160. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring that all staff at DISC with line management responsibilities are aware of relevant legal requirements related to staff recruitment, training requirements, and staff development opportunities.
161. The Centre Management Team are responsible for facilitating inductions for new members of staff in their area, for ensuring that all required training is complete, and development needs are identified and supported.
162. Responsibility for ensuring compliance with relevant safeguarding laws is delegated to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

5.3 Safer Recruitment Policy

163. DISC is committed to providing the best possible care and education to its students and to safeguarding and promoting their welfare. This is particularly important in terms of legal requirements where minors are admitted. DISC has a Designated Safeguarding Lead who is responsible for ensuring compliance with applicable laws (see [section 9.6.2](#) for further details).
164. DISC provides a supportive and flexible working environment to all its members of staff. DISC recognises that, in order to achieve its aims, it is important to attract, recruit and retain staff of the highest calibre who share this commitment.

165. DISC adopts the principles of the SGG Safer Recruitment Policy (see **Appendix 5.1**) which is periodically reviewed by the global HR and safeguarding teams to ensure that it is up to date and reflects best practice. The aims of the Safer Recruitment Policy are to ensure:
- The best possible staff are recruited on the basis of their merits, abilities and suitability for the position;
 - All job applicants are considered equally and consistently;
 - No job applicant is treated unfairly on any grounds including race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or religious belief, gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, race, and membership of the Traveller community;
 - Compliance with all relevant legislation, recommendations and guidance including the statutory guidance published by the Department of Education, the Children First policies and guidelines of Tusla- Child and Family Agency, and any guidance or code of practice published by the Garda Vetting Service;
 - Study Group meets its commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people by carrying out all necessary pre-employment checks.
166. Employees involved in the recruitment and selection of staff must comply with the provisions of this policy.

5.4 Procedure for Staff Recruitment

167. The Head of Centre and the Centre Management Team (CMT) plan DISC's academic and support staffing needs in advance of each academic year, which is then reviewed on a termly basis. Staffing is also an agenda item on the monthly Finance and HR meeting (which is attended by representatives from SGG) and the weekly CMT meeting. Staffing needs are judged based on the module teaching requirements for each term which can be impacted by an increase or decrease in the number of students recruited to DISC. Staffing related issues that may impact on quality and standards are reported to Academic Board.
168. Where gaps are identified, there is a review of work allocation in the relevant area to establish whether a vacancy actually exists, or if the duties can be covered by existing staff.
169. The Board have delegated responsibility for the approval of new members of staff to SGG to utilise and benefit from their specialist knowledge and expertise. Once a requirement for a new member of staff is established by DISC, the Head of Centre enters into discussion with relevant SGG staff, including HR and finance, to clarify and agree the staffing need. An Approval to Hire business case is then put together by the relevant line management team member with support from SGG HR; this is sent to SGG. Formal approval for a new member of staff typically takes around 8 days; rejection is unlikely as long as the justification for the role is clear and relevant to business need.
170. The job description (see the governance handbook for examples) sets out the detail of the position in terms of objectives, main areas of responsibility, reporting responsibilities, and requirements of the job in terms of academic, personal and experiential qualities. As resource requirements are similar across the International Study Centre network, DISC makes use of generic job descriptions available from SGG

which are edited by the relevant member of the CMT to reflect the specific needs of DISC.

171. Once approval is granted, the vacancy can be advertised internally (at DISC and to the SGG network) and externally. Applications are screened, initially by a SGG Talent Acquisition specialist and then by the Head of Centre and the relevant member of the CMT. A shortlist is drawn up and those shortlisted applicants are invited for interview.
172. The interview panel for academic appointments normally consists of the Head of Curriculum & Progression plus one other relevant staff member depending on the nature of the vacancy. For professional services appointments, the panel will normally be made up of the Head of Professional Services and another relevant staff member.
173. In addition to an interview, the selection process may involve a presentation or a teaching-related activity to consider teaching ability or professional knowledge. This additional activity could be delivered to peers or students and is recognised as a key factor in the recruitment process. Feedback on the activity will be sought from the interview panel.
174. All appointments are subject to satisfactory references, validation of academic qualifications, a Garda Vetting check, and international checks (if required). In this way, DISC assures itself of the suitability of the appointment, a key element of the QA framework.

5.4.1 Minimum Requirements for Staff

175. DISC expects those applying for academic roles to have:
 - A Bachelor's degree in a related subject area (essential);
 - A relevant teaching qualification (desirable);
 - Experience of teaching in the Higher or Further Education sectors or of Leaving Certificate (Hons)/A-level (desirable);
 - Experience of working with international students (desirable);
 - Minimum CELTA or equivalent (essential for English tutors, desirable for other academic staff).
176. Minimum requirements for professional services staff are determined based on the needs of the role. Please see the governance handbook for example job descriptions.

5.5 Staff Induction

177. All staff members receive a full induction programme and a copy of this Quality Assurance Manual to ensure they are familiar with DISC's operational procedures. The induction is facilitated by the relevant DISC management team member; the main topics covered are:
 - An introduction to DISC which will include information on how it interacts with UCD and the SGG network;
 - Health & Safety requirements;
 - DISC Management and academic structures;
 - Terms and conditions of employment;
 - Quality assurance policies and processes;
 - Relevant academic and administrative procedures;

- Support services;
 - Staff training (including safeguarding) and CPD opportunities;
 - Provision of access to the required systems; and
178. During the induction period, all new members of staff are expected to complete baseline compliance and policy training including the SGG policies relating to Global Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy, Employee Privacy Notice and Anti-Bribery & Corruption, and the DISC Children First Safeguarding Policy. Staff must read and sign their acceptance and understanding of a number of compulsory reading and training materials prior to commencing employment. Compliance is a condition of employment, including compulsory attendance on refresher training courses.
179. All staff must review these policies during their time of employment at DISC. They are reminded and required to produce certificates from the online training to prove that they have completed the training. Automated reminder emails are sent to staff and their line manager where completion of online training courses (including refresher training) is overdue, and the completion rates are regularly reviewed by the Head of Centre.
180. Module and/or programme specific induction sessions are also provided to academic staff to give them the opportunity to meet other tutors in the relevant subject areas. Key points covered in these sessions include:
- Roles and responsibilities of academic staff;
 - Access to module handbooks and teaching materials;
 - Overview of DISC's Virtual Learning Environment;
 - Pedagogical expectations and an introduction to DISC's Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy; and
 - Academic quality assurance policies and processes.
181. Webinars and further training regarding quality assurance processes are provided for staff as needed. Updates and enhancements to quality assurance processes, such as changes to formal policy documents, are communicated via regular notifications on the internal social media platform, and by the Head of Quality.

5.6 Individual Contribution and Development (Appraisal)

182. DISC utilises SGG's Individual Contribution and Development process (see **Appendix 5.2**) which provides a structure for staff to reflect on their achievements and individual contributions to the success of DISC, and to discuss future priorities, expectations, career aspirations and development needs. This framework enables staff to develop and progress their career at DISC and throughout the SGG network.
183. The Individual Contribution and Development process is designed to help staff to:
- Agree the individual yearly objectives that will make a difference to DISC and Study Group's success as an organisation;
 - Record progress toward achieving their objectives;
 - Reflect on how they demonstrate key team behaviours in pursuit of their objectives; and
 - Highlight and track their development goals and aspirations.

184. At the heart of the process is an ongoing dialogue between staff and their line manager. There are three key stages:
- An initial meeting to agree the focus and contribution for the year ahead;
 - A mid-year review to see how this is progressing and where or how the focus should remain or change in the second half of the year; and
 - A final review meeting at the end of the year.
185. The output of this dialogue is captured in an Individual Contribution and Development Plan form (see **Appendix 5.3**) which has been designed to keep all key information together in one place for staff and their line manager. The form is a live document which should be referred to regularly throughout the year during one-to-one meetings.
186. The initial meeting between staff and their line manager is designed to agree the objectives and development goals. The discussion will focus on a reflection of the previous year, and a consideration of key priorities and objectives for the forthcoming year. There will also be a discussion about any learning opportunities needed to help in achieving goals; these can be formal online courses (see [section 5.7.1](#)), job shadowing, mentoring, or getting involved with projects. Discussions will include consideration of student feedback from module & programme evaluations and student satisfaction surveys, and outcomes of lesson observations (where relevant).
187. This process is used for all staff, i.e. members of the academic and professional services teams, as well as sessional staff.
188. DISC recognises that career growth can include a lateral move within DISC or across the SGG network. Career and development opportunities can come from business need and/or projects that require specific skills and may lead to job opportunities. Staff are encouraged and supported to take advantage of all relevant opportunities to achieve their full potential.

5.7 Staff Development & Continuing Professional Development

189. Reflective practice, community of practice initiatives, and scholarly activity are at the heart of DISC's approach to learning, teaching, and assessment. The academic community is supported through collaboration, sharing of knowledge and expertise, engaging with external stakeholders to widen understanding, and by gaining professional recognition. Effective and inclusive practice in learning and teaching is demonstrated through innovative academic professional development opportunities that are easily accessible and meet a variety of needs.
190. All staff (academic and professional services) have regular meetings with their line manager to create and review their Individual Contribution and Development plan (see [section 5.6](#)) and discuss any learning and development needs. Approval for participation in formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities is granted by line managers. Where activities require funding, this must be approved by the Head of Centre.
191. There are also broader developmental opportunities available to all staff (academic and professional services) spanning leadership, professional, personal and cultural development programmes. DISC does not differentiate between permanent staff and sessional staff in terms of developmental opportunities and access to CPD.

192. The table below details the opportunities available to academic staff at DISC to support them in undertaking Continuing Professional Development and keep up to date with best practice pedagogy. Staff can access full details of all these activities via the Academic Professional Development Hub.

Activity	New Academics	Experienced Academics
Appraisal (Individual Contribution and Development (see section 5.6))	✓	✓
MyDevelopment tutorials and webinars	✓	✓
Evaluative observations	✓	✓
Peer observation	✓	✓
Access to Academic Professional Development Hub	✓	✓
Central community initiatives including Skill Build, Ask Me Anything, Community Collaboration and bite-sized PD	✓	✓
Funded ad-hoc external training events	✓	✓
DISC-based development days	✓	✓
Attendance at SGG Learning and Teaching Conference	✓	✓
Speaker participation at SGG Learning and Teaching Conference		✓
Access to SGG's Journal of Assessment, Learning and Teaching in International Education (JALTIE)	✓	✓
Publication in SGG's Journal of Assessment, Learning and Teaching in International Education (JALTIE) (following peer review)		✓
Study Group Certificate in International Teaching and Learning (from 2024)	✓	
Professional Recognition Scheme Participation to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEA Fellowship Membership Fee • A programme of workshop support and mentoring for Fellowship in all categories (AFHEA, FHEA, SFHEA, PFHEA) 		✓
Research and Scholarship Committee Funding for Higher Qualifications, Scholarly CPD and Research Activity		✓
Teaching and Learning (T&L) Champ training (see section 5.7.2) and participation in T&L Champs Community of Practice		✓

5.7.1 Online Learning Opportunities

193. All staff at DISC (academic and professional services) have access to online courses on a range of topics via the learning and development platform called MyDevelopment. The topics include general business skills, management and leadership courses, and teaching strategies & tools.
194. Academic staff also have access to the Academic Professional Development Hub on the internal network drive which provides information on academic development courses and opportunities available within Study Group and through external providers.

5.7.2 Observation of Learning and Teaching (OLT) Policy

195. The Observation of Teaching Learning and Teaching Policy (OLT) was launched at DISC and across the SGG network in September 2022. The OLT takes a reflective and developmental approach to observation and seeks to cultivate engagement with the Study Group Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework and principles of constructive alignment.
196. The OLT strives to:
 - Align to the principles and expectations of the Study Group Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, and the principles of constructive alignment;
 - Link to important elements of the student learning experience, such as the VLE and assessments, without these forming the core part of the review;
 - Focus on the impact on student learning rather than the actions of the teacher alone and promote both a supportive and developmental approach to observation and a culture of continuous improvement;
 - Ensure the student voice is heard in the observation process;
 - Actively contribute to an understanding of the quality of learning and teaching being delivered at DISC and across the SGG network; and
 - Champion effective practice and address key areas for development.
197. Study Group aligns with the Higher Education Academy's (HEA 2006) reasons why academics should be observed and observe teaching to:
 - Enhance the importance attached to quality of teaching;
 - Encourage all staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching and identify their development needs;
 - Foster discussion and dissemination of best practice;
 - Increase staff awareness of the whole student experience;
 - Identify any weaknesses and put in place an action plan to remedy them; and
 - Assist departments in providing a high-quality educational experience for their students.

(Abridged from Gosling, 2006)

Panel of Observers

198. The role of the Panel of Observers is to provide strategic direction and leadership to ensure that the OLT is successfully embedded and regularly reviewed and that outcomes in relation to areas for development and areas of effective/innovative practice are analysed with the purpose of designing a strategic development plan for the SGG network.

Membership and Meetings

- Quality Leads x 4 (representative from each group of centres), including a Chair
- Teaching and Learning (T&L) Champs x 4 (to be from different centres to Quality Leads if possible)
- Secretary
- Membership to rotate annually
- Meetings to be held quarterly

Roles and Responsibilities

199. The Panel of Observers is accountable for:

- Representing views and sharing evidence from their centres or group of centres in relation to the OLT;
- Raising and recommending solutions to barriers to successful implementation of the OLT;
- Reviewing and analysing outcomes of the OLT process;
- Co-ordinating the input of quantitative data outcomes into Power BI for further analysis;
- Contributing to a strategic development plan for the network;
- Reviewing and evaluating the success of the OLT; and
- Reporting to the Study Group Academic Board.

200. The OLT focusses on a collaborative/peer process and developmental observation and consists of two stages.

Stage 1 - Buddying/formative

201. Stage 1 of the process focusses on:

- Facilitating engagement with the Study Group Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework (LTAF);
- Providing a safe space for peer discussion and sharing of practice; and
- Furthering staff ownership of their own development.

202. In stage 1, staff complete the following:

- Short self-reflection, including review of last year's actions if appropriate;
- Selection of focus area for development;
- Observation by peer/buddy; and
- Completion of Summary Log and Action Plan (including effective practice identified and areas for development).

Stage 2 - Developmental/summative

203. Stage 2 of the process focusses on:

- Providing high quality guidance and expertise through dialogue and observation, ranging across all areas of the Study Group Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework; and
- Capturing effective practice and key areas for development across DISC and across International Study Centres to feed into a network development strategy.

204. In line with this policy, a Teaching and Learning (T&L) Champ has been appointed at DISC and trained with T&L Champs across the SGG network. T&L Champs are

academic staff who have the necessary expertise to fulfil the role of what Biggs and Tang refer to as staff developers:

205. “Staff developers have the expertise to act as critical friend and provide important insights on all stages of teaching where your own perspective might be limited” (Biggs, J. and Tang, C, 2011, pp.53-4).
206. In Stage 2, staff complete the following:
 - Initial meeting with T&L Champ;
 - Developmental observation (including all key areas of the Study Group Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework);
 - Discussion with T&L Champ; and
 - Completion/update of Summary Log and Action Plan (including effective practice identified and areas for development).
207. See **Appendix 5.4** for the full Observation of Learning and Teaching Policy and the OLT Staff Handbook.

5.7.3 CPD activities

208. Regular CPD activities take place at DISC, including informal sharing-good-practice sessions (held online or in person) where staff can share learning activities, scholarly research, and action research projects. There are also regular training sessions, planned to support the implementation of DISC’s Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.
209. The SGG online social media platform ‘Workplace’ is used by all staff across the network to share ideas of good practice and to highlight any training, development or information courses about issues affecting the education sector. Workplace is also used by the Community Teaching and Learning team to provide regular updates, ideas and tips for supporting and teaching international students.

5.7.4 Journal of Assessment, Learning & Teaching in International Education

210. Journal of Assessment, Learning & Teaching in International Education (JALTIE) is an internal peer-reviewed publication that encourages and facilitates research-led scholarship and the sharing of evidence-based practice. The focus is teaching and learning in international study centres and colleagues’ work in supporting international students to prepare for and engage with university study, and to strengthen the link between education, teaching and research.
211. JALTIE provides staff at DISC and across the SGG network the opportunity to showcase the work they have been doing to enhance learning and teaching and the student experience. It is a culmination of the CPD opportunities and scholarly activity undertaken by all staff and therefore enables the sharing of good practice and an opportunity to expand their professional network.

5.8 Staff Complaints and Whistleblowing

212. DISC strives to provide an inclusive, supportive and collegial environment for its staff to ensure that they, in turn, can provide the best experience for students. To enable

this, staff are provided with training on HR policies and expectations (see [section 5.5](#)), staff development opportunities (see [section 5.7](#)), and regular meetings with their line manager, including an appraisal process (see [section 5.6](#)).

213. However, DISC understands that there may be times where staff need to raise a concern or make a formal complaint. All staff are encouraged to raise any concerns with their line manager informally or during regular one-to-one meetings in the first instance. Should they remain dissatisfied and wish to escalate the matter further, the SGG Grievance policy is in place to facilitate this (see **Appendix 5.5**); this policy is available to staff on the internal network drive along with other HR policies such as Dignity at Work, Equality & Diversity, and Disciplinary procedure.
214. The SGG Whistleblowing policy (otherwise known as 'protected disclosure') outlines the process for reporting any suspected wrongdoing or misconduct, how it will be taken forward, and the related protection and support measures in place. The policy also outlines how staff can submit a report in confidence via a third party, EthicsPoint, in the event that they wish to remain anonymous. The policy applies to all employees, officers, consultants, contractors, casual workers and agency workers, and aligns with the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022. Please see **Appendix 5.6** for the SGG Whistleblowing policy.

Chapter Six

Access, Transfer & Progression

Chapter 6 - Access, Transfer & Progression

6.1 Introduction

215. This chapter outlines DISC's policies relating to access, transfer and progression, which are defined as:
- **Access:** the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence required.
 - **Transfer:** the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme having received recognition for knowledge, skill and competence acquired.
 - **Progression:** the process by which learners may transfer from one programme of education and training to another programme.
216. DISC's policies ensure that recruitment and admission is fair and transparent and that applicants are matched to an appropriate programme that will enable them to progress to their chosen degree at UCD.
217. This chapter is informed by the QQI Policy Restatement Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners of Further and Higher Education and Training 2015.

6.2 Admissions Policies

218. The Admissions policy seeks to ensure that admissions processes and related decision making are open, fair and transparent, and that applicants are considered on a case-by-case basis against the specified programme entry requirements. Elements of the policy relevant to DISC applicants are outlined in this chapter.
219. The policy is aligned with the QQI Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications – QQI, Jun 2015.

6.2.1 Admission Requirements

220. Entry requirements are set by DISC in consultation with UCD as part of programme approval (see [section 4.3](#)) and are reviewed as part of the programme review process (see [section 4.4](#)). They are recorded in a centralised database, which is maintained by the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, and published on the DISC website (<https://www.dublinisc.com/how-to-apply/entry-requirements>).
221. Entry requirements are reviewed on an annual basis with UCD Global Admissions and any changes are mutually agreed. Any proposed amendments to entry requirements must be approved by Academic Board in line with the Programme Modifications process (see [section 4.5](#)).

6.2.1.1 Academic Entry Requirements

222. Academic entry requirements for each pathway programme are benchmarked at a level which ensures that students are best placed to achieve success on their chosen programme. As DISC solely recruits international students, a wide range of global

qualifications are accepted, which are published on the website (<https://www.dublinisc.com/how-to-apply/entry-requirements>).

6.2.1.2 English Language Requirements

223. English language entry requirements are set for each programme at a level that ensures students have the best chance of success on the programme and that student visa regulations in Ireland are met. They are set in agreement with UCD Global Admissions and are contingent on the progression requirement of the applicants desired progression degree.
224. Applicants are required to provide proof of their level of English language ability in the form of accepted certificates, which includes IELTS. Information about other accepted tests can be provided by the Admissions team. English requirements for DISC's Foundation Programmes are:

International Foundation Year (except for progression to BA Joint Honours, BA Humanities, BCL Law and BBL Business and Law)

- IELTS: 5.0 & min of 4.5 in each band on the Academic Version.

BA Humanities & BA Joint Honours

- IELTS 5.5 (or equivalent) overall with min 5.5 in Writing & 5.0 in each other band on the Academic Version.

BCL Law and BBL Business and Law

- IELTS 5.5 (or equivalent) overall with min 5.0 in each other band on the Academic Version.

225. Acceptable English language test providers are reviewed annually and are set in accordance with the [Irish Immigration Service requirements](#). Certificates must have been issued within two years of the student's programme start date.

6.2.1.3 Non-Standard Assessment

226. The Non-Standard Assessment Policy ensures that applicants who do not meet the specified entry requirements, but who may be able to demonstrate suitability for enrolment onto the programme by other means can be considered on their merit.
227. In such cases, the contextual information provided by applicants will be considered in order to reach an informed decision. This includes, but is not limited to, applicants who:
- Have a non-traditional education and/or work history;
 - Have qualifications which were obtained more than two years before the programme start date;
 - Have academic credentials not covered in the programme entry requirements; and/or
 - Have dual nationality or potential EU-fees status due to countries of residence or parents' tax residency status.

228. All cases of non-standard assessment must be referred by the Admissions team to the DISC Head of Centre to ensure that any complex regional requirements (for example fee status restrictions) are fully taken into account. Where a judgement call needs to be made (for example where applicants have a non-traditional education history) then the Head of Centre may liaise with UCD Global Admissions as appropriate and the decision will be explained to the applicant.

6.2.1.4 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

229. DISC does not currently have in place provision for recognition of prior learning, owing to the fact that its pathway programmes lead to specific undergraduate degree programmes at UCD for which entry requirements are agreed and set so that students can realistically achieve the required progression threshold.

230. As such, academic and English language levels must be demonstrated in line with the set entry criteria. Applicants who do not meet the published entry requirements may still be considered as part of the non-standard assessment (see [section 6.2.1.3](#)).

6.2.2 Admission of Students Under the Age of 18

231. Students under the age of 18 are required by Irish visa law to have a parent or guardian resident in Ireland until their 18th birthday.

232. As the majority of DISC students are unlikely to have a parent or guardian that will be resident in Ireland, DISC is partnered with Godsil Education (GE) to provide guardianship services. Students who require a guardian will be identified as part of the admissions process and asked to complete the Guardianship form. GE will then liaise with the student directly to confirm the arrangement and invoice them accordingly.

233. Students wishing to secure their own guardianship arrangements must complete a form declaring this, which Admissions will submit to DISC's Designated Safeguarding Lead for consideration. The alternative arrangements will only be approved if the student has nominated a suitable individual to act as their guardian.

234. Admissions will not issue a visa letter until the student's guardianship arrangements have been confirmed.

6.2.3 Applications from Students with Disabilities and Diverse Learning Needs

235. DISC welcomes applications from students with disabilities, health conditions, or specific educational needs, and can provide varying levels of support to students as needed. [Section 9.7.1](#) outlines further detail about support that is available. Students are asked to declare additional support requirements at application, which Admissions will refer to the Head of Centre and/or Head of Professional Services, who will consult with UCD if necessary.

236. Discussions about the support requirements of applicants will be separate from any consideration of academic suitability. Criteria and procedures used for selecting applicants relate to the requirements of the programme, including any professional requirements, and will not unjustifiably disadvantage or debar applicants with disabilities. In the unlikely event that appropriate support cannot be provided, an alternative option within the wider SGG network will be explored.

6.2.4 Use of Agents and Other Third Parties

237. As a recruiter of international students, DISC utilises third-party, in-market agents to support applicants through the admissions process. All agencies operating on behalf of DISC are expected to comply with the standards and expectations of Study Group.
238. The Agent Management Compliance Requirements (see **Appendix 6.1**) set guidelines for the retention, management and termination of all agents that work with SGG. These have been designed to ensure compliance with all regulatory and policy requirements for agents in all jurisdictions in which SGG operates.
239. Agents are also required to adhere to the Agent Code of Conduct (see **Appendix 6.2**), which sets out expectations for conduct and standards, ensuring that agents operate honestly, with integrity, and in the best interests of applicants. All agents are required to complete an onboarding process, attend refresher training, adhere to financial controls, and comply with random and red flag audits.
240. The SGG Legal Department is responsible for setting and maintaining the compliance requirements and will coordinate periodic review of requirements with appropriate functional areas, which is reported periodically to DISC's Operations Committee.

6.2.5 Marketing of Programmes and Promotional Material

241. All information relevant to prospective students, including academic and English language requirements, term dates and course fees is published on the DISC website (<https://www.dublinisc.com/>).
242. Further information about materials that support recruitment efforts, and their associated QA processes, are addressed in [Chapter 11](#), Published Information.

6.3 Admissions Procedures

243. DISC's admissions procedures have been designed to efficiently process applications while maintaining appropriate controls to ensure quality of assessment and identification of fraudulent applications.
244. At each phase, documentation is assessed for eligibility and authenticity. Authenticity checks may include online verification, ensuring that transcripts are appropriately stamped, signed, and dated by the relevant authorities, confirmation with relevant institutions, and reviewing consistency of personal information.
245. A record is kept of all admissions-related documentation and email communications between the applicant (or their representative) and Admissions, in line with GDPR requirements.

6.3.1 Responsibilities

246. Applications to DISC programmes are processed by the SGG Admissions team, which is based at the Global Admissions office in India.

247. The UK-based Partner Admissions team provides quality oversight for all SGG admissions processes, ensuring that quality is maintained and that any challenges or changes relating to student recruitment are addressed.

6.3.2 Application Submission and Assessment

248. Applications may be submitted by potential students, their parents, or authorised agents. An agent acting on behalf of a student should apply by submitting a completed application form via the Agent Portal, which allows agents to monitor the status of applications and access relevant programme information and marketing materials. Information about the Agent Portal is included in **Appendix 6.3**.

249. Applicants who are not represented by an agent must complete the application form on the DISC website (<https://www.dublinisc.com/how-to-apply/apply-now/>), at which point they will be assigned a Student Enrolment Advisor (SEA), a SGG member of staff who will support them with the application.

250. Applications are normally validated within 48 hours of submission, which includes a review for completeness and accuracy, following which they will be assessed against the admission requirements for the programme (see [section 6.2.1](#)). If any information is missing or requires clarification, then the applicant will be notified accordingly. If all requirements are met, an offer letter will be issued.

251. If an applicant does not hold the relevant qualifications for entry onto a programme at DISC, Admissions will explore alternative programmes in the wider SGG network.

252. If an applicant is found to have provided fraudulent or misleading information, the application will be rejected, and any offer already issued will be withdrawn.

6.3.3 Offer & Confirmation

253. Applicants who have been approved for entry to the programme will be sent an offer letter, which will outline any outstanding conditions that must be met prior to commencement and detail how applicants can confirm their place.

254. Offers may be unconditional if an applicant has met all requirements, or conditional if there are requirements that must still be met (e.g. submission of their final academic transcript).

255. Applicants will also be sent a copy of the [terms and conditions](#) and [fee requirements](#), both of which are also published on the DISC website.

256. Applicants wishing to confirm their place must complete the following steps:

- Return a complete acceptance form;
- Return a completed parent/guardian acceptance form (if under the age of 18);
- Provide proof of payment of the security deposit and administration fee (if paying their own fees); and/or
- Submit a Financial Guarantee Letter (if sponsored)

257. Applicants who require a visa may confirm their place prior to meeting all outstanding conditions; however, all conditions must be satisfied before they can progress to the

visa application stage. If a visa is not required, any outstanding conditions must be satisfied prior to commencement of the programme.

258. Applicants may request to defer entry to re-apply for a later intake; however, a re-assessment of eligibility will be conducted prior to a revised offer being issued.
259. Applications that have not been accepted or deferred will be closed ninety days after the programme start date.
260. In the rare event that a programme does not run, Admissions will seek to re-direct all applicants to an equivalent alternative pathway programme within the SGG network. Where this is not possible or desired, applicants will be eligible for a full refund in line with the [DISC Refund Policy](#), as outlined in the Terms & Conditions.

6.3.4 Student Visa Applications

261. The Admissions team will support applicants through the visa process wherever possible; however, it is the sole responsibility of the applicant, or agent working on their behalf, to obtain the visa in a timely fashion.
262. In order to comply with visa requirements in Ireland, applicants must make an advance payment for their programme fees, as outlined in the payment plan included in the offer letter, prior to applying for their visa. Once this has been done, a visa letter with all the relevant information required for the visa application will be issued to the applicant by the SGG Admissions team. Further information about the Irish visa application process can be found on the [Irish Immigration Service website](#).

6.4 Quality Assurance of the Admissions Process

263. The Global Admissions team is committed to ensuring ongoing compliance and continuous improvement. To support this, a cross-functional review of the global admissions processes is conducted annually, the outcome of which is reported to DISC's Operations Committee. DISC may propose recommendations emanating from the report, which will be considered by Admissions and, where appropriate, integrated into the relevant processes.
264. Specific controls that are used to ensure admissions quality on an ongoing basis include:
 - Verification of identification, academic qualifications, and work experience by dedicated admissions team personnel;
 - Repeated revalidation of completeness and accuracy of information at each stage of the application process to identify gaps and inconsistencies;
 - Use of qualified resources in an applicant's location to validate academic information and authenticity of transcripts;
 - Regular self, peer, and team led reviews of processes to ensure accuracy and compliance (e.g. spot checks);
 - English language interviews (if required) conducted by individuals outside of the admissions process to eliminate potential conflict of interest;
 - Verification of banking information and financial ability to pay, supplemented by review of student financial information by functions external to admissions (e.g. compliance and financial controls team);

- Oversight of processes, including spot checks, from functions external to admissions including legal and compliance, and the financial controls team within the global finance group; and
- Regular quality assurance reporting provided to admissions from external functions, including finance and visa compliance.

6.5 Transfer and Progression

6.5.1 Progression to UCD

265. DISC programmes are designed to facilitate students to progress to their chosen undergraduate degree programme at UCD following the achievement of the relevant English language and academic progression requirements. Students are advised from enquiry, through application and during their studies in terms of what academic and language thresholds need to be reached to enable them to progress to their chosen programme at UCD.
266. In addition, DISC works closely with UCD to ensure that students receive comprehensive and useful information in relation to progression degrees, and arranges for academic tutors and advisors from UCD to give talks to students at appropriate points in the academic cycle.
267. To facilitate progression, DISC convenes a Programme Assessment Board (see [section 8.8.2](#)) to confirm the academic and English language outcomes for each student; students are then provided with a transcript.
268. Students may request to change their intended progression programme with UCD, subject to any capacity constraints and providing that they meet the stated entry requirements. This must be requested prior to the start of the student's second term and requires approval from UCD.

6.5.2 Transfer Arrangements

269. DISC will attempt to facilitate a student request to transfer to a different pathway programme, where possible and subject to any capacity constraints. The academic performance of the student during the completed period of study up to the point of the requested transfer will be considered, along with any prerequisite requirements for the preferred programme. Students are guided to contact the Head of Curriculum & Progression to discuss transfer options.
270. DISC does not accept applications from students outside of the Study Group network of International Study Centres to transfer into and part way through a pathway course.



Chapter Seven

Learning & Teaching

Chapter 7 - Learning & Teaching

7.1 Introduction

271. DISC ensures that the student experience is at the centre of all activities, whether academic, extracurricular, or social. Activities are aligned to support student success in their DISC programme and to prepare them for continued academic success at UCD. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy and associated frameworks and policies combined with the provision of resources to students have been developed to support this principle.

272. This chapter is informed by:

- DISC's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTA) (**Appendix 7.1**);
- Study Group's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework: Pedagogic Principles and Curricula Design Standards 2023-2024 (**Appendix 7.2**);
- [QQI National Framework of Qualifications – Grid of Level Indicators \(2019\)](#);
- [The European Credit Transfer & Accumulation System User Guide \(2015\)](#);
- [The National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching & Learning](#).

7.2 Responsibilities

273. The Head of Centre has overall responsibility for academic leadership and ensuring that DISC's aims and objectives are achieved, and standards are maintained. Associated tasks are delegated to DISC staff as follows:

- Working with the Head of English, the Head of Curriculum & Progression is responsible for the management of the day-to-day delivery of programmes and arranging regular team meetings with academic staff to ensure that programme delivery aligns with the programme documentation and the LTA strategy;
- The Head of Curriculum & Progression and the Head of English provide support to ensure that the key aims and objectives of the Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (LTA) strategy are driven across DISC;
- The Head of Curriculum & Progression is responsible for the effective management of academic staff;
- The Head of Professional Services is responsible for the effective management of administrative staff and works with the academic teams to ensure administrative support of programmes remains effective; and
- The relevant member of the Centre Management Team is responsible for the provision of training to support the successful implementation of the LTA strategy.

7.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

274. DISC's Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) strategy provides a framework to ensure continuous enhancement of curriculum delivery and a dynamic learning environment through a commitment to the following:

- A student-centred approach to teaching and learning;
- The pursuit of excellence in student outcome-based learning, teaching and assessment supported by research, reflection, innovation and best practice, and CPD opportunities;
- Creating and developing a culture of improvement in all areas of DISC operations informed by evidence, innovative ideas, and feedback from stakeholders;

- Working with UCD, SGG, key agencies (such as QQI and Department of Justice) and the wider community (e.g. employers and sponsorship bodies) to achieve goals, align with standards and regulatory requirements, and enhance DISC operations;
- Ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources to achieve DISC goals and objectives;
- Provision of an exemplary and consistent system of academic support for students;
- Embedding employability skills throughout the curriculum; and
- A robust staff recruitment and development policy (see [Chapter 5](#)).

275. DISC staff are provided with training workshops to ensure they understand and implement the LTA strategy objectives in all activities. Delivery and progress of the LTA strategy is monitored via the Centre Action Plan (CAP) (see [section 12.4](#)) and reported to Academic Board.

276. The LTA strategy is reviewed on an annual basis by the Centre Management Team with input from students via the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Any changes to the LTA strategy are approved by Academic Board, and approved amendments are shared with UCD via the Oversight Board. Please see **Appendix 7.1** for DISC’s LTA strategy.

7.3.1 Strategic Objectives, Intended Outcomes, and Operational Delivery

277. DISC’s strategic objectives, intended outcomes, and how they will be achieved are outlined in the table below.

Objective 1: Deliver quality discipline-related learning experiences and opportunities	
Intended outcome	Students understand their discipline and can question its principles, practices and applications
How achieved	<p>Enhanced quality teaching through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment of quality qualified teaching staff 2. Staff Performance Management Review processes encompassing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning focussed goal setting • Peer and evaluative observations • Continual Professional Development relevant to achievement of goals • Student feedback on teaching and learning 3. Use of learning technologies to enhance teaching and learning and through the Study Smart (VLE), Turnitin, and other educational applications 4. Adhering to DISC’s principles of assessment for learning (see section 8.3)
Objective 2: Develop and follow creative and appropriate curricula	
Intended outcome	Students think independently and analytically, using methods of synthesis and creativity as described by relevant benchmarks

How achieved	Ongoing improvement and development of curricula through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous module review process • Feedback and input from External Examiners, UCD academic staff members, DISC teaching staff members, and students
Objective 3: Cultivate employability and lifelong learning competencies	
Intended outcome	Students engage imaginatively with the application of key employability and subject related skills
How achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding employability skills in the programme • Visits to and inputs from external organisations and companies (potential employers)
Objective 4: Develop cultural awareness and cross-cultural and intercultural intelligence	
Intended outcome	Students are cross-culturally aware and competent
How achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse and cross-national/cultural class groups • Cross-cultural group work and project work • Various DISC social and cultural activities and events throughout the academic year
Objective 5: Offer quality effective curricula	
Intended outcome	Students achieve progression and acquire academic and learning skills to equip them for future study, work and life
How achieved	Assessing the impact of curricula through a range of feedback mechanisms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality feedback on assessments • Progression data • Feedback from UCD • Feedback from External Examiners • Module review processes
Objective 6: Offer explicit and integrated learning opportunities entailing use of learning technologies	
Intended outcome	Students make effective use of familiar and emerging information and communication technologies
How achieved	Championing and requiring the use of digital-technology resources, especially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Smart (VLE) for module-related materials, activities and assignments • A range of tried-and-tested applications and learning tools available online
Objective 7: Achieve excellence in QA processes and inspections	

Intended outcome	Students can be confident that DISC programmes are benchmarked against appropriate measures and standards of quality and achievement
How achieved	Engage in various QA initiatives and processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Review • QQI audits and reviews

278. In addition, DISC supports students with their personal development in the following key areas to ensure they are prepared for successful progression to UCD:

- **Participation:** all students understand what it means to participate within a university environment both academically and socially.
- **Self-directed learning:** all students can organise their time and use resources to achieve the learning outcomes of their programme.
- **Academic skills:** all students understand different levels of knowledge and develop their academic skills during the programme.

7.4 Provision for Diversity of Students

279. DISC programmes are designed to cater for a diverse and international student body with a range of educational experiences and backgrounds. Staff work to develop and support students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural and intercultural intelligence, as stated in the Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy (see [section 7.3](#)).

280. The curriculum is designed to embrace international perspectives, and modules and programmes focus on developing the key skills needed to prepare students for further study in the Irish Higher Education system. The Academic English Skills (AES) module is core across all programmes and is designed to specifically develop the skills needed to be successful in higher education for students whose first language is not English.

7.5 Academic Framework

281. DISC programmes and modules are delivered within a clear framework to enable tutors and module developers to design and deliver effective programmes with clear educational aims and learning outcomes which guide content, delivery and assessment methods. Guidance is provided to assist with the development of clear, complete and consistent programme and module specifications to complete the QQI programme and module templates. Full details of programme and module documentation requirements can be found in [section 4.3.3](#).

7.5.1 The Academic Year

282. The Centre Management Team is responsible for setting term dates, in accordance with Programme Specifications, and with reference to term dates at UCD to ensure alignment for student experience and accommodation purposes. Term dates are held by the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team and checks are conducted by the Head of Quality to ensure accuracy of dates on the DISC website and student admissions documentation.

7.6 Employability Skills Development

283. DISC embeds employability development activities within all programmes. Activities are organised in cooperation with UCD and other external organisations wherever possible.
284. Employability development activities may include:
- Individual and group projects;
 - Guest lectures from UCD and businesses in the Dublin area;
 - Careers support and guidance;
 - Establishing and maintaining links to local businesses and professions; and
 - Engagement events with UCD.
285. Provision of these activities supports students to:
- Demonstrate self-awareness and personal skills development;
 - Acquire knowledge about the 'world of work';
 - Undertake self-reflection and take action to improve; and
 - Develop an awareness of the need to take responsibility for their own future.
286. To support employability development activities and documentation of outputs, students may be asked to complete:
- A personal reflection;
 - A Personal Development Plan (PDP); and
 - An Employability Skills Self-Evaluation entitled 'Going for Gold'. This is to identify and evidence strengths and areas for development to support the PDP.

7.7 DISC Learning & Teaching Space

287. DISC is situated on the UCD campus in the Newstead Block A building. There are five teaching rooms, which are all equipped with appropriate resources to support the use of learning technologies, such as a PC and Projector or Interactive Whiteboard. Technical support with network and access issues is provided by the SGG IT Services team.
288. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring that DISC's facilities meet requirements and works with the UCD and SGG Estates teams as needed. Further information about teaching space at DISC is provided in [section 9.5.1](#).

7.8 Study Smart - Virtual Learning Environment

7.8.1 Blended Learning

289. QQI define blended learning as "the integration of classroom, face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences".
290. DISC does not provide formal blended learning; the provision of online learning experiences is supplementary to the main delivery mode of face to face, and are designed as enhancement and reference resources rather than for delivery of the programme/module material.

7.8.2 Virtual Learning Environments (VLE)

291. The main Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that DISC students have access to is a Moodle based VLE called Study Smart (the main VLE will be referred to as Study Smart in the rest of this document).
292. DISC utilises the SGG VLE framework which sets out minimum baseline expectations for Study Smart sites and identifies features which can be used to enhance the site to fully support students with their studies. Study Smart sites should be used as an engaging learning tool to enhance the student experience, rather than just a repository for documents.
293. Each module has a Study Smart site which contains the module materials (including lecture recordings, seminar materials and details of independent learning), module and student handbooks, staff contact details, and assessment information. Students are guided to submit assessments via Study Smart and, where applicable, through Turnitin plagiarism detection software.
294. DISC has an e-learning champion who works with academic staff at DISC to support and develop their learning technology skills. This support enables academic staff to utilise learning technologies and multimedia to enhance teaching and learning, increase student engagement and advance student outcomes.
295. In addition to the main VLE, the Academic English Skills module utilises the network-developed VLE called Insendi (see insendi.com/our-platform).
296. See **Appendix 7.3** for the SGG VLE framework.

7.9 Quality Assurance of Learning & Teaching

7.9.1 Student Satisfaction & Feedback

297. Students are asked to complete module evaluation questionnaires via Study Smart at the end of each module to provide feedback on their experience, and to suggest any opportunities for improvement and enhancement. Questionnaires are designed to be consistent and student friendly, with simple language and clear instructions; see **Appendix 7.4** for an example module evaluation questionnaire. Results of module evaluation questionnaires are analysed as part of module reviews, are reported to Module Assessment Boards, are fed into the annual monitoring process, and are available to external examiners for review.
298. In addition, DISC students are invited to participate in SGG network-wide student surveys, which are conducted to secure quantitative and qualitative feedback on matters relating to learning and teaching and associated areas. These surveys enable SGG to assure itself that student satisfaction is consistent across the network, and to identify where additional support may be needed. The survey results are evaluated by Academic Board and enable DISC to assure itself that student satisfaction levels are comparable to other International Study Centres and take action where there are areas for improvement.
299. These surveys include:

- Post-induction surveys to capture student satisfaction with the pre-arrival experience and student induction (see **Appendix 7.5**).
 - Student experience surveys towards the end of the programme (see **Appendix 7.6**).
300. Survey results are provided to, and reviewed by, Academic Board and as part of the annual monitoring process to enable DISC to identify areas for improvement and enhancement.
301. Student representatives are also invited to gather feedback from their peers to discuss with DISC staff at the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (see governance handbook), and can input into the review of DISC's quality assurance processes via Academic Board.
302. Students may provide less formal feedback throughout their programme during discussions with academic staff or the professional services team. Any concerns or queries raised will be fed back or escalated as needed, and action will be taken as appropriate.

7.9.2 Evaluative Observations

303. In addition to the peer review process which takes place as part of the Observation of Learning and Teaching policy (see [section 5.7.2](#)), managers carry out evaluative observations of teaching if any concerns are raised, for example from quality assurance processes, including student feedback or complaints, RPAG ratings (see [section 9.8.2](#)), or student outcomes. If there are any concerns about programme delivery, a meeting will be arranged between the relevant teaching staff member and their line manager, who will also arrange an observation as soon as possible. A detailed lesson plan will be required to ensure that areas of concern are addressed, and the relevant manager will provide feedback on the plan prior to the observation.
304. All new teaching staff members are observed as soon as possible during their probation period, normally within a month of starting. This observation is carried out by their line manager and is an opportunity to ensure that the new staff member is understanding of the needs of international students, and that their values and ethos are consistent with those of DISC.
305. After an evaluative observation, the member of staff and their manager meet to discuss feedback, and additional advice will be offered to resolve any remaining issues. Depending on the observation performance a support plan will be created and, if necessary, a follow up observation will be arranged to ensure teaching quality is assured.



Chapter Eight

Assessment of Students



Chapter 8 - Assessment of Students

8.1 Introduction

306. DISC has robust processes in place to ensure that students are assessed in a consistent, reliable, and fair manner. These high-quality assessment processes are achieved through the implementation of a well-managed assessment system which is subject to systematic review including input from external examiners and representatives from UCD.
307. DISC's assessment framework enables students to demonstrate achievement of the module and programme level learning outcomes (as detailed in the module and programme specifications). There are systems in place for setting, marking, moderating (including external examination) and providing clear feedback to students on their work. Formative assessment opportunities provide students with feedback and feedforward and help identify any gaps in knowledge.
308. There are also clear guidelines in place for processes related to academic integrity and personal mitigating circumstances.

8.2 Responsibilities

Head of Centre and Head of Curriculum & Progression

309. The Head of Centre and the Head of Curriculum & Progression are responsible for managing assessment processes and play an important role in the development of the assessment strategy during the programme approval process. They ensure that the programme assessment strategy is implemented by academic staff in accordance with the requirements of the programme and assessment regulations, including those for grading, moderation, student feedback and administration.

Professional Services Staff

310. Professional services staff are responsible for the operation of the assessment processes, including:
- Processes connected with the timely generation of examination question papers;
 - Communication with external examiners and arrangement of external examiner visits;
 - Coordination of assessment results and ensuring they are entered into the student management system;
 - Logistical arrangements for written examinations;
 - Organising and running of Assessment Board meetings;
 - Notification to students of results; and
 - The secure storage and archiving of assessment materials, ensuring that General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) are maintained.

8.3 Principles of Assessment

311. DISC is informed by the six themes associated with fundamental principles of assessment as contained in the [QQI Assessments & Standards, Revised 2022](#), when designing, implementing, and reviewing its assessment strategy.

Students are responsible for demonstrating their learning achievement

312. Students must demonstrate their learning achievement for each stage of the programme by successfully completing the associated assessment components, as set out in the programme documentation. DISC utilises a range of assessment methods, including formative and summative assessment. Assessment methods are aligned to those used for UCD programmes to ensure continuity for students when they progress.

Assessment supports standards based on learning outcomes (criterion referenced assessment)

313. The main reference point for the DISC awards structure is the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and relevant QQI awards standards (such as those for [Pre-Higher Education Foundation Awards for International Students](#)). Learning outcomes for the programmes and modules are aligned with relevant awards standards and form the basis of assessments used to measure whether students have met the required knowledge, skills and competencies.

314. While DISC modules do not currently carry any credit (as DISC does not confer any awards on its students) they are designed in line with the principles outlined in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). As such the achievement of module learning outcomes, and aggregate contribution to the achievement of programme learning outcomes, are in line with the weightings expected of modules that do carry ECTS credit.

Assessment promotes and supports both effective learning and teaching

315. One of the main objectives of the teaching and learning process at DISC is enabling student achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The assessment process complements the teaching and learning activities, with the intention to engage and stimulate students, and verify the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies.

316. DISC includes diagnostic and formative assessment as a valuable tool for engaging students in the learning, teaching and assessment process and ensuring that they fully understand the assessment strategies. Feedback and discussion with students about their formative assessment forms the basis for continuous improvement in the learning and teaching process.

Assessment procedures are credible

317. DISC's assessment procedures are credible and conform to the following principles:

- **Fairness** - Assessments are manageable for prepared students who have engaged in the teaching/learning activity sufficiently well. Over-assessment may inhibit fairness for students; this is addressed by taking a cross-programme and cross-module perspective on the scheduling of assessments. This topic is reviewed by DISC's Curriculum and Progression Committee (see the governance handbook). It is also the case that any member of staff with a conflict of interest (real or apparent) will not be involved in the marking process for that student; any relevant interests will be ascertained before the marking and moderation process begins.

- **Consistency** - The weighting for each assessment is proportionate to input and output metrics for the task, across modules and programmes. Broad metrics for word-counts and exam durations are discussed and agreed at Curriculum and Progression Committee to ensure consistency.
- **Authenticity** - The assessment component provides a valid method for students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes.
- **Reliability** - When setting assessments, consideration is given to how effective the mode is in measuring student performance. Assessment task materials are clear and transparent, and timely explanatory information is provided for students. A review of the appropriateness of assessment methods is also undertaken by external examiners and representatives from UCD.

Assessment methods are reviewed and renewed as necessary to adapt to evolving requirements

318. The Curriculum and Progression Committee is responsible for conducting reviews of programme assessment systems and processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose. While remaining consistent with the requirements of the approved programme documentation, assessments are monitored and enhanced on an ongoing basis in response to feedback from tutors and students. All examinations and assessments are subject to review by other relevant tutors within the programme teams; this avoids overburdening a single examiner and enables cross-module feedback on assessments.
319. In addition to this internal review, DISC's assessment strategy is reviewed during programme re-approval and re-validation processes (see [section 4.6](#)), as required by QQI.
320. External examiners and academic representatives from UCD are asked to give feedback on module and programme assessments. They are encouraged to express views, both at Assessment Boards and in their reports, particularly if there are specific issues that need to be addressed.

Students are well informed about how and why they are assessed

321. Students are informed at the start of the year as part of their induction sessions about the learning outcomes they are expected to achieve, and the assessment methods used to demonstrate them. This information is also contained in the student and module handbooks which are issued to students at the start of term and at the start of each module.
322. During the first teaching session for each module, students are provided with detailed information about the assessment methods to be used, including module assessment guidelines, marking schemes, assessment criteria and submission protocols. This information is referred to throughout module teaching sessions, particularly nearer the time of assessment submission deadlines. Detailed assessment information is also available on Study Smart module pages. In tutorial sessions, students are reminded and encouraged to refer to information on Study Smart, particularly during exam periods.

323. Formative assessment is included in each of the modules. This allows students to learn more effectively at an early stage and to better understand their strengths, weaknesses and possible gaps in knowledge, skills and competencies. Students are provided with comprehensive feedback by academic tutors for their assessments.

8.4 Academic Regulations

324. DISC's academic regulations cover all elements of assessment and related matters. The assessment regulations, which form the main part of the academic regulations, are aligned with UCD's principles of assessment to support an effective transition for students from DISC to UCD processes. DISC's assessment processes ensure that academic standards are maintained, and all students are treated fairly and equitably. Academic regulations (see **Appendix 8.1**) are approved by Academic Board.

8.4.1 Setting of Assessments & Allocation of Marks

325. Module assessment modes are determined through consultation with UCD; the Head of Curriculum & Progression will liaise with relevant academic staff at UCD to ensure the assessment modes are clearly mapped to module and programme learning outcomes. All modules should have more than one summative assessment to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes. Assessment and module marks are recorded as a percentage. Students are required to achieve a minimum overall mark of 40% in order to pass a module.
326. Assessment task rubrics and mark schemes for the Academic English Skills (AES) module are provided by the SGG Curriculum Office. Assessment task rubrics and mark schemes for all other modules are set and agreed by relevant DISC teaching staff, then the Examinations Officer or Head of Curriculum & Progression sends them to the relevant external examiner for approval.

8.4.2 Examination Rules & Procedures

327. DISC has strict guidelines for the conduct of in-person examinations, as summarised below:
- Students should be sitting at the correct desk in the correct examination room, ready to start, 15 minutes before the start of the exam;
 - On the day of the exam, students should refer to the seating plan posted outside examination halls to find out which room they will be in and their desk number. This information is also provided directly to students at least a week before the exam;
 - Exam papers will be distributed to students at the published start time of the exam. Students will be given ten minutes to read through all the questions; they may not write at this time. The exam duration will be timed from when students are permitted to begin writing;
 - The senior invigilator will inform students when they can begin writing and the official start time of the exam. Students will be reminded how long the exam will last and will be given periodic updates during the exam on how much time is left. There will also be a large clock in the examination hall. The senior invigilator will announce when the exam has ended and will collect all exam papers;
 - Students must write their student number on their question paper, answer booklet, and all additional sheets of paper used. If they are unsure of their student number,

- they should check on the seating plan before the start of the exam. Students should not write their name on any piece of work;
- Electronic equipment must not be brought into the examination area. This includes but is not limited to mobile phones, MP3 players, electronic dictionaries, smart watches and spell checkers. Students will be disqualified from sitting the exam if any electronic device is found in their possession and the Academic Misconduct Policy will be invoked;
 - Bags and personal belongings must not be brought into the examination area;
 - Students can take a drink of water in a transparent water bottle and a transparent pencil case containing a pen or pencil, calculator from an approved list (provided to students in advance of exams), ruler and eraser into the exam. No other items are permitted during the exam. The use of dictionaries, electronic or paper, is not allowed unless specific instructions are given;
 - If students require assistance during the exam, they must raise their hand and the exam invigilator will see them. There will be extra paper and pens if needed;
 - If students need to leave the room for a toilet break, the invigilator will call for a member of staff to escort them;
 - Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late for the exam will not be allowed to enter or sit the exam and will be given a mark of zero. They may be offered a resit by the Assessment Board. No students will be allowed to enter an Academic English Skills Listening exam once it has started and will not be allowed to leave during the exam;
 - Students will not be allowed to leave during the first 15 minutes or last 15 minutes of the exam. During this time students should sit quietly;
 - Students are not allowed to communicate with each other for any reason or in any way during the exams. Students caught trying to communicate in any way will be removed from the exam hall and the Academic Misconduct Policy will be invoked.

8.4.3 Reasonable Adjustments for Assessments

328. DISC ensures that all students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their full academic potential, and that students with particular requirements based on a disability or learning difference are supported as much as possible. To facilitate this, reasonable adjustments may be put in place, such as:
- Printed texts and exam papers provided on specific coloured paper or using a specific font size/style, and/or use of coloured overlays;
 - Provision of a vocabulary/terminology list;
 - Provision of handouts of lectures/presentations in advance of lessons;
 - Permitted use of reading or speech software;
 - Permission to take regular breaks (during both lessons and exams);
 - Exams to be taken in one-to-one or small group rooms; and
 - Extra time for exams.
329. Students who potentially require adjustments are identified by the Welfare Officer based on declaration forms (requested during the application stage but may also be submitted after the start of the academic year). The Welfare Officer arranges meetings with each student to discuss their support requirements and identify the most suitable reasonable adjustments. A support plan is developed which outlines the agreed provisions to be put in place to support the student with their learning and assessment. Please see **Appendix 8.2** for the template support plan.

330. Support plans are shared with members of DISC as required (with consent from the student) and are reviewed with the student at the end of each term to ensure that the provisions remain adequate.
331. For further information about general support provided for students with disabilities and/or learning differences, please see [section 9.7.1](#).

8.4.4 Marking, Standardisation & Moderation Procedures

332. DISC ensures that marking and moderation is consistent by following the standardisation and moderation procedures set out below. Where possible, all assessments are submitted anonymously using a student number to ensure fairness and avoid bias or subjectivity.

Standardisation

333. All markers use approved mark schemes and, where there is more than one marker for the assessment, attend standardisation sessions.
334. The standardisation process must take place before full marking commences to ensure that all markers apply the assessment criteria consistently and that any differences in marks are within a reasonable tolerance.
335. To ensure that it is as effective as possible, the standardisation process involves the following:
 - The module leader or equivalent first reviews the submissions to identify a sample that incorporates a range of grades (high, medium, low).
 - All markers blind mark a sample of 3-5 submissions and discuss any identified areas of inconsistency and agree what the consistent approach should be.

Moderation

336. Moderation of assessments is a key process for assuring the academic standards of the programme and the outcomes of the quality of learning opportunities delivered. It provides confirmation of the consistent application of clear and transparent assessment criteria and marking practice. It also provides a core piece of peer review that is used for ongoing professional development and continuous self-improvement. Moderation must be completed before provisional marks are released to students.
337. The module tutor is the first marker for assessments which are then blind double marked by an internal moderator (normally a DISC tutor with the appropriate specialist subject knowledge). Where an appropriate moderator cannot be found within DISC, one will be selected from the pool of tutors with relevant subject specific knowledge, available within the SGG network.
338. Moderation involves the review of a sample of scripts and feedback on assignment tasks to ensure that marking criteria have been fairly, accurately and consistently applied during marking. All marked scripts are subject to arithmetical checks and a minimum of 10% of scripts, including all borderline scripts, are selected for moderation. Borderline scripts are those within 3 percentage points of the pass or progression grade.

339. The moderator completes the Moderation Form (see **Appendix 8.3**). Where the moderator expresses concern that assessment criteria have not been fairly, accurately and consistently applied, the Moderation Form should be used as a basis for discussion between the marker and the moderator in order to improve the quality of marking and feedback to students.
340. Where a negotiated outcome cannot be reached, a second moderator will need to be consulted. This should be a senior academic from DISC who will decide if further action is required. Where an appropriate second moderator cannot be found within DISC, one will be selected from the pool of tutors with relevant subject specific knowledge, available within the SGG network. The adjudication of the second moderator is final, subject to approval by the external examiner who, in all circumstances where a third marker or second moderator is used, should be consulted.
341. Moderation forms are stored in the module box on a shared, secure network drive. Module boxes are a secure online repository of all assessments and associated administrative documents. External examiners are given access to the module boxes to ensure that they have all the documentation they need to be able to complete their duties in a clear, central location, and can also access Study Smart for module material such as lesson plans.

8.4.5 Recording and Reporting of Marks and Storage of Assessments

342. Assessment marks are input into the student management system (Progresso) and checked by the teaching team as part of the quality assurance of marks process. This process is coordinated by the Examinations Officer. Marks reports are created using this system and are presented to the relevant Assessment Board (see [section 8.8](#)).
343. All assessments are stored electronically in the relevant module boxes, including assessments submitted in hardcopy which are scanned and then archived. Please see [section 10.3.2](#) for further details about the policy on the retention of student data and records. The scripts may be used for the continuing training of DISC staff through marking exercises to achieve standardisation. At any stage in the programme, scripts may also be discussed with students to provide them with feedback on their performance.
344. Samples of completed contributory assessments are made available to the external examiner for scrutiny before the relevant PAB (see [section 8.7.6](#)).

8.4.6 Assessment Security

345. DISC ensures that all assessments are stored securely, whether digital or hardcopy. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring security is maintained and the effectiveness of processes is reviewed at appropriate points, including if concerns are raised about potential vulnerability.
346. Exam question papers are stored in a secure area on the internal network and are password protected. They are sent to external examiners via email, and the password is sent in a separate message to ensure security. Exam question papers are printed in a secure location which is inaccessible to students, and papers are then kept in a locked cupboard prior to the date of the exam.

347. Completed assessments submitted in hard copy (including exam papers) are securely stored and transported during the marking and moderation process. When scripts are transferred from the professional services team to markers, and vice versa, they are counted and recorded on a sheet. Markers are instructed to keep assessments in a locked office or cupboard when they are not in the process of marking. Following the completion of marking and moderation of hardcopy assessments, the Examinations Officer ensures that they are scanned and stored electronically in the module box, and the originals are securely shredded.
348. Students are instructed to submit digital assessments in PDF format to aid straightforward submission and secure storage. Permission based access to Study Smart ensures the security of assessments stored electronically by limiting access to specific members of staff.

8.4.7 Non-attendance of Exams and Time-controlled Assessments

349. If a student does not attend an exam or time-controlled assessment but has agreed personal mitigating circumstances, they will be given a further initial attempt to take the exam by the Module Assessment Board (see [section 8.8.1](#)). If there are no agreed personal mitigating circumstances, the decision to permit a resit or resubmission will be considered by the Module Assessment Board.

8.4.8 Non or Late Submission of Assessments

350. Coursework/project assessments may be submitted up to 72 hours late, subject to a penalty. The following penalties will be applied to work submitted late:
- Up to 24 hours late: will be accepted with a deduction of 5 percentage points from the overall mark;
 - Between 24 hours and up to 48 hours late: will be accepted with a deduction of 10 percentage points from the overall mark;
 - Between 48 hours and up to 72 hours late: will be accepted with a deduction of 15 percentage points from the overall mark;
 - Over 72 hours late: submission will not be accepted and a non-submission will be recorded with a mark of zero .
351. Penalty deductions for assessments submitted within 72 hours cannot reduce the mark below the module pass mark. This will, in some instances, mean no reduction can be made for lateness. Penalties are not applied to failed work.
352. Tutors are responsible for applying late penalties to assessments. If a student has personal mitigating circumstances, they should apply for an extension to the deadline using the Personal Mitigating Circumstances process. In exceptional cases where it has not been possible to apply for an extension in advance, penalties may be removed following a successful Personal Mitigating Circumstances claim (see [section 8.5](#) for more information about the Personal Mitigating Circumstances process).

8.4.9 Student Feedback for Learning

353. DISC ensures that quality feedback is provided to students on both formative and summative assessments. Ensuring quality of feedback to students is part of DISC's

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (see [section 7.3](#)) and forms part of the internal and external moderation processes (see [section 8.4.4](#) and [section 8.7.6](#)).

8.5 Personal Mitigating Circumstances

354. Personal mitigating circumstances are events or circumstances beyond the student's control that leads to them being unable to submit or perform to the full extent of their ability for an assessment. Students are responsible for informing DISC of any illness or personal mitigating circumstances which might affect their overall performance and/or attendance during the academic year. Information about this Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy is available to students on Study Smart and in the student handbook. Attention is drawn to this policy during student induction.
355. Persistent and chronic illness that might impact a student's ability to perform effectively in assessments should be made known to DISC at the start of the academic year (see [section 9.7.1](#) for further information on support for students). DISC will provide support and make reasonable adjustments for assessments in advance where appropriate (see [section 8.4.3](#)), but such cases will not normally be considered as personal mitigating circumstances.

8.5.1 The Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel

356. The DISC Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel considers all submitted Personal Mitigating Circumstances forms; this can be via Chairs Action if needed, for example extension requests. The Panel can only consider circumstances of students who have submitted a form and acceptable supporting evidence (see [section 8.5.3](#) and [section 8.5.4](#)).
357. The Chair of the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel will be established at the beginning of the academic year, and membership will include the Head of Curriculum & Progression, at least one member of academic staff, and a member of professional services staff. Minimum quoracy will be the Chair, Head of Curriculum & Progression, and member of academic staff.
358. The Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel will meet as required, and as a minimum at the end of each assessment period before the Module Assessment Board. The Panel terms of reference are to:
- Consider and make decisions on requests from students for personal circumstances mitigation and extenuation in respect of formal assessments and report these decisions to the appropriate Module Assessment Board;
 - Investigate and make decisions on any claims of personal mitigating circumstances notified by staff in respect of groups of students having taken formal assessments;
 - Liaise with the DISC professional services staff regarding communication of decisions to students and application of decisions to student records and assessment requirements; and
 - Provide a summary report to Academic Board via the Programme Assessment Board for inclusion in the Annual Monitoring Report.
359. The Panel will not make decisions on marks or progression; these decisions are made by the relevant Assessment Board, taking into account the recommendation of the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel (see [section 8.8](#)).

360. Actions normally considered include discounting an attempt at an examination or assessment, removal of late penalties (where it was not possible for the student to apply for an extension in advance), or in exceptional cases, adjusting the balance of assessment for the module for the affected student.
361. Appeals against the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel's decisions may be made against the decision itself or the mitigation approved. Refer to DISC's Complaints & Appeals Policy in [section 9.11](#) for full details.

8.5.2 Examples of Valid Personal Mitigating Circumstances

362. The following are examples of what might be accepted as personal mitigating circumstances (list not exhaustive):
- Serious illness or accident, including sudden and unexpected deterioration of a long-term condition;
 - Hospitalisation during or immediately before the assessment period or for a significant period during the term;
 - Bereavement (the loss of a close relative or significant other);
 - Funeral of a relative or close friend on the day of an examination;
 - Serious illness of a close relative/significant other;
 - Unexpectedly becoming the sole or main carer for a relative or significant other;
 - Family breakup;
 - Being a victim or witness of a significant crime;
 - Exceptional and unforeseen travel circumstances beyond the student's control that prevented them from attending an examination or other scheduled assessment;
 - Severe and unforeseen financial problems (e.g. failure of a bank or withdrawal of funding for a reason out of the student's control);
 - Impact of Forced Marriage; and
 - Jury Service (which should be notified to DISC as soon as possible).

Circumstances that will not normally be considered

363. Circumstances which students should be expected to cope with as part of a properly managed workload or would not ordinarily have a significant impact on academic performance would not normally be considered.
364. The Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel will also not normally consider circumstances that the student could reasonably have avoided, where the student could have taken measures to reduce their impact, or are no different from the circumstances facing a significant number of other students.
365. The following are examples of circumstances which would not normally be considered (list not exhaustive):
- Minor illness or ailment such as sore throats, minor colds, or headaches;
 - A short-term problem or illness which is deemed not to have had an overall effect on the student's performance;

- Long term illness or disability, where reasonable adjustments have already been made for assessments or could have been made if DISC had been made aware of the problem at the proper time;
- Secondary applications for circumstances which have already been catered for by granting an extension for submitting coursework or assignments;
- General pressure of work;
- The timetabling of examinations;
- Being unaware of the dates or times of submission deadlines or examination(s);
- Missing an examination due to misreading the timetable or oversleeping;
- An inability to prioritise and schedule the completion of several pieces of work;
- Inadequate planning to cope with last-minute delays and missing deadlines because of computer difficulties or a failure of a single data source;
- Failure to make alternative travel plans when disruptions were advised in advance;
- Normal employment commitments, changing jobs or taking on overtime work;
- Failure of cultural acclimatisation;
- Representing UCD or country at a sporting event where DISC has not been notified in advance;
- Holidays, religious observances, or wishing to attend important family events such as weddings (funerals are an exception to this);
- Financial issues other than those mentioned above; and
- Not being aware of the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy.

8.5.3 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Form

366. Students who are unable to attend an examination or complete a piece of assessed coursework by the deadline because of illness or other valid reason must complete a Personal Mitigating Circumstances form. Information about the nature of the circumstances, their extent and duration, and how they have affected performance should be detailed on the form. The form and all relevant supporting evidence must be submitted to the professional services team no later than three days after the examination or assessment deadline.
367. All personal mitigating circumstances forms will be considered by the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel (see [section 8.5.1](#)). Requests for an extension to coursework deadlines may be considered by Chairs action as needed to ensure timeliness of the decision.
368. Students can seek support with completing the form from the professional services team or their tutor.
369. Please see **Appendix 8.4** for the Personal Mitigating Circumstances form.

8.5.4 Supporting Evidence of Personal Mitigating Circumstances

370. All Personal Mitigating Circumstances forms should be accompanied by written supporting evidence. The evidence required to support a claim will depend on the individual circumstances. Normally, students should seek evidence from an independent person, organisation, or support service, such as a local GP or welfare

service. A claim for Personal Mitigating Circumstances without appropriate supporting evidence is unlikely to be upheld.

371. Original documents should be provided (not photocopies), and they should be signed by an appropriate third party, giving details of the circumstance, its duration, and, where possible, its impact. If the original document submitted as evidence is not in English, an independent translation must also be provided from a professional translation service, a member of UCD staff, or the embassy. This translation should not be undertaken by the student, a member of their family or a friend.
372. It is recognised that there may occasionally be circumstances where a student is unable to obtain independent evidence. This should be explained on the form and the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel may, at its discretion, still consider the personal mitigating circumstances.

Examples of acceptable evidence

373. Students should seek to obtain one or more of the following as written evidence to support their claim (list not exhaustive):
- Letter or another official document signed by a medical practitioner (doctor) on headed paper;
 - Death certificate – where a death certificate is difficult to obtain, especially if the death occurred abroad, hospital documentation confirming the death or evidence of funeral arrangements would normally be an acceptable alternative (a copy of the certificate should be annotated with the student's name and registration number and relationship to the deceased);
 - Letter from solicitor, summons to attend court or attend for jury service;
 - Report or written evidence from a police officer; and
 - A letter of confirmation of any matters of fact relevant to the claim from an academic member of staff or other appropriate independent third party.

Examples of unacceptable evidence

374. The following would not normally be accepted as evidence (list not exhaustive):
- Letters from family members (unless the student is a minor), friends or fellow students;
 - Character references that confirm the good character of the student or how hard they worked but cannot confirm the facts of the claim;
 - Self-certificates for missed examinations or assignments; and
 - Retrospective notes/letters where the doctor or other professional simply reports what the student has told them.
375. Dates of evidence must correspond with the circumstances detailed in the claim. If a student has missed an assessment deadline through ill health, then the illness must coincide with the preparation, writing and deadline of that assessment.
376. Students who take ill during an examination should inform the invigilator before leaving the examination so that it is recorded.

8.5.5 False Declarations of Personal Mitigating Circumstances

377. The submission of a false Personal Mitigating Circumstances claim or appeal will be regarded as an attempt to mislead an Assessment Board or Appeals Committee or to obtain extensions to deadlines or exemption from work. This is an offence of academic dishonesty and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the student.

8.6 Academic Integrity

378. DISC maintains best practice in the implementation of academic standards across all forms of assessments, both online and in-person. Guidance around academic integrity is embedded in all programmes to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the rules and requirements. Academic integrity is covered during student induction sessions, as well as in specific refresher sessions.

379. While DISC provides guidance on the importance of academic integrity, students are responsible for their own academic work and conduct. Students must ensure that they do not fall into poor academic practice or breach academic integrity; such practices are unacceptable whether they have been followed deliberately or through a lack of understanding.

380. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been the topic of a number of debates regarding academic integrity. As such DISC does not yet (as with many academic institutions) have a settled position on how to effectively deal with the use of AI while maintaining appropriate academic standards in the delivery of its programmes and the assessment of its students. To this end DISC has set up a working group to discuss the impact of the relatively recent technological advancements and availability of AI tools, and to establish processes around of the use of them.

381. Prior to establishing a settled position, DISC's current academic policies and processes do not explicitly refer to the use of AI tools. To mitigate any uncertainty while the position is being settled students are being informed that if they utilise AI tools it may lead them to be subject to the academic misconduct policy under the definition of subcontracting outlined below.

8.6.1 Definitions of Academic Misconduct

382. Academic misconduct refers to activities that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, the pursuit of knowledge, or the fair evaluation of a student's performance.

383. Common types of academic misconduct are explained to students (with illustrative examples) during programme delivery and are also outlined below.

Cheating

384. Cheating includes (but is not limited to):

- Any form of communication with or copying from any other source (for example, another candidate) during an examination;
- Communicating during an examination with any person other than an authorised member of staff;
- Introducing any written, printed or other material into an examination space (including electronically stored information) other than that specified in the rubric

of the examination paper. Any additional written or printed material permitted during the examination must be specified in the rubric of the examination paper in a manner which would be clear to a non-specialist invigilator;

- Gaining access to unauthorised material during or before an assessment (for example a copy of the question paper or mark scheme relevant to a forthcoming examination);
- Submission of a false personal mitigating circumstances claim or academic appeal;
- Falsification of data; and
- Another person attempting to take an examination in lieu of the actual candidate.

Collusion and subcontracting

385. Collusion includes the conscious collaboration, without official approval, between two or more students in the preparation and production of work which is finally submitted by each in an identical or substantially similar form and/or is represented by each to be the product of their individual efforts.

386. Subcontracting (also known as Contract Cheating) is when another person completes all or any part of a piece of coursework on behalf of a student, paid or otherwise. Section 43A of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 makes it an offence to:

- Facilitate a student to cheat in any way;
- Advertise cheating services to students; and
- Publish advertisements for cheating services to students.

Plagiarism

387. Plagiarism is the representation of the work, written or otherwise, of any other person, from any source whatsoever, as the candidate's own. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- The verbatim (word-for-word) copying of another person's work without clear identification and acknowledgement;
- The close paraphrasing of another person's work by changing a few words or altering the order of presentation, without clear identification and acknowledgement;
- Unidentified and unacknowledged quotation of phrases from another person's work;
- The deliberate and detailed presentation of another person's ideas as one's own; and
- The submission of previously assessed work completed for another module or Institution.

388. To help eradicate plagiarism and protect the value and academic standards of programmes, coursework assignments must be submitted electronically through Turnitin (similarity detection software). Assessments with high similarity scores will be reviewed by the tutor to determine whether plagiarism has occurred.

8.6.2 Distinction Between Minor and Major Misconduct

389. Academic misconduct will be categorised as minor or major. A case of misconduct will normally be determined as minor where the assessment contains a minimal volume of misconduct which does not threaten the academic integrity of the assessment. It may be a result of the student having a poor understanding of good academic practice or correct referencing techniques. Examples of minor misconduct include:

- Poor academic practice (for example, inaccuracies or minor omissions in referencing, poor paraphrasing);
- A low volume of the assessment is subject to plagiarism or collusion; and
- Unintentional breaches of examination regulations.

390. Examples of what might constitute major (rather than minor) misconduct include:

- A significant volume of the assessment is subject to plagiarism or collusion;
- Multiple cases of minor misconduct;
- Subcontracting/contract cheating;
- Intentional breaches of examination regulations;
- Falsification of data; and
- Impersonation of a candidate.

391. The Chair of the Academic Misconduct Panel may be consulted for advice about whether the case should be categorised as major or minor misconduct, if need.

8.6.3 Development of Students' Understanding of Academic Misconduct

392. DISC requires students to confirm that they have read and understood the Academic Misconduct policy by completing a form on Study Smart. Students are provided with opportunities to develop good academic practice and with training on how Turnitin works/how the generated reports are interpreted. The use of Turnitin has 3 purposes:

- A plagiarism detection tool;
- A formative tool to aid good academic practice, help ensure the use of correct referencing techniques and identify those students who require extra guidance at an early a stage as possible; and
- Deterrent to plagiarism and collusion.

393. It is each student's responsibility to ensure that they understand correct referencing practices according to the *Harvard Referencing* style (the official referencing system of DISC). Students are expected to use appropriate references and keep carefully detailed notes of all sources of material, including any material downloaded from the internet. An essay or report cannot consist merely of summaries of other people's ideas and texts; students must demonstrate their own critical engagement with, and evaluation of, the material presented and discussed. Students are advised to consult their tutor if they need further advice or guidance.

8.6.4 Investigation of Suspected Academic Misconduct

394. Suspected instances of misconduct are investigated by the relevant tutor (for coursework) or the Examination Officer (for exams) who collates the evidence and arranges a meeting with the student. The student will be advised that an investigation

of misconduct is underway, and that the meeting will be an opportunity for them to discuss and provide explanations about the evidence.

395. Examples of evidence of misconduct in coursework includes:

- The assessment in question;
- Turnitin similarity reports;
- Comparative examples of the student's prior work; and
- In the case of collusion, anonymised copies of the other student's work.

Examples of evidence of misconduct in exams includes:

- Invigilator reports;
- Examination reports;
- Evidence confiscated during the course of an examination; and
- Copies of students' examination scripts.

396. At the meeting, the evidence will be discussed, and the student may be asked questions related to the assessment or to recreate elements of the assessment in order to determine if misconduct has occurred, and whether it constitutes major or minor misconduct (see [section 8.6.2](#)). If the student does not attend the meeting without giving prior notice with a reasonable explanation, the tutor/Examination Officer may determine or recommend a penalty and/or action required in the absence of the student.

397. The process following the investigation will vary depending on whether it is deemed to be a case of minor or major misconduct:

398. For **minor misconduct**, decisions will be made by the tutor or Examination Officer who will apply any resulting penalties (see [section 8.6.6](#)). The outcome of all investigations into minor misconduct will be reported to the Academic Misconduct Panel. The Chair of the Academic Misconduct Panel may be consulted for advice in ambiguous cases.

399. For **major misconduct**, the tutor or Examination Officer will submit the evidence and a recommendation to the Academic Misconduct Panel for consideration (see [section 8.6.5](#)).

8.6.5 Academic Misconduct Panel

400. The Academic Misconduct Panel review and make decisions about major misconduct on an ad hoc basis as and when required. Student details are anonymised, and the proceedings and outcomes remain confidential (unless confidentiality has been waived by the student, for example to comply with sponsorship requirements).

401. The Academic Misconduct Panel consists of:

- The Head of Curriculum & Progression (Chair)
- The Head of English
- The Welfare Officer
- At least one other academic staff member not immediately involved in the relevant assessment(s)

402. The Chair of the Misconduct Panel may review instances of documented Personal Mitigating Circumstances to enable the panel to make an informed and measured

decision. All cases are assessed anonymously with identifying information only available to the Chair.

403. The Academic Misconduct Panel will decide on a penalty and/or required student action, and will clearly record the decisions in the minutes of the meeting. Decisions made by the Academic Misconduct Panel will be ratified by the Module Assessment Board (MAB) and reported to the final Programme Assessment Board (PAB) at the end of the year.
404. The Academic Misconduct Panel will be convened, when necessary, at the end of each assessment period (prior to the relevant Module Assessment Board) to decide on any major cases of academic misconduct and approve the decisions of all reported minor cases.

8.6.6 Penalties for Academic Misconduct

405. Any penalty applied and/or action required is determined by the seriousness of the misconduct and any instances of prior misconduct.
406. In cases of minor or unintentional breaches of regulations, a caution may be given to the student and a record of this caution will be placed on the student's record.
407. In cases of more serious breaches where there was a clear intention to cheat, a reduction of marks sufficient to cause the student to fail the module concerned (and, by implication, the whole programme) may be imposed. Alternatively, it might be deemed more appropriate to impose a reduction on the overall average percentage achieved at the end of the programme. A record of all penalties applied for academic misconduct will be recorded on the student's record.

Potential penalties for minor misconduct

- Percentage reduction of the final mark for the assessment;
- Resubmission of sections of coursework;
- Full resubmission of the assessment;
- Examination grade set to zero with resit required.

Potential penalties for major misconduct

- Percentage reduction of the final mark for the programme;
- Full resubmission of the assessment for a capped mark;
- Examination grade set to zero with resit required;
- Assessment grade set to zero with no resubmission permitted.

Levels of warning

408. The following levels of formal warning may be issued with a misconduct decision (the starting point will depend on the seriousness of the infraction):
 - Verbal warning
 - First written warning
 - Second written warning
 - Third written warning
 - Expulsion.

409. In serious cases of major misconduct, a student may be expelled, regardless of the number of prior warnings.

8.6.7 Communication to Students About Academic Misconduct Decisions

410. Students will normally be notified of the outcome of a misconduct investigation within 5 working days of the scheduled meeting or Academic Misconduct Panel meeting. Enhanced guidance on avoiding misconduct will be offered to students to help develop their academic skills. The outcome of all misconduct investigations will be placed on the student's record.
411. Where it has been determined to be a case of minor misconduct (see [section 8.6.4](#)), for a first offence, the notification will be verbal, otherwise, a written warning will be sent to the student by the tutor or Examination Officer.
412. Where it has been determined to be a case of major misconduct (see [section 8.6.4](#)), the provisional decision will be communicated in writing by the Chair of the Academic Misconduct Panel, noting that it is subject to ratification by the Module Assessment Board (see [section 8.8.1](#)). If it is a final warning, the student will be contacted by the Head of Centre.

8.6.8 Appeals Against an Academic Misconduct Decision

413. Students may appeal against decisions made and/or penalties applied in relation to academic misconduct.
414. Appeals against a minor misconduct decision made by a tutor or the Examinations Officer are referred to the Academic Misconduct Panel for consideration in the first instance.
415. The Academic Appeals process should be followed for appeals against the decision of the Academic Misconduct Panel (see [section 8.9](#) for full details).

8.7 External Examiners

416. External examiners are appointed to all programmes at DISC to provide external oversight to ensure the security of academic standards and the quality of assessment processes.
417. DISC's external examiner requirements and guidelines align with [QQI's Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022](#), and ['Effective Practice Guidelines for External Examining'](#), (revised February 2015).
418. The duration of an external examiner's appointment will normally be four years, with an exceptional extension of one year, for example to ensure continuity of external oversight. The Head of Centre must submit extension requests for approval by Academic Board with a clear rationale for the proposal. An external examiner may be reappointed in exceptional circumstances after a minimum period of five years has elapsed since their last appointment.
419. The full Study Group External Examiners Policy is attached as **Appendix 8.5**.

8.7.1 Criteria for External Examiners

420. Nominations for external examiners must meet the following minimum criteria; the nominee must have:
- Knowledge and understanding of sector agreed reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality;
 - Competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof;
 - Relevant academic and/or professional qualifications to at least the level of the qualification being externally examined, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate;
 - Competence and experience relating to designing and operating a variety of assessment tasks appropriate to the subject and operating assessment procedures;
 - Awareness of current developments in the design and delivery of relevant curricula; and
 - Competence and experience relating to the enhancement of the student learning experience.
421. External examiners will normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments for taught programmes at any point in time.

8.7.2 Avoiding Conflict of Interest

422. DISC ensures that conflict of interest is avoided by not appointing external examiners in the following categories or circumstances:
- An employee or member of a governing body or committee of DISC or UCD;
 - Anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with DISC programmes;
 - Anyone required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to DISC programmes;
 - Anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme;
 - Anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the programme(s) or modules in question;
 - Former staff or students of DISC unless a period of five years has elapsed;
 - A reciprocal arrangement involving cognate programmes at another institution;
 - The succession of an external examiner from an institution by a colleague from the same department in the same institution;
 - The appointment of more than one external examiner from the same department of the same institution for the same or cognate programme.

8.7.3 Appointment of External Examiners

423. The Head of Centre or Head of Curriculum & Progression will conduct a suitability assessment of a proposed external examiner based on programme need and the criteria outlined in [section 8.7.1](#) and [section 8.7.2](#). They will then approach the nominee

with a clear description of the requirements of the appointment, including an indication of the expected workload. The nomination form is completed, and appropriate signatures secured.

424. The Head of Centre will submit the External Examiner nomination form to the Academic Board for approval. Approvals are then endorsed by UCD via the Oversight Board.
425. Once approved, DISC's Head of Centre or Head of Curriculum & Progression will inform the nominee of the outcome of their nomination and will issue an appointment letter and agreement for signing. This will include full details of tenure, areas of examining duty and related administrative matters.
426. Appointed external examiners will be provided with a handbook containing guidance on DISC's External Examiners policy and expectations.

8.7.4 Induction of External Examiners

427. The Head of Centre or Head of Curriculum & Progression will contact new external examiners to invite them to an induction at DISC (which may be remote or in person); this should include meetings with relevant DISC staff and students where possible. The induction will provide opportunities for external examiners to familiarise themselves with DISC and its assessment procedures, and to reconfirm their responsibilities.
428. External examiners will be provided with information such as:
 - Relevant module descriptors, programme specifications and any subject benchmark statements;
 - Details of relevant DISC regulations, policies and procedures;
 - External examining and assessment guidelines; and
 - Programme documentation, for example student and programme handbooks, examination papers, assignment briefs, and grade criteria.
429. Professional services staff at DISC will provide external examiners with regular updates on assessment policy and procedures, as necessary.

8.7.5 Mentoring Arrangements for First Time External Examiners

430. DISC will provide new external examiners who have not undertaken a previous external examining role with a mentor during their first year of tenure. The mentor will normally be an experienced external examiner appointed to another DISC programme, or if that is not possible, an appropriate member of staff selected by the Head of Centre or Head of Curriculum & Progression.
431. The role of the mentor will be to provide a source of advice and guidance to the new external examiner about their role and responsibilities, Assessment Board procedures and writing the annual report.

8.7.6 External Examiner Duties

432. The main purpose of external examiners is to ensure that:
 - The academic standard for each programme and programme element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged in accordance with relevant external benchmarks;

- The assessment processes measure student achievement against the intended learning outcomes and are fair and equitably operated;
- The programmes and the achievements of students are of the appropriate standard to equip them for their intended degrees; and
- Programme staff receive expert external, independent opinion that can be used to assure the standards and enhance the quality of the programmes.

433. External examiners undertake the following duties in order to fulfil their remit:

- Provide feedback to programme teams on the design of assignments, examination papers and marking schemes;
- Review and advise on the appropriateness of the published assessment criteria;
- Moderate, for the purposes of confirming appropriate standards, a representative range or sample of internal marking to include a sample of scripts from each band of classification or marking, borderline cases and those with fail marks. At least 20% of scripts assessed during the academic cycle must be scrutinised;
- Attend Programme Assessment Board (PAB) meetings (in person or remotely as required) to provide advice, and to endorse the collective decisions of the Board; and
- Submit a report in the prescribed format at the end of each cycle, which will be shared with DISC staff and students.

434. External examiners are given access to all graded assessment materials via the online module boxes at the end of each term (hardcopy submissions are scanned and made available digitally) to enable them to fulfil their duties. External examiners are made aware of the dates of the PAB meetings well in advance and are given a minimum of two days to scrutinise assessments prior to the meeting.

435. External examiners do not act as second markers and will not be used to reconcile differences between internal markers. It would not be appropriate for external examiners to recommend adjustments to individual marks awarded in a sample of work. However, external examiners may ask to see a further set of marked assessments if this is necessary for effective quality assurance.

8.7.7 External Examiner Reports

436. External examiners must submit a report in the prescribed format at the end of each cycle, which will be shared with staff and other relevant stakeholders. In their report, external examiners are asked to comment, analyse and reflect on the standards and quality of DISC programmes as determined by student performance and the appropriateness of the assessment process to judge achievement of learning outcomes.

437. External examiners are asked to report specifically on:

- Whether the standards set for the programme are appropriate with regard to published national subject benchmarks, the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), programme specifications and other relevant external reference points;
- The comparability of standards with similar programmes offered by other Irish higher education institutions;

- The standard of student performance in assessments for those programmes they have been appointed to examine;
- The extent to which the processes for assessment and the determination of marks are sound and have been fairly conducted by the Assessment Boards;
- The extent to which the recommendations of the Programme Assessment Board's sub-committees (for example the Personal Mitigating Circumstances and Academic Misconduct panels) are fairly taken into account;
- Whether recommendations and action points in previous external examiner reports have been addressed and quality enhanced accordingly;
- Any strengths and distinctive, innovative features of programmes of study;
- Whether sufficient evidence was received for the external examiner role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, details should be provided); and
- Their experience during their term of office (in final report only).

438. External examiners are required to submit their completed report to the Head of Curriculum & Progression and to the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team via email within four weeks of the final Assessment Board. Payment will be approved on completion of a report which provides valuable feedback regarding academic standards and quality.

439. The CMT consider the comments and recommendations made in external examiners' reports, and where practicable and appropriate, take immediate action. Outcomes and proposed actions are recorded and reported through the annual monitoring process (see [section 12.3.5](#) and [section 12.6](#)). The Head of Curriculum & Progression will provide a written response to the external examiner, including any actions that have or will be taken. The external examiner reports and written responses are submitted to Academic Board.

440. The template External Examiner Report Form is attached as **Appendix 8.6**.

8.7.8 Premature Termination of Appointment

441. An external examiner's appointment may be prematurely terminated in the following circumstances:

Reason for Termination	Action
Serious illness	In consultation with the external examiner
Resignation of the External Examiner	The external examiner is expected to give DISC reasonable notice of their intention to resign to allow sufficient time for a suitable replacement to be found. External examiner resignations must be reported to Academic Board.
Changes to the programme which render the appointment no longer applicable	DISC's Head of Centre will make a recommendation to Academic Board who will, if in support of the recommendation, terminate the appointment. The Head of Centre will notify the external examiner, specifying the reasons for the termination and all records will be amended accordingly, in line with GDPR requirements.
Non-fulfilment of external examiner's duties, such as failure to provide annual reports or persistent	

non-attendance (either in person or remotely) at assessment boards	Where changes to the programme render the appointment no longer applicable, reasonable notice will be given to the external examiner, as far as possible.
Unprofessional conduct	
Irretrievable breakdown of relationship with programme teaching teams such as to disadvantage students on the programme.	Where duties have not been fulfilled or where there has been unprofessional conduct or irretrievable breakdown, DISC may terminate the appointment immediately.

8.8 Assessment Boards

8.8.1 Module Assessment Board (MAB)

442. The Module Assessment Board (MAB) meets at the end of each examination session and is chaired by a member of the Centre Management Team. The primary function of the MAB is to agree all marks and consider any further circumstances that might be relevant for each individual module, reported via Module Impact Statements, which are then reported formally to the Programme Assessment Board (PAB). Module Impact Statements are written reports provided by the relevant member of the Centre Management Team detailing any issues which may have affected all students on a module, for example an incident during an examination.
443. Any recommendations for adjustment of marks (with supporting statements or evidence) are presented to the MAB. If the Board approves a change of marks this will be recorded, together with the rationale and evidence, in the minutes of the MAB. These will be made available to the external examiner prior to the relevant Programme Assessment Board (PAB).
444. Once the module marks have been ratified, the MAB will offer resits to students with fail marks. The MAB will also ratify the decisions of the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel (see [section 8.5.1](#)) and the Academic Misconduct Panel (see [section 8.6.5](#)) and determine if any further action is to be taken regarding module marks for students who have Personal Mitigating Circumstances or have been found guilty of Academic Misconduct.

8.8.2 Programme Assessment Board (PAB)

445. The Programme Assessment Board (PAB) meets at the end of each programme and the Chair is appointed by Curriculum and Progression Committee. The primary function of the PAB is to consider each student to determine whether they have passed the DISC programme and met the progression threshold criteria to progress to their chosen UCD programme, as set out in the programme requirements. The PAB may also, in line with academic regulations, offer retakes to students who are below, but very close to, the progression threshold requirement.
446. PAB has delegated authority from the Curriculum and Progression Committee and reports all decisions and outcomes to that committee. Only those outcomes reported by PAB and confirmed by the Curriculum and Progression Committee may be used for the issuing of transcripts to students.

447. Please see the governance handbook for the full terms of reference and membership of the MAB and PAB.

8.8.3 Resit & Resubmission Opportunities

448. A resit is an opportunity to retrieve an initial failed assessment without having to repeat the original period of teaching and learning. Marks for resit assessments will not be capped, unless the module was failed as a result of academic misconduct, in which case the resit mark will be capped at the programme progression threshold. Resit opportunities will be offered by the Module Assessment Board where a student has either failed a module or not achieved the module or programme progression requirement specified by UCD.
449. Students will normally be expected to pass all modules (including any resit attempts) before progressing to the next term of study. Students may be offered conditional progression to the next term with one failed module; this must be passed at resit attempt by the end of the following term. Students who have failed two modules (including any resit attempts) may be offered a repeat term where this is practicable in terms of completing the programme within the academic year.
450. Students are normally permitted a maximum of one resit attempt per module. A student may be given a second and final resit for a module by the Module Assessment Board or Programme Assessment Board provided that:
- The progression criteria for the stage have not been achieved;
 - Attendance requirements have been fulfilled and there has been sufficient engagement with assessments; and
 - There is adequate and reasonable allowance for it within the academic year in relation to timing and workload.
451. Repeat years are not permitted for DISC programmes; students who fail to meet the progression threshold requirements following any resit opportunities will not be able to progress to a UCD programme.

8.8.4 Completion of the Programme and Progression Threshold Requirements

452. Students must achieve a pass mark of at least 40% in all modules to pass the programme overall. In addition, students must achieve set minimum threshold requirements to be able to progress to a programme at UCD. The minimum requirements vary depending on the UCD programme. There are both subject specific and English language threshold requirements which are detailed in the relevant programme specifications (available on the internal network drive). Students are made aware of the progression thresholds for their chosen UCD programme before enrolment and are reminded of them during the course of the DISC programme.

8.8.5 Communication of Results to Students

453. Module results, with details of any resit requirements and confirmation of the final outcome of Personal Mitigating Circumstances or Academic Misconduct Panel decisions, are made available to students once they have been ratified by the Module Assessment Board. At the end of each term, the professional services team send each

student a report containing a summary of their assessment grades and RPAG ratings (see [section 9.8.2](#)).

454. At the end of their programme and following the final PAB, students are sent a transcript detailing the final marks they have achieved for each module.

8.9 Academic Appeals

455. If a student feels that an academic process has not been followed or has a grievance on academic grounds, they may submit an appeal. It is made clear that appeals against academic judgement will not be heard. If a student is not sure why they have received a mark, then they should approach their relevant academic tutor for guidance and feedback.
456. Appeals can also be made against decisions made by Academic Misconduct Panel and Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel outcomes.
457. See [section 9.11](#) for full details of the DISC Student Complaints and Appeals policy.



Chapter Nine

Support for Students & Student Engagement



Chapter 9 - Support for Students & Student Engagement

9.1 Introduction

458. DISC has a diverse student body with international students recruited from over 70 countries. A supportive environment is provided to ensure students are integrated into life at DISC and in Dublin, their learning and wellbeing is supported, and they have an excellent overall experience.
459. This chapter outlines the resources and supports available to DISC students. It also outlines the responsibilities and processes for ensuring that these resources are fit for purpose, easily accessible and that everyone is aware of them.

9.2 Responsibilities

460. It is the responsibility of all staff at DISC to provide students with a supportive environment and to act on or escalate any concerns to the appropriate member of the Centre Management Team. The Head of Centre has ultimate responsibility for the provision of student support and opportunities for engagement, with delegation as appropriate. The range of support and engagement processes provided by DISC are outlined in this chapter, and responsibilities are explained in each section.

9.3 Student Information

9.3.1 Pre-Arrival Information

461. Prior to arrival at DISC, students are supported by SGG's Central Student Services (CSS) team who are their main point of contact before they begin their programme. Students with a confirmed place are sent a welcome email from the CSS team containing a comprehensive pre-arrival guide.
462. Students are also given access to the DISC [Welcome Hub](#) which contains pre-arrival information including an outline of what to expect during the first two weeks, information about insurance, accommodation, and checklists to help them to prepare for traveling to Dublin.
463. The CSS team are contactable by email and assist DISC students with all their pre-arrival needs, including:
- Facilitation of accommodation bookings and issuing accommodation deadline reminders;
 - Securing airport transfer services;
 - Providing induction information, including timetables and guides; and
 - Supporting with the completion of arrival forms.
464. The student's dedicated CSS coordinator can also provide general information and advice about DISC, studying in Ireland, the city of Dublin, and what to bring when they travel to Ireland.
465. The Head of Professional Services works with CSS team to ensure that information provided remains current.

9.3.2 Student Induction & Orientation

466. All DISC students are given an induction programme at the start of their first term to ensure that:
- Students feel safe within their environment;
 - All required documentation is completed;
 - Students are ready to concentrate on their academic studies;
 - Students are aware of DISC policies and processes; and
 - Any specific learning or access needs have been reported so that arrangements can be made to accommodate them, as appropriate (see [section 9.7.1](#)).
467. The induction includes an orientation programme that gives students the opportunity to meet other students, introduce them to the place that they will be living, and provides them with information that they need to make the most of studying at DISC and UCD.
468. The induction programmes also include some UCD activities which further supports students with integration into university life. DISC students are also invited to participate in UCD's fresher's week (September) or refresher's week (January) activities.
469. The Head of Centre, working with the Head of Professional Services, is responsible for creating and delivering DISC induction programmes.
470. See **Appendix 9.1** for an example of the DISC induction schedule.

9.3.3 Student Handbook

471. The student handbook provides key information about the programme of study and what is expected from students. It also contains important information about DISC's rules and regulations, quality assurance processes and how students are expected to engage with these, and information about progression to UCD programmes. The handbook is available to students on Study Smart, and they are introduced to it during induction. The Head of Centre, working with the DISC management team and the wider staff body, are responsible for the accuracy and currency of all information contained in the handbook; it is reviewed annually and is approved by Academic Board.
472. See **Appendix 9.2** for the Student Handbook.

9.3.4 Student Module Guides

473. Students are provided with Module Guides containing detailed information about each module such as weekly content, learning outcomes, and assessment information (including scheduling). This supports effective time management and ensures that students know what to expect. These guides are provided to students during induction and are also available on the module Study Smart site. The module tutors are responsible for ensuring that the guides are accurate and up to date.
474. See **Appendix 9.3** for an example Student Module Guide.

9.4 Student Representation & Engagement

475. DISC understands that student representation and engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement processes which underpin learning, teaching and assessment is crucial. DISC therefore commits to recognising and addressing any barriers to this engagement so that all students have an equal voice and opportunity to contribute.
476. DISC considers students to be partners in their learning and is therefore committed to gathering and responding to student feedback in order to monitor and enhance the quality of the student experience, and to maintain a positive culture.
477. The following are some of the ways that DISC students are encouraged to engage with activities related to the enhancement of learning and teaching:
- Opportunities to engage are widely publicised, accessible, inclusive and flexible to meet the needs of all students;
 - Students are invited and encouraged to undertake formal roles, including in governance, and are trained and supported to fulfil these roles and to make effective contributions;
 - Students are clear in terms of what is expected of them, for example as members of deliberative and decision-making bodies;
 - All students who are not student reps are encouraged and enabled to feedback via surveys and through the representation system; and
 - The effectiveness and impact of student engagement are regularly monitored, reviewed and evaluated with a view to continual improvement and enhancement.

9.4.1 Student Representatives

478. All students have the right to stand for election and DISC will ensure that all cohorts of students receive the same opportunity to be Student Representatives.
479. To promote the role of student representative, former or current student representatives will be invited to speak to new students at the beginning of the academic year. DISC holds an election for student representatives, with a minimum of one student being chosen from each subject or pathway. If there are insufficient candidates to merit an election, volunteers may be appointed to the role of student representative with the agreement of the group of students that they will represent.
480. Student representatives from each programme are members of the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) which feeds into Academic Board and provides formal opportunities to give feedback.

Provision for Student Representatives

481. Student representatives are provided with training, arranged by the Head of Centre of Head of Professional Services, to enable them to participate and contribute effectively to the governance processes.
482. Online tutorials are available for student representatives on how to create a presentation about items to be discussed by the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and Academic Board and consult on any other issues to be raised. A notice

board and space on Study Smart are available for student representatives to keep their peers up to date and to seek additional feedback on any proposals.

Responsibilities of Student Representatives

483. Student representatives are responsible for gathering and presenting the views of those they represent to SSLC and Academic Board meetings, and for reporting the outcomes.
484. Student representatives should aim to attend all meetings, conduct themselves in an appropriate fashion, and raise points in a constructive manner. Discussion will be encouraged by the academic members of the committees.

Head of Centre & Head of Professional Services Responsibilities

485. To support student representatives with their role, the Head of Centre and Head of Professional Services will ensure that:
 - There is an appropriate mechanism to facilitate the election or appointment of student representatives and will identify a member of staff to take responsibility for communication;
 - Training is arranged for student representatives;
 - Information about the student representation system is included in the student handbook;
 - A noticeboard is provided in the main hallway of DISC and space is available on Study Smart for student representatives to communicate with other students;
 - Relevant sets of minutes are provided as needed to inform the annual review process. Where possible, the approved minutes should be published for the student body; and
 - Students are informed of any issues that have been raised and how these will be addressed.

9.4.2 Student Feedback

486. Student feedback is a key element of the quality cycle to ensure that students' views and ideas contribute to the QA processes. This is outlined in further detail in [section 12.3.2](#) and [section 12.3.3](#), as part of the Quality Assurance Cycle. Data from student surveys and questionnaires also informs the annual monitoring process, see [section 12.6](#).

9.5 Centre Facilities & Services

9.5.1 DISC Teaching Rooms & Space

487. DISC is situated on the UCD campus in the Newstead Block A building. The teaching rooms are equipped with a PC and Projector or Interactive Whiteboard.
488. DISC provides a communal area for students and students are able to make use of all UCD facilities such as the Library, Sports Centre and Medical Centre. UCD facilities are free for students to use; the associated costs are paid by DISC.
489. There are two staff rooms and three offices, including a welfare office which ensures that students can speak confidentially with the Welfare Officer.

490. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring that facilities are fully equipped and functioning. The Head of Centre works with UCD estates to resolve any issues regarding the building, with the network Facilities Manager regarding any issues related to fixtures and furniture, and with the IT department regarding IT equipment.

9.5.2 Study Smart

491. Each DISC module has an accompanying Study Smart module page for students to use before, during and after classes to enhance their learning and provide further opportunities to achieve success. It is the responsibility of module tutors to ensure that their module page is updated, and the information is accurate. All staff are encouraged to explore Study Smart features and learning tools so that both students and staff use it to its full potential to enhance all learning outcomes. Please see [section 7.8](#) for full details about Study Smart.

492. In addition to the subject module pages all students have access to the 'Virtual Reception' which provides information on all aspects of life at DISC, UCD and Dublin, including:

- Academic related information, such as term dates, where to go for academic advice, guidance for online etiquette and good study habits like time management.
- Important documents such as the Attendance Policy, Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Safeguarding Policy.
- Wellbeing advice and support, such as information about health services, disability supports, and faith services.
- Information about the UCD campus, such as maps and the library, and about the city of Dublin, such as public transport and places to visit.

493. During induction all students will receive a comprehensive tour of Study Smart to ensure they understand how to access and navigate it prior to their studies.

9.5.3 Library Services

494. All DISC students have full access to UCD library services. The main library on campus is [The James Joyce Library](#). The library has an excellent provision of both learning materials and study spaces and all DISC students are encouraged to take advantage of them.

9.5.4 Social Spaces

495. DISC students have access to all the social and eating spaces provided by UCD.

9.6 Safeguarding

496. DISC is committed to protecting all of its students from harm and to providing a safe and secure environment for them to study in. DISC has a Safeguarding Policy in place to ensure that:

- All students are safe;
- All staff and students can recognise welfare issues and signs of abuse;
- All staff act according to the best interests of the students;
- All welfare and child protection concerns are escalated to an appropriate member of staff in a timely manner; and
- Safeguarding is integrated into the leadership and management of DISC.

9.6.1 Safeguarding Policy for Ireland

497. The DISC safeguarding policy is based on the following principles:

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility;
- All staff understand that abuse in any form can happen within the DISC community;
- There is a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who has overall responsibility for safeguarding;
- The DSL acts on all safeguarding or Child Protection concerns in line with current legislation;
- All staff and students are vigilant of possible safeguarding issues and risks of harm;
- All staff and students have effective and various means to raise concerns;
- All students know who to turn to for help, advice or support, can access services confidentially, quickly and easily, and have access to 24-hour support;
- All reasonable steps are taken to ensure the whereabouts of any student aged under 18 years, or considered a vulnerable adult, is known;
- All staff are aware of the importance of early help and how to access it;
- DISC is a safe place for students to learn;
- All students feel safe and secure and protected from harm;
- Staff are aware of and actively use the Safeguarding Policy and adhere to safeguarding procedures;
- The Head of Centre has overall accountability for the safeguarding and welfare of students within DISC;
- All relevant DISC staff are made aware of the special needs or particular vulnerabilities of individual students (in line with GDPR requirements);
- There is regular monitoring and reporting of welfare and safeguarding issues so that trends are identified and acted upon; and
- All staff members are required to read and understand Chapters 1-3 of Children First National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children.

9.6.2 Safeguarding Responsibilities

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

498. Safeguarding responsibilities at DISC are supported by SGG and therefore align with SGG terminology. As such, references to the Designated Safeguarding Lead throughout this manual and in supporting documentation should be considered consistent with the Irish equivalent definition of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

499. The DSL is trained in higher level safeguarding in line with Tusla guidelines. In line with the Children First National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children 2017, the role of DSL will always be a member of the senior management team within DISC but not the Head of Centre to ensure an appropriate level of independence. The DSL is responsible for ensuring:

- All students have sufficient and appropriate means to report concerns, issues and incidents;

- DISC staff are conversant with the procedures outlined in the safeguarding policy and those that directly support it;
- DISC staff complete appropriate safeguarding training;
- Advice and support are available to staff on issues relating to safeguarding;
- Literature and information from the provider and partner university agencies related to welfare and safeguarding services is readily available to students;
- Individual welfare or safeguarding risk assessments are completed and followed;
- A complete and up-to-date record of all safeguarding related issues and activities is maintained and available to review on request;
- Students are provided with appropriate individual support and advice, including for those students with particular health conditions and/or care plans;
- Students at risk are reported to Tusla, the Gardai and any other external agency (whichever is most appropriate);
- Safeguarding concerns relating to a member of staff are reported to the Tusla at the soonest opportunity;
- Working links with other agencies are established to provide welfare support and information to students;
- The Head of Centre and relevant DISC personnel are kept informed of any appropriate information on any safeguarding or welfare issue (in line with current legislation);
- Assisting the Head of Centre to complete the Annual Safeguarding Review (ASR);
- Information is shared with parents, agents or sponsors as is deemed appropriate and in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) on a case-by-case basis;
- Strong relationships with partner university agencies are maintained to provide welfare support and information to students; and
- Significant concerns are referred to the Global Safeguarding team for assistance or consultation.

500. DISC has a Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL), as named in the Safeguarding Policy for Ireland. The DDSL is also trained in higher level safeguarding and will take on the role of safeguarding lead in the absence of the DSL.

Safeguarding Responsibilities of the Head of Centre

501. The Head of Centre has overall accountability for the safeguarding and welfare of students to ensure that:

- Staff members are appointed to the DSL and DDSL roles;
- The DSL and DDSL can always operate within their statutory responsibilities as defined by the Children First National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children 2017 guidance;
- The DSL and DDSL have current higher level safeguarding training that is updated every 3 years as a minimum;
- DISC has a comprehensive centre safeguarding risk assessment in place which is reviewed at least annually;
- All staff are recruited safely in line with the Safer Recruitment Policy;
- All safer recruitment checks are recorded within a Single Central Record (SCR);

- The completion of the Annual Safeguarding Review;
- Significant concerns are escalated to the SGG Safeguarding team or HR Director as appropriate;
- All staff receive safeguarding awareness within their initial induction period and every three years thereafter;
- A safeguarding training log is maintained and available to view on request; and
- Systems are available to log welfare and safeguarding concerns and subsequent actions.

502. See **Appendix 9.4** for the full Safeguarding Policy (Ireland).

9.6.3 Safeguarding Escalation Policy

503. In addition to the main Safeguarding Policy, DISC has a Safeguarding Escalation Policy in place to ensure that should there be an incident of significant concern, or if trends are identified which could impact on both students and Study Group as a whole, they are escalated to the Managing Director, University Partnerships (SGG) within an agreed timeline.

504. The Safeguarding Escalation Policy (Ireland) (see **Appendix 9.5**) defines the types of issues and trends to be escalated, timings, and the persons responsible for escalation and/or action. This policy is made available to all DISC staff via the internal shared drive, on Study Smart and is referenced in the Safeguarding Policy.

9.6.4 Safeguarding Review

505. To support a network-wide review of the consistency of the application of safeguarding laws and regulation across SGG, DISC submits reports to the SGG Safeguarding team on a quarterly and annual basis. The Head of Centre and the Designated Safeguarding Lead are responsible for submitting these reports.

Quarterly Safeguarding Review

506. DISC ensures that any safeguarding incidents or concerns are properly recorded and produces a narrative report of these incidents, including a record of any actions to address issues. This report is reviewed and endorsed by Operations Committee for approval by the Board. DISC also keeps up to date with and disseminates information about any changes in Irish legislation which would potentially affect the efficacy of the DISC Safeguarding policy.

Annual Safeguarding Review

507. DISC's application of the Safeguarding process is reviewed on a yearly basis; as part of this review, DISC submits a report which includes:

- Review of DISC's Safeguarding plan and evaluate any successes and failures, and an evaluation of the DSL & DDSL roles in DISC;
- Update the availability of UCD Welfare Services and identify any key contacts for various postholders;
- Detail any referrals for both under 18 and over 18-year-old students;
- Update on staff training and staff recruitment to ensure that the safer recruitment policy has been complied with;
- Update details of any under 18 DISC students in student accommodation; and

- Confirm how the safeguarding policy is included for discussion at Centre Management Team meetings.

508. This report is reviewed and endorsed by Operations Committee for approval by the Board

9.7 Student Welfare

509. DISC is committed to providing comprehensive and timely welfare support to contribute to the wellbeing of all students. The Welfare Officer is primarily responsible for ensuring that students are fully supported. The Welfare Officer liaises with all members of staff to ensure that students' needs are accommodated where possible, and to address any concerns that may arise. This includes working with UCD colleagues to ensure that support services can be accessed as needed.

9.7.1 Support for Students with Disabilities & Learning Differences

510. DISC aims to ensure that all students who have the capability to benefit from studying at DISC can do so. It takes as its starting point the premise that accessible and appropriate provision is not 'additional' but a core element of the overall service that DISC provides. Students with a disability or learning difference are included as part of the community and have access to facilities and a learning environment that is, where possible, comparable to that of their non-disabled peers.

511. All of DISC's publicity, programme details and general information are accessible to people with disabilities and learning differences. When developing and reviewing policies, procedures and activities (including strategic planning and resource allocation), DISC ensures that consideration is given to enabling the participation of students with disabilities and learning differences.

512. Once a student arrives at DISC, the Head of Professional Services and the Welfare Officer meet with them to discuss and confirm the additional support requirements. Additional resource can be provided by UCD or the SGG network if needed. Details of reasonable adjustments that can be put in place to support assessments can be found in [section 8.4.3](#). Students who have specific health conditions or learning differences are made known to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (see [section 9.6.2](#)) to ensure that suitable support is provided. Arrangements are reviewed periodically throughout the student's studies to ensure that they remain sufficient; further adjustments can be made, if needed.

513. There may be cases where students have not declared their disability or learning difference to DISC at application stage. This can impact on the timeliness and availability of support that can be provided, but DISC will always endeavour to work with students to identify and discuss support needs as soon as practicable. Identification and implementation of support requirements will be carried out in a supportive and timely manner, with the involvement of all relevant colleagues.

9.7.2 Counselling Services

514. DISC students have access to the UCD counselling services. If a student has been identified as having a need for counselling, a referral will be made by the Welfare Officer to the counselling services at UCD. If the service is oversubscribed, DISC students may

be given vouchers to visit external counselling services. Please visit www.ucd.ie/studentcounselling/ for further details.

9.7.3 Student Accommodation

515. All students are given information about and support with sourcing private accommodation in Dublin during the application stage. A limited number of rooms in university provided accommodation on campus are available to DISC students; those under the age of 18 are prioritised for on campus accommodation. See [section 6.2.2](#) for more information regarding the admissions process for students under the age of 18, including guardianship requirements.

9.7.4 Student Social & Extra Curricular Activities

516. Students will be encouraged to get involved with social and extracurricular activities at DISC and UCD. Information will be provided by tutors, the Welfare Officer and the Head of Professional Services.

517. DISC students are given UCD ID cards and can access all services provided on the university Campus. This includes all sports & social clubs and activities run by both UCD and the Students Union. Further information about social and extracurricular activities provided by UCD and available to DISC students can be found using these links:

- www.ucd.ie/events/
- www.ucd.ie/studentcentre/studentexperience/

9.7.5 Access to other UCD Student Services

In addition to those detailed above, DISC students have full access to the following support services provided by UCD which give access to information, advice and guidance related to:

- Advice and money
- Careers and employability
- Health and wellbeing
- Day care centre
- Disability and dyslexia
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- International student support
- Practising your religion
- Student mentor scheme
- Residence life team

518. Information about the services listed above is available on Study Smart and in the student handbook. Students may approach the professional services team for support and information about accessing a specific service or scheme.

9.8 Academic Support

519. DISC understands the importance of ensuring that students are well supported to achieve their academic potential and that if support needs are not addressed early enough, students can quickly fall behind on their programme. This can be a particular concern for international students who are studying away from their familiar surroundings and support network in their home country.

9.8.1 Identifying Support Needs

520. The progress of all students at DISC is kept under constant review using an intervention log; this enables support needs to be identified and put in place as early as possible.

The intervention log is a spreadsheet of all modules for every student on each programme. Tutors update the log on a weekly basis for students on their module with an RPAG rating (see [section 9.8.2](#)) and add comments indicating any particular issues to be addressed.

521. The intervention log is discussed during weekly pathway meetings, led by the Head of Curriculum & Progression and attended by all relevant teaching and professional services staff, including the Welfare Officer and the Head of English. The intervention log is updated during these meetings to highlight students requiring intervention, and to identify which member of staff will follow up where concerns are raised, depending on the need (English language, academic knowledge, or welfare concerns).
522. The weekly pathway meetings also provide opportunities to review support requirements for the module or programme as a whole if several students are experiencing similar problems.

9.8.2 Academic Performance Monitoring – RPAG ratings

523. Student progress is monitored using an RPAG (Red, Pink, Amber, Green) rating system, as outlined in the table below.

Rating	Description
Red	The student is very unlikely to pass the programme or progress to UCD, regardless of any support measures put in place.
Pink	The student is unlikely to pass the programme or meet the threshold requirements to progress to UCD without intensive intervention.
Amber	The student is currently meeting the threshold requirements to progress to UCD but is at risk of not progressing. If they continue with support classes, resits of exams and assessments, enhanced participation in class, and complete sufficient work outside their classes, they will have a significant chance of progressing to UCD.
Green	If the student continues as at present then they should meet the threshold requirements to progress to UCD.

524. An initial RPAG rating is given for each student at the start of their programme based on an assessment of their English language ability and module subject knowledge. This is reviewed on a weekly basis, as outlined in [section 9.8.1](#).
525. RPAG assessments are completed by module tutors based on student performance in diagnostic tests, formative and summative assessments, completion and performance of homework tasks, participation in class, attendance, and academic or welfare concerns flagged by the Welfare Officer or other staff.
526. All students are provided with a formal mid-term report which contains their RPAG rating, detailed feedback of their progress to date, and guidance on any areas for development. If there are any concerns about progress or development in the interim, students are contacted by a member of the team following the weekly pathway meetings.

527. A final report for each module is provided to students at the end of each term, after all assessments are complete, detailing their module outcome including any resit requirements. See **Appendix 9.6** for the RPAG Report Template.

9.9 Attendance Monitoring

528. Attendance monitoring is vital for visa compliance purposes, to support student welfare, and to help students achieve academic success. Students are expected to attend all classes and timetabled activities, with a minimum overall attendance requirement of 85%. Attendance of DISC students is monitored daily from the first day of their studies and attendance records are maintained in Progresso.

529. It is made clear to students as part of their induction that there is a direct relationship between attendance and performance. The Attendance Policy outlines expectations and is available on Study Smart. This message is also reinforced in attendance warning emails which are issued to students who do not comply with the attendance policy.

530. Students are required to:

- Contact the professional services team (preferably by email) in advance if they are not able to attend a timetabled class;
- Inform DISC promptly of any issues that affect their attendance and engagement (e.g. personal or health issues, concerns about studies);
- Check emails regularly for timetable updates and notification of appointments;
- Do everything possible to avoid unnecessary absences, e.g. make any health-related appointments outside class time;
- Not book a holiday during term time; and
- Advise DISC in advance about any planned absence or emergencies that will mean they will be absent.

531. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late may not be permitted to enter the class and will be marked as absent.

532. All DISC staff (teaching and the professional services team) are informed of the correct reporting procedures and how to complete class registers using the student management system. Training is given by the Head of Centre and Head of Professional Services who are also responsible for ensuring that all staff are informed about any relevant policy changes.

533. Professional services staff keep a record of all attendance, and absences are classified as either 'authorised' or 'unauthorised'. Unless self-certified, absences will only be recorded as authorised if formal evidence is provided, such as a letter confirming an immigration appointment. Students may self-certify absences of a maximum two consecutive days, up to 10 non-consecutive days. See **Appendix 9.7** for the Study Group Attendance Monitoring Policy and **Appendix 9.8** for the Attendance Management Standard Operating Procedure.

9.10 Protection of Enrolled Learners Policy

534. To comply with the relevant provisions of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, DISC will:

- Have a refund policy in place, made publicly available on the website(s), communicated during the application process, and published to students in handbooks;
- Make arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners known to the Designated Awarding Body (QQI), if collaborative arrangements are not already agreed and stated within the joint contractual agreements; and
- Ensure that all relevant information is publicly available and accessible via its website.

535. The Board is accountable for ensuring that DISC has adequate measures in place to ensure the protection of enrolled learners.

Programme Cessation

536. In the event that it becomes necessary for DISC to terminate a programme unexpectedly, students will be notified without delay and a transfer to an equivalent programme in the SGG network or the partner university, UCD, will be explored.

537. In the event that a transfer to an equivalent programme is not possible or desirable to the student, DISC has a refund policy in place that ensures that students are refunded accordingly.

538. In the unlikely event that DISC is unable to refund students, a financial bonding (insurance) agreement is in place with an insurance company, Arachas, to ensure that all money is refunded to the student. DISC makes information about this insurance, which is mandatory for all students, available during the admissions process and publishes it on its website (<https://www.dublinisc.com/learner-protection>).

Public Information

539. DISC undertakes to make the following information publicly available and accessible on its websites, partner institution websites as appropriate, and in other published material, e.g. prospectuses, before enrolling students or accepting any payment from or on behalf of an applicant:

- a. The name of the awarding body (or bodies) making the award, where an award is applicable;
- b. The name of the institution (company) delivering the programme of study;
- c. The title of the programme and the award (where applicable) to which it leads;
- d. Information about whether the programme of study sits within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), and, if so:
 - The level of that recognition within the NFQ;
 - Whether the award is a Major, Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental award as identified within the NFQ;
 - Where the programme does not lead to an award, whether a certificate of completion or similar certificate will be provided; and
 - Any procedures for access, transfer and progression (ATP).

540. This policy will be reviewed on a three-year cycle or updated between reviews as necessary for the policy and guidance remain fully compliant with legislative and regulatory requirements including those listed below:

1. [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#)
2. [QQI – Protection of enrolled learners](#)
3. QQI Protocols 3.2 apply
4. Protocols 3.6 apply
5. [National Framework of Qualifications](#)

9.11 Student Complaints and Appeals

541. Staff at DISC strive to provide the best possible level of service, but there may be instances when a student feels the need to make a complaint or submit an appeal. When this happens, DISC will investigate with impartiality and seek to arrive at an acceptable outcome as quickly as possible. Complaints and appeals will be taken seriously and, where necessary, measures will be put in place to prevent a recurrence.
542. A student will not suffer any disadvantage as a result of making a complaint or appeal, and confidentially will be respected as far as possible throughout the process. Details of the complaints and appeals processes are included on Study Smart and in the student handbook; if a student is not sure which process to follow, they should seek guidance from a member of staff at DISC.
543. DISC will keep a record of all complaints (formal and informal) and appeals, including full details of the final resolution/decision.

9.11.1 Complaints

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

544. A complaint is where a student is dissatisfied with the provision or standard of service they have received at DISC. Students are encouraged to raise any concerns informally at source level in the first instance to enable the issue to be resolved quickly. Where the concern is more serious, or the student feels unable to raise it with those involved, they may discuss the informal complaint with another member of staff such as their tutor or the Head of Centre.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

545. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of raising an informal complaint, or they feel that the complaint is more serious, they may raise a formal written complaint with the Head of Centre using the Stage 2 Student Complaint form (see **Appendix 9.9**). The form is available on Study Smart or from the professional services team; completed forms should be returned to the professional services team.
546. The student should indicate what reasonable steps they would like to see taken to resolve the matter. The student will be provided with acknowledgement of receipt, and an indication of the likely timescale for the outcome of the investigation (which should be within 20 working days). The Head of Centre may arrange meetings with relevant persons, including the student, to establish the facts and reach a conclusion.
547. The student will be advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation, and any actions or mitigations that have or will be put in place as a result. A clear explanation will be given if the complaint is not upheld.

Stage 3: Independent Review

548. If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation of their complaint and would like there to be a review of the case, or would like to present additional evidence which they were (for legitimate reasons) unable to provide earlier, they may request an Independent Review. The Independent Review process (stage 3) involves a review of the complaint by a University Partnership Director from SGG. This will include a review of whether the correct processes were followed, and whether the outcome was reasonable.
549. To request an Independent Review, the student must complete a stage 3 complaint form (see **Appendix 9.10**), available from Study Smart or the professional services team. This form must be completed and returned to SGG's Quality Assurance and Enhancement team via email within 10 working days of the outcome of the stage 2 complaint.
550. The review stage will involve an assessment of the findings of the investigation and a judgement of whether the outcome was reasonable; it will not normally involve a new investigation. If the stage 3 form was submitted on the basis of new information, and the University Partnership Director is satisfied that valid reasons have been given for not providing this information earlier, the complaint will be referred back to DISC's Head of Centre to review their decision in light of the new evidence.
551. The outcome of the independent review will be normally communicated to the student in writing within 20 working days of submission. This will include details of any action that will be taken if the complaint is upheld, or a clear rationale if it is not.

9.11.2 Academic Appeals

552. An Academic Appeal is where a student feels that an academic process has not been followed, or where there is a grievance on academic grounds. Appeals can also be made against the outcome of the Academic Misconduct and Personal Mitigating Circumstances panels. Students cannot appeal against academic judgement; if they do not understand how a mark has been arrived at, they may contact the marker for additional feedback. Appeals cannot be submitted until formal results or outcomes have been published.
553. Acceptable grounds for appeal include:
- Procedural irregularities in the assessment process (including alleged administrative error which could have led the assessment board to reach a different conclusion to that which they might have reached had the error not been made);
 - Inadequate assessment;
 - Prejudice or bias on the part of the examiners/staff;
 - Medical, personal or other circumstances which affected a student's performance of which the examiners were unaware at the time of the assessment; and
 - An unreasonable outcome or decision (in the case of academic misconduct or personal mitigating circumstances panel decisions).

Stage 1: DISC Appeals Committee

554. Appeals must be submitted in writing using a Stage 1 Student Appeals form (see **Appendix 9.11**) to the Head of Centre via the professional services team within 10 working days of the publication of results or outcome of a decision. The form is available on Study Smart or from the professional services team. The appeal should set out the grounds for appeal and include an indication of the student's expected outcome. All supporting documentation must be included with the form. If the basis for appeal is evidence which was not submitted earlier in the process, a rationale for not presenting the evidence at the time must also be included.
555. Acceptable grounds for appeal include:
- Procedural irregularities in the assessment process (including alleged administrative error which could have led the assessment board to reach a different conclusion to that which they might have reached had the error not been made);
 - Inadequate assessment;
 - Prejudice or bias on the part of the examiners/staff;
 - Medical, personal, or other circumstances which affected a student's performance of which the examiners were unaware at the time of the assessment; and
 - An unreasonable outcome or decision (in the case of academic misconduct or personal mitigating circumstances panel decisions).
556. The Head of Centre will assess the appeal to check whether it meets the grounds for appeal (set out above), that sufficient information has been provided, and that it has been submitted within the required timeframe. The student may be contacted for further information, or to notify them that the appeal cannot be heard (a clear explanation and guidance on how to appeal this decision will be provided). The Head of Centre will not make a judgement with respect to the appeal itself.
557. Appeals that meet the grounds for appeal will be considered by the Appeals Committee which will consist of impartial members who have had no involvement in the original decision. DISC may source panel members from the SGG network if it is necessary to ensure impartiality. Relevant DISC staff will be consulted to provide additional information to be presented to the Appeals Committee. If necessary, the student may be invited to attend the panel meeting in order to discuss the appeal, and may be accompanied by a person of their choice.
558. The student will normally be informed of the outcome of the appeal within 20 working days of submission. This will include full details of why it was or was not upheld, and any action to be taken.

Stage 2: Independent Appeal Review

559. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 appeal, they have the right to escalate their appeal to an Independent Appeal Review (stage 2). For an appeal to be escalated to this stage, it must meet at least one of the following grounds:
- New material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide at earlier stages;
 - Bias or prejudice on the part of those who dealt with the appeal at the Appeals Committee;

- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable in all the circumstances;
- Breach by the DISC Appeals Committee of the procedure set out in the Complaints & Appeals Policy.

560. To request an Independent Appeal Review, the student must complete a Stage 2 Appeal form (see **Appendix 9.12**), available from Study Smart or the professional services team. This form must be completed and returned to SGG's Quality Assurance and Enhancement team via email within 10 working days of the outcome of the stage 1 appeal.
561. If the appeal meets the grounds for Independent Appeal Review (as set out above), SGG's Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will appoint a senior member of staff from the SGG network to review the appeal. To ensure impartiality, this member of staff will not be directly connected to DISC.
562. The review stage will involve an assessment of the findings of the investigation and a judgement of whether the outcome was reasonable; it will not normally involve new investigation. If the stage 2 appeal form was submitted on the basis of new information, and the independent reviewer is satisfied that valid reasons have been given for not providing this information earlier, the appeal will be referred back to DISC's Appeals Committee to review their decision in light of the new evidence.
563. The outcome of the independent review will be normally communicated to the student in writing within 20 working days of submission. This will include a clear explanation of the decision and details of any action to be taken.

9.11.3 Further Information and External Guidance

564. The full SGG Complaints & Appeals Policy is attached as **Appendix 9.13**, which includes a flow chart of each process.
565. Students are informed about how to make a complaint or appeal as part of their induction and this is also summarised in the student handbook. The full policy is available to students via the dedicated policies section of Study Smart.
566. If a student has followed all the stages of DISC's complaints or appeals process and remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may wish to pursue a complaint via external means:
- Citizens Advice: www.citizensinformation.ie/en/consumer/how_to_complain/
 - ICOS Irish Council for International Students: www.internationalstudents.ie/info-and-advice



Chapter Ten

Information & Data Management



Chapter 10 - Information & Data Management

10.1 Introduction

567. DISC has policies and processes in place to ensure the effective and appropriate use of data and information in the management of DISC and the evaluation and enhancement of its activities. Data and information are collected and stored according to policies which ensure that data and information is accurate, is held securely and for a clear purpose, and is retained as per the data retention schedule (see [section 10.3](#) for policy details). Please refer to [section 9.3.1](#) for details of information that is provided to students in advance of registration.

10.2 Responsibilities

568. SGG has appointed an external Data Protection Officer (DPO), Aphaia Limited. It is the responsibility of the DPO to ensure:

- Compliance with data protections laws in the UK and EU;
- that SGG is kept updated with all relevant changes to legislation relating to data protection;
- Guidance and advice is offered, including training;
- Data protection policies are maintained and kept up to date;
- There are timely responses to data breaches, including assessment as to whether formal notifications are required to the relevant authority;
- Privacy impact assessments are entered into to identify potential risk of breach and privacy risks.

569. The Head of Centre is the information owner for DISC and is responsible for ensuring that all DISC staff undertake appropriate training and understand their responsibilities regarding information security and data management.

570. It is the responsibility of staff to ensure that they comply with the published policies in relation to student data and records held on private systems, e.g. personal email accounts, personal computers or hardware. Staff are provided with regular mandatory online training.

571. It is the responsibility of students using personal data and information accessible within DISC's online learning systems to handle such data in line with the code of conduct stated in the student handbook. This is drawn to students' attention during induction.

10.3 Data Protection and Data Retention

572. DISC has adopted SGG's Policies on Data Protection and the Retention of Student Data and Records, as summarised below.

10.3.1 Data Protection Policy

573. The Data Protection Policy sets out the principles and legal conditions that DISC must satisfy when obtaining, handling, processing, transporting or storing personal data in the course operations and activities. DISC will uphold all laws and regulations relevant to data protection, specifically GDPR.

574. DISC adheres to the principles of GDPR which require personal data to be:

- Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner;
- Collected only for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes;
- Adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which it is processed;
- Accurate and where necessary kept up to date;
- Not kept in a form which permits identification of Data Subjects for longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the data is processed;
- Processed in a manner that ensures its security using appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage;
- Not transferred to another country without appropriate safeguards being in place; and
- Made available to Data Subjects and Data Subjects are allowed to exercise certain rights in relation to their Personal Data.

575. DISC staff are required to complete mandatory GDPR training as part of their induction, as well as refresher training during the course of their employment (see [section 5.5](#)). If staff have any queries about the data protection requirements, or believe there has been a data breach, they should contact the Data Protection Officer or a member of the SGG legal team. Please see **Appendix 10.1** for the full Data Protection Policy.

10.3.2 Policy on the Retention of Student Data and Records

576. The Policy on the Retention of Student Data and Records defines the principles, time periods, mechanisms and responsibilities for DISC's retention of student personal data. The Data Retention Schedule (see **Appendix 10.2**) sets out the agreed timeframe for the retention of all students' personal data and records, in line with GDPR requirements.

- Records such as student names, modules, and outcomes will be kept permanently.
- Records and data relating to fee payment, registration, etc. will be kept for 7 years after the student has completed or withdrawn from the module or programme.
- Records of student support may be kept for 6 years. This includes careers support, disability support, study issues advice, research student support, and programme choice.
- Data relating to student support services or day to day administration such as tutor allocation or graduation ceremonies may be retained for up to 4 years.
- Data required for management, development and research may be retained outside the student records systems long term. In storing this data, the name and address of a student will be removed and, in line with GDPR, the data will not be used to support any actions or decisions that affect or cause distress or damage to the individual. The exception will be research data which with student agreement requires follow-up contact.

577. Please see **Appendix 10.3** for the full Retention of Student Data and Records policy.

10.4 Data Generated and Analysed by Dublin International Study Centre

578. DISC collects and analyses data as part of key quality assurance processes and to inform decision-making.

579. This data use includes evaluation of:

- Student recruitment and admissions information;
 - Student retention and outcomes data, including assessment results and progression entitlement;
 - Quantitative and qualitative student feedback (survey and other) data and information;
 - Student engagement data on Study Smart.
580. Admissions data is used to support resource planning and timetabling. DISC also provides student admissions information to UCD in order for students to receive Student ID cards and gain access to relevant university systems.
581. Student outcomes and feedback data are analysed as part of regular quality assurance mechanisms such as Quality Committee meetings, Academic Board deliberation and decision-making, and the annual monitoring process. Interrogation and analysis of student progression data sets (both 'progression offered' and registration on UCD degrees) provide evidence of student success, the security of academic standards, and the quality of learning opportunities; they are therefore key to DISC's Annual Monitoring Report. These data sets also inform module and programme review and are a key part of the process for programme re-approval and re-validation (see [section 4.6](#)).
582. [Chapter 12](#), Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review, provides further information about the use of data in self-evaluative and reflective QA processes.
583. Where there are concerns about a student's engagement with the programme, their use of material on Study Smart may be analysed to assess their level of engagement outside of the classroom. Where a support plan requires a student to engage more frequently with Study Smart, this will be monitored.

10.5 Student Data Systems

584. The data systems operating at DISC are:
- Study Global: a Study Group database containing student admissions data and managed pre-arrival by Admissions.
 - Progresso: a database designed for effective timetabling, the operation of attendance registers, inputting of assessment results and information regarding reasonable adjustments relating to assessment. Student data from Study Global is automatically imported into Progresso.
 - Power BI reports: an application which enables users to run reports on data from Study Global and Progresso, such as key student outcomes data for annual monitoring purposes.
 - Study Smart: the Moodle virtual learning environment which students access for programme and module information and a range of learning enhancement activities.
585. Reports are downloaded from Progresso to include details of student module marks which are used by assessment board meetings to facilitate decision making as well as for review and evaluation (see [section 8.8](#)). Progresso and Power BI reports are also a vital part of the programme review and annual monitoring processes (see [section 4.4](#) and [section 12.6](#)).

586. DISC is supported by SGG's IT support structure, which provides 24/7 support for these systems and to staff and students.

10.6 Records Maintenance and Data Security

587. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring that all staff follow the correct processes and records are accurately maintained.

588. All online data systems have permission level access to ensure that staff and students can only access relevant information; this ensures that data security and confidentiality is maintained. The Head of Centre determines permission levels required for staff based on their role, and the SGG IT Services team manages implementation of this. The IT Services team also manage student access to relevant module pages on Study Smart.



Chapter Eleven
Published Information



Chapter 11 - Published Information

11.1 Introduction

589. A wide range of information is published by DISC, both internally and externally, including details about programmes, support services, and other activities. Information is available on the DISC website (dublinisc.com), staff intranet, Study Smart, the student/staff/centre handbooks and in published marketing material.
590. This chapter sets out the responsibilities and controls in place to ensure that published information is in line with DISC guidance and expectations.

11.2 Responsibilities

591. The Head of Centre has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all information made available is accurate, current and timely, and will liaise with the SGG Head of Product Marketing for support with the collation, publication and distribution of information.
592. The Head of Curriculum & Progression and Head of English (for the Academic English Skills programme) are responsible for the accuracy and currency of all programme and academic related information. The Head of Professional Services is responsible for ensuring that all non-academic material (including the student handbook) is accurate and up to date.
593. The Head of Quality, in collaboration with the CMT, ensures that all documentation goes through a quality assurance process either after initial creation or by review.

11.3 Dublin International Study Centre Website (Public Facing)

594. The DISC website can be found at: <https://www.dublinisc.com/>.
595. DISC sets out clear requirements with regards the communication of information available to the public. The Head of Centre and Head of Professional Services are supported by the SGG Marketing and Creative Services teams to ensure that the website is current, and that marketing material is accurate.
596. DISC's website is the main source of information for prospective students and is available to the public and other external stakeholders. The website includes information about:
- Programme structure and programme details
 - Entry requirements
 - Details of degree articulation routes with UCD
 - Progression requirements (for access to UCD)
 - How to make an application (including fee information)
 - Accommodation
 - Student Welfare and Pastoral Support
 - Academic Support
 - Latest news about the DISC and UCD
 - News and updates from alumni and current students at DISC
 - Information about UCD and the City of Dublin
 - Studying in Ireland and the Irish Education system

597. Published information relating to programmes and modules must be in line with what has been formally approved via the Programme Development, Approval and Validation processes outlined in [Chapter 4](#).
598. DISC students are protected by Irish consumer protection law through the Consumer Protection Act 2007 and Consumer Rights Directive 2014. In addition, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directives 2005 and the Consumer Rights Directive 2014 apply. To ensure that DISC meets these obligations, regular website audits are overseen by the Head of Product Marketing to review the accuracy of information about DISC and its academic offerings.

11.4 Information Provided to Students

599. In addition to the information available for current and potential students on the website, as noted above, DISC provides the following:

Copies of Promotional Material

600. Promotional material is made available to prospective students at Sales and Marketing events throughout the world and is also distributed to recruitment agents. It includes programme information, approved entry requirements and the quality assured DISC prospectus.
601. The Head of Centre works with the relevant Head of Product Marketing to ensure that this information is accurate and current. Accuracy is confirmed and signed off by the Head of Product Marketing and SGG Director of Product Marketing.

Student Handbook

602. The Head of Centre, Head of Professional Services and the Head of Curriculum & Progression are responsible for ensuring that information contained in the student handbook is accurate and up to date. The student handbook is signed off by the Head of Centre before publication.
603. The handbook, which is made available on Study Smart, contains information about:
- DISC and UCD;
 - Health & Safety, including personal safety;
 - Passport & Visa Information including students working rights;
 - Methods of Student Feedback and Student Representation;
 - Campus Activities, including IT & Library Services and Study Smart;
 - DISC Rules & Regulations;
 - Programme and Assessment processes, including assessment regulations;
 - DISC's Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel;
 - Complaints & appeals;
 - Exam information and dates; and
 - How to communicate effectively with staff at DISC.

Virtual Learning Environment, Study Smart

604. Study Smart is used as a key source of information for students. Each module has a separate site which is the main forum for non-face to face interaction between academic

staff and students. All supplementary learning materials are posted on these sites along with independent learning activities and independent work.

605. Module and Programme handbooks are also published on Study Smart; these include information such as learning outcomes, module and programme content, assessment guidelines and deadlines, indicative reading lists, and relevant information about how the LTA strategy will be adopted for each module. Module tutors are responsible for creating and maintaining their Study Smart module pages, which are subject to quality reviews by members of the Centre Management Team.
606. Study Smart also includes a Virtual Reception where online copies of all other handbooks are provided along with induction information, the full range of available support services, assessment information, and QA policies and procedures. The Head of Professional Services is responsible for the maintenance of this site, which is also subject to review by other members of the Centre Management Team.
607. DISC utilises the announcement feature of Study Smart to ensure students are notified of important information, such as deadlines, events and key updates.

11.5 Information Available to Staff

608. In addition to the information on the DISC website, all staff have access to a dedicated staff area of Study Smart, which is maintained by the Head of Centre and Head of Professional Services. This site provides information:
 - Staff, Centre, and Student handbooks;
 - DISC policies including guidance on academic-related matters, health and safety, HR and staff welfare, student support including Safeguarding, and CPD opportunities; and
 - Links and information about SGG policies relevant to DISC.
609. Staff also have access to a SGG intranet site, which is a repository of key documentation provided by the central Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. This includes information on the Study Group network and company structure, Service Desk Portals to raise service requests to HR, the student management system, and IT services.
610. In addition, staff have access to Workplace which is an online social media platform where staff can provide updates on their centre activities and where they can get regular news and updates from SGG, including job adverts, policies and procedures, and CPD opportunities.
611. Staff can also access the UCD website to keep abreast of all university policies and procedures, news, and relevant information about their degree programmes.

11.6 Information Available to Education Agents

612. The DISC Head of Centre works with the SGG Sales and Recruitment team to provide accurate and up to date information to Education Agents. This includes information about programmes and modules, entry and progression requirements, student support and DISC facilities, quality processes and procedures, and this Quality Assurance Manual.

11.7 Information Provided to University College Dublin

613. As its key stakeholder, DISC works closely with UCD and provides relevant updates and information as needed. There are specific reporting requirements for joint committees which includes submission of:

- An annual report to the Oversight Board in the autumn. The report summarises the performance of the previous DISC cohort and includes data on student completion and progression.
- Regular reports to the Recruitment and Marketing committee (see the governance handbook for details) on recent marketing activities and plans, and forecasts of student numbers.

614. Additional information and updated reports will be provided as requested.

11.8 Publication of Quality Assurance Manual & Quality Evaluation Reports

615. Following QQI approval, this Quality Assurance Manual and associated procedures will be made available publicly on the DISC website, as will internal and external quality assessment reports.

11.9 Freedom of Information

616. As DISC is not a publicly funded institution, it is not subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Chapter Twelve

Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

Chapter 12 - Self-Evaluation, Monitoring & Review

12.1 Introduction

617. DISC is committed to ongoing monitoring and review of its provision to assure academic standards and enhance the learning experience for students. A range of quantitative and qualitative data is used to support evidence-based decision making by the Centre Management Team and the governance committees.
618. DISC's commitment to self-evaluation and continuous improvement is reflected in the following key monitoring and review mechanisms:
- Weekly, termly, and annual review and evaluation of key data (see [section 12.3](#));
 - Ongoing review and development of the Centre Action Plan (CAP) as the key mechanism to enhance provision (see [section 12.4](#));
 - Completion of the Annual Monitoring Report which brings together data and actions from across the year, evaluates the effectiveness and impact of actions taken, and identifies further actions to be added to the Centre Action Plan (see [section 12.6](#));
 - Benchmarking of provision (see [section 12.7](#))
619. Through these monitoring and review mechanisms, DISC assures itself of the following:
- Students are supported to achieve their potential;
 - Programmes are effective and enable students to achieve the learning outcomes;
 - Learning, teaching and assessment are effective;
 - The student experience is the best it can be;
 - Effective practice is identified and shared;
 - Governance committees make evidence-based decisions;
 - Deliberate steps are taken to enhance the provision.

12.2 Responsibilities

620. DISC monitors a variety of data sets and information. Review and analysis of this data enables governance committees and the Centre Management Team to take evidence-based decisions, agree actions and identify areas of good practice and areas for further enhancement. Ongoing review of data enables evaluation of actions taken. The tables in [section 12.3](#) set out who is responsible for collating data, for evaluating data, and for ensuring that appropriate actions are taken.
621. Academic Board maintains oversight of all monitoring and review, actions taken, and the evaluation of actions and outcomes. This enables Academic Board to assure itself that ongoing quality assurance mechanisms are operating as required and that governance committees are fulfilling their responsibilities with regards to quality assurance and continuous enhancement.

12.3 Quality Assurance Cycle

622. The following sections give an overview of the information and data that is monitored, the frequency of review, and identify who is responsible for evaluation. Actions are owned by the relevant Centre Management Team member or governance committee and tracked accordingly. Actions that have a DISC-wide impact or require additional resourcing will be recommended to Academic Board for inclusion in the Centre Action Plan (see [section 12.4](#)).

12.3.1 Weekly Monitoring and Review

Data	Data collated by	Evaluated by
Student attendance and engagement data (from Progresso and Study Smart)	Administration Assistant	Pathway team and Welfare Officer (weekly), Programme Assessment Board (end of each term)
Student progress and intervention log	Head of Curriculum & Progression	Pathway team (weekly), Programme Assessment Board (end of each term)
Staff feedback in staff meetings	Centre Management Team	Centre Management Team

623. Student attendance data is monitored weekly and any concerns are dealt with through the attendance policy (see [section 9.9](#)). The Administration Assistant is responsible for downloading weekly attendance reports from Progresso and providing this data to Pathway teams (all tutors involved in the programme delivery) and the Welfare Officer. If there are concerns about a student's engagement with the programme, then their level of engagement with Study Smart may be analysed.
624. There is also an intervention log which involves academic staff rating students on a weekly basis using a traffic light system (see [section 9.8.2](#)); this enables the activation of early interventions to support students as needed. The Head of Curriculum & Progression ensures that student progress ratings are completed by academic staff, and takes these ratings to the Pathway teams teaching the students. Each Pathway team meets weekly to review students' attendance and progress, and to agree interventions and identify who is responsible for next actions (e.g. the Welfare Officer, or Tutor, depending on the individual circumstances).
625. These data sets, interventions, and outcomes are evaluated by the Curriculum and Progression Committee each term, provided by the Administration Assistant and Head of Curriculum & Progression respectively. This enables the identification of any patterns and any strategic or preventative measures which can be put in place to support student learning and progress.
626. Staff feedback is gathered via weekly whole staff meetings and informs Centre Management Team decisions.

12.3.2 Termly Monitoring and Review

Data	Data collated by	Evaluated by
Student progress and RPAG (traffic light system) rating (on Progresso)	Administration Officer	Curriculum and Progression Committee
Student feedback – module evaluation questionnaires	Administration Officer	Module Assessment Board, Curriculum and Progression Committee

Student feedback via Student Reps	Administration Officer	Staff-Student Liaison Committee, Academic Board
Student assessment/module outcomes	Administration Officer	Module Assessment Board, Curriculum and Progression Committee
Staff feedback on modules and assessments	Head of Curriculum & Progression	Module Assessment Board, Curriculum and Progression Committee
Module reviews (including student feedback, staff feedback, student outcomes)	Chair of Module Assessment Board	Module Assessment Board, Curriculum and Progression Committee

627. Each term, tutors complete mid-term RPAG (traffic light system) ratings (see [section 9.8.2](#)) and provide feedforward for students in a mid-term report completed on Progresso for each module. The primary aim of the mid-term reports is to provide guidance to students, however, they also provide data alongside the weekly intervention log (see [section 12.3.1](#)) which may be used to support students. The Administration Officer is responsible for issuing completed reports to students and sharing RPAG data with the Curriculum and Progression Committee for review. RPAG ratings provide the Curriculum and Progression Committee with an overview of student progression and any trends over time and inform strategies to support student progress.
628. Student feedback is an essential element of quality assurance monitoring and is gathered via Student Representatives at Student Representative meetings with the Administration Officer. The Administration Officer takes feedback to the Staff Student Liaison Committee each term, so that any issues can be further discussed and resolved with staff and students. Matters discussed with Student Representatives can include all areas of the student experience, including academic, social and welfare. Student feedback is also monitored via module evaluation questionnaires. The Chair of the Staff Student Liaison Committee ensures that Student Representatives are informed of actions taken as a result of student feedback, either through written communication or in Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings. Academic Board reviews student feedback and trends over time, supporting evidence-based decision making.
629. Module evaluation questionnaires invite students to feedback on module organisation and structure, quality of teaching (including pace of delivery), workload, and Study Smart materials. Students are also asked to comment on what they enjoyed the most and least about the module and to provide suggestions on how modules could be improved. The Administration Officer is responsible for collating module evaluation results at the end of each module delivery, making them available to staff and external examiners via the module box, and taking them to Module Assessment Boards. See **Appendix 7.4** for an example module evaluation questionnaire.
630. Student and staff feedback on modules and student assessment results are all reviewed as part of Module Assessment Board business. Information from Module Assessment Boards is also considered by the Programme Assessment Board and may be used (when reported to the Curriculum and Progression Committee) to propose curriculum changes (see [section 4.4](#) and [section 4.5](#)).

12.3.3 Cohort Monitoring

Data	Data collated by	Evaluated by
Student feedback – post induction survey	Professional services – data and reports available on PowerBI	Academic Board
Student feedback – student experience survey at the end of the programme	Professional services – data and reports available on PowerBI	Academic Board
Student programme outcomes	Professional services	Programme Assessment Board, Academic Board

631. In addition to module evaluation questionnaires, students are invited to feed back on their experience of starting their programme through a post-induction survey, and to feed back on their whole programme through a student experience survey towards the end of their programme (see [section 7.9.1](#)). The post-induction survey focusses on students' arrival and induction period and feedback is used to enhance induction programmes. The student experience survey includes questions about learning, teaching and assessment, and the programme overall, as well as the general student experience, including student support. See **Appendix 7.5** for an example post-induction survey and **Appendix 7.6** for an example student experience survey. The results of these surveys are reviewed by Academic Board for each cohort, and compared to previous years.
632. Student outcomes for the cohort of each programme are reviewed by the Programme Assessment Board. Academic Board evaluates these outcomes for each cohort, including completion rates, progression offered and registration at UCD, and compares them to previous years.

12.3.4 Bi-annual Staff Survey

Data	Data collated by	Evaluated by
Staff Survey	An external body, reported to Head of Centre	Centre Management Team

633. SGG runs a bi-annual global staff survey, which is delivered and managed by an external body to ensure staff anonymity and provide reports globally and by location. The survey measures staff satisfaction and allows for comments and suggestions for improvements. A report is provided to the Head of Centre including the results from DISC staff and highlighting positive results and areas for development. The CMT review the report and agree on any actions to be taken as a result, which may include further meetings with staff, or working with SGG colleagues to address concerns. Reports, actions and trends are considered by Operations Committee and reported to SGI Board.

12.3.5 Annual Review

Data	Data collated by	Evaluated by
Lesson observations (areas of effective practice and areas for development)	Teaching and Learning (T&L) Champ, Head of Quality	Centre Management Team
Staff appraisals	Centre Management Team	Centre Management Team
Staff development activities	Head of Quality	Centre Management Team
Feedback from UCD academic staff members	Head of Curriculum & Progression	Academic Board, Oversight Board
Student performance on UCD degrees	Head of Quality, from UCD where available	Academic Board, Oversight Board
Feedback from DISC progressed students studying at UCD	Head of Quality	Academic Board, Oversight Board
External examiner feedback	Head of Quality	Centre Management Team
Student complaints and appeals	Head of Quality	Centre Management Team, Academic Board
Academic Misconduct Panel data	Head of Quality	Centre Management Team, Academic Board
Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel data	Head of Quality	Centre Management Team, Academic Board

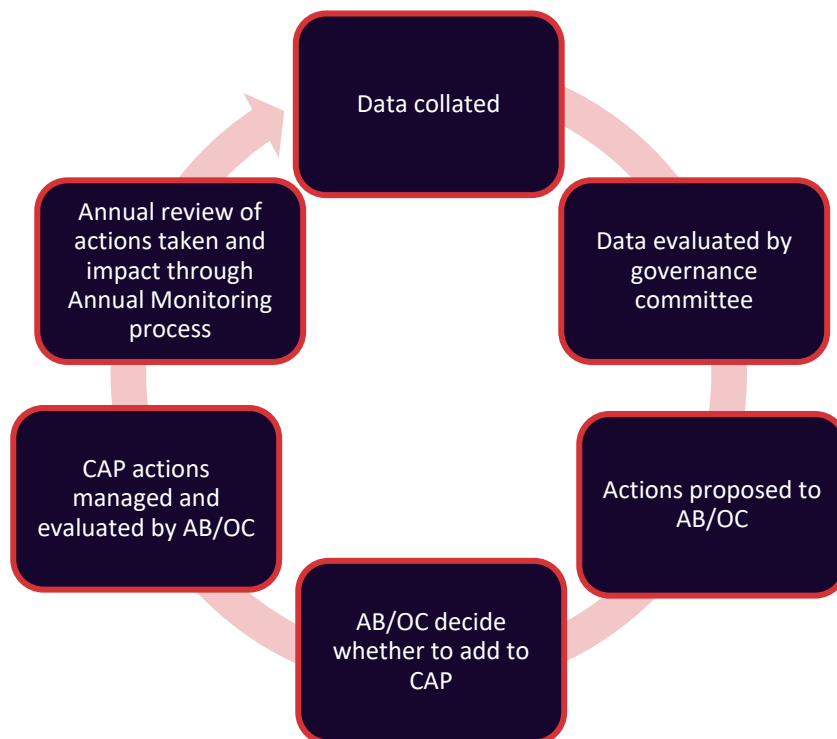
634. The Centre Management Team (CMT) annually evaluate the data collated by the T&L Champ and the Head of Quality as part of the Observation of Learning and Teaching process (see [section 5.7.2](#)). This enables the CMT to ensure areas of good practice are shared and further training and/or workshops are provided in areas for development.
635. Line Managers collate feedback from their direct reports gathered as part of regular 1:1 meetings and appraisals to share with the CMT. The CMT review any themes arising from annual staff appraisals (see [section 5.6](#)) in terms of feedback and staff development requests, and there is an annual review of staff development activities in terms of feedback on CPD activities and outcomes. This informs staff development plans and analysis is included in the Annual Monitoring Report.
636. Information from relevant UCD academic staff members and student outcomes data provide important indications of the effectiveness of DISC programmes in preparing students for UCD degrees. Feedback from UCD academic staff members, such as student achievement in the first year of their UCD programme, is collated by the Head of Curriculum & Progression and reviewed by Academic Board and the Oversight Board. The Head of Quality collates data regarding progressed DISC students on UCD degrees (where available), including completion rates, degree outcomes, and attainment data at each stage of the degree, which is also reviewed by Academic Board and the Oversight Board. Progressed students at UCD are invited to complete a survey during the first year of their degree to provide feedback on how well their DISC programme prepared them for their studies at UCD.

637. Feedback provided by external examiners is reviewed by the CMT throughout the year, and actions taken as needed. At the end of each academic year, external examiners provide a written report, which is submitted to the CMT and the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. The CMT provide a written response to external examiner annual reports with details of actions taken or planned, including the owner and timeline (see [section 8.7.7](#)). External examiner reports and written responses are submitted to Academic Board. Actions and outcomes from external examiner feedback are evaluated through the annual monitoring process.
638. The CMT review data from student complaints and appeals, the Academic Misconduct Panel, and the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel on an annual basis and note any trends. This data is also evaluated by Academic Board year on year.

12.4 Centre Action Plan

639. The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is the key mechanism that enables the Centre Management Team to take deliberate steps to enhance provision at DISC. Academic Board (AB) and Operations Committee (OC) manage the two distinct areas of the CAP (academic and operational) and approve any additions or updates proposed by the Centre Management Team or DISC governance committees.

Diagram 8) CAP process



640. Items on the CAP may include actions related to:
- Implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy;
 - Maintenance of academic standards;
 - Enhancement of the student experience;
 - Staff development;

- Partnership activities with UCD.

641. The Centre Management Team regularly review the progress of actions recorded on the CAP and provide updates for board and committee to evaluate. An annual review of actions taken and their impact is completed as part of the Annual Monitoring process (see [section 12.6](#)). See **Appendix 12.1** for a sample CAP.

12.5 Start of Year Checklist

642. DISC undertakes an annual check before the start of the academic year, led by the Head of Quality, to ensure that the following key documentation is accurate and up to date:

- Quality Assurance Manual;
- Centre Handbook;
- Student Handbook, including student-facing policies;
- Programme Specifications;
- Module Specifications;
- Centre Action Plan;
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; and
- DISC policies.

643. Where quality assurance mechanisms identify the need for a review or update of a policy, this is proposed to Academic Board. If Academic Board approve the need for a review, an appropriate member of staff is appointed to lead on the review or update, which may be a DISC member of staff or an appropriate member of staff from the SGG network. Any policy changes must be approved by Academic Board, and the updated policy will then be incorporated into the annual check.

644. Academic Board receives confirmation that the check has been completed and that all relevant documentation has been published to DISC staff and students at the beginning of each academic year.

12.6 Annual Monitoring Report

645. The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is an evaluation and reflection of the previous year's activity in terms of assuring the security of academic standards and managing the range of quality assurance mechanisms operating at DISC. There is a focus on reflecting on what went well and how good practice will be maintained and disseminated, and reflecting on what did not go so well and what mitigations will be put in place to prevent these issues arising again. This ensures that the quality of the student learning experience remains strong, and opportunities for enhancement are identified. The process of annual monitoring includes analysis of all data collected and monitored throughout the year as noted in [section 12.3](#), and evaluation of the impact of actions taken as a result.

646. The Annual Monitoring process includes a review of the following areas:

- Issues identified in the previous AMR and the impact of actions taken;
- Data on student enrolment, attendance and achievement (including student completion rates, module grades, progression offered and registration at UCD) and actions taken or planned as a result of analysis of the data;

- Feedback from key stakeholders (students, staff, and UCD), including from teaching observations and staff development activities, and the impact of actions taken;
- Reflection on academic governance and quality assurance processes, including feedback from external examiners, review of complaints and appeals, and the impact of actions taken;
- Overall reflections on effective practice and areas for improvement by the CMT, based on findings from the annual monitoring process; and
- SMART actions to be undertaken for the current academic year, agreed by the CMT and proposed to the Academic Board for inclusion in the CAP.

647. The Head of Quality leads on the Annual Monitoring process, with members of the CMT and chairs of governance committees contributing as required. The Annual Monitoring Report is considered and approved by Academic Board. Once approved, the Annual Monitoring Report is peer-reviewed by the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, who review all the Annual Monitoring Reports from across the SGG network and produce a network-level report. This provides opportunities to share identified areas of good practice across the SGG network. The Annual Monitoring Report is also shared with the Oversight Board for information.

12.7 Benchmarking of Provision

648. DISC benchmarks its provision against other centres within the SGG network in several ways:

- Student outcomes and the quality of provision as evidenced through the annual monitoring process. As noted in [section 12.6](#), Annual Monitoring Reports are submitted to the SGG Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, who produce a network-level report. This is submitted to Academic Board, and provides opportunities to learn from other centres and share ideas, processes and expertise across the network. Student outcomes in terms of completion, progression and registration are benchmarked across the centres; this enables DISC to assure itself that student outcomes are comparable to other centres.
- Student survey results. Student post-induction surveys and student experience surveys (see [section 12.3.3](#)) are used across the SGG network. Results are available on PowerBI and DISC results are benchmarked against network averages. These results are evaluated by Academic Board and enable DISC to assure itself that student satisfaction levels are comparable to other centres and take action where there are areas for improvement.
- Staff survey results. The SGG staff survey benchmarks DISC results against network-level results and enables DISC to review staff satisfaction in comparison to the global organisation (see [section 12.3.4](#)).

649. External benchmarking takes place as part of the external examiner duties, who confirm that academic standards are appropriately aligned to relevant external benchmarks, see [section 8.7.7](#).

650. DISC staff participate in a number of SGG network-wide groups, as outlined below. While these do not formally benchmark provision, they enable sharing of effective practice and expertise.

- Observation of Learning and Teaching Policy, reviewed by the Panel of Observers (see [section 5.7.2](#)). The DISC T&L Champ is also a member of a Community of Practice with T&L Champs from across the SGG network.
- Professional Services Network. This group includes professional services staff from across the SGG network and enables staff to problem solve together and share good practice. The group meets monthly online.
- Quality and Enhancement Leads Group. This group includes staff members who lead on quality and enhancement from across the SGG network, including the DISC Head of Quality. The group meets monthly online and has a Team site on Microsoft Teams, which enables sharing of initiatives in enhancement and quality assurance.
- Centre Leadership Forum. Centre Leaders, including the DISC Head of Centre, from across the SGG network have regular online meetings as well as a regular face-to-face forum, which promotes sharing of effective practice and a network approach to enhancement. Any aspects of provision may be addressed, including operational, academic, and central functions such as IT systems, HR, admissions, sales and marketing.

12.8 Periodic Programme Re-approval and Re-validation and QQI Cyclical Review

651. DISC undertakes a periodic review of programmes at least every five years, to ensure that the provision remains current, provides the best possible student experience, and continues to meet the QQI validation criteria. See [section 4.6](#) for details of the programme re-approval and re-validation process.
652. DISC will fully engage with the QQI cyclical review processes and anticipates the publication of QQI's procedures for review of independent and private providers so that relevant DISC policies and procedures can be developed in accordance.

12.9 Escalation Protocol

653. The governance committee cycles and processes outlined above provide regular opportunities to reflect on areas of good practice and address any areas of concern. However, there may be instances where it is necessary to take more urgent action to address concerns about academic standards or quality. All members of staff at DISC are responsible for escalating any such issues to the Head of Centre and should include proposed solutions. The Head of Centre will work with the Centre Management Team to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Where the issue has already been resolved, a report should be submitted to the Head of Centre outlining actions taken and their impact.



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